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# Healthy Parks Healthy People

Strategic Plan 2008-2011



Department of  
Environment and Conservation

*Our environment, our future*





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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People* is an initiative of the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) aimed at protecting Western Australia's (WA) natural areas by fostering an awareness and appreciation within the community of the health benefits gained from visiting parks. It also incorporates how people can be involved in contributing to the health of these areas through a range of environmental and recreation activities. The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* initiative was first implemented in Australia by Parks Victoria in 2000<sup>1</sup>. Parks Victoria has since invited other agencies around Australia to join them in a leadership role to expand *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* as a national program.

DEC adopted the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program in Western Australia in 2004 and this strategic plan replaces the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People Strategic Plan 2005–2007*. Initial implementation of the program was guided by two internal steering committees and included linking the program to DEC's key nature-based visitor programs and activities in and around Perth and developing promotional materials, such as a logo, brochures, posters, a webpage on DEC's website and a range of articles. The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* logo has been included on other relevant DEC brochures, pamphlets and departmental information, signage and visitor information in parks and on selected external events held on DEC-managed land. Since 2005, the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program has also secured formal partnerships with seven non-government health organisations and two other government agencies and has successfully developed and implemented activities with these partners.

This strategic plan sets the direction for *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* over the next three years and describes the vision and outcomes of the program which are consistent with DEC's core business as documented in the *Corporate Plan 2007–2009*. The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* objective, strategies and strategic actions designed to deliver the anticipated outcomes of the program are also detailed and linked to a number of evaluation measures.

<sup>1</sup> [www.parkweb.vic.gov.au](http://www.parkweb.vic.gov.au)

## 2.0 HEALTHY PARKS, HEALTHY PEOPLE IN CONTEXT

### 2.1 Vision for Healthy Parks, Healthy People

*A community that is aware of the physical, mental, social and conservation benefits of being involved in parks.*

### 2.2 DEC's vision, strategic directions and objectives

DEC manages more than 27 million hectares of national parks, marine parks, regional parks, State forests and other protected areas on behalf of all Western Australians and the statutory bodies in which these areas are vested<sup>2</sup>. As an agency with integrated responsibilities, DEC manages lands and waters for the conservation of the State's rich diversity of native plants, animals and natural ecosystems, and for recreation and visitor opportunities, services and facilities that these areas can sustainably support.

DEC's vision is:

***A healthy, diverse and well-managed Western Australian environment.***

This complements the environmental policy platform of the State Government, which 'recognises and values the important role that the natural environment plays in the unique lifestyle and quality of life enjoyed by Western Australians'<sup>3</sup>.

DEC's *Corporate Plan 2007–2009* provides the strategic directions and objectives that guide all activities undertaken by the department. These include:

- **Conserving biodiversity**

To protect, conserve and, where necessary and possible, restore Western Australia's natural biodiversity.

- **Managing natural resources and promoting environmentally sustainable practices**

To protect, manage and, where necessary and possible, restore Western Australia's natural resources, including land, water and air, and promote the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices in the community, industry and government.

<sup>2</sup> Terrestrial reserves are vested in the Conservation Commission of Western Australia and marine reserves are vested in the Marine Parks and Reserves Authority.

<sup>3</sup> Western Australian Labor Party 2005, *Labor's plans for our environment*, Government of Western Australia, Perth.

- **Leading climate change actions**

To provide leadership in the development and implementation of strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation initiatives to reduce the impact of climate change for Western Australia.

- **Creating a world class parks system**

To generate environmental, social, cultural and economic benefits through the further development of a world class parks system in terms of ecosystem management and visitor facilities and services.

- **Implementing sustainable forest management**

To generate social, economic and cultural benefits from forests while sustaining their biodiversity, health, vitality and productive capacity.

- **Preventing pollution and remediating contamination**

To protect the environment, and people's health and amenity, by ensuring discharges meet approved criteria and contaminated sites are appropriately remediated.

