



CHAPTER **6**  
*Recreation  
and Health*



Founders Park on the Potomac River, Alexandria | Cameron Davidson/Virginia Tourism Corp.

## Introduction

In today's social climate, technology appears to be dominating time at work and social interactions. People spend a significant portion of the day sitting at computers or connected to a myriad of other devices. The end result is people sit more and move less. Health research is emerging that indicates unplugging is beneficial and that physical activity can counter-act the negative impact of long periods of inactivity. Regardless of why people choose to put down their devices and move, greater than 50 percent of Virginians who responded to the 2017 Virginia Outdoors Demand Survey (VODS) indicated that the outdoors was their destination for combining exercise and recreation.

In 2013, the National Institutes of Health published a literature review paper that looked closely at the benefits of heading outside to exercise. To summarize, outdoor environments for exercise appear to offer many health benefits such as increasing physical activity while lowering levels of perceived exertion, creating stress reduction, reducing mental fatigue and improving self-esteem. Outdoor exercise may also increase enjoyment and bring about positive behavioral changes in those who partake.<sup>1</sup>

2017 VODS responses related to health and outdoor recreation:

- Sixty-seven percent of survey respondents report the main reason for participation in outdoor recreation is for physical activity and exercise.
- Almost 87 percent say their healthcare provider recommends exercise. Respondents of Hispanic descent were more likely to say their healthcare provider recommended recreation. Those between the ages of

18 and 24 were less likely to report that their healthcare provider recommended exercise or asked about exercise.

- Almost 65 percent of trail users report using trails for health and physical training.

## State Partners in Health and Recreation

### The Virginia Department of Health

The partnership between the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) is growing. Both agencies have statewide plans to guide citizens, agencies and regional partners in implementing statewide initiatives related to outdoor recreation and health. VDH's [Virginia's Plan for Well-Being 2016-2020 \(VPWB\)](#) is a call to action for Virginians to create and sustain conditions that support health and well-being. The plan outlines four categories (AIMs) and 13 goals to address issues affecting Virginians' health.

There is an opportunity to integrate goals from the VPWB with the 2018 VOP. Achieving a healthier Virginia includes working together to address the challenges and implement recommendations for outdoor recreation and health.

Challenges for improving health through local recreation partnerships include:

- Identifying opportunities to interface regional outdoor recreation with health initiatives.
- Encouraging the VDH regional representatives to align outdoor recreation and the VPWB program goals.

- Addressing challenges that discourage outdoor physical activity such as lack of time, limited number of rural resources and safety.
- Aligning goals for both health and recreation to include outdoor recreation opportunities.

### Recommendations

Health recommendations are primarily based on the VPWB program. Meetings of the VOP Technical Advisory Committee expanded upon VPWB recommendations in the categories of educating, engaging youth and envisioning communities for active lifestyles. Many of these recommendations may be achieved in partnership with the private sector and state and local governments. Opportunities to elevate these initiatives may be highlighted at annual regional meetings conducted by DCR.

- Envisioning communities for active lifestyles
  - Integrating health planning into local and regional comprehensive planning.
  - Improving connections to parks.
  - Encouraging community gardens, therapeutic landscapes and healing gardens.
  - Creating walkable/bikeable communities.
  - Creating parks, recreation facilities or open space in all neighborhoods.

Source: VPWB

The Complete Parks Systems concept originated in 2014 under the auspices of the Healthy Eating Active Living Cities Campaign and a series of statewide brainstorming sessions held with California Parks and Recreation Society leadership. Components of the Complete Parks framework that implement Virginia Outdoors Plan and VPWB program goals include:

1. Engage residents and stakeholders in planning for parks;
2. Connect parks to neighborhoods;
3. Locate parks where they are most needed and support nearby access to recreation;
4. Activate parks through robust, relevant programming;
5. Plant and maintain sustainable and aesthetically beautiful landscaping;
6. Make parks safe from real and perceived threats of criminal activity; and
7. Fund park creation, maintenance and programming.<sup>2</sup>

Source: <http://www.changelabsolutions.org/publications/complete-parks>

- Engaging youth
  - Providing walking paths.
  - Addressing water safety to reduce youth drownings.
  - Incorporating strategies to integrate use of electronics in outdoor recreation.
  - Promoting outdoor play.

Source: VPWB

- Educating the community about health through parks and recreation especially regarding:
  - Park programs
  - Tobacco control in parks
  - Youth education through sports programs by incorporating nutrition, exercise, well-being and good decision-making skills that influence positive behaviors.
  - Risks of sun exposure

Source: VPWB

LENOWISCO Health District increased opportunities for outdoor extracurricular activity for youth. They offer after-school and summer physical activity camp to low-income youth in the city of Norton. Participants are involved in archery, canoeing, fishing, hiking, and numerous other outdoor activities and classes. During the school year, the grant supports a walk-to-school event and offers bikes as a prizes to select students.

Crater Health District worked with the Friends of Lower Appomattox River to increase connectivity to local trails through newly designed community signage.



Display signage for tobacco-free parklands

## The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries

The partnership between DCR and the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) has been in effect for many decades through combined land conservation and water access programs.

Creating fishing opportunities is a primary function for DGIF. The department owns and manages 298 water access sites and 39 manmade lakes and ponds for public fishing. In order to improve the angling experience and respond to anglers' needs, DGIF is working to improve fish habitat, develop shoreline access and build fishing piers.

DGIF also manages the Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail. "Find Birding" serves as the electronic, interactive version of this hugely popular program with more than 650 sites open to the public for birding, wildlife viewing, or simply enjoying the outdoors and nature.

Further, DGIF maintains 42 management areas totaling more than 203,000 acres for the benefit of all citizens for a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities. Many management areas are open for some type of hunting. These lands are purchased and maintained with hunting, fishing, and trapping license fees and with Wildlife Restoration Funds. The public is encouraged to utilize management areas and enjoy the bountiful natural resources found in each area.

DGIF recreation programs

- Angling education program - fishing in the schools
- Hunter education program
- National Archery in Schools Program
- Virginia Birding and Wildlife Trail
- Boating safety program

To learn more about all DGIF programs, visit:  
<https://www.dgif.virginia.gov/>.

DGIF launched the Virginia Wildlife Grant Program in 2014, which provides a funding source to nonprofits, schools and government agencies with a focus to connect youth to the outdoors. It is a partnership between DGIF and the Wildlife Foundation of Virginia. In 2017, the Virginia Wildlife Grant Program awarded funding for 27 projects totaling just over \$55,000 that will impact almost 10,000 youth. Eleven projects will benefit at-risk youth. Projects spanned the entire Commonwealth and integrated activities including fishing, archery, wildlife viewing, boating, shooting sports, hunting and trapping. Support of the program is generated through the sale of gear and other merchandise from ShopDGIF.com, the One Shot Turkey Hunt Fundraiser and private contributions.

*Source: Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries*



Archery at Bear Creek Lake State Park | Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation

## Resources

"Status Report for Step It Up! The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities." Atlanta, GA: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2017.

## Works Cited

1. Gladwell, Valerie F et al. "The Great Outdoors: How a Green Exercise Environment Can Benefit All." *Extreme Physiology & Medicine* 2 (2013): 3. *PMC*. Web. 28 Mar. 2018.
2. "The Health and Social Benefits of Recreations" Report, An Element of the California Outdoor Recreation Planning Program.