Appendix C

Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Online Surveys
PA Outdoor Recreation Online Surveys

The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources used an online survey tool in the spring and fall of 2014 to collect citizen feedback for both the development of the outdoor recreation plan and for final feedback on a draft plan.

Plan development feedback

For six weeks in April and May 2014, DCNR conducted an online survey using the Survey Monkey survey instrument to gauge certain attitudes and needs relating to outdoor recreation. The results of the survey were considered along with other data in developing the priorities for the Pennsylvania Outdoor Recreation Plan 2014-19.

The survey was sent to email distribution lists representing a variety of recreation interests. Social media also was used to encourage people to participate. In total, 7,159 people responded to all or portions of the survey. Respondents were 66 percent male and 34 percent female, with 61 percent over age 45 and 38 percent ages 18-44. The survey included seven multiple choice questions about outdoor recreation, two open-ended questions on how to improve outdoor recreation, and four demographics questions. All Pennsylvania counties were represented, with 40 percent identifying themselves as living in a rural community; and 30 percent each associating with city/suburb and borough/town.

When asked how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the outdoor recreation amenities offered near where they live such as trails, parks, playgrounds, playing fields/courts, about 59 percent of the respondents indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. About 20 percent were neither dissatisfied nor satisfied, 16 percent dissatisfied, and nearly 6 percent very unsatisfied.

Demonstrating they were clearly an audience of engaged outdoor recreation enthusiasts, 91 percent of the respondents indicated that outdoor recreation was either extremely important or important in their everyday lives. Only 8 percent said it was somewhat important, and less than 1 percent of respondents said outdoor recreation was not at all important in their everyday lives. The third survey question asked respondents to check all places that “best reflect what you value about your community.” By far the most
popular answers were trails, natural areas, waterways, with 89 percent of respondents making that selection; local parks and public spaces and surrounding countryside and farmland followed close behind, both with around 75 percent. The selections then dropped off precipitously, with only 39 percent citing residential neighborhoods and 30 percent choosing downtown businesses as valuable to their community.

When survey respondents were asked to rate the level of priority their local community should place on investing in certain facilities over the next five years, those that answered 4 or 5 cited:

- regional and community trails (73 percent)
- opportunities for water-based recreation (61 percent)
- community/regional parks (60 percent)

About 40 percent of the respondents ranked opportunities for hunting and fishing their highest priority (5). Off leash dog parks, trails for motorized use, team sport facilities and skate parks ranked lowest, although nearly one-fifth of the respondents ranked motorized trails their top priority (5).

