GREEN CITIES INITIATIVE

Healing America's Cities

How urban parks can make cities safe and healthy

THE TRUST FOR PUBLIC LAND

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SUMMARY

WHY WE MUST INVEST IN URBAN PARKS

Healing America's Cities cites examples of the link between urban open space and healthy communities which has been documented for several decades. Recent findings documented in the report show that crime drops when adequate parks and recreational activities are available in inner-city neighborhoods.

- In Philadelphia, after police helped neighborhood volunteers clean up vacant lots and plant gardens, crime in the precinct dropped 90 percent.
- During the summer, when Phoenix basketball courts and other recreation facilities are kept open until 2 a.m., police calls reporting juvenile crime drop by as much as 55 percent. Compared to other crime fighting measures, midnight recreation is a bargain. With over 170,000 participants in Phoenix, the cost is sixty cents per youth. The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimates that the cost of keeping one teenager in detention for a year currently approaches $30,000.
- Fort Myers, Florida police report that juvenile arrests have dropped by nearly one-third since the city began the STARS (Success Through Academics and Recreational Support) Program in 1990. Young people's grades have also improved significantly. STARS won the 1992 crime reduction program of the year from the U.S. Conference of Mayors.
- Since Project HYDRA (Hart Youth Development Resource Association) in Hart County, Georgia, began putting young first offenders into a recreation and mentor program juvenile complaint calls fell by 14 percent and incarcerations went down by 23 percent.

However, parks and recreation programs in urban centers are in crisis. Dwindling funds for open spaces have left little money for city parks. The neighborhoods most in need have the fewest resources for acquiring and maintaining open space. Monies from the primary funding source for parks, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, are spent primarily in suburbs and rural areas; less than 16 percent goes to cities, and less still to underserved neighborhoods.

After the 1965 Watts riots and other urban disturbances in 1967, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders listed insufficient parks and recreation as a primary concern of inner-city residents, ranking above unemployment and difficulties with police.

After the violence in Los Angeles in 1992, a survey of neighborhood residents most affected by the civil unrest revealed that 77 percent ranked improved parks and recreation as "absolutely critical" or "important" to their communities, giving them a higher priority than health care or business development.

In addition to their role in reducing crime, parks and recreation pay real dividends in increased tourism, maintaining water quality, controlling urban sprawl, creating a better business climate, and contributing to a higher quality of life.

As part of its "Green Cities Initiative," the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit land conservation organization, plans to help communities in inner-cities and fast-growing metropolitan areas create neighborhood playgrounds, ballfields, community gardens, recreation areas, greenways, and trails.

"We are going to recreate or we are going to incarcerate. The choice is ours. We cannot afford to put a cop on every corner and we can't build a jail cell for every youthful offender... so why do we continue to believe that the answer is strictly in law enforcement?"

Sharpe James
Mayor, Newark, New Jersey
President, National League of Cities

URBAN NEGLECT ADDS TO RISING CRIME

Members of the Tenth Street School Mothers' Club were not especially surprised when they saw the condition of their community garden after the civil unrest in Los Angeles in 1992. They had cleared the vacant lot on Union Avenue some years before and over time had raised lush crops of tomatoes, corn, chili peppers, and squash. The garden is in the heart of Pico–Union, where the remains of torched buildings can still be seen. Up and down the streets surrounding the Mothers' Club garden, windows had been shattered and businesses looted. But after the violence subsided, the gardeners returned to their plots and discovered that not a single plant had been disturbed.[1]

In one neighborhood after the next, community gardens and parks somehow escaped the fury.[2] "The gardens are a source of pride for the neighborhoods they are in," says Brenda Funches, who leads the grassroots gardening organization Common Ground. Even in areas where aimless violence took hold, Funches says, there was a protective attitude toward the parks and gardens. "People had cleaned up these lots themselves. We'd removed a lot of diapers and old Chevrolets. Anyone who has a history in the neighborhood remembers what these places looked like before, and the truth is everybody knows somebody who is involved with the garden."

