

Parks and Trails Youth and Young Adult Legacy Outreach



Summary, February 15, 2010

Contacts

Brian Hubbard 25yr Strategic Plan Assistant
brian.hubbard@state.mn.us (651) 259.5569

Laurie Young Project Planning Supervisor
laures.young@state.mn.us (651)296-6690



Summary

The objective of the youth outreach was to increase the number of young people providing input into the Parks and Trails Legacy Plan. Over 1,000 youth and young adults were involved from a variety of diverse geographic areas across Minnesota. Meetings and discussions were held in a variety of formal and non-formal environments including schools, youth centers and other social places where young people were. This was to ensure a wide array of young people were able to provide input to the Parks and Trails Legacy plan.¹

Background of Parks and Trails Legacy Youth and Young Adult Outreach

This report is a summary of a series of discussions and meetings with youth and young adults about their experiences with nature based recreation. By identifying some key issues, we hope to continue to support a dialogue and provide information developed within this outreach described by young people. State and regional park and trail providers have a strong commitment to increase the number of young people participating in parks and trails into the future. During previous Legacy Plan Public Engagement Workshops, participants clearly emphasized the importance of building Minnesota's next generation of stewards.² Young people's involvement in nature based recreation and input to the Legacy Plan is critical for the state of Minnesota to have a well balanced and thoughtful approach toward allocating resources.

Data collection methods

To better understand young people's perspectives a qualitative approach was used. In this document, key testimonies and communications of young people during the parks and trails legacy outreach are examined. The participants provided their own direct interpretation and stories through two questions.

¹ See table 1 on page 7 for description of youth and young adult outreach

² See Parks and Trails Legacy Plan: Increasing Outdoor Recreation Participation chapter

These two questions focused on experiences and recommendations for nature based recreation with state and regional park and trail providers.

1. What do you like to do outdoors? How important are parks, trails and nature based recreation to you? Why? What contributed to your involvement or lack of involvement in nature-based recreation?
2. What would you do to make parks, trails and nature-based recreation more accessible and interesting to young people?

The participants responded through dialogue, writing and drawing their responses individually and in small groups. The purpose and importance of this was not to get a simple yes/no response from the individuals, but to get a description of an experience, a linkage or an explanation of their ideas and beliefs.

These same methods were used throughout all conversations with 1,060 respondents. Our findings are based on face to face meetings with youth ages 10 to 15, youth ages 15 to 18 and young adults ages 18-40. Each of the twenty-eight individual meetings was unique and required a continuous attention to the young people present. Youth came from elementary, middle and high schools and youth programs. Young adults came from technical colleges, universities and the Conservation Corps Minnesota Young Adult Program.

Although economic and ethnic diversity was not specifically targeted, there was an attention to collecting information from diverse communities, including a rural high poverty community and economically distressed urban neighborhoods. In addition there was an emphasis on diverse geographic areas of the state of Minnesota.

A 25yr Strategic Plan Assistant from the Conservation Corps of Minnesota was contracted into the Department of Natural Resources to plan and implement the youth and young adult outreach. The 25 yr Strategic Plan Assistant summarized the results and attended all the meetings with assistance from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Findings

In this section themes that youth and young adults described are reported and defined by their involvement and lack of involvement with parks and trails and nature based recreation. There are patterns and phases of discussions from the meetings that have uniqueness in this report, yet the outcomes have much in common with the young people that participated throughout the state of Minnesota. This provides support for the following youth and young adult recommendations in the next section.

Role of Parents

Parents and family members play a critical role in getting youth involved at an early age. Young adults described how as children they ended up in activities their parents were involved in (“My dad went camping a lot and introduced me to this, and we would just hike around and camp at different places, and after this I joined a program that went camping a lot”).

Young adults indicated parents and family members are key decision makers regarding participation in nature based activities. When asked how decisions were made about participation in nature based recreation young adults reported that parents and guardians are the key decision makers. Youth are given the opportunity to make their own decisions, but parents or guardians have the overall decision. Consequently promoting participation in parks and trails, parents and guardians play a unique role in what young people are doing in nature based recreation.

What involved youth want

Involved youth want to know more about opportunities with nature based recreation in parks and trails. Even though youth expressed satisfaction with their involvement and time use in nature based recreation, many claimed not knowing about opportunities in parks and trails. Youth suggested providing access to information through outreach and social media that young people use. They identified social media as an important aspect to increasing participation with State and Regional Park and Trail providers.

Involved youth want direct involvement in hands on projects with real world applications. They would like to see their participation as an integral part of learning, community planning and problem solving in parks, trails and nature based recreation. This is identified as a beneficial aspect for them to increase their knowledge and experiences with parks and trails. This project is an excellent example of how that could be achieved.

Involved youth claimed boredom at parks and trails. Most indicated there was a need to make their experiences more interesting and that they wanted places they could be physically active, (e.g., open play spaces, skating rinks, skateboard parks) do recreational activities (e.g., biking, fishing, swimming, camping) and have more opportunities to socialize with friends at parks and trails. They reported the need for engaging adults supervising and leading activities.