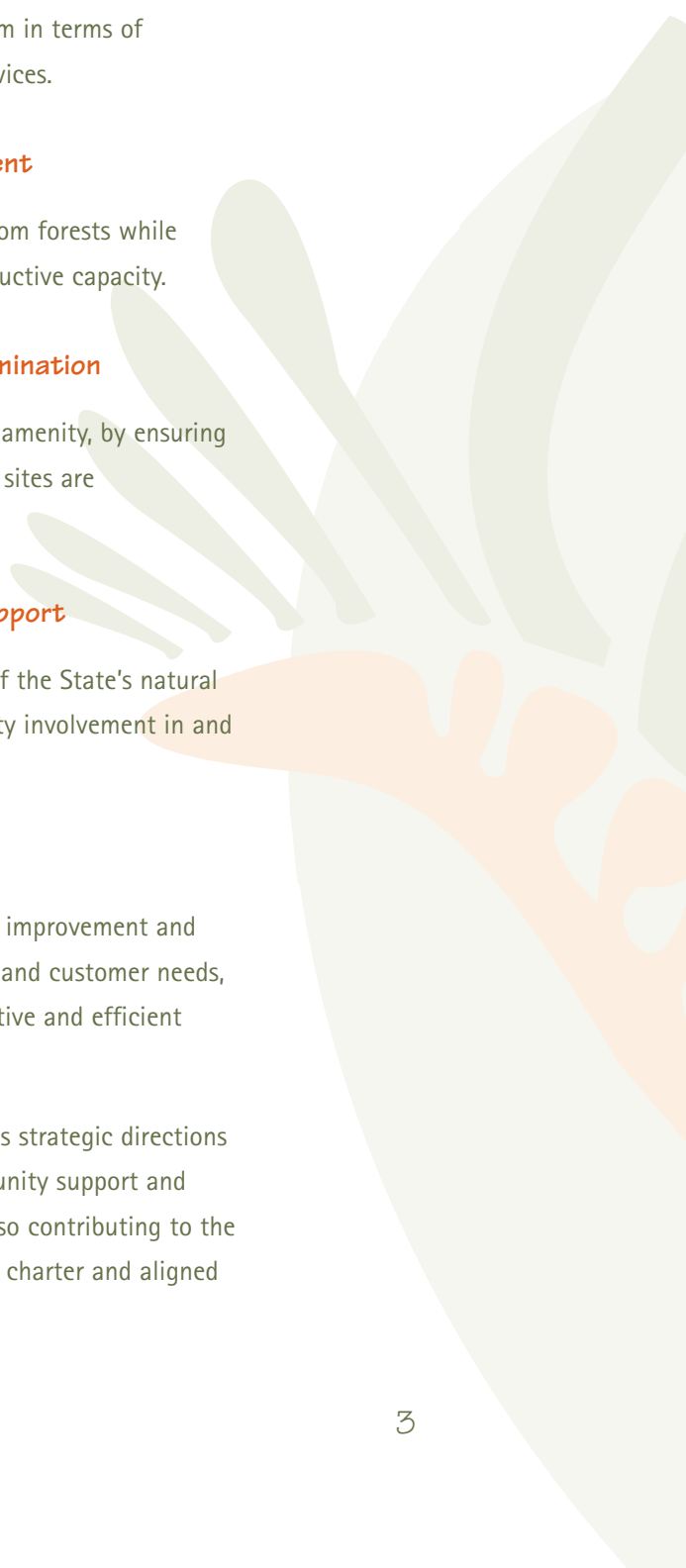
- **Maintaining community involvement and support**

To develop community awareness and appreciation of the State's natural environment and biodiversity and promote community involvement in and support for its protection and conservation.

- **Improving the way we do business**

To foster a positive work culture of trust, continuous improvement and anticipation of environment and conservation issues and customer needs, and deliver core business activities in the most effective and efficient manner.

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People* relates to most of DEC's strategic directions and objectives. The program's aim to increase community support and involvement in the protection of WA's parks while also contributing to the health of the community, is an integral part of DEC's charter and aligned with the State Government's broader agenda.



The State Government's *Better Planning: Better Services* (2003) strategic planning framework outlines the Government's intentions to improve the quality of life and wellbeing of all Western Australians. The aim of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program is consistent with several of the framework's goals. Furthermore, the strategic partnerships that have been formed with other agencies, the health sector and the community through *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* will help the Government deliver its outcomes as outlined in the *Better Planning: Better Services* framework<sup>4</sup>.

The key messages of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program are:

- DEC is responsible for park management in Western Australia and is committed to ensuring there is a healthy, well-managed, world class parks network;
- there are a broad range of individual, community and environmental health benefits that can be derived from a healthy parks system;
- physical activity in the natural environment not only reduces the risk of disease but also improves mental outlook;
- contact with nature in a park setting has significant mental health benefits by promoting mental restoration and relaxation;
- contact with nature facilitates social or community cohesion by bringing people together outdoors and promoting social interaction and a greater sense of community;
- parks keep the environment healthy by improving air quality, reducing erosion, delivering clean drinking water and contributing to clean waterways; and
- a healthy parks network requires a careful balance between environmental and recreational needs.

