The SCORP is a state policy plan required by the National Park Service (NPS) under the terms of the 1965 Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) Act for the distribution of approximately $2.5 million dollars in federal assistance during the 2015-2020 period. LWCF matching share grants are made available to state and local units of government for the purpose of developing high quality, public outdoor recreational projects.

The LWCF program has been the federal government’s longest standing strategy (since 1965) towards giving states an environmental approach using parks to develop what we value today as healthy lifestyles. Underlying—but nonetheless related—policies and processes for ensuring healthy lifestyles fall to a variety of institutions including the State’s Bureau of Public Health, Department of Education, Department of Environmental Protection, Bureau of Senior Services, Department of Commerce, Department of Transportation and a wide number of local public health departments and hospitals in addition to select departments of the State’s two universities. Facilitating and enabling these institutions deal with the myriad dimensions of health and environmental policies; systems and contexts are a growing number of local and non-profit organizations. Thus in its extended meaning, the State’s LWCF program can either be an environmental antecedent or pursuit towards using parks to develop healthy lifestyles, when considered as a funding resource for state or local park improvements by, for or with one of the above agencies.

Directions for administration of the state’s LWCF program are guided by three, state-defined policies in the SCORP for justifying and prioritizing projects recommended to the NPS for financial assistance. These project priorities concern capital repairs and replacement of obsolete park facilities, the expansion of new park facilities, and the development of new recreational trails, particularly in the state’s rural areas. Development of these policies was based on an analysis of park issues and trends as they relate to the supply and demand for public park facilities in the state.

SCORP content is organized around a synopsis of prior work for the 2009-2013 period, a digest of trends and issues concerning state public recreation, a policy and plan description for the 2015-2020 period, and some additional guides for future project development including an update to the state’s Regional Wetlands Concept Plan, for candidate wetlands acquisitions, required by Section 303 of the Emergency Wetlands Resources Act of 1986. Source and support material for the SCORP is derived from surveys, data collection and analysis, public engagement efforts, and consultations with state and federal officials and other public and private outdoor recreation stakeholders.

The West Virginia Development Office (WVDO) is the cognizant state agency for the administration of the state’s LWCF program, by and for the National Park Service. The SCORP Appendix includes a copy of the formal project application required by the NPS as well as the WVDO’s annual fund notice and instructions to all project applicants. The WVDO fund notice additionally includes standards for project selection based upon NPS requirements for an Open Project Selection Process (OPSP), which are elaborated upon as strategies within this SCORP’s Plan Implementation section.
**SCORP Methodology:**

Survey research for the 2015-2020 West Virginia SCORP was developed and administered between April and December of 2014. A sample size of 300 responses for the state's population of 1.8 million was received from 1,200 surveys distributed for a 95 percent confidence interval and 5.6 percent margin of error. Survey questions were initially developed from regional planning and development organizations, then alpha-tested by and between the West Virginia Departments of Commerce, Highways, and Bureau of Public Health with additional comments received from the WVDO staff.

Public comments were sampled from a distribution list of statewide stakeholders including:

- Regional planning councils;
- Visitor and Convention Bureaus;
- Economic Development Authorities;
- Chambers of Commerce;
- WV Park Association members;
- County Health Departments;
- Child After-School Programs;
- YMCAs/YWCAs;
- On-Trac Organizations;
- Main Street Organizations;
- West Virginia Land Trust;
- WV Environmental Council;
- WV Highlands Conservancy;
- WV Planning Association;
- WV Coalition for Physical Activity;
- WV Commission for National and Community Service;
- WV Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund;
- Sport and Recreation Groups (long list: including trail groups, riding clubs, bicycle groups, and hunting groups);
- WVU student body student canvas through the Davis School of Forestry and Natural Resources.

This list of stakeholders was initially organized from a comprehensive list of park and trail interests developed by the U.S. Center for Disease Control for their Parks and Trails toolkit for developing Health Impact Assessments.

Public participation to review the survey results and other data analyzed was conducted during the summer and early fall of 2014 in four public meetings: one in Charleston and one in each of the state's three Congressional Districts. A final presentation on the SCORP and the State's LWCF program was made before the West Virginia State Legislative Subcommittee on Parks, Recreation and Natural Resources on September 8, 2014 during the Legislature's Interim Legislative meetings.

Student presentations on public outdoor recreation needs and the state's SCORP survey were concluded December 9, 2014 by the WVU Davis College's Division of Recreation, Parks and Tourism Resources. A copy of the survey instrument is included in this appendix along with an abstract of student responses to the state's survey.
Acknowledgements

Over 300 West Virginians took the time to help prepare this update to the State’s public outdoor recreation plan, without whose survey inputs no conclusions would have been possible. A select few went above and beyond to assist the West Virginia Development Office staff with their expertise or comments, sometimes responding on limited notice—they deserve special note:

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Keith Burdette, Secretary, WV Department of Commerce
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About our cover:

The QR-inspired ‘word cloud’ represents the thoughts most often expressed by state residents in our SCORP survey responses to describe their greatest park experiences.

The Bank Gothic font used in the cover’s title block was drawn from the style of signage engraved on a Boone County mine portal, reminiscent of the culture and symbols of our State’s coal identity.
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- Glossary

- Legal Authorization  (Omitted in this version)

- Survey and WVU Recreation, Parks & Tourism Findings

- LWCF Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) and Application Forms (ESF)

- State Unmet Needs

- State Wetlands Plan

- West Virginia Park Resources by County and Region

- State Health Ranking Summary

- Park Source and Support References
Overview and Accomplishments from 2009 to 2013

West Virginia’s outdoor recreation, tourism, and energy-producing industries are collectively tied to the State’s iconic mountain topography (Figure 1). Coal is only a cultural image but a major contributor to the State’s economy (see Figure 2). While alternatives to coal and the State’s new-found Marcellus and Utica natural gas formations are sought, these energy sources remain viable—and volatile—fuel resources for not only public utilities but the growth of the State’s chemical industry exports.

