

Programming Ideas for Parks Professionals

Healthy
in nature



How to Use this Information

This is a list of ideas, suggestions and tips for promoting and incorporating the healthy in nature movement in your parks. Whether these ideas enhance your existing programs or prompt you to create new parks, the goal is the same—to encourage people to spend time outdoors

▶ Promote the concept!

Use this information to help promote healthy in nature activities, policies and programs in your area.

▶ Spread the news!

- Give this information to members of the public, friends, fellow staff members, municipal leaders, community partners and others.
- Incorporate this information in your communication materials such as a recreation newsletter or programming guide or in correspondence with municipal council and community partners.



Target programs to a wide range of people in your community

- ▶ Offer a broader range of parks programs
- ▶ Market and promote various activities people can do while spending time outdoors, such as gardening or walking
- ▶ Involve diverse populations in developing programs – the benefits we experience from being outside are compounded for folks living with a disability, experience low income or are new Canadians
- ▶ Create support groups to help individuals spend time outdoors



Encourage intergenerational work

- ▶ Facilitate intergenerational park restoration, trail maintenance or removing invasive species to improve or protect natural areas. People of all ages can participate in nature education, conservation and ecological restoration.
- ▶ Remember that a place that's beneficial for older and younger people is good for everyone in between. View park creation and maintenance with this in mind.
- ▶ Host a neighbourhood clean-up to eliminate signs of neighbourhood disorder such as graffiti, litter or overgrown vegetation. Adults who see signs of disorder and perceive their neighbourhood to be unsafe at night are less likely to encourage children to use playgrounds or spend time outdoors.
- ▶ Offer organized programs at local parks. Consider teen leadership programs, intergenerational gardening or trail maintenance, or walking programs for all ages. Foster community connections and relationships among neighbours to increase feelings of safety and trust.



+ Help create family nature clubs

- ▶ For families by families, these clubs are self-sustaining, self-organizing nature networks that host multi-family hikes and nature activities such as gardening, stream restoration and visiting a park or garden.
- ▶ Blogs, social networking sites and other online tools can facilitate the creation and organization of virtual clubs.
- ▶ When these clubs grow in popularity and more people are using parks and recreation activities, use this movement to engage political support or solicit funding.
- ▶ Young Naturalists' Club of BC - There are over 40 clubs in communities and schools across the province; membership is made up of young people aged five to 12.

✎ Create partnerships

- ▶ Partners can help you to create and deliver programs or events, build or maintain playgrounds and parks, and promote parks and the health benefits of being outdoors.
- ▶ Consider working with the following sectors and individuals:
 - Health providers and public health officials
 - Teachers and schools
 - Landscape designers, urban planners, architects
 - Non-profit organizations
 - Private corporations and businesses
 - Municipal government departments
 - Agriculturalists, farmers, naturalists
 - Local media
 - Interested community members
- ▶ Partnering with others can help you overcome financial resource challenges when creating policies, programs and places to facilitate your community members spending time outdoors in nature.
- ▶ Work with government departments, health professionals, environmental planners and researchers to integrate parks and nature in public health programs, policies and initiatives.
- ▶ Collaborate with partners to calculate and present economic reasons that support investments in protecting existing green spaces and rehabilitating other areas to increase access and use. For example, the cost-benefit ratio of per capita costs of bike and pedestrian trails and the medical benefits to local government may help you obtain support for healthy in nature policies, programs or infrastructure.
- ▶ Partnerships promoting parks and nature can be used to improve the community's health, get people onboard with your ideas and sell the benefits of being outdoors in nature.
- ▶ Partner with universities and community organizations to contribute to scientific research on the benefits of nature.
- ▶ Partners can educate community members on where to spend time outdoors or donate gear to support people to get outdoors or sponsor the creation of nature playgrounds, bike paths, trails and signs. Partners can financially support outdoor recreation programs and events.



- ▶ Partners can provide safety information on how to reduce risks and dangers of being outdoors such as staying safe in bear country, using pesticides or avoiding ticks.
- ▶ Work with and encourage schools and school boards to incorporate gardens and natural playgrounds into their school grounds or create them through shared use agreements. Local non-profit groups may also be interested such as Girl Guides, Young Naturalists, Birdwatchers, Ducks Unlimited etc. One example is Toronto's neighbourhood park rangers and partners working together to create a green corridor in the Homegrown National Park Project.

