



# The Future of Outdoor Recreation in Florida

Silver Springs State Park, Credit: Noeker Media House

## What is SCORP?

Florida is paradise for millions of outdoor recreation enthusiasts. Whether you enjoy fitness walking in your neighborhood, horseback riding on a woodland trail, deep sea fishing for snapper, or playing a pick-up game of basketball at your local court, the Sunshine State has thousands of parks, thousands of miles of trails and millions of acres of recreation lands and waters where you can pursue your passion.

There are numerous challenges to ensuring that all Floridians have access to high-quality outdoor recreation opportunities. This is especially true for under-served communities in urban and rural areas. To better meet Florida's growing needs, a team of recreation professionals from various agencies and organizations develops a planning document known as the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). This five-year plan offers guidance and recommendations regarding major issues that recreation professionals face every day.

Working together, recreation and healthcare providers, planners, non-governmental organizations, elected officials and private citizens can use this plan to make Florida's vision of a balanced, equitable and accessible outdoor recreation system a reality. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection coordinates the implementation of the 2019 SCORP.

### Priority Area 1: Health and Wellbeing

- Goal 1-1: Increase the promotion of active and healthy lifestyles in the outdoors.
- Goal 1-2: Increase the number of recreation facilities, programs and opportunities in urban areas and rural communities.

### Priority Area 2: Public Access, Accessibility and Connectivity

- Goal 2-1: Promote the diversity of recreation participants through the development of inclusive and welcoming programs and facilities.
- Goal 2-2: Improve universal accessibility on all public lands.
- Goal 2-3: Ensure that appropriate conservation lands and waters are open and accessible for public use and are widely promoted.
- Goal 2-4: Coordinate providers, agencies and organizations to better connect and promote lands and opportunities.
- Goal 2-5: Promote local parks and trails, along with neighborhood and regional connectivity.

### Priority Area 3: Economic Opportunities and Ecotourism

- Goal 3-1: Promote the economic benefits of outdoor recreation and ecotourism in Florida.

### Priority Area 4: Resource Management and Stewardship

- Goal 4-1: Encourage the conservation and protection of Florida's natural, historical and cultural resources.
- Goal 4-2: Support natural, historical and cultural resource management to ensure high quality outdoor recreation experiences for Florida's residents and visitors.

## Outdoor Recreation Participation

Participation and opinion surveys conducted as part of the SCORP process revealed that Floridians recreate for many different reasons, including relaxation, to enjoy the scenery, for overall health, for physical fitness and to be with family and friends. 97 percent of residents surveyed said that outdoor recreation is essential to their health and quality of life.

Florida's spectacular climate, scenery, beaches, wildlife, parks, trails and other recreation facilities make a wide variety of outdoor pursuits possible. The top activities in terms of household participation rates are fitness walking/jogging, wildlife viewing, saltwater beach activities, visiting historical sites, picnicking, hiking, swimming in outdoor pools, bicycling and fishing. The same activities, plus paddling, are also popular with visitors.

Most Floridians are satisfied with the outdoor recreational opportunities and the quality of facilities in their county, as were 97 percent of tourists. However, only two-thirds of residents are satisfied with the quantity of recreational facilities in their county, indicating there is need for additional parks and amenities closer to home.

When asked which recreational facilities they would like to see provided in their county, residents overwhelmingly replied "trails." Hiking/walking trails, biking paths and nature trails, plus community parks and wildlife viewing areas/overlooks, were the top five amenities desired by Floridians. Paved walkways, playgrounds, beach access, off-leash dog areas and campgrounds also ranked highly.

Many Floridians lack opportunities to participate in outdoor activities. The primary barriers reported in this study were cost of participation, competing priorities and travel distance. More than half of respondents indicated that travel costs had an effect on where they recreated, reinforcing the need for close-to-home facilities.

Public providers of outdoor recreation also had a chance to voice their opinions. When asked about their number one issue, the overwhelming majority replied that it was inadequate funding for programs. Connecting youth to the outdoors and the impact of urban development on conservation were also significant concerns. Most providers indicated their governing body lacked adequate funding for new park lands.

## Outdoor Recreation's Economic Impact

Outdoor recreation plays a significant role in the Sunshine State's economy. In 2016-2017, a first-of-its-kind companion study to SCORP examined economic impacts for 35 outdoor activities at the statewide, regional and county levels. This study revealed that outdoor recreation in Florida generated approximately:

- \$70 billion in visitor spending
- \$60 billion in spending from parks/public lands
- \$20 billion in resident spending
- \$10 billion in tax revenues

Overall, outdoor recreation in Florida had a total economic impact of \$145 billion and supported 1.2 million jobs. Fitness walking/jogging, saltwater beach activities, hiking, picnicking, bicycling (paved surfaces), swimming (outdoor pools), golfing, visiting historical sites, wildlife viewing and nature study generated the most impact in this study; each activity triggered billions of dollars in consumer spending. Additional studies show that boating and saltwater fishing in Florida create comparable impacts.



Oleta River State Park, Credit: Crawford Entertainment