

Appendix C. Park and Recreation Trends

The Sunriver Owners Association (SROA) is developing a master plan that evaluates the current and future recreation needs for the Sunriver area and specifically the parks and facilities owned and managed by the SROA. The purpose of the plan is to recommend enhancements to SROA parks and facilities to address changes in the demographics and priorities of SROA homeowners and visitors, as well as evolving trends and desires for different types of recreation experiences. This report focuses on those changing recreational trends and potential opportunities to address them, including examples from resort communities and key organizations in the Pacific Northwest and nation. Understanding future trends in recreation will help Sunriver design and develop an innovative, resilient, and engaging park and recreation system.

This document highlights and briefly describes specific trends in recreation, design and development, community demographics, and natural and environmental resources. It provides examples of how these trends are being addressed in other communities.

RECREATION TRENDS AND OPPORTUNITIES

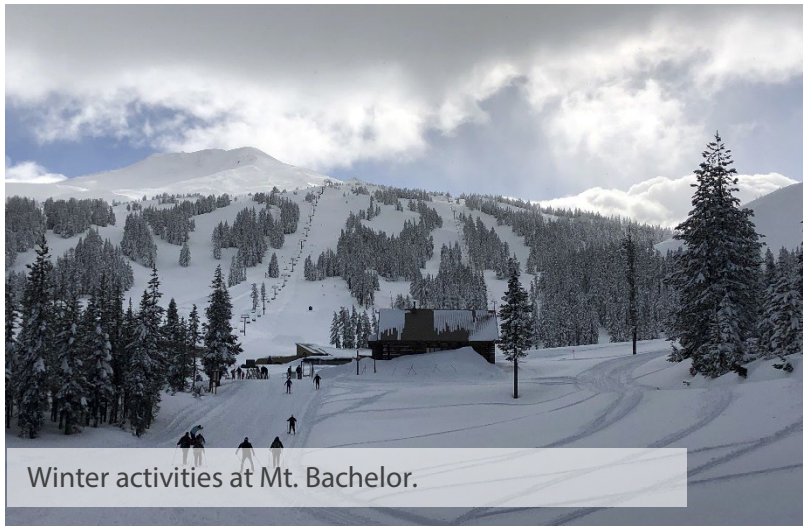
Popularity of Outdoor Recreation

Since the arrival of COVID-19, the numbers of people seeking outdoor, nature-based recreation opportunities has been increasing. More people are leaving urban areas to recreate than ever before.

Oregon State Parks saw a record 53,656,533 day-use visitors in 2021 and Central Oregon sees about 4.5 million visitors annually. Scenic beauty, enjoying outdoor activities and spending time in nature are driving people to visit Central Oregon.



Cascade Lakes Scenic Byway is directly west of Sunriver, only a short drive and provides access to great views, lakes, hikes, and other recreation opportunities.



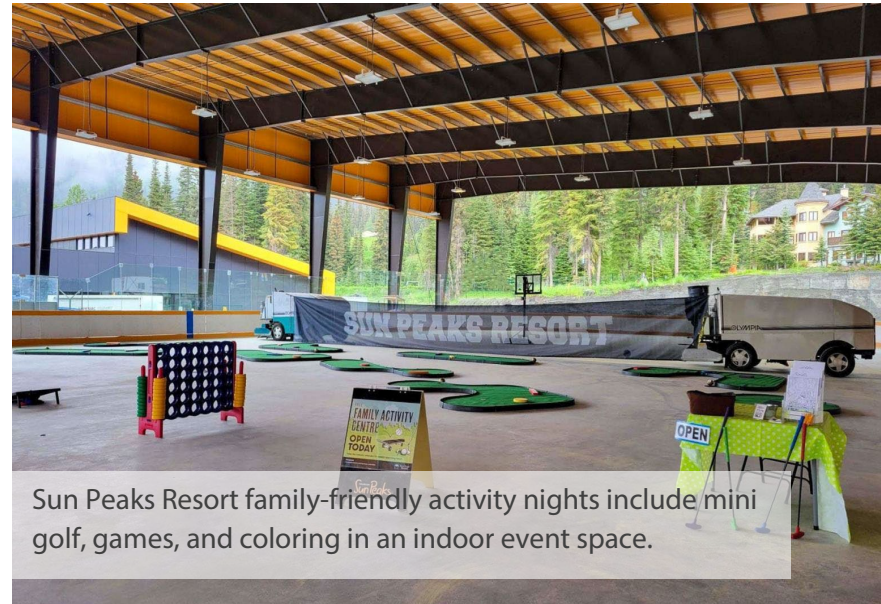
Winter activities at Mt. Bachelor.



