



The
City
Project

HEALTHY PARKS, SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES: Green Access and Equity for Riverside County



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This policy report is a summary for Riverside County of The City Project's 2011 report, *Healthy Parks, Schools, and Communities: Mapping Green Access and Equity for Southern California*, which maps and analyzes green access and equity in nine counties in Southern California—Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, Kern, Santa Barbara and Imperial—using narrative and legal analyses, geographic information system (GIS) mapping tools, and demographic and economic data.

Unlike other studies, which plot either green space or population, the maps in this report plot green space in relation to population and other metrics that indicate accessibility, such as distance to the park. This report also provides multidisciplinary analyses of the vital benefits of parks and other green space to people and the environment. It describes the consequences of disparities in green access and the benefits that could be reaped in “park poor” and “income poor” communities if resources were fairly allocated. It concludes with recommendations for equitable investments in green space in Riverside County and throughout California and the nation.

The goal of this work is to combine research and analyses with effective outreach to provide concerned citizens, community groups, elected and other government officials, planners, funders and other stakeholders with the best available information upon which to prioritize actions and decisions that positively impact green access and quality of life for all.

Together we can help children be active, eat well, stay healthy and do their best in school and life.

*For more information on green access and equity in Riverside County and Southern California, or to download a copy of this summary or the full nine county policy report, please visit www.cityprojectca.org. **This report is available in English and Spanish.***

ABOUT THE CITY PROJECT

The mission of The City Project is to achieve equal justice, democracy and livability for all.

The City Project carries out its mission by influencing the investment of public resources to achieve results that are equitable, enhance human health and the environment, and promote economic vitality for all communities. Focusing on parks and recreation, playgrounds, schools, health, and transit, we help bring people together to define the kind of community where they want to live and raise children. The City Project works with diverse coalitions in strategic campaigns to shape public policy and law, and to serve the needs of the community as defined by the community.

The City Project is a nonprofit legal and policy advocacy organization established in 2000 with a grant from the Ford Foundation. Over the past decade, The City Project has worked and published extensively on equal access to parks and green space, physical activity and physical education, transportation, and related issues at the intersection of social justice, sustainable regional planning and human health.

AUTHORS

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Mr. García is a nationally recognized leader in the urban parks, physical education and environmental justice movements and has received numerous awards, including the 2010 Presidential Citation from the American Public Health Association for his dedication and contribution to the field of public health. He received a Bachelor's Degree in Philosophy from Stanford University and a J.D. from Stanford Law School, where he served on the Board of Editors of the Stanford Law Review.

Seth H. Strongin, Director of Policy and Research, The City Project

Mr. Strongin analyzes policy, data and social science research related to public health, the natural environment and civil rights. He writes policy reports on physical education, park access, human health and the built environment. Mr. Strongin received a Bachelor's Degree in Biology from American University and a Master's Degree in Environmental Science and Management from the Bren School at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Anahid Brakke, Principal, Heed Nonprofit Consulting

Ms. Brakke works to advance the social justice efforts of nonprofits and foundations. She specializes in creating publications that make technical information or complex issues accessible and relevant to the public.

Amanda Recinos, Associate Director of GreenInfo Network and a GIS specialist, prepared the maps and demographics analyses in this report and has worked with The City Project for over ten years.

Cover photo: California Citrus State Historic Park, City of Riverside | Creative Commons – Rachel Moore

The City Project

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View of City of Riverside from Sycamore Canyon Park | Creative Commons – Lori McCollum

FOREWORD BY THE CALIFORNIA ENDOWMENT

The California Endowment is a foundation committed to improving the health of all Californians, especially those in underserved communities. The most important thing we have learned is that where we live has an enormous impact on our health. Being able to breathe clean air, to send our kids to school without fear of violence, to have a convenient place to buy fresh foods, to live near a park where we can walk and play – these are the things that keep us healthy.

The California Endowment has worked with The City Project for many years to broaden access to parks and open space in underserved communities, and to fight childhood obesity by guaranteeing that students get enough physical education at school.

Childhood obesity is an epidemic, and The California Endowment believes all California families deserve to live in healthy environments with access to opportunities for physical activity. Improving green access, as called for in this report by The City Project, is a critical strategy in building healthy communities. We must make it easier for kids and adults to be more active by eliminating the disparities in access to green space and physical activity.

The California Endowment funded a study in late 2010 that shows nearly all segments of the voting population view childhood obesity as a very serious problem in the state, with African-Americans, Latinos and low-income voters particularly concerned. Of those surveyed, 89% support requiring physical education classes for four years in high school. A similar percentage (88%) favors requiring school gyms, tracks, playgrounds and fields to be open to children when school is not in session. And 87% back the idea of cities making street improvements so that it is easier to bike, ride and walk. These are all recommendations that you will find in this report by The City Project.

This report includes images from “Picturing Health,” a photo documentary project of Venice Arts sponsored by the Endowment that explores health issues as seen through the eyes of teens in diverse Southern and Central California communities, including the Coachella Valley in Riverside County.

Whether you are a parent, concerned citizen, educator, elected official or activist, we hope this report will be useful in your efforts to make your community a healthy environment.

Sincerely,

Anthony Iton, M.D., J.D., M.P.H.

Senior Vice President, Healthy Communities
The California Endowment

The work of The City Project is made possible in part by generous support from The California Endowment.

The California Endowment, a private, statewide health foundation, was established in 1996 to expand access to affordable, quality health care for underserved individuals and communities and to promote fundamental improvements in the health status of all Californians. For more information, please visit www.calendow.org.

PICTURING HEALTH: COACHELLA VALLEY



Untitled, courtesy of Celeste Lopez (age 13) and Venice Arts



Untitled, courtesy of Elizabeth Curiel (age 17) and Venice Arts

“Picturing Health” is a photo documentary project of Venice Arts that explores health issues as seen through the eyes of teens in eight diverse Southern and Central California communities. “Picturing Health: Coachella Valley” features photographs by ten teens living in Coachella, Mecca, and Indio in the eastern Coachella Valley of Riverside County. Coachella teens focused on fruit pickers, unhealthy food at schools, gangs and violence, healthcare access, teen pregnancy, and unsafe parks. They also documented their communities’ strengths, such as a new health clinic. The California Endowment sponsored the project, and the Boys and Girls Club of Coachella Valley was the collaborative partner.

