



The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership

A **SMART INVESTMENT** FOR AMERICA'S
COMMUNITIES, HEALTH, AND ECONOMY





INTRODUCTION

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) program provides grants for park and recreation projects in cities across the US. Congress established the ORLP in 2014 and permanently codified it through the bipartisan EXPLORE Act in 2025. The National Park Service manages the ORLP, which is funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). The nationally competitive program provides matching grants to assist communities that have little to no access to outdoor recreation opportunities. The grants fund locally-led land acquisition, new park development, or the renovation of existing parks, all with the goal of providing Americans access to the outdoors. Since 2014, the ORLP has supported more than 150 projects nationwide investing \$470 million and leveraging an additional \$500 million in matching funds.

City parks play a vital role in the social, economic, and physical well-being of America's cities and their residents. They provide access to recreation opportunities, spur local economies, provide physical and mental health benefits, and reduce the impacts of extreme weather events, thereby saving cities money.

However, more than 100 million people in the U.S., including

28 million children, do not have a quality park or green space within a half mile from their home.¹ And historic disinvestment has left many low-income communities and communities of color without access to quality parks and recreation opportunities, and with park assets in need of significant upgrades.

HEALTH BENEFITS

Residents with safe, accessible parks are more likely to exercise regularly, and as a result have increased rates of overall health,² including lower rates of obesity, Type 2 diabetes,³ and heart disease.⁴ And residents within a short walking distance of a safe park are significantly less likely to suffer from stress, anxiety or depression than residents further from a park.⁵ Research also shows that time spent in parks reduces attention deficits in children and the effects of a walk in a park are even similar to the effects of common ADHD medication.⁶

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Parks provide enormous green infrastructure benefits. Low-income communities, which have fewer trees and parks and more paved surfaces, are often hit hardest by the impact of extreme weather, such as flooding, heat waves, and reduced air quality. Parks and green spaces absorb carbon and clean the

air, soak up and slow stormwater, limiting the severity of flooding, and make cities cooler. All of these provide cost savings for cities and help underserved communities.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Parks also provide tremendous economic benefits. Parks create jobs and generate economic activity. In one year alone, local parks supported more than 1.1 million jobs⁷ and generated \$201 billion in economic activity.⁸

A SMART INVESTMENT

Despite the enormous economic, physical, mental, and environmental benefits and cost savings that parks provide, public funding for parks—especially in distressed communities where their multiple benefits are most needed—is limited and not keeping up with demand.

Cities have used the ORLP to create neighborhood parks. ORLP projects attract families and improve public safety. The ORLP has been a vital tool in closing the park funding gap, ensuring that the communities with the greatest need have access to quality green space and recreation opportunities.