Parks and public outdoor public recreation are integral parts of the State’s Leisure and Hospitality industry. Income growth and visitors have been steadily increasing for the last several years, although salary growth falls behind that of the State’s other economic sectors (see Figures 3 & 4). The 2013 opening of the 10,600-acre Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve in Southern West Virginia will provide some unique opportunities as well as challenges for the State’s recreation and tourism providers, the impact of which is discussed in the Trends and Issues section.

Figure 1—The Mountain State of West Virginia. (left) Slope Map, (above) Bridge Day BASE jumper, Fayetteville, West Virginia.

Figure 2 (above): The State’s natural resources and mining remain strong, yet volatile, sectors (WV Outlook, 2014).

Figures 3 & 4 (below) Leisure and Tourism remain in fourth place in employment and last place in salaries.
2009-2013 Period-SCORP Priority I: “Assist park expansions to promote active lifestyles and innovate community cores.”

The lack of movement or physical activity has contributed to a major health issue related to the State’s high obesity rate and rates of other chronic diseases (see Figure 5).

Losses in traditional manufacturing (see Figure 2, preceding page) have reinforced the population decline and social isolation of persons living in predominantly rural areas of the State, especially among those elderly and retired. However the State’s many small towns—built originally as local trade centers—retain the framework necessary for recovery. Population losses have already stopped in many places as jobs already lost cannot be lost again.

The development of parks and tourism infrastructure implicit in this SCORP priority are key forces among a number of factors that can now help revive community cores. However slow this process is, incremental, more efficient improvements are important enabling steps towards developing these most stable of community assets. Further discussion of these matters are discussed in Trends and uses of other resources in Implementation, Part II and in our Main Street/Growing Healthy Communities sidebar.

Authors having discussed this include:

SCORP Priority I LWCF projects built during 2009-2013 were characteristically more costly park infrastructure improvements, which nonetheless greatly widened and deepened their intended impacts to revitalize their local community cores and promote more physical activity. Representative projects in each of the State’s three Congressional Districts are featured here.

**Figure 5 (below): 1992-2012 Comparison of State Obesity Trends.** (source: CDC BRFSS)

**Figure 6 (right)**
Oglebay Park Winter Sports Complex, Wheeling WV, First District.
Thirteen of the 31 LWCF applications funded between 2009 and 2013 were considered SCORP Priority I projects, including three new parks now protected under Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act.

SCORP Priority I projects were represented in each Congressional District. In Northern West Virginia’s First Congressional District, Oglebay Park’s new Winter Sports Complex in Wheeling is shown on the preceding page. Second and Third District Priority I projects shown at right, respectively, include a gateway park for Charleston, the Mary Ratrie Greenspace, and the April Dawn Spraypark in Milton.

Fig. 7 (top) Priority I project from 2nd Congressional District—Mary Ratrie Greenspace, Charleston WV.
Fig. 8 (middle) Priority I project from 3rd Congressional District—April Dawn Spraypark, Milton WV.
Fig. 9 (bottom) Priority III project from 3rd District—Chuck Ripper Wildlife Interpretive Trail, Huntington WV.

2009-2013 Period—SCORP Priority II:

“Provide park funding for maintenance or additions to restore or maintain services.”

By far the greatest number of LWCF projects funded during this period were facility upgrades to existing parks. A total of 14 projects, divided almost evenly between the 1st and 2nd Congressional Districts, included a variety of pool repairs, shelter upgrades, and new playground installations. In the 1st District, LWCF projects were awarded to the Town of Beech Bottom, Marshall County, the City of McMechen, the City of Clarksburg, the City of Parkersburg, the City of Shinnston and the Town of Parsons. In the 2nd District, grants were awarded to the Town of Belle, the City of Charles Town, Barbour County, the City of Dunbar, and the City of Nitro. Nitro, Beech Bottom and Dunbar were all first-time LWCF recipients.

2009-2013 Period—SCORP Priority III:

“Provide support to complement the State’s Recreational Trails program.”
In regard to SCORP Priority III, there were no expressed, RTP-LWCF joint ventures during the 2009-2013 period. However one interpretive trail in Huntington (photo on previous page) and one water trail in Jefferson County were assisted with LWCF funds.

**2009-2013 Period—SCORP Priority IV:**

"Acquire lands for conservation values to preclude loss from development and promote healthy life-

One LWCF acquisition project was undertaken during the 2009-2013 period, to save a two acre tract from housing redevelopment in the Jerome Park neighborhood of Morgantown, to be rededicated as Mayfield Park (see photo below).

The State’s 2009-2013 SCORP included two programming priorities (see above) which were partially successful as objectives. A “Certified Healthy Communities” designation was not accomplished as a LWCF program initiative, however the concept was incorporated into a current mini-grant program for eligible On-Trac and Main Street communities managed jointly between the WVDO and the State’s Bureau of Public Health. (see following Sidebar)

In a similar fashion, no formalized inter-agency agreements have been formed as expressed, LWCF initiatives, however the WVDO continues to work cooperatively with a broad array of public and private, state and local organizations as part of its overall mission to develop or restore essential infrastructure and human capacity needs to ensure a high life quality.
Growing Healthy Communities program cultivates community and economic development

By Keith Burdette

Cabinet Secretary, Department of Commerce Executive Director, West Virginia Development Office

“Cities and towns across the nation have come to see that a vibrant, sustainable community is only as healthy as its core.”