The mission of Venice Arts is to ignite youths’ imagination, mentor their creativity, and expand their sense of possibility through high quality, accessible media-based arts education programs. Venice Arts also serves as a catalyst for people of all ages, living in low-income or underrepresented communities, to create and share personal and community stories through photography, film, and multi-media. See www.venice-arts.org



Untitled, courtesy of Elizabeth Curiel (age 17) and Venice Arts



Soccer Goal, Coachella Valley | Untitled, courtesy of Alexandra Galvez (age 17) and Venice Arts

DEFINING GREEN SPACE AND ACCESS

Green Space: “Green space” refers to all parks, natural open spaces, beaches, school fields, trails and recreational facilities. This term is applied broadly even though some of these areas may not have much greenery. The National Recreation and Parks Association has recommended *ten acres of park space per 1,000 residents*.

Green Access: The presence of green space alone is not enough. In order to truly benefit from these resources, residents must have access to green space. Many factors determine the accessibility of green space:

- Distance and time from green space to where people live, whether green space can be reached without a car, and obstacles such as highways.
- Location of natural geographic features and walkability.
- Whether a park is safe, or perceived as safe, by local residents.
- Physical appearance, condition and recreational amenities.
- Whether green space is open to the public, hours of operation and cost of admission.

Park Poor: Refers to any geographic area that provides less than *three acres of green space per 1,000 residents*, as defined by California law. Three acres is the size of approximately one and one half soccer or football fields.

Income Poor: Refers to a median household income of \$47,331 per year or less, as defined by California law.

Complete Streets Improve Green Access

“Complete streets” ensure safe and convenient access to public transit and promote active transportation, both of which can help people get to parks, schools and pools without a personal vehicle. Gas tax and public transit funding can improve green access when invested in new buses, extended transit services, and active transportation resources such as bicycle racks, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and trails. Programs such as *Safe Routes to School* can make bicycling and walking to school safer, thus encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age.

Photo by Tim Wagner for Partnership for the Public's Health (twagnerimages.com)





Joshua Tree National Park | Creative Commons - Vicente Villamón

GREEN ACCESS IN RIVERSIDE COUNTY TODAY

Demographics

At 7,200 square miles, Riverside is the fourth largest county in California. There are 28 incorporated cities in the county, more than 40 unincorporated communities, and 12 Native American reservations. The City of Riverside is the largest city and the county seat.

Nearly 200 miles across from east to west, Riverside County is geographically and demographically diverse. The western portion of the county is the most densely populated part of Riverside County and is often referred to as part of the Inland Empire, along with parts of San Bernardino County.

With 2,189,641 residents as of the 2010 Census, the population of Riverside County has grown by more than 41% in the past decade — more than four times the state average — and an astounding 87% over the past twenty years. Riverside's racial and ethnic composition has also changed considerably. As of 2010, people of color are now the majority of the population at approximately 60%. Now accounting for 45% of the county's total population, the Latino population has grown by 78% since 2000. At the same time, the non-Hispanic white population has dropped from 51% to slightly less than 40%. The county's Asian and Pacific Islander population has jumped from 3.8% to 6% during this time, while the proportions of African Americans (6%) and Native Americans (0.5%) have remained relatively constant.

Hit hard by the recession, the Inland Empire's poverty rate surged 31% from 2007-2009. Riverside County's estimated 2009 poverty rate was 13.9%, with children and their families suffering the worst. Nearly one out of five children age 0-17 lives below the federal poverty level.

