KANSAS
Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

A FOCUS ON ACCESS TO PARK EXPERIENCES
A statewide analysis of need and supply
Kansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
A Focus on Access to Park Experiences

To help provide Kansas communities with resources for recreational needs and trends across the state, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks and Tourism (KDWPPT) has released the 2015 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The SCORP serves to address emerging issues in Kansas outdoor recreation and set goals for the next five years. The document also summarizes actions taken during the last five years to address the goals of the 2009 SCORP. The 2015 and 2009 SCORP documents were built upon years of work by Sid Stevenson, PhD. Dr. Stevenson is an Associate Professor of Recreation Resources at Kansas State University, where he focuses much of his research on comprehensive planning.

Improved access to outdoor experiences is the common focus of this document. Because access is partially a measure of proximity or location, and because the state of Kansas has a very comprehensive dataset of amenities, this document examines how these data might help in the planning process. The report strives to illustrate where access to recreation experiences is adequate or in need of enhancement – to define gaps in service or identify outdoor experience deserts. Comparisons of service levels at three city classification levels (I=over 15,000 population, II=2,000 to 15,000 population, and III=under 2,000 population) are provided.

This compilation is designed to serve as a starting point for discussion and determination of an approach to best utilize the comprehensive outdoor recreation supply data the state has collected. The tool is under construction and has some limitations, as explained in the chapter, but it does illustrate the capabilities and comparability of standardized data, as has been collected in the state’s outdoor recreation geo-database.

Additional and related documents are available for perusal and download from either the Cited Resources section of this report, the report’s Appendices or the KS Outdoor Recreation Reports webpage.

The report was compiled with the assistance of an advisory committee representing suppliers of outdoor recreation experiences at all levels of government and both the not-for- and for-profit sectors, as well as other non-governmental outdoor recreation stakeholder groups and organizations.

Based on the inputs of the public and professionals, results of the data analysis and review of other relevant reports and trends, the following goals were identified and the actions recommended with the intended result of improving the supply of and access to quality outdoor recreation experiences for the state’s citizens and visitors.
GOALS ON WHICH TO FOCUS

GOAL A: To measurably enhance outdoor recreation opportunities closer to where people live.

Input from the public and professionals in Kansas and trends in the national literature continue to indicate those experiences more conveniently accessed will more likely be better utilized. Experience deserts (a measure of gaps in proximity/inaccessibility) are a national focus of the National Recreation and Park Association and Centers for Disease Control (2013, NRPA, CDC) and warrant attention. This 2015 report provides a measure of this closeness; measured as .5 mile walkable proximity for selected outdoor experiences (physical activity and natural). Any such criteria shall continue to recognize the value of enhancing existing unique, state and federally supplied natural resource based experiences located in remote, rural areas. State efforts such as boat ramps, water and linked trails to communities, and state parks close to urban areas also meet this objective.

**Recommended Action A.1**: Examine the possible addition of scoring criteria to local Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant applications that will serve as an incentive for applicants to develop projects that result in improvements to outdoor experiences close to where people live.

GOAL B: To more effectively utilize the data available in the state’s comprehensive outdoor recreation geo-database, along with population and health statistics; and to gather additional information, if appropriate, to continue to address gaps in access to outdoor recreation experiences.

This is a continuation/refinement of a 2009 Goal: Outdoor Recreation Planning at all levels of supply would be enhanced with improved comparative data. Since 2009, notable progress has been made. The use of proximity analysis was identified as a promising tool in 2009, but as reported in this document, it has been refined, adjusted to match published and emerging research, and compiled for three city classification levels.

This 2015 report made significant strides in addressing comparative data needs relative to parks, facilities and trails, but it also revealed shortcomings, notably the lack of specific details. The additional information needs cited in this section address the amenity categories and are designed to further aid planning decisions, resulting in the more optimal positioning of needed services.

TRAILS

Trails continue to be ranked highly as a need by the public and agencies, but constructing the right type of trails in the right location is difficult without additional information.