In the days following the unrest, gang members in L.A. issued a manifesto listing, among their paramount complaints, a shortage of parks and green spaces in their neighborhoods.[3]

That people consider parks and recreation opportunities so important to their communities should come as no surprise. For nearly 30 years studies into the causes of urban violence have reported this concern. Following the anger that erupted in the streets of Los Angeles in 1992, there was much talk of remaking the city, of addressing the root causes of the unrest, just as there was talk after the Watts riots in 1965 and the disturbances in other big cities in 1967 that left 83 people dead and 1900 injured.[4] In 1968, following the violence, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders reported a host of ills festering in the cities,

José Martí Park, Miami, Florida.

JOHN BLAUSTEIN

including a deep-seated unhappiness with the absence of places to relax and play. "Grievances concerning municipal recreation programs were found in a large majority of the 23 cities that were surveyed and appeared to be one of the most serious complaints in half," the report said. In three cities, inadequate parks and recreation ranked above unemployment and difficulties with police as the most significant problem.[5]

In the days following the unrest, gang members in L.A. issued a manifesto listing, among their paramount complaints, a shortage of parks and green spaces in their neighborhoods.

Although political leaders through the years have embraced the concept of expanding city green spaces and recreation, very little has been done. The crisis in urban open space that existed in 1968 is essentially unchanged.[6] In many central cities, parks are more dangerous and poorly maintained than ever and fewer opportunities for recreation exist than at any time in the past.

As crime and urban violence continue to escalate, political leaders, sociologists, and community activists are considering how neglect of city parks and green spaces has contributed to these problems, and what improvements in parks and recreation programs might do to reduce crime and make cities more livable.

When the Trust for Public Land (TPL) was founded in 1972, the San Francisco-based nonprofit organization set out with a mission to conserve land for human needs. According to a 1993 TPL study,[7] those needs are greatest in metropolitan areas, where 80% of Americans will be living by the turn of the century.[8] The study, supported by the Lila Wallace–Reader's Digest Fund, found that public open spaces in urban areas are deteriorating, parklands are inadequate and overcrowded, and low-income communities are critically underserved.

Through its Green Cities Initiative, TPL hopes to serve as a catalyst for mobilizing resources to expand and revitalize parks and open spaces in and near urban centers. Historically the organization has acted as an intermediary in land transactions, using $28 million in revolving capital funds to purchase important natural areas and potential parkland on behalf of community groups and government agencies. Over the next five years, as part of the Green Cities Initiative, TPL plans to help cities acquire as many as 250 parcels of land for city parks that meet high-priority needs. The organization will offer teams of experts to help guide local groups through complicated real estate, legal, and financial transactions and will help to devise a strategy for raising the estimated $2.5 billion needed to correct some of the deficiencies of the past quarter-century.

This effort will range from buying vacant city lots for conversion into playgrounds and gardens to assembling extensive greenways that link neighborhoods across cities. As TPL president Martin J. Rosen sees it, the initiative is not a matter of simply "fixing" the nation's urban crisis. Our cities—old and new—must be reimagined, he says, adding: "Parks and gardens alone cannot solve the problems faced by our cities, but they are crucial to the health of urban communities. We need to take seriously the evidence that open space counts in human lives and that the places where we live can be places of hope."

THE LINK BETWEEN RECREATION AND CRIME PREVENTION

Crime has now surpassed unemployment and economic troubles as the primary concern of most Americans.[9] The reflexive response from political leaders is to promise more police on the streets and longer jail terms for offenders. But that approach is expensive and not necessarily effective. Violent crime in most cities has increased even after additional police officers have been hired.[10]

According to a study by the U.S. Department of Justice, in many cities half of the young men will be arrested for assault, robbery, burglary, or other serious crimes by the age of 17.[11] In major U.S. cities in 1992,

police arrested 2.8 million people under the age of 21.[12] The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimates that the cost of keeping one teenager in detention for a year currently approaches $30,000.[13] Nationwide, that added up to $2.3 billion for incarceration of juveniles in 1993—a 35% increase in spending on juvenile corrections in just five years.[14] But more prisons and a threat of longer sentences do not necessarily deter young offenders. While California was spending $4 billion building new prisons, gang membership in Los Angeles doubled.[15]