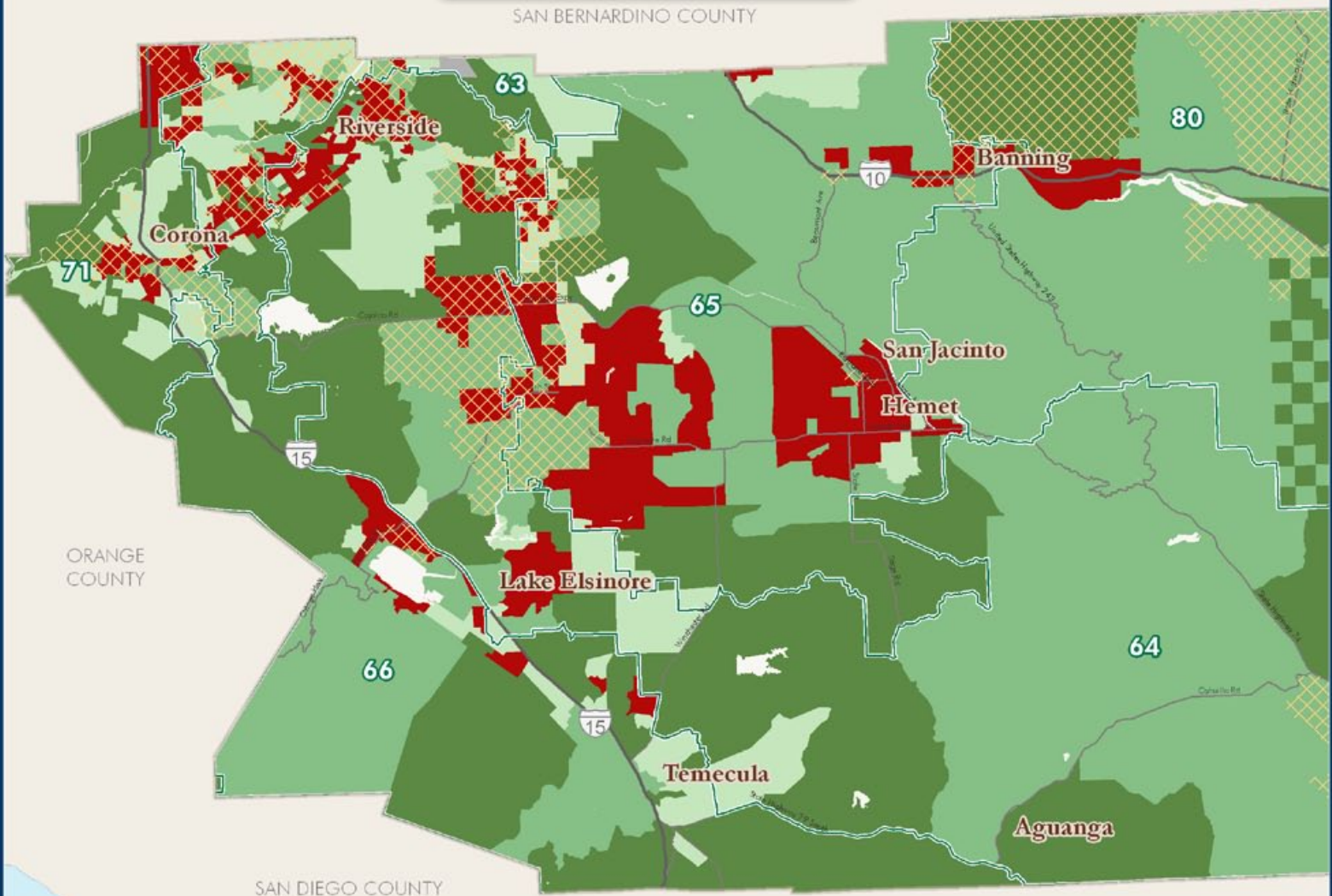
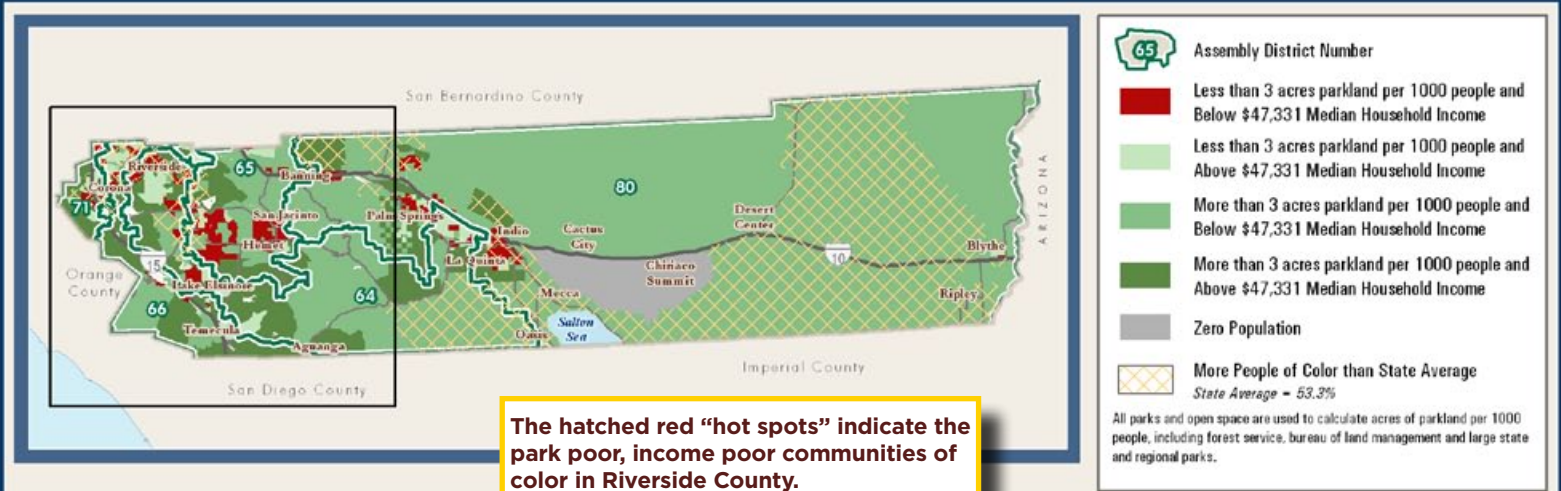
Green Access

There are nearly three million acres of parks and open space within Riverside County. Green access, however, varies widely depending on where you live within the county.

Huge areas of federal, state, and county-managed natural open space, such as San Bernardino National Forest, Cleveland National Forest, Joshua Tree National Park and Mount San Jacinto State Park, are a wonderful resource for serious nature-seekers but most are located far from the major population centers and require access to a vehicle, as well as planning and some expertise.

Wide disparities exist in terms of access to local parks, as well. Many communities in Riverside County are park poor, with less than three acres of green space per 1,000 residents. This is particularly true for places with disproportionately high concentrations of people of color, such as the Coachella Valley, Moreno Valley and the City of Riverside. Park space also tends to be insufficient in the communities that were built out before the development boom of the past few decades. As more working class families moved to Riverside County in search of jobs, the population in older neighborhoods swelled but public resources for parks and recreation were not invested proportionally to the growth.

Some progress to correct inequities in park access has been made over the past few years, but more needs to be done. Riverside County's 2008 General Plan refers explicitly to the need to enhance park access. Recently the county and individual city governments have been trying to implement policies that encourage healthy lifestyles. In April 2011, the County Board of Supervisors passed a Healthier Communities amendment to the County General Plan that is designed to influence new development projects to include parks, bike paths, trails, and other open spaces.





WHY DO PARKS MATTER?

Parks and school fields promote the simple joys of playing; bringing people together; improved physical, psychological, and social health; youth development and improved academics; positive alternatives to gangs, crime, and drugs; economic justice including local green jobs; conservation values of climate justice, clean air, water, and land, and habitat protection; art, culture and historic preservation; spiritual values in protecting the earth and its people; and sustainable regional planning. Equal justice and democracy underlie these values.



There was one little girl at the “Festival of Life” who was wearing a mask because she had problems breathing.

Coachella Valley | Untitled photo and caption courtesy of Alexandra Galvez (age 17) and Venice Arts

WHY PARKS MATTER: PHYSICAL HEALTH

Children of color living in poverty without access to a car suffer from the worst access to parks and school fields in Riverside County. Children and adults who live in communities with parks, school fields, pools and other recreational facilities are more physically active than those who lack access to these resources. One study found that in low-income areas, people who live within one mile of a park exercised 38% more than people who lived farther away.