What uninvolved youth want

Uninvolved youth most consistently requested small group, flexible, leisure, and interest based recreational activities. Uninvolved youth want to “do something besides just staying inside.” The youth who were not part of a structured program that involved or exposed them to nature or indicated that they had someone that encouraged outdoor nature based recreation, still longed for involvement in something that related to their personal interests. One sixteen year old boy described, “I don’t like going to the parks because, [adult leaders] make it boring and fights happen between kids when adults aren’t around.” He would prefer to start a hiking club at a nearby park because, “You don’t usually fight when you’re hiking.” The types of interesting opportunities described by uninvolved youth with parks and trails do not necessarily result from a structured nature based program, but more often take the

structure of young people 'hanging out' with an adult or other young person who may share their common interest in nature based recreation.

Uninvolved youth indicated a need for access to opportunities with nature based recreation in parks and trails. On weekends and week nights they would like to go to different parks and trails to do fun activities with friends, but that they do not know about parks or have a way to access other parks outside of their community. This finding suggests that transportation to parks and trails is an important ingredient to increasing youth involvement.

What young adults want

Young adults want to have more opportunities to socialize and connect with peers within activities that are of their same interests. Interestingly, young adults wanted what youth wanted in their experiences with parks and trails. Young adults advocated for an increase in more unstructured environments where young people can relax and visit with friends. The types of interesting opportunities described by young adults with parks and trails do not necessarily result from a structured nature based program, but more often take the structure of young people being active with peers who may share their common interest in nature based recreation.

Young adults referred to the need for partnerships and opportunities with engaging adults leading and supervising activities. We have learned from youth and young adults that they want to be with their friends and possibly connect with adults and peers who are passionate about their common interests, such as camping or fishing. This finding suggests that organizations need to pay particular attention to identifying those adults with interests in nature based recreation who can connect with young people.

Young Adults want strong partnerships with neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations to increase involvement with outdoor nature based recreation. They would like to see these partnerships well established in their communities and prefer that these relationships continue over an extended time rather than a short term experience.

Recommendations

Common themes were constructed from participants. Schools, community and youth serving organizations play a critical role in the lives of young people and their relationships with outdoor nature based recreation. During this outreach, young people expressed enthusiasm for working to overcome constraints so that they and their peers can integrate nature based recreation in their lives. Recommendations that emerged from discussions are organized in the next three areas.

- 1. Provide partnerships and opportunities with young people in their communities.**
- 2. Implement and create significant employment and mentoring opportunities for youth and young adults.**
- 3. Implement nature based recreational programming for all young people (formal and informal).**

1. Provide partnerships and opportunities with young people in their communities.

- Increase *access* to nature based recreation with schools, youth programs and families.
- Provide *access* to information through outreach and social media that young people use.

Comments by participants: Youth	Comments by participants: Young Adults
<p>“We don’t know what kinds of activities are available at parks and trails” <i>youth, YWCA Leap forward Collaborative participant, Saint Paul</i></p> <p>“Advertise in youth magazines, newspapers and school papers.” <i>11th grade student Red Lake High School, Red Lake</i></p> <p>“Activities should be sponsored by community partner organizations for example schools or community centers.” <i>10th gr student Harding High School, Saint Paul</i></p>	<p>“Increase partnerships with community programs that work with young people and offer opportunities to those programs, such as camping and exploring parks and trails.” <i>Youth Worker from YWCA Leap Forward Collaborative</i></p> <p>“Make long-term investments in families and young people rather than short-term interventions.” <i>University of Minnesota Youth Studies student</i></p>
<p><u>Summary:</u> Youth described a desire to try new and exciting things outdoors. In addition they would like to do activities and programs more. Youth identified ways to inform more people through social media that young people use. For example facebook, school newspapers and youth magazines.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> Young Adults described wanting strong partnerships with neighborhoods, schools, and community organizations to increase involvement with outdoor nature based recreation. They would like to see these partnerships well established in their communities and prefer that these relationships continue over an extended time rather than a short term experience.</p>

2. Implement and create significant employment and mentoring opportunities for youth and young adults.

- Direct involvement in hands on projects with real world applications were identified by young people as a beneficial aspect for them to increase their knowledge and experiences with parks and trails. Their sincere dedication in wanting to become involved and to be a part of the process was an overarching theme in this outreach.
- Youth and young adults would like to see their participation as an integral part of learning, community, planning and problem solving in parks trails and nature based recreation.