Congressman Bruce Vento (D-Minn.) is among an increasing number of political leaders and community activists who insist that perhaps there is a better way to fight crime. "Urban recreation and sports programs are a proven, commonsense, and cost-effective means of preventing crime and delinquency," he says. "I wonder if our urban youth crime rate would be different if these programs had not been neglected in the past." Vento is co-sponsoring legislation to provide crime prevention funds for parks and recreation facilities because, he says, "without accessible and well-maintained places to recreate, there can be no recreation." [16]

Although criminologists have found no way to measure directly how much crime is caused by a lack of open space and recreation opportunities, plenty of evidence shows that crime frequently drops—sometimes dramatically—when these things are improved. Yet investments in parks and open space have generally been considered a low priority. As cities continue to witness rising crime and urban distress, it is becoming increasingly clear that support for parks and recreation is not a luxury—it is an investment in our own security and health and the stability of our cities.

For the same money that would put one new police officer on the street, says Mayor Sharpe James of Newark, New Jersey, the city could hire three recreation leaders who would have a much greater impact on keeping kids out of trouble and reducing crime. "The answer for those kids who are...doing wrong should not be get off the street, go home, or go to jail," James says. "We should be able to tell them where to go and what to do.[17]

"We are going to recreate or we are going to incarcerate," adds James, who is also President of the National League of Cities. "The choice is ours. We cannot afford to put a cop on every corner and we can't build a jail cell for every youthful offender... so why do we continue to believe that the answer is strictly in law enforcement?" [18]

RECREATION—MORE THAN JUST FUN AND GAMES

A full 40% of a schoolchild's waking hours are discretionary, according to a major study by the Carnegie Corporation entitled "A Matter of Time—Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours." Frequently young teens are left alone with no adult supervision.[19] When researchers asked adolescents what they wanted most during nonschool hours, safe parks and recreation centers topped the list.[20]

"[When] you've got a high percentage of single working parents...it doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that you need after-school programs for kids," says Charles Jordan, parks director of Portland, Oregon.[21] Jordan is adamant that recreation be recognized as more than just fun and games. "We've been building high self-esteem in kids for years. We've been dealing with social harmony, conflict resolution, wellness, appreciation for education, prevention of juvenile delinquency," he says. "There is nothing quick and dirty about [crime] prevention." [22]

In many central cities, parks are more dangerous and poorly maintained than ever, and fewer opportunities for recreation exist than at any time in the past.

As examples from across the nation make clear, community green space and recreation programs can make a difference. In Philadelphia, after police helped neighborhood volunteers clean up vacant lots and plant gardens, burglaries and thefts in the precinct dropped

by 90%—from about 40 crimes each month before the cleanup to an average of only four per month.[23] In the summertime, when Phoenix basketball courts and other recreation facilities are kept open until 2 A.M., police calls reporting juvenile crime drop by as much as 55%. But reports of crime go up again in the fall once gymnasiums go back to regular hours.[24] Assistant parks director Dale Larsen says the activities—late-night swimming, volleyball, basketball, and dancing—are needed year round, but funding is not available. Compared to other crime-fighting measures, midnight recreation is a bargain. With 170,000 participants in Phoenix, the cost is 60 cents per youth.

When Phoenix basketball courts and other recreation facilities are kept open until 2 a.m., police calls reporting juvenile crime drop by as much as 55%. But reports of crime go up again in the fall once gymnasiums go back to regular hours.

The late Arthur J. Holland, former mayor of Trenton, New Jersey, used to talk about moving into a run-down neighborhood where he encountered teenagers who regularly pelted his home with stones. To Holland's relief, as soon as the neighborhood built a small park with a basketball court, the stone-throwing stopped. In 1989, Holland told the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, "That's why I'm convinced, firsthand, that there's a direct relationship. You don't throw stones when you've got balls to throw around."[25]

The East Bay Regional Park District in Oakland, California, is currently rehabilitating an old stable in the hills so that inner-city children can participate in a riding program. The program will give children an opportunity to learn how to work with a horse, how to care for it, and how to care about it. Skyline Ranch is only ten minutes from downtown Oakland by bus. The property was nearly snapped up for a condominium development until the equestrian community protested and the Trust for Public Land stepped in. TPL negotiated the sale of Skyline Ranch to the park district and helped incorporate the nonprofit Metropolitan Equestrian Preservation Society (MEPS).[26]