Seventy percent of overweight adolescents go on to become overweight adults. With 30% of seventh graders in Riverside County being overweight in 2004, it is not surprising that 61% of adults are also overweight or obese. As is the case throughout California, the rates of obese and overweight children are highest for Latinos and African Americans. Children of color are especially vulnerable because they disproportionately live in communities that lack opportunities for physical activity

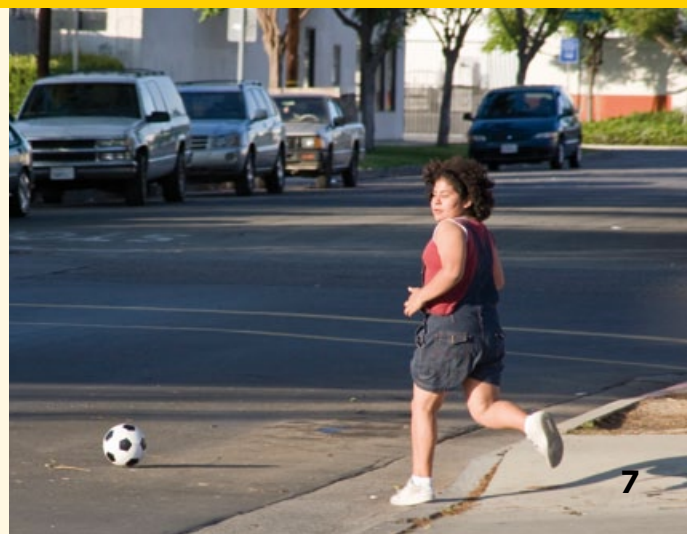
and access to nutritious food. According to the County Health Officer, Riverside County has the 7th worst physical environment conducive to good health of the 58 counties in California and ranks 35th in its rate of adult obesity. There is a clear need for increased physical activity and healthier eating in the county.

Health problems associated with people being overweight or obese, in combination with general lack of physical activity, are estimated to cost California \$41.2 billion annually. Parks, schools, physical activity and healthy eating are integral parts of a comprehensive approach to healthcare and the built environment. As the nation struggles to come to grips with spiraling costs of medical care, improving access to green space and recreational opportunities and increasing physical education and healthy eating in schools should be embraced as forms of preventive medicine.

Children Need Safe Places to Play

Children of color disproportionately live in communities of concentrated poverty without enough safe places to play in parks and schools, and without access to cars or an adequate transit system to reach parks and school fields in other neighborhoods. Children with the worst access to parks and open space tend to suffer from the highest levels of obesity. It is critical that green space is accessible to all Riverside County residents, regardless of race and ethnicity or economic standing.

Photo by Tim Wagner for Partnership for the Public's Health (twagnerimages.com).



3 WAYS to INCREASE Children's Physical Activity

1. QUALITY EDUCATION INCLUDING PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Evidence shows lifelong benefits of physical activity. Physically fit students tend to do better academically. Students who regularly take part in physical activity, including team sports, tend to stay in school longer and are less likely to get involved with gangs, drugs, crime and violence. Increasing physical education and activity in school can improve academic achievement and graduation rates.

Good schools, a good education and the full development of the child includes making physical education a part of the core curriculum. California public schools are required by state law to provide an average of 20 minutes of physical education per day in elementary school and 40 minutes per day in middle and high school. In addition, civil rights laws require equal access to physical education in public schools to alleviate unfair health and activity disparities based on race, color or national origin.

Increased pressure to meet academic standards, as measured by standardized tests, has led in part to a decline in physical education classes. Half of the California school districts audited from 2005-2009 failed to provide the required minutes of physical education.

Physical education quality and quantity are particularly deficient for less affluent students and those in racial and

ethnic groups most at risk for overweight and obesity. Many of these students do not have enough safe places to play in their neighborhoods, so physical education may be their best opportunity for physical activity. Only 33% of all fifth graders in Riverside County met minimum physical fitness standards in the 2009-2010 school year, compared to 29% statewide. A closer examination reveals wide disparities between racial and ethnic groups. In all grades assessed, fewer Latino children met physical fitness standards than the countywide average. Conversely, a higher percentage of their non-Hispanic white peers achieved the same standards than the county average for each grade.



Photo by Tim Wagner for Partnership for the Public's Health (twagnerimages.com)

2. IMPROVE PARK SAFETY - REAL AND PERCEIVED

Access to safe parks and other places for physical activity has an important effect on whether children meet recommendations for physical activity — and whether they get any activity at all. Fear of crime is a major deterrent to the use of parks. In a nationwide study of urban areas, 48% of Latino children and 39% of African American children were kept inside as much as possible because of parents' perception there were no safe places to play in their neighborhoods, compared to 25% of non-Hispanic white children and 24% of Asian children.

Parks and recreation programs can play an important role in reducing crime and violence and making neighborhood parks safer. Programs that are designed to engage high risk youth or that provide recreational activities and support services during extended park hours can have a positive impact on local communities. One good example, *Summer Night Lights* in Los Angeles County, has been shown to reduce gang-related homicide by 40% in targeted neighborhoods.

In densely populated urban areas that may lack space for creating new parks, making existing parks safer and seem safer may be one of the best ways to improve green access.



Children are kept inside when parents feel neighborhood parks are unsafe.

3. SHARED USE AGREEMENTS

Joint use agreements between schools and parks can help alleviate the lack of places to play and recreate, while making optimal use of scarce land and public resources. Keeping schools, pools and parks open to the public after school, on weekends and during breaks provides places for physical activity.



Jurupa Aquatic Center, City of Riverside | Photo courtesy of Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District.

Staying Active in Extreme Summer Heat

An important consideration regarding access to recreation and physical activity in Riverside County is the extreme daytime heat during much of the year. In July and August, the average high is over 100° F. It may not be advisable for residents to engage in outdoor physical activity for prolonged periods of time. It is important that, along with more outdoor playing fields, indoor recreational facilities and pools are also built and have shared use agreements. Developing sites that meet the needs of the community is an important part of improving green access and increasing physical activity.

The Cove Jurupa Aquatic Center, a joint use facility in the disproportionately Latino Jurupa Valley, opened in May 2011. The 7.5-acre complex is designed with facilities for the local school district, such as a competition swimming and diving pool, and other facilities, including a water park, for public use. The project is a creative partnership between the Riverside County Regional Park and Open-Space District, the Economic Development Agency and Jurupa Unified School District. However, while the public has access to the swimming pool for \$3 a day or less when it is not being used by the school district, the usage fees for the other parts of the complex are significantly higher. Jurupa residents do not receive a discount for single-day admission to these parts of the complex, even though it is partially funded through local property taxes. In order to truly benefit all of the residents of the Jurupa Valley, regardless of socioeconomic status, this facility should offer local residents discounted admission.



