



# Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021



photo: Panola Mountain State Park



photo: Jon Minnihan | Henry County Parks & Recreation



photo: Forsyth County Parks and Recreation



photo: Reed Bingham State Park





# Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021

Georgia's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan



Nathan Deal  
Governor  
State of Georgia



Mark Williams  
Commissioner  
Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources

# Acknowledgements

## Advisory Committee

Greta DeMayo  
*Georgia Recreation Trails Advisory Board*

Todd Edwards  
*Association County Commissions of Georgia*

Catherine Fleming  
*Georgia Municipal Association*

Jimmy Gisi  
*Georgia Recreation and Parks Association*

Beda Johnson  
*Georgia Department of Economic Development*

Melissa Memory  
*National Park Service*

Mike Phillips  
*Georgia Power*

Robert Ramsay  
*Georgia Conservancy*

Elizabeth Smith  
*Georgia Department of Community Affairs*

Wes Robinson  
*Georgia Department of Natural Resources*

## Department and Division

*Department of Natural Resources*

Mark Williams  
Antoinette Norfleet

*Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division*

Becky Kelley  
Sally Winchester  
Amanda Hrubesh  
Linda Patrick

## Project Management

*Vanguard Contingent, LLC*

Eric VanDeGenachte  
Chris VanDeGenachte

## Georgia Board of Natural Resources

William Bagwell, Jr., Chairman  
S. Aaron McWhorter, Vice Chairman  
Jeff “Bodine” Sinyard, Secretary  
Nancy A. Addison  
Dwight Davis  
Dwight H. Evans  
Duncan N. Johnson, Jr.  
Alfred W. “Bill” Jones, III  
Ray Lambert, Jr.  
Robert D. Leebern, Jr.,  
J. Mark Mobley, Jr.  
Thomas “Mike” Phelps, Jr.  
Matthew Sawhill  
Paul Shailendra  
Winburn E. “Brother” Stewart, Jr.  
Philip C. Watt, M.D.  
Philip A. Wilheit, Jr.  
Delos Yancey, III

## Public Engagement & Survey

*Carl Vinson Institute of Government*

John R. Barner  
Danny Bivins  
Leigh Askew Elkins  
Shannon Ferguson  
Shana Jones  
Sherri Livingstone  
Molly Longstreth  
Samantha M. Rogers  
Brian Simmons  
Theresa A. Wright

## Inventory Assessment

*GreenInfo Network*

Larry Orman

---

For more information, including supporting materials, or to download this Plan, visit [www.GeorgiaStateParks.org/SCORP](http://www.GeorgiaStateParks.org/SCORP) or call 770-389-7286.

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The State of Georgia appreciates the opportunity to work with the following partners in the development of this plan.



**Carl Vinson  
Institute of Government  
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA**





photo: Office of the Governor



STATE OF GEORGIA  
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR  
ATLANTA 30334-0900

Nathan Deal  
GOVERNOR

October 28, 2016

Dear Fellow Georgians,

Georgia is a vibrant and growing state because it is a great place to live, play, work and do business. The abundance of quality outdoor recreation opportunities encourages people to visit Georgia as tourists and to stay as new residents. These resources also help attract and retain high quality business and positive economic growth.

The benefits of public parks, trails, greenspace and wild places are undeniable. Our local parks offer our citizens important connections to nature as well as opportunities to participate in healthy recreation activities close-to-home. Our larger properties, managed by state and federal agencies, provide important natural and recreational experiences and attract significant tourism business to our state. Combined, conservation of our lands and the provision of parks and outdoor recreation areas have an overwhelmingly positive impact on our state's economic health and community well-being.

**The Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021** reports on the state of our parks and greenspaces and offers perspectives and strategic recommendations that will help maximize Georgia's attractiveness as a great place to live and do business. It was developed in compliance with mandates of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and will guide the disbursement of LWCF funds to state and local agencies between 2017 and 2021.

I am pleased to convey that the public was provided with ample opportunity to participate in the development of this Plan. I further commend the efforts of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, the guidance of the Advisory Committee, the support of agency partners and the participation of all the citizens who contributed to this important policy document.

Sincerely,

Nathan Deal  
Governor



# Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021

Georgia's Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan



# Executive Summary

**The Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation** affirms the multiple benefits that parks have on physical health, mental well-being and the economic vitality of communities served by the conservation of those parks and greenspaces. The Plan also provides a snapshot of the current supply and demand for outdoor recreation resources. By offering information on important issues and considerations facing our public parks, this Plan provides guidance to Georgia’s policy makers, practitioners and citizens as we work together to protect key resources and address the outdoor recreational needs of our citizens.

**The Plan** is an official state document mandated by the U.S. Department of Interior in order for Georgia to receive and disseminate federal Land and Water Conservation Funds to governmental recreation agencies for acquisition of park lands or the development and rehabilitation of outdoor recreation facilities.

## The Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021 Strategic Action Statements

### Parks Promote Healthy, Vibrant Communities

**Reinforce the connection between health, quality of life and outdoor recreation at all levels of government service.**



Proximity to nature, parks and trails are important residential and business attractors and are core components of sustainable, healthy and growing communities. In order to maximize these dividends, outdoor recreation facilities should be a fundamental part of any community planning effort or economic development package. This is especially important in densely populated urban areas, which are challenged to conserve remaining greenspaces.

### Parks Advance Tourism and Positive Economic Impact

**Support and maintain Georgia’s outdoor recreation resources so that we remain attractive to new business and industry, draw tourists across our borders and grow our tax base.**



Georgia’s rivers, mountains, beaches, woodlands and plains provide a rich diversity of outdoor recreation experiences and opportunities for our citizens and visitors. Public parks, trails, open spaces and recreation facilities can help every Georgia community thrive and become more sustainable. The greater the visitation to our parks and outdoor resources, the greater economic benefits to the surrounding communities.

### Parks Keep Natural and Recreational Resources Healthy for Future Generations

**Continue to protect the natural landscapes which help to make recreating outdoors fun and exciting and to preserve critical land and water resources.**



Central to the missions of both the Department of Natural Resources and the Land and Water Conservation Fund is the conservation and wise stewardship of natural resources and wild lands. Natural landscapes are part of what makes recreating outdoors so fun and exciting. Georgia still has ample opportunities to expand its inventory of conservation and recreation lands in order to satisfy the strong need expressed in communities across the state.



photo: James H. 'Sloppy' Floyd State Park

# The Value of Parks, Greenspace and Outdoor Recreation

Colonists in Savannah were among the first city designers in our nation to establish parks to preserve our natural and cultural heritage and to provide spaces for public outdoor recreation activities. They recognized that parks were good for the prosperity of the entire community; a fact that still holds true today, centuries later.

Parks are loved for providing spaces where we have amazing fun with family and friends as well as for their beauty, peacefulness and flourishing wildlife. A growing volume of research shows that parks also provide tangible benefits to our health and well-being as well as to the economic prosperity of our communities.

Collectively, citizens and elected officials will decide whether our quality of life will include open spaces for recreation, fitness and wildlife. Future generations will judge the attractiveness of our communities based on how we develop the landscape today. And they'll determine which communities will be viable places to raise a family, pursue a career and set down roots.

We have the power to create a future where people have affordable access to parks that are located close to their homes and jobs. We can create parks that are safe, well-maintained and professionally managed that provide a place to get fit, to commune and visit with neighbors, as well as to serve as transportation corridors to relieve road congestion. If planned properly, these public assets can often generate revenue, which helps to lessen their dependence on tax fund support.

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**“In the walk with nature  
one receives far more  
than he seeks.”**

– John Muir

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*Considering these two aerial photos,  
which community would you rather  
live in today?*





## The Connection between the Plan and LWCF

An updated outdoor recreation plan is mandated by the U.S. Department of the Interior in order for Georgia to disseminate federal funds from the State and Local Assistance Program of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The LWCF State and Local Assistance program provides funds to support public parks systems through land acquisition and the development (or renovation) of facilities. Over \$88.8 million in federal funds have been distributed in Georgia over the last fifty years. Considering that the program has a 50% match requirement, a cumulative investment exceeding \$177.6 million has been made.

Despite that level of investment, the demand for financial assistance consistently outstrips the limited funds available. More applications are received for assistance than can be fulfilled. It is also important to recognize that LWCF only supports ‘capital’ projects (like acquisition, construction and rehabilitation) and cannot be used to support efforts related to operations and maintenance.

### Land & Water Conservation Fund - State and Local Assistance Program Grants Awarded Over the Last Decade

Acq=Acquisition; Dev=Development; Dis=Disadvantaged; Rehab=Rehabilitation

#### 2006-2008

Applicant	Title	Type
Athens-Clarke Cnty.	Greenspace & Greenway Corridor	.Acq
Carrollton, City of	Carrollton Greenbelt	.Acq
Pulaski Cnty.	Pulaski County Riverfront Park	.Dev
Rockdale Cnty	Lorraine Trailhead-Rockdale South River Trail	.Dev
Peach Cnty Commission.	North Peach Park Extension	.Dev
Jefferson Cnty	Jefferson County Park Expansion	.Dis
Forsyth Cnty	Ducktown Park Rehabilitation	.Rehab
Dublin-Laurens Cnty	DLCRA System-Wide Renovation & Skate Park	.Rehab
Wilkinson Cnty	East Wilkinson Community Park	.Rehab
Morrow, City of	Morrow Playground	.Rehab
Ben Hill Cnty	Blue-Gray Park Rehabilitation	.Rehab
Baldwin Cnty	Baldwin County Parks & Rec. Renovations	.Rehab
Dawson Cnty	War Hill Park Enhancement	.Rehab

#### 2009-2010

Applicant	Title	Type
Carroll Cnty	Moore’s Bridge Park Development/Rehab	.Dev
Cartersville, City of	Dellinger Park Field Lighting Rehab	.Rehab
Commerce, City of	Commerce Community Park Property Acq	.Acq
Cornelia, City of	Cornelia Bark Park and Park Improvements	.Acq-Dev
Crawford Cnty	Crawford Co. Recreational Fields	.Rehab
Dawson Cnty	War Hill Park	.Rehab





**Georgia has received \$88.6 millions in federal funds over the last fifty years . . .**



**2009-2010** *(continued)*

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Doraville, City of . . . . .	Bernard Halpern Renovation Park . . . . .	Rehab
Douglas Cnty . . . . .	Woodrow Wilson Park Rehab . . . . .	Rehab
Forsyth, City of . . . . .	Kynette Park Rehab . . . . .	Rehab
Morrow, City of . . . . .	Milton Daniel Park Walking Trail Surface . . . . .	Rehab
Rutledge, City of . . . . .	Rutledge City Park Improvements . . . . .	Rehab
Whitfield Cnty . . . . .	Miracle League Field . . . . .	Dev
DNR . . . . .	Panola Mountain State Park . . . . .	Acq
DNR . . . . .	Chattahoochee Bend State Park . . . . .	Dev
DNR . . . . .	Mossy Creek Public Fishing Area . . . . .	Acq
DNR . . . . .	Tugaloo State Park . . . . .	Dev

**2013-2014**

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Alpharetta, City of . . . . .	Big Creek Greenway Rehabilitation . . . . .	Rehab
Barrow Cnty . . . . .	Field Lighting Improvements . . . . .	Rehab
Brunswick, City of . . . . .	Urbana Park Facility Rehab . . . . .	Rehab
Bulloch Cnty . . . . .	Memorial Park - Phase 1 Renovations . . . . .	Rehab
Doraville, City of . . . . .	Halpren Park Renovation Phase 2 . . . . .	Rehab
Douglas, City of . . . . .	Tennis Court Rehabilitation . . . . .	Rehab
Fairburn, City of . . . . .	Duncan Park Improvements 1C . . . . .	Rehab
Grady Cnty . . . . .	Barber Park Lighting Safety Improvements . . . . .	Rehab
Gwinnett Cnty . . . . .	Ronald Reagan Park Renovation . . . . .	Rehab
Macon Cnty . . . . .	Whitewater Creek Park Rehab & Improvements . . . . .	Rehab

**2013-2014** (continued)

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Newton Cnty . . . . .	Lake Varner accessible pier & playground . . . . .	Rehab
Toccoa, City of . . . . .	Henderson Falls Park Rehabilitation Phase 1 . . . . .	Rehab
Tyrone, Town of . . . . .	Soccer Field Rehabilitation . . . . .	Rehab
DNR . . . . .	Playground/Multiple State Parks . . . . .	Rehab

**2015**

<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Type</b>
Bartow Cnty . . . . .	Bartow County Parks LED Lighting . . . . .	Rehab
Brantley Cnty . . . . .	Satilla Fields Enhancement . . . . .	Acq-Dev
Calhoun, City of . . . . .	Calhoun Park Expansion . . . . .	Acq
Cartersville, City of . . . . .	Dellinger Park Shelter/Pavilion Replacement . . . . .	Rehab
Crawford Cnty . . . . .	Crawford County Recreational Fields . . . . .	Rehab
Doraville, City of . . . . .	Halpren Park Phase III - Pedestrian Bridge . . . . .	Rehab
Dublin-Laurens Rec Auth . . . . .	Stables/RV Hookups at Southern Pines AG Expo . . . . .	Dev
Effingham Cnty . . . . .	Effingham County Recreation Complex . . . . .	Dev
Georgetown-Quitman Cnty . . . . .	Georgetown - Quitman County Recreation . . . . .	Dev
Grady Cnty . . . . .	Renovations of Barber Park Fitness and Play Area . . . . .	Rehab-Dev
Gwinnett Cnty . . . . .	Mountain Park Football Field . . . . .	Rehab
Hiawassee, City of . . . . .	Hiwassee Mayor's Park . . . . .	Dev
Jones Cnty . . . . .	Jones County Special Needs Playground . . . . .	Dev
Lamar Cnty . . . . .	North Lamar County Recreation Park . . . . .	Dev
Talking Rock, Town of . . . . .	Talking Rock Town Park Improvements . . . . .	Rehab-Dev
Tallapoosa, City of . . . . .	Rayford Roberts Ball Park Rehabilitation . . . . .	Rehab
Toccoa, City of . . . . .	Lake Toccoa Pavilion and Pier . . . . .	Dev
Trion, City of . . . . .	Trion City Parks Renovation . . . . .	Rehab
Valdosta, City of . . . . .	Miracle Field at Freedom Park . . . . .	Dev
DNR . . . . .	Hard Labor Creek State Park . . . . .	Rehab

**Mandatory components of the Plan** are presented in the table below. Several appendices were produced as part of this report which include important details. In an effort to manage costs, however, those appendices are not included in the printed version of this Plan, but can be secured from the Georgia Department of Natural Resources.

