

Recreation Resources Division

Vision Statement - The RRD vision statement reflects the values staff wish to emulate and project to our customers, the taxpayers of the State of Tennessee:

RRD will provide innovative customer assistance that creates positive impacts and experiences for people, parks, and programs in Tennessee.

Mission Statement

To create and protect parks and open spaces that provide recreation opportunities and conservation education for all Tennesseans

Throughout the past year, we have been going through a restructuring of our division. Our goal went from educational services that weren't well defined and didn't describe what we do to providing resources and connections – becoming meaningful catalysts to community quality of life through parks and recreation. This has also involved process improvement exercises, such as in grants management.

The Recreation Resources Division provides parks and recreation grant, planning and technical assistance resources to local governments in Tennessee. The grant programs also support and protect the natural and cultural resources of our state park system and provide funding for community park development, trails development and land acquisition. Funding sources include the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Local Parks and Recreation Fund, and the Recreational Trails Program.

RRD also houses the state's Greenways and Trails program, which encourages Tennessee communities to save special green spaces. The Council on Greenways and Trails ensures the diversity and type of greenways and trail projects and facilitates input from various user groups across the state. Types of projects may include rails-to-trails, community greenway connections, river and water trails and natural surface trails.

The division develops the Statewide Recreation Plan (SCORP), which is designed to be a framework for recreation planning at all levels of government. Action plans support successful partnerships, meaningful investment in infrastructure, and effective outreach and engagement that ensure an outstanding system of outdoor recreation for Tennesseans.

Technical assistance services include workshops, studies and surveys, recreation delivery system assessments and technical bulletins, but our team is looking to grow our outreach and become broader – with parks and recreation as the focal point but connecting to other quality of life elements in a community.



**PARKS AND
CONSERVATION**

T E N N E S S E E

Why we do what we do -

- We feel a commitment to steward state and federal funding sources in the most responsible way possible – either adhering to requirements that are placed on us as administrators or developing our own management policies and processes.
- Parks and recreation projects are set aside for current and future generations – in perpetuity; therefore, the National Park Service requires that states do a SCORP every five years (Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan) that lays out priorities, needs and interests for Tennessee. These priorities direct the federal funding to the right projects. RRD in turn, requires a parks and recreation master plan or a system comprehensive plan that lays out why that project is a priority in their community or region. Why? If they care about it, they will care for it.
- The benefits of parks and recreation are endless – (please see attachment NRPA – why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services)
- RRD manages recreation and parks services, not just grants, because we believe parks and open spaces are important to all people – for the following reasons:
 - **Health and Individual Benefits**
 - **Family and Community Bonding**
 - **Parks as Spaces for Mentoring Programs**
 - **Encouraging Kids activity**
 - **Helps build safer neighborhoods**
 - **Economic Advancement**
 - **Environmental Benefits**

How We Do What We Do...

Our qualified and professional staff include:

The **Parks and Recreation Technical Advisory Service (PARTAS)** section of the Recreation Resources Division is responsible for providing technical assistance to our public parks and recreation partners.

PARTAS provides technical assistance to public parks and recreation agencies by offering workshops, training, on-site meetings, assessments, strategic planning, etc. There are 3 PARTAS consultants that cover east, middle and west Tennessee and a PARTAS manager that oversees the statewide technical consultants and initiates special projects and studies. All PARTAS staff are certified in playground safety and can also provide expertise on ADA guidelines and compliance for recreation and park facilities and trails. A map is attached for your reference.

The **Grants Management section** includes a program manager and three grant analysts that work across the state and are also responsible for a region as well as a grant program emphasis area. The grants' section administers all of TDEC-RRD's federal and state recreational grant

programs to local and state governments. The division manages the Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF), the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), the Tennessee Recreation Initiative Program (TRIP), the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF).

Staffing had also been an issue for TDEC-RRD and we were without a full grants team from early in 2020 until Sept, 2021. Our grants section has been fully re-structured, and we have 3 positions covering the state – a first for RRD. Also, our former grants analyst 3 was promoted to Grants Program Manager so we are fully staffed at 4 FT employees. A map is attached which outlines their regions of responsibility.

Where they have been able to change or improve a process in the GMS, they have done so. I think a lot of our early struggles were because TDEC had implemented this new GMS system in 2018 and now, for our second round of grants, we are able to not only understand it better but how we can manipulate the system or request changes or improvements. For example, realizing that some steps do not have to be linear in nature, staff can work through 2-3 steps simultaneously to keep the lengthy contract process moving steadily and quicker.

The **Planning section** is currently being re-invented and the current planner position is vacant (soon to be filled). Collaborative partnerships led by RRD leadership has most recently ensured the development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The SCORP is designed to be a framework for recreation planning at all levels of government and it requires diversified public input and an advisory committee for the enhancement of Tennessee's recreation delivery systems.

