

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. INTRODUCTION

Maryland’s natural and cultural landscape provides an ideal setting for residents and visitors to participate in a stunning array of world class, four-season outdoor recreation opportunities. These opportunities come as a result of Maryland’s long history of natural resource preservation and conservation efforts, which continue today in an effort to balance the impacts of development and population growth.

The ***Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*** is a framework for state, county, and local outdoor recreation planning initiatives. This plan has a strong focus on planning and design for access by people of all abilities, and on encouraging enjoyment and stewardship of Maryland’s natural resources, parks, trails, and cultural places. This document presents a clear, concise vision for the next five years. Preserving and enhancing Maryland’s outdoor resources corresponds with broader state and national efforts to balance outdoor recreation land use with natural and cultural resource protection.



Maryland’s new “[Smart, Green, and Growing](#)” initiative, a coordinated statewide effort to conserve the state’s vitally important natural resources and to implement comprehensive sustainability practices, is supported by the efforts of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Investments are needed in long range planning for land acquisition and preservation, including agricultural lands, progressive conservation practices, and balanced development for recreation activities. On the national level, the [America’s Great Outdoors](#) (AGO) initiative promotes connecting people to the outdoors, conserving natural and cultural resources, and developing partnerships.

“When children get outside, they build a healthy lifestyle at a young age and create connections with nature that last a lifetime. We have a responsibility to connect kids to nature so that they grow up to be our next generation of business leaders, scientists, and conservationists.”

Sally Jewell, Secretary of the Interior

An intended outcome of the ***Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*** is to justify state and federal expenditures for outdoor recreation and land preservation using the following planning criteria:

- Identify major issues and challenges facing the state’s outdoor recreation areas and natural resources
- Assess the existing supply of and demand for outdoor recreation opportunities
- Conduct an inventory of DNR land, trails, and water based resources
- Quantify the relationship between natural resource protection; land conservation; outdoor recreation; and public health and livability, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability
- Establish priorities for land conservation, outdoor recreation, and natural resource protection for the next five years based on outreach efforts, data research, previous plans such as PlanMaryland and related climate action plans



B. PLANNING CONTEXT

The Planning Context outlines the purpose of the plan, the DNR vision, mission, and goals that guided the plan's development, and the planning process and timeline.

Purpose

In December 2012, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources began the process of updating its 2009 *Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plans Volumes I and II* to create a coordinated document, the *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*.

The purpose of this plan is to establish priorities and actions for the next five years that support a healthy citizenry through equitable and connected access to the outdoors, wise stewardship of Maryland's natural and cultural resources, and recognition of DNR's contributions to Maryland's economic vitality.

In addition, the *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan* will be submitted to the National Park Service in fulfillment of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) requirement. This enables Maryland to participate in the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program, guiding the use of LWCF funding.



Maryland Department of Natural Resources Vision, Mission, and Goals

The following vision, mission, and goals for the *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan* have guided the development of this plan.

DNR Vision

"In a sustainable Maryland, we recognize that the health of our society and our economy are dependent on the health of our environment. Therefore, we choose to act both collectively and individually to preserve, protect, restore, and enhance our environment for this and future generations."

DNR Mission

"The Department of Natural Resources leads Maryland in securing a sustainable future for our environment, society, and economy by preserving, protecting, restoring, and enhancing the State's natural resources."

DNR Goals for Recreation, Parks and Open Space

1. Make a variety of quality recreational environments and opportunities readily accessible to all of its citizens, and thereby contribute to their physical and mental well-being.

2. Recognize and strategically use parks and recreation facilities as amenities to make communities, counties, and the State a more desirable place to live, work, and visit.
3. Use state investment in parks, recreation, and open space to complement and mutually support the broader goals and objectives of smart growth within Maryland.
4. To the greatest degree feasible, ensure that recreation land and facilities for local populations are conveniently located relative to population centers, are accessible without reliance on the automobile, and help to protect natural open spaces and resources.
5. Complement infrastructure and other public investments and priorities in existing communities and areas planned for growth through investment in neighborhood and community parks and facilities.
6. Continue to protect recreational open space and resource of lands at a rate that equals or exceeds the rate that land is developed at a statewide level.



