

STATE, REGIONAL, AND LOCAL PARKS, AND TRAIL SYSTEMS (1964, R1991, R2000, R2001, R2007, R2020)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) believes that parks, trail systems, and other recreational landscapes protect and advance human, environmental, and economic health. ASLA recognizes that state, regional, and local parks, greenways, blueways, and other public lands contribute to the sustainability of the community and region through recreation, education, social interaction, psychological renewal, and connection with nature.

ASLA promotes comprehensive planning and design grounded in an understanding of human and natural systems as crucial in the development and management of parks and recreational landscapes. ASLA supports strategies and policies that protect and enhance park resources, maintain and improve ecosystems services and connectivity, and create solutions that ensure equitable assets and programs to benefit all users.

Rationale

Parks and trails in rural, suburban, and urban areas are essential for human, environmental, and economic health, both locally and regionally. They contribute to:

- Physical and mental wellness through personal and community activity and social engagement
- Resilience through green infrastructure, and other planning, design, and management practices
- Ecosystem services by reducing pollution, mitigating the effects of extreme weather, and establishing and protecting habitat
- Connectivity by establishing ecological and transportation linkages between communities and natural features
- Economic well-being through enhancing tourism, attracting diverse revenue streams, providing jobs, and increasing property values
- Sense of place, identity, and connection through ecological and historic significance as well as recreation, education, and social opportunities

Parks provide numerous benefits ecologically, socially, and culturally; however, many established outdoor recreational lands face diverse challenges. The popularity of parks can lead to overuse and misuse. Funding affects the ability of parks and park systems to meet current user needs, acquire new properties, and maintain and renovate existing parks and amenities. Adjacent and nearby development can impact park resources. Ongoing assessment of existing park resources includes understanding needs and meeting increasing demand, recognizing and addressing challenges, and protecting public safety.

Developing, renovating, and maintaining park assets requires innovative planning, design, and management initiatives tailored to the specific needs of each community and ecosystem. Landscape architects balance diverse user needs with environmental and



economic considerations. Ongoing investments of time, expertise, and resources from park management, the community, and professionals are necessary to ensure long-term benefits and preservation of assets for future generations.

Equitable access and distribution of well-maintained state, regional, and local parks and trail systems are currently lacking in many American communities. This is a problem in all types of communities, rural to urban. However, merely adding more park lands will not ensure equitable access for all residents, nor will it address issues of inclusivity, adequate facilities, and safety. Park development and maintenance that meets the needs of underserved communities is vital. Landscape architects are actively engaged in identifying areas of need, fostering active stakeholder involvement, and developing facilities for all users.

Many factors affect the ability to fund, build, and maintain parks. Seeking long-term solutions is vital to optimizing resources. Revenue bonds, transfer of development rights, mitigation banking, and partnerships with the private sector are creative methods state, regional, and local governments use to develop and maintain park and trail systems. Investment in parks and open spaces balances and enhances urban, suburban, rural, and regional resilience. Landscape architects are leaders in parks and recreation planning and design, and will continue to innovate, advocate, and embrace future opportunities.

Resources

Parks and Recreation Design (Advocacy), American Society of Landscape Architects - <https://www.asla.org/community.aspx>

Parks and Recreation Professional Practice Network, American Society of Landscape Architects - <https://www.asla.org/parks.aspx>

City Parks Forum, American Planning Association - <https://www.planning.org/cityparks/>

The Benefits of Parks: Why America Needs More City Parks and Open Space, Trust for Public Land - <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-park-benefits-white-paper12005.pdf>

Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System, Trust for Public Land - <http://cloud.tpl.org/pubs/ccpe-econvalueparks-rpt.pdf>

Parks and the pandemic, Trust for Public Land - <https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/Parks%20and%20Pandemic%20-%20TPL%20special%20report.pdf>

Preserving and Building Parks, Connect Our Future - <https://connectourfuture.org/tools/preserving-and-building-parks/>

Green Streets and Community Open Space, United States Environmental Protection Agency - <https://www.epa.gov/G3/green-streets-and-community-open-space>

Best Practice Resources, National Recreation and Park Association - <https://www.nrpa.org/publications-research/best-practice-resources/>

Healthy World for All News: Parks and Green Spaces - <https://www.healthyworldforall.org/en/news/parks.html>