That statement from the National Main Street Center reflects the vision which Main Street West Virginia supports. In its 2012 Strategies for Economic Improvement in Appalachia’s Distressed Rural Counties, the ARC notes that understanding one’s local resources and assets is key to developing individualized revitalization plans. While barriers from a number of factors continue to limit individual communities’ potential economic growth, the State’s Main Street and ON-TRAC process help clarify the unique and complex obstacles and issues communities face to achieve that vision.

As part of the design process and civic infrastructure, community parks help serve a vital economic function. As one of a community’s most stable assets, parks, if well-situated, can help create a positive impact on downtown real estate, tourism, and retail sales. A park can function to connect different buildings and services as well as send a message about the level and quality of strategic investments being made in the community. The park venue can convey a new image or identity to downtown and provide a stage to vary cultural and civic events. As the “lungs” of a community, a community park literally invites people to become more physically active and simply hang-out and enjoy the uniqueness of their special place. A successful park development adds ‘boutique’ value for investors and visitors as they see these how these other downtown elements can be brought together to convey a high-quality environment rather than simply relying on a generic layout of streets and buildings.

In 2012, the Growing Healthy Communities initiative was created to promote physical activity, access to affordable healthy food and community fitness and to connect health and economic development impacts in West Virginia Main Street and ON TRAC communities. In time, this program will help downtowns broaden their green-related initiatives to include other neighborhoods and businesses featuring locally grown or produced products with other civic infrastructure improvements. Going forward, it is hoped that these green initiatives will achieve the same return on reinvestment as Main Street West Virginia’s past accomplishments have shown. In our most recent 2013 Main Street West Virginia summary, that impact showed that for every $1 of state public dollars invested in the Main Street West Virginia program, there was $204 in direct private reinvestment and $7 in indirect private reinvestment. In addition, Main Street West Virginia communities leveraged state investment to generate another $350,000 in new taxes from net new business creation, and $509,238 in new taxes from net job creation.

Administered by the West Virginia Development Office, the Growing Healthy Communities program is funded by the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation and the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. Growing Healthy Communities projects are selected through a competitive process. To qualify, projects must focus on developing healthy community activities, increasing access to healthy food and promoting active lifestyles in ways that will stimulate the local economy. They approach improvements to the local health and economy of local communities through policy, systems or environmental changes. Strategies include making
a community more bike-friendly, an area more walkable, a farmer’s market more usable for both vendors and shoppers. In 2015, Gov. Earl Ray Tomblin announced awards for seven projects totaling $135,720 in grants for the Growing Healthy Communities Grant Program. The projects provided grants to:

§ **Elkins ON TRAC**: Begin the implementation phase of the rail yard path to connect the Elkins Rail Yard to downtown attractions.

§ **Main Street Fairmont**: Begin the implementation phase of the Fairmont Connectivity Plan. Crosswalks will be painted with murals and artistic bike racks will be installed in the historic downtown, and community events will be held to encourage use and safety for pedestrians and cyclists.

§ **Main Street Kingwood**: Continue the development of the Preston County/kingwood Farm to Table initiative by loaning iPads to local farmers to enable credit card, EBT, and WIC acceptance at the Kingwood Farmers Market. The project will also install a high-tunnel and community garden to encourage gardening among seniors and low income citizens in the area.

§ **Main Street Morgantown**: Design and implement way finding signage to connect existing trails, the Wharf district, and the downtown area.

§ **Parsons Revitalization Organization**: Add fitness stations and activity panels in Mill Race Park.

§ **Town of Shinnston**: Conduct a local business health assessment and enhance walkability by completing the Rail Trail and the trail in Ferguson Park.

§ **Town of Sutton**: Enhance the Sutton Farmers Market and promote bicycling in Sutton. The grant project will provide more canopies and tables for the Sutton Farmers Market, install a sound system and security system at the Sutton Farmer’s Market, and a plan for a permanent structure. The project will also install 18 bike racks in the area and hold an event to promote cycling.

Whether creating bike paths, planting community gardens or making farmers markets more shopper-friendly, these community projects show ingenuity and commitment to improving health and encouraging economic development.

**Trends and Issues**

Public outdoor recreation is all about creating opportunities to refresh mind and body in different environments. These opportunities evolve over time, influenced by a variety of trends and issues. Broad matters influencing the finance of new recreational development since the State’s 2009-2013 SCORP include these major challenges and accomplishments:

- Following the prosperity of the 1990’s and Millennium, the recent Great Recession marked the most significant reduction in states’ revenues since the Great Depression.

- Federal budget battles have accompanied significant declines in federal LWCF assistance for the acquisition and development of high-quality public outdoor recreational projects.

- Obesity rates continue to increase for West Virginia and the nation as the improvement of public health has arguably become the nation’s number one domestic policy issue.

- West Virginia continues to age, as it maintains its rank of having the third oldest population in the United States—both a challenge as well as an opportunity for simultaneously having fewer preferences for active, youth-oriented recreational facilities as well as growth potential for retirees and second home development.

- West Virginia was successful over scores of other states in the Boy Scouts of America’s selection of their permanent venue for a National Scout Jamboree site at the Summit Bechtel Reserve in Fayette County. Besides its variety of world-class, outdoor recreational opportunities, the state’s ‘wild and wonderful’
natural areas were judged to be readily accessible via existing commercial carriers—rail, airline and interstate—to larger regions.