When the stable reopens, MEPS hopes to operate the riding programs along with the Black Cowboys Association and another African American group called High Horse. The groups have already gone into schools and recreation centers to begin teaching children how to handle themselves at the stable. "Many of these kids are kind of full of themselves, but a horse doesn't care about that," says Cynthia Hall, a TPL program director. "It's a big animal and kind of scary. But before long they are learning how to mount while the horse is moving, and riding backwards." The result, Hall says, is a big boost in self-esteem.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Confidence-building programs like the one under way at Skyline Ranch have been shown to have a direct impact on crime reduction.

In Fort Myers, Florida, police have documented a 28% drop in juvenile arrests since 1990, when the city began STARS—Success Through Academics and Recreational Support—for young adolescents.[27] To support STARS, Fort Myers built a new recreation center in the heart of a low-income community. According to Mayor Wilbur Smith, the location was controversial because many people expected the center to be plagued by crime. It has not turned out that way. The program won an award from the U.S. Conference of Mayors as the outstanding crime reduction program of 1992.

In 1991, 75% of the children enrolled in STARS were making less than a C average in school. Now 80% of the 1,500 children enrolled have brought their grades up to a C average or better. "As the mayor of a city that totally committed itself to using recreation and academic support as the vehicle for combating violent juvenile crime, I can tell you that

it works," Smith says. "In my judgment it is the best, most cost-effective, and most responsible position to take in the very complex search for solutions to juvenile crime."

Newark, New Jersey, is also beginning to see results from an aggressively expanded recreation program. The abandoned John F. Kennedy Recreation Center had been a magnet for vandalism and other crimes until the city invested $1.2 million in renovation. Now the center is used by 5,000 young people every month, and crime in the area has decreased.[28] Hundreds of inner-city children are learning to ice skate, and midnight basketball is available in the summer, when criminal activity usually escalates.

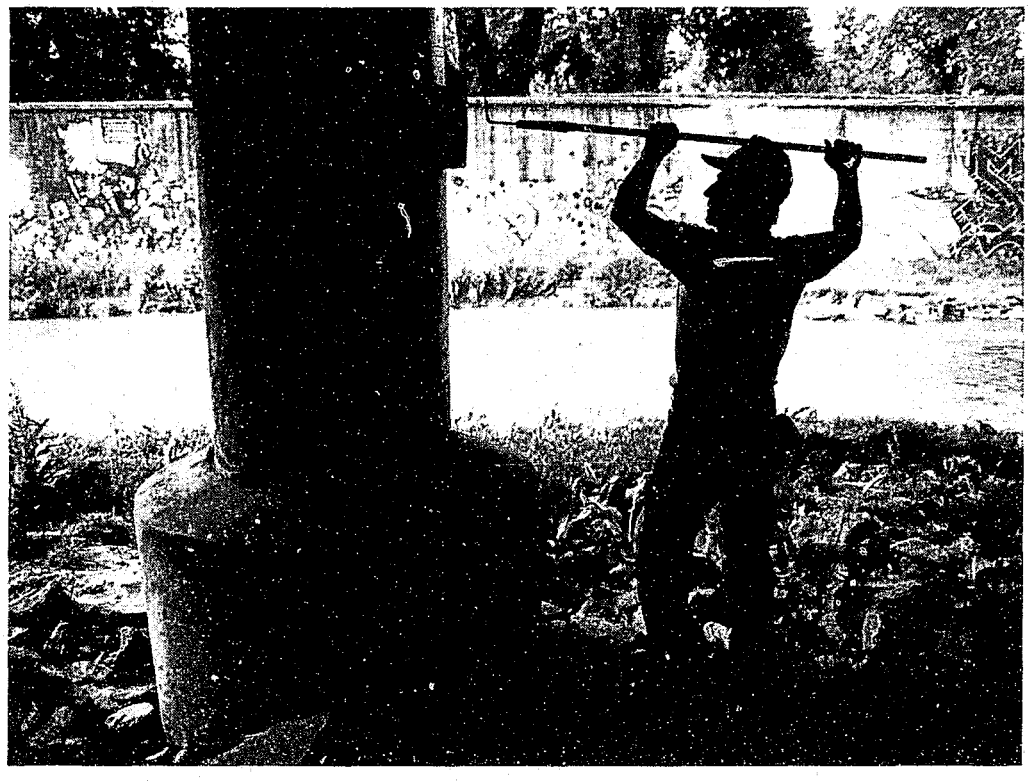
Newark's tennis program, begun by the late champion Arthur Ashe, requires that kids keep up good grades to participate. Peer counseling is combined with tennis lessons several times a week in order to "foster independent thinking, self-discipline, good manners, and a healthy lifelong activity."[29] So far, more than 6,000 teenagers have participated, and, according to Newark's program director, Charles Hardman, many of the tennis players have substantially improved their grades in school.[30] When Ashe set up the Safe Passage Foundation that sponsors the tennis program in Newark and another one in Albany, New York, he was aware that when young people are frustrated, they often feel they have precious little to lose. In his autobiography, *Days of Grace*, Ashe wrote that he wanted to help youth make the transition to adulthood "without a crippling loss of faith in society and themselves. Safe Passage can hardly solve the problems of poverty, racism, juvenile delinquency, cynicism, sexual promiscuity, crime, and drug addiction. But we have an obligation to try to do something to counter this social and spiritual plague. Too many people have simply given up."[31]

