

**MD Partnership for Children in Nature**  
**Progress on Community & Public Lands Recommendations Winter 2010-2011**

- 1. Incorporate nature play spaces into community health planning, land use planning and community development design.** *Lead: Sandi Olek, MD-DNR Office for a Sustainable Future, [solek@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:solek@dnr.state.md.us)*
  - Developed nature play spaces task force
  - Defined nature play space, benefits and suggested elements.
  - Defining & addressing challenges: introduction of concept to public, safety, liability, maintenance
  - DNR compiling pattern book of nature play spaces for public
  - State installing nature play spaces: at DNR headquarters child care center as demonstration (w/ grant from Chesapeake Bay Trust), several state parks, and through DNR Community Parks & Playgrounds Program
  
- 2. Establish a MD Trail Development Office to address trail planning and funding, trail advocacy, a one-stop trail GIS database, and the development of a new MD Trail Town Program.** *Lead: John Wilson, MD-DNR Assoc. Director of Stewardship & Land Acquisition & Planning, [jfwilson@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:jfwilson@dnr.state.md.us)*
  - Trail Summit held October 2010; attended by over 200 trail stakeholders.
  - Trails Development Office being created: John Wilson Statewide Trails Coordinator.
  - 2011: Creating internal trails workgroup and inter-agency trails workgroup to increase collaboration on trail planning and funding to develop Statewide Trail System “second to none.”
  
- 3. Develop a strategic state park and public lands Interpretive and Outdoor Classroom Plan, identifying funding needs to support a greater presence of park rangers and seasonal naturalist staff.** *Lead: Matt Ritter, MD-DNR Chief Interpretation, [mritter@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:mritter@dnr.state.md.us)*
  - State park rangers met for Interpretive Summit to improve visitor interpretive experiences. Focused on statewide programs (Junior Rangers, Scales & Tales, Park Quest) school and public programs.
  - Forming committee to develop comprehensive school programs (pre & post-school trip programs, field trip programs, and evaluations). Each ranger leading EE programs will be trained on specific program areas (incl. forestry, ecosystems/habitats, water, and life cycles). All programs will meet education standards and include a teacher training aspect.
  - Parks will continue to develop partnerships such as Bridging the Watershed (working with Rocky Gap, Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary, Cunningham Falls) to offer an outdoor classroom experience with assistance of non-profit and NPS staff, training, and evaluation material.
  - State parks will develop individual State Park Interpretive Plans to be incorporated into a 5-yr Comprehensive Interpretive Plan for Parks. Plan will highlight park history, interpretive and recreational programs, nature center/visitor center visitation, and EE programming. Each park will have an interpretive theme for their park that all programming will support.
  - Each park ranger attends Ranger School for training in Project Wet, Project Wild, Project Learning Tree, Leave No Trace, and National Association for Interpretation certification.
  - Each Park will have a minimum of one Seasonal Naturalist and in some cases 2-3 naturalists. Each naturalist attends a two-day interpretive training prior to programming
  - MD Conservation Corp attend multiple trainings to learn to teach EE and assist with programming
  - Outdoor Discovery Program will begin offering family camping outings. The planned trips will give families an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of camping, cooking, and outdoor recreation in state parks. All equipment will be provided. The goal of the program is to get families out to camp, meet other families, and begin to build confidence in their own abilities outdoors.

[continued...]

4. **Develop and implement a comprehensive program to increase access and utilization of public lands and waterways for underserved communities.** *Leads:* Sandi Olek, MD-DNR Office for a Sustainable Future, [solek@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:solek@dnr.state.md.us); Meredith Lathbury, MD-DNR Office of Land Acquisition & Planning, [mlathbury@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:mlathbury@dnr.state.md.us); Matt Ritter, MD-DNR Chief of Interpretation, [mritter@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:mritter@dnr.state.md.us); Hieu Truong, Chesapeake Bay Trust Grants Program Office, [htruong@cbtrust.org](mailto:htruong@cbtrust.org)

**MD-DNR Efforts:**

- Developing GIS Park Equity Analysis to identify underserved communities with least amount of access to parks & green space. Statewide analysis of demographics (incl. poverty level, density, age) on a census block scale and relative distance to green space. Results will be used to support state goals and made available to local sponsors and public.
- State parks are increasing efforts to introduce programming to underserved communities.
- Outdoor Discovery outreach program will balance in-classroom visits with field trips for city schools to build excitement for outdoors at younger age and create understanding & appreciation for wildlife throughout city and surroundings. Program will be publicized to schools in Baltimore and areas of Prince George's county initially, then expand; and utilize existing relationships (e.g. Parks & People; Boys and Girls Clubs) to increase offerings.
- Outdoor Discover family camping outings will give underserved communities opportunity to try camping without a need to own any equipment.

**Chesapeake Bay Trust Diversity Initiative:**

- Goal: Engage more people of color in stewardship of their communities on both public & private lands.
- A high percentage of CBT grants involve stewardship activities on public lands as well as providing access to public land for Maryland's youth through school field trips.
- Directly encourage organizations (environmental organizations and non) that work in areas with high percentage of communities of color to submit applications for all CBT grant programs. Soliciting applications from regions traditionally underserved by CBT grants. CBT offers technical assistance for preparation of grant proposals.
- Develop relationships with organizations that do not traditionally have environmental focus but have potential connection to Bay/water stewardship (e.g. public health, community development).
- Diversifying CBT review process, particularly Technical Review Committees, to lend new "eyes" to process and to ensure CBT is diversifying grantmaking process and the Trust itself.
- Facilitating a series of Listening Sessions throughout Maryland to reach out to various communities of color to find out how CBT could better engage them on the environmental front.
- CBT requesting applicants note and track volunteers, students, and teachers of color that they intend to engage in order to measure progress on these goals.

5. **Expand and improve the existing Civic Justice Corps (CJC) model to serve 1,000 at-risk youth statewide by 2015 with summer conservation jobs and outdoor enrichment activities.** *Lead:* Fred Banks, MD-DNR CJC Program Director, [fbanks@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:fbanks@dnr.state.md.us); Captain Peyton Taylor, Exec. Director Conservation Corps & Interpretation for MD Park Service, [ptaylor@dnr.state.md.us](mailto:ptaylor@dnr.state.md.us)

- CJC entering fourth summer of operation; expected to operate in 6 locations throughout MD this summer, for a six-week program serving approx. 360 youth from Harford, Prince George's, Worcester and Montgomery counties & Baltimore City. Several jurisdictions are experiencing budget cuts and contraction of staff & operations, challenging efforts to maintain and grow the program. Continuing to work with many community partners to build and maintain a diversity of relationships to support CJC.
- Outdoor enrichment for CJC is provided by Outdoor Discovery Program that sends naturalists to all locations CJC serves to provide hands-on learning opportunities during work or travel. Naturalists hold Enrichment Days providing youth with an opportunity to learn new outdoor life skills (e.g. hiking, fishing, boating, orienteering, compass reading, and outdoor survival).
- Outdoor Discovery Camp staff take every CJC member on multi-day camping trip to Eastern Shore or Western MD. Members set up tents, participate in interpretive & rec programs and outdoor activities
- CJC enjoys a high rate of returning staff. This increase in experience and institutional knowledge has increased youth to crew chief ratio from 5:1 to 7:1, streamlining program and maximizing efficiency.
- DJS utilizes CJC program at residential youth centers in W. MD with capacity for 180 youth per year which brings total program capacity to 540.