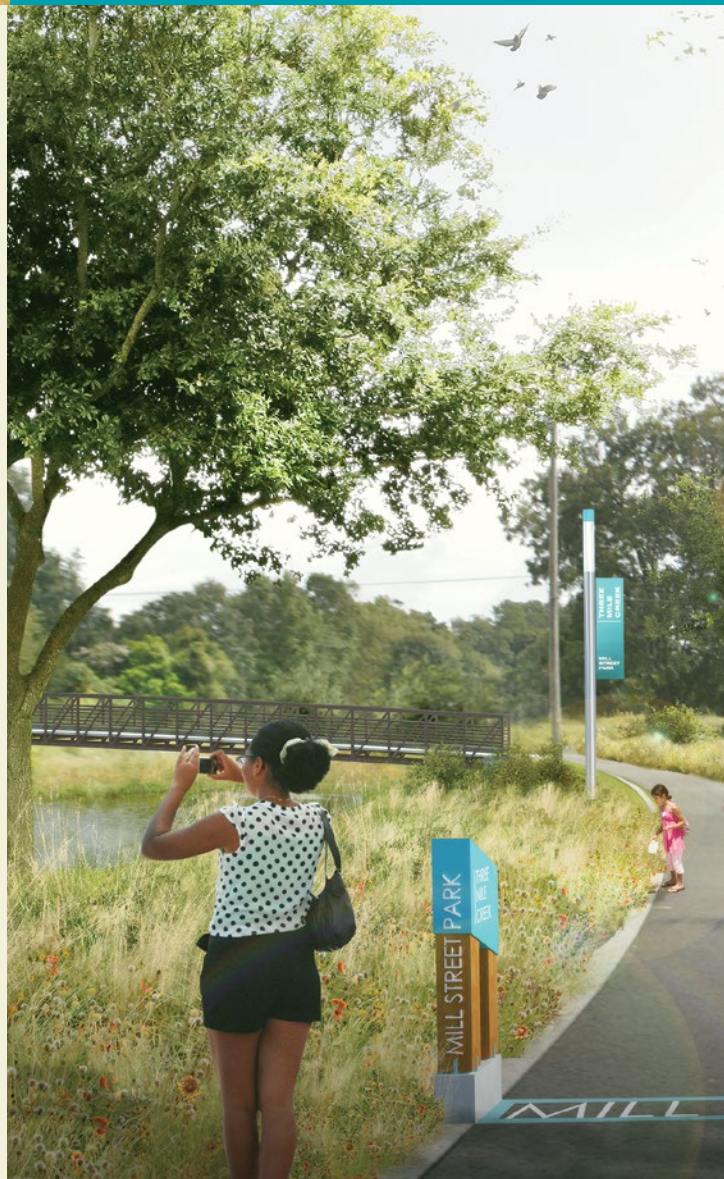
ORLP'S CONTRIBUTION TO AMERICAN CITIES

**THE OUTDOOR RECREATION
LEGACY PARTNERSHIP
OFFERS CRITICAL FUNDING THAT
CITIES CAN LEVERAGE TO
ATTRACT THE PUBLIC
AND PRIVATE PARK
INVESTMENTS NEEDED
TO SUPPORT STRONG,
THRIVING COMMUNITIES
ACROSS AMERICA.**

MOBILE, AL

Three Mile Creek Greenway

Initiated by a grant from the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership, the City of Mobile, AL is transforming Three Mile Creek—once the city's drinking water source but more recently a degraded urban stormwater conveyance—into part of a larger 18+-mile greenway system that will reconnect diverse neighborhoods and provide much-needed outdoor recreation options for its 195,000 citizens. When complete, the Greenway will be within one mile of 70,000 residents and have city-wide benefits related to the local economy, personal health, and flood control. It will be an amenity that will benefit all Mobilians. The project catalyzed a range of public private partnerships with philanthropic and corporate partners. When completed the Three Mile Creek Greenway Trail will provide a safe space for walking, running, biking, and other outdoor activities, while fostering physical wellness and community engagement. Moreover, the Greenway will serve as an alternative transportation corridor, linking neighborhoods to community amenities, workplaces, and other parts of the city.





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ANCHORAGE, AK

The Municipality of Anchorage, Anchorage Park Foundation, and residents of the Muldoon neighborhood worked together to turn what was once an abandoned lot into a lively, community space—Chanshtnu Muldoon Park.

An initial \$750,000 grant from the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership enabled the partners to raise an additional \$1.2 million from municipal bonds and private funds. The first phase of the park included an ice-skating loop, inclusive playground, restored natural areas, and trails built by the Youth Employment in Parks program, where teens gain job skills while learning about environmental stewardship.

The second phase included a bike park and dog park, as well as a large community garden with 45 garden plots and a food forest with more than 100 Alaskan fruit trees and thousands of berry bushes and edible plants that will produce up to 10,000 lbs. of food. The community gardens and food forest create an opportunity for community members to enjoy low-cost, locally grown, healthy food, as well as learn about gardening, agriculture, and forestry.

DENVER, CO

The City and County of Denver, along with its partners, created Montbello Open Space Park in one of the most densely populated and diverse neighborhoods in Denver, with more than 36,000 residents underserved by parks. Funding included a \$250,000 grant from the Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership.

The partners have transformed 5.5 acres from a vacant lot into a restored short-grass prairie ecosystem with native plants and green infrastructure to manage stormwater. The new park includes sports fields and courts, walking trails, and a new playground with interactive nature play spaces.

Separate from the scope of the ORLP grant, the park also houses Environmental Learning for Kids' (ELK) nature education center with outdoor classrooms, science stations, and interpretive signs. ELK provides recreation and programs for youth who may otherwise not have the opportunity to engage in science and science-related careers.

DUBUQUE, IA

The National Park Service awarded two ORLP grants (\$508,000 & \$1.98 million) to the City of Dubuque for the revitalization of Comiskey Park. These grants spurred community engagement, leveraged philanthropy and other private sector support, created new jobs, and provided economic development. Specifically, the ORLP grants leveraged nearly \$4 million in federal, city, and corporate dollars.

The ORLP improvements included more basketball courts, an event field, improved lighting, shade pavilions, native plants, picnic shelters and curved benches—to facilitate conversation—in addition to state-of-the-art playground equipment and a splash pad. Fifty trees were planted, helping to replace trees that were decimated by an emerald ash borer infestation. The park also links to a flood control and greenway project known as the Bee Branch, where an ugly storm sewer was replaced with an attractive creek and floodplain.

The new trails will connect the park to the nearby county-run Heritage Trail where residents and visitors can bike, rollerblade or stroll through beautiful scenery, from the Mississippi River almost all the way to the city's famous Field of Dreams baseball diamond.



MAYORS PRAISE ORLP

MAYOR JOSEPH PETER GANIM OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

"Parks in the City of Bridgeport provide a major haven for healthy, outdoor fun. With a \$375,000 ORLP grant, the City of Bridgeport leveraged private partners to transform Johnson Oak Park and the grounds of the Jettie S. Tisdale School in the East End, a predominantly minority and low-income neighborhood of the city. The park now includes playing fields, a playground, a spray pad, and a fitness exercise area. We are thankful for the ORLP program for helping us improve our residents' quality of life."