In Tampa, Florida, simply establishing the Boys & Girls Club at Rembrandt Homes, a public housing complex, helped reduce crime. Tampa Housing Authority director Audley Evans says that in the two years since the club opened, "we have seen a significant decrease in recidivism, drug trafficking, and drug activity."[32] According to a National Park Service report, similar reductions in drug use have occurred at other public housing projects after recreation areas were renovated.[33]

> ***"We have an obligation to try to do something to counter this social and spiritual plague. Too many people have simply given up."***
>
> **Arthur Ashe**
> ***Days of Grace***

In Hart County, Georgia, Project HYDRA—HartYouth Development Resource Association—

Erasing graffiti, Cherry Creek Greenway, Denver, Colorado.



PHIL SCHERMEISTER

"We can either build more jails or detention facilities for young people or we can invest more in the prevention side."

Barry Tindall
Director of Public Policy
National Recreation and Park Assoc.

puts young first offenders into a recreation and mentor program as part of an informal probation. In HYDRA's first year of operation, juvenile complaint calls fell by 14% and incarcerations by 25%.[34] In Richmond, Virginia, Project READY—Recreation and Educational Activities Designed for Youth—hires at-risk youth to work on park and road beautification, providing young people with jobs and recreation while they help maintain green spaces.[35]

The U.S. departments of Interior and Justice are using the same concept in a Youth Environmental Service (YES) program that began in 1994: employing delinquent and at-risk teens to do environmental conservation work on federal lands. Three pilot programs are under way. In Utah, moderate offenders will be bussed from Salt Lake City to work on Bureau of Land Management property, where they will spend as long as 30 days in wilderness areas. At the Big Cypress National Preserve and Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge in Florida, serious and violent juvenile offenders will live and work near conservation areas, and in Washington, D.C., juvenile offenders will help the National Park Service maintain the national parks and monuments within the city.[36]

Law enforcement officials who have seen the beginnings of success from these kinds of programs are adding their voices to those calling for more resources for parks and recreation. Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block says young people are less attracted to gangs when they have other alternatives.[37] Los Angeles Police Chief Willie Williams specifies that the city needs more "safe parks and healthy recreation opportunities to keep our kids off the streets and out of gangs."[38] Samuel Saxon, director of the Department of Corrections in Prince George's County, Maryland, sees the whole process as key to the nation's future. "The difference between a safe country and a country that is going down the tubes is the degree that we pay attention to the young people," he says.[39]

Columbus, Ohio, police officer Sergeant Frank Weirick, who represents the National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), says the fact that recreation programs can prevent youth from becoming youthful offenders is nothing new to police.[40] The FOP began running Police Athletic Leagues (PALs) for teenagers in the 1930s and now operates 23 PALs. There is a hitch, though, in making youth programs widely available. As Weirick puts it, "the hunt for necessary funds is a dog fight."

