

# THE ROLE OF PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENTS IN CREATING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

The answer is right in your own back yard!



Public park and recreation agencies create healthy communities and play a fundamental role in enhancing the physical environments in which we live. Through facilities, outdoor settings, and services provided, they support good health for people of all abilities, ages, socio-economic backgrounds, and ethnicities.



## Parks foster change through collaborative programs and policies that reach a vast population to:



- ✓ Help reduce obesity and incidence of chronic disease by providing opportunities to increase rigorous physical activity in a variety of forms;
- ✓ Provide a connection to nature which studies demonstrate relieves stress levels, tightens interpersonal relationships, and improves mental health;
- ✓ Aid in reducing hunger in America and increasing access to nutritious food options; and
- ✓ Foster overall wellness and healthful habits, such as becoming tobacco-free and engaging in enrichment opportunities that add balance to life.

The nation's public parks and recreation are leaders in improving the overall health and wellness of the nation. They are essential partners in combating some of the most complicated challenges our country faces –poor nutrition, hunger, obesity, and physical inactivity.



Park and recreation agencies effectively improve health outcomes and thus should be supported through national and community level funding and policies that enable them to continue to expand their efforts in making a positive change in the health and wellness of our nation.



## Parks and Physical Activity Evidence

- Living closer to park space is associated with increased physical activity among adults & youth
- Park features & other characteristics may be just as important as proximity in encouraging neighborhood & park-based physical activity
  - ✓ Number & types of features (e.g., playgrounds, trails)
  - ✓ Quality of park and features (e.g., renovations)
  - ✓ Ease of accessing the park from surrounding neighborhood (e.g., street connectivity, traffic, crossings, public transportation)
- Park availability & park features and quality are generally worse in low income and/or high-minority areas

In addition to the tradition healthy programs offered by Parks and Recreation agencies, some of the newer programs include:

- Posting wellness tips in community centers
- Providing healthy snacks at community centers and other recreation venues (provide healthy snack to each participant, or work with your vending company to have a healthy food week).
- Providing short health lesson with a healthy snack in afterschool programs.
- Conducting health fairs (blood pressure checks, hearing screening, stress relief, healthy food samples) at community center.
- Adding wellness sections to your existing newsletter.

Other program ideas offered by departments are:

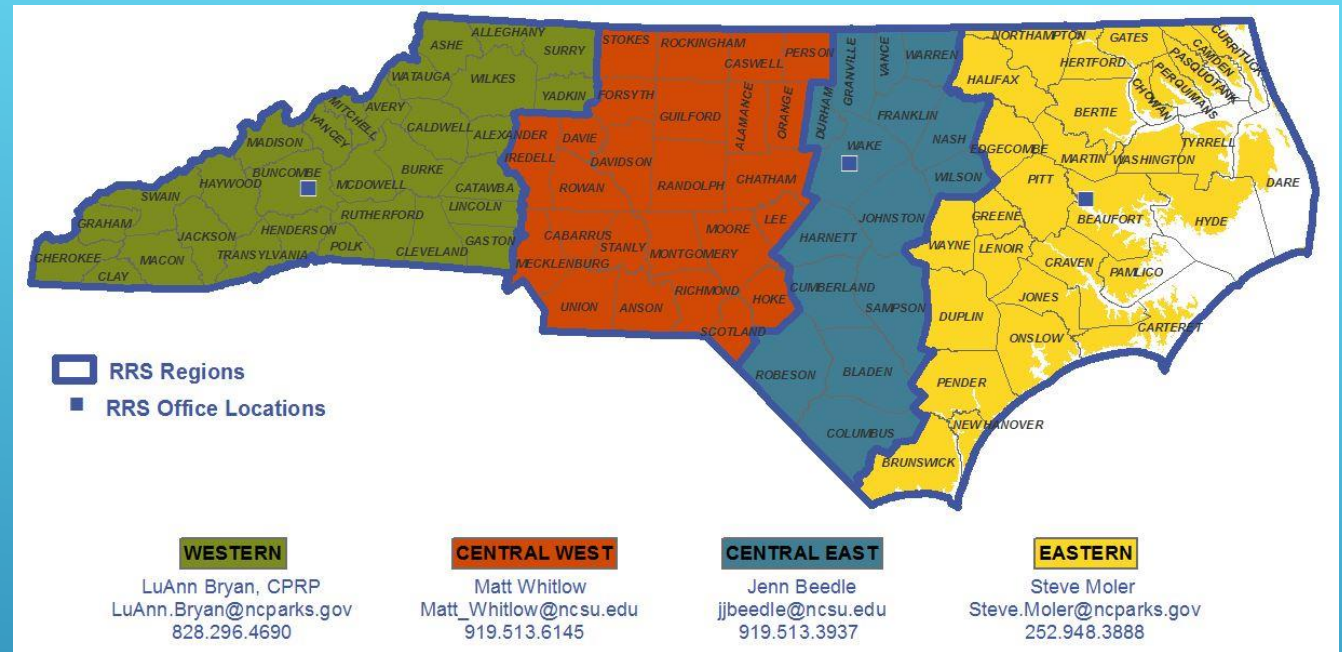
- Healthy cooking/nutrition programs
- Community gardens
- Employee Wellness Programs
- Physical Activity Programs





## RRS provides four types of services:

- Technical assistance for communities/parks and recreation agencies
- Continuing education for parks and recreation professionals
- Applied research
- Administration of LWCF and PARTF.



Services are provided by contract between the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation and the Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism Management, College of Natural Resources, North Carolina State University. RRS began as a function of the State of North Carolina Recreation Commission in 1943.



Contact your local parks and recreation agency for more information about how they can contribute to making your community a better place to live!



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