Floating on the Deschutes River.

Year-Round Recreation

Demand for year-round recreation opportunities is on the rise, which has clear repercussions for park and facility use, maintenance, and scheduling. Park agencies are diversifying the types of facilities or amenities they offer to extend recreation opportunities throughout all seasons. Oftentimes, slight adaptations in programming or small investments in equipment, amenities, and facilities can expand year-round recreational options. In the case of Sunriver, the resort has strong visitation in both summer and winter due to recreation opportunities nearby. The area also is seeing increased use in the shoulder seasons, plus an increasing demand for more and a greater variety of winter recreational facilities and opportunities within Sunriver. For example, other resort communities are designing and maintaining summer biking and walking paths as Nordic ski or snowshoe trails in the winter. Multi-seasonal cycling opportunities, such as designated fat bike loops (bikes with tired intended for off-road cycling with wider, oversized tires to handle the snow), are also popular in Central Oregon and other areas that see snow. Smaller activity stations or programs have been set up in indoor spaces as they are flexible uses.



Sun Peaks Resort family-friendly activity nights include mini golf, games, and coloring in an indoor event space.



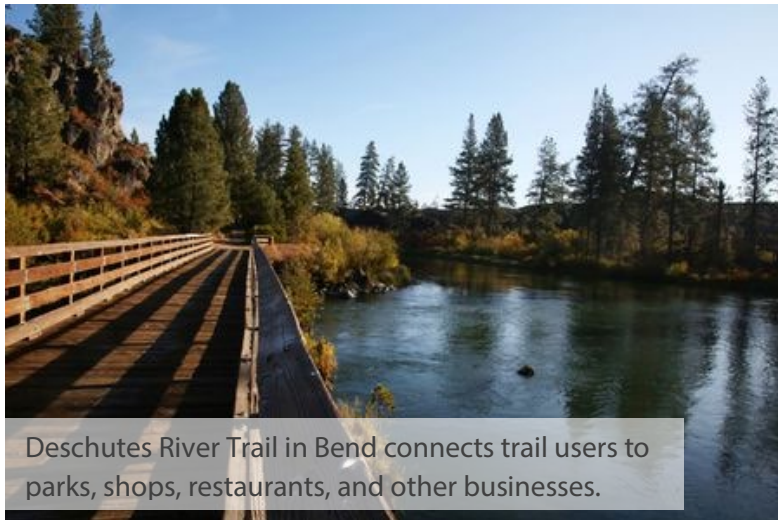
COTA fat biking winter trails in Central Oregon.

River Access

The Deschutes River represents an important resource and amenity in Sunriver although the opportunities for development of significant recreational facilities along the river are constrained by environmental protection restrictions, as well as the vegetative and topographic character of its banks in Sunriver. In many locations, increased popularity in water activities and sports, such as kayaking, stand-up paddleboarding, and “wild swimming” (ocean swimming and floating in natural pools of water) has opened new avenues for recreation providers with access to open bodies of water to innovate their facilities and program offerings. While large projects like Bend’s Whitewater Park are likely not feasible or desirable in the protected sections of the river that run through Sunriver, there are many types or levels of river access and programming. Small areas to wade or places to dangle your feet in the river can be a good alternative for organizations where funding and site area available is more limited. Overlooks or riverside trails can also provide scenic views while limiting direct access to the river and protecting environmentally sensitive areas.



Small access points and rocks allow visitors to get close to the water.



Deschutes River Trail in Bend connects trail users to parks, shops, restaurants, and other businesses.



A South Lake Tahoe boardwalk trail and overlook with interpretive signage on the life cycle of salmon.

Increasing Bike Usage

While participation in trail activities has been climbing nationally and regionally¹ for years, the rise of ebikes, cargo bikes, mountain bikes, and bike road races had led to a variety of trail use conflicts as well as increasing needs for a greater variety (and speeds) for trails. Especially in regions with more challenging mountain biking trails on federal and state lands, resort communities are providing bike skills courses, pump tracks, and/or other facilities where kids and adults can test and improve their mountain biking skills.