<b>Component</b>	<b>Engagement</b>
<b>Supply assessment</b>	Online mapping inventory of parks, including amenities ( <a href="http://www.MapCollaborator.org/georgia">www.MapCollaborator.org/georgia</a> ).
<b>Demand assessment</b>	A telephone survey of about 1,100 Georgia residents and surveys of local, state and federal practitioners.
<b>Public input</b>	Dedicated website, press releases, social media announcements, three public meetings, three focus groups, meetings of the Advisory Committee and Board of Natural Resources, presentations to several audiences and conferences.





photo: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority



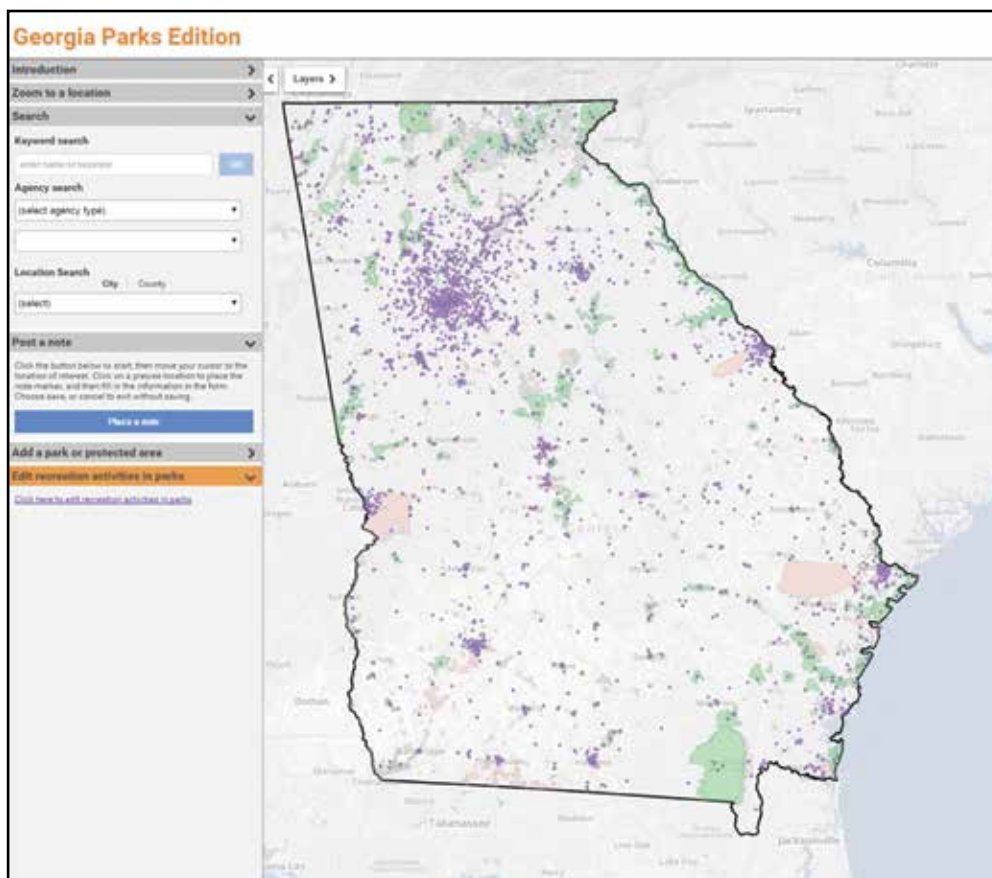
# Supply of Outdoor Recreation Resources

A primary component of this Plan was the development of a statewide inventory tool representing the most thorough and accurate GIS database of Georgia's public outdoor recreation areas ever assembled. It permits professionals, decision-makers and planners to assess the availability of resources and to gauge outstanding needs. A user-friendly interface allows practitioners to submit updates and also serves as a baseline for monitoring the expansion of park systems across the state over time.

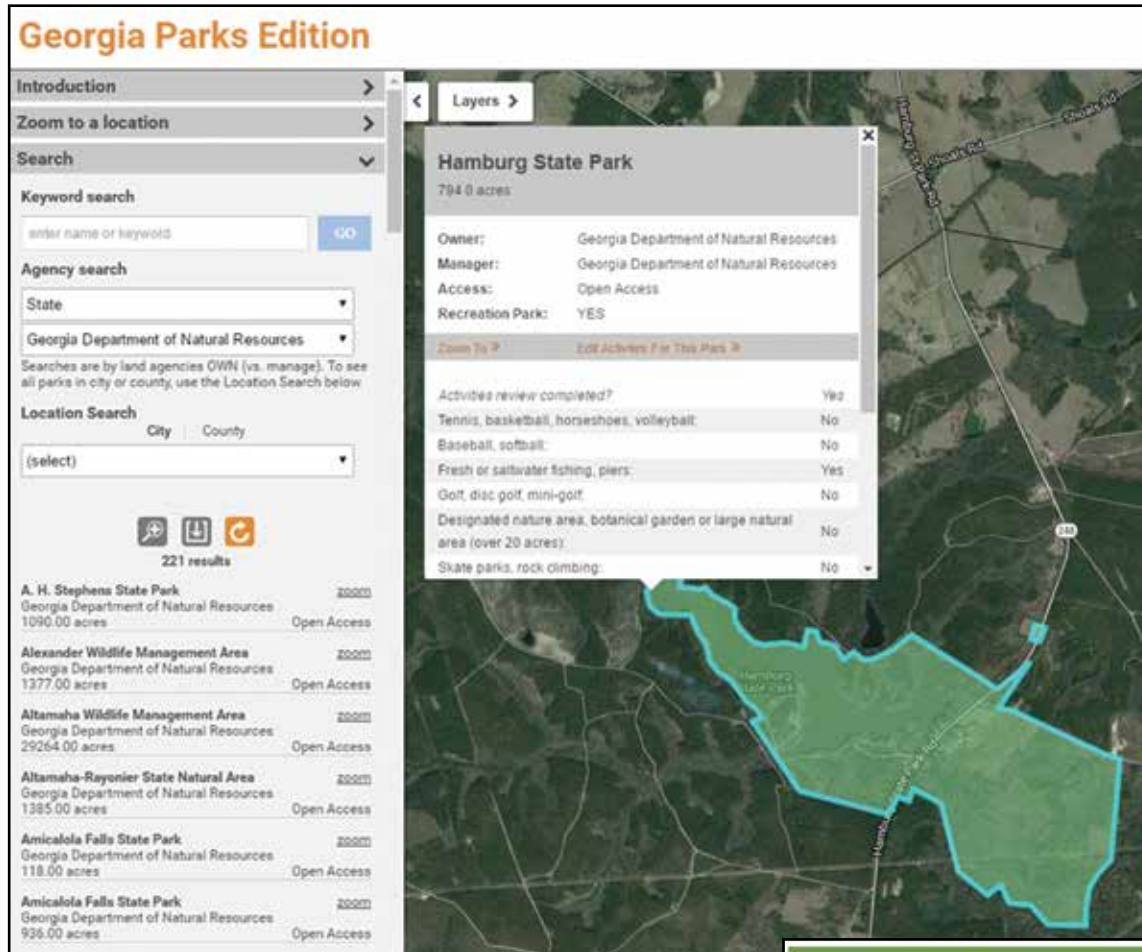
## Georgia Public Parks Inventory

This new inventory has built upon the previous efforts of partners like the University of Georgia and others. In collaboration with a non-profit partner, GreenInfo Network (GIN), Georgia DNR (DNR) sought to make several major refinements to create a new-generation inventory system. The inventory represents thousands of public outdoor recreation areas, covering millions of acres, which are managed by hundreds of individual agencies and organizations.

The new system allows users to navigate around the state, view the extent and boundaries of parks, and view available amenities. Authorized users are able to review and update data on all park properties and their amenities. Because the new system shows actual property boundaries, planners are able to get a better sense of how recreation areas could be connected.



In addition to using the map to find properties, users can search by managing agency, keyword, or by location. Clicking on any of the highlighted properties provides information on the kinds of amenities available. In addition to a map with property boundaries, photographs of the area are available for both aerial and ground-level perspectives.



The new inventory system also manages amenity data in a more concise format. The previous inventory tracked over fifty facilities and was difficult to maintain. The new system consolidates the wide diversity of facilities into just a few amenity-types, making maintenance fast and easy.

Although this tool won't necessarily determine whether a community has a sufficient quantity and diversity of outdoor recreation areas, it can be used to make the case for areas of expansion. Therefore, the most meaningful way to understand the available recreation resources in an area is to take an interactive approach to using this tool.

ACTIVITIES AND AMENITIES INVENTORY	
Select a Yes or No for the activities and amenities listed below. If you're not sure, leave it blank.	
Tennis, basketball, horseshoes, volleyball	No ▾
Baseball, softball	No ▾
Fresh or saltwater fishing, piers	Yes ▾
Golf, disc golf, mini-golf	No ▾
Designated nature area, botanical garden or large natural area (over 20 acres)	No ▾
Skate parks, rock climbing	No ▾
Campground, group camp, RV, horse camp	Yes ▾
Paddlesports - kayak, canoe, etc.	Yes ▾
Covered or open picnic table, group shelters	Yes ▾
Play area, tot lot	Yes ▾
Football, soccer, lacrosse	No ▾
Shooting range, paintball, archery, trap, skeet	No ▾
Pool, beach, spray pool, wading	No ▾
Track for running, etc.	No ▾
Paved trails	No ▾
Unpaved trails	Yes ▾

GreenInfo Network is a non-profit organization that assists clients with the use of Geographic Information Systems and related technologies to analyze and visualize information in the public interest. Learn more at <http://www.greeninfo.org>.

**GreenInfo  
Network**



Information and Mapping in the Public Interest

## All Protected Lands

### RECREATION LANDS:

Parks  
Recreation areas  
Wildlife management areas  
Wildlife refuges  
Natural areas  
State / National forests

### NON-RECREATION LANDS:

Parks not yet open  
Military bases  
Cemeteries / Memorials  
Conservation easements  
Research areas  
Traffic islands  
Very small parks

### What does this Inventory capture?

It is important to point out that this inventory tracked all protected lands and that only a subset of them provide for outdoor recreation. The adjacent graphic shows the relationship between: 1) All protected lands, 2) Recreation lands and 3) Non-recreation lands.



### How are “protected lands” defined?

Although there is no hard-and-fast definition for “protected lands,” it generally describes properties that are protected from commercial or residential development. Typically, these are governmental (public) properties, but several are privately held.

### Why not focus on “recreation lands” exclusively?

It was important to include all protected lands and not just recreation lands for a number of reasons. First, they support a wide range of ecological services including habitat connectivity for wildlife, migrating birds, the protection of wetlands and water quality, among other services – all of which are important to LWCF. Secondly, although they may not support recreation now, they may serve as important links in future land protection efforts. Lastly, the recreation agencies with which we coordinated during the creation of this inventory preferred seeing their entire holdings represented. The inclusion of these other properties expands its usefulness to land managers since it helps to document the demands they face in providing stewardship efforts.