**What we know:**
- Where the trails are
- Who is underserved
- Trail details: Surface, length, width, allowable uses, degree of difficulty
- That people want better access to shared use trails close to home

**What we need to know:**
- Use levels of current trails and probable use levels of new trails
- Which trail sections are accessible to wheelchair users
- That trails are accurately categorized by type and appropriate uses

**Use levels**
The most needed trails are those that will be used. It is evident that some trails in the state may be over-utilized, while others are underutilized, suggesting a need for either re-vitalization, improved marketing, or recognition that more trails of that type are unnecessary at present.

**Recommended Action B.1**: Determine use levels of existing trails. Several useful methodologies exist, including the national survey of trail managers, cameras and counters. Start with a sample or pilot, indicative of key types.

**Recommended Action B.2**: Review and edit trail categories, and better define the state’s trails and paths. Convene a panel of trail and agency representatives at all levels of supply to review trail characteristics (attributes) and define appropriate categories, titles and details. Build on work already done in this area by the Wichita Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (WAMPO) and others.

**Recommended Action B.3**: The managing agency of each trail shall update the state’s trail database by providing trail accessibility details according to specific criteria.

TRAILS

This current inventory includes approximately 950 trails. Some of these are clearly trails and others not so but may be currently included either because they have received trail funding or fulfill a trail-like function. Based on national recommendations published by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (1999, AASHTO Guide), urban paths under 8 feet wide, intended for shared use, should be particularly scrutinized and distinguished from sidewalks.

**Recommended Action A.1**: Examine the possible addition of scoring criteria to local Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant applications that will serve as an incentive for applicants to develop projects that result in improvements to outdoor experiences close to where people live.

**Recommended Action A.2**: Examine the opportunities to provide additional funding to construct new trails in needed locations.

**Recommended Action A.3**: Examine the potential for limited new funding to enhance the existing trail system. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.4**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the William Pendley and Billingsley Trail Impact Fee. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.5**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.6**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.7**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.8**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.9**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.10**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.

**Recommended Action A.11**: Examine the potential for increasing the current funding levels for the Land and Water Conservation Fund. This may be accomplished through a variety of funding sources.
What we need to know:
- Number of existing parks (with acreage) by agency type and where each is located
- An average level of park acreage (by various types) by city class
- The ratio of selected community type park acreage to a city’s total acreage
- Where each city ranks in its level of supply of park acreage, by city class
- Where the gaps in the supply of community parks exists

What we still need to know for improved outdoor recreation planning
- That city data are complete and accurate prior to comparisons
- To what extent should a benchmark measure be used to rank park projects?

That city data are complete and accurate prior to comparisons
Benchmarking can only be done if the data are complete; otherwise comparisons are invalid. Any measure of comparability between cities should be made only after the state’s data have been comprehensively updated (last done in 2007). Kansas’ initial collection of geo-spatial data in 2007 was limited to key fields. Known errors and data omissions exist. While updates are added continually, there is no systematic, statewide process. The more critical updates needed include: accurate street addresses, correct name (e.g. field number), facility age and condition (utility), correct ownership and management, and access limitations (if any).

To what extent should a benchmark measure be used to rank park projects?
Benchmarking – using some accepted level of service – is standard practice in park planning. Many communities have published desired levels of community type park supply (e.g. 5% of the total community acreage, or 10 acres of community parks for each 1,000 residents, or 80% of community residents should live within .5 miles of a community park) but the opportunity to benchmark by city class, statewide, has not been previously available. Those data are now available for Kansas and examples are linked to this report, but how the data should be utilized in planning needs to be determined prior to actual use of any specific benchmark measure. At present, it is believed that the results should be made available for use by individual cities and not considered as a comparative measure just yet for regional or statewide planning.

Recommended Action B.4 Convene an existing or new panel of park professionals (the current LWCF committee would be appropriate), representing all levels of government and task the panel with the issue of how best to utilize Kansas’ newly published park, facility and trail benchmark data in local, regional and statewide park planning. The benchmark data currently available, as published in this report, include measures of proximity, several measures of quantity and a general estimate of quality based on a combination of measures. The panel would review the methodologies, and after weighing the values and limitations of various measures, determine if the KS ParkScore or other approach should be used, and if an approach is approved, what specific metrics should be included in its composition.