- The U.S. 2010 Census reveals 80.7 percent of the nation’s population now living in urban areas. Significantly, the rural-to-urban shift is occurring nearly three times faster than the overall population growth rate of 9.7 percent. The land conversion accompanying this population shift accounts for the ‘sanctuary in rural greenery’ East Coast visitors see in the Mountain State’s available natural areas. In large part, this demographic accounts for West Virginia’s trend-bucking, exponential growth in big game hunting and ATV ridership when compared to national trends.

- The multi-dimensional aspects of linking physical activity opportunities with stronger place-making, access to healthier foods, improvements to the natural environment, and increased access to new or better economic opportunities has

now generated a consortium approach by and between more than 25 state and private agencies or groups in West Virginia which are now beginning to network together to address a number of the challenges and opportunities noted here. (for additional description of these consortiums, go to www.trythiswv.com and www.keys4healthykids.com).

**Details of Trends**

“Recent economic conditions are leading many parks and recreation agencies across the country to cut their budgets….recreation resources per capita are projected to be about 2/3 of what they are now by 2060, yet demand will rise substantially by that year.”

—quotes from *Recreation Management* and the U.S. Forest Service (NSRE)

For years the LWCF grants-in-aid program has been a ‘go-to’ source of financial support for park capital improvements. However in the history of the program, federal funds have been dramatically cut since 1982 (see table below), greatly limiting the number and size of grant awards. Effects have been

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Fig. 12: Time Value of Money—LWCF Annual Apportionments Adjusted for 2014 Dollars
As the competition for traditional funding sources and consumer dollars grows more intense, public service/non-profit organizations must rely on producing revenue through a wide variety of means, among them the donations of friends and supporters. Because revenue from taxes, fees, and charges can no longer meet optimal operation and maintenance requirements, most organizations are facing a challenging financial deficit. To help bridge the gap between agency needs and revenue many park and recreation departments, botanical gardens, zoos, cultural arts groups, and universities have turned to Friends Organizations.

A Friends Organization is simply a non-profit 501(c)3 corporation whose purpose is to assist with the improvement of the agency that it serves, most commonly in the area of financial support. Support may also come in the form of volunteerism and advocacy. Specifically, Friends Organizations can be used in the following ways:

1. Creating an additional flow of funds on a yearly basis through an annual campaign.
2. Creating a flow of funds for a special projects including designated capital improvements.
3. Using Friends as volunteer staff for special projects/special events.
4. Serving as an operating entity if the governmental entity is unable.
5. Sponsorship of fund raising events.

Establishing a Foundation

The important of a separate trust fund or supporting foundation is that individuals, businesses, and philanthropic foundations, in general, are reluctant to contribute to governmental agencies. In fact, there is really no precedent for major giving to units of government. However, people will contribute to non-political trust funds established with guidelines that state its specific purpose and are administered by an independent group of trustees whose main purpose is to generate monies for the fund, and assure that they are managed for the purpose intended.

Partnering with Your Community Foundation

It may be appropriate, and to some extent economically feasible, to establish a “donor advised fund” with a local community foundation. Community foundations already have in place tax-exempt status and the expertise to handle such an arrangement. In exchange for using the community foundation’s tax exempt status, its facilities, its staff, as well as saving the time, effort, and funds to create a separate trust fund, the local entity relinquishes the rights to the final decisions for managing and distributing the fund monies.

The parks and recreation field must become pro-active in acquiring resources from the private sector to address the deferred maintenance needs of their agencies, to provide for the long-term financial sustainability for West Virginia parks through the establishment of endowments. While we want to build and grow the capital facilities that provide for the healthy places in our communities that attract tourists, improve community wellness, and conserve natural resources, it is imperative that we identify resources that will guarantee the existence of facilities and programs into the future.
disproportionate, with southern distressed counties of the Third Congressional District seeking funds the least due to the program’s local matching requirements.

Of greater concern is the obsolescence of previously funded park improvements built during the onset of the program that 40 years later, have all but reached the end of their life cycle. State-maintained parks alone have unmet needs exceeding $60 million (see Appendix). Now much of what was built then is due for replacement, without significant fund sources being available to finance necessary improvements. As a consequence, deferred maintenance is an all-too-common observation, underscored by the large number of comments received in our 2014 survey about needed improvements to existing facilities.

Measures to reinstate the LWCF program to a greater share of its $900 million authorization may yet gain traction in the near-term Congressional budget debates. Three current bills to reinstate LWCF funding include S. 1265, S. 1813, and HR 2727.

Of particular interest to West Virginians is the House Bill, sponsored by First District Congressman David McKinley, whose motives in sponsorship include correction of the inequities between federal and state apportionments and the creation of greater incentives for tourism-based job growth and local economic development.

Aside from these Congressional initiatives, financial assistance for park developments from governmental sources appears very limited. Our 2014 survey asked if current financial assistance for parks and tourism infrastructure was good, bad or indifferent, to which only 12 percent of residents felt it was ‘bad’ while 51 percent thought current support was good. A significant minority of 37 percent were either indifferent towards, or unresponsive to, this issue.

While the LWCF program is not a sole source of support for public outdoor recreation, a comprehensive review of park resources goes beyond the scope of this policy plan. Given the limits of present and prospective governmental assistance, philanthropic support from West Virginia foundations will need to be pursued more in the future (see sidebar and listing of WV foundations in Appendix ‘Park Source and Support References’).

“If I knew I was going to live so long, I would have taken better care of myself.”