Blythe Intaglios | Creative Commons – Chris M (cm195902)

WHY PARKS MATTER: CULTURAL HERITAGE

Parks provide important places to celebrate diverse culture, heritage and art. People of color and women have been vital to the creation and history of Riverside County, and this should be reflected with its cultural, historical and artistic monuments.

Native Americans inhabited most of California for more than 10,000 years prior to European contact. The indigenous peoples of what is now Riverside County included the Serrano, Luiseño, Cupeño, Chemehuevi and Cahuilla Indians. Ancient petroglyphs and other historical artifacts are found throughout Riverside County and on the twelve Native American reservations located within the county lines.

The Blythe Intaglios, also known as the “Giant Figures” (photo above), are found on the ground near the City of Blythe along the Colorado River Flood Plain. The intaglios, or geoglyphs, were created by scraping away layers of darker rocks or pebbles to reveal lighter soil. The largest figure is nearly 167 feet long, so these “gravel pictographs” are best viewed from the air. Believed to be 450 to 10,000 years old, the total set of geoglyphs includes several dozen figures and a labyrinth. The Blythe Intaglios were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975. The three figures that lie within Riverside County are California Historical Landmark No. 101.

Other California Historical Landmarks in Riverside County include Native American rock art that is carved (petroglyphs) or drawn (pictographs). The petroglyphs carved by the Luiseño Indians who lived near the hot springs in Temescal Canyon (CA Historical Landmark No. 187) are characterized by geometric designs such as diamonds, zigzags, straight lines and dot patterns. Unfortunately, many of the petroglyphs have been damaged by vandals.

Without adequate maintenance and security, Native American cultural resources may be vandalized or destroyed, erasing an important historic link with indigenous California and the natural environment.

Pochea Indian Village

Pochea was one of a cluster of Indian villages forming the very large settlement of Pahsitnah, which extended along the ridge east and west of Ramona Bowl. Pahsitnah was thriving when the Spanish first passed by in 1774. A tragic story tells of the natives contracting smallpox from Europeans and a terrible epidemic spreading. Survivors fled to the area that became the Soboba Indian Reservation in 1883, established by an Executive Order that set aside more than 3,000 acres of land for the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians for their permanent occupation and use.

Pochea Indian Village, CA Historic Landmark 104 | Creative Commons – Trader Chris





Lake Perris State Recreation Area | Creative Commons - Knot

WHY PARKS MATTER: PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

Children have the right to the simple joys of playing in safe parks and school fields. Fun is not frivolous. The United Nations recognizes a child's right to play as a fundamental human right.

Spending time in parks can reduce irritability and impulsivity. Parks promote intellectual and physical development in children and teenagers by providing a safe and engaging environment to interact and develop social skills, language and reasoning abilities, and muscle strength and coordination.

Green space provides needed reprieve from the everyday pressures that lead to mental fatigue. This improves the health of adults and children by reducing stress and depression and improving focus, attention span, productivity and recovery from illness.

Researchers have also found associations between contact with the natural environment and improvements in the functioning of children with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

Parks provide a place for social support and an opportunity for self-determination, both important factors in reducing stress, lowering anxiety, and improving a person's overall mood. This is true for children and adults, though it is particularly significant for older adults. Social support is derived from the friendship or companionship that comes from the shared experience of participating in activities in a park with other people. Research has also shown that people living in public housing who have contact with natural environments, such as trees, are more likely to make changes that will improve their lives.



Recreation Builds Character

The Jurupa Valley Boxing Club is a recreation program that provides low-income youth of the Rubidoux community in the City of Riverside with low-cost boxing classes. The Boxing Club operates in a 4,500-square-foot-gymnasium, which was built with redevelopment funds. After the club experienced financial struggles in 2008, the County took over responsibility of handling the operating costs and now leases the building to the boxing club for \$1 a year. The Boxing Club upholds the idea that recreation not only promotes physical health, but also builds character and provides positive alternatives to juvenile delinquency and gang involvement.

Photo courtesy of County of Riverside Parks and Open-Space District



Glen Avon Heritage Park | Courtesy of Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

WHY PARKS MATTER: COMMUNITY PRIDE

Parks satisfy our need for social interaction by enticing residents into public spaces with trees, greenery, and places for sports and active recreation. People from different racial and ethnic groups use parks differently, constructing meanings for natural space based on their own values, cultures, histories and traditions. According to a UCLA study of cultural differences in the use of urban parks, parks are primarily social gathering places for Latinos. African Americans, more than any other racial group, tend to engage in team sports in parks. Non-Hispanic whites tend to value a park for its passive qualities – its greenness, landscaping and natural elements – and tend to engage in solitary, self-oriented uses. Asian American (specifically, Chinese) families were rare in parks studied. This does not mean that Asians do not value parks; it may reflect the failure of the parks to meet the needs of the Asian American community.

Park and recreation plans, programs, and funding should provide a balanced park and recreation system that offers active recreation with soccer fields, baseball parks, basketball and tennis courts, running tracks or bike paths, as well as passive recreation with wilderness areas, walking trails or picnic areas.

Parks and recreation programs that serve the diverse needs of diverse users bring people together in the public commons for the public good. Social interaction and neighborhood spaces have been identified as key facets of healthy communities. These factors promote social networks, social support systems, and social integration, all of which contribute to a sense of belonging and community.

Neighborhood workdays for green space maintenance and improvement foster common purpose and sense of ownership and pride among residents. Parks become a source of community building, pride, and inspiration for further neighborhood improvements and revitalization.

Park poor neighborhoods miss out on the many opportunities green space provides to increase civic engagement and enhance community well-being.

Community Restores Neighborhood After Toxic Waste Incident

After decades of living near the Stringfellow Acid Pits — a toxic waste dump that flooded and contaminated the local water system in 1978 — the Glen Avon community filed a class action lawsuit against thirteen parties, including the companies responsible for the toxic waste dumping. Mel Weiss, the attorney who represented the community, made a personal donation of \$225,000 to revitalize the area by purchasing land for Glen Avon Heritage Park. The Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice worked with local residents to plan and build the 13-acre park that boasts a garden, hiking trails, soccer field, volleyball and basketball courts, and a water playground.