C. PLANNING PROCESS & TIMELINE

The development of the *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan* has been guided by a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), key state agency staff, county parks and recreation leaders and stakeholders, and an extensive statewide public input process. The TAC and DNR staff met with consultants from the GreenPlay team and provided input throughout the planning process. The planning process and timeline follows:

PHASE I: Information Gathering

January – June 2013

Start-Up

- Refined project goals and work plan

Regional Public Meetings & Stakeholder Input Process

- Conducted two TAC meetings to establish direction
- Facilitated four regional public meetings with 104 attendees
- Held staff interviews and received guidance from staff project team
- Facilitated MD Association of Counties and MD Recreation & Park Association Focus Groups

Inventory and Assessment of Existing Facilities

- Assembled inventory of state and federal public lands with the MD Department of Planning

Statistically Valid & Online Surveys

- Random phone survey conducted with 2,800 households
- 2,475 respondents to open link web-based survey

Demographic and Trends Analysis

- Reviewed statewide demographics and population projections
- Identified outdoor recreation and natural resource-related trends

PHASE II: Findings and Visioning

June – August 2013

Findings and Visioning

- Presented and validated key findings to TAC and DNR staff
- Facilitated visioning session
- Identified plan goals and priorities

PHASE III: Plan Development

September – November 2013

Analyze and Coalesce Data

- Presented draft plan to TAC
- Collected and evaluated TAC and staff feedback

Coordination and Final Draft Preparation

- Coordinated document development
- Finalized GIS mapping outputs

D. KEY FINDINGS

Through statistically-valid telephone and open online surveying, DNR staff interviews, and stakeholder meetings, the ***Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*** assessed trends in outdoor recreation, participation levels, barriers to participation, perceptions of user fees, benefits of land conservation and outdoor recreation, and user satisfaction and areas for improvement. The following high level key findings were identified:

- Outdoor recreation has a high participation rate across the state (> 80%).
- There is a need to expand trails for all types of users.
- Enhanced connectivity of trails among local, county, and state systems is important.
- Walking is the number one outdoor recreation activity; visiting cultural/historical sites is number two.
- Outdoor recreation is important, but it must be balanced with natural resource preservation.
- Physical limitations (mobility) and time are barriers to participation.
- Conflicts in trail use between different user groups need to be resolved.
- Fees are adequate, and residents are amenable to paying more for expanded opportunities.
- Expanded water access is a priority at the federal, state, county, and local levels.
- Land acquisition and park development efforts should continue to be a priority.
- State, county, and local coordination for planning and development of trails, water recreation, picnicking, and natural areas is a common goal.
- School transportation policies are a limiting factor in youth access to the outdoors.
- DNR staff is perceived to be responsive and customer service oriented by residents.
- There is inconsistent coordination of local, county, and state planning efforts.
- DNR outreach and education efforts are visible, but they need to evolve to have a health, livability, economic impact, and diversity focus.
- Both the ecological and social benefits of land conservation and protection are now acknowledged, ensuring equitable access to public lands by all Maryland residents.
- Heritage Tourism has become an important component of Maryland's economic vitality, demonstrating the nexus of trail use, land and property acquisition, and celebration of cultural and historic landscapes.

E. KEY STRATEGIES

The ***Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*** utilized broad public engagement methods, quantitative data review, and an analysis of state and national trends to assess current conditions statewide for outdoor recreation and land preservation. This process resulted in four key strategies to focus on during the next five years, illustrated in ***Figure 1*** and explained in further detail below. Detailed recommendations are discussed in ***Chapter 6: Strategies and Actions***.

Figure 1: Key Strategies – 2014-2018 Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan



1. Coordinate Planning Efforts

The *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan* provides a Geographic Information System (GIS) based assessment of gaps in resident proximity to recreation areas, land and water based natural resources, and trails to sustainably address the growing demand for outdoor recreation. Sharing this information with county and local parks and recreation agencies and planners will help to coordinate long range planning efforts across Maryland and contribute to the mutually shared goals of stewardship of natural resources and provision of adequate outdoor recreation.

The previous LPRP stated an important recommendation which is still relevant and bears repeating. *“Where conservation investment is not supported by local land use management, the State should invest relatively little or no money. Small amounts should be invested to preserve individual properties or small aggregates of properties if that will accomplish specific conservation objectives, even if the properties are ultimately likely to be surrounded by development. Investment of small sums should also be used to encourage local adoption of more supportive land use policies and procedures, in areas where State goals might still be achieved if more effective zoning and related land use tools were established.”*

Actions Summary – Coordinate Planning Efforts

- Work with Counties to collect GIS data on outdoor recreation facilities and amenities, including trail heads, to provide a better understanding of the level of service provided.
- Coordinate with the Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE), county school districts and parks and recreation agencies to encourage the use of DNR lands as outdoor classrooms, with a focus on collaboratively resolving transportation issues.
- In collaboration with the staff of the Maryland Historical Trust, develop a GIS layer that identifies significant historic and cultural resources found on lands owned and managed by the Department.

“We (county and municipal parks and recreation agencies) need a uniform set of survey questions to use for public input on levels of service for outdoor recreation.”