—Lawrence Peter ‘Yogi’ Berra

West Virginians continue to struggle with the effects from a wide variety of health issues including high blood pressure, smoking, physical inactivity, obesity, diabetes, and preventable hospitalizations, according to the American Public Health Association (see Appendix for State Health Rankings Details and WV Bureau of Public Health sidebar following this section).

Everyone recreates differently, however our 2014 SCORP survey sought to get a more effective understanding of people’s recreational preferences not only by the purpose of their activity but also the context in which they chose one interest over another. As a consequence, several of the most common physical activity preferences—walking, running and cycling—were paired with the passive recreational interest of driving for pleasure, in both census-defined, urban and rural environments. As an additional measure, urban and rural residents were each asked to prioritize their respective park facility interests. Finally, a cross-tabulation of activity interests was examined by physical activity level (‘low’—being limited or no physical activity interest, medium—being casual or occasional physical activity interest, and high—being daily or near-daily physical activity
State Health Officer Gives Prescription for Better Health

By: Dr. Rahul Gupta
Commissioner, West Virginia Bureau of Public Health, DHHR

In West Virginia, residents are lucky to live in beautiful spaces that encourage outdoor activities. People are more likely to walk and be physically active, as well as enjoy higher levels of health and well-being, when they have easy access to parks and trails within their communities. A top priority for the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources Bureau for Public Health (BPH) is working with communities, worksites and schools to improve trails and sidewalks for walking and assure connectivity in transportation planning. The goal is for adults and children of all ability levels to have easy and safe access to physical activity in the places where we live, work, learn, pray and play.

Only a few lifestyle choices have as large of an impact on a person’s health as physical activity. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that people who are physically active for about seven hours a week have a 40% lower risk of premature death than those who are active for less than 30 minutes per week. The benefits of exercise add up. Each additional 15 minutes of daily exercise will reduce all causes of death from chronic disease by 4% and cancer deaths will be reduced by 1%. BPH Commissioner and State Health Officer Dr. Rahul Gupta says that getting outside to walk is the prescription that offers the greatest health benefits at the lowest cost.

“Regular physical activity lowers the risk of heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and helps control type 2 diabetes. It improves mood, memory and overall health,” Dr. Gupta said. “Walking is good exercise for people of all ages and it’s free. You can walk alone or in a group, at any time of day, and in most types of weather.”

Physical activity not only has tremendous health benefits, but can save tens of thousands of dollars for a person over their lifetime. Physical inactivity is associated with two types of costs. First are the health care costs related to chronic conditions, including doctor’s visits, prescriptions and hospitalizations. Second are the costs associated with lost wages and premature death.

BPH supports and promotes physical activity through many activities, including funding community projects like “Mt. Hope on the Move” in Fayette County and “Get Out, Get Active, Get Healthy” in Greenbrier County. Mt. Hope is creating a walking/running club for residents and distributing an area map of walking trails. Greenbrier County’s project includes a walking program, physical and nutritional activities, and fruit/vegetable fairs throughout the county, with the aim of increasing usage of state parks, walking and biking trails.

These are just a few of several projects important to BPH. The people of West Virginia deserve to have every opportunity to be healthy, and understanding the long-term health and financial benefits of physical activity is a critical step toward that goal. People must have access to the opportunities that our beautiful state has to offer. It’s all about healthy people in healthy places across West Virginia!


Consistent with national trends and prior State SCORP surveys, walking continues to be the first choice of West Virginia residents for physical activity (see Fig.13). By any other measure, the availability of trails to walk on was either a first or second facility priority (see Fig. 14). Moreover, the availability of trails was of particular importance to rural West Virginians and those low-activity park users who would stand to gain the most from having more accessible walking opportunities. The health significance of being too far from a safe place to walk for rural residents is noted in Figures 13 and 14 —those residents living in a rural area are more likely to be less active and be more inactive generally than their urban neighbors. As aerobic levels increase from walking to running or cycling, the activity disparities between urban and rural areas increases dramatically by a near 2-to-1 margin (See Fig. 13).

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Consistent with national trends and prior State SCORP surveys, walking continues to be the first choice of West Virginia residents for physical activity (see Fig.13). By any other measure, the availability of trails to walk on was either a first or second facility priority (see Fig. 14). Moreover, the availability of trails was of particular importance to rural West Virginians and those low-activity park users who would stand to gain the most from having more accessible walking opportunities. The health significance of being too far from a safe place to walk for rural residents is noted in Figures 13 and 14 —those residents living in a rural area are more likely to be less active and be more inactive generally than their urban neighbors. As aerobic levels increase from walking to running or cycling, the activity disparities between urban and rural areas increases dramatically by a near 2-to-1 margin (See Fig. 13).

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Our survey results further indicated that the majority of casual park users were also the least motivated in term of requiring more park amenities or programs to feel motivated to be more active. A list of the most common items from more than 550 comments received is shown below. Significantly, two of the highest rated improvements—better walkways and restrooms—are readily achievable within the limits of LWCF projects recently funded.
“West Virginia must do everything possible to protect its lovely wilderness and natural serenity—while the rest of the world becomes a crowded beehive.”

—Charleston Gazette op-ed, July 27, 2014

Our 2014 SCORP survey asked residents to describe their most memorable park experience in three words. Their words and thoughts were arranged as a word ‘cloud,’ for the cover of this report. Many if not most of the comments expressed intangible, unquantifiable market values, which have oftentimes made support for parks a difficult proposition. Nonetheless these non-market values have become the basis for a significant state tourism industry, which the national Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) estimated in 2012 to generate $7.6 billion in in-state consumer spending, $2 billion in wages and salaries, 82,000 direct West Virginia jobs and $532 million in state and local tax revenues.

