

## Missouri Park & Recreation Association 2022 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 and 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 educate for 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. MPRA encourages the adoption of statute revisions that would allow local parks and recreation departments to increase recreational opportunities for its citizens, regardless of income level.

**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. The National Recreation and Park Association has recognized the problem and believes recreation is a partial solution using 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, contribute 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 and accessibility across Missouri.

**Tax Initiatives:** Missouri's municipalities and counties rely upon sales taxes, property taxes, special use taxes, and internet 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 counties parks are funded and the benefits they provide to all citizens. MPRA urges the Missouri General Assembly to respect the voice of local voters by requiring sales taxes that are collected from online sales to be apportioned by the Missouri State Revenue Department to funded entities in Missouri in exactly the same apportionment as sales taxes collected locally within Missouri.

**Funding 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.

**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 Department 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 recommend action that reminds all Missourians of the need for continued dedication to issues of improving open space, expanding recreation opportunities, and the responsible use of all our natural resources. MPRA recognizes, supports, and defends the public ownership of lands used for public recreation. Any disposal of such lands for use(s) other than public recreation should be cautiously considered and be approved by a vote of the public.

**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, sport, and tourism 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 national accreditation of outstanding parks, recreation, sport, and tourism 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.

**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. MPRA encourages the authorization of local, county, and state recreation agencies to operate "Park Ranger" divisions to maintain order and enforce codes within their jurisdictions.

**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 economies. The robust marketing of tourism opportunities is critical to drawing those visitors to every part of Missouri, and the Department of Tourism is the logical source of those efforts. MPRA supports full funding to the Missouri Department of Tourism each year as presented by department leadership.

**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**

### **About NRPA**

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) is the leading not-for-profit organization dedicated to building strong, healthy and resilient communities through the power of parks and recreation. NRPA advances this vision by investing in and championing the work of park and recreation professionals as a catalyst for positive change in service of equity, climate-readiness, and overall health and well-being.

### **NRPA's Mission**

To advance parks, recreation and environmental conservation efforts that enhance the quality of life for all people.

### **NRPA's Vision**

We seek a future where the full power of parks and recreation is widely recognized for creating a better life for everyone by building strong, healthy and resilient communities.

### **Conservation**

#### **Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)**

The Land and Water Conservations Fund (LWCF) has protected our nation's natural resources while providing recreation opportunities for all Americans for over 50 years. Thanks to the continued efforts of our [parks and rec] advocates, Congress permanently authorized LWCF in 2019 and then permanently funded it 2020, thus establishing this program as the nation's most important conservation funding stream for public lands throughout the country.

NRPA supports robust funding through the annual federal appropriations process, including maintaining 40 percent dedicated funding for the state assistance program and investing in the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership program, which is an urban parks focused competitive grant program.

#### **Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development administers The Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). These grants support local community activities like 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.

#### **Active Transportation**

Active transportation refers to human-propelled modes of transportation like walking or cycling. Multi-modal transportations systems make communities more accessible, people healthier, and environments cleaner by reducing pollution and the heat island effect. Active transportation systems can be particularly beneficial to Black, Brown, and low-income communities, which have often borne the brunt of pollution.

NRPA supports providing resources to local communities to expand public greenways that build networks of sidewalks, bike lanes and paths, investing in the accessibility and health of local communities. We call upon Congress to protect and maintain programs that connect communities, make streets safer, and promote healthy modes of transportation.

Specifically, as Congress debate the reauthorization of the Fixing America's Surface Transportation Act which expired in October 2021, NRPA urges that Congress support the Transportation Alternatives Program, including the Recreational Trails Program and Safe Routes to Schools. Combined, these programs provide approximately \$800 million annually for bike and pedestrian projects and safety in local communities. NRPA also supports The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act, which provides low-cost loans to local communities.

### **Health and Wellness**

#### **Child Nutrition Reauthorization (CNR)**

Congress reauthorizes federal child nutrition programs, including the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) and the Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP), through the Child Nutrition Act every five years. The U.S. Department of Agriculture administers these programs and reimburses after-school and summer meal programs. Park and recreation agencies are the largest public provider of healthy meals and snacks to children outside of schools.

The current CNR authorization — the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010 — expired in 2015, but the programs continue to operate under level funding. Congress is expected to consider this legislation sometime over the next two years.

NRPA supports investing in these vital federal programs that reduce childhood insecurity and strengthen families. Kids should be having fun over the summer, not worrying about where their next meal is coming from.

#### **Chronic Disease Prevention and Management**

NRPA, with the support from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), is funded directly to disseminate arthritis-appropriate evidence-based physical activity programs to improve the quality of life among people with arthritis and contribute to reductions in both arthritis-related medical costs and lost earnings.

300 park and recreation agencies across 48 states and American Samoa have offered more than 700 Arthritis-Appropriate Evidence Based Intervention (AAEBI) courses to approximately 20,000 participants. In addition, more than 2 million people across the country have been exposed to marketing materials promoting AAEBIs in park and recreation settings. Communities in states with a high prevalence of arthritis, such as Alabama, Michigan and Missouri, offered arthritis programs to help their community members to better manage their arthritis and live fuller, healthier lives.

## **Equity**

### **Youth Mentoring**

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention within the U.S. Department of Justice administers a federally funded Youth Mentoring Grant Program. The Youth Mentoring Grant Program is a critical support for young people who are at-risk of entering the juvenile justice system. A prevention and intervention strategy, the program identifies young people at times when they are the most likely to need support, helping hundreds of thousands of young people achieve positive academic, professional, and personal outcomes and deterring negative and risky behaviors, including drug abuse.

Park and recreation agencies deliver critical out-of-school time programming that helps local children deal with the many challenges of growing up, with 34 percent of agencies focusing their programming on youth mentoring and 18 percent of agencies focusing their programming on substance use prevention.

### **Out-of-School Time Programming**

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 U.S. 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.

Park and recreation agencies provide safe places where kids can go when they are not in school. Local park and recreation agencies' out-of-school time (OST) programs are leading providers of childcare in our nation — 84 percent offer summer camps; 63 percent, programming targeted specifically to teens; 55 percent, after-school programming; more than half, OST Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) activities that focus on the environment and project-based learning. These OST programs provide low-income households accessible, affordable, and safe spaces for their children to learn, have fun and grow.