**Q4: Please rate the level of priority your local community should place on investing in each of the following facilities over the next five years.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facility Type</th>
<th>1 (Lowest priority)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Highest priority)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community or regional trail systems</td>
<td>3.82%</td>
<td>5.78%</td>
<td>17.67%</td>
<td>31.63%</td>
<td>51.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for hunting and/or fishing</td>
<td>10.67%</td>
<td>12.15%</td>
<td>17.86%</td>
<td>22.64%</td>
<td>40.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for access to water-based recreation (e.g., boating, kayaking)</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
<td>10.19%</td>
<td>23.39%</td>
<td>31.51%</td>
<td>25.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community or regional parks</td>
<td>4.68%</td>
<td>9.44%</td>
<td>25.68%</td>
<td>36.12%</td>
<td>24.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-road bike lanes</td>
<td>19.22%</td>
<td>22.74%</td>
<td>21.53%</td>
<td>19.67%</td>
<td>23.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood parks</td>
<td>6.51%</td>
<td>12.74%</td>
<td>29.65%</td>
<td>31.46%</td>
<td>19.44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trails/parks for motorized activities</td>
<td>37.41%</td>
<td>50.99%</td>
<td>14.59%</td>
<td>10.83%</td>
<td>17.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor interpretive/educational facilities</td>
<td>8.03%</td>
<td>15.44%</td>
<td>30.94%</td>
<td>27.88%</td>
<td>19.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain bike trails</td>
<td>27.46%</td>
<td>50.64%</td>
<td>27.78%</td>
<td>22.65%</td>
<td>17.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playgrounds</td>
<td>9.42%</td>
<td>16.39%</td>
<td>33.58%</td>
<td>26.50%</td>
<td>13.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community gardens</td>
<td>17.66%</td>
<td>21.23%</td>
<td>27.47%</td>
<td>26.20%</td>
<td>12.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skate parks/adventure parks</td>
<td>27.43%</td>
<td>23.36%</td>
<td>23.29%</td>
<td>16.25%</td>
<td>10.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swimming pools/water play parks</td>
<td>26.45%</td>
<td>21.22%</td>
<td>29.24%</td>
<td>17.35%</td>
<td>8.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Off-leash dog parks</td>
<td>32.88%</td>
<td>22.79%</td>
<td>22.74%</td>
<td>12.05%</td>
<td>8.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team sports facilities</td>
<td>26.67%</td>
<td>25.49%</td>
<td>28.74%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>5.66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The survey respondents clearly support conservation efforts. When asked in question 5 to rate priorities for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts, the highest-rated outdoor recreation and conservation funding priority was protect wildlife and fish habitat, with 64 percent rating it as extremely important. About 55 percent of respondents rated maintaining existing park and recreation areas as extremely important, as well as acquiring and protecting open space as undeveloped, conserved land.

**Q5: From your perspective, how important to you are each of the following priorities for funding outdoor recreation and conservation efforts?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>1 (Not at all important)</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5 (Extremely important)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protect wildlife and fish habitat</td>
<td>1.06%</td>
<td>3.19%</td>
<td>9.64%</td>
<td>21.95%</td>
<td>64.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain existing park and recreation areas</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
<td>1.99%</td>
<td>11.48%</td>
<td>30.32%</td>
<td>55.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire and protect open space (as undeveloped, conserved land)</td>
<td>3.44%</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
<td>13.29%</td>
<td>21.72%</td>
<td>54.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restore damaged rivers and streams</td>
<td>1.55%</td>
<td>3.75%</td>
<td>12.51%</td>
<td>27.31%</td>
<td>54.87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build more greenways/trails</td>
<td>4.89%</td>
<td>8.14%</td>
<td>20.61%</td>
<td>30.10%</td>
<td>36.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build pedestrian and cycling paths between places of work, parks, schools, and shopping areas</td>
<td>12.61%</td>
<td>12.67%</td>
<td>19.63%</td>
<td>22.40%</td>
<td>32.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide environmental and conservation programs</td>
<td>3.91%</td>
<td>9.70%</td>
<td>24.53%</td>
<td>31.63%</td>
<td>30.24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire additional land and water areas for developed recreation</td>
<td>5.59%</td>
<td>11.03%</td>
<td>24.94%</td>
<td>29.28%</td>
<td>29.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide recreation programs at parks and recreation areas</td>
<td>4.90%</td>
<td>13.05%</td>
<td>29.89%</td>
<td>30.33%</td>
<td>21.82%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 5 also included an “other” category, which garnered 333 responses. The two most popular categories in the comments were motorized vehicles (21 percent of responses) and habitat protection/maintenance (15 percent of responses). Motorized vehicle comments were mostly calling for more trails and better trail maintenance; habitat protection/maintenance comments were mostly regarding protection of wild lands from industry pollution, especially from natural gas drilling activity. Other comments related to activities/programs/education, better access, biking, costs, drilling, equine activity, hunting/fishing, maintenance/safety, management/regulations, new/upgraded facilities, trail networks and water/boating.

