

California's Recreation Policy

Recreational opportunities provide Californians the freedom to develop their innate capabilities, beneficially use their energies, enrich their lives and improve their health and sense of well-being. Research consistently points toward recreation as essential to the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals, communities and society as a whole. It is therefore important that all Californians be provided with adequate opportunities by which they can pursue their recreational interests. In recognition of this, the State Legislature delegated the responsibility for preparing a Recreation Policy for the State of California to the State Park and Recreation Commission. Public Resources Code (Section 540) directs that:

The Commission shall formulate, in cooperation with other state agencies, interested organizations and citizens, and shall recommend to the Director (of the Department of Parks and Recreation) for adoption by him, a comprehensive recreational policy for the State of California.

This California Recreation Policy is intended to be broad in scope and to consider the full range of recreation activities - active, passive, indoors and out-of-doors. The policy considers the means by which recreational opportunities are provided – the lands, waters, facilities, programs and support functions – and it recognizes the broad health, personal, social, economic and environmental benefits served through the many important dimensions of recreation.

The California Recreation Policy is directed at recreation providers at all levels: federal, state, and local agencies and special districts; private suppliers; and quasi-public or nonprofit organizations. It is intended that all suppliers of park facilities and recreation opportunities will be guided by California's Recreation Policy as they work to provide high quality recreation experiences Californians have come to expect and which they deserve.

1. Adequacy of recreation opportunities: the supply of parklands, waters, open space, recreation facilities and services must be adequate to meet current and future demands, particularly in the State's most populated areas.

It is State Policy that:

- An adequate supply of park and recreation areas, along with their associated open space, facilities, beaches and waterways, trail corridors, and programs should exist throughout California so that all people can engage in near-home activities as well as opportunities to visit distant locations for extended leisure time or vacation pursuits.
- Particular attention should be given to providing access to parklands, natural and developed recreation areas in and near urban areas where most Californians live. In heavily populated areas, special attention should be given to the acquisition and protection of natural and cultural resource lands, waters and open space.
- Government entities closest to the recreation resources and particularly to the sources of recreation demand shall have the primary responsibility for providing needed recreation opportunities. In urban and suburban areas, these responsibilities shall generally fall to agencies of the cities, counties and special districts. It shall be the responsibility of the State to take the lead where resources or recreation demand are of greater than regional significance.
- Parklands and trails should be promoted for the economic benefits they provide, whether through jobs, serving as a tourist destination, supporting local communities, drawing in new businesses to park-friendly communities, providing concession operations or through increased property values.

2. Leadership in recreation management: Leadership, cooperation and partnership must be demonstrated at all levels to ensure quality recreation resources, opportunities, programs and services are provided.

It is State Policy that:

- The State of California, through its Department of Parks and Recreation, should encourage and stimulate active and coordinated participation of federal, state, and local agencies, as well as the private and non-profit sectors, in providing park and recreation lands, waters, facilities and programs.
- Local public and private decision-makers have a leadership role in ensuring that a full range of stimulating, enjoyable and safe recreation experiences are available to their constituents, regardless of their skills, abilities or income levels. The State, by means of grants and technical assistance shall aid local providers in the realization of this vision and the delivery of these services.
- Federal, state and local decision-makers and program administrators should weigh the important quality of life outcomes associated with adequate park and recreation services in equal measure with other vital community services when considering the allocation of funding and staffing resources.
- California's public and private schools, colleges and universities should support their undergraduate, graduate and post-graduate programs for training professionals in the field of park and recreation management, and for conducting research on park and recreation related subjects.
- Providers in the private, quasi-public and non-profit sectors are essential partners in the provision of recreation services and should be encouraged to develop and operate a wide range of recreation resources, and to provide a wide range of recreation opportunities on both private lands and appropriate public lands.
- The people of California should have the opportunity to, and are encouraged to, participate as volunteers in support of recreation facilities and programs.

3. Recreation's role in a healthier California: Recreation activities, facilities and programs are vital to improving the health and well-being of Californians.

It is State Policy that:

- Park and Recreation lands, facilities and programs should be recognized as a positive force for individuals, families, communities and society, fostering community pride, increasing productivity, reducing crime and healthcare costs, and supporting healthy lifestyles.
- Recreation programs should be provided for all Californians, particularly the children and youth, which encourage constructive play and ensure lifelong physical and emotional health.
- Park and recreation professionals should take forward the unified message that abundant parks, sports activities and recreation programs provide youth the opportunity to be involved in positive, supervised activities, and that recreation services play an important role in reducing truancy, teen pregnancy, gang involvement, and juvenile delinquency while building self-esteem and improving school performance.
- Recreation providers should evaluate the availability and adequacy of facilities and programs to serve California's growing numbers of seniors associated with an aging population and make needed adjustments to serve this increasing population. Senior programs should promote healthy lifestyles, physical activity, continued learning, and community engagement, including intergenerational activities.
- Park and recreation providers at all levels should seek opportunities to collaborate with other social service programs in such fields as education, health care, housing, juvenile justice and social welfare.

4. Preservation of natural and cultural resources: Educating Californians about their state's invaluable resources is a critical part of ensuring their availability for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

It is State Policy that:

- An environmental ethic should be fostered among Californians, particularly its children and youth, to encourage wise use of the state's finite natural and cultural resources.
- Californians should be made aware of California's unique and important environmental, ecological, scenic, and historical resources contained within parks, recreation areas, open space and resource lands.
- Educational materials should be made available that have consistent core messages designed to conserve, protect and respect resource values and raise individual awareness to potential concerns.
- Attention should be given to the conservation of habitat for special status species and wildlife, and the restoration of important natural areas such as wildlife corridors and wetlands. The preservation of cultural and historic resources such as archaeological sites, historic trails or notable buildings should receive similar attention.
- To ensure resource lands, waterways and habitat will continue to be available for future generations, consideration should be given to protecting working farms and ranch lands involving important natural and cultural resources through voluntary land protection agreements.
- Recreation areas should be planned and managed to provide optimum recreation opportunities without damaging significant natural or cultural resources. Management actions should strive to correct problems that have the potential to damage sensitive areas and degrade resources.

5. Accessibility to all Californians: All citizens have the right to enjoy California's park and recreation legacy.

It is State Policy that:

- Physical barriers and administrative obstacles should be eliminated so that California's park and recreation lands, waters, facilities and programs are accessible to all who want to enjoy them.
- Through careful planning and parkland acquisition in California's urban areas, Californians, particularly the children and youth, should have safe access to a park or other recreation area within walking distance of where they live.
- Low income communities and communities embodying California's great diversity should be provided the same access to healthful outdoor settings, well-maintained facilities, and professionally competent programs as are enjoyed by all other Californians.
- Park and recreation service providers at all levels should reflect the diversity of California's people in their staffing to better understand the needs and preferences of California's changing population.