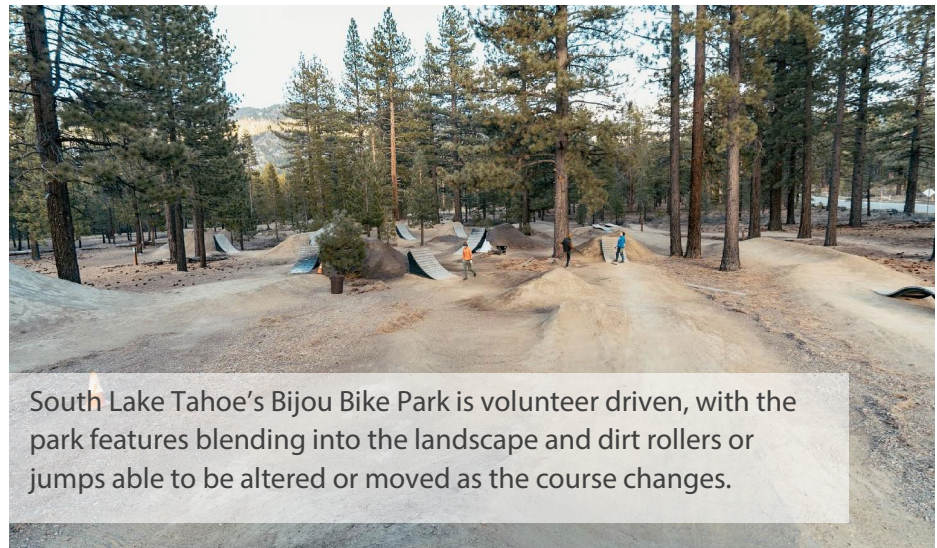
Bike skills areas are being designed to fit into smaller spaces while still providing challenging features and terrain for users. They can use as little as 500 square feet of terrain and can be incorporated into existing parks or standalone facilities. Larger pump tracks or courses geared towards multiple skill levels typically take up more area and with greater topographic variation.



Sun Peaks Resort “Progression Park” offers a variety of bike skills zones where riders can advance their technique.



Little rollers on bike trails in Vancouver are a small, cost-effective way to incorporate fun bike experiences.



South Lake Tahoe’s Bijou Bike Park is volunteer driven, with the park features blending into the landscape and dirt rollers or jumps able to be altered or moved as the course changes.

¹ The 2019-2023 SCORP notes that *community trails* and *trails connected to public lands* are among the three top recreation funding priorities for Deschutes County.

Unique Play Experiences

Providing more diverse play experiences in parks is a growing regional and national trend. Unique play opportunities can include nature play, water play, adventure play, thematic play, or challenge elements. These offer new experiences for both adults and children and can be added as amenities to existing parks or stand-alone facilities.

Challenge Elements for Teens and Young Adults

While play in past frequently focused on children ages 2-5 and 5-12, current trends show an increase in the provision of more exciting and challenging play features in parks specifically to attract and serve teens, young adults, and adventurers of other ages. Alpine slides, larger climbing walls and spires, parkour features, ziplines, and bouldering opportunities are emerging in resorts to appeal to thrill-seekers.



The Visiting Seals Playground in Denmark offers unique play elements connected to local wildlife.



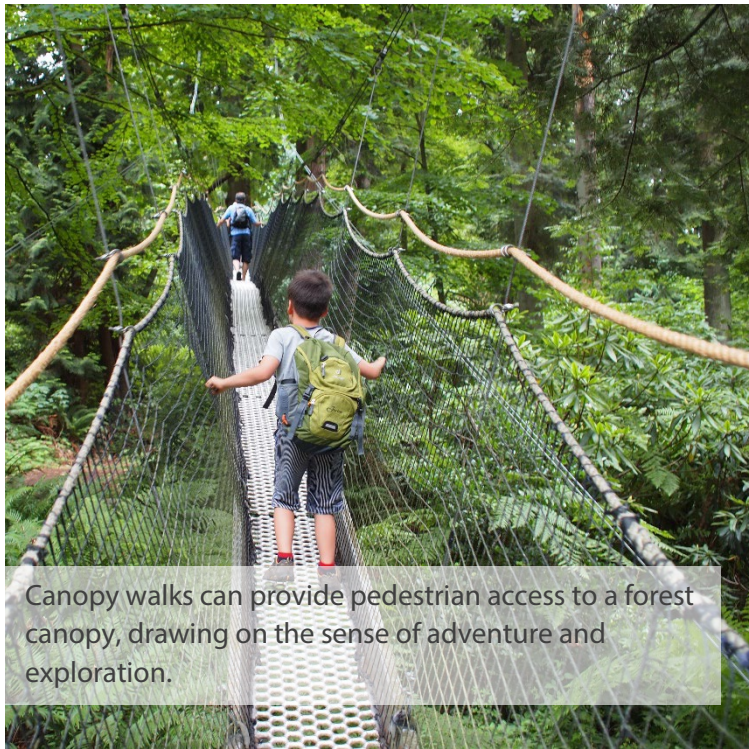
A zipline in Jefferson Park in Seattle uses natural topography changes.