Comments by participants: Youth	Comments by participants: Young Adults
<p>“I want to help parks and nature.” <i>5th grade student from Harambee Elementary, Roseville</i></p> <p>“Students in their schools can do an outdoor television program about their local outdoor nature based activities that they didn’t know about.” <i>11th grade Student from Pillager High School, Pillager</i></p> <p>“Have or increase jobs for youth at parks and trails.” <i>12th grade student North Community High, Minneapolis</i></p>	<p>“Encourage young people to volunteer in parks with incentives.” <i>Student from Saint Benedicts, Saint Joseph</i></p> <p>“Projects related for young people to earn credits or service learning opportunities for reduction in fees or for field trip opportunities at a reduced rate.” <i>Student from Central Lakes Community College, Brainerd</i></p> <p>“Engage more college environmental studies programs in mentoring.” <i>Student from Rainy Lakes Community College, International Falls</i></p>

<p><u>Summary:</u> Youth 10-15 year old described service as a necessary attribute toward their commitment to the environment and parks and trails. Youth 15-18 years old described wanting the creation of significant employment opportunities in parks and trails. A concern of theirs was being underemployed and unemployed.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> Young adults described the importance of mentoring youth. They described money as a constraint of nature based recreation. As a result a majority of young adults described projects designed to reduce costs that that incorporate volunteer opportunities. This will result in greater participation.</p>
---	--

3. **Implement nature based recreational programming for all young people (formal and informal).** Implementation and support of programs to make nature based recreation programming (formal and informal) as a base for healthy growth with young people and parks and trails was identified as contributing to participation.
- Increase more social opportunities to participate in nature based recreation.
 - Implement a series of events aimed at specific age groups of youth, young adults and families
 - Create and maintain facilities with an intention to provide a safe and welcoming environment.

Comments by participants: Youth	Comments by participants: Young Adults
<p>“Create ‘National Teen Night Out!’ at parks, trails and recreation centers” <i>Youth Outdoors participant (15-17 yrs old), Conservation Corps</i></p> <p>“Have more activities for teens to hang out!” <i>12th grade student from Park Rapids High School</i></p> <p>“Photo classes for people at parks and trails.” <i>6th grade student from American Indian Magnet School</i></p>	<p>“Add outdoor nature based recreation to art classes and photography.” <i>Student from Bemidji State University</i></p> <p>“More signs with interpretive and what you can see along the trail.” <i>Student Saint Cloud State University</i></p> <p>“Make trails feel more safe, I don’t feel safe to go on my own.” <i>Student from Mankato State University</i></p>
<p><u>Summary:</u> Youth described ‘hanging out’ with an adult or other youth who may share their specific interest as a beneficial aspect of a park or trail. A need to feel safe was what youth described as beneficial. This feeling of being ‘safe’ came from the facilities, supervisors, park police and being with friends.</p>	<p><u>Summary:</u> Young adults identified that through a mix of recreational, arts and enrichment activities would increase the amount of young people actively engaged. Feeling safe was a theme for some young adults. This was emphasized for the need of signs, facilities and more social opportunities with groups of people that have similar interests.</p>

Conclusion

The impressive accomplishments and participation of diverse communities in the Parks and Trails Legacy effort with youth and young adults call for more opportunities to participate as an integral part of learning, community planning and problem solving in parks, trails and nature based recreation.

In light of this, it is important to think that young people do not grow up in programs and organizations; rather they grow up in communities. This experience highlights how community outreach by itself is an opportunity to increase awareness and participation. Young people described that outreach is important and that there is a need to balance community outreach and community participation. The

Parks and Trails Legacy Youth and Young Adult Outreach			
High School	Location	Technical Colleges	Location
Johnson Senior High School	Saint Paul	Brainerd Lakes Community College	Brainerd
Harding High School	Saint Paul	Rainy Lake Community College	International Falls
Mankato East High School	Mankato	Universities	
North High Community High School	Minneapolis	Bemidji State University: Depts. of Recreation and Natural Sciences	Bemidji
Pillager High School	Pillager	Mankato State University: Dept. of Recreation	Mankato
Red Lake High School	Red lake	Saint Benedicts/Saint John's University: Student group	Saint Joseph
School for Environmental Sciences: Apple valley	Apple Valley	Saint Cloud State University: Dept. of Community Studies	Saint Cloud
Youth Outdoors Conservation Corps	Saint Paul/ Minneapolis	University of Minnesota-Duluth: Dept. of Recreation	Duluth
Park Rapids High School	Park Rapids	University of Minnesota: Freshman seminar- Department of Education	Minneapolis
Cathedral High School	Saint Cloud	University of Minnesota: Dept. Recreation	Minneapolis
Elementary and Middle School			

activity of empowering young people to have a voice in parks and trails can ultimately transform participation in the community creating new roles for both young people and adults. This has been identified by participants in this outreach throughout the state of Minnesota. In addition, youth participation is an ongoing process and that it is necessary to stay committed to young people.

Barton Open School	Minneapolis	University of Minnesota: School of Social Work	Saint Paul
Harambee Elementary	Roseville	University of Minnesota: Dept. of Youth Studies	Saint Paul
Forest View Middle School	Brainerd	Winona State University: Recreation	Winona
YWCA Leap Forward Collaborative	Saint Paul	Young Adult (non student)	
American Indian Magnet School	Saint Paul	Conservation Corps Young Adult Crew	Saint Paul
Total of 1060 youth and young adults			