## Examples of “non-recreation” lands

Properties purchased but not yet opened to the public, cemeteries, memorials, very small parks, traffic islands and medians, military bases, and even properties that are protected by private conservation easements are examples of properties that were considered “protected lands” but not necessarily “recreation lands.”

The distinction between “protected land” and “recreation land” becomes important when considering a county like Chattahoochee which has a very large percentage of its total land area under protection (as a military base), but has very little land available for public outdoor recreation. The charts on the next page show this distinction graphically by presenting both the percent of a county’s land area that is protected and the percent available for outdoor recreation.

## What does the Georgia Public Parks Inventory tell us?

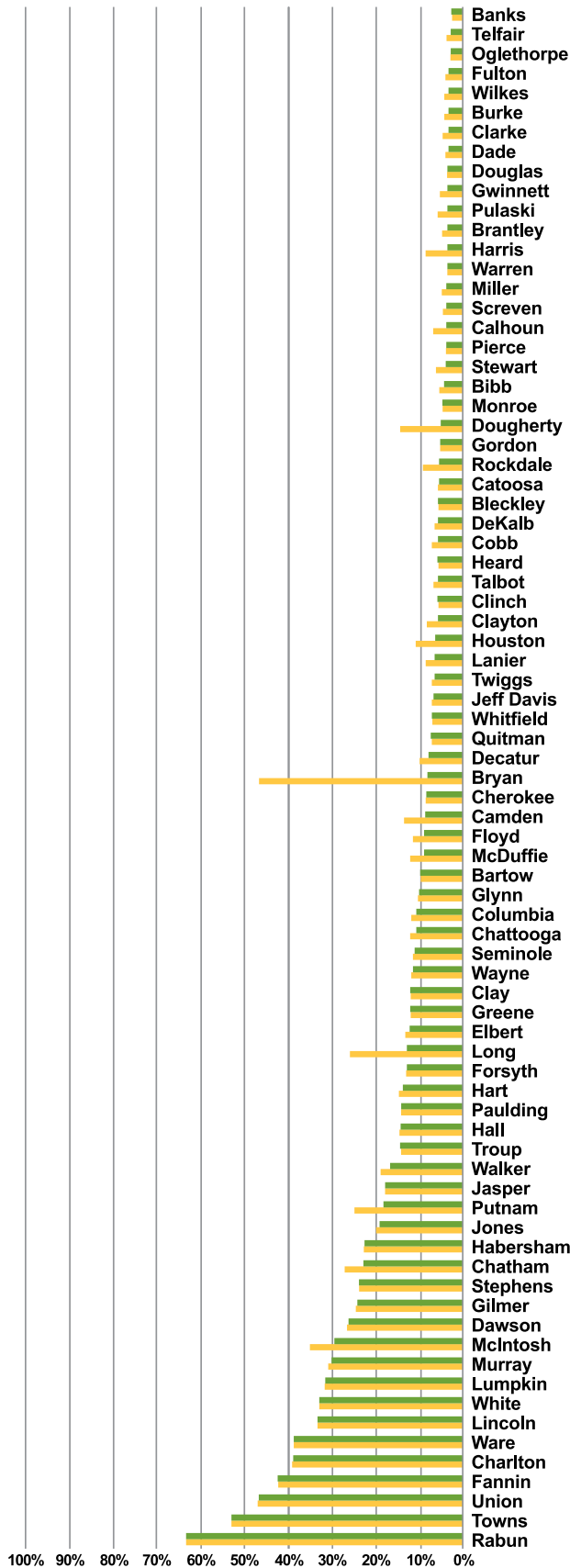
First, it is important to point out that the vast majority of Georgia’s land area (totaling 38 million acres) is privately held with no explicit public outdoor recreation potential. Secondly, it’s not easy to have one universal measure that really captures the adequacy of outdoor recreation resources – especially at a statewide level. Therefore, defining what is “adequate” is often relative and based on many factors. For example, having access to a large park with an abundance of trails, camping and wildlife watching won’t suffice if you’re interested in playing team sports or hosting a large family picnic. That said, we can still get a sense of the “big-picture” with the tools available to us.

We can gauge the availability of outdoor recreation resources by looking at various characteristics like: 1) Size, 2) Distribution (geographically and as a function of population density), 3) Quality and 4) Types of amenities provided. We’ll explore these characteristics in the pages that follow.



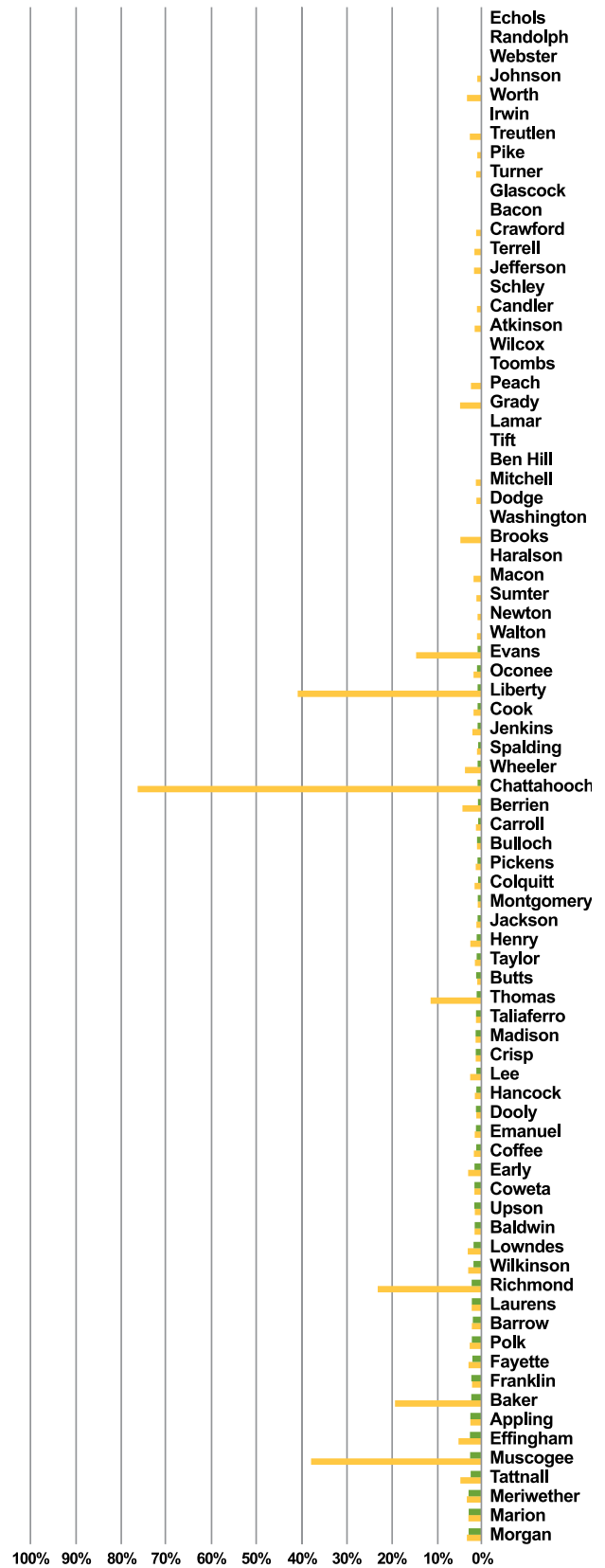
### Part 1 of 2: Percent of County Area Protected and Percent Available for Outdoor Recreation

■ Percent of County Area for Recreation  
 ■ Percent of County Area Protected

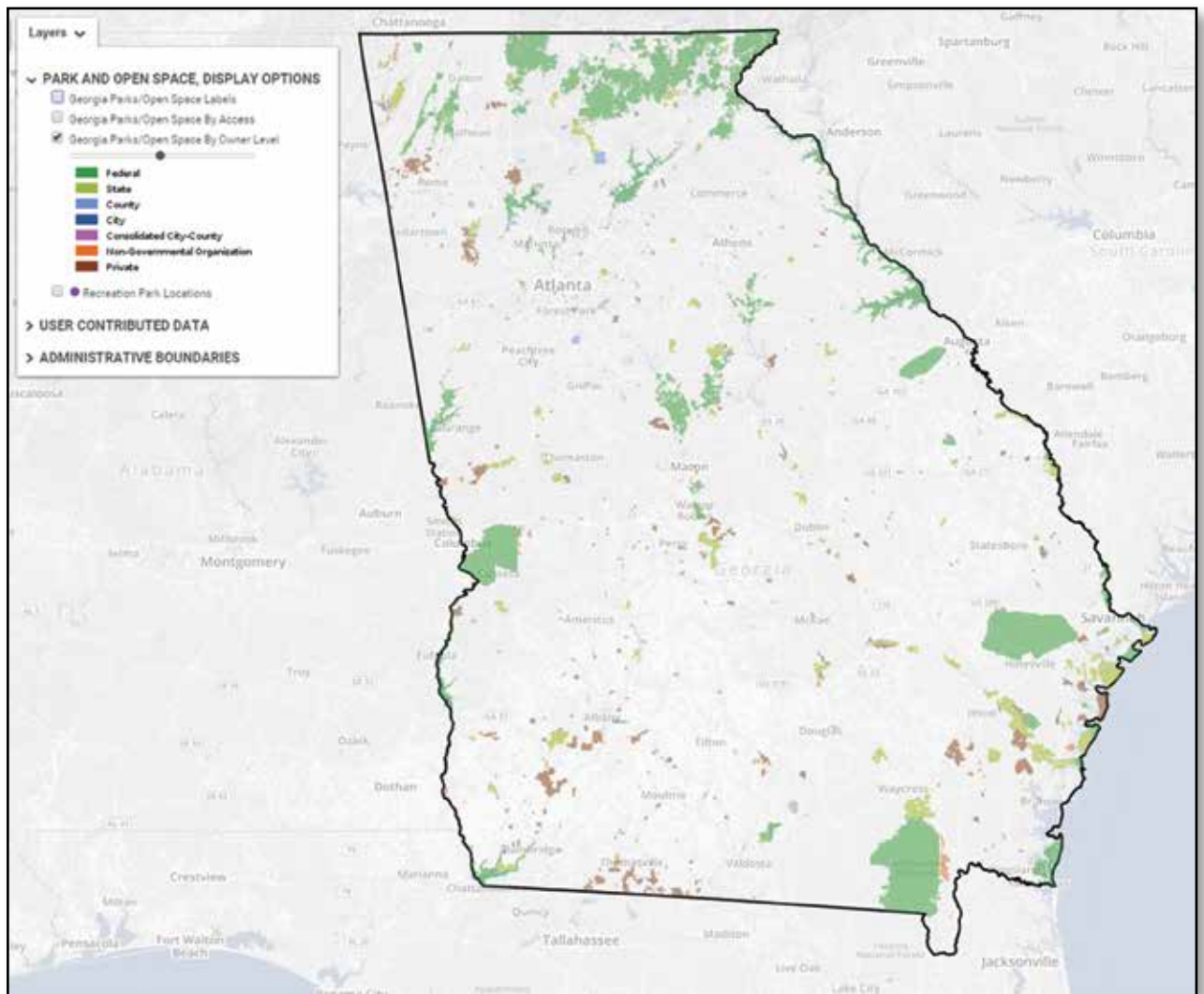


### Part 2 of 2: Percent of County Area Protected and Percent Available for Outdoor Recreation

■ Percent of County Area for Recreation  
 ■ Percent of County Area Protected



**Size.** If we first look at sheer size, we find that **federal agencies** have the largest contiguous areas (shown in bright green). Many of the largest properties were established on lands that had modest agricultural value like steep slopes, mountains, swamps, marshes (freshwater and saltwater), coastal zones and eroded lands. Other large properties were established to protect water quality and the operation of reservoirs. According to the latest version of the Georgia Public Parks Map, federal agencies own about 2.4 million acres - about 77% of it is entirely or partially open to the public (~1.85 million ac). Most federal properties provide a fairly wide range of recreational opportunities, but are generally geared toward nature-based activities.



Properties owned by **state agencies** are shown in an olive-green color and account for about 586,000 acres. Almost all of it (~96%, 565,000 ac) is entirely or partially open to the public for outdoor recreation. State Parks are particularly important since they're developed specifically to accommodate heavier levels of attendance, they provide the widest range of recreational activities and they are generally open year-round for that purpose. Although State Wildlife Management Areas tend to be larger in size than State Parks, they tend to deliver a somewhat narrower range of activities that are somewhat more restricted, seasonally.