Recommended Action B.5 Utilize approved recreation agency staff to update the Kansas geo-spatial recreation data using an online process; likely a hybrid of two national models under development (The National Recreation and Park Association’s model and the Protected Areas Database of the US model used by the U.S. Geological Survey). (BS is an additive but repeated action)

FACILITIES

What we know:
- The number and location of 95% of facilities in Kansas’ parks
- The average level of service for all facilities, by city class
- The location of gaps in the supply of selected facilities
- The location of state and federal park facilities in a format useable in mobile applications
- Currently popular facilities being constructed

What we need to know:
- A more accurate assessment of the condition or utility of selected facilities
- The level of use of selected facilities; and a method to address the change in the level of service due to a change in facility condition
- A more accurate estimate of the cost of renovation/construction of facilities
- That the facility data in the state’s outdoor recreation geo-database is accurate and complete

The condition or utility of selected facilities, the level of use of selected facilities, and a method to address the change in the level of service due to a change in facility condition or use level
Representatives from the National Recreation and Park Association and the Centers for Disease Control highlighted a recently convened panel of experts (CDC, 2013) that was tasked with defining Play Deserts. In order to best address this emerging analysis tool Kansas needs to collect facility condition and levels of use data.

In a study initiated in the Spring of 2014, the City Parks Alliance and the Rand Corporation have begun collecting facility use and condition data in selected Kansas cities.

While proximity analysis (spatial measurement of a walkable service area) is an emerging park planning tool, it cannot adequately address the enhancements of service areas (at the city level in particular) resulting from a facility upgrade or renovation. Before this can be measured, facility condition must be monitored.

The estimated cost of renovation/construction of facilities
Each year, as partial requirement of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, states are asked to submit an estimate of unmet outdoor recreation needs for the upcoming year. Kansas does not currently maintain a data set of construction estimates for parks and facilities. An estimate of needs was compiled for this 2015 document using published community plans in the Midwest,
but the process revealed the lack of readily available data. The beneficiaries of archived construction costs for park amenities would include all levels of government.

That the facility data in the state’s recreation geo-database is accurate and complete Facility changes are made at a relatively quick pace, with each community averaging several each year. These changes are not currently systematically entered in the state’s recreation geo-database, as no convenient method to do so presently exists. Ranked comparisons (benchmarks) rely heavily on the accuracy and completeness of the data.

Recommended Action B.5: Utilize approved recreation agency staff to update the Kansas geo-spatial recreation data using an online process; likely a hybrid of two national models under development (The National Recreation and Park Association’s model and the Protected Areas Database of the U.S. model used by the U.S. Geological Survey). (B.5 is an additive but repeated action)

Recommended Action B.6: Develop a searchable database/archive of recreation and park construction project costs in a standardized format to aid in comparability between several quality levels.

GOAL C: Encourage stakeholder advocacy efforts that regularly address significant outdoor recreation issues facing the state of Kansas.

The existence of outdoor recreation advocacy representing the most potent and key stakeholders is particularly relevant given the issues facing outdoor recreation in the state and may be particularly helpful in aiding efforts requiring legislative action. This is a continuing issue – listed as improved advocacy in 2009.

The current SCORP advisory committee meets some of these criteria but since it is organized only every 5 years, it lacks timely advocacy functionality in between. A 2013 poll of the current SCORP committee showed a number of members interested in participating in continuing and enhanced advocacy efforts, however.

The Kansas Recreation and Park Association plays an important statewide advocacy role on park and recreation issues. It meets regularly, has a statewide presence and represents all levels of public recreation supply. Its advocacy efforts have historically been shown to be both supplier- and user-oriented.

While panels, coalitions, task forces and work groups are developed on an issue, regional, and opportunity basis (e.g. Eco-Tourism, Flint Hills, Health and Fitness, Children in Nature, Water), no established entity (e.g. Colorado Outdoor Stewardship Coalition) presently exists with its primary purpose to regularly examine and work to positively influence outdoor recreation policy and outcomes at the local, regional and statewide level.

Recommended Action C.1: Encourage private efforts to initiate an Outdoor Recreation Advocacy group that consists of a diverse representation of key supply, retail and participation stakeholders.