MAYOR BARBARA BUFFALOE OF COLUMBIA, MISSOURI

"The City of Columbia was thrilled to receive a \$400,000 ORLP grant in 2018 to assist with the development of Clary-Shy Community Park. This critical federal investment helped create a 10-acre park centered on outdoor education, fitness, and healthy food access through our agriculture park development and construction of the MU Health Care Pavilion to support our growing farmers market. The park now provides a welcoming place for children, families, and neighbors to exercise, play, and connect. The ORLP was a critical asset as we developed a key park in our community."

MAYOR SATYA RHODES-CONWAY OF MADISON, WISCONSIN

"Federal support such as the LWCF grant is essential to improving Madison's 6,000-acre park system and serving the full diversity of Madison residents. The Skatepark at McPike (formerly Central) Park is a great example. The LWCF's ORLP program helped us create a skating experience that is safe, free, and appropriate for all skill levels. It's wonderful to see the diversity of folks who use the park and the community they create there. McPike Park transformed a former industrial site into a vibrant regional attraction, and the skatepark has been critical to that revitalization."



CONCLUSION: ORLP IS A SMART INVESTMENT

Parks and green spaces are essential to the physical, mental, and environmental health of communities. Safe, accessible parks offer opportunities for residents to be physically active and experience the restorative power of nature. Increased physical activity can help prevent and manage serious health conditions, and access to nature reduces stress and improves mental health. Trees and plants clean and cool the air, absorb stormwater, and prevent flooding, mitigating extreme weather and improving community resilience. Lastly, parks create

jobs, attract businesses, and spur economic growth.

Unfortunately, more than 100 million Americans, particularly low-income people of color, lack access to safe parks or natural areas and, as a result, suffer from higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and mental health disorders. The lack of green spaces also makes their communities more vulnerable to the impacts of extreme weather.

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership grant program expands



access to the wide-ranging benefits of parks for the communities that need them most, making it a smart investment in America's future.

ENDNOTES

- 1 10 Minute Walk Campaign, <https://10minutewalk.org/#Our-research>
- 2 Pitas NAD and Barrett AG, et al, The Relationship Between Self-Rated Health and Use of Parks and Participation in Recreation Programs, United States, 1991–2015, CDC Research Brief, Preventing Chronic Disease, Vol 14, January 5, 2017.
- 3 Christine P, University of Michigan School of Public Health, *Bridging the Gap: Biologic, Behavioral, and Environmental Contributions to the Development of Type 2 Diabetes*, JAMA Internal Medicine, June 29, 2015.
- 4 Barrett, Meredith A., et.al. *Parks and Health: Aligning Incentives to Create Innovations*

- in *Chronic Disease Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, April 17, 2014.
- 5 Orstad SL and Szuhany K, et al, *Park Proximity and Use for Physical Activity among Urban Residents: Associations with Mental Health, 2020*, International Journal for Environmental Research and Public Health, July 2020, 17(13):4885.
- 6 Taylor AF and Kuo FE, *Children with Attention Deficits Concentrate Better After a Walk in the Park*, Journal of Attention Disorders, March 2009, 12(5):402–9.
- 7 *The Economic Impact of Parks: An Examination of the Fiscal Effects of*

- Operations and Capital Spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the U.S. Economy*, National Recreation and Park Association, Source: IMPLAN, Center for Regional Analysis, George Mason University, 2021.
- 8 *The Economic Impact of Parks: An Examination of the Fiscal Effects of Operations and Capital Spending by Local Park and Recreation Agencies on the U.S. Economy*, National Recreation and Park Association, Source: IMPLAN, Center for Regional Analysis, George Mason University, 2021



Entities interested in seeking **funding under the ORLP program** should contact their **state lead agency** to get details about their state's process for selecting and nominating projects to the National Park Service's national competition.

Don't know your state lead? Email NPS at ORLP_inquiries@nps.gov

For more information visit <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/lwcf/orlp.htm>

As the only **federal program** focused exclusively on supporting parks and outdoor recreation opportunities in cities, **the ORLP provides critical funding to cities to create new or restore existing parks, trails, and recreation areas in communities in need.**



CITY PARKS ALLIANCE

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City Parks Alliance is the nation's only independent, multi-sector organization dedicated solely to the future of city parks. Our mission is to educate and elevate a diverse constituency to leverage the power of parks in shaping equitable, resilient, and thriving cities. Our vision is that everyone in urban America will have access to high quality parks and green spaces that are clean, safe, and vibrant.

The Mayors for Parks Coalition, a project of City Parks Alliance, is a national bipartisan coalition of mayors from cities large and small across America that advocates for increased federal investment for our nation's city parks.