



The following "top ten" list of park and recreation values are in no particular order, but this list of values encompass the range of why we collectively believe that public parks and recreation are an essential part of our national heritage:

1. Public parks provide millions of Americans with the opportunity to be physically active. Physical activity is an essential part of an individual's efforts to stay healthy, fight obesity and prevent chronic conditions that lead to coronary disease, high blood pressure and diabetes. Having close-to-home access to places where one can recreate is one of the most important factors linking whether people will become active and stay that way.

2. Parks have true economic benefits. Proximity to a developed state, regional or Community Park improves property value. The economic benefits of park and recreation areas are manifold but one of the most significant is the increase in value of private land adjacent or near protected public land. The proximity of parks to residential areas leads to increased value of private land, a higher tax base and ultimately many economic benefits to a community including increased local and regional revenue from heritage tourism, steady jobs, and numerous small business benefits. Park and recreation areas are economic engines that improve the quality of life and make communities livable and desirable for businesses and homeowners.

3. Parks provide vital green space in a fast-developing American landscape, and provide vegetative buffers to construction and development, thus reducing the effects of sprawl. More importantly, parks and public lands also provide groundwater recharge areas, floodplain protection, natural sound barriers, storm water protection from wetlands, reductions in heat island effects, and carbon uptake from abundant trees and vegetation. Parks keep our living environment healthy.

4. Parks preserve critical wildlife habitat. As our nation develops and our rural, agricultural and forest landscape is being lost, open space and wildlife habitats are disappearing at an alarming rate. The connected network of local, regional, state and national parks across our country provide permanently protected wildlife habitat corridors for thousands of indigenous and migratory wildlife species. In addition, stream valley parks and community parks allow natural wildlife to co-exist with people while providing enjoyment and educational opportunity for children and families.

5. Parks and recreation facilitate social interactions that are critical to maintaining community cohesion and pride. Parks provide a meeting place where community members can develop social ties and where healthy behavior is modeled and admired. People gather to share experiences, socialize and to build community bonds in common green spaces. These public commons are often the glue that holds the community together and the means to maintaining and improving future positive social interactions.

6. Leisure activities in parks improve moods reduces stress and enhances a sense of wellness. In an increasingly complex world, more and more people are placing a high value on achieving the feelings of relaxation and peacefulness that contact with nature, recreation and exposure to natural open spaces bring. People go to the park to get in a better mood, to reinvigorate themselves and to decrease the anxieties of daily life.

7. Recreational programs provide organized, structured, enjoyable activities for all ages. The diverse range of recreational programs offered by Public Park and recreation agencies offer all Americans the opportunity to develop the skills necessary to successfully and confidently engage in sports, dance, crafts and other social activities. Public recreation leagues and classes offer seniors, adults and children alike the opportunity to interact with coaches and teachers who often turn into mentors and role models. Quality recreational programs facilitate safety, good sportsmanship and community participation.

8. Community recreation services provide a refuge of safety for at-risk youth. Many parents are rightfully concerned with the dangers of unstructured 'hanging-out' or unsupervised after-school activities. Community recreation programs at public park and recreation facilities provide children with a safe refuge and a place to play, which are important in reducing at-risk behavior such as drug use and gang involvement. Recreational programs led by trained leaders offer children healthy role models and give valuable life lessons to help steer youth to a future of promise and opportunity for success.

9. Therapeutic recreation is an outlet that individuals with disabilities have to be physically active socially engaged and cognitively stimulated. A goal of all public recreation agencies is to provide access to all people. Public park and recreation agencies are the largest providers in America of high-quality, life-enhancing, therapeutic recreation programs and interventions. Such programs prevent the on-set of secondary conditions due to inactivity, improve physical, social, emotional and cognitive functioning and slow the onset regressive conditions.

10. Public parks embody the American tradition of preserving public lands for the benefit and use of all. Since the creation of the first national park in the early 1900s and the subsequent development and growth of state, regional and local park systems in virtually every part of our nation, Americans have had a special relationship with their parks and public lands. A love of parks is one of the defining characteristics of our national identity. Americans love their parks, historic sites, national monuments, recreation areas and public open spaces because they bring such joy and pleasure to all people. In addition, the American public has shown time after time that they are willing to care for their parks, protect them, and pay for them.