San Geronio Pass Wind Farm in the Coachella Valley | The City Project

WHY PARKS MATTER: ECONOMIC VITALITY

If you want parks, work for jobs — and justice. Green space is an economic stimulus that creates jobs, boosts local businesses and raises property values. Improving green space and green access can benefit local, state and national economies in the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression.

The New Deal's Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) is a best practice example for government agencies today to get the nation back to work, while improving green access and quality of life for all. The CCC created 3 million new jobs, established 8,000 new parks including 800 state parks, and planted 2 billion trees. Visits to national parks increased 600 percent from 3.5 million people in 1933, to 21 million by 1941. Other public work projects built 40,000 new schools. Parks and recreation programs and green infrastructure projects — such as developing and enhancing parks or park accessibility via public transit, walkways and bike paths — can be sources of green collar jobs and job training for local workers. Giving priority in contract selection to local small businesses and apprenticeship programs can help ensure benefits are fairly distributed.

Parks are essential to community development and revitalization efforts, drawing new visitors to existing businesses and new businesses to the area. Parks and recreation also help strengthen and stimulate the economy through the tourism and hospitality industries and recreation-related sales of clothing, equipment, fees and services. Studies from around the country have shown that parks can generate as much as \$5 in revenue for every \$1 in costs.

A Southern California study found that being located near green space adds five to ten percent to the total value of a home, in both high-income and low-income communities. Higher home prices can also result in higher property tax revenues.

Earn-a-Bike

The Earn-a-Bike program is a collaboration between Riverside County Parks and the National Wildlands Conservancy that promotes physical activity and helps create the next generation of environmental stewards. Youth perform ecological restoration work in parks along the Santa Ana River while learning about nature and the value of wetlands from Wildlands Conservancy naturalists. At the end of the program, each child learns bike safety and receives a helmet and a lock to go with their brand new bicycle!

Photo courtesy of County of Riverside Parks and Open-Space District





Santa Ana River | Creative Commons – cyclotourist

WHY PARKS MATTER: ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Parks and green space provide many important environmental benefits. The ground in parks and school fields acts as a natural filter that absorbs rainwater directly or from runoff, preventing pollutants from entering our rivers or ocean and helping reduce flooding after heavy rainfall. Clean water compliance and flood control projects should be combined with efforts to improve green access through multipurpose projects.

Parks can help promote climate justice, including offsetting global warming and dirtier air. Low-income communities of color already experience more heat-related deaths during heat waves, and higher rates of asthma and other respiratory illnesses associated with air pollution. A canopy of trees provides shade and cooler temperatures that moderate the effect of asphalt, concrete, and other man-made building materials that trap heat. Trees and other vegetation also filter out harmful pollutants, improving the air we breathe.

Green access can often be improved by providing alternative transportation options, such as public transit, complete streets and bicycle paths. Transportation resources are generally spent in a way that encourages people to drive more. Currently, more than 80% of gas taxes go to highways and bridges, while less than 20% goes to transit. Developing sustainable infrastructure that people can use to get to parks and school fields without a car can also reduce transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions and improve local air quality.

Another important ecosystem benefit of green space is habitat for plants and animals. For many individuals, particularly in low-income urban areas, parks represent their only opportunity to escape from concrete, play on grass and experience a diversity of wildlife. Green space promotes environmental conservation values including the protection of clean air, water and land, and climate justice.

Santa Ana River Trail

The Santa Ana River Trail is a 110-mile hiking, biking, and equestrian trail, with approximately 20 miles in Riverside County. The trail provides Riverside residents the opportunity to reconnect with nature and be physically active in a variety of ways. In addition to the recreation trails, the Hidden Valley Wildlife Area runs along the Santa Ana River, between Riverside and Norco. Hidden Valley's Nature Center offers an array of educational programs about Native Americans, wildlife, and the wetlands.

La Sierra Hills, Santa Ana River Trail | Creative Commons - cyclotourist



TRANSIT TO TRAILS: MOUNT SAN JACINTO STATE PARK



View looking towards the Salton Sea and the Coachella Valley | Creative Commons – The City Project

Riverside County boasts a wide variety of opportunities for recreation and enjoying the natural environment. Although low-income families may live within an hour or two of these natural wonders, often their children have never experienced them, because parents often work two or more jobs and do not have access to cars or to information to plan trips. Transit to Trails programs take children and families on fun, healthy and educational nature trips. Successfully piloted in Los Angeles County by The City Project and partners, Transit to Trails would be a good fit for Riverside County as well.

The summit of Mount San Jacinto stands 10,834 feet above sea level, and is the second highest mountain in Southern California. The state park offers two drive-in campgrounds near the town of Idyllwild. Most of the park is a designated wilderness area enjoyed by hikers and backpackers. There are 48 miles of trails in the San Jacinto Wilderness, including 28 miles of the Pacific Crest Trail.

A majority of Mount San Jacinto State Park and Wilderness is part of the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument, with diverse terrain ranging from desert oases to granite peaks. In addition to hiking, recreational opportunities include picnicking, bicycling, camping, climbing, fishing, and horse riding.

The Idyllwild Nature Center offers field study trips, environmental education programs and guided tours. Programs focus on mountain ecology, habitats, flora and fauna, Cahuilla Native American culture, and the history of the San Jacinto Mountains. Nature walks, natural history lectures, and Junior Naturalist Programs are offered during the summer.

Free or subsidized Transit to Trails trips can maximize public access for all to the San Jacinto Mountains and other natural open spaces in Riverside County. Enabling low-income residents to visit these public lands could change their sense of environmental stewardship and entitlement. Understanding cultural values opens up many avenues and solutions to local problems in ways that can resolve even the toughest of problems facing park planners and administrators. The Southern California Agency of Governments (SCAG) has recommended a multiagency effort to provide transit to green space in Riverside County and Southern California.



San Jacinto Wilderness Area | The City Project



Coachella Valley | Untitled, courtesy of Ernesto Lopez (age 15) and Venice Arts

GREEN ACCESS AND EQUAL JUSTICE

The history of Riverside County is relevant to understand how the region came to be the way it is, and how it could be better. The fact that low-income people of color disproportionately lack equal access to parks, school fields, and other green space is not an accident of unplanned growth or the outcome of an efficient free market distribution of land, housing, transit and jobs. Disparities in green access are the result of a history and continuing legacy of discriminatory land use, housing, school, and economic policies and practices.

