

I. INTRODUCTION

The significance of outdoor recreation in Maryland cannot be summarized in a single sentence. From a leisurely walk in a neighborhood park to fishing on the Chesapeake Bay or camping in the Appalachian Mountains, there are endless outdoor opportunities in Maryland. The benefits of outdoor recreation and land conservation are far-reaching and have positive impacts on public health, the environment, and the economy. National, state, and local parks, forests, trails, beaches, and open spaces are foundational infrastructure that support the variety and quality of outdoor recreation experiences that contribute to Marylanders' high quality of life and make the state attractive to visitors. In Maryland, outdoor recreation generally includes activities that are dependent on the natural landscape and outdoor environments, such as boating, fishing, hunting, hiking, and camping.



Scraping Bottom by Margaret Sentman



“In a sustainable Maryland, we recognize that the health of our society and our economy are dependent on the health of our environment. Therefore, we choose to act both collectively and individually to preserve, protect, restore, and enhance our environment for this and future generations.”

*Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Vision*

“The Department of Natural Resources leads Maryland in securing a sustainable future for our environment, society, and economy by preserving, protecting, restoring, and enhancing the State’s natural resources.”

*Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Mission Statement*

Every five years, Maryland updates its Land Preservation and Recreation Plan to remain eligible to receive federal Land and Water Conservation Fund grants and adjust strategies for enhancing the provision of public outdoor recreation services based on changing demographics and trends, needs, and resources. The Land and Water Conservation Fund was established in 1965 and has provided over \$90 million to fund over 400 projects in Maryland to improve public access to nature and outdoor recreation. In 2014, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources created its first Land Preservation and Recreation Plan, with prior iterations developed by the Department of Planning.

A. PURPOSE OF THIS PLAN

The 2019 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan is a resource and guide for strategically enhancing public outdoor recreation opportunities statewide over the next five years. It captures the latest recreation wants and needs of citizens, details relevant service provision challenges, and outlines goals and priority actions for the Department of Natural Resources to pursue to improve outdoor recreation in Maryland through 2023. The plan also provides a summary of major statewide natural resource and land conservation programs.

The update of the plan for 2019 is the result of a 15-month planning process that included research, lessons learned through implementation of the 2014 Plan, key findings of current local Land Preservation, Parks, and Recreation Plans; public input and feedback; advice and direction from a multidisciplinary technical advisory committee; and updating the statewide outdoor recreation inventory and GIS analysis.

Key outcomes of the planning process included:

- Exponential expansion of the Department’s GIS inventory of public outdoor recreation areas from less than 200 sites to more than 2,200 through teamwork with Maryland’s county governments and the City of Baltimore to include local data.
- Completion of a level of service analysis by Department of Natural Resources service regions. In 2014, the level of service analysis was conducted on a statewide level.
- Validation of the continued importance of the 2014 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan central theme of “Connecting People and Places” and associated key strategies.
- Identification of current needs, trends, and priorities for enhancing public outdoor recreation opportunities statewide.

- Updating of the Department of Natural Resources’ statewide goals for improving outdoor recreation in Maryland over the next five years.

2014 Plan Theme: Connecting People and Places



COORDINATE with local, county, and state planning efforts



PROMOTE health, livability, economic, and environmental benefits of outdoor recreation and natural resources



ACCESS to water and land based recreation for all populations

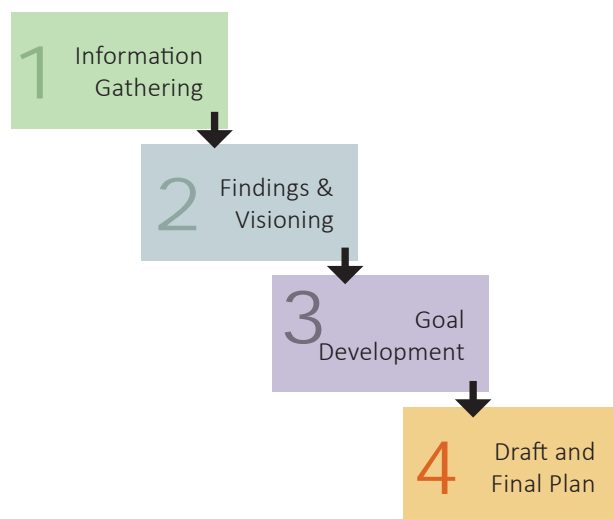


CONNECT Department of Natural Resources trails and public lands to the places where people live, work, and play

B. PLANNING PROCESS OVERVIEW

Development of the 2019 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan followed a multi-faceted planning process to gather and analyze quantitative and qualitative data on issues impacting outdoor recreation, gain an understanding of Marylanders' current needs and perceptions of public outdoor recreation opportunities, and to vet and validate key findings and develop goals for addressing priority needs over the next five years. The planning process began in December 2017 and concluded in March 2019 with National Park Service approval of the 2019-2023 Land Preservation and Recreation Plan.