PUTTING URBAN PARKS ON THE NATIONAL AGENDA

"We spend millions upon millions on our athletic elites, but [we] seem to be short of money for the grass roots," says former professional basketball star Thomas McMillen, the co-chair of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.[41] McMillen says young people "see millions spent on athletic palaces, yet our parks, recreation, and physical fitness programs are being cut."

The U.S. Conference of Mayors has added recreation programs to its list of "weapons to fight crime," and even President Bill Clinton has acknowledged the need.[42] In his 1994 State of the Union address, Clinton said we must "remember how we came to this sad point. In our toughest neighborhoods, on our meanest streets, in our poorest rural areas, we have seen a stunning and simultaneous breakdown of community, family, and work—the heart and soul of civilized society. This has created a vast vacuum which has been filled by violence and drugs and gangs. So I ask you to remember that even as we say no to crime, we must give people, especially our young people, something to say yes to."[43]

The 1992 reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act was the first major crime legislation to provide funds for parks and recreation.[44] The bill states that "the incidence of juvenile

delinquency can be reduced through public recreation programs and activities designed to provide youth with social skills, enhance self-esteem, and encourage the constructive uses of discretionary time."[45] The Clinton administration has requested $30 million for fiscal year 1995 for all prevention activities.[46]

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) drafted the act's language and lobbied for its inclusion in the law. NRPA Director of Public Policy Barry Tindall calls the act a major step forward. "It's time to turn the corner on how we invest in kids," he says. "We can either build more jails or detention facilities for young people or we can invest more in the prevention side. There are some young people who should be locked up for a long time, but we can keep many others out of the juvenile justice system altogether if we invest in appropriate activities."[47]

Representatives George Miller (D-Calif.) and Bruce Vento (D-Minn.) are pushing for an omnibus crime bill that will allow crime prevention funds to be used for recreation programs and facility improvements in high-crime urban areas. Miller says he is taking this approach because he has seen "the magic effect these programs have on young people" and because traditional means of fighting crime have failed. "This is my fifth war on crime," Miller says. "The first four didn't work."[48]

Before recreation programs can begin to make a difference, however, safe parks and adequate open spaces for those activities are essential. William T. Spitzer, acting assistant director of National Recreation Programs at the National Park Service, emphasizes that communities need "a strong and healthy infrastructure of parks and facilities to provide a sound base for activity programs. Only with such a base can communities particularly troubled by crime hope to use recreation as one tool in their prevention arsenal."[49] Unfortunately, the neighborhoods most in need generally have the least parkland, the fewest facilities, and the greatest difficulties maintaining them as safe havens.

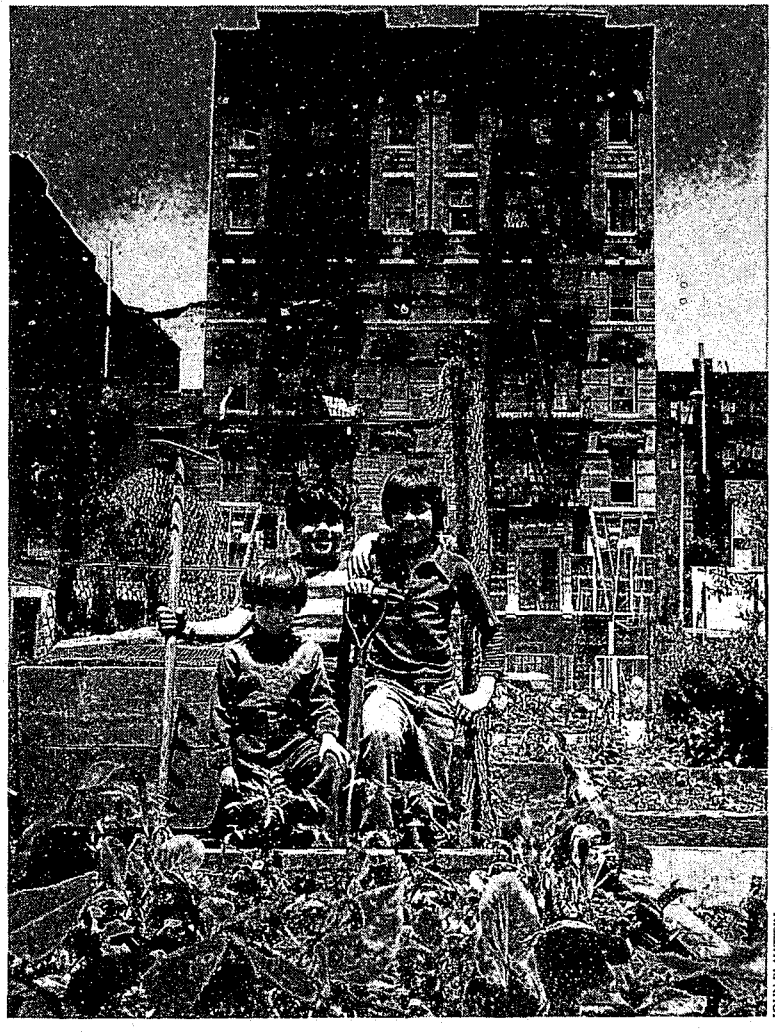
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE— THE NEGLECT OF CITIES