Originally part of San Bernardino County, the City of Riverside was founded in 1870 by Easterners looking to establish a colony devoted to furthering education and culture. The city's first major expansion came as a result of the introduction of the citrus industry, which began in 1873 when Eliza Tibbets planted two Brazilian navel orange trees sent to her by Washington's Department of Agriculture and found that they grew famously in the warm climate. Riverside County was formed twenty years later by carving out a portion of San Bernardino County and a larger part of San Diego County.

The Riverside area prospered with the arrival of transcontinental railroads, which could take its produce across the country. By 1895, the City of Riverside was California's richest city on a per capita basis.

In the decades after World War II, public housing was built almost exclusively in low-income communities of color. Federal home loan policies were explicitly discriminatory and resulted in areas that were disproportionately non-Hispanic white and wealthy. Though discriminatory underwriting policies for the most part ended in the 1960s,

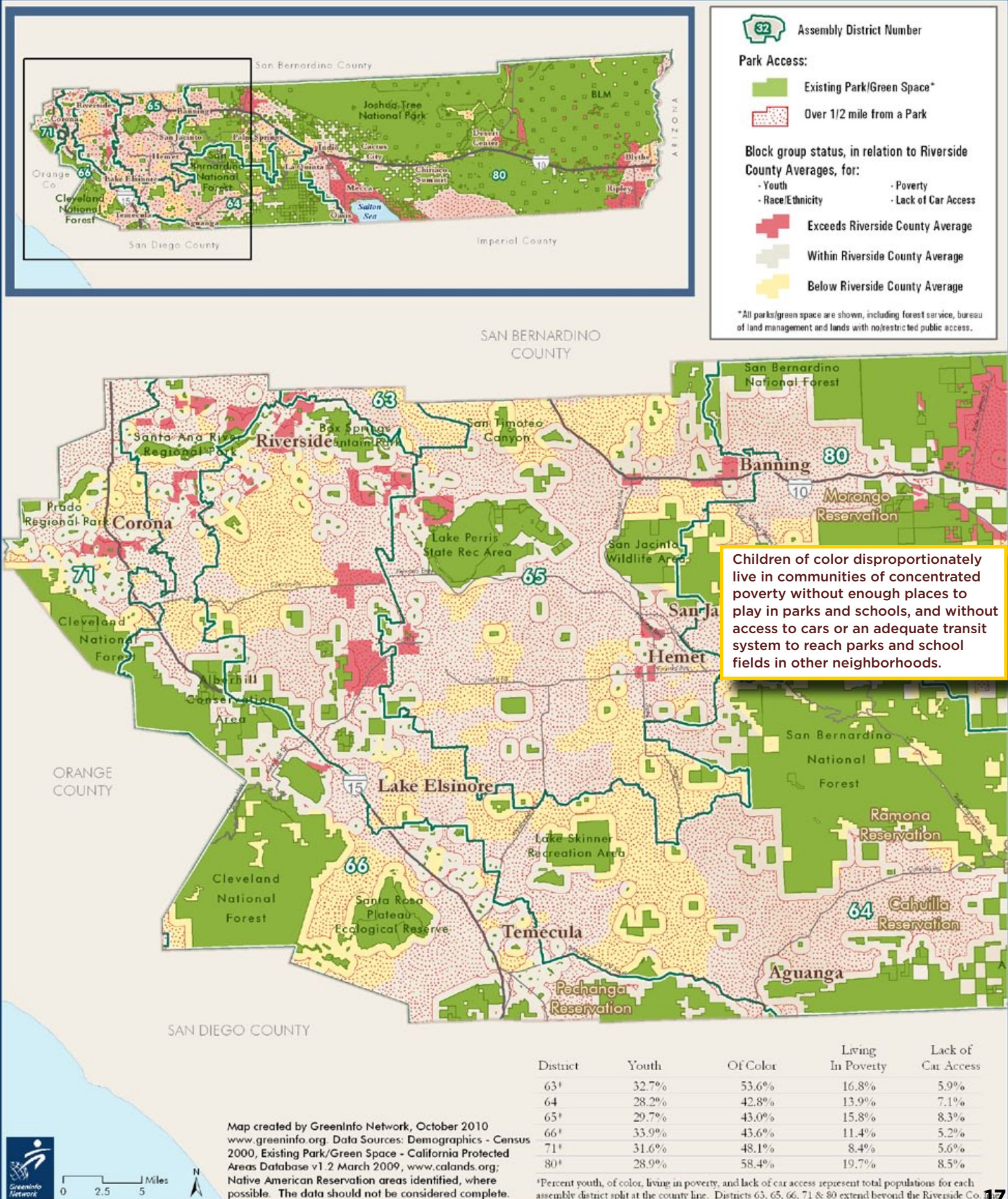
Riverside County was marked by segmentation based on race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

As suburban development began to boom, older neighborhoods became increasingly neglected, even as their populations grew with the influx of new workers seeking the employment opportunities fueled by the development boom. These older communities did not have enough parks and recreational infrastructure to begin with, and the new influx of workers and their families only served to exacerbate the problem.

At the same time, the new master planned, higher-income suburban neighborhoods that popped up throughout the region were designed to include parks. The sprawling nature of this development pattern meant that the new neighborhoods were located far from the existing communities. Access to the parks in these neighborhoods, therefore, was limited by distance. A lack of adequate public transit limited access even further.

Recipients of federal and state funds, including cities in Riverside County and their park and recreation agencies, are prohibited from engaging in practices that have the intent or the effect of discrimination based on race, color or national origin. Parks, school fields and other green space are a public resource, and funding must be distributed with the goal of disparities in access. Investing in park poor and income poor communities not only provides economic stimulus and the additional benefits of green space to underserved communities, it helps achieve compliance with civil rights laws and principles mandating equal access to public resources.

Park Access for Children of Color Living in Poverty with No Access to a Car Riverside County





Coachella Valley | Untitled, courtesy of Ariel Martinez (age 16) and Venice Arts

RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIES

Parks and green space are not a luxury. Access to parks and recreation should not depend on where you live, the color of your skin, or how much money you have.

Prioritizing existing public resources for creating and improving access to green space in low-income communities and communities of color offers an exceptional opportunity to improve public health, environmental quality, economic vitality, and quality of life for all.