### 2.3 National and international setting

There is worldwide recognition that healthy outdoor activity is good for people physically, however, research into the relationship between nature and health and wellbeing is still in its infancy. The findings of recent

<sup>4</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet 2003, *Better planning: better services: a strategic planning framework for the Western Australian public sector*, Government of Western Australia, Perth

research from a wide range of disciplines, however, suggest that interaction with the natural environment is beneficial to people's health and wellbeing and the environment. The research findings are sufficient to warrant the repositioning of parks as a positive and fundamental community health resource<sup>5</sup>.

Parks are an ideal catalyst for the integration of environment, society and health by promoting an ecological or holistic approach to human health and wellbeing, based on contact with nature. Appendix A summarises the contribution of parks to the health and wellbeing of people and the environment.

Many developed nations are now successfully implementing programs such as the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* initiative to encourage greater use of parks as a way of protecting these areas and improving individual and societal health. In the USA, the Neighbourhood Parks Council in San Francisco and Los Angeles, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources in Washington and the Anchorage Park Foundation in Alaska have all independently implemented *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* programs. Further, the US National Recreation and Parks Association (NPRPA) and the US Department of Health and Human Services have formed a strategic partnership to implement *Healthy People 2010* which aims to promote community-based health education and activity programs to increase physical activity and reduce obesity, a serious health issue for the country.

The concepts which underpin *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* have also been embraced internationally by a burgeoning range of tertiary institutions, professional bodies and not-for-profit organisations. For example, the Harvard Medical School has created the Centre for Health and the Global Environment, the Australian National University has the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, the University of Illinois has the Landscape and Human Health Laboratory and Deakin University in Melbourne has established the School of Health and Social Development (NiCHE). Within these centres and laboratories, the focus is predominantly on multidisciplinary research dedicated to studying the connection between natural environments and human health. The range of non-government and not-for-profit organisations which promote the link between natural environments and human health include the Trust for Public Lands (USA), Natural England (UK), Forest Research group of the

<sup>5</sup> Maller, C, Townsend, B, Brown, P & St Leger, L 2002, *Healthy parks, healthy people: the health benefits of contact with nature in a park context: a review of current literature*, Social and Mental Health Priority Area Occasional Paper Series, vol. 1, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood



Forestry Commission (UK), OPENspace Research Centre (UK), Environments for Wellbeing (Australia), Projects for Public Space (USA), International Community of Ecopsychology, Doctors for the Environment (Australia), MIND (UK) and the Children and Nature Network, to name a few. In addition, the newly created journal *Ecohealth* also addresses issues of human health and contact with nature by focussing on the integration of knowledge at the interface between ecology and health sciences.

Within Australia, Parks Victoria first launched the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program in 2000 with a ministerial announcement followed by extensive media coverage. The philosophy of the program was supported by all Parks Victoria staff and the agency's website continues to promote the program's messages. Since 2006, the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* initiative has also been adopted by park agencies in South Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. DEC implemented the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program in Western Australia in 2004.

### **3.0 HEALTHY PARKS, HEALTHY PEOPLE IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

#### **3.1 Role of *Healthy Parks, Healthy People***

The slogan *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* is a simple way of communicating to the public that a well-managed parks system leads to greater health of individuals, the community and the environment. As DEC is the lead agency responsible for the conservation of Western Australia's biodiversity and many of the State's unique landscapes, *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* provides the opportunity to encourage community understanding, enjoyment and appreciation of parks, wildlife and the natural environment as well as involvement in their management.

Protected areas around the State attract more than 12 million visits from local, interstate and international tourists, with some 9,700 people volunteering to manage, protect and promote these areas. This represents the existing level of environmental and recreational activity undertaken in protected areas that can contribute to the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* initiative and highlight the relationship between the health of individuals and communities and engagement in activity in parks. It is envisaged that *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* will continue to create greater community support and responsibility for the care of parks and build links with groups do not usually have a natural affinity with the parks system.

### 3.2 Outcomes for DEC

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People* is initially focussed on DEC's regional parks, national parks, marine parks and other protected areas around Perth, where about 75 per cent of the population of Western Australia reside. The range of recreation sites, tourist attractions and visitor activity programs offered in these areas attracts up to five million visits each year. The main reason people visit these natural areas in and around Perth is to engage in active exercise, such as bike riding, bushwalking, dog walking, swimming and other water activities. The key nature-based recreation, education and interpretive opportunities provided at a range of sites close to Perth include the Perth Hills National Parks Centre, Herdsman Lake Wildlife Centre, Yanchep National Park and Penguin Island. There is also a range of volunteer projects and activities undertaken on DEC-managed lands and waters in and around Perth in order to achieve environmental and recreational objectives. All these opportunities represent a considerable resource to continue to implement and further establish and develop *Healthy Parks, Healthy People*.