Question 6 requested respondents to rate their agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- Outdoor recreation plays a major role in my family’s vacation and free time. (91 percent agree/strongly agree)
• I would like to become more involved in outdoor recreation activities in the future. (77 percent either agree/strongly agree)
• Providing outdoor recreation services is a core function of state government. (70 percent agree/strongly agree)
• Providing outdoor recreation services is a core function of local government. (70 percent agree/strongly agree)
• Private entities should do more to build facilities or provide spaces for conservation and outdoor recreation. (59 percent agree/strongly agree)
• I don’t have easy access to outdoor recreation. (18 percent agree/strongly agree)
• I am not sure where or how to get involved in outdoor recreation activities. (9 percent agree/strongly agree)
• Physical limitations or disabilities limit or prevent my participation in outdoor recreation. (7 percent agree/strongly agree)
• I can’t afford to participate in outdoor recreation. (6 percent agree/strongly agree)

The final multiple choice survey question asked respondents to select what they thought was the biggest challenge facing outdoor recreation in their area. Nearly 41 percent of respondents selected inadequate funding for outdoor recreation/conservation as the biggest challenge in their area, and 31 percent of respondents selected lack of public support for outdoor recreation facilities/services. The quantity or number of facilities provided was chosen by only 14 percent of respondents, and the quality of facilities/services currently provided was only chosen by 8 percent. Insufficient staffing for outdoor recreation facilities/services was selected by 6 percent of respondents as the biggest challenge facing outdoor recreation in their area.

This question also included an “other” category, which received 714 responses. The two most popular categories for comments were maintenance/safety (12 percent of responses) and drilling/development (11 percent of responses). Maintenance/safety comments were mostly advocating for better cleanup and maintenance of recreational facilities; drilling/development comments were mostly concerns about the impacts of natural gas drilling on or near public land, more specifically forest fragmentation, water pollution and loss of open space. Other comments related to activities/programs/education, advertising/communication, better access, biking, costs, equine activity, funding/public support, hunting/fishing, lack of space/overcrowding, management, motorized vehicles/ATVs, new/upgraded facilities, trail networks and wildlife protection.
Open-ended questions

The survey allowed respondents to expound on their thoughts about outdoor recreation through two open-ended questions:

- What is the single most important thing that parks and outdoor recreation agencies/organizations could do to help you participate in outdoor recreation in Pennsylvania?
- Is there anything else we should consider as we develop the next five-year outdoor recreation plan for Pennsylvania?

There were 4,652 responses to the first question. Answers were categorized based on commonality of topics. Responses were sorted into 24 basic categories (in order of prevalence, excluding irrelevant and off topic comments): advertise/public outreach, maintain/improve/safety, trails, hunting/fishing, motorized vehicles, programs/activities, biking, better access, protect/conserve, funding/public support, more rec areas/public land, new/better amenities, boating/water, costs, drilling, signage/maps, equine activity, camping, management, partnerships, disabled/elderly access, pets, political and transportation. Some answers fell into multiple topic areas. The largest category of responses (12 percent) fell into the “advertise/public outreach” category. A common theme within this category was that there is a need for better advertisement regarding available programs and facilities. Many respondents said they don’t know what programs are being offered, where trails are, what facilities are available for use and when events are happening. Many people suggested creating a well-organized and comprehensive online calendar of events and using the Internet more to connect with the public.

Other strong categories of responses were “maintain/improve/safety” and “trails.” A few common themes within the maintain/improve/safety category were longer park hours, better maintenance of trails and other park areas and ensuring that rivers, forests, and other parkland are clean and free of pollution. Some mentioned fracking, mining and other industry regulation in state park/forest areas as a way to reduce pollution and keep parks clean. Several survey respondents also called for more staff to make sure park rules and regulations are enforced as well as for better signage and maps so that areas are easier to navigate. Within the trails category, there was a definite emphasis on creating more trails with better accessibility and more connections to communities in addition to better maintenance of current trails. Also, several respondents called for more trails for biking, particularly rail trails and greenway trails created from abandoned properties and other unused land. One respondent commented:

“Increase the amount of safe cycling routes out of the city and between parks to be useful for commuters and recreational users. Connect disjointed bike trail systems in surrounding area around Pittsburgh (and through the rest of the state) to make a cohesive network to allow safe longer distance travel.”

Equestrian and mountain bike trails are also areas where some respondents felt there needed to be improvements and additions.

In the second open ended question nearly 3,900 people expressed what else should be considered in the development of the next five-year outdoor recreation plan for Pennsylvania. The greatest percentage of
the responses (11 percent) fell into the “hunting/fishing” category. A common theme within this category was Sunday hunting. Those in favor of Sunday hunting cited more opportunities for family hunting trips and better accommodation for working people. Others were opposed to Sunday hunting due to the potentially increased danger to non-hunters in the woods and lack of a weekend day for peaceful forms of recreation like hiking, horseback riding and wildlife watching. Deer management was also a popular topic within this category, with some respondents advocating for less hunting of deer herds in certain regions, such as the “Northern Tier” and less doe hunting in order to restore deer populations to previous levels. Ensuring clean streams and rivers for a healthy fish population, as well as adding more public access points for using waterways were also points of emphasis for respondents. Several respondents also suggested obtaining more land for hunting and other recreational activities. For instance, one respondent commented, “Give us undeveloped land to hunt, hike and enjoy.” Getting the public – particularly hunters -- involved with habitat improvement projects to improve both the habitat on public land and the hunting was also a prevalent suggestion.

The next most popular category for this question was “off-road/motorized vehicles,” with nearly 10 percent of responses. Respondents called for the creation of additional trails for motorized vehicles that are legal, longer, and more complex, either on public land, or using public funding throughout the state. West Virginia’s Hatfield-McCoy trail system was mentioned by several respondents as an example of an ideal ATV trail park. And while many respondents want more ATV opportunities, others see a need for more stringent regulation and better enforcement on state lands calling the illegal use of ATVs on public land “an epidemic” and “a detriment [to] the environment.”

The third biggest category of this open-ended question was “protect/conserve habitat,” with nearly 10 percent of respondents making comments in that area. A common theme within that category was the strong desire to protect Pennsylvania’s wildlife, natural areas and resources. Respondents placed emphasis on land acquisition as a way to protect wild lands and also keep it from becoming industrialized. Emphasis was placed on saving and protecting native species, waterways and open space and limiting damage/pollution from recreation as well as hydraulic fracturing and other industry. One respondent commented:

“We need to preserve much of the valuable wild places in our state. Forest fragmentation from industry is changing the biodiversity in our state, which will have negative effects on outdoor recreation, not to mention on the native species as well. Much consideration needs to be given to inducing industry to practice real conservation measures so that industry does not destroy our wonderful wild habitats. Industry can co-exist in many places with the native species but it does take forethought and conscious practices.”

Educating residents about conservation and the outdoors was also suggested by several respondents as a great way to help protect undeveloped land and natural resources. In addition, forest management was of utmost importance to many survey respondents, especially in terms of making sure forests are healthy and fauna are thriving.

Final feedback on draft plan

DCNR used the Survey Monkey tool in October 2014 to gather input on the plan’s recommendations and action items. Respondents were asked to select what they thought were the most important
recommendations and action steps within each priority area. Those numbers were tallied, along with the ranking sheets submitted at the three public meetings. The recommendations and action items listed under each priority in the implementation matrix are in order of importance as selected by those participating in the public ranking process.

In addition to the ranking process, respondents to the online survey also had a chance to provide open ended feedback about the plan. Out of the 579 people who responded to all or parts of the survey, 126 chose to provide their opinions about the plan. That feedback was placed into categories that mirrored the priorities of the plan (some comments fell into multiple categories):

- Resource Management, 81 comments
- Local Parks and Recreation, 30 comments
- Trails, 27 comments
- Funding, 19 comments
- Health and Wellness, 16 comments
- Tourism and Economic Development, 13 comments
- General positive/negative, 16 comments