The Penzer Action Playground in British Columbia offers a wooden parkour playground for children.

New Ways to Interact with Nature

More jurisdictions across Oregon are providing programs to introduce people of all ages to nature and wildlife. Sunriver's location and natural landscape are well suited to highlighting nature and exploration in more parks and spaces. These spaces are designed to include interpretive features low-quality nature spaces that allow kids to dig holes, build shelters, get muddy, throw rocks, and explore. Other new ways to interact with nature include canopy walks, tree climbing, or bouldering.



Canopy walks can provide pedestrian access to a forest canopy, drawing on the sense of adventure and exploration.



The Betty Ford Alpine Gardens allow for kids to touch and interact with the landscape around them, letting them use their imagination.



Children are able to add to or modify the forts made out of sticks and branches.

PARK DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Placemaking and Thematic design

The concept of authentic placemaking lies in its people-centered approach to the planning, design, and management of public spaces. This design process involves looking at, listening to, and designing for people who live, work, and play in a particular space, to discover and respond to their unique needs and aspirations. In parks, this can look like adding more comfortable places to sit, incorporating local art and history into play areas, or embedding visual elements into green infrastructure to explain how passive systems can help prevent stormwater runoff.

Thinkscapes

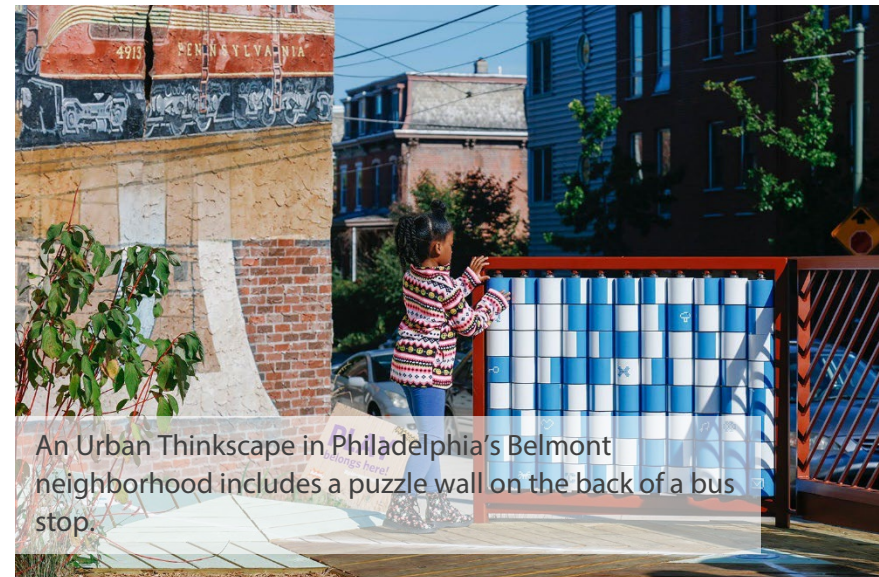
Park agencies are also responding to the need for playful learning into “Thinkscapes”. Puzzles at bus stops stimulate spatial skills; movable parts on park benches become opportunities for exploring language, color, and numbers; and on-site signage and a website connect caregivers to additional information and resources about the links between play and learning.

Sustainable Design

A sustainable park is a park that’s made to preserve natural resources and promote quality of life for the people around it. It uses existing native plants and geographic features to be more efficient, while also enjoyable. Park agencies are increasingly looking for ways to use durable, natural and recycled materials in designs, restore habitat, utilize green roofs, or install solar panels.



