

2009

INFRASTRUCTURE FACT SHEET



*American Society
of Civil Engineers*



Parks, beaches, and other recreational facilities contribute \$730 billion per year to the U.S. economy, support nearly 6.5 million jobs, and contribute to cleaner air and water and higher property values. Despite record spending on parks at the state and local level, the acreage of parkland per resident in urban areas is declining. While significant investments are being made in the National Park Service for its 2016 centennial, the agency's facilities still face a \$7 billion maintenance backlog.

PUBLIC FACILITIES

FACTS
ABOUT

PUBLIC PARKS AND RECREATION

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PUBLIC FACILITIES

2009
GRADE

C-

RAISING THE GRADES SOLUTIONS THAT WILL WORK NOW

A = Exceptional
B = Good
C = Mediocre
D = Poor
F = Failing

AMERICA'S
INFRASTRUCTURE
G.P.A.

D

ESTIMATED 5-YEAR FUNDING
REQUIREMENTS FOR
PUBLIC PARKS
AND RECREATION

Total investment needs
\$85 BILLION

Estimated spending
\$36.835 BILLION
Projected shortfall
\$48.17 BILLION



- ★ **CREATE** partnerships between public agencies and private recreation and conservation groups to provide benefits to the public at a lower cost;
- ★ **ADOPT** regional planning approaches that recognize recreation use and demand trends to maximize the use of limited funds for park acquisition and maintenance. Care must be taken to avoid overextending limited operation and maintenance budgets by creating too many new properties;
- ★ **ESTABLISH** state and local dedicated funding sources for parks and recreation facilities to ensure consistent future funding;
- ★ **CONTINUE** to increase federal leadership through programs like the Centennial Initiative and the Land and Water Conservation Fund to meet growing population demands for outdoor recreation opportunities;
- ★ **ESTABLISH** a federal commission to study ways to improve access to recreation in the United States. A bipartisan commission could assess use and demand of outdoor recreational facilities and better track the spending and effectiveness of federal investments in parks and recreation facilities.

CONDITION

State/Local Parks

Americans frequent their state and local parks more often than national parks. State parks entertained more than 730 million visitors during the period July 2006 through June 2007, and the vast majority (90.9%) were day visitors. During this time, states acquired 56,681 acres of parkland and spent more than \$463 million on new construction of state park improvements to accommodate growing populations.¹

States and territories received nearly \$28 million in federal funds in 2007 through the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program. However, they reported more than \$15 billion in unmet needs, a significant increase over the amount reported in 2006.²

The 75 largest cities in the U.S., home to more than 51 million Americans, reported spending just under \$5 billion in fiscal year 2006 on urban park and recreation facilities and programming, adding more than 5,000 acres of green space. Despite such record spending, the amount of parkland per resident has declined due to rapid

Parks spending may be an easy target for budget hawks, but in reality state spending on parks represents a minuscule part of overall expenditures—0.231% on average.

increases in population. In 2006, the 60 largest cities averaged 18.88 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. In 2007, that number fell to 16.72 acres per 1,000 residents.³ As suburban areas become more densely populated with infill developments, parkland will become more important in maintaining residents' health, safety, and stable property values.

Parks enjoy broad public support. Even in the current troubling economic environment, voters in November 2008 approved a record amount of new funding measures for parks and open space. Voters supported 62 of 87 (71%) conservation finance ballot measures, representing a commitment to spend \$7.3 billion on parks and open space. The \$8.4 billion total approved by ballot measures in all of 2008 is the highest single-year amount in 10 years.⁴

Parks spending may be an easy target for budget hawks, but in reality state spending on parks represents a minuscule part of overall expenditures—0.231% on average. California's percentage was the highest in the country, but is still less than 1% of the overall state budget (0.979%).¹ A lack of consistent data to track usage of state and local parks makes it difficult to determine unmet needs and to benchmark against other states and communities.

National Parks

During the second half of the 20th century, the National Park Service (NPS) suffered from stagnant budget appropriations, even as popularity and use skyrocketed. The result was an estimated \$6.1

TABLE 13.1 ★ Acres of Protected Land

REGION	TOTAL ACRES PROTECTED	PROTECTED ACRES PER CAPITA	% OF REGION PROTECTED
Mid-Atlantic	10,304,151.6	0.18	9.2%
Midwest	30,139,330.5	0.45	6.3%
New England	4,839,352.7	0.34	12.0%
Rocky Mountain	95,015,799.3	9.06	29.0%
Southeast	28,960,508.7	0.44	9.7%
Southwest	37,250,994.8	1.04	10.3%
West	267,143,832.8	5.21	41.5%
Total	473,653,970.5	1.57	20.5%

SOURCE National Trust for Public Land, Conservation Almanac

billion maintenance backlog by the beginning of the 21st century. The NPS consists of 391 units covering 84 million acres in 49 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 territories. National parks entertained more than 274 million visitors in fiscal year 2007, up from 266 million in 2003.

To address the staggering maintenance backlog, the Bush administration first undertook a comprehensive effort to inventory its assets and better manage improvements. It also committed \$4.9 billion over 5 years to directly address park facilities and maintenance beginning in fiscal year 2002. The NPS received \$2.39 billion in 2008.

In 2006, the Bush administration established the Centennial Initiative, aimed at

preparing for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the NPS. The Centennial Initiative provides federal matching funds to supplement private donations to enhance parks across the country according to the NPS strategic goals.⁵

Beaches

The United States has more than 84,000 miles of coastline that includes invaluable economic, environmental, and recreational resources. Coastal areas receive about 85% of tourist-related revenues in the U.S., contributing an estimated \$322 billion annually to the economy.⁶ Nearly one quarter of our coastline is suffering from erosion and yet the federal government has no policy to assess and

address the most critically eroded shorelines.⁷ As the rate of coastal erosion has increased, federal expenditures to repair erosion have actually decreased, exposing lives, infrastructure, and environmental resources to the hazards associated with increasingly strong storms.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Facilities

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is the largest federal provider of outdoor recreational services. More than 4,200 recreation areas are located on Corps-managed lands in 42 states. About 1,800 of these areas are operated and maintained by other entities, such as state and local governments, under leases or license agreements.

The vast majority (70%) of Corps sites are located within 50 miles of a major metropolitan area, making recreation opportunities easily accessible to many Americans. Corps facilities entertained 372 million visits in 2007, resulting in \$13 billion in total trip expenses and \$5 billion in durable goods, including \$8 billion spent by visitors in communities around Corps lakes. This recreation contributes approximately \$22.4 billion to the national economy and supports around 350,000 jobs.

The condition of Corps-managed recreation areas as well as those of its partners is a growing concern. More than 90% of Corps lake projects were constructed before 1980 and more than 30% are at least 50 years old. Flat budgets in recent years have led to the partial or full closure of 74 recreational areas in five states. This has led to a \$4.25 million loss in eco-

nomic benefits to the local communities. Further, Corps recreational areas have not kept pace with changes in equipment and use patterns of today's diverse population. New uses for Corps lakes, such as sailboarding, were never anticipated when most Corps facilities were designed.⁸

RESILIENCE

Parks are an important asset to the nation's economy and environment. With limited funds available, little or no attention is currently paid to the resilience of the national park system. Balancing site security with access is taxing and often unsuccessful. A failure to protect these national treasures will strongly affect the heritage and identity of future generations. Future investments must address life-cycle maintenance, security, risk management, and system robustness.

CONCLUSION

Parks serve many roles in the lives of Americans, providing recreation opportunities, jobs, and economic development as well as increased property values for adjacent private properties. Yet funding sources are inconsistent, and park facilities in many areas suffer from neglect—especially in times of tight budgets—even as their popularity and demand soars. Our federally funded national parks are not immune to these problems, suffering from deferred maintenance despite the rising numbers of visitors. At the state and local level, dedicated sources of revenue for parks and open spaces need to be identi-

RAISING THE GRADES CASE STUDIES

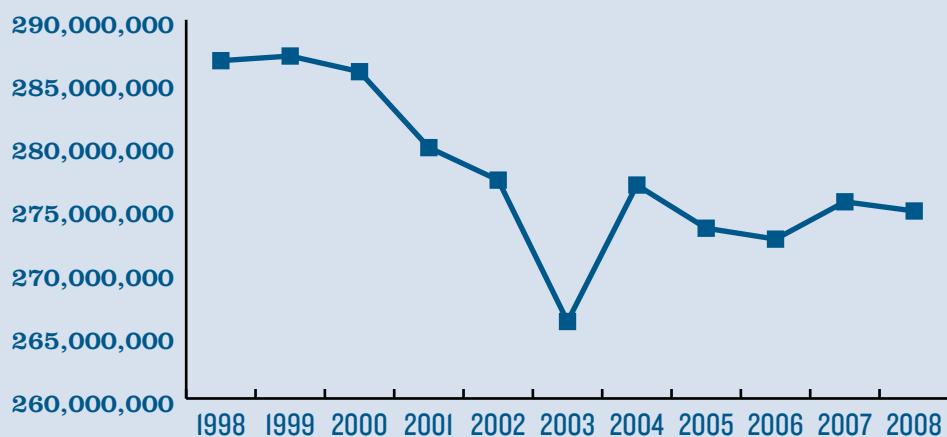
UNITED STATES ★ The Trust for Public Land

The Trust for Public Land has partnered with state and local governments across the country to set aside and restore parkland, both in urban and rural areas. From schoolyards in New York City to clean water initiatives in Minnesota and urban trails in Atlanta, they have worked to raise funds from private sources and pass bond referenda to support creation and rehabilitation of open spaces.⁹ **RIGHT:** The Trust for Public Land formed an ongoing partnership with the New York City Department of Education and several other



public and private donors to rehabilitate schoolyards across the city, including this one in the Red Hook section of Brooklyn. *Photo courtesy of Julieth Rivera, Trust for Public Land.*

FIGURE 13.1 ★ Visits to National Parks



SOURCE National Park Service

UNITED STATES ★ The National Park Service

At the close of the 20th century our treasured national parks were suffering from years of flat budgets and deferred maintenance. Administrators in Washington, D.C., and other regions could not even estimate accurately the total maintenance backlog, which the Government Accountability Office estimated at \$5 billion in 1998, but has been reported as high as \$9 billion. In 2001, the National Park Service embarked on developing an asset management program to inventory and assess the conditions of its structures, roads and other facilities, and then establish a program of rehabilitation and maintenance. Since then, significant strides have been made in reducing the maintenance backlog, and the National Park Service has set goals to quantify its success in this area.⁵

PORLAND, OR ★ State-Local Government Partnerships



Partnerships between state and local government entities that share common recreation goals can help maximize limited funds, especially in concentrated urban environments. For example, Portland's Parks and Recreation Department shares facilities with school districts, coordinates land and water resource management and use with other regional agencies and raises money for equipment and facilities by partnering with corporations and other nonprofit groups.¹⁰ PHOTOS, TOP TO BOTTOM: Students in Portland, Oregon help clean up the Elk Rock Island Natural Area. Created from an outmoded road that separated the waterfront area from the rest of the city, Portland, Oregon's Waterfront Park exemplifies the city's success in creating multi-purpose recreation areas. Photos courtesy of Portland Department of Parks and Recreation.

fied to ensure quality facilities for future generations. The National Park System should continue its Centennial Initiative to increase investment in park improvements leading up to the 100th anniversary in 2016. In addition, parks at all levels will benefit from a comprehensive assessment of usage and needs by an independent commission. ★

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