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People*, in part through the promotion of volunteerism and the significant capacity for constituency building, demonstrates DEC's commitment and concern as an agency dedicated to the wellbeing of people and parks. The outcomes of integrating *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* into DEC's core business include:

- the opportunity to recognise and promote the importance of healthy ecosystems and general environmental health as represented in parks;
- the promotion of applied environmental volunteerism to rehabilitate, restore and protect parks to achieve conservation outcomes;
- the provision of opportunities for the community to recreate in parks through a diversity of activities and park settings organised as part of *Healthy Parks, Healthy People*;
- constituency building through partnerships and sponsorship arrangements with key government agencies, peak health bodies, and environmental, recreational and community organisations, to deliver the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program; and

- complementing DEC's core business of conserving biodiversity, managing natural resources and promoting environmentally sustainable practices, creating a world class parks system, implementing sustainable forest management and maintaining community involvement and support.

### 3.3 Healthy partnerships

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People* provides a unique opportunity to develop partnerships with leading conservation, health and community groups. Partnerships can effectively achieve common goals which serve to benefit the community and parks. The aim of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* partnerships is to work collaboratively to inspire the community to value and use parks to improve their lifestyle and health, and also the health of parks. Ideally, the partnerships will involve ongoing activities and opportunities appropriately cross-promoted by all parties involved.

The health organisations selected to become *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* partners were identified from the Federal Government's National Health Priority Areas (NHPA) – arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions, asthma, cancer control, cardiovascular health, diabetes mellitus, injury prevention and control, and mental health. These seven conditions contribute to about 80 per cent of the financial and social burden of ill health in Australia.

In 2005-06, a customised partnership package was offered to all potential partners as part of a formal partnership agreement. The partners secured by the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* initiative are:

- the National Heart Foundation;
- the Cancer Council of WA;
- Diabetes WA;
- Arthritis Foundation (incorporates Osteoporosis WA);
- *Beyondblue: the national depression initiative*;
- the Asthma Foundation of Western Australia;
- Mentally Healthy WA
- the Office for Seniors Interests and Carers; and
- the Premier's Physical Activity Taskforce.

Although the partnerships are still in a nascent stage, *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* has created links to the partners' websites from the DEC website, is in the process of developing a partners' brochure and has Healthy Parks, Healthy People brochures and other DEC information at partners' offices for distribution to the public. In addition, *Healthy Parks, Healthy People*, in partnership with the Office for Seniors Interests and Carers and the Physical Activity Taskforce, created a park-based activity program for seniors in 2007 and 2008.

*Healthy Parks, Healthy People* has also created linkages with community groups with the concepts of the initiative being incorporated into DEC volunteer information packages and into the school curricula through EcoEducation's *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* school excursion program.

Linkages to further develop the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program are also being considered with:

- tertiary institutions such as Curtin University of Technology's Curtin Sustainable Tourism Centre, which will conduct research into the benefits of the initiative;
- commercial tourism operators licensed to conduct activities in DEC-managed areas;
- the education sector, to further incorporate the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* concepts into a range of learning outcomes in the school curriculum;
- local government agencies, to provide further linkages of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program with local communities; and
- media outlets for promotional opportunities.

### 3.4 Healthy Parks, Healthy People objectives and strategies

The objective and anticipated outcomes of the *Healthy Parks, Healthy People* program will be achieved by implementing the strategies presented in Figure 1. The detailed list of strategies and their associated strategic actions and evaluation measures are shown in Appendix B.



**Figure 1: Healthy Parks, Healthy People vision, objective and strategies**

The *Healthy Parks, Healthy People Strategic Plan 2008–2011* provides the program's direction for the next three years and the framework to develop the program over the longer term. It is intended that events, activities and other promotional opportunities will continue to be identified and implemented over time to help secure healthy parks, healthy people and a healthy future for all Western Australians.

## APPENDIX A

Table 1: Contribution of parks to human and environmental health and wellbeing<sup>6</sup>

Component of health	Contribution of parks
Physical	Provide a variety of settings and infrastructure for various levels of formal and informal sport and recreation, for all skill levels and abilities (e.g. picnicking, bushwalking, running, cycling, ball games, surfing, photography, birdwatching and camping).
Mental	Make nature available for restoration from mental fatigue, solitude and quiet, artistic inspiration and expression and educational development (e.g. natural and cultural history).
Spiritual	Preserve the natural environment for contemplation, reflection and inspiration; invoke a sense of place; facilitate feeling a connection to something beyond human concerns.
Social	Provide settings for people to enhance their social networks and personal relationships from couples and families, to social clubs and organisations, from casual picnicking to event days and festivals.
Environmental	Preserve ecosystems and biodiversity, provide clean air and water, maintain ecosystem function, and foster human involvement in the natural environment (e.g. 'friends of' parks groups).