Planning Process Methodology



Step 1: Information Gathering

- Review and consideration of existing federal; state; and local plans, reports, and guiding documents pertaining to outdoor recreation and land conservation in Maryland.
- Creation of a multidisciplinary Technical Advisory Committee to steer plan development.

- Collection of input and feedback from the public through hosting:
 - Eight Public Regional Focus Group Meetings
 - Statewide Statistically Valid Telephone Survey and Open Public Survey
- Expansion of the statewide public outdoor recreation site database and completion of a GIS-based level of service analysis to help identify potential gaps in access to outdoor recreation opportunities.

Step 2: Findings and Visioning

- Vetting of data and analysis results with the Technical Advisory Committee.
- Review of accomplishments and challenges for outdoor recreation over the past five years.
- Development of preliminary recommendations.

Step 3: Goal Development

- The creation, prioritization, and refinement of statewide goals and implementable actions for enhancing public outdoor recreation opportunities.

Step 4: Draft and Final Plan

- Development of the updated Land Preservation and Recreation Plan including review and approval by the National Park Service and the State of Maryland.

The Technical Advisory Committee included 24 senior members of federal, state, and local government agencies and other entities with a variety of connections to outdoor recreation. This multidisciplinary team assisted in identifying stakeholders to invite to focus group sessions, the development of survey questions, analyzed research and public input findings, and contributed to the development of an implementable action plan. Notes from the Committee's meetings were provided as a staff resource document.

I. INTRODUCTION

Public input in the development of the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan included hosting stakeholder focus group meetings with outdoor recreation enthusiasts, representatives of local and regional conservation groups, interested citizens, and staff from local and state agencies, as well as conducting a statewide outdoor recreation survey of residents through a statistically valid phone survey and a publicly accessible online survey. Survey and focus group feedback helped identify current public outdoor recreation challenges and needs.

Multidisciplinary/multi-agency collaboration through the Technical Advisory Committee and public input were key in developing the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan and will be important to implementing the plan.

C. CURRENT STATE OF PUBLIC OUTDOOR RECREATION IN MARYLAND

Outdoor opportunities for fun, fitness, leisure, and learning can be found in every corner of Maryland. This is the result of decades of purposeful work by the state and local public agencies to create a world-class system of lands, facilities, and programs that support outdoor recreation and provide people with access to a variety of high-quality outdoor experiences.



Since the completion of the last Land Preservation and Recreation Plan in 2014, the State of Maryland passed legislation to restore and protect funding for land preservation and recreation programs and completed several major projects that increase public access and recreation opportunities for Marylanders to get outside, which are detailed as follows:

HB 462, the Administration's bill passed during the 2016 General Assembly, restores and protects state funding to transfer tax-funded land conservation, preservation, and recreation programs including Program Open Space. HB 462 provided \$60 million in new funding – \$20 million in 2017 and \$40 million in 2018 – for programs such as the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund, and Rural Legacy and Program Open Space, and allocates funds for state land and park development, maintenance and recreation.

- Governor Hogan's FY 2019 budget returned transfer tax funded land conservation, preservation, and recreation programs to full cash funding (no funds diverted to the General Fund) for the first time in several fiscal years. Program Open Space received \$110 million in FY 2019 funding.
- HB 462 also protects transfer-tax funding for land conservation, preservation, and recreation programs going forward, requires that some past transfers be repaid, and establishes new procedures for all future appropriations. This legislation secures funding for POS and similar programs that benefit parks and recreation in our communities going forward.



The new Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad State Park opened in 2017 and has welcomed over 100,000 visitors from all 50 states and 68 countries.



Between 2013 and 2017, 11,204 acres of open space was acquired by the Department of Natural Resources, increasing the total acreage managed to 486,863.

- The acquisition of 182 acres in Charles County is an addition to the Myrtle Grove Wildlife Management Area. The acquisition will enhance and protect water quality in Mattawoman Creek and the Potomac River Basin while providing additional wildlife habitat; the National Audubon Society identified the property as an “Important Bird Area,” making it an ideal location for birders and other wildlife observers.
- The acquisition of 460 acres in Cecil County will be managed as a new state park. Bohemia River State Park will provide opportunities for public access in the form of low-impact, passive recreation such as canoeing, fishing, hunting, kayaking, trail use, and wildlife viewing, keeping with the primary goals of conservation and education.
- The acquisition of 1,986 acres in Garrett County will be managed as a new state park. Wolf Den Run State Park will provide a high-quality recreation experience and opportunity for off-highway/off-road vehicle riders. This purchase was made possible with a match from the National Park Service with a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant.