"It is not surprising that the incidence of juvenile crime in many places directly corresponds to general decreases in national, state, and local investment in recreation and parks."

R. Dean Tice, Executive Director
National Recreation and Parks Association[50]

Although political leaders have declared their support for parks and recreation programs, actual funding falls short when it comes to cities. The 1992 Carnegie report noted that "publicly supported recreation programs are evolving into a two-tier system, with more and better services available in suburban areas than in less affluent rural and urban areas. The current fiscal cutbacks are serving to increase the disparity between upper- and lower-income areas, meaning that youth most dependent on public recreation services are increasingly less

El Sol Brillante Garden, New York, New York.



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likely to have access."[51] The report cites a University of Chicago study that compared the recreational activities available in two neighborhoods. The public parks department in a mostly white, middle-income suburban neighborhood provided eight times more activities for young people than the parks department in a low-income, primarily African American, inner-city neighborhood offered.[52] In 1968, the National Commission on Civil Disorders linked urban violence with the decay of inner-city recreation facilities. Ten years later, a study by the U.S. Department of the Interior found virtually no improvement in city parks and recreation programs.[53] The 1978 National Urban Recreation Study (NURS) accused the states of ignoring municipal recreation needs: Parks in older cities were deteriorating, understaffed and unsafe. One quarter of low-income neighborhoods had no park or play areas at all. And most important, a wildly disproportionate share of money for parkland was flowing to suburbs and outlying areas.

A Trust for Public Land survey found that parks were concentrated in affluent neighborhoods in two-thirds of the cities surveyed, leaving low-income, inner-city communities with inadequate and severely overcrowded parklands in 16 out of 23 cities.

In 1993 a Trust for Public Land survey found the situation essentially unchanged: Parks were concentrated in affluent neighborhoods in two-thirds of the cities surveyed, leaving low-income, inner-city communities with inadequate and severely overcrowded parklands in 16 out of 23 cities. The study revealed a pattern of municipal disinvestment and a deteriorating infrastructure of public parks in all 23 cities. Among the most serious problems identified: inadequate maintenance, crime, and safety.[54]

Chicago is a case in point. In the fashionable Loop district downtown, where some of the city's most impressive waterfront parks are found, more than 41 acres of parkland exist for every thousand residents. But, according to the Chicago Park District Land Policies Plan of 1990, "the extensive lakefront and regional park system is not supported throughout the city...with a backup system of neighborhood and community parks." On the Lower West Side, barely half an acre of parkland for every thousand people appears.[55]

After a 1983 federal lawsuit accused the city of discrimination in allocating recreational resources, the Chicago Park District signed a consent decree recognizing the inequities and pledging to do a better job of distributing resources.[56] Enough improvements were made in recreational facilities that the decree is no longer in force. But there remain "wide disparities in the number of park acres available to residents of different communities," according to the Land Policies Plan. The deficiencies have been nearly impossible to correct. "Large sites, well located in residential areas, at reasonable prices, simply don't exist," the plan says.[57] On top of that, the Chicago Park District has had no land acquisition budget at all for several years, making it imperative to search for alternative means of acquiