Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

Nathan Deal, Governor
State of Georgia

Mark Williams, Commissioner
Georgia Dept of Natural Resources
In accordance with Georgia Code 12-3-1, this report updates the state’s Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, which makes the state eligible to receive federal grant dollars through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Office of the Governor certifies that ample opportunity for public participation went into plan development.

Nathan Deal
GOVERNOR

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For more information, including supporting materials, or to download this SCORP, visit GeorgiaStateParks.org or call 404-656-2770.
Georgia, is a vibrant state, yet like much of our nation, it is facing unprecedented challenges due to a combination of world, national and state events. Since publication of Georgia’s 2008-2013 Strategic Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), we have begun to experience the impacts of the Great Recession, continue to see declines in both adult and children’s health, and are realizing shifting outdoor recreation preferences due to greater diversity of our population. These realities directly affect our ability to:

• Properly maintain our inventory of outdoor recreation assets
• Address the emerging outdoor recreation needs of our citizens
• Protect and conserve important natural spaces
• Improve the livability of our state and local communities.

In order for Georgia to continue to benefit from the myriad of positive impacts provided by outdoor recreation, we must seek ways to navigate these dynamic shifts and reposition our operations to take advantage of and highlight the immense value that parks and recreation bring to protecting important natural resources and maintaining healthy populations and local economic vitality. A collective and coordinated effort by all outdoor recreation providers and our state’s leaders is the only way to confront both short-term challenges as well as the emerging “new normal” situations. Without a focused and coordinated force, with clear and measurable targets, the challenges facing the state and our outdoor recreation resources will only intensify.

SCORP 2014-2016 highlights many of the issues facing Georgia’s outdoor recreation providers, identifies trends that will help to chart a positive course forward and outlines our priority focus for the investment of federal Land and Water Conservation Funds. SCORP 2014-2016 makes calls for cooperative action that are targeted to municipal and county recreation departments as well as to state and federal agencies and even quasi-public private service providers.
The Land and Water Conservation Fund
Created in 1965 by Congress, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides money for public outdoor recreation. States are eligible to receive funds and to pass them on to cities and counties, provided they produce an approved plan which defines how those monies will be used. This Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is commonly referred to as “SCORP” and is typically updated every five years. The plan also satisfies requirements of state law (O.C.G.A. 12-3-1).

LWCF IMPACT ON GEORGIA
Since 1965, Georgia has received more than $83 million in federal funds from the LWCF program and has impacted more than 96% of all counties and a large number of communities in the state. Because LWCF demands a 50:50 match, those grant funds have leveraged an additional $83 million from local matching funds for a total impact to the state’s outdoor recreation resources of $166 million. These funds have allowed for thousands of improvements to existing facilities, development of new facilities and the acquisition of properties for conservation and outdoor recreation.

SCORP 2014-2016
This edition of SCORP deviates slightly from typical SCORPs by only covering three years, 2014 to 2016. Its findings and recommendations are based on five contributing elements:

1: Still relevant (evergreen) findings from SCORP 2008-2013 and the pending launch of the 2017-2022 SCORP assessment
2: Recent research on usage trends in outdoor recreation
3: Impacts of the Great Recession on outdoor recreation
4: Perspectives from a recent forum of outdoor recreation providers
5: Commentary from the public

SCORP 2008-2013
The previous version of SCORP (2008-2013) was an exceptional document that remains relevant today. It was honored with an award for “excellence in planning” by the National Park Service and the Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals (formerly known as National Association of Recreation Resource Planners). The depth of research, carefully selected priorities and detailed strategic actions identified in the plan served as a strong foundation that continues to be relevant and provide powerful guidance to this day.

SCORP 2017-2022
Georgia is committed to conducting a more in-depth assessment of outdoor recreation. Beginning in spring 2014, we will initiate a robust public engagement process, identify key trends in outdoor recreation and update our supply data based on a GIS inventory assessment tool currently being piloted in several entities including the National Association of Outdoor Recreation State Liaison Officers, National Park Service, National Recreation and Parks Association and National Association of State Park Directors.
Forum of Outdoor Recreation Providers
In August 2013, a forum of outdoor recreation professionals from federal, state, local and quasi-public service providers was convened to assess the state of outdoor recreation across Georgia (“Forum”). Facilitated by the Carl Vinson Institute, participants were surveyed for their perspectives on a wide range of relevant topics including identifying the priority targets for SCORP 2014-2016, the supply and condition of existing facilities and how federal funds should be prioritized. Their responses were incorporated into this report, shaping its direction and content.

Collectively, Forum participants called for the need to construct more outdoor recreation facilities throughout the state. They asserted that, in urban areas, population growth and increased diversification was out-stripping existing supply and that, in rural areas, the sparse availability of quality facilities naturally called for new construction.

A majority of Forum participants (67%) indicated that their portfolio of conservation lands had remained largely the same since 2008. A minority (25%) said they had increased their holdings of conservation lands. On average, the Department of Natural Resources (perhaps the most active purchaser) acquired about 7,000 acres a year between 2008 and 2013. One participant reported a reduction in their holdings of conservation lands. That said, all Forum participants agreed that it was more important, over the next three years, to care for existing facilities and to construct new facilities than it was to aggressively acquire additional lands.

Outdoor Recreation Usage
Research conducted for SCORP 2014-2016 revealed findings that were largely consistent with the trends and conclusions identified in SCORP 2008-2013. Research was conducted by Dr. Gary T. Green from the Warnell School of Forestry and Natural Resources of the University of Georgia. Trends in outdoor recreation were drawn from four primary tools:

- An assessment of demographic changes
- Analysis of data from two iterations of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE)
- Analysis of data from the National Kids Survey (NKS)
- An assessment of market segmentation clusters

Georgia Outdoor Recreation Inventory Assessment
A majority of Forum participants (61%) indicated that, since 2008, the condition of the recreation facilities has remained the same or declined. Specifically, twenty-three percent (23%) reported little change in the condition of their facilities and thirty-eight percent (38%) indicated a decline in their facilities. Only 38% of Forum participants declared notable improvement in the condition of their facilities since 2008.
Georgia Trends

Shifting Demographics

Georgia continues to change quite dramatically across several demographic aspects, from ethnicity to age profiles to the proportion of the population in urban centers. Because demographic features are an important part of both the NSRE and the NKS, we first present information from the U.S. Census Bureau on the status and changes taking place in Georgia.

With regard to ethnicity, Caucasians are declining as a proportion of total population, over time, whereas African Americans and Hispanics are growing (US Census, 2010). As it relates to age profiles, roughly 46% of Georgians are now over the age of 45. Historically, when generations entered their forties, their activities tended to slow, but that doesn’t seem to be the case with the newest generation of adults 45 and older who are remaining more active than have previous generations. Since the publication of the last SCORP, the rural population of Georgia has declined, while the metropolitan population has increased by about 12%. In the 2000 Census, 69% of the population was in metropolitan areas whereas by the 2010 Census, 81% of the population was in metropolitan centers. This increase could result in higher demands and strain on recreation areas in and around metro areas.

Outdoor Activities - Adults

The NSRE is a survey of outdoor recreational activities of adults. This report relied on two iterations of the NSRE survey. Activities that were identified in the initial survey (conducted for SCORP 2008-2013) as being the most popular remained the most popular in the latest survey conducted for SCORP 2014-2016. In fact, this survey says that participation increased in all of the most popular activities, with the exception of nature-based land activities. Notice in the table below that many of the most popular activities involve little or no specialized skills or equipment. The five most popular outdoor recreation activities for Georgia are outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percent of Georgia Population Participating*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking for Pleasure</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Gatherings</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening or landscaping</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing/photographing natural scenery</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attending outdoor sporting events</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(rounded to whole number)
Because outdoor recreation can be engaged through a wide diversity of activities, a single park’s ability to provide mixed-offerings of activities and interests will likely increase attractiveness to broader audiences (e.g., age groups, ethnicities, etc.) and are likely to enjoy greater attendance and participation. By way of example, a facility like a ball field complex could attract and serve new audiences if it installed walking and biking trails around its perimeter.

**Outdoor Activities – Kids**

The National Kids Survey (NKS) is much like the NSRE, but focuses on how kids engage in outdoor recreation activities. The results of the survey can help shape the kinds of programming and facilities being developed by service providers. To the best of our knowledge, this document represents the first time NKS data has been incorporated into a SCORP document. Curiously, one of the primary findings from the NKS was the realization that kids actually do spend a lot of time playing outside, which may be contrary to prevailing perceptions. The NKS survey revealed that a strong majority (more than 57%) of children play outside more than two hours every day.

We previously reported the most popular outdoor activities for the general (adult) population as determined by the NSRE. The NKS study allows us to determine which outdoor activities children reported participating in most frequently (values rounded to whole numbers).
In addition to determining which activities children reported participating in most frequently, the NKS attempted to determine which activities children actually spent most of their time doing. This was referred to as their “Primary Activity,” the single activity they did more than any other.

Roughly 84% of kids reported “playing or hanging outside.” As expected, when we look at the table below, we see a large percentage of kids (about 24%) claim that activity as the one they spent the most time doing.

However, that trend doesn’t always pan out as indicated in the previous tables. Of the kids reporting, 65% use an electronic device outside at some point, but only 3% report the use of electronic devices as their “Primary Activity.”

People use their devices, but usually not for very long. Not all “screen-time” is the same. Mobile applications are being developed regularly that enhance the outdoor experience (e.g., guidebooks, bird calls, trail maps, photography, audio recording, GPS features for sports like orienteering, etc.). Some service providers may elect to encourage the use of such devices in outdoor settings, where appropriate. Moreover, we should appreciate the impact that social media, photographs, short videos and the like have toward motivating other “sedentary screen-timers” to come out and play when they see all the great things to do.

### Primary Activity
(Activity they spent most of their time doing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Activity</th>
<th>Percent of Children Claiming Primary Activity*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Playing or hanging outside</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land-based sports</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical activities (biking, jogging, walking, etc.)</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of electronic devices</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It appears that older kids don’t recreate outdoors as frequently or intensely as younger kids do. Green et al. (2012) found that younger children (in the ‘6 to 12’ year-old age groups) spent more time outside on weekends than children that were older. One of the most dramatic contrasts existed between kids who were in the ‘6 to 9’ year-old age group versus those in the older (‘16 to 19’ year-old) age group. More than 85% of the younger kids played two or more hours outdoors whereas only about 63% of older kids did.

There were also differences in the degree and type of participation between children of different ethnicities. Hispanic and Caucasian children participated in a wider diversity of outdoor activities than did children from other ethnic backgrounds. Hispanic children were more likely to spend two hours or more outside than all other ethnic groups. Generally, children from all minority groups were more involved in team sports (~57%) than were Caucasian children (~46%). Interestingly, the use of electronic devices was most prevalent among African American children (~77%).

Acknowledging that different demographic groups tend to use outdoor recreation resources in different ways may prompt some jurisdictions to adjust the kinds of facilities and programming offered to accommodate changing outdoor recreational preferences. As areas of the state change in demographic composition, it may be important to transition services and facilities to meet the recreational preferences of various groups.

### WHY DON’T KIDS PLAY OUTDOORS?

The most common reasons cited by Green et al., (2012) for children not playing outdoors included greater preferences for the following:

- Listening to music, doing art or reading (57%)
- Playing video games and watching TV or DVDs (48%)
- Using electronic media such as internet and texting (48%)

Nearly one-half of participants (~49%) cited other reasons for not going outside, including lack of time due to commitments like homework or weather-related issues.
Health
Obesity continues to be a daunting epidemic that can be addressed, in part, through outdoor recreation. Roughly 29% of Georgia’s adult population was obese in 2012 (Trust for America’s Health 2013). This places Georgia as the 20th most-obese state in the nation (Trust for America’s Health 2013). Georgia exceeds the national goal for childhood obesity in every category (e.g., age, sex, race and ethnicity) (Healthy People 2010). Considering that obese children are more likely to become obese adults, this is an unsettling trend. More than half (54%) of adults in Georgia fail to meet the CDC’s recommendations for physical activity (Georgia Department of Public Health, 2011). The CDC’s recommendations for weekly physical activity are either 75 minutes of vigorous activity (e.g., jogging) or 150 minutes of moderate (e.g., brisk walking).

Managing obesity is very expensive. For all Georgians, the annual cost of obesity is estimated at $2.4 billion, which includes direct health care costs and indirect costs like lost productivity due to disease, disability and death (Georgia Department of Public Health, 2011). The Georgia Department of Public Health specifically calls for communities to promote healthy lifestyles in children by creating safe places for physical activity – like parks and recreation areas.

All Forum participants declared that health and fitness objectives have long been a critical part of their programming and facilities development. Since 2008, a narrow majority of (55%) said that they had increased promotion of the health and fitness aspects of their outdoor recreation. A minority of Forum participants (45%) indicated that they are promoting health and fitness about as much now as they did in 2008. None suggested that they were doing less. All agreed that healthy lifestyles should remain an active strategy for SCORP 2014-2016.

Funding Challenges
Another major factor influencing SCORP 2014-2016 is the shift in service delivery approaches at all levels due to the prolonged, negative impacts of the Great Recession in Georgia and throughout the US. There are clear markers indicating that there will be direct and potentially long-term impacts resulting from cuts to budgets and personnel, reductions in service, deferred maintenance and an increased reliance on volunteerism and partnerships. Many of the strategic actions outlined in this document address issues related to funding. The economic condition of local, state and federal jurisdictions continues to be thready and sparse. Amplifying the economic contributions that outdoor recreation makes to local economies and maximizing fiscal self-sustainability of parks is a critical step to ensuring a bright future.
Government Funding Support
A majority (85%) of Forum participants declared that they do not have adequate funding to guarantee sufficient outdoor recreation and conservation of natural resources. A minority of Forum participants (14%) indicated that they did have adequate funding. All participants agreed that securing adequate funding for outdoor recreation should remain an active strategy for SCORP 2014-2016. Forum participants indicated that collaborating with others was one of the only ways they were able to continue providing high-quality experiences to the public. A majority of Forum participants (83%) declared that, since 2008, they had increased their efforts to collaborate with partners to achieve common objectives. A minority (17%) indicated that their efforts to collaborate with partners had largely remained the same since 2008. No one claimed a reduction in their efforts to collaborate with partners. All participants agreed that collaboration should continue to be an active strategy for SCORP 2014-2016.

Georgia’s Economic Forecast
Jeff Humphreys is Director of the Selig Center for Economic Growth at the Terry College of Business. He predicts that Georgia’s gross domestic product (GDP) will out-pace the national GDP. Growth for the remainder of 2013 is expected at 2.5% and an additional growth of 2.8% for 2014 (Williams, 2013). Much of the short-term growth is expected to be in the private sector. Local governments, in contrast, may continue to struggle due to reductions in federal and state funding and may need an additional two years before they begin to recover (William, 2013). Georgia currently has the fifth highest unemployment rate in the country at nearly 9% (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2013).

Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation
The Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) produced a report in 2012 demonstrating that the outdoor recreation industry is an over-looked economic giant. Using data from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, OIA showed that, nationally, annual consumer spending for outdoor recreation exceeds $640 billion. Of the $646 billion spent, roughly $120 billion was for the purchase of products (e.g., apparel, footwear, equipment, vehicles, accessories, services, etc.) and about $525 billion is due to trips and travel-related spending (e.g., food and drink, transportation, entertainment/activities, lodging, souvenirs/gifts/misc.). In Georgia alone, outdoor recreation accounts for $23.3 billion in consumer spending.
Economic Impact

- The OIA estimates that outdoor recreation accounts for more than six million American jobs
- In Georgia alone, outdoor recreation accounts for some 231,000 in direct Georgia jobs
- Outdoor recreation represents $70 billion in Georgia wages and salaries

According to the OIA, almost $40 billion is generated in federal tax revenue and nearly $40 billion in state and local tax revenues at the national level. In Georgia alone, $1.4 billion is generated in state and local tax revenue.

OIA points out that Americans spend more on bicycling gear and trips alone ($81 billion) than they do on airplane tickets and fees ($51 billion). The outdoor recreation economy grew approximately 5% each year between 2005 and 2011 at a time when economic recession caused many industries to contract.

These significant economic impacts are clearly recognized by outdoor recreation providers in Georgia. The vast majority (92%) of Forum participants agreed that promoting economic vitality should remain an active strategy for SCORP 2014-2016. A narrow majority of Forum participants (54%) indicated that, since 2008, their agencies had increased their focus on the aspects of outdoor recreation that contribute to economic vitality. A minority (38%) said their efforts have largely remained the same since 2008. Interestingly, one participant declared that they had reduced their focus on economic vitality.

Clearly, the outdoor recreation industry serves a powerful role in local, state and national economies. Continuing to provide quality parks and facilities will encourage increased participation and economic vitality. Efforts on behalf of land managers to engage with local business partners, concessionaires, and to consider migrating to more business-like approaches in the management of their lands will further contribute to the impact parks have on economic vitality.

In Georgia alone, the outdoor recreation industry supports 231,000 direct jobs representing $70 billion in wages and salaries and generates $1.4 billion in local and state tax revenues.
In **2014-2016**, Georgia will continue to advance the significant positive impacts that public outdoor recreation has on our health, economic standing and protection of natural spaces. Specific action steps are outlined below for these three primary outcome goals. It is critical to bear in mind that these actions are directed to all outdoor recreation providers, from municipal and county departments to state and federal agencies and even quasi-public entities as well. Only through a collective, concerted effort will we achieve our shared objective of providing the best outdoor recreation experiences for communities to support healthy people, vigorous economies and functioning environments.

### Top Three Funding Priorities

Georgia’s priority focus for the expenditure of federal assistance funds will be to attend to the urgent needs of our current outdoor recreation facilities. We will give secondary preference to developing the kind of outdoor recreation facilities that are able to:

1. Help meet the needs of a changing demography
2. Help recreation providers generate revenue and ensure financial sustainability
3. Continue to refine our priorities for the acquisition of critical outdoor recreation areas in the future

### Data-driven Decision Making

To the best of our ability, we will base our priority actions and directives on the best available, corroborated data to ensure effective decision-making. This may require conducting additional surveys, mining existing data sets, executing pilot programs and even refining previous research questions to resolve conclusions that are ambiguous or confusing.

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**Call to Action - Health**

*Outdoor Recreation Directly Improves Health*

Georgia recognizes that parks and outdoor recreation opportunities are a vital part of our efforts to combat our alarming problems with obesity and physical inactivity. Participation in outdoor recreation provides an accessible, affordable way for all Georgians to directly improve their health, both physically and mentally.

- We will continue to seek opportunities to leverage initiatives, programs, funds, partnerships and LWCF support to advance outdoor recreation projects that directly support active, healthy lifestyles.

- We will, to the best of our ability, work to improve access to high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities by providing for safe and well-maintained facilities close to where people live and work.

- We will explore ways to connect existing facilities for pedestrians and non-motorized vehicles (e.g., bikes, in-line skates, horses, etc.) and to attend to segments of the population, which are under-served by existing facilities (e.g., seniors, young adults and changing ethnic majorities and recreational preferences, etc.).
Call to Action – Economic Standing

Outdoor Recreation is Top-Tier Georgia Economic Driver

We will emphasize the powerful impact that outdoor recreation industries have on re-establishing Georgia’s economic vitality through commerce and tourism. A new emphasis will be to explore opportunities, where appropriate, for outdoor recreation providers to get a larger part of their annual income from revenue generated on-site and to rely less on public funding (taxes).

We will continue to advance the positive economic value of outdoor recreation. In order to promote tourism, event planning and revenue generation, to invigorate local economies and to ensure that recreation services are more fiscally self-sustaining, we will encourage recreation providers to adopt business-like practices by seeking partnerships with:

- Local businesses (e.g., concessionaires, vendors, outfitters, service providers, etc.)
- Nonprofit organizations (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitors’ Bureaus, advocacy organizations, etc.)
- Government agencies (e.g., agencies for health, tourism, recreation, etc.)
- Volunteer groups (e.g., Friends groups, Scouts, retirees, etc.)

Call to Action – Protection of Natural Spaces

Georgia’s Outdoor Recreation Inventory Needs Assessment

Conservation of outdoor recreation lands remains an important priority in Georgia and we will always seek ways to protect natural, cultural and recreational areas of critical statewide or local significance. Over the next three years, we will focus our conservation efforts on cataloging and better understanding our outdoor recreation lands and prioritizing acquisitions.

- We will identify & prioritize the condition of our outdoor recreation amenities statewide and focus LWCF support on taking care of current facilities/areas.
- We will support recreational amenities that advance greater self-sufficiency.
- We will identify and prioritize lands for acquisition and begin exploring collaborative and multi-jurisdictional projects in order to:
  - Coordinate land protection efforts for connectivity
  - Capitalize on complementary strengths
  - Ensure resource conservation and outdoor recreation opportunities.
- We will continue to identify protection of wetlands as a priority, consistent with Section 303 of the Federal Emergency Wetlands Resources Act. The benefits provided by wetlands are well known, and include maintaining water quality, managing flooding and erosion events, providing habitat for wildlife and providing opportunities for outdoor recreation.
A RESOLUTION

Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)
2014-2016

WHEREAS, Georgia Code 12-3-1 mandates the development of a state policy on outdoor recreation; and

WHEREAS, a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is required for continued eligibility under the Land and Water Conservation Fund, as managed by the U. S. Department of Interior; and

WHEREAS, over the past 48 years the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) has provided over $83 million in 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 $166 million in direct outdoor recreation investments; and

WHEREAS, in an effort to fulfill the requirements of the law and LWCF program, the Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites Division convened a public land managers forum and conducted a public hearing to assist in updating SCORP; and

WHEREAS, SCORP 2014-2016 is based on continued relevant findings from SCORP 2008-2013, current research on usage trends in outdoor recreation, the impacts of the Great Recession on outdoor recreation, perspectives from the land managers forum, and commentary from the public; and

WHEREAS, SCORP 2014-2016 affirms continued advancement of the significant impacts that public outdoor recreation has on our health, economic standing and protection of natural resources; and

WHEREAS, SCORP 2014-2016 revealed the funding priorities to be meeting the urgent needs of existing outdoor recreation facilities, developing outdoor recreation facilities to help meet the needs of a changing demography, helping recreation providers generate revenue and ensure financial sustainability, and continuing to acquire critical outdoor recreation areas.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT, SCORP 2014-2016, will become Georgia’s official policy document guiding the provision of outdoor recreation for the next two years.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT, the Georgia Board of Natural Resources adopts the 2014-2018 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 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 3rd day of December, 2013.

Respectfully submitted by:

Robert Leebern, Jr., Chairman
Georgia Board of Natural Resources

ATTEST:

Roy Lambert, Jr.
Secretary
Georgia Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-2016

This plan was developed in part through a planning grant from the National Park Service, Department of Interior, under the provisions of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965 (Public Law 88-578, as amended).