

The Role of the SCORP in Public Health Promotion

New Hampshire Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

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Since the mid-60s, the National Park Service Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program has required every state to prepare a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and update it every 5 years to be eligible to receive funding for acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation sites and facilities. In the past, many states have begrudgingly completed these plans, seeing them as a means to an end – a task that must be completed to receive grant money. However, in recent years, many states have begun using the SCORP as a valuable tool for collaborative planning, and statewide community engagement. SCORPs can be used to evaluate the economic impact of outdoor recreation resources like state parks, forests, and wildlife management areas. The SCORP is also often used to develop supplemental plans to integrate parks into tourism, public health/wellness, sustainability, and public education initiatives.

In 2009, GreenPlay completed a SCORP for the State of New Mexico, and in 2012, our team assisted with the writing and editing component of the New Hampshire SCORP. As our nation faces an increasing obesity crisis, the State of New Hampshire took the opportunity to incorporate public health as one of the components of its SCORP update. Another priority goal outlined in the New Hampshire SCORP was connecting people with nature.

Conservation and recreation leaders surveyed in New Hampshire realize that improving community health and wellness can only be tackled as a collaborative effort. The 2012 SCORP recommends partnership development across agencies statewide to ensure that all residents in the state have access to outdoor recreation. To achieve this, the plan recommends a three-step process to “identify, create, and connect.”



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First, state recreation and conservation leaders must **identify** populations and geographic areas in the state that may have limited access to outdoor recreation. By developing an inventory of all outdoor recreation opportunities in the state, and identifying potential limits to access, the state can then determine a sustainable, cost-effective solution. If key leaders are only able to identify that people aren't using state parks, recreation, and conservation areas, rather than identifying WHY they are not using them, they may not be providing the correct solution to the problem.

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The next step, **create**, involves the development of an informational database that people can use to educate themselves about outdoor recreation opportunities. The New Hampshire Division of Parks and Recreation and the New Hampshire Division of Forests and Lands collectively manage over 197,000 acres of outdoor recreation lands and amenities. However, the public outreach process conducted as part of this project indicated that New Hampshire citizens want to be more informed about them. In each geographic location around the state in which public input was solicited, participants indicated that information was an issue. As a result, the SCORP recommended a centralized information system that is user-friendly to inform residents and guests about their outdoor recreation options.

The SCORP also recommended that this database inform the public about health benefits associated with outdoor recreation. While people in the recreation, health, and wellness industries have long touted the benefits of outdoor recreation, the average citizen simply isn't aware of them. By including this information in the database, residents can learn how experiencing their local and state parks systems can help them live healthier, more active lives in an inexpensive way.

The last step of the process is to **connect**. Studies have shown that a well-connected park system, including trails, greenways, blueways, and other connective features helps to promote a healthier, more active lifestyle. By providing safe, well maintained access to these areas, residents are more likely to use active transportation modes such as bicycles, walking, wheelchairs, skateboarding, and other non-motorized means to get from place to place. Not only does this help them stay more active, it also helps them get outside more often. These amenities also allow people to interact with their neighbors, creating a sense of connectedness that isn't always available in a digital society.

Rather than treating SCORP plans as a means to an end, state parks departments should embrace the opportunity to obtain useful feedback from their constituents, partners, and user groups. They can hear

directly what citizens think about outdoor recreation opportunities and use these opinions to strengthen the attractiveness and value of the overall system. The SCORP planning process provides an excellent chance to promote the outdoor recreation resources at the local and state level, inform residents about the benefits of outdoor recreation, and encourage a healthier, more active lifestyle.



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In addition to the New Mexico and New Hampshire SCORPs, GreenPlay is working with the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism to develop the plans that meet the National Park Service SCORP requirements.