Many people under-estimate both the number and the size of protected properties that are held privately (by individuals, corporations or non-profit organizations). Some of these lands are publicly accessible, whereas others are not. Some permit only a narrow range of recreation activities, whereas others are more inclusive. For such properties, determining their contributions to outdoor recreation must be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**County and municipal properties** tend to be much smaller in size. In fact, most are difficult to see on a map that has been scaled to the full-extent of the state (shown in the map as medium and light blues). However, they often support recreation activities (like team sports) that are not accommodated extensively by other jurisdictions. Some municipalities have designated their parks departments to manage properties with little or no recreation value – like road medians, traffic islands and the like. A judgement call was made to exclude these as ‘recreation parks’ for the purposes of this inventory.

## A Snapshot of Georgia’s Recreational Lands

This inventory recognized about 3,640,000 acres of “protected land,” representing approximately 9.7% of the state’s area. A portion of that gross acreage is available for outdoor recreation. The 2,674,000 acres of “recreation land,” represent about 7% of the state’s area.

Four counties have 40% or more of their area available for outdoor recreation [Rabun 63%, Towns 53%, Union 47% and Fannin 42%, all of which are concentrated in northeastern Georgia]. Thirty counties have between 10% and 39% of their area available for recreation.

Counties with 10% to 39% of Their Land Area Available for Recreation					
Charlton	Dawson	Greene	Jones	Murray	Troup
Chatham	Elbert	Habersham	Lincoln	Paulding	Walker
Chattooga	Forsyth	Hall	Long	Putnam	Ware
Clay	Gilmer	Hart	Lumpkin	Seminole	Wayne
Columbia	Glynn	Jasper	McIntosh	Stephens	White

The adjacent table presents information on the number of counties, when grouped by the percent of land area available for recreation. In summary, the vast majority of counties (63%, 101 of 159) have 4% or less of their area available for recreation.

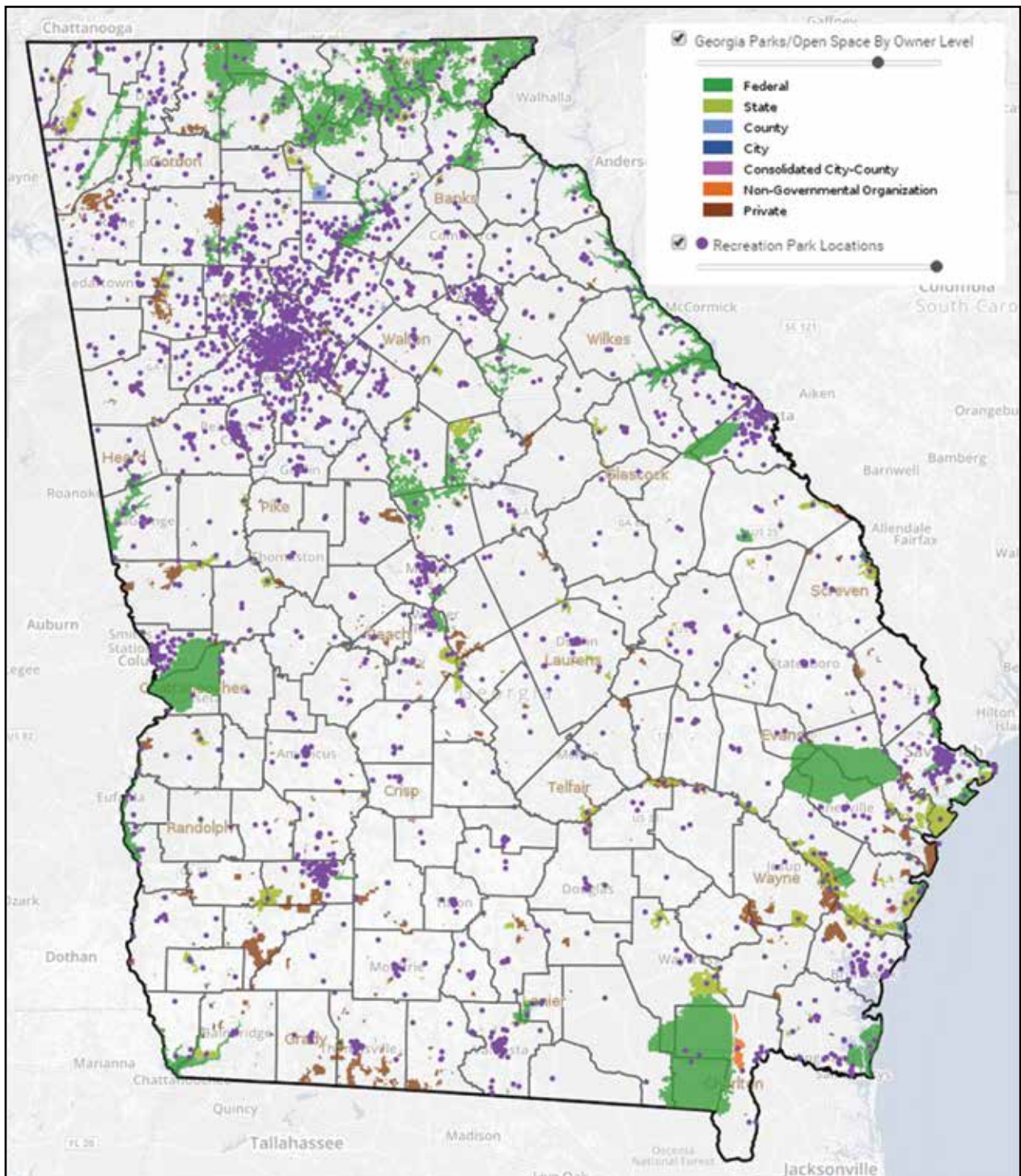
**Municipal Agencies:** Ten counties contain municipalities which operate 500 acres or more of park land. Those counties are: Bartow, Carroll, Cobb, Douglas, Fayette, Floyd, Fulton, Gwinnett, Hall and Rockdale. The vast majority of counties (80%, 128 of 159) contain municipalities which operate fewer than 100 acres of park land each.

**County Agencies\*:** Five county agencies manage more than 5,000 acres of park land. Those agencies are located in Clayton, Cobb, Dawson, DeKalb and Gwinnett. Seventy-six counties manage less than 100 acres of park land and 34 counties manage no park land at all. In summary, the vast majority of county agencies (67%, 107 of 159) operate less than 100 acres of park land. (\* This includes consolidated city-county governments).

Number of Georgia Counties, by Percent Land Area for Recreation	
% Land Area	# of Counties
40+%	4
10% to 39%	30
5% to 9%	24
1% to 4%	44
Less than 1%	57



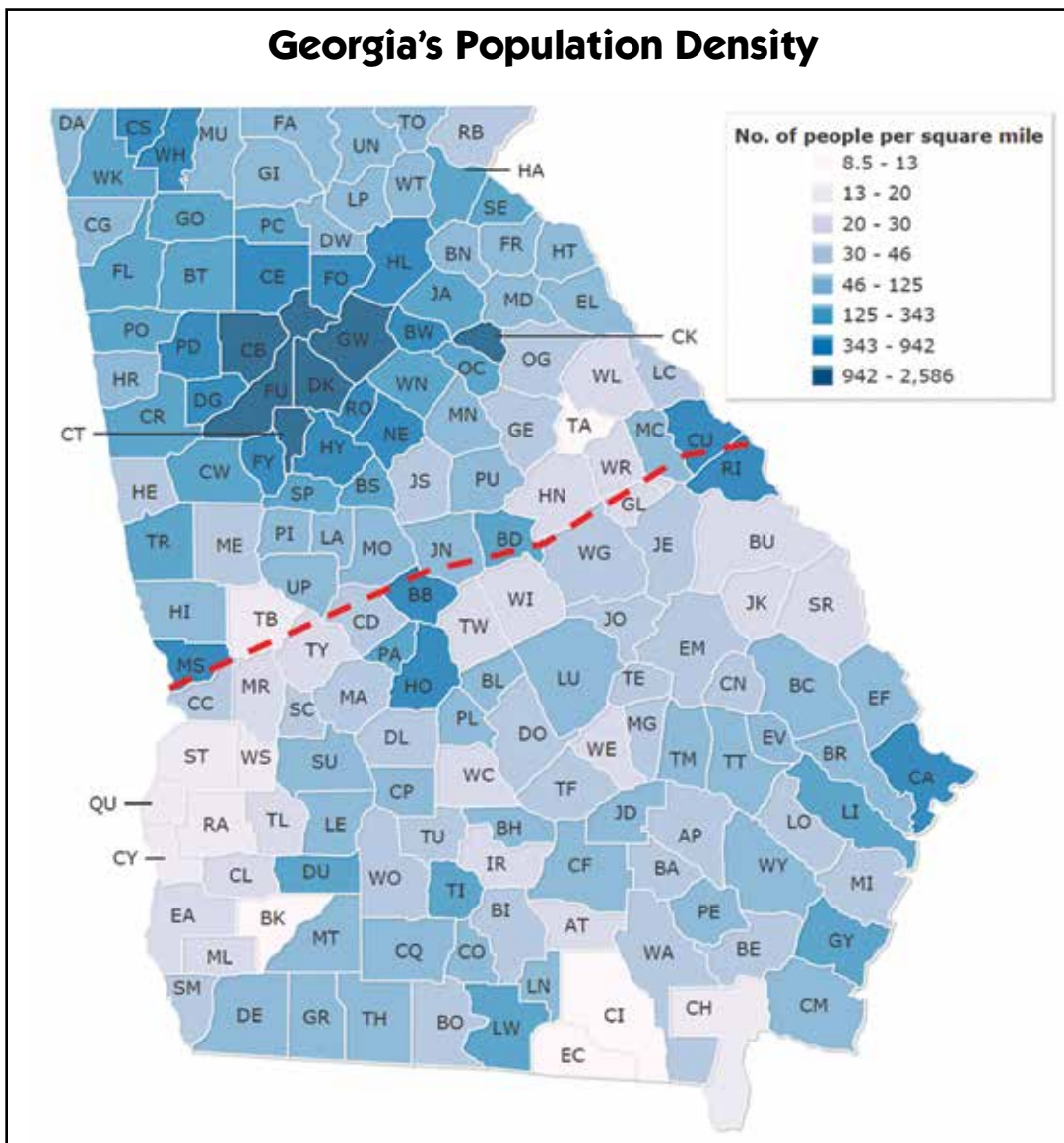
**Distribution.** We can look at the distribution of parks from two perspectives: 1) their physical arrangement throughout the state (which we'll call geographic distribution) and 2) their distance from population centers (which we'll call proximity distribution). To better understand the geographic distribution of parks, we'll have to modify our map slightly. This is because previous maps have only made it possible to see the very largest properties when zoomed-out to see the entire state. In order to see all the parks better, they were converted to points (independent of their actual acreage). Notice that there are clusters of parks around major metropolitan areas with a higher concentration in the northern third of the state. Several counties have less than a half-dozen parks and some have just one.





To better understand the distribution of parks relative to population centers (i.e., “proximity distribution”), we’ll explore the population density of counties. As seen in the accompanying map, Georgia’s population is concentrated in a half-dozen large cities and north of the Fall Line (approximated by the red line on map). Areas south of the Fall Line tend to have lower densities with fewer than about a dozen people per square mile in counties like Taliaferro, Baker, Clinch and Echols.

Large federal properties tend to be in areas with lower population densities. Generally, National Forests are in the northern half of the state and National Wildlife Refuges in the southern half. Lands managed by the National Park Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are somewhat more evenly distributed. State-owned properties tend to be distributed a bit more evenly than the largest federal lands and although they are rarely located within population centers, they are often fairly close. For most cities and towns, the closest public recreation area that is fairly large is likely to be a state park. Although privately-held properties (of significant size) tend to be evenly distributed, the larger holdings tend to be more common in the western and southern halves of the state. For many people, county and municipal parks may be the closest public space (of any size) available for any outdoor recreation. For many, the first experience people have in parks takes place on municipal & county properties.



**Quality.** For many recreators, the quality of their experience depends in large part on the quality of facilities they use. In other words, if a park is maintained poorly, people may simply choose not to visit. So, from their standpoint, the park doesn't really exist as a suitable recreation option. Although the inventory prepared for this Plan mostly focused on the location and size of parks and the kinds of facilities they provide, it is important to recognize that the quality and condition of facilities has a strong impact on the "effective supply" of recreation resources.

In recognition of the importance of quality facilities, roughly 60% of LWCF awards to local governments between 2006 and 2015 were targeted toward the rehabilitation of facilities. This was particularly important in the wake of the economic downturn when funding for outdoor recreation contracted significantly. The ability of park agencies to maintain facilities in good condition is dependent on the financial support those agencies receive.