If initiated: Keep the group informed and encourage it to address and move forward sustainable solutions to relevant outdoor issues that are statewide in nature. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Improve environmental and outdoor skills education statewide
- Address outdoor recreation revenue generation and sustainable funding options (that impact service delivery at all levels of supply: local, county, state and federal)
- Focus on the value of water to outdoor recreation in Kansas
- Explore approaches to improving access to quality outdoor experiences

GOAL D: To explore and implement a sustainable source of outdoor recreation funding for both operations and capital projects.

Across the country, agencies rank the day to day challenges of adequate and stable operating funds as a significant challenge to providing quality outdoor recreation experiences. The number of capital projects needed to address gaps in service, as outlined in this document, is also significant. Three states in the region (MO, AR and CO) have established dedicated funding mechanisms of substantial benefit to conservation and outdoor recreation. Kansas uses a special liquor tax to some positive effect but the limits of impact (local level only) and limitations of use are significant. Currently, while Kansas Lottery money is being utilized to fund State Park operations, no legislation exists to protect this specific investment.

Recommended Action D.1: Continue to measure and provide decision makers with accurate, state specific, return on investment data, such as that provided in the KRPA economic impact study compiled in 2012, so that the impacts of investments in the supply of outdoor recreation experiences are well known.

Recommended Action D.2: Encourage legislative action on dedicated and sustainable fiscal measures that would benefit the state through the improved supply of life enriching and visitor attracting outdoor recreation experiences.
GOAL E:
To continue to protect our state’s legacy landscapes (e.g. the Flint Hills) and key biological reserves (e.g. Cheyenne Bottoms) while simultaneously working to enhance access for consumptive and non-consumptive outdoor recreation experiences.

Threats to the state’s legacy landscapes and biodiversity are documented in this report, and include but are not limited to: fragmentation, invasive species, urban sprawl, wind power development. Access to outdoor recreation experiences needs to continue to be a part of protection scenarios.

Recommended Action E.1: Publicize protection and planning efforts that contain access recommendations as part of sustainability planning.

GOAL F:
Continue to measure and promote the health benefits of participating in outdoor recreation experiences.

The ongoing Built Environment and Outdoor Summit was initiated in 2007 to address a 2003 SCORP issue. A major goal of the summit continues to be collaboration of members of the health services profession, community planners, and outdoor recreation professionals in particular in addressing planning and supply issues related to enhancing the health of the state’s residents.

This report illustrates several summit topics designed to enhance collaborative efforts.

Recommended Action F.1: Catalog and document known best practices within the state that exemplify the purpose of modifying the built environment to achieve collaborative goals of improved health via improved access to recreation and physical activity. Newsletters, websites and agency publications highlighting these efforts would be appropriate examples of documentation.

GOAL G:
In anticipation of future water shortages, prepare salient justification for the value of water for recreation use to state and local economies, personal enrichment, family cohesion, and mental and physical health.

An adequate supply of water based recreation at the local, regional and statewide level is especially crucial to Kansas because so many experiences are dependent on its availability. The state has experienced a negative climate and drought scenario over the last couple of years; one that forecasters believe is more likely than not to repeat itself in the future.

While water can serve multiple beneficiaries, reduced availability and/or changes in policy or allocation potentially could result in troubling impacts on the state’s outdoor recreation supply and therefore the state’s economy. Outdoor recreation suppliers must anticipate the need to provide evidence of the values and benefits derived from water based recreation and take steps now to assimilate solid justifications.

Recommended Action G.1: Collect evidence in support of the importance and value of water based recreation to Kansas. Support should include white papers, use and spending data, and advocacy assistance (as noted in C.1). Use all available data to forecast several possible visitation impact scenarios.
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Dear Readers:

As Governor, my family and I have the unique opportunity to enjoy two fine public parks and a number of trails right next to Cedar Crest, the governor’s official residence in Topeka. We often walk the trails and frequently encounter others taking advantage of a great time outdoors. While many people might not have a park or trail just steps from their door, there are thousands of easily-accessible locations in our state where Kansans can enjoy time outdoors. Wherever I travel in Kansas, I see families and friends enjoying our state and local parks. There are hundreds of amenities available such as shelter houses, picnic shelters and playgrounds; thousands of picnic tables and a variety of trails, lakes and ponds. Kansans don’t have to hike, bike, camp, boat, hunt or fish to experience the outdoors. Visiting a park for a family reunion, a picnic with friends, a nap in the shade or bird watching are among the many ways to take in all that Kansas has to offer.

