

Planning for Disaster Recovery

By Alaina Brandenburger

Nearly five months ago, the BP/Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded, unleashing gallons of oil into the surrounding ecosystem. Though the leaking well has been capped and cleanup efforts are currently underway, this accident has had an effect on tourism and recreation throughout the Gulf Coast. Public perception about potentially harmful areas has led to a decrease in tourism and recreational visits in the region.

According to the Department of Louisiana Culture, Recreation, and Tourism:

“26 percent of people who already had a trip to Louisiana planned are actively postponing or canceling the visit.”

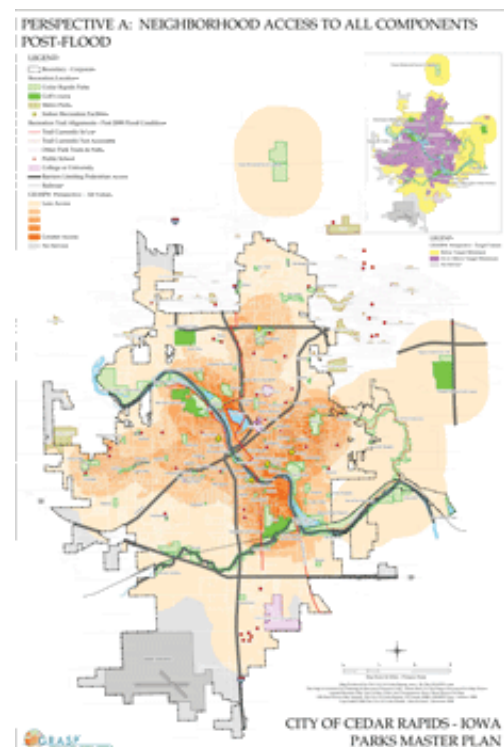
The situation in the Gulf, along with the fires that are currently burning in the Colorado mountains serve as a stark reminders that parks and recreation departments are vulnerable to situations out of their control. GreenPlay faced such a situation in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in June of 2008. In the middle of the Parks and Recreation Master Planning process, the City was hit with the worst flood in its history. Over 50 park and recreation areas/facilities were affected by the flood.

Rather than focusing on the negative impacts of the flood, Cedar Rapids used the flood as an opportunity to guide revitalization efforts. Anne Miller, GreenPlay Project Manager, stated:

“The [community] seized the opportunity ... to create a visionary Parks and Recreation Master Plan... Unique aspects of the planning process included new approaches toward building community consensus and buy-in, the integration of bold riverfront park plans to promote economic and environmental sustainability, and strategies for operational efficiencies.”

By using a natural disaster as a chance to reevaluate the needs of the community, an agency can address needs that may have been previously unmet. The agency can then increase its level of service to the community and potentially increase public usage.

So how can your agency prepare for disaster? One way is to be aware of areas that are prone to damage. Areas that are prone to flooding, hurricanes, fires, etc. should be regulated, and provisions made as to what kinds of structures can be built on them. Secondly, by having a digital composite-values based inventory and assessment of all holdings complete, the agency can identify losses, quickly respond to new community expectations, and be prepared for efforts to rebuild. By analyzing previous data and being proactive, an agency can help to minimize potential losses.



What has your agency done when faced with a disaster? Join the discussion on our Facebook page!