State and local parks represent some of the most stable assets in our communities and can well serve to attract other investments and help the state and its localities diversify our economic base. The value of appearances in this regard cannot be underestimated. Significantly, ‘good views’ besides common park amenities rated highly among both urban and rural area residents in our June, 2014 survey. For smaller communities in our more rural areas, as well as some larger places, imagining park improvements can be difficult when growth is minimal. However, quality placemaking demands that this effort be made, and is the object of further discussion in the last section of this report, dealing with updates and implementation of our LWCF program policy for the 2015-2020 period.

On a larger scale, the state Division of Tourism’s 2012 Ten Year Plan highlights the importance of broad investments and capacity-building within the state’s parks, forests and wildlife management areas, ski and ATV venues, and cultural or heritage businesses supporting cultural or heritage development, additional lodging and the expressed support of the Boy Scout’s Summit Bechtel Reserve. West Virginia is well-positioned for growth in all these areas, in spite of flat or declining national trends in hunting, fishing and off-road, motorized recreation, according to the U.S. Forest Service’s 2012 Outdoor Recreation Trends and Futures.

While West Virginia’s population growth is among the least of states (2000-2010, +2.5%, U.S. Census), its value as a still-predominantly rural area is a draw for greater visitation from more urbanized areas of the country that now outpace the overall rate of U.S. population growth (12.1 percent urbanized area growth vs. 9.7% overall growth, 2010 Census). As a consequence big game hunting is on the rise here as is ATV ridership. (see Fig. 17 below).

Source: WV-DNR

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Source: WV-DNR

While West Virginia ATV ridership is less than U.S. ridership (21.2 %, USFS NSRE vs. 11.7 % WV, 2014 Economic and Fiscal Impact of the Hatfield-McCoy Trail System, MUCBER) the NSRE does not reflect where that ridership takes place. In West Virginia’s case, 80 percent of the Hatfield-McCoy Authority’s permits reflect out-of-state visitation, from Canada to Florida over its 700 mile system.
Maps shown here of prior year LWCF investments, 2010 state population concentrations by county, and state primary roads (see *next page*) help explain broad development patterns and needs. While local parks can be found throughout the State (see *Appendix for county park features by region*), only 40 percent of localities have participated in the LWCF program to date.

In 50 years of LWCF funding, per capita LWCF project grants have averaged $30.00 per capita, statewide (mean value, $30.00; median value, $41.42). Concentrations of LWCF funding in the Northern Panhandle and Eastern Mountains area of the state have generally been due to the development of regional park attractions such as Oglebay Park in the Wheeling-Pittsburgh metropolitan area, Canaan Valley and Blackwater Falls State Parks in Tucker County, and several state park, forest and wildlife management area initiatives concentrated in Pocahontas County.

*Mean value, $30.00 per capita; Median value, $41.42 per capita.*
Plan Implementation: Where Do We Go From Here?

As noted in the SCORP Abstract, this SCORP serves as a guide for the allocation of federal LWCF grants for qualified LWCF projects and applicants [see OPSP/ESP in Appendix]. Plan implementation for the Fiscal 2015-2020 period is premised upon two limiting conditions: reduced federal funding and greater demands for increased park maintenance to deal with significant and growing repair and replacement needs for both state and local parks.

Outward population growth and major travel patterns suggest future regional demands for LWCF-assistance in the Morgantown/I-68 corridor through the Eastern Panhandle for this area’s population growth, the Corridor ‘L’ area through New River Gorge region for anticipated growth and development of the Boy Scouts of America’s Summit-Bechtel Reserve, and further development of camping and other trailhead support facilities in the Southwest Coalfields to broaden off-road recreation supplied by the Hatfield-McCoy’s Recreational Trail Authority given eventual buildouts of the King Coal and Coalfield Expressways which will improve public access to this underserved region (See Fig.20, above).
LWCF Project Funding Priorities:

First 2015-2020 Facility Priority:

Provide assistance for park, forest or wildlife area capital repairs to restore or maintain services to support demands beyond the present.

**Discussion:** A plurality of residents’ demands for better maintained parks as opposed to more park facilities represents the most significant change from prior West Virginia SCORP priorities. Increased maintenance here for funding purposes pertains to major capital repairs of basic park infrastructure in contrast to the support of routine park maintenance, which is an expected standard of care for all LWCF project sponsors.

Discussions with State park officials indicates greater need for park maintenance financing given the difficulty of attracting or securing private funding for this type of work. Local capital park needs estimated at $200 million in the 2003 SCORP have now grown to a value in excess of $250 million, given the time value of money. State park immediate capital project costs now exceed $60 million [see Appendix: 2015 Unmet State Park Needs] reflecting the quickened pace at which costs of replacing old facilities rapidly exceed functional obsolescence when depreciated on a straight line basis. LWCF funds continue to represent a smart use of this limited fund source for the reasons noted.

Second 2015-2020 Facility Priority:

Provide assistance for State or local park renovations to promote active lifestyles, innovate community cores or attract or retain visitors to an area.

**Discussion:** This SCORP priority reaffirms the need for expansion of basic park infrastructure as a public good. Walking continues to be the number one, statewide recreational preference of a broad cross-section of residents, however any number of other worthwhile park improvements noted previously in the Trends section and in our statewide SCORP survey [see Appendix, SCORP survey] serve the purpose of making our State’s communities more desirable places to live or visit, create venues for greater youth and adult physical fitness, promote better attraction or retention of business or economic development, or provide core leisure facilities in underserved areas without such necessary public outdoor improvements.