Participant in Maryland Recreation & Parks Association and Maryland Association of County Officials Stakeholder Meeting

2. Promote Economic, Health, and Environmental Benefits of Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resource Protection

Economic Benefits

In Maryland, the outdoor economy generates \$9.5 billion in consumer spending, 85,000 jobs, and \$686 million in state and local tax revenue, according to the Outdoor Industry Association.

A recent report on the economic impact of Maryland State Parks tells a similar story. With nearly 10 million day users and one million overnight visitors to the state’s 66 parks, the total economic impact is more than \$650 million annually, according to a 2010 report, “Maryland State Parks Economic Impact & Visitor Study.”

Maintaining the delicate balance between meeting public demand for outdoor recreation opportunities, environmental sustainability practices, and economic growth goals is particularly important. According to *PlanMaryland*, the state’s Development Plan, population is expected to grow by one million additional residents by the year 2035. At this growth rate, *PlanMaryland* forecasts a loss of 226,000 acres of farmland and 176,000 acres of forested land, calculated at a value of more than \$312 million. The loss of this valuable resource economy based on agricultural and forest lands needs to be addressed.



Health Benefits

Overweight and obesity rates among children and adults continue to receive attention nationally and in Maryland, notably for the increased risk of developing chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, high blood pressure, and cancer. There is extensive research on the benefits of outdoor recreation participation and natural resource protection on individual as well as environmental health and livability. Spending time outdoors contributes to enhanced physical, social, and mental well-being.



Environmental Benefits

DNR participates in the review of Sustainable Community applications in conjunction with the Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT), the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), the Maryland Department of Economic Development, and the Maryland Department of the Environment. The planning process creates opportunities to consider plans for development, as well as connections to and preservation of nearby open space/agricultural land. The interagency planning process defines geographic areas eligible for state revitalization resources. Designated Sustainable Communities are urban, suburban, or rural communities that in many cases are adjacent to, or are in close proximity to, state parks and other public lands.

Actions Summary – Promote Economic, Health, and Environmental Benefits of Outdoor Recreation and Natural Resource Protection

- Utilize the Maryland Partnership for Children in Nature as a catalyst for conversations with local school districts and parks and recreation agencies to address barriers to schools using parks as informal environmental education sites, including transportation and fees.
- Conduct an economic impact study of trails and greenways.
- Add Quick Response Codes (QR Codes) and trail maps at trailheads and visitor centers to educate visitors about poison ivy, deer ticks, boating safety, related outdoor skills, and trail information.

- Assist friends groups in developing partnerships with businesses to identify trails as an important economic generator (Trail Passport contest), and promoting active lifestyles, healthy eating, and community vitality.
- Showcase Maryland’s Native American cultural heritage using trails and interpretive signage to tell Native American stories, develop Indian Heritage Tourism, and highlight significant Native American sites.

3. Access to Water and Land Based Recreation for All Populations

The *2013 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Access Plan*, prepared by the National Park Service, highlights the indispensable value of access to water for boating, swimming, fishing, and wildlife viewing. It also highlights the environmental value of water based recreation in multiple plans at the state, county, and local levels. The high public demand for access to water based recreation, and Maryland’s growing urban population have the potential to threaten the available water resources for future generations.



Maryland has over 500 public water access sites, more than any other jurisdiction in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The *Access Plan* promotes the creation of new access throughout the Bay watershed with the goal of establishing 300 new sites by 2025. Using GIS mapping, the ***Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan*** shows proximity to water access throughout the state, and prioritizes recommendations for expansion.

In addition, equitable access to land-based recreation for youth, diverse cultural populations, and individuals with physical and mental disabilities has been identified as a priority.

The DNR actively promotes recreational opportunities for wounded warriors, veterans, and their families through its [Wounded Warrior and Veteran Outreach Program](#).

Actions Summary – Access to Water and Land Based Recreation for All Populations

- Examine Wildlife Management Areas for opportunities to provide wildlife-dependent recreational development such as low-amenity camping, fishing/canoeing access, birding, walking, biking, ORVs, and equestrian trails, which are compatible with primary wildlife management purposes.
- Consider opportunities for water recreation access at Patuxent River State Park, Franklin Point State Park, Severn Run Natural Environmental Area, Patapsco Valley State Park, and Frederick and Carroll counties with Chesapeake Bay Watershed Public Access Report priorities.

4. Connect DNR Trails and Public Lands to the Places People Live, Work, and Play

The State of Maryland has a strong commitment to the health and well-being of its citizens and visitors. Partnerships and collaborations among state and local non-profit organizations, businesses, academic institutions, planning community, and public health practitioners have the greatest opportunity for providing a high quality outdoor recreation and natural resource protection to Maryland’s residents and visitors.