The recreation planning section will assist the division and others in the bureau of Parks and Conservation within TDEC with data, on-site planning assistance, maps, assessment of demands for recreation activity, special needs requirements and other related items. The section also works very closely with the bureau's GIS team in coordinating a new parks, greenways and trail inventory system. They will assist in collecting, recording and distributing information regarding recreation services, facilities and programs available to the public.

Local Parks and Recreation Fund (LPRF)

The LPRF program provides state funding through the Real Estate Transfer Tax for the purchase of land for parks, natural areas, greenways and the purchase of land for recreational facilities. Funds also may be used for trail development and capital projects in parks, natural areas and greenways. These require a 50% match.

Land and Water Conservation Funds (LWCF)

The LWCF is a federal program through the U.S. Dept of the Interior, National Park Service, that provides matching grants to states to administer to state and local governments for the acquisition and development of public outdoor recreation areas and facilities. Recreation Resources administers the LWCF grants in Tennessee. These grants require a 50% match. There are usually two cycles per year that states can send in applications for funding requests.

Recreational Trails Program (RTP)

The Recreational Trails Program (RTP) is a federal funded, state administered grant program. The RTP provides grant funding for land acquisition for trails, trail maintenance, trail construction, trail rehabilitation and for trail head support facilities. These funds are distributed in the form of an 80% grant with a 20% match. Local, state and federal land managing agencies are eligible to apply as well as state chartered, non-profit organizations with IRS 501 (c) (3) status that have a written agreement for trail management with an agency. All grant projects MUST be on publicly owned land.

Tennessee Recreation Initiative Program (TRIP)

The Tennessee Recreation Initiative Program (TRIP) apportions grant money to cities and counties who lack professional park and recreational directors and do not provide a comprehensive recreation delivery system in their community to assist with the establishment of the first Parks and Recreation Department. These grants are a three-year commitment, \$50,000 grant matched equally by the communities.

Overall – General Info for All Programs

- All in one cycle where applications are accepted for all types of projects and then staff lines up the funding source with the project scope.
- All programs require a match – 50/50 for all except RTP, which is 80/20.
- Cycles held every other year – odd numbered years in the Fall; with a Spring award date
- All programs set up and administered/managed through the SmartSimple grant management system (GMS).
- If applications are selected for funding, the land must be publicly owned and a Notice of Limitation of Usage must be placed on the land parcel's deed protecting the land in perpetuity for public recreation. In certain instances publicly owned land that is leased from another public entity can qualify as land for certain grant programs listed below.

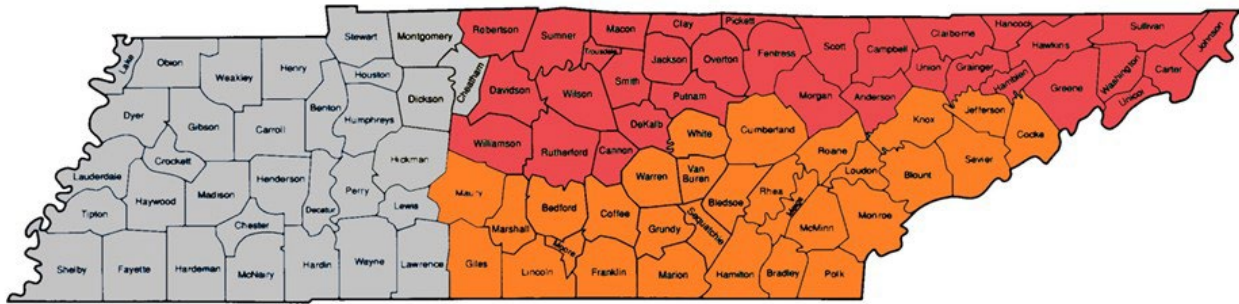
Eligible Applicants

- Any local government that does not have an open grant project administered by RRD
- State parks and natural areas – for LWCF and RTP
- Federal governmental agencies and 501c3 organizations – for RTP
- Joint applications are allowable and are encouraged (ie. Two cities, a city and a county, a local government and a non-profit, etc.)