**Strategies:**

- Note and prioritize, through appropriate state Open Project Selection Process (OPSP) criteria, projects which correct state or local facility needs to deal with physical or functional obsolescence.
- Broaden and deepen state support for LWCF projects which promote or correct ADA accommodations for disabled or elderly park patrons.
- Prioritize park projects which demonstrate initiatives toward greater public support of necessary park improvements with such actions as ‘save our parks,’ ‘friends of the park’ campaigns, or effective use of local community improvement foundations.
**Strategies:**

- Prioritize candidate projects having program descriptions which elaborate on a wide variety of public needs and interests addressed through their project proposal.
- Provide funding support for projects in under-served areas by virtue of their increased demand for—or basic lack of—core park facilities.
- Encourage connections beyond strictly park and recreation enterprises to other non-profit, for-profit, and educational endeavors that broaden and deepen the value of recreational resources made available through the LWCF program.

**Third 2015-2020 Facility Priority:**

*Provide assistance for the acquisition and development of natural areas in support of trail development to match approved Recreational Trails projects, or other federally-approved, LWCF matching share program.*

**Discussion:** Given the overall limitation of funding available for new, public outdoor recreational facilities, state and federal programs should be considered together when practical to maximize the beneficial impacts to be had from jointly financing a given outdoor recreational proposal. Owing to varying review requirements and procedures for different LWCF-eligible, matching share programs such as the WVDOT Recreational Trails program [see sidebar description] and DHUD Community Development Block Grant programs, candidate LWCF projects leveraging other eligible federal funding resources need to proceed in their review by the National Park Service from a position of already being an approved project grant from the other cognizant federal fund sponsor.

**Strategies:**

- Encourage greater use of RT project funds in under-served rural areas in combination with LWCF eligible project activities.
- Encourage and work with state ATV interests in broadening and deepening local park connections to existing ATV trails for day-use park development or local ATV trailhead support.
- Work cooperatively with the West Virginia Outdoor Heritage Conservation Fund (OHCF) to help develop public trails or access across candidate OHCF projects.
The lack of safe places to walk, run or bicycle for both recreation and fitness has been a long term problem recognized by governmental and non-profit organizations fighting the high rate of obesity and poor health in West Virginia. Many times those who wish to walk for recreation or exercise are forced to walk along narrow roadway shoulders with vehicular traffic passing close by.

In recognition of this dangerous reality, the West Virginia Recreational Trails Advisory Board has attempted to ameliorate this situation by recommending projects for the Recreational Trails Program that construct local recreational trails, usually centered around a community asset, like a park, a school, or a community center. These trails, usually level and circular in nature, built to accessibility standards, offer residents of local rural communities a place to walk in safety.

The trails built near schools also have the added benefit of providing physical activity for the local school children and helping combat obesity and poor physical fitness in the young.

The opportunity has also presented itself on a larger scale when urban trails have been created allowing urban resident the opportunity to combine recreational/health benefits with alternative transportation. A prime example of this is the White Oak Rail Trail in Oak Hill.

With the latest SCORP research indicating the public is receptive to this initiative, the Recreational Trail Program and the West Virginia Trails Advisory Board will continue to recommend community trail projects to the Secretary of Transportation for future grant awards.
**Sustainability and Recreational Values**

Protection and promotion of the State’s water resources has long been recognized as a public good (cf. §22-26-1, WV Code: Water Resources Protection and Management Act). Fresh water demands and the effects of climate change will offer challenges as well as opportunities for protecting and promoting the state’s abundant water resources. Future water demands for all forms of development—industrial, commercial and residential—are incrementally posed to stimulate water management’s balance of regulatory controls with the protection and enhancement of wildlife and human habitats. Small cropland losses across all the State’s watersheds are noted from the incremental land losses shown on the attached map, documenting the relatively minor but steady land conversions. Similar incremental demands are evident in small losses to the State’s forested areas, except for those in the Greenbrier River watershed.

**Figure 21: West Virginia Watersheds by Hydrological Groupings**

**Figure 22: Percent Change in Planted/Cultivated Crops by Watershed**
63,689 acres of known State wetlands covering an estimated 70,000 sites—only 0.4 percent of the State’s land mass—are particularly sensitive landscapes necessary for the protection of wildlife habitats (see RTE aquatic habitats in Fig. 23, above) and the cushioning of stormwater runoff effects. Located primarily along the Ohio River and Eastern Mountains areas of the state, a draft listing of the most Exemplary Wetlands is more fully described in the Appendix. The State’s Wetlands Conservation Plan, as updated (see Plan Appendix) and ongoing monitoring and assessment efforts will help broaden the methodological base for quantitative information available, required and needed for better wetlands and shallow stream protection and promotion. To date, most state wetlands recreational projects have been spurred by mitigation efforts involved with new bridge and highway projects. Typical of past efforts include fishing and canoe access made from low-water crossings built during bridge replacement projects as well as wildlife habitat buffers constructed along major highway upgrades.

Public recreational access to floodplain and wetland areas is likely to become a greater positive use of these resources with the effects of future climate change upon the state. While not affected by sea level changes, fluctuations and increases in rain events over the next several years are expected to increase demands upon the state’s communities to prepare for and adapt to greater flooding vulnerabilities. As noted in the State’s recent DHUD National Disaster
Resiliency Competition (NDRC) application, riparian lands offer state communities the opportunity to buffer threats posed by excess flood waters, rising riverbeds, and other hazards with the creation of new parks, greenways, and bike and walking trails among other projects which would altogether promote an aesthetic feature with new functional uses. Current planning efforts to deal with projected climate-related trends have increased work by and between the state’s Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management (DHSEM), the National Weather Service and the State Climatologist in this regard to better equip state and local capabilities to understand, prepare for, mitigate and recover from flood and other storm events.