All these opportunities are the result of planning and hard work by dedicated outdoor recreation professionals who take pride in offering Kansans the best possible recreation experience. Although we have an abundance of opportunities available in Kansas, it is always possible to do more. Therefore, I certify this document as the Kansas Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Opportunities for public participation were used during the planning process and included an online public forum and two surveys – one for the general public and one for recreation professionals across the state. The Kansas SCORP will help increase access to recreational opportunities and guide the efficient use of resources where they are needed most. It will also help state and local leaders continue to develop experiences that embellish the quality of life for all Kansans.

Kansas is blessed with natural beauty that is unmatched in the U.S. Personally, I am always amazed by the beauty of the Flint Hills and the Kansas River, and there have been several significant accomplishments regarding these natural treasures since the 2009 SCORP. In 2010, then U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the creation of the Flint Hills Legacy Conservation Area, a program to help maintain the integrity of the tallgrass prairie and its wildlife, streams and agricultural heritage by using voluntary, perpetual conservation easements to acquire and protect up to 1.1 million acres of habitat. And the longest trail in Kansas, the Flint Hills Nature Trail, has received several grants to build improvement on portions of the trail.

In addition, the National Park Service designated the Kansas River as a national water trail in 2012. There are 19 access ramps to the river, and I believe it will continue to draw a growing number of river enthusiasts, benefitting businesses and communities along and near its banks.
Kansans can be proud of these accomplishments and many more like them. We can be proud that our legacy includes an abundance of ways to fill our leisure time with outdoor activities that contribute to good health, strong families and vibrant communities.

I encourage state and local governments, businesses, organizations and interested Kansans to work together to create strong partnerships and advance this plan so Kansans and those who visit our state can share our outdoor leisure heritage.

[Signature]
A Message from Secretary Robin Jennison:

Leisure time outdoors fosters a renewed spirit, promotes health and well-being, enhances fitness and nurtures respect for the environment. Outdoor recreation is a great way to create memorable experiences with family and friends, and it’s important to our state’s economy. The economic impact of outdoor recreation is large and growing. Nationally, it generates an estimated $646 billion in annual consumer spending. In Kansas, it generates an estimated $7.1 billion in consumer spending and 85,000 direct Kansas jobs. At least 60 percent of Kansas residents participate in outdoor recreation each year (excluding hunting, fishing and wildlife watching).

The economic benefits of outdoor recreation are enormous, and so are the more intangible benefits to the qualities of our lives, families and communities. However, reaping these benefits means investing in the necessary resources. A vital funding source for these investments is the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) that was created by Congress in 1965. Part of the Fund includes a state grants program that provides matching funds administered by a state liaison (KDWPT for Kansas) to plan, acquire, and develop land and water areas for state and local parks and recreation facilities. The LWCF alone cannot address all state and local park needs, but it is a critical federal component to leverage state, local, and private park funding.

Since the Fund’s inception, the State of Kansas has received more than $50 million in 50 percent matching LWCF dollars. This investment, leveraged with other support, has funded more than 700 state and local park and recreation projects. If it wants to be eligible for LWCF funds, the state is required to have an approved plan on file with the National Park Service describing how it has and expects to address a variety of outdoor recreation issues. That’s why this Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is such an important document.

The SCORP focuses on access to park experiences, including city and county parks. It sets goals and makes recommendations to help achieve those goals. It examines the need for better and more organized data for improved decision-making. And it attempts to define gaps in service or identify “deserts” with limited or no access to outdoor experiences. Enhancing access to outdoor experiences is a tall order, particularly in the challenging economic times, but without this plan, without good data, and without a clear direction, we will certainly fall short of our goals.

I am very grateful to all the individuals, government entities, businesses and organizations that contributed to charting this plan. I join Governor Brownback in calling for collaborative partnerships that move the plan forward and help us make improvements that will benefit our constituents and our economy.