### Improved Accessibility

Recreation service providers strive to maximize public accessibility to their facilities, including to those with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires agencies to meet specific standards of accessibility. The ADA affects recreation professionals in many ways – through daily operations, training of personnel, law enforcement efforts as well as minimum requirements for project renovation costs and construction standards.

An important step for any recreation agency is to develop an ADA Self-Evaluation and Transition Plan to ensure compliance. For guidance and additional information, contact the ADA coordinator in your jurisdiction or reference the Title III Regulations here: [http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII\\_2010/titleIII\\_2010\\_regulations.pdf](http://www.ada.gov/regs2010/titleIII_2010/titleIII_2010_regulations.pdf)

## Types of Parks and Activities

There is a wide range of park types and outdoor recreation activities. Categorizing them can help us to better understand them and to develop a holistic perspective. Frequently, the terms, "passive" and "active" are used to describe different kinds of park **lands**. Our preference here, however, is to use those terms to describe **activities** – specifically as they relate to cardiovascular intensity. Thus, 'active' recreation is anything that gets your heart racing – whether that is playing baseball at your local park or biking up a mountain at a state park. 'Passive' recreation describe activities that don't require intense physical engagement - like picnicking or bird-watching.

As for describing different types of park **land**, we define them according to whether or not they have been "built-out" or require intense maintenance. So, let's think about your local park for a moment. Maybe it has ballfields which were constructed by mechanical grading, installing drainage lines, constructing bleachers, providing bathroom and concession facilities, equipment rentals, etc. These are the kinds of parks that need frequent and high-levels of maintenance like cleaning, mowing, herbicide applications, etc. For this report, we would consider these kinds of properties to be 'facility-based' parks. In contrast, a property that may only provide a simple gravel parking area,



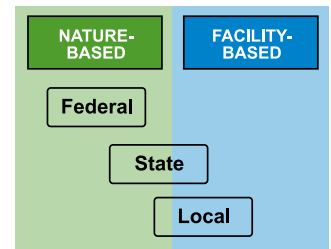
photo: Chamblee Parks and Recreation Department



photo: Cloudland Canyon State Park

a narrow hiking trail on natural surface or a hand-launch boat ramp might be considered a ‘nature-based’ park.

Each type of park provides different recreational opportunities. Some communities have access to thousands of acres, but it may be all in ‘nature-based’ parks with few places to play organized team sports. In contrast, other parts of the state have the opposite problem - an ample supply of ‘facility-based’ parks, but few ‘nature-based’ parks. For this reason, using a simple universal standard (like number of acres per person) to determine sufficiency may not be very useful. When it comes to determining sufficiency, it’s all relative. While this report can provide data, perspectives and approaches for consideration, it is up to recreation professionals and elected officials to determine whether the mix of resources available is meeting its citizens demand and responding to changing preferences.



Generally speaking, park lands provided by local governments are ‘facility-based’ whereas federal parks are typically ‘nature-based.’ State parks are somewhat unique in providing a mix of both types. Despite their differences, various park types also have a lot in common. Trail systems, for example, are common in all park types.

Attribute	Local	State	Federal
Size	Small	Moderate -Large	Very large
Recreation Type	Mostly ‘facility-based’ A few ‘nature-based’	Mostly ‘nature-based’ A few ‘facility-based’	Mostly ‘nature-based’
Over-night facilities	Rarely	Extensive & diverse opportunities	Modest & scattered opportunities
Trails	Yes	Yes	Yes

### Special Mention: Trails

One consistent message received from the results of the survey, focus groups, public comments and other sources underscored the popularity and importance of trails. Support was strongly expressed for all kinds of trails – from water trails, to paved trails, backcountry passages and others.

Trails have enjoyed very strong support over the last decade. Fortunately, when compared to many kinds of recreation facilities, trails can be comparatively inexpensive to design, construct and maintain when strategically placed and supported by local communities. Trails support a wide range of outdoor recreation activities (e.g., walking, hiking, biking, roller-blading, etc.); all of which can serve as gateway activities for engaging other activities. Trail systems can increase access to adjacent outdoor recreation areas as well as providing important habitat corridors for wildlife. Moreover, trail systems can often be established in urban environments that would otherwise no longer be suitable for conventional, large-area parks. In fact, trail systems are one of the few kinds of recreation facility that can be designed to cross a large number of jurisdictions and landowner types. A simple internet search will reveal a host of studies demonstrating the power of trails to increase real estate values and to deliver strong, positive, sustainable contributions into the local economy. Many organizations in Georgia are dedicated to developing extensive, high-quality, inter-connected trails systems throughout the state.

The combination of strong support, modest start-up costs coupled with low maintenance demands help to make trails systems an increasingly popular choice for recreation professionals to pursue.

In addition to LWCF, financial support is available to city governments, county governments, federal agencies, authorized commissions, as well as state agencies through the federal Recreation Trails Grant Program (RTP). RTP is a primary source of funds for trail maintenance, construction and education projects that advance the goals of Georgia’s statewide outdoor recreation plan.





## Demand for Outdoor Recreation Services

Critical to any recreation plan is an assessment of preferences and demands for public outdoor recreation services. Demand for outdoor recreation services was assessed for this Plan in several ways including:

- 1) **Public Survey:** A telephone questionnaire of 1,100 respondents about outdoor recreation preferences.
- 2) **Public Meetings:** Three public meetings were hosted throughout the state in the autumn of 2015.
- 3) **Focus Groups:** Several target audiences were invited to participate in small summits to discuss the findings of the public survey and to collect their opinions.
- 4) **Written Comments:** An online form was created to receive public input ([www.gastateparks.org/scorp](http://www.gastateparks.org/scorp)).
- 5) **Practitioners' Survey:** Forums and surveys of outdoor recreation practitioners were hosted.
- 6) **Regional Planners:** DNR engaged elected officials and planners in a discussion on the value of incorporating parks and outdoor recreation opportunities into local and regional planning efforts.
- 7) **Advisory Committee:** An Advisory Committee, composed of a diversity of stakeholders, provided perspective and oversight for the entire planning process.

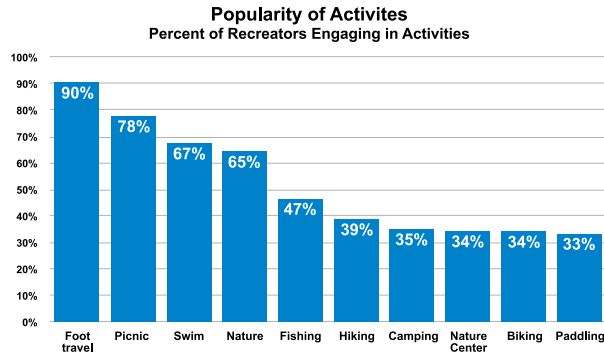


# 1) Public Survey

To assess demand and preferences for outdoor recreation, a telephone survey was conducted. Key results of that survey are presented here (Longstreth et al., 2015).

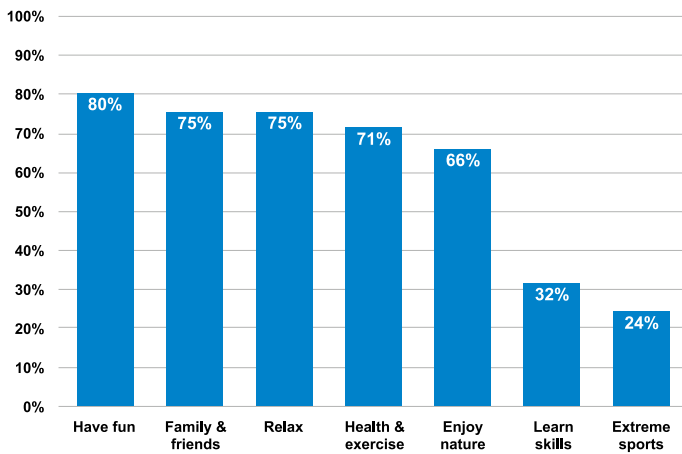
## Recreators and Popular Activities

About 63% of respondents self-identified as being outdoor Recreators. These Recreators indicated that their most popular activities included walking, jogging, running, etc. (collectively refer to as “foot travel”). Other activities cited by 50% or more of Recreators included, picnicking, swimming and activities involving the study, observation or appreciation of wildlife and nature. The chart below shows activities that were cited by at least 30% of Recreators.



## Top Reasons to Recreate?

Percent of 'recreators' indicating reasons they consider "very important" to recreate



## Why Recreate?

Self-described Recreators were asked what motivated them to participate and were invited to provide multiple responses. More than half of Recreators indicated that they were motivated by the opportunity to 1) have fun, 2) to be with family and friends, 3) to relax, 4) to be healthy and exercise and 5) to enjoy nature.

## Popularity of Parks

Close to three-quarters of respondents (70%) indicated that they had visited a park in the last year (i.e., “Park-users”).

## Alternative Locations for Recreating

A portion of respondents identified as Recreators but indicated that they did not recreate in public parks. So,

### What Portion of the Public Visit Parks in the Last Year?

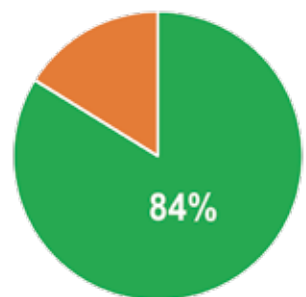


if people recreated, but didn't use parks, where did they do it? More than half cited their home or the gym and more than a third identified 'theme parks' or 'places outside of Georgia.'

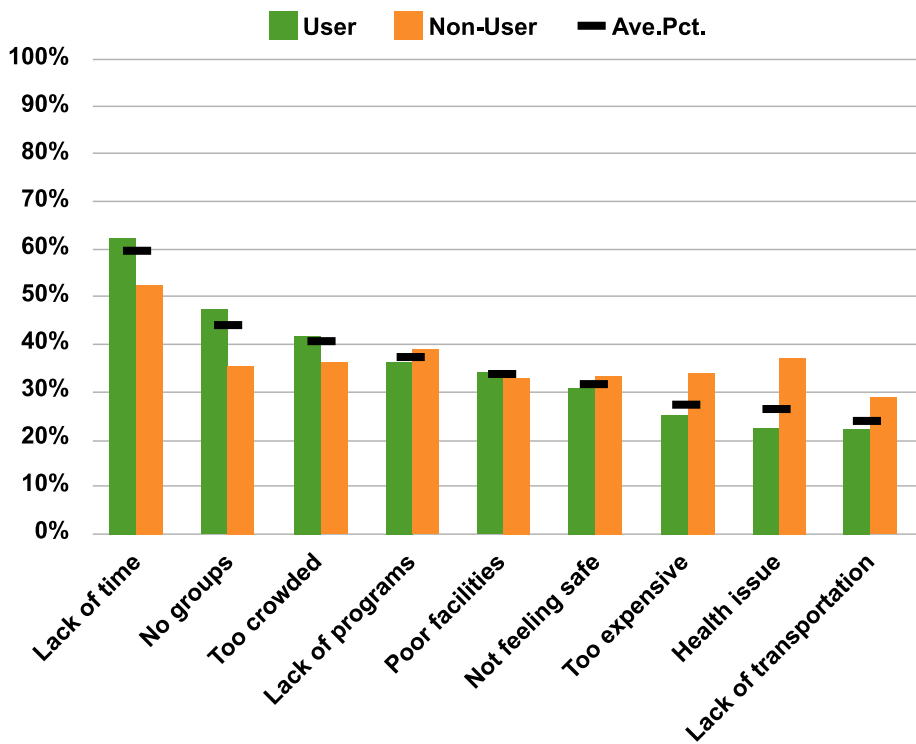
## Frequency of Visitation

We asked Park-users how often they had attended, the vast majority (~84%) indicated that they visited at least several times in the past year.

About 84% of Park Visitors Came Several Times Last Year



### Challenges that are “Always” or “Sometimes” a Problem, by User-Type



### Deterrents and Barriers

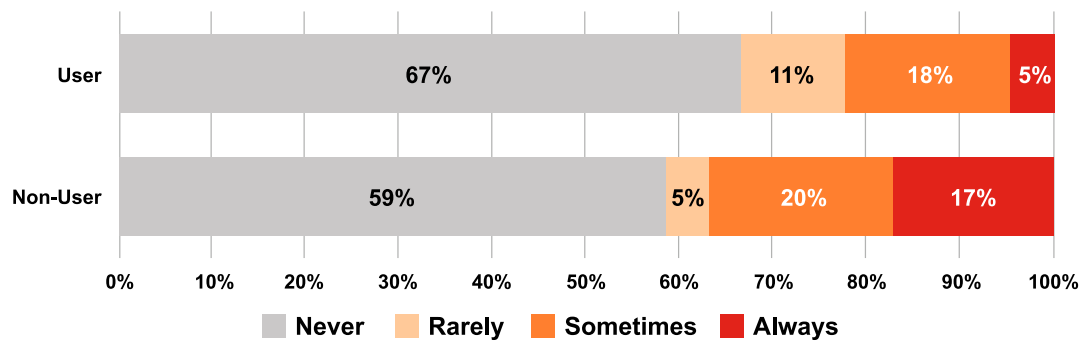
We asked Recreators what kinds of factors deterred their participating more frequently and invited them to provide multiple answers. Among all Recreators, the deterrents cited most commonly as being a problem “sometimes” or “always” included: 1) lack of time, 2) lack of organized groups and 3) crowding. Among just the Non-Users, the top three deterrents were (1) lack of time, 2) lack of programs, and 3) health issues. Park-users were more likely to identify the same kinds of deterrents whereas the non-users identified a greater diversity of deterrents. That is to say, if the top three deterrents could somehow be resolved, Park-users would recreate more frequently, but non-users might not be affected as much since they were more likely to identify other factors as also being deterrents. Three deterrents

were cited more frequently by non-users than by Park-users (by at least five percentage points) and those deterrents were: 1) personal health or disability issue, 2) expensiveness and 3) lack of transportation.