Sampling of Eligible Projects

Funds may be awarded for one or a combination of sites and facilities such as:

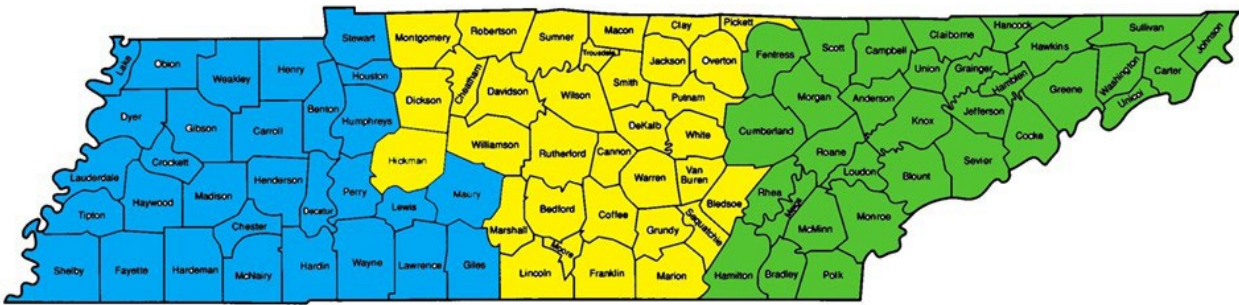
- Athletic Fields
- Play Courts
- Playgrounds
- Picnic areas
- Trail Construction
- Trail Rehabilitation, not routine maintenance
- Trail head facilities
- Trail side amenities
- Picnic Pavilion
- Splash Pad
- Fishing Piers
- Boardwalks
- Non-motorized Boat Docks and ramps
- Riverwalk
- Recreation Buildings and Structures
- Stand-alone Land Acquisition with development of land for public recreation within 3 years of the acquisition



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Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services

Parks and recreation have three values that make them essential services to communities:

1. Economic value
2. Health and Environmental benefits
3. Social importance

Just as water, sewer, and public safety are considered essential public services, parks are vitally important to establishing and maintaining the quality of life in a community, ensuring the health of families and youth, and contributing to the economic and environmental well-being of a community and a region.

There are no communities that pride themselves on their quality of life, promote themselves as a desirable location for businesses to relocate, or maintain that they are environmental stewards of their natural resources, without such communities having a robust, active system of parks and recreation programs for public use and enjoyment.

Economic Value

- Parks improve the local tax base and increase property values. It is proven that private property values increase the value of privately owned land the closer such land is to parks. This increase in private property value due to the proximity to parks increases property tax revenues and improves local economies.
- A Texas A&M review of 25 studies investigating whether parks and open space contributed positively to the property values of surrounding properties found that 20 of the 25 studies found that property values were higher. "The real estate market consistently demonstrates that many people are willing to pay a larger amount for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity,"
- American Forests, a national conservation organization that promotes forestry, estimates that trees in cities save \$400 billion in storm water retention facility costs.
- Quality parks and recreation are cited as one of the top three reasons that business cite in relocation decisions in a number of studies.

- Parks and recreation programs produce a significant portion of operating costs from revenue generated from fees and charges
- Parks and recreation programs generate revenue directly from fees and charges, but more importantly, provide significant indirect revenues to local and regional economies from sports tournaments and special events such as arts, music, and holiday festivals. Economic activity from hospitality expenditures, tourism, fuel, recreational equipment sales, and many other private sector businesses is of true and sustained value to local and regional economies.

Health and Environmental Benefits

- Parks are the places that people go to get healthy and stay fit.
- Parks and recreation programs and services contribute to the health of children, youth, adults, and seniors.
- According to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, creating, improving and promoting places to be physically active can improve individual and community health and result in a 25 percent increase of residents who exercise at least three times per week.
- A study by Penn State University showed significant correlations to reductions in stress, lowered blood pressure, and perceived physical health to the length of stay in visits to parks.
- Parks and protected public lands are proven to improve water quality, protect groundwater, prevent flooding, improve the quality of the air we breathe, provide vegetative buffers to development, produce habitat for wildlife, and provide a place for children and families to connect with nature and recreate outdoors together.

Social Importance

- Parks are a tangible reflection of the quality of life in a community. They provide identity for citizens and are a major factor in the perception of quality of life in a given community. Parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most important factors in surveys of how livable communities are.
- Parks provide gathering places for families and social groups, as well as for individuals of all ages and economic status, regardless of their ability to pay for access.
- An ongoing study by the Trust for Public Land shows that over the past decade, voter approval rates for bond measures to acquire parks and conserve open space exceeds 75%. Clearly, the majority of the public views parks as an essential priority for government spending.

- Parks and recreation programs provide places for health and well-being that are accessible by persons of all ages and abilities, especially to those with disabilities.
- In a 2007 survey of Fairfax County, VA, residents of 8 of 10 households rated a quality park system either very important or extremely important to their quality of life.
- Research by the Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods indicates that community involvement in neighborhood parks is associated with lower levels of crime and vandalism
- Access to parks and recreation opportunities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and to reduced juvenile delinquency.
- Parks have a value to communities that transcend the amount of dollars invested or the revenues gained from fees. Parks provide a sense of public pride and cohesion to every community.

National Recreation and Park Association

For more information on the value and benefits of parks go to www.nrpa.org