

Missouri Park & Recreation Association

2019 Legislative Platform

THIS IS MPRA . . .

Founded in 1959, the Missouri Park and Recreation Association serves as the voice for parks and recreation issues in Missouri at the local, state, and national levels. The nonprofit association's members work to provide opportunities for all Missouri's citizens to enhance their quality of life, are dedicated to promoting public awareness of the contribution of parks, recreation and open space to healthy, balanced individuals and communities.

The association works to ensure the growth and improve the quality and accessibility of urban and rural parks, open spaces and recreational lands, facilities, and programs. It promotes research and information dissemination on park, conservation, health and wellness, recreation, and leisure issues. MPRA strives to maintain high standards of professional ethics and practices, promoting continuing education for its membership. The association encourages the support of college and university curricula to enhance research and assure a well-trained stream of future professionals. MPRA cooperates with public, private, and voluntary agencies to assure provision of quality park, recreation, and conservation programs. MPRA is governed by a board of directors elected by the general membership. It maintains an office with full-time staff in Jefferson City. MPRA is an affiliate member of the National Recreation and Park Association.

MPRA Legislative Issues – State

Building Healthy Individuals and Communities:

Obesity - Throughout Missouri there is an epidemic of obesity and associated health issues in both children and adults. A physically active lifestyle is critical to disease prevention and good health. Public parks and recreation facilities offer low cost opportunities for citizens of every age, ability, and income level to increase their level of physical activity, improve nutrition, and better connect with the natural environment, thereby preventing chronic and costly health problems.

Smoking - For years, MPRA has endorsed initiatives to create smoke-free environments for all citizens. **We support the general efforts to increase the tobacco tax, currently the lowest in the nation, which would encourage smoking cessation. Additionally, we support the use of the increased tax revenue to be used for programs that promote healthy and active lifestyles.**

Alcohol and Drug Abuse - Alcohol and drug use is widespread and ranks as one of the nation's most serious health problems. The problem should be addressed at the individual, community, state and national levels, working together to lessen the demand for alcohol and other drugs. The National Recreation and Park Association has recognized the problem and believes recreation is a partial solution, nationwide programs, promoting park and recreation programs and facilities as positive alternatives. MPRA supports legislation similar to the Anti-Drug Act of 1988, promoting community services and partnerships designed to target alcohol and drug abuse prevention through education, training, and recreation projects. New legislation should promote collaborations among alcohol and drug abuse prevention, treatment and rehabilitation, juvenile justice, education, housing, employment, social welfare, parks and recreation, physical and mental health programs. MPRA stands ready to cooperate fully to assist our communities to promote a drug-free society.

Funding - The State should take the lead in developing policies, practices and funding infrastructure to promote physical activity and healthy lifestyles that best utilize parks and recreation facilities that currently exist. We recommend **support for making parks and recreation agencies eligible for all state programs targeting youth and adults for healthy physical activities, development of life skills, environmental education, and crime prevention/intervention programs.**

Trails

Access to safe, well-maintained community connections is a priority for Missouri's citizens. State, local, and Federal lands feature thousands of miles of multi-use trails. In 2013-14, Missouri was named the "Best Trails State" by American Trails, reflecting the efforts put into the development of major trail systems, including Katy Trail State Park. Such systems, soon to include the Rock Island corridors, contributes significantly to local economies, support conservation, promote alternative transportation, connecting communities to nature and to each other. **MPRA supports initiatives that enable local and state agencies to develop and promote trail connections across Missouri.**

Funding for Missouri Department of Tourism

Communities across Missouri benefit from visitors who not only learn about all there is to offer in the state, but who also contribute significantly to the local economy. The robust marketing of tourism opportunities is critical to drawing those visitors to every part of Missouri, and the Dept. of Tourism is the logical source of those efforts. MPRA supports to restoration of funding to the Missouri Dept. of Tourism, returning to 2016 levels.

Recreational Use Liability

MRS 537.347 grants a release from liability for landowners outside corporate limits who allow access across their property for recreational use. Because many recreational activities utilize property that is actually within corporate city limits, it would be appropriate to extend that release to all private landowners. MPRA recommends that MRS 537.348(3)A be revised to confer these benefits to land owners in cities, municipalities, towns, and villages in this state.

Bonding Initiatives

MPRA supports a comprehensive bonding package that provides increased funding for Missouri state parks and trails, along with its higher education institutions. Parks and trails provide an enriched quality of life for all Missourians regardless of geography or socioeconomic status. Modernized, state-of-the-art facilities prepare Missouri students for real world experiences and allow for a seamless transition into the workplace. Support for such initiatives will enhance the lives of all Missouri citizens. MPRA encourages elected officials to consider the specific differences between capital expenditures and maintenance when considering bonding decisions.