The following strategies are based on The City Project's research and analyses.

1. Implement standards to measure equity and progress and hold public officials accountable.

- Park poverty and income poverty criteria under California law are best practice examples for standards to measure green access and equity.
- Identify community-specific standards based on community need, such as the number of existing after-school recreation programs or parks with areas for physical activity.
- Publish a community needs assessment every five years to document progress and ensure public officials meet the needs of the community, as defined by the community.

2. Develop and implement a strategic plan to improve access to parks and recreation programs in every neighborhood.

- Prioritize communities that are “park poor” and “income poor” to eliminate unfair disparities.
- Increase joint use of parks, schools, pools and other recreational facilities to make optimal use of scarce land, money and public resources.
- Improve real and perceived park safety through better lighting, maintenance and upkeep, the visible presence of security officers, and targeted programs to meet the needs of at-risk youth.
- Keep public lands public for all. Reverse the privatization of public green space.
- Meet the diverse needs of diverse users by creating “balanced” parks that offer active recreation with soccer fields, baseball diamonds, basketball and tennis courts, running tracks, and bike paths, as well as passive recreation with natural open space, walking trails, and picnic areas.

3. Create a fair system of park financing and fees that ensures equitable development and access to parks and recreation.

- Invest Quimby park development fees based on need, not based on artificial geographic limitations.
- Hold public agencies responsible for allocating funds in compliance with civil rights laws guaranteeing equal access to public resources.
- Publish reports analyzing investments by park agencies and allocation of resource bonds to get a more complete picture of which communities benefit from the investment of public funds and which do not, in order to help prioritize investments.



Desert Memorial Park, Cathedral City | Creative Commons - Rocor

4. Frame green access as a multi-benefit solution to a range of issues, including public health, obesity and diabetes, the full development of the child and community, gangs and crime, economic vitality, and environmental quality.

- Combine efforts to improve green access with efforts to prevent obesity and related diseases and improve individual and community well-being. Apply physical, psychological and social health criteria to public infrastructure investments.
- Enforce physical education and healthy food requirements in public schools.
- Physical activity and healthy eating go hand in hand to promote human health, and there are unfair disparities in access to both. Parks and schools should promote both.
- Implement a Civilian Conservation Corps for the 21st century. Ensure that infrastructure projects create green collar jobs for local workers, small and disadvantaged business enterprises, and youth. To ensure benefits are fairly distributed, contracts should be awarded to local small businesses and should hire workers and apprentices from the community where the project is located.
- Align green access goals with other environmental initiatives to improve water quality, reduce the effects of climate change, promote climate justice, decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and preserve plant and animal habitat.
- Create complete green streets and safe routes to school. Utilize public transportation resources for infrastructure projects that enable green access without a car, such as Transit to Trails, walking and bike paths and pedestrian bridges.
- Prioritize cultural, historical and public art projects that reflect the diversity of a place and its people to build community pride and civic engagement, including Native American sacred sites.
- Keep state parks open for all. Support the National Park Service *Healthy Parks Healthy People* initiative, and the *Centennial Steering Committee* by the National Parks Conservation Association and National Parks Foundation. Diversify the *America's Great Outdoors* initiative to address disparities based on race, ethnicity and income.



Strategies for Success

The City Project works with diverse allies to implement strategies to improve green access for all through: (1) community organizing and coalition building; (2) translating research into policy, law and systemic change; (3) strategic media campaigns, including new social media; and (4) policy and legal advocacy outside the courts. (5) When necessary, we also seek access to justice through the courts.

OUTDOOR EDUCATION AT SANTA ROSA PLATEAU



Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Preserve | Creative Commons - Mayr

The Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve is located at the southern end of the Santa Ana Mountains in southwest Riverside County, near the City of Murrieta.

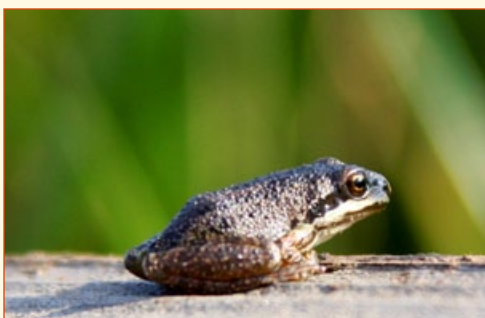
The Reserve consists of 9,000 acres set aside to protect unique ecosystems like Engelmann oak woodlands, riparian wetlands, coastal sage scrub, chaparral, bunchgrass prairie, vernal pools, and more than 200 species of native birds and 49 endangered, threatened or rare animal and plant species.

The Santa Rosa Plateau Foundation (SRPF) in partnership with Riverside County Regional Parks and Open-Space District provides a variety of educational programs that seek to connect children to the natural environment.

The Third Grade Program serves about 8,000 students a year from eight school districts and 70 schools in Riverside County. Students learn about wildlife and the history of Native Americans through a curriculum that starts in the classroom and concludes with a field trip to the Santa Rosa Plateau Ecological Reserve. The children are taught concepts related to wildlife and the environment, and presented with real plants, wildlife and artifacts. Over 85,000 children have been through the program since it began in 1994.



Trail to Vernal Pool | Creative Commons - Randy McEoin



SRPF's Outreach Program specifically targets low- to moderate-income students, many of whom have never been outside a city environment.

Outdoor education programs have been shown to increase children's knowledge and understanding of science concepts, as well as their awareness about the environment and conservation. Contact with nature can also have important psychological benefits, including better performance in school.

Pacific Tree Frog, Santa Rosa Plateau | Creative Commons - Tinyfroglet

CREDITS

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www.cityprojectca.org

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"It is very important that our children grow up healthy. The more they run, the happier they are. The more they play together with other children, the better people they will be in the future. Parks and school yards are a place for peace, a place where life-long values are built. Community activism to build parks and schools is a way of saying no to violence, no to war. Peace and hope are part of our children's education and culture."

Rigoberta Menchú Tum, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate,
speaking about the work of The City Project and
Anahuak Youth Soccer Association to bring parks,
school fields, and green space to the children
of Southern California.



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For more information on green access and equity in Riverside County and Southern California,
and to download a copy of this summary and the full policy report, please visit www.cityprojectca.org.

This report is available in English and Spanish.

The City Project

Equal Justice, Democracy, and Livability for All

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