★ Value and educate yourself and colleagues

- ▶ You and your colleagues are health practitioners. The work you do encourages and facilitates people to spend time outdoors which reaps health benefits. Provide staff education and training on the benefits of being active in nature.
- ▶ Promote parks as a positive health resource because they play an essential role in preserving, maintaining and promoting human health. Investing in recreation and parks services provides tangible health benefits to your community.
- ▶ Create strategies in parks and recreation master plans and official community plans that support the development and renewal of parks and that guide decision-making to increase opportunities for community members to spend time outdoors. Plan walking meetings – being outside ourselves helps staff to learn and plan together.

🔧 Create a youth conservation crew

- ▶ Offer summer employment or volunteer opportunities to restore and manage parks. Teenagers can work alongside arborists and parks staff to build and maintain trails, plant and prune trees and remove invasive plants. Check with your Regional District to see if such initiatives are underway.



↻ Enhance travel connections to parks

- ▶ Make parks more accessible with dedicated multi-use paths, sidewalks, trails from residential areas, schools, workplaces and shopping areas to and from parks. Create trails and bike lanes that connect residential areas with parks.
- ▶ To encourage park usage, advocate for safety measures and pedestrian friendly infrastructure such as safe crossings, curb accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers, sidewalks and covered spaces.
- ▶ Create new parks and green spaces that are close to places where people live, work and play.
- ▶ Encourage urban planners to incorporate green space into communities and to build nature playgrounds. Advocate for urban design that improves accessibility to green space.

Encourage wildlife in parks

- ▶ Wildlife sightings—even squirrels, birds and ladybugs—attract people to green spaces. Biodiversity, the variety of living things around us, enhances public spaces and enriches people's lives.
- ▶ To add biodiversity, install birdhouses and birdfeeders, incorporate a diversity of trees and shrubs, plant flowers that provide pollen and nectar to attract bees and butterflies, add a pond, use compost for healthy soil.
- ▶ For more information, see the United Kingdom's Commission for Architecture and the Build Environment report: Making contracts work for wildlife.



Promote the positive aspects of local parks and programs

- ▶ Park programs get people outdoors and using parks. When only a few things happen in a park such as reduced hours or less maintenance, people visit parks less. People use parks more when they are more user friendly with things like good signage and activities offered in the park.
- ▶ Active park features such as trails, open spaces, sport fields and courts, and playgrounds are linked to higher park usage.
- ▶ Upgrade and renovate parks to be more inviting for families including child-friendly features such as nature playgrounds or bike racks to increase bike accessibility.
- ▶ Encourage and guide parents to use nature playgrounds so they are comfortable encouraging their children to use the playground. Children model their parents, including learning how to play in nature.
- ▶ Promote the benefits of being in nature and outdoor play. It increases the perceived value and benefits of participating in nature and encourages respect and appreciation for green spaces.
- ▶ Encourage parks to have a diversity of plants, animals and landforms. The best natural areas have a “density of diversity,” a collection of micro-habitats that have lots of natural discoveries throughout the seasons such as a wildflower garden, a pile of boulders, a tiny garden pond, and a berry patch.
- ▶ Practice organic lawn care. Consider using organic weed and insect treatments rather than pesticides because they are harmful to health and can be safety concerns for park users.



Create park signs and programs

- ▶ When people can recognize and name something like a tree or bird, they value and care about it. People protect the animals, plants and environments to which they feel connected.
- ▶ Create signs and programs that support the development of ecological knowledge. Emphasize the positive rather than the negative.
- ▶ Promote the accessibility of green spaces and outdoor learning opportunities for children to experience nature.
- ▶ For more information on creating park signage, see Project for Public Spaces website.
- ▶ One example: Salt Spring Parks and Recreation Commission and University of Victoria have completed an interpretive sign project in Mouat Park. After collecting data on park users' experiences and perceptions and by working with expert stakeholder groups to determine the park's historical, cultural and ecological significance, they have installed signs that meet the approval of all user groups, enhance park experiences and welcome new guests to this space.