Tax Initiatives

Missouri's cities rely upon sales taxes for general fund and park fund operations and capital improvements. **MPRA recommends that any changes to the Missouri Tax Code take into account how cities and parks are funded and the benefits they provide to all citizens.**

Environmental Stewardship

The State of Missouri should help take the lead in supporting and implementing practices statewide, which protect human life, preserve the environment, and conserve valuable natural resources. These initiatives are integral to sustaining and improving the quality of life for all citizens into the future. The State should include parks and recreation agencies in strategies, initiatives and projects that protect our natural resources and create recreational amenities through the use of “green solutions” such as stream buffers, stream restoration/protection efforts, native plantings, bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, storm water control projects, bio-retention facilities, energy efficiency measures, recycling programs, air and water pollution reduction and other measures that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve environmental quality.

Municipal, county, and state parks and recreation departments assist in promoting a commitment to clean air, water, the wise use of our natural resources, and stewardship of public and private lands. **We encourage financial support for local government "green" initiatives. We support funding for the Dept. of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks, and the Department of Conservation.**

MPRA encourages positive action on environmental issues. We oppose any changes to the makeup of the Conservation Commission or to the process by which the Commission is appointed. We oppose any attempts to infringe on constitutional mandate under which the Commission carries out its mission. MPRA supports the value of traditional rural recreation opportunities to Missourians. We especially recommend action that reminds all Missourians of the need for continued dedication to issues of improving open space, expanding recreation opportunities, and the wise use of all our natural resources.

Parks as Safe Havens

Missouri citizens have long regarded their public parks as “safe havens.” Public parks and recreation agencies have always endeavored to remove any condition in their parks that might pose a threat or danger to its parks’ users, including sexual predators, drugs, bullying or other harassment, and illegal weapons. **MPRA continues to vigorously support legislation that grants political subdivisions in Missouri the authority to ban or remove any condition or activity in their public parks that poses a potential danger to park user groups and individuals.**

Americans with Disabilities Act & Inclusion

MPRA believes that diversity is the cornerstone of our society and culture. Including all people in the fabric of society strengthens the community and its individual members. The value of inclusive leisure experiences in enhancing the quality of life for all people cannot be overstated. As we broaden our understanding and acceptance of differences among people through shared leisure experiences, we empower future generations to build a better place to live and thrive.

MPRA supports programmatic access (as defined in the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and more recently the 2010 updates specific to Parks and Recreation) **to all parks, historic sites, and recreation areas throughout federal, state, county, and local parks and recreation sites.**

Support for Higher Education

MPRA believes that effective long-term stewardship of Missouri's leisure-oriented resources, facilities, and programs is dependent upon the quality of present and future parks, recreation, and tourism professionals. MPRA stresses the need to provide strong nationally accredited parks, recreation program curricula at the state's higher education institutions, creating a strong work force and important internship opportunities in the State of Missouri. In doing so, there is an acknowledgement of the critical role that superior parks and recreation opportunities play in the long-term economic health and well-being of the state.

MPRA urges the state of Missouri, General Assembly and Coordinating Board of Higher Education to **maintain and support outstanding parks and recreation educational programs within the state.** Special care should be given to provide nationally accredited curricula that afford financial accessibility to the many students throughout the state.

Therapeutic Recreation Specialists Included as Qualified Health Care Professionals

MPRA recognizes the significant role Therapeutic Recreation Specialists/Recreational Therapists have in the health care field, providing quality services in public and private health care facilities. Therapeutic recreation specialists are principle treatment team members in physical rehabilitation programs, substance abuse treatment, and psychiatric rehabilitation. MPRA encourages the General Assembly to include therapeutic recreation as a vital, cost-effective component of building healthy communities through healthy citizens.

MPRA Legislative Issues – Federal

Conservation

1. Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

NRPA supports a permanently authorized and fully funded Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) with a minimum of 40% of the annual LWCF appropriations allocated to the State Assistance Program. This includes robust funding for the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) urban competitive grant program. LWCF is scheduled to expire in October 2018.

2. Environmental Education (Healthy Kids Outdoors Act and No Child Left Inside)

NRPA supports the re-introduction and passage of the Healthy Kids Outdoors Act (HKOA), which would create a national movement to connect Americans, especially children, youth, and families, to the outdoors. The No Child Left Inside Act of 2015 was previous legislation, of which NRPA was an active supporter. Major portions of this legislation were included in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (Every Student Succeeds Act, or ESSA) which was signed into law in 2015. The new provisions identified environmental education as eligible for funding under Title IV, Part A of the new law. Authorized at \$1.65 billion annually, NRPA supports ample and robust funding for Title IV, Part A of the ESSA.

3. Protecting Existing Tax Policy

NRPA supports the protection of existing federal tax policy which supports conservation and outdoor recreation. This includes preserving existing authority to issue tax-exempt municipal-type bonds, as well as tax incentives for conservation easement donations. Many cities rely upon sales taxes for general fund and park fund operations and capital improvements. It is recommended that any changes to the tax code consider how cities and parks are funded and the benefits they provide to all citizens.