In the resource management category, which had by far the most comments, many respondents voiced concerns about the impacts of fracking, especially in terms of water pollution and forest fragmentation. Several respondents urged DCNR to stop all Marcellus-shale gas activity on state land, while others suggested that the drilling companies ought to contribute more money to mitigate the negative effects. Respondents also urged officials to acquire more wild, undeveloped land and take care of those types of spaces that already exist. Members of the equine community suggested that more consideration should be given to equestrian trail users and that the plan should include something relating to that area of outdoor recreation. Other responses in this category related to preserving habitat for certain species for ecological or hunting purposes. One respondent commented:

“We should also make preservation of species at risk for extinction a priority. Audubon has targeted over 300 species at risk for extinction several of which breed or migrate through our state. Habitat fragmentation and climate change will severely impact birds and mammals, plant species, pollinating insects, etc. which are integral to the natural environment. If this view is not part of the planning, the natural recreational or outdoor experience we are trying to protect and preserve for our residents will be much changed from the one we have now.”

The local parks and recreation category had the second most comments, with emphasis from respondents on providing adequate funding to smaller, more rural communities for parks and natural areas and coordinating with local nonprofit groups on improvement projects. Others noted the lack of natural open spaces in their communities, because of a preponderance of areas for organized sports. One respondent commented:

“Outdoor recreation is sometimes considered to be something that is nice but not essential to a community. This thinking must be changed. More open space must be provided, not just for sports, but for walking and quiet contemplation. My community lacks such spaces. The parks
consist only of baseball diamonds and tennis courts. A way to increase all forms of outdoor activity is a pressing need.”

Trails was another popular category for comments; creating connections between trails, closing gaps, and building more accessible and family-friendly bike and walking trails were all ideas voiced by respondents. In addition, the equestrian community was well represented in this category, emphasizing the need for properly designed and maintained trails. Many of the comments regarding trails overlap with resource management, local parks and other categories of comments.

Most of the respondents’ suggestions relating to the funding category were about obtaining more funding for outdoor recreation projects. Again, there were multiple mentions of the need for aid to smaller communities, specifically obtaining funding for their recreation and conservation efforts. Non-profit organizations, local governments, and hunting/fishing organizations were suggested as resources for increased funding for outdoor recreation. One respondent also suggested for-profit businesses as sources of funding, asking the question: “Why can't big business fund more? It’s all about being healthy, getting outdoors, keeping active, and teaching the kids...WILDLIFE, WATER, THE HEART OF PA.”

In the health and wellness category several respondents stated that there was a need to link recreation and conservation to health and to reconnect residents, especially children and senior citizens, with the outdoors. One respondent suggested a specific program aimed at older Pennsylvanians:

“In China every local community has several sessions of Tai Chi every day to serve a local walking community close to home. We, in PA, should consider duplicating this very effective program for our citizens. With our aging population and the onslaught of Alzheimer's, we have to provide innovative programs to serve our taxpayers.”

The final category of comments was tourism and economic development, and this category had many overlapping comments from resource management and local parks as well. Several respondents expressed the need for better marketing and recognition of outdoor recreation programs and opportunities across the commonwealth in order to create environmental stewardship and increased economic activity. One respondent explained:

“Getting far more people using Pennsylvania's woods and rivers will create more sustainable natural resources than legislating buffers for rivers or methods for designating endangered species. People who use our natural resources will naturally do what is best to preserve the resources. Getting more people to use the existing trails, campgrounds, rivers and streams is the key to sustainable natural resources.”

General comments mostly commended DCNR on the plan and thanked the department for taking their input into consideration. Some positive comments also emphasized that the implementation of the plan was the most important part. A few negative comments said the survey was too long or confusing to complete.
Conclusion
The online surveys proved to be a fast and effective tool in soliciting public feedback for the outdoor recreation plan. While the results weren’t statistically valid, responses gave an indication of what was important to those people who recreate in the outdoors the most. Some responses reflected certain issues more strongly than others due to the strength of those constituent groups and the methods used to communicate with them.