A new collaboration between the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the Maryland Department of Transportation is evolving to assess gaps in trail connectivity between where people live, work, and go to school, and where they want to play. The value of trails, greenways, and multi-use pathways in promoting health, livability, and environmental sustainability cannot be overstated.



Through the public outreach process, a connected trail network as well as a desire for more trails was identified as a high priority by Marylanders. Using U.S. Census and survey data, the **Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan** examined the proximity to trails and DNR lands within a five-mile catchment area. Using this information and advancing collaboration with county parks and recreation agencies for data sharing and coordinated planning will serve to create a connected trail system and greater access to water recreation and natural areas.

In a study of three urban communities, perceived miles between home and trail access, neighborhood connectivity, and trail safety were indicators of increased trail use¹.

Public education and connecting with users to promote outdoor recreation and natural resources are also important. Increasingly, public lands are in close proximity to existing communities – in some cases dense, urban communities. The value of these lands to the public and the importance of creating safe, accessible opportunities for participation cannot be overstated.

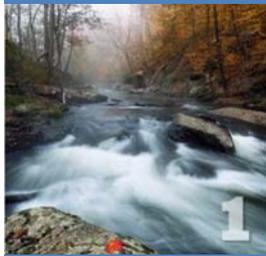
Actions Summary – Connect People and Places

- Create connections between trails within Maryland state parks and forests as well as between state, city, county and federal trail systems.
- With few exceptions, trails should be designed for multi-use and managed for cooperation among user groups to reduce conflicts.
- In cooperation with the ongoing program development of the Maryland Conservation Corps, Civic Justice Corps, and Maryland Department of Education, develop working relationships with school systems to engage high schools in trail construction and maintenance projects on DNR lands as a means for students to fulfill community service requirements.

¹ Wolch, J.R., Tatalovich, Z., Spruijt-Metz, D., Byrne, J., Jerrett, M., Chou, C.-P., et al. (2010). Proximity and Perceived Safety as Determinants of Urban Trail use: Findings from a Three-City Study. *Environment & Planning A*, 42(1), 57-79.

F. LAND PRESERVATION AND RECREATION PLAN CHAPTER SUMMARY

The *Maryland Land Preservation and Recreation Plan* has six chapters, summarized as follows:



1: Introduction

Provides an overview of the vision for land preservation and recreation in Maryland and the relevance of natural resources and outdoor recreation to health, the economy, and environmental sustainability. Planning methodology, public engagement process, and a summary of the plan references and accomplishments are reviewed.



2: Maryland's Outdoor Recreation Demand

Presents the planning methodology, online, phone survey, and stakeholder meeting results demonstrating the demand for outdoor recreation activities, participation preferences by activity and location, and barriers to participation. A demographics snapshot of Maryland's migration, population, and diversity patterns and a look at state and national trends pertaining to outdoor recreation, health, and multi-cultural issues are discussed.



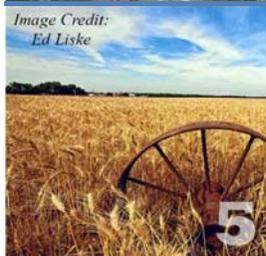
3: Maryland's Outdoor Recreation Supply

Analyzes the current inventory of DNR public lands and level of service for selected outdoor recreation activities and public access to water recreation. Provides an overview of DNR's major outdoor recreation initiatives. High level GIS maps of Maryland's regions and proximity maps for water access, picnicking, trails, hunting, and fishing show gaps in levels of service.



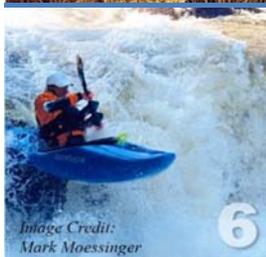
4: Connecting People and Places – A Vision for a Connected Trail System

Evaluates opportunities to expand connections between Maryland's parks, forests, and wildlife management area. Focuses on connecting people to the places they live, work, and play with a network of paved and natural surface trails. Examines best practices for different types of trails.



5: Land Protection and Conservation – Sustaining Maryland's Legacy

Documents Maryland's rich history in land protection and conservation and discusses how the State's four key land conservation programs work to protect "GreenPrint" and other priority lands. Land protection and conservation efforts in Maryland are closely aligned with the state's effort to maintain ecological balance in relation to development pressures, formally known as "GreenPrint."



6: A Future Direction for Land Conservation & Outdoor Recreation in Maryland

Summarizes the input of the Technical Advisory Committee and DNR staff, public engagement, and data analysis process. Describes four major strategies and related recommendations intended to foster greater connection to the outdoors by Marylanders to achieve the benefits of health and livability, economic vitality, and environmental sustainability.