<sup>6</sup>Maller, C, Townsend, B, Brown, P & St Leger, L 2002, *Healthy parks, healthy people: the health benefits of contact with nature in a park context: a review of current literature*, Social and Mental Health Priority Area Occasional Paper Series, vol. 1, Faculty of Health and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood

## APPENDIX B

**Table 2: The objective, strategies, strategic actions and evaluation measures for the Healthy Parks, Healthy People program 2008–2011**

Objective: TO INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PARKS.		
Strategy (related to DEC Corporate Strategies)	Strategic actions	Evaluation
Continue to encourage the support and ownership of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program by DEC staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> Coordinator to administer the program.</li> <li>• Continue to meet regularly with the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> steering committee that is represented by a cross-section of relevant staff.</li> <li>• Continue to implement <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> promotional, environmental and recreational activities across nominated DEC-managed areas.</li> <li>• Provide regular updates on <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> via <i>DECmatters</i> and Helpdesk broadcast email.</li> <li>• Develop <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> information packages for all staff.</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to inform staff of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program at a range of internal DEC workshops and courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of DEC staff aware of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> <li>• Number of DEC workshops or training courses where the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> initiative is presented.</li> <li>• Number of DEC-managed sites where <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> programs or activities are implemented.</li> <li>• Number of activities badged with the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> logo.</li> </ul>
Continue to identify and develop partnerships to grow the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to develop and consolidate formal partnerships.</li> <li>• Continue to seek out partnership opportunities with community, health and environmental groups to create further linkages of the program with local communities.</li> <li>• Seek out partnership opportunities within the education sector for incorporation of <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> concepts into a range of learning outcomes in the curriculum.</li> <li>• Seek out partnership opportunities with local government to create further linkages of the program with local communities.</li> <li>• Seek out and build partnerships with culturally diverse community groups, including Aboriginal community groups.</li> <li>• Gain support for the program from DEC-licensed tourism operators.</li> <li>• Form external <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> reference group to guide implementation of the program where opportunities and activities involve nominated partners (see Section 3.3 for list of some identified representatives on reference group).</li> <li>• Recruit tertiary institutions to conduct research relating to benefits of the initiative.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of formal and/or informal partnerships.</li> <li>• Number of activities, promotions or opportunities conducted with partners.</li> <li>• Range of promotional outlets or opportunities external to DEC.</li> <li>• Determine level and type of involvement of selected partners in the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> </ul>

Objective: TO INCREASE COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE BENEFITS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONTRIBUTION AND RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN PARKS.

Strategy	Strategic Actions	Evaluation
<p>Continue to develop communication and marketing tools, products and opportunities to build awareness of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update marketing and communication plan for the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> <li>• Continue creating links with the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program and DEC's existing nature-based activity programs such as <i>Nearer to Nature</i>, DEC's marine education and community monitoring programs, the Urban Nature program, DEC Bush Rangers activities, the EcoEducation program, Aboriginal cultural heritage programs, organised activities on the Bibbulmun Track and Munda Biddi Trail, and the range of community and recreation events and activities held in national, regional and marine parks and other natural areas in and around Perth.</li> <li>• Continue to identify and expand channels to communicate the objective of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program through a range of DEC interpretive media (such as guided walks, talks, signage, brochures, posters, displays and electronic media).</li> <li>• Maintain a <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> webpage on DEC's website with links to partners and relevant DEC activities and programs.</li> <li>• Incorporate the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> brand across print and electronic media linked to the program.</li> <li>• Seek out external print and electronic media opportunities such as community newspapers, radio, TV and internet.</li> <li>• Determine and implement cross-promotional opportunities with partners such as events, displays, print and electronic media.</li> <li>• Create new events, activities or opportunities specific to the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> <li>• Encourage community awareness, involvement and engagement in parks through volunteerism.</li> <li>• Investigate sponsorship opportunities for mutual benefit and revenue generation.</li> <li>• Identify and appoint a suitable personality as patron for the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement and participation levels at <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> promoted activity programs and events.</li> <li>• Number of new events or activities specific to the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> <li>• Survey results showing community awareness of the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> concepts and the health benefits of park visitation.</li> <li>• Visitor satisfaction with parks, experience, activities or events relating to the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> program.</li> <li>• Number of unique visits to the <i>Healthy Parks, Healthy People</i> webpage.</li> </ul>



