Illinois' most recent outdoor recreation plan documents the demands placed on our public lands and trends in popular activities.

The number of Illinois residents enjoying activities such as kayaking and bicycling has significantly increased in the last 20 years.

Green Spaces for Illinois

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Illinois has a new SCORP: the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. It's a 5-year plan that maintains the state's eligibility for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program for outdoor recreation land acquisition and development and also guides DNR's Open Space Lands Acquisition and Development grant program. SCORP sets priorities for how to spend grant funds to best meet the state's needs.

Beyond SCORP's technical aspects—inventories, analyses, supply, demand, needs and issues—there also is a real-life look at the activities people enjoy in the outdoors and the public lands and facilities available for these activities.

DNR's latest SCORP outdoor recreation participation survey reveals that more people than ever enjoy outdoor activities, with rates of participation higher than in previous years.

Illinois residents in 2008 enjoyed many of the same activities as they did decades ago, but there also are new ways people like to spend time outdoors. Pleasure walking is now the number one recreational activity, nationally as well as in Illinois, in large part because it is a simple and easy way to exercise and enjoy the outdoors.

Newer activities, such as in-line skating, kayaking and disc golf, are trending upward. What outdoor recreation studies in 1960 termed "playing outdoor games or sports" has become more sophisticated in the 21st century, with soccer and outdoor basketball joining baseball as America's pastimes.

Teach youngsters to enjoy the outdoors and they'll develop a healthy life style and have a life-long appreciation for nature.

Trails have exploded in popularity over the past 20 years, offering pleasant places for walkers, runners, bicyclists, equestrians, rollerbladers and others to mingle. Some activities have fewer overall followers, but a much higher number of days of participation for those who participate, including hunting, golfing, motorboating, off-highway vehicles and softball/baseball.

Illinois has more than 1.3 million acres of land available to the public for outdoor recreation. Federal, state, county, park district and municipal agencies and schools manage these lands, which range from large tracts that protect high-quality natural resources to smaller parks developed for specific activities. In addition, privately operated facilities, such as golf courses and hunting areas, help meet important needs.

Despite this amount and diversity, Illinois' large population, nearly 13 million—fifth highest among all states—translates into a low per capita supply of recreation opportunities compared with other states. Acquiring more land and developing more facilities remains a major SCORP priority.

Outdoor recreation contributes to healthier people and healthier communities, and parks are now recognized for their vital role in improving public health. Parks located close to where people live can encourage regular physical activity, which improves health. Therefore, a SCORP priority is acquiring land and developing community parks that contribute to health, wellness and active living. Other SCORP priorities include conservation and stewardship of natural resources, more outdoor opportunities for high-need populations, conservation education, sustainable management and economic recovery.

"Getting more people interested and involved in outdoor recreation means they can enjoy a happier and healthier life," said DNR Director Marc Miller.

It is well-documented that children today spend more time indoors: many don't see the outdoors as fun and don't value nature as much as previous generations did. An indoor, sedentary lifestyle also is creating a generation of children with growing health problems such as obesity. Re-connecting a new generation to the outdoors is a new and important SCORP priority.

In a large, diverse state such as Illinois, with changing outdoor recreation participation trends, diverse demands placed upon the public lands available for outdoor activities, and an era of limited government resources, SCORP helps identify important needs and focuses available funding on the highest priorities.

A couple of certainties exist: Outdoor recreation resources and facilities are a highly valued part of people's lives, and DNR's LWCF and OSLAD programs, with guidance from SCORP, are preserving Green spaces and creating recreation facilities in all areas of the state.

Green spaces and recreational facilities add up to a better future for all Illinoisans.

DNR partnered on two research projects contributing to the SCORP: the "2008 Illinois Outdoor Recreation Survey," conducted by the Western Survey Research Center, Western Illinois University, and the "2008 Illinois Community Recreation Facilities & Park Lands Inventory," conducted by the Office of Recreation and Park Resources, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Motorboating, hunting and golfing are among the activities where the number of participants decreased, but the days of participation increased.

The more things change, the more they stay the same: outdoor recreation activities most enjoyed by Illinois residents over the years include:
1960: swimming, bicycling, fishing, picnicking, nature walks
1978: swimming, fishing, hiking, developed camping, bicycling
2008: picnicking, observing wildlife, swimming, hiking, bicycling

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