### Physical Limitations

About 20% to 30% of Recreators indicate that physical limitations were “sometimes” or “always” a barrier. Interestingly, people who did not use parks were more likely to identify “physical limitations” as a barrier to outdoor recreation than those who did use parks. With nearly a quarter to a third of the population affected by physical limitations, it will continue to be important for recreation professionals to ensure that planning, development and rehabilitation efforts are effectively addressing this challenge.

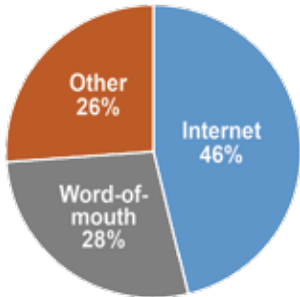
### Barriers: Physical Limitations



## Safety and Security

Security is, understandably, a primary concern of many people. Recreators were asked, how common it was for security to be a concern or a barrier to recreation. Overall, about 70% were “rarely” or “never” concerned about safety issues (i.e., ~30% indicated that safety was “sometimes” or “always” a concern). When those same data were analyzed according to race, we found that African-Americans more frequently ranked security as being a concern “always” or “sometimes” compared to respondents identifying as other races. There were also differences when analyzed by gender. More women than men considered security a high concern (36% vs 26%, respectively).

Sources of Information



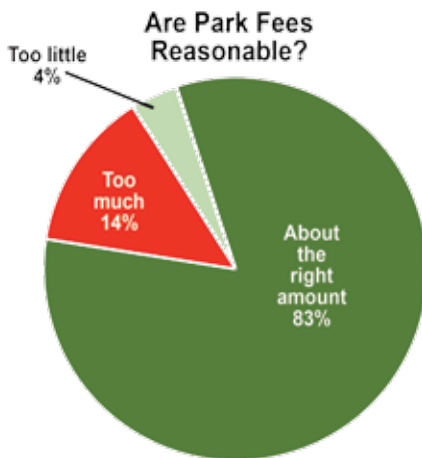
## Sources of Information

Park-users were asked about their primary source of information for outdoor recreation opportunities. Close to half of respondents (46%) indicated that the internet was their primary source. Roughly a third (28%) said that “word-of-mouth” was their primary source and roughly a quarter (26%) relied on “other sources.” Those “other sources” included television, social media, publications and brochures, newspapers, magazines, outdoor recreation clubs and organizations, information and tourist centers.

## Paying Fees at Parks

About 73% of survey respondents answered a question about paying program fees or user fees in the last year. Roughly 56% of respondents to that question indicated that they had paid fees.

Percent Paying Fees

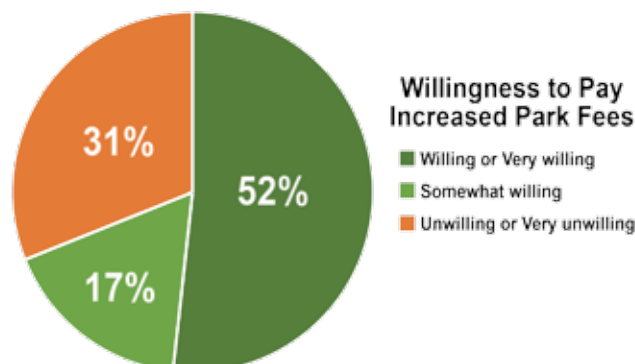


## Reasonable Fees

The people who had paid fees in the last year, were then asked whether they thought the fees were reasonable. About 83% indicated that they were “about right” and an additional 4% indicated that fees were actually “too low.” Overall, almost 90% of respondents indicated that fees were “about right” or “too low.” Only about 14% thought fees were “too high.”

## Willingness to Pay More

About 68% of survey respondents answered a question about their willingness to pay increased park fees. More than half of respondents to that question indicated that they would be “willing” or “very willing” to pay increased fees and an additional 17% indicated that they would be “somewhat” willing to do so. Only about a third of respondents indicated that they would be “unwilling” or “very unwilling.”

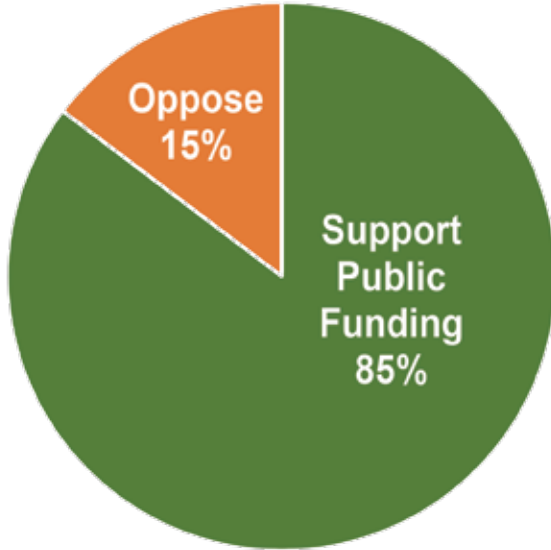




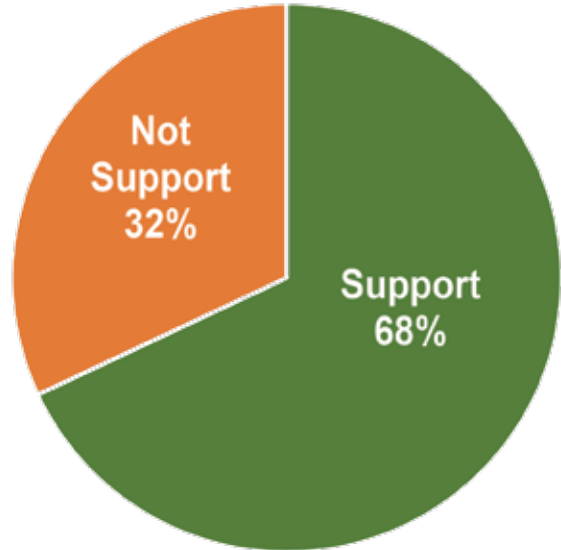
## Public Funding

All survey respondents were asked whether they supported public funding for outdoor recreation. A full 85% indicated that they did support public funds for recreation. Roughly 70% of those who supported public funding were also willing to pay additional public funding.

### Do You Support Public Funding for Outdoor Recreation?



### Would you Support Additional Public Funding for Outdoor Recreation?



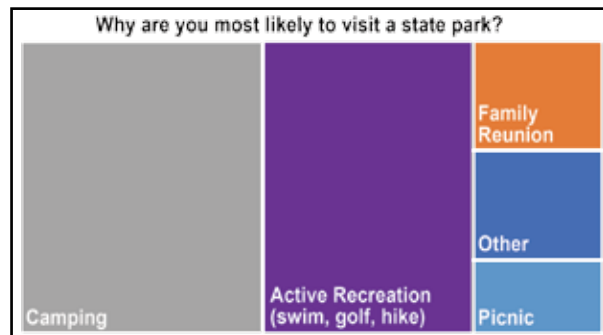
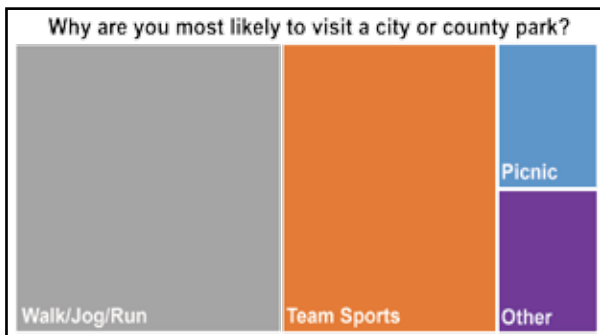
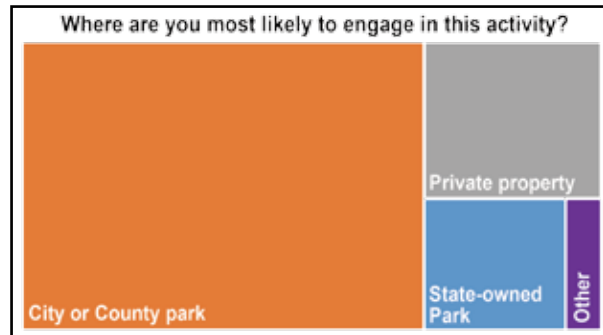
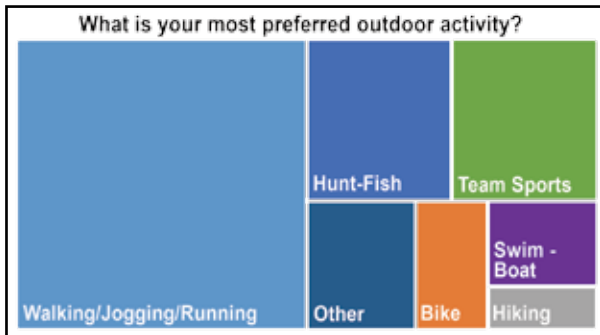
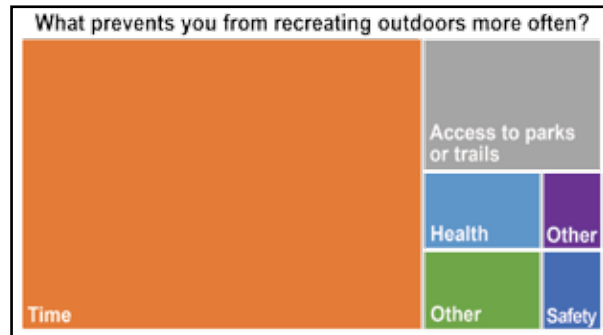
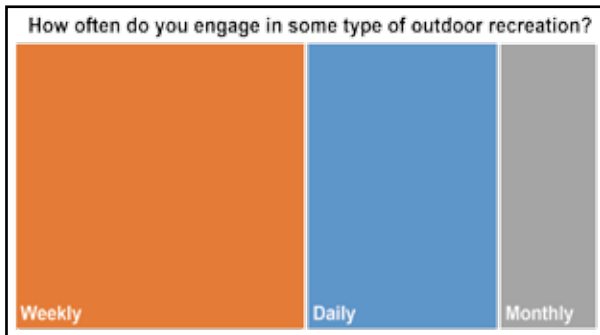
## 2) Public Meetings

In collaboration with the Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG), three public meetings were held in the cities of Dalton, Perry and Tifton. Attendance was modest, with 30 or fewer people in attendance at each of the meetings. Meetings started with a brief overview of the Georgia State Parks Division, the importance of outdoor recreation and the Plan for Outdoor Recreation. The second phase involved a brief survey of six multiple choice questions. Thereafter, a series of open-ended questions were posed to stimulate conversation. Those six questions are presented below along with the “treemap” graphs showing relative proportion of answers. Many of the core messages that from the public meetings were also common with the public telephone survey.

- 1) How often do you engage in some type of outdoor recreation?
- 2) What prevents you from engaging in outdoor recreation more often?
- 3) What is your most preferred outdoor activity?
- 4) Where are you most likely to engage in this activity?
- 5) Why are you most likely to visit a city or county park?
- 6) Why are you most likely to visit a state park?

### Public Meeting Locations and Dates

Tifton: October 23, 2015  
 Dalton: November 2, 2015  
 Perry: November 16, 2015



### 3) Focus Groups

DNR hosted focus group sessions for three target audiences: 1) Trail users, 2) Millennials and 3) Minority users. Focus group meetings were facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute of Government and were comprised of about 15 people engaging in loosely-structured conversation. The objective was to assess preferences, critical issues, successes and priorities for future improvements.

Why focus on these target audiences?	
<b>Trail users</b>	Walking, jogging, riding are the most popular activities.
<b>Millennials</b>	They are the trend-setters and decision-makers of the future.
<b>Minority users</b>	A growing constituency with unique recreation preferences.

