

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Rhode Island's 2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) is a roadmap for creating a more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive outdoor recreation system over the next ten years. Shaped by extensive public engagement, including input from more than 3,500 Rhode Islanders, the SCORP outlines clear strategies and actions to create an outdoor recreation system that serves all Rhode Islanders – a system that meets evolving recreation needs, addresses existing barriers to participation, and protects the state's beloved outdoor spaces.

While gauging the supply and demand of our existing outdoor recreation assets, this plan robustly examined the reasons that keep the public from making the most of Rhode Island's recreation opportunities. Several barriers were identified, including:

- Lack of information about where to go and what can be found at each facility;
- Private ownership and overcrowding, especially at coastal sites;
- Limited facilities with universal access to amenities;
- Cost;
- Facilities that did not meet expectations due to lack of amenities, maintenance issues, and feelings of unsafety;
- Lack of walkable, bikeable, transit friendly options for reaching parks and other outdoor recreation resources; and
- Lack of opportunities for culturally relevant activities.

To address these barriers, this plan recommends expanded access to and within facilities, strategies to provide outdoor recreation experiences with desired amenities, and approaches to improve maintenance and feelings of safety. Specific strategies include:

- Showcase and provide better information about Rhode Island's existing facilities that provide in-demand amenities and experiences;
- Create more easily accessible outdoor recreation facilities with amenities that are well-maintained and staffed; and
- Provide family friendly programming and guided introductions to outdoor experiences at these facilities.

Also revealed by this planning process is the overwhelming demand for outdoor recreation opportunities by Rhode Islanders and tourists alike. This demand places great pressure on those individuals and organizations maintaining these treasured spaces – an imposition often difficult to manage given limited financial and staffing support and finite outdoor recreation assets. To confront this challenge, creating a culture of care and better maintenance practices are recommended.

This plan also calls for the removal of barriers to participation so more Rhode Islanders can have quality outdoor recreation experiences while the state's natural assets are preserved for future generations. Five key priority areas guide the plan:

## **1. Sustainable by Design**

Residents voiced concerns about the ongoing maintenance and condition of parks, beaches, trails, and recreation facilities. The SCORP promotes a culture of shared responsibility, clear standards for facility maintenance, strategic long-term maintenance planning, and strengthened public/private partnerships to ensure the state's outdoor resources remain safe, welcoming, and environmentally sound.

## **2. Tides Change, So Must We**

Rhode Island's recreation facilities and programs must adapt to changing demographics and preferences. Residents highlighted the need for spaces supporting family-friendly, multi-generational, and culturally diverse

activities such as flexible community spaces, paddle sports, biking, disc golf, and nature-based educational programs. The SCORP prioritizes creating versatile facilities that reflect evolving interests and community traditions.

### **3. Recreation for All**

Equitable access is fundamental. Many Rhode Islanders face barriers including high fees at beaches, limited transportation options, safety concerns, and facilities not designed for all abilities. This SCORP emphasizes inclusive fee structures, expanded public transit and pedestrian connections, universal design standards, improved signage and lighting, and targeted infrastructure investments to create safer, more accessible recreation experiences statewide.

High demand at state beaches, often at capacity early in the day, highlights the need to promote and improve alternative coastal recreation options. This includes developing and directing visitors toward lesser-known sites and new recreational areas, such as improved water access points along Narragansett Bay.

### **4. Gateway Experiences**

Some Rhode Islanders hesitate to explore the outdoors due to a perceived lack of safety and comfort. This plan suggests the creation of guided introductions or “gateway” experiences as a way to get people comfortable with the outdoors. These can include both the promotion of existing high-amenity outdoor recreation facilities - well-manicured and maintained facilities with support amenities such as restrooms and weather shelters that have park staff present - as well as individual staff or volunteer-led outdoor experiences at outdoor recreation facilities.

### **5. Shout It from the Treetops**

Many Rhode Islanders are unaware of the full range of outdoor recreation opportunities available. Enhanced communication strategies, including a central online hub, multilingual outreach, improved signage, and strengthened community partnerships, will ensure all residents can easily discover and enjoy Rhode Island’s outdoor resources.

### **Establishing an Office of Outdoor Recreation**

Central to achieving these priorities is the recommended creation of a dedicated Office of Outdoor Recreation. This office would coordinate statewide initiatives, enhance interagency collaboration, streamline resource allocation, and promote partnerships between state, municipal, private, and non-profit stakeholders.

Rhode Island’s 2025 SCORP reaffirms the state’s commitment to outdoor recreation as integral to public health, environmental sustainability, economic vitality, and community wellbeing. Guided by robust public input, this plan positions Rhode Island to deliver accessible, inclusive, and sustainable outdoor recreation experiences now and into the future.