Built in a nearby town, the Pirate Ship Playground highlights Vail’s commitment to uniquely themed playgrounds.



An Urban Thinkscape in Philadelphia’s Belmont neighborhood includes a puzzle wall on the back of a bus stop.

Incorporating Community Culture and History into Parks

Local culture provides a sense of identity for rural communities and residents. This identity facilitates common understandings, traditions, and values, all central to the identification of plans of action to improve well-being. Culture contributes to building a sense of local identity and solidarity.

Typical park development can bring a standard, institutional look rather than a cultural look. Jurisdictions can work with local artists, historians, or indigenous tribes to incorporate a sense of place in park design.



Skinner's Butte playground in Eugene includes play replicas of the unique basalt climbing columns at Skinner Butte.



This replica of dinosaur bones in Tualatin allows for climbing and highlights history from millions of years ago.



Some park agencies have set up scavenger hunts related to natural wildlife and resources that incorporate art, like this pika sculpture.

SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

Year-Round Remote Working Location

In response to COVID-19 and the rise in videoconferencing, trends indicate that many people are leaving larger cities to work from more remote locations. These include temporary stays in resort areas for work + recreation, as well as more permanent moves and homeownership in towns, cities, and resort areas that have good Wi-Fi, are near airports, or are a relatively easy commute to nearby cities for workers that have to report to offices only one or two days per week. As part of these trends, park agencies are creating “outdoor work stations” with work tables and seating (rather than picnic tables), Wi-Fi, electrical hookups, shade, and in some cases, nearby amenities (such as food and beverages) and scenic views to promote a stress-free work environment.



Outdoor work station with solar panel covers.

Increasing Multigenerational Families

As family configurations have changed, there is a trend of providing multi-generational, universally accessible parks and facilities so that larger family groups can socialize, and different generations can recreate together. This is changing the style and configuration of picnic tables/picnic areas, seating, the width of trails, the amenities in playgrounds, the mix of facilities offered in parks, etc. Other passive recreation opportunities are growing in popularity and are largely focused on places to enjoy nature.



Improved picnic and barbeque shelter at Compass Park in Bend.

Increasing Diversity in Outdoor Recreation

Park agencies have long responded to demographic diversity by providing a range of services and facilities that cater to different age groups and participant recreation styles. Despite these efforts, non-white populations are less likely to participate in outdoor recreation in the U.S., and this limits the benefits both to minority populations and to the natural areas where outdoor recreation occurs. This rise in awareness has led to the desire to connect historically underrepresented and/or underprivileged groups to outdoor recreation options. Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan data shows that Latino and Asian populations in Oregon are increasingly interested in natural areas, nature and wildlife viewing areas, trails and pathways, and improvements that make parks safer more comfortable places to gather.

An Active, Aging Population

The numbers of active older adults are increasing given the prevalence of the Baby Boomer generation and the fact that people are living longer. This generation of “seniors” have more varied interests than traditional activities such as golf and tennis and are seeking a variety of active opportunities as well as multi-generational activities. Pickleball, soft-surfaced jogging and fitness trails, outdoor fitness stations, and accessible water access are all different ways park jurisdictions are addressing this.



Durable coverings can be added to existing picnic areas.



Hammock hanging area in a Utah state park.

ENVIRONMENTAL TRENDS

Nature in Parks

Park designs are trending away from active uses and more towards passive use parks and restoration of natural systems, whether its woodlands or riparian zones along creek corridors. In many cases, this extends to nature-based play and design using natural materials. These types of spaces can offer comfort in the form of shade while also providing functional benefits like cleaning stormwater or bolstering local wildlife and insect populations. Other examples of natural design incorporated into parks includes pollinator patches, wildlife habitat, butterfly gardens, native plants, and demonstration gardens.



A hummingbird park in Los Angeles provides wildlife habitat and utilizes native plants.



Interpretive panels highlight how stormwater swales enhance ecological function.