Maryland’s first purpose-built off-road vehicle trail and campground opened in 2017 at Savage River State Forest. The 12-mile St. Johns Rock off-road vehicle trail provides a variety of terrain for four-wheel drive vehicles, dirt bikes, and all-terrain vehicles.



The Land and Water Conservation Fund, Program Open Space, and other funding sources managed by the Department of Natural Resources consistently delivered millions of dollars in grants to help fund parks, recreation, and land conservation improvement projects in all of Maryland’s counties and the City of Baltimore.

Over the past five years the population of Maryland has continued to grow, and the Department of Natural Resources and local parks and recreation agencies have reported strong visitation to parks and usage of outdoor recreation amenities and increases in demand for

services and programs. Marylanders are regular users of public parks and open spaces, and as the population grows, so will the diverse outdoor recreation needs of this active citizenry.

I. INTRODUCTION

As was the case in 2014, trail-based activities, especially walking, continue to be the most popular outdoor recreation and fitness activity overall, and many state and local agencies are investing in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure and recreational trails to meet demands for more walkable communities and diverse trail-based experiences. The inter-related health, environmental, and economic benefits of outdoor recreation, including something as simple as going for a walk outside, have become a higher focus of parks and recreation agencies statewide over the past five years. While these benefits have been generally accepted for some time, contemporary research and advocacy has helped to quantify and make the benefits of being active outdoors more easily and widely understood and leveraged in more impactful ways.

Visitation to Maryland State Parks has steadily increased over the past five years. Nearly 14 million people visited in 2017, compared to 12 million in 2015.

Residents of Maryland have provided significant input to state and local parks and recreation agencies through surveys, public meetings, and other opportunities for sharing ideas and concerns over the past five years. Recurring

themes in public feedback received during the process to update the Land Preservation and Recreation Plan indicated:

- Outdoor recreation is extremely important to the majority of Marylanders, but existing public opportunities at state and local facilities are not completely meeting the needs of recreators.
- Although most people drive to parks and open spaces, access to the outdoors close-to-home is important as most people are not willing to drive more than an hour.
- The majority of Marylanders have visited a state park or forest at least once in the past year. Annual user surveys by the Maryland State Park Service report high rates of satisfaction.
- Priority areas for enhancing outdoor recreation statewide should include better maintenance and improvement measures for basic parks and recreation infrastructure; investing in trails and enhancing opportunities for biking and walking; and improving marketing, availability, and accessibility of information about outdoor opportunities online and at public parks and open spaces.



Paddleboarding with Dogs by Norma Broadwater

D. GETTING PEOPLE OUTDOORS IS GOOD FOR MARYLAND

A growing body of modern scientific research and literature concludes that being active outdoors can have tremendous benefits for individual and community well-being. In Maryland, the public health, environmental, and economic benefits of outdoor recreation and land conservation are key areas of interest for public agencies. Why does getting people outdoors matter in Maryland? Public health and individual well-being increases when people regularly participate in physical activity outdoors, while sedentary lifestyles and lack of exposure to nature are linked to health challenges. While these concepts have been recognized for some time, the depth of scientific research that directly links regular physical activity outdoors and spending time in greenspace to reductions in obesity, heart disease, diabetes, and mental health issues continues to grow.

As reported by the United Health Foundation, in 2017, Maryland ranked as the 16th healthiest state in the country, but faces increasing rates of adult obesity (30% of Maryland adults are obese) and cardiovascular deaths.¹ At the same time, healthcare organizations including the American Heart Association, National Institute of Health, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and Blue Cross Blue Shield all actively promote the high-health value of physical activities as simple as walking as preventative and treatment tools for a variety of physical and mental health conditions.

The majority of Americans live in urban areas and spend the majority of their average day indoors. At the same time, data shows that not everyone has equitable access to nature or the ability to access quality park space on a regular basis. Studies show that time spent outdoors, especially in natural areas, has physical and mental health benefits. Various medical, university, and public

health studies from the past 10 years have all come to similar, supportive conclusions that getting out into nature and being active outdoors does great things for individual and public health including the following:

- Exposure to sunlight increases vitamin D levels, can improve mood, stave off seasonal affective disorder, and aid in healing.
- Clinical studies reported improved healing and lower stress in patients recovering from surgery when they were exposed to natural light. Healthcare facilities have embraced this notion, and created garden spaces that provide employees and patients with a quiet green space. The concept is widely accepted and actively researched and promoted by groups including the American Society of Landscape Architects.²
- People with stress, depression, dementia, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and other mental health challenges report higher levels of calmness, focus, and improved memory after spending time in nature versus suburban or urban surroundings.³
- Walking and other easily accessible outdoor activities can help prevent and treat chronic cardiovascular diseases and diabetes. Just getting out to a park tends to increase an individual's physical activity.
- Adding parks that integrate green infrastructure to traditionally underserved communities or improving safe access to quality parks can improve social equity. Studies have shown that increasing access to parks for underserved communities can show improved health, social, and economic benefits as well as increased resiliency to environmental hazards.