**Where Do We Go From Here? (Part 2: People and Other Resources)**

“A person is a person through other persons.” —Zulu Proverb

As noted, imagining change can be difficult when growth is limited, as found in many parts of West Virginia. However, incremental changes can lead to major impacts when an effort is both organized and committed. Previously described LWCF and RT grant programs represent the State’s longest standing governmental programs dedicated to the construction of public outdoor recreation facilities. Other newer programs and initiatives now offer important enabling steps with the incentive of mini-grants to help organizations and communities take steps towards developing permanent park and community development improvements.

**Passage of the State’s Healthy Lifestyles Act in 2005 spurred a host of initiatives at the State and local levels, enabling group efforts to improve policies and practices for greater physical activity and healthy eating. State efforts to improve the policies acceding environmental improvements from the LWCF and RT construction grants include initiatives from groups including these organizations:**

- www.trythiswv.com
- www.wvphysicalactivity.org (WV Physical Therapy Association)
- www.wwhub.org
- www.activeswv.org
- www.qchelp.wv.gov (WV Healthy Lifestyles Coalition)
- www.wcwv.org (WV Wellness Council)
- www.wvonthemove.net
- www.wvahperd.org
- (WV Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance)
- www.keys4healthykids.com
- www.wvde.state.wv.us/healthyschools/LetsMove.php (‘Let’s Move’ program)
- WV Bureau of Public Health
- WVU College of Physical Activity and Sports Sciences
- WV Recreation and Parks Association
- Marshall University Department of Pediatrics
- WVU Prevention Research Center
- American Heart Association, WV Chapter
- United Way of Central West Virginia
- WV Bureau of Senior Service
- others

Further, more engaged community-building efforts include the State’s Main Street and On-Trac community development programs [see sidebar] which help align and integrate any number of different community development projects with professional, technical assistance. Additional state grants including the Neighborhood Investment Program and Community Partnership programs administered by the West Virginia Development Office may further qualify particular projects with a public recreation scope [go to <wvcommerce.org/people>]. Altogether, these different initiatives and partnerships help raise public awareness and interests in building the social, physical and community capacities necessary for sound placemaking.
National park databases (see table above and also ‘Source and Support’ resources in the Appendix) include metrics on some community cost and resident priorities noted in our June SCORP survey. By and large, most West Virginians’ park priorities were fairly modest. The simplest improvements—handicapped-accessible restrooms and walkways, fountains, cleaning and clearing, and updated signage—can all be readily phased for a pay-as-you-go approach within a locality’s abilities. Better capacity building with improvements such as these can help pave the way towards greater park programming for special events, sports tournaments or races, sponsored youth activities, or arts and crafts exhibits and installations.

Park improvements are not limited to stand alone, park-only projects. In our June survey, park usage was reported to increase in the range of five to ten additional trips per month when a park or sport-related visit could be combined with some other purpose. Chief among other non-park/park related attractions were, “good places to eat nearby.” For larger communities with planning and zoning this may be a consideration in their future comprehensive planning to examine the development of mixed-use, park/commercial combinations that could serve to attract or retain visitors to their area and help reinforce investments with mutually compatible activities.

Future Developments

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Forecasts for the U. S.

- **Land development** will continue to threaten the integrity of natural ecosystems.
- **Climate change** will alter natural ecosystems and affect their ability to provide goods and services.
- **Competition** for goods and services from natural ecosystems will increase.
- **Geographic variation** in resource responses to drivers of change will require regional and local strategies to address resource management issues.
- **Recreation resources per capita** is projected to be about 2/3 what it they are now by 2060.
- Yet, **demand will rise** substantially by that year.
For the more distant future, the Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) and Forest Service’s 2012 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE) forecasts recreational impacts influenced by a mix of environmental, technological and cultural issues. While large-scale environmental issues characterize the NSRE’s forecast (see Fig. 25, preceding page) the OIA’s view is more sanguine and underscores the increasing use of social media to share outdoor experiences and provide greater variety in recreational opportunities beyond the usual hiking, fishing, and sightseeing—what it characterizes as being ‘inclusive’ of younger, more diverse park users interests, ‘accessible’ parks more accommodating of peoples’ time constraints, greater commercial connectivity, and ‘experiential’—looking for opportunities to make the outdoors a catalyst for building relationships and bonding with more family and friends.

Providing such high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities is certainly an important key to developing healthy lifestyles—and the availability of LWCF dollars is just as important to maintaining them to help make any lifestyle changes permanent.

**LWCF & Other State Issues:**

The State’s LWCF program offers an underfunded, yet nonetheless valuable, environmental approach towards helping to develop thriving communities with the funding of worthwhile, outdoor recreational construction grant projects. For the future, underlying barriers of declining revenues, aging population and out-migration will continue to challenge the governance of both State and local units of government. What the LWCF lacks in purpose to be able to deal with such demographic and other social changes is more than addressed by the many health-focused, public and non-profit coalitions now engaged to increase public awareness and education regarding healthy lifestyles including the benefits of public outdoor recreation. These cross-sectional partnerships are responsible for such policy and programming initiatives as ‘Complete Streets’ legislation, physical activity events and improved messaging regarding healthier living habits. As a consequence, whether as an antecedent or a goal, the State’s LWCF program provides a worthwhile physical complement towards helping manifest these other policy and system initiatives. By and of itself, this program’s limited funding precludes the funding of major capital improvements for public parks; however, it incentivizes other public and private resources towards realizing the LWCF program’s worthwhile objectives.