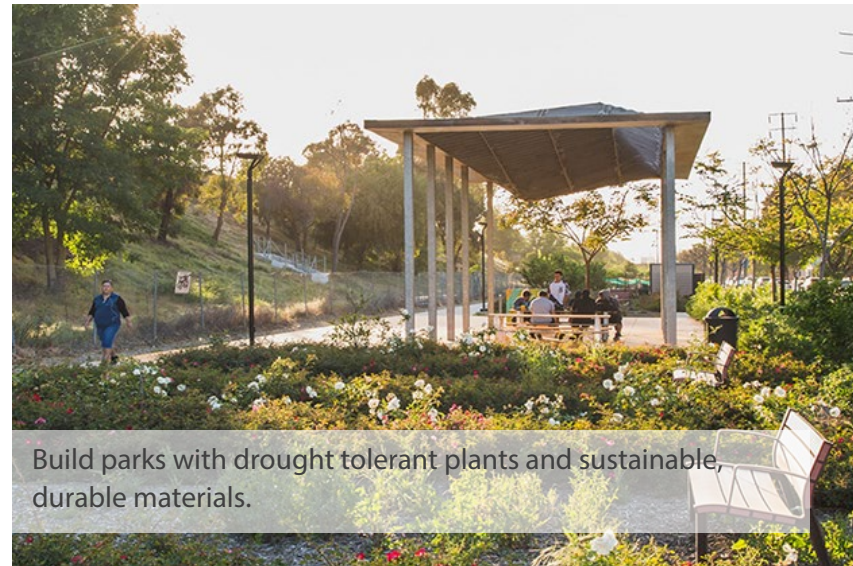


A demonstration wildlife habitat garden in Alpharetta, Georgia showcases nearly 100 native plants.

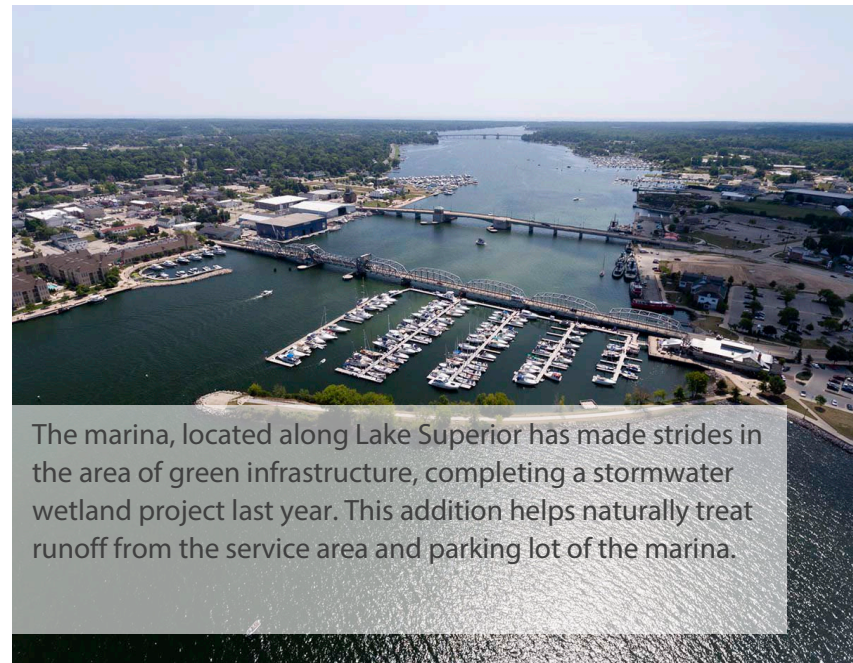
Response to Climate Change

Park agencies are already addressing parks system needs in response to increased fires, droughts, severe weather, warming temperatures and other impacts of climate change. Examples include banning outdoor cooking and campfires, providing more shade, choosing weather-resistant equipment and materials, integrating native and drought-tolerant plantings and smart irrigation systems, providing more indoor recreation programming, extending boat ramps due to decreasing water levels in lakes and rivers, etc. Resort communities are dependent on a healthy environment for recreational amenities that influence development, tourism, and economic viability.

Planning for future park and recreational assets — or the expansion or renovation of existing ones — means planning for climate resiliency. This affects placement, materials, design, and engineering, especially when we're talking about locations near water. Parks, marinas, or other facilities along waterfronts need to withstand changes in water levels. At the same time, recreation facilities need to withstand higher temperatures, longer heatwaves, and severe weather conditions. With limited resources, it can be a heavy lift for park and recreation agencies to incorporate principles of sustainability into their operations, programs, and management.



Build parks with drought tolerant plants and sustainable, durable materials.



The marina, located along Lake Superior has made strides in the area of green infrastructure, completing a stormwater wetland project last year. This addition helps naturally treat runoff from the service area and parking lot of the marina.