**Common messages** to public park and outdoor recreation providers echoed by all three focus groups included:

- **PRIORITIES:** (in no particular order): a) the connectivity of public spaces, b) improved communication, marketing and online presence; c) planning efforts, d) program offerings and e) land conservation.
- **ACTIVITIES:** Trail use was cited very frequently, but the complete list of activities was very diverse.
- **BARRIERS:** The most intense barrier to participation was lack of time. However, issues like transportation and lack of information were also very commonly cited.
- **STAFFING:** More staff would improve visitor experience.
- **NETWORKING:** Learning from the successes and challenges of others.

Many of the core messages that were common to the focus groups were also common with the public telephone survey. Additional notes from the public meetings are available from the Department of Natural Resources.



### 4) Written Public Comments

A website with a comment link was created to receive public input ([www.gastateparks.org/scorp](http://www.gastateparks.org/scorp)). About 40 comments were received. A large portion of the comments related to augmenting trail systems – particularly of water (paddling) trails along the Altamaha, Chattahoochee and Ocmulgee rivers. Many of the other comments received were for specific requests that were cited only once or twice or were not related to the project. All comments are on file with the Department of Natural Resources.



## 5) Outdoor Recreation & Planning Professionals (Practitioners)

Securing a full view of the state of outdoor recreation in Georgia extends beyond simply surveying the public. It includes the perspectives of professionals and practitioners. Are practitioners noticing any consistent trends in participation? What opportunities do they foresee and what challenges are they suffering? In collaboration with several partners, DNR invited an inclusive range of service providers to share their insights through a series of exchanges including surveys, webinars, conferences and collaboration with partners.

### Local Recreation Practitioners Survey and Webinar

DNR collaborated with the Georgia Recreation and Park Association (GRPA) to engage their membership, to participate in a short survey and a webinar of issues facing practitioners. Participants discussed challenges related to management, funding and meeting the needs of constituents.

### State and Federal Recreation Practitioners Survey

DNR also invited state and federal practitioners to participate in a short, open-ended survey. Generally, the themes of the survey focused on:

- 1) Adjustments in the emphasis of outdoor recreation and expectations for future trends;
- 2) 'Out-sourcing' of services;
- 3) Reliance on self-generated revenues;
- 4) Focus on healthy life styles and well-being;
- 5) Changes in popularity of outdoor recreation activities;
- 6) Increasing diversity of participants.

When asked whether agencies had changed their level of emphasis on outdoor recreation, respondents provided a diversity of responses that had few threads in common between them. Responses ranged from increasing public outreach, to shifts in specific kinds of programming and specific kinds of facilities. Most respondents believed that the themes and changes recently seen were likely to continue over the next five years.

When asked to comment about the impact of out-sourcing, most indicated that some or many of their services had been outsourced to vendors, concessionaires and volunteers.

About 40% of respondents indicated that they never had to rely on generating revenues on-site whereas about 20% indicated they always had. The remaining 40% of respondents indicated that they have become more reliant on self-generated revenues than they had in the previous five years.

When asked how their agencies contributed to healthy lifestyles, respondents commonly recited trail systems, offering specific kinds of programming, infrastructure and increased accessibility as well as by partnering with others.

Respondents were asked whether they had noticed any dramatic changes in the popularity of specific activities. They provided diverse answers that had few trends in common. Some that were mentioned by more than one respondent included: camping, trails and shooting sports.

When asked about the kinds of things that could be done to increase the diversity of outdoor recreators, respondents provided several specific strategies, with no clear consensus. That said, some of the strategies recommended included providing low-cost facilities and services and adopting changes to marketing efforts, more on-site signage and adoption of multi-lingual materials.



## 6) Conference of Georgia Association of Regional Commissions (GARC)

In early November 2015, DNR conducted a focus group with members of the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions. Over 50 people participated. Some of the emergent points from the discussion:

- **Parks are important:** Participants felt that outdoor recreation was extremely important for them and their families. They saw it as crucial to their physical health and mental well-being as well as being pivotal to their community's sense of place and heritage. Appreciation was expressed for the vital role that the State Parks system played toward ensuring long-term protection of natural lands and local economic impacts.
- **Priorities for parks:**
  - o Increased Access: Their number one priority for improving parks was "improving access." They argued that parks that were more readily accessible were likely to receive both a larger number of visitors and a higher frequency of returning visitors. This sentiment held true for participants of both urban and rural communities.
  - o Costs: There was a shared concern that certain outdoor recreation activities (e.g., camping) is becoming prohibitively expensive.
  - o Youth Engagement: Some wanted to see parks encourage greater participation by youth and youth-groups through expanded marketing and social media efforts. Some recommended developing "packages" to create regional outdoor recreation activities for multiple day trips and activities for the entire family. These activities could work with both the public and private recreational providers.
  - o Regional Commissions (RCs) and Parks: RCs work with local governments to define their goals and help them identify resources and implementation strategies. They encouraged recreation professionals to coordinate with community planners to elevate the importance of parks and ensure that recreation concerns were integrated into long-term development efforts.
  - o Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT): Incorporate DOT staff into advisory committees and regional recreation planning efforts.



## 7) Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee for this Plan was composed of members representing state and federal governments as well as corporate and non-profit entities – all of which are intimately invested in the future of parks and outdoor recreation. Four members represented state and federal agencies; one represented a corporate entity and five represented non-profit organizations. The Committee participated in webinars, mini-surveys and in-person meetings to discuss a wide range of topics from the current status, challenges and opportunities in outdoor recreation to providing prospective on policies, leadership directions, collecting public input as well as to monitor research efforts, guiding the development of tools for recreation professionals as well as media messaging strategies.





photo: Valdosta-Lowndes County Parks and Recreation Authority

## Parks and Society

Having a clear understanding of the supply and demand of outdoor recreation resources has tremendous value for its own sake. However, to achieve a more comprehensive understanding requires that we look at the role that outdoor recreation plays in society at large. For this reason, we'll explore outdoor recreation through the lenses of: 1) Public Health, 2) Economic Vitality and 3) Natural Resource Conservation. In this section, we'll see how these components are inter-connected and how modest investments made to recreation systems can deliver enormous benefits to some of the most important aspects of society and governance.

### Health

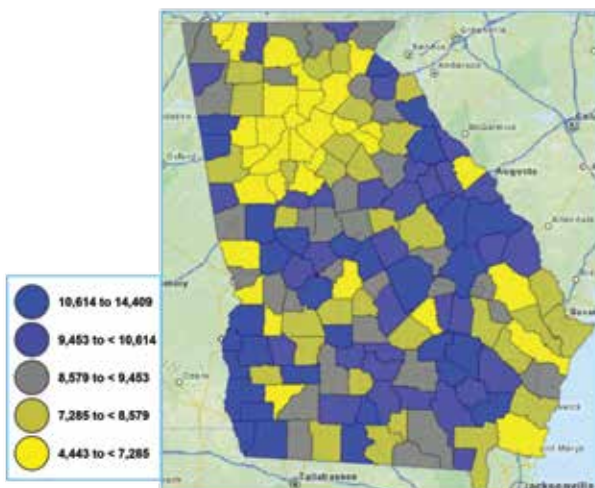
Physical activity through outdoor recreation is a fun and engaging way to promote healthy weight, muscle tone and mental clarity. Consequences of inactivity can result in obesity and a host of other medical concerns, including coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes, various cancers and other complications. Georgia ranks as the 19th most-obese state in the nation (Levi et al., 2016). Summary of related research can be found in Rosenberger, Bergerson and Kline (2009), which documents these connections. Considering the consequences of being physically inactive – in terms of disease, quality of life and health care costs, it is increasingly important to provide ample opportunities for the public to recreate outdoors.

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**“Studies show that people are more physically active when recreation activities are available.”**

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Because measures of health and obesity are affected by so many factors (e.g., genetics, consumption, access to nutrition, physical activity, etc.) it can be difficult to directly tie the impacts to any one influencing behavior. However, despite those challenges, some studies have provided empirical evidence for the importance of recreation areas. Research conducted in Oregon by Rosenberger, Bergerson and Kline (2009) found that the supply of recreation activities was associated with a larger proportion of people who were physically active.



### Health of Georgia County Populations

Research compiled by the Atlanta Regional Commission (2015) found that metro areas are generally “healthier” than rural counties. In the adjacent map, blues identify counties that are less healthy whereas areas in yellows depict counties that are healthier. Specifically, the map depicts the number of “Years of Potential Life Lost Before the Age of 75” (data collected between 2011-2013). Although there is not a perfect correlation, many of the counties in yellow (“healthier”) also tend to have greater densities to outdoor recreation resources and many of the blue counties (“unhealthy”) tend to have fewer outdoor recreation resources.



## Mental Wellbeing

Similarly, mental well-being is also affected by a broad range of factors, which, again, makes it challenging to draw hard and direct connections to outdoor recreation. However, there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the ability of outdoor recreation to positively affect several measures of psychological well-being including social functioning, positive life outlook, mood, attention, coping abilities and other measures. A review of these studies can be found in Duval and Kaplan (2013).

**“Studies show that outdoor recreation positively affects psychological well-being.”**



## Economic Vitality

Local and state economies are stimulated by the presence of abundant and well-managed outdoor recreation areas. Some of the ways recreation brings new money to a local economy include: 1) encouraging tourism and consumer spending, 2) increasing the value of nearby homes and 3) attracting new businesses. In addition to generating income, parks and recreation areas can help reduce costs as well. Some of the ways parks help to save money include: 1) reducing health costs by providing places to remain physically active, 2) reducing automobile traffic by providing commute alternatives and 3) by incorporating “green infrastructure” concepts which can off-set the enormous costs associated with managing storm-water runoff. These are just a few of the ways that parks contribute to our local economies.

**Local and state economies are stimulated by the presence of abundant and well-managed outdoor recreation areas.**



## Parks are Economic Stimulators

- The American Society of Civil Engineers (2014) reported that property values increase an average of 20% when a park is nearby and that 57% of residents want to live near a park. The American Planning Association has compiled the results of several similar studies (APA, 2002).
- National Park Service lands in Georgia contributed to over 7 million visitors who spent \$348.2 million, generating 5,089 jobs, resulting in an output of \$465.2 million (Thomas, et al. 2014).
- The Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, alone, generated \$25.9M in visitor expenditures and economic value while only drawing a budget of \$18.7M. In other words, the refuge generated \$1.38 in total economic effect for every \$1.00 of budget expended (Carver & Caudhill 2013).
- Marketing of outdoor recreation opportunities are key to maximizing economic returns. The Georgia State Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division's commitment to enhance marketing of state parks is a great example. The partnership with GA Economic Development has greatly accelerated positioning of the parks system as a primary economic engine for the state and our host local communities.
- Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites have an annual economic impact of \$610 million and create more than 8,000 jobs (Kelley, 2015).
- The Georgia Recreation and Park Association reported that Bainbridge generated \$1.89 million through seven fishing tournaments; Tifton and Tift County brought in \$3.4 million by hosting the GRPA state swim meet; Dalton generated \$3.2 million by hosting a 4-week senior softball tournament; and Cobb County brought in \$79 million through 36 athletic events contracting over 60,000 hotel room nights.

## Outdoor Recreation is Big Business in Georgia

According to the Georgia Department of Economic Development:

- In 2014, about a quarter of all people visiting Georgia for leisure participated in nature-based activities or outdoor sporting activities.
- Nearly 10% of Georgia leisure visitors go to parks.
- Travel parties who visit either Georgia State Parks or National Parks spend \$633 per trip, on average and those who camp spend even more (average \$737).



photo: John Lees | Dawson County Parks & Recreation

### Sampler of How Outdoor Recreation is Big Business in Georgia (2015)

- Paddle Sports = \$11.3 Billion
- Camping/RV = \$3.2 Billion
- Boating = \$2.7 Billion
- Hunting & Fishing = \$2.3 Billion
- GA State Parks = \$610 Million
- Silver Comet Trail = \$120 Million

Reported by GA Dept. Economic Development

Notably, a significant volume of the state's strong and growing tourism industry is driven by people's increasing desire to experience our parks, to be in nature and to have positive outdoor experiences. In 2015, outdoor recreation in Georgia generated over \$23 billion dollars in economic activity, supported 231,000 jobs and returned over \$1 billion in state and local taxes. These significant impacts are





photo: Oconee County Parks and Recreation Department

augmented further by the additional positive economic benefits realized from in-state and out-of-state travel from people and families participating in locally sponsored park and sports activities, tournaments and special events.

### Nature-Based Tourism’s Growing Impact in Georgia

Georgia is becoming more aware of the role that nature-based tourism plays as an economic driver. As Baby-boomers retire to have more fun and Millennials seek a stronger

connection to nature, Georgia’s diverse natural resources, parks, cultural and outdoor recreation areas play an important role in the economic prosperity of our state. Advancing nature-based tourism, in all its forms, at the state, region and local level makes good environmental, societal and economic sense.



photo: Tyrone Recreation

## Conservation

Proper land use planning at all levels of government can encourage the protection of natural resources and the provision of outdoor recreation opportunities. This is especially true in our fast-growing urban areas where demographic shifting and the loss of lands to development is most prevalent. Conserving natural areas not only protects important habitats for wildlife, but provides the very environments and experiences that recreators seek in order to escape the trappings of modern life and to appreciate the diversity of life around them.



Wetlands, in particular, are critically important ecosystems which deliver a number of services including: (1) providing habitat for a wide variety and number of wildlife and plants, (2) filtering, cleaning and storing water, (3) collecting and holding flood waters, (4) absorbing the forces of wind and tides, (5) providing places of beauty and recreational

activities. Georgia's Environmental Protection Division regulate wetlands under the §404 permit and §401 certification processes. However, Georgia has seen the number of palustrine and estuarine wetlands decline over time. Because this decline is not unique to Georgia, federal programs such as the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which encourage their protection, are of significant importance.



This Plan works in concert with the Georgia's State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), produced by DNR's Wildlife Resource Division (2015), to protect important lands and ensure that outdoor recreation activities are properly managed to maximize enjoyment while minimizing impact. We recognize that there are abundant opportunities to protect lands close to where people live and work in order to provide outdoor recreational opportunities.

Georgia's SWAP also acknowledges the emergence of several wide-ranging conservation challenges, which range from climate change to growing wildlife diseases. It also provides for generic strategies for confronting these challenges. One such strategy found in SWAP is the integration of "adaptive management strategies," as outlined by Williams and Brown (2012) emphasizing the importance of habitat connectivity. Another outlines land conversion strategies to convert land that is not well suited for food production to support energy crops. The SWAP also addresses several wildlife conservation challenges by detailing various diseases and identifies strategies to mitigate these challenges. Considering these strategies can be an important resource for the management of conservation lands, wildlife and parks at all governmental levels.



photo: Black Rock Mountain State Park



photo: Don Carter State Park





photo: City of Decatur Recreation

## Conclusions and Recommendations

**The Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021** affirms the fact that by investing in public parks, trails and outdoor recreation opportunities, communities improve public health and quality of life, enhance economic growth and protect important natural and cultural resources so that they can be experienced and enjoyed for generations to come. And, as Georgia works to position itself and its local communities for greater economic growth and public well-being, it is evident that demand for parks, trails and outdoor recreation opportunities will continue to increase.

The Plan offers guidance to Georgia's state and local decision-makers and citizenry on ways to maximize these opportunities through three primary goals.

**“. . . demand for parks, trails and outdoor recreation opportunities will continue to increase.”**

### Three Primary Goals:

- 1) Promote Healthy Communities:** Reinforce the connection between health, quality of life and outdoor recreation at all levels of government service.
- 2) Enhance Economic Vitality:** Support and maintain Georgia's outdoor recreation resources so that we remain attractive to new business and industry, draw tourists across our borders and grow our tax base.
- 3) Conserve Natural Resources:** Continue to protect the natural landscapes which help to make recreating outdoors fun and exciting and to preserve critical land and water resources.

Each primary goal is accompanied by a number of high-level support strategies. The supporting strategies are intentionally defined in broad ways in order to provide professionals and planners with the greatest degree of freedom and to fashion their approaches in ways that are most appropriate to their regular operations. For recreation professionals who prefer more structure and greater detail, we stand-by and affirm the strategies outlined in previous versions of SCORP (GSPHS 2007 and GSPHS 2013), which are still relevant and applicable today.

We can greatly amplify our progress toward achieving these primary goals by engaging in simple coordination and collaboration with partners and stakeholders. As illustrated previously, parks deliver important benefits to other critically-important measures of society – like public health and economic vitality. Relatively small investments made in parks can deliver compounded dividends by advancing the missions of sister agencies. In other words, supporting decent parks is an inexpensive way to address other challenges like obesity and sluggish economies.





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## **Promote Healthy Communities**

**Reinforce the connection between health, quality of life and outdoor recreation at all levels of government service.**

### **Strategies:**

- Incorporate outdoor recreation into the community planning and collaborative decision making process of local, state and federal governments particularly with agencies addressing public health, transportation, planning, economic development and parks.
- Establish safe and well-maintained parks near where people live and work and explore ways to connect existing facilities for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles via trails.
- Continue to serve the needs of underserved populations and give greater attention to universal accessibility.
- Leverage initiatives, programs, funds, partnerships and LWCF support to advance outdoor recreation projects that directly support active, healthy lifestyles.

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## **Enhance Economic Vitality**

**Support and maintain Georgia's outdoor recreation resources so that we remain attractive to new business and industry, draw tourists across our borders and grow our tax base.**

### **Strategies:**

- Use the tools made available by this Plan to communicate the economic benefits of outdoor recreation and to track the financial return from investing in outdoor recreation facilities.
- Commit to marketing natural and recreation resources as well as developing exciting programs and special events. These efforts can fuel high attendance rates and foster community support through volunteering. They can stoke tourism appeal and empower profitable opportunities by creating partnerships with local businesses, convention bureaus, equipment-retailers and outfitter-services.

- Use the data and tools presented in this Plan to identify priorities and potential collaborations when preparing LWCF grant applications.
- Continue to explore and expand entrepreneurial and innovative ways of providing public outdoor recreation services in order to reduce the impact on the tax base.
- Support the development of recreational amenities and services that promote greater self-sufficiency.

## **Conserve Natural Resources**

### **Continue to protect the natural landscapes which help to make recreating outdoors fun and exciting and to preserve critical land and water resources.**

#### **Strategies:**

- Identify and prioritize key lands for acquisition, particularly in the fastest-growing areas of the state.
- Maintain the new Georgia Public Park Inventory to ensure that the data are current and practitioners have the tools they need moving forward.
- Collaborate with existing trail advocates to continue to advance awareness of existing trail opportunities and provide guidance on ways to achieve greater connectivity and recreational opportunities through multi-jurisdictional development
- Begin exploring collaborative and multi-jurisdictional projects in order to: 1) Coordinate land protection efforts for connectivity, 2) Capitalize on complementary strengths, 3) Ensure resource conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Protect high-priority wetlands, consistent with the Federal Emergency Wetlands Resources Act.
- Continue to explore opportunities for funding sources to support land conservation and outdoor recreation services at all levels of government.



photo: Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency



## Collaborate

**Advance the positive impacts of outdoor recreation by improving collaboration among government agencies as well as their partners in the corporate and non-profit sectors.**

If there is one secret weapon to help the state advance the three priorities, with the power to deliver vast improvements in quality and impact, it would be: Collaboration. Government agencies and their partners can be much more efficient and responsive to the overall needs of their citizens when there is effective collaboration in planning, designing and developing community assets like parks, trails and outdoor recreation spaces.

Parks impact the health and economic well-being of every community. Therefore, to maximize the prosperity of our state and local communities, the power of parks should be fully incorporated into planning efforts addressing important government functions like public health, economic vitality, community development, planning and transportation.





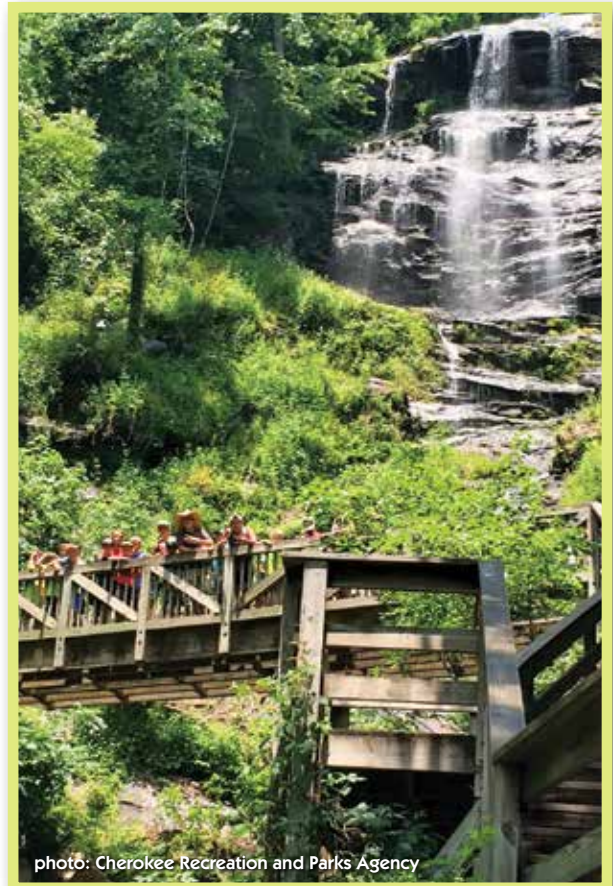
It is critical that local governments collaborate with the Department of Natural Resources whenever the fate of an existing park is being debated – particularly if the park or outdoor recreation area was a recipient of LWCF funds. This is because the federal regulations governing LWCF contain a provision requiring all recipient properties will forever remain available for outdoor recreation. Failure to comply with these provisions could result in costly consequences.

Many state-level agencies may have a role in encouraging the incorporation of parks and outdoor recreation into their statewide and regional planning efforts as well as their performance goals. Local governments should analyze their comprehensive planning and community development efforts when the provision of quality parks and outdoor experiences are added to the mix of community assets as the outcomes are often improved.

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**Collaboration among agencies at the local, state and federal level, in concert with corporate and non-profit partners makes for good government, good economics and good conservation ethics.**

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# GEORGIA

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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

A RESOLUTION

Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation  
2017-2021

**WHEREAS**, Georgia Code 12-3-1 mandates the development of a state policy on outdoor recreation in order to remain eligible for federal Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF); and

**WHEREAS**, since 1965, the State and Local Assistance portion of the LWCF has provided over \$88.8 million in federal grant funds to the state of Georgia for the sole purpose of providing quality outdoor recreation for its citizens and visitors; and

**WHEREAS**, these funds have been matched to achieve over \$177.6 million in direct outdoor recreation investments which have protected important natural and cultural resources, developed an array of outdoor recreation facilities, rehabilitated existing outdoor recreation assets and provided affordable and accessible recreational opportunities for all; and

**WHEREAS**, to fulfill the requirements of the law and LWCF program, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources conducted extensive public outreach and engagement and created a robust interactive inventory of existing public parks outdoor recreation resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021 is based on current research addressing usage trends in outdoor recreation; and

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021 affirms the role that parks and outdoor recreation plays as a catalyst for positive community and economic growth for both our state and local communities through its direct and significant impacts on our health, economic standing and protection of natural resources; and

**WHEREAS**, the Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021 presents goals and strategies that can assist the state and our local communities in maximizing the positive benefits of parks and outdoor recreation experiences.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT**, the Georgia Board of Natural Resources adopts the Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation 2017-2021, as Georgia's official state policy document guiding the provision of outdoor recreation for the next five (5) years.

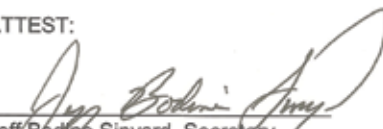
**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT**, the Georgia Board of Natural Resources adopts the 2017-2021 Georgia Plan for Outdoor Recreation and forwards the plan to Governor Nathan Deal for certification and then to the National Park Service of the Department of Interior for approval.

Adopted this 26<sup>th</sup> day of October 2016.

Respectfully submitted by:

  
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William A. Bagwell, Jr., Chairman  
Georgia Board of Natural Resources

ATTEST:

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeff Bodine Sinyard, Secretary  
Georgia Board of Natural Resources



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## List of Acronyms

**ACCG** – Association County Commissioners

**ADA** – Americans with Disabilities Act

**ASCE** – American Society of Civil Engineers

**CVIOG** – Carl Vinson Institute of Government

**DNR** - Georgia Department of Natural Resources

**DOT** – Georgia Department of Transportation

**GIS** - Geographic Information System

**GMA** - Georgia Municipal Association

**GRPA** – Georgia Recreation and Park Association

**LWCF** – Land and Water Conservation Fund

**NPS** – National Park Service

**RCs** – Regional Commissions

**SCORP** - Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

**SWAP** – State Wildlife Action Plan





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***“Ensuring that every visitor has a  
great time, every time.”***

Becky Kelley, Director  
Georgia State Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division







# Get Outdoors Georgia!

The Future of Recreation in Georgia



photo: Gwinnett County Parks & Recreation



photo: F. D. Roosevelt State Park



photo: Jon Minniam | Henry County Parks & Recreation



photo: Cherokee Recreation and Parks Agency



photo: Skidaway Island State Park