¹ americashealthrankings.org/learn/reports/2017-annual-report/state-summaries-maryland, Accessed October 2018

² scientificamerican.com/article/nature-that-nurtures/; Accessed October 2018

³ ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5663018/; Accessed October 2018

Environmental Stewardship

The people of Maryland have high standards and expectations when it comes to protecting, preserving, restoring, and teaching others to maintain healthy ecosystems and landscapes. There are strong cultural and social ties to the Chesapeake Bay, forests, fields, and mountains of Maryland that residents treasure and desire to pass onto future generations. State and county parks, forests, and open spaces not only preserve natural resource functions critical to human survival, they also serve as the stage for diverse world-class outdoor recreation experiences, and a living classroom for teaching tomorrow's stewards of our shared environment. Public parks and open spaces are places where anyone can go to be surrounded by nature and participate in activities that create palpable connections with the natural world. Federal, state, and local land conservation programs ensure that Marylanders continue to have places to go to develop connections with nature that support a sustainable land conservation and environmental stewardship ethic as fundamental for a healthy, prosperous, and resource-rich Maryland.

Economic Prosperity

Outdoor recreation is a major stimulator of economic activity in Maryland and attractive and well-maintained parks, trails, and facilities increase the desirability of community for residents and businesses. The Outdoor Industry Association estimated that participation in outdoor recreation in Maryland in 2017 generated \$14 billion in consumer spending, which supported 109,000 jobs, \$4.4 billion in wages and salaries, and generated \$951 million in state and local tax revenue.⁴ In addition to consumer spending, the National Recreation and Parks Association 2017 report, "Promoting Parks and Recreation's Role in Economic Development," indicates that high-quality public parks and recreation opportunities generate positive economic impacts in communities by:⁵

- Playing a central role in community identity or sense of place and contributing to a high-quality of life and high-quality communities tend to attract skilled, educated, and entrepreneurial workers and employers seeking this type of talent.



Friends Forever by Maddie Capps

⁴ outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/OIA_RecEcoState_MD.pdf; Accessed October 2018

⁵ nrpa.org/siteassets/nrpa-economic-development-report.pdf; Accessed October 2018

- Enhancing community “curb appeal” and increasing the value of properties (and associated local tax revenues) located proximate to well maintained parks. The National Association of Realtors finds that homes located near a desirable public park or recreation open space can have their values boosted by 8% to 20%. However, a poorly maintained park nearby can drag down the value of nearby homes.
- Lowering health care costs by providing opportunities that improve physical and mental well-being.
- Serving as green infrastructure capable of improving community resiliency to natural disasters. Parks and preserved natural spaces detain and absorb flood waters and storm damage, which can reduce risks to life, property, and infrastructure and reduce recovery and insurance costs.

In addition to the findings of the National Recreation and Parks Association report, tourism in Maryland is also highly dependent on the state’s system of parks and public open spaces. In 2017 alone, Maryland State Parks welcomed 14 million visitors, including locals and travelers from across the world. State parks, local jurisdictions, and the National Park Service host millions of visitors at their parks and open spaces on an annual basis. Those who recreate in Maryland spend money on goods and services in their pursuit of fun, fitness, and leisure, and this has become the focus of the Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission.⁶ Established in 2017 by Governor Larry Hogan, the Commission is, “responsible for developing strategies and making recommendations to the governor to strengthen the state’s outdoor recreation industry and help ensure increased investment in our state’s outdoor recreation resources.”

⁶ dnr.maryland.gov/pages/more/home.aspx

E. PRIORITIES AND GOALS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

The Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan provides a summary of key information relevant to decision making, goals, and recommended actions for the Department of Natural Resources and partners to pursue over the next five years to improve outdoor recreation opportunities for the public across the state. Key information regarding existing assets and resources supporting outdoor recreation are summarized in Section II: Maryland’s Public Parks and Open Spaces. An overview of Maryland’s population, public feedback, level of service analysis, and other research is presented in Section III: Research and Trends. Section IV: Priorities and Goals for the Next Five Years was developed based on the sum of all research, public input, and guidance from agency staff and project Technical Advisory Committee, and includes specific goals and actions for the Department and partners to seek to implement in 2019-2023.



Foggy Mornings by Bryan Rosensteel