Health and Wellness

1. Prevention and Fitness

Prevention and Public Health Grants are grant programs funded through the HHS/Labor/Ed Appropriations and administered through the Centers for Disease Control that support state and community level programs that prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases. This includes the CDC Arthritis Program, which provides funding for the sub-awards NRPA gives to community park and recreation agencies to implement the CDC's evidence-based physical activity programs for arthritis management. The Personal Health Investment Today (PHIT) Act (H.R. 1267, S.B. 482) would expand the IRS definition of medical expenditures to include physical activity as preventative medicine. This would allow individuals to use the pre-tax dollars in Flexible Spending Accounts and Health Savings Accounts to include expenditures such as; membership at a fitness facility, youth and adult sports league fees, exercise classes and other physical activities.

2. Child Development

Every five years, the Child Nutrition Act is due for reauthorization to improve and strengthen the federal child nutrition programs, including the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP). SFSP and CACFP are managed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and provide the reimbursement dollars for after-school and summer meal programs at park and recreation agencies. Park and recreation agencies are the largest public provider of healthy meals and snacks to children outside of schools. While the current authorization for the Child Nutrition Act, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, expired in September 2015, the programs continue to operate. It will be taken up for debate once Congress completes its work on the farm bill. The 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program is the only federal grant program that supports summer and afterschool learning programs. Administered by the US Department of Education, 21st CCLC supports the establishment of local community-based educational programs for children in out-of-school time settings, particularly for low-income areas. Centers are encouraged to focus educational curriculum around STEM learning and to offer enrichment activities that add to the academic education children are receiving during the school day. However, the allowable uses of funds offers providers a wide range of activities to focus on, from environmental education to substance use prevention among youth.

3. Farm Bill

The reauthorization of the Agricultural Act of 2014 (Farm Bill) is an opportunity for Congress to consider the role local park and recreation agencies can play in creating and enhancing community food systems. As the second largest provider of USDA summer and afterschool meal programs, park and recreation agencies have established a significant foundation of work in fighting hunger and improving nutrition for our nation's youth. We hope to build upon this success and create new opportunities for collaboration with local farmers, producers, and distributors to assist in the execution of a nationwide healthy food pipeline.

Social Equity

1. Community Development

The Community Parks Revitalization (CPR) Act (H.R.343) would provide matching federal grants for park and recreation infrastructure in metropolitan areas. Specifically, this legislation would authorize the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide funding to local park and recreation agencies, through three grant programs: Rehabilitation and Construction, the Innovation and Recreation Program and the Recovery Action Program. The bill also includes innovative financing for park infrastructure (known as PIFIA). Another important tool is Community Development Block Grants, which are administered through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. These grants support local community development activities aimed at neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and improvement of community facilities, such as parks and recreation. Historically this program has provided up to \$100 million annually for park and recreation infrastructure.

2. Parks as Critical Components of Infrastructure

NRPA welcomes the renewed national discussion on the need to rebuild our challenged infrastructure. Whether through direct investment, tax-incentives, innovative financing or, "all of the above", we call upon the Administration and Congress to work in a bi-partisan manner and ensure that

any new federal infrastructure investment strategy includes parks and recreation, active transportation options, as well as “mixed-use” infrastructure as critical pieces to (re)building vibrant and resilient local communities in every corner of the country. In this case, the details matter even more than the level of funding. NRPA calls upon Congress to protect and maintain dedicated funding for key programs that connect communities, make streets safer, and promote healthy modes of transportation such as walking and biking – accomplished primarily through the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), including the Recreational Trails Program (RTP) and Safe Routes to Schools, as well as Parks. Combined, these programs, found in the federal surface transportation law, known as the “FAST Act,” provide approximately \$800 million annually for bike and pedestrian projects and to promote pedestrian and bicycling safety in local communities. The FAST Act funds surface transportation programs until October 2021. NRPA also supports providing additional resources to local communities to build networks of sidewalks, bike lanes and paths with low-cost loans as part of the federal transportation financing program known as TIFIA.

3. Federal Regulatory Policy

NRPA will continue to serve our industry with regard to monitoring, reporting and responding to Federal Agency actions which may impact how Park and Recreation Agencies and professionals operate, including, but not limited to FEDERAL regulations related to:

Employee salary & benefits (ex. federal minimum wage, overtime pay and healthcare);
Environmental policy (Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, climate issues);
Community Health (tobacco bans, marijuana decriminalization, taxes on “sugary” products);
Access/Equity (Americans with Disabilities Act, LGBTQ);
Smart Design (“Complete Streets”, LEED Certification);
Wildlife Conservation (Endangered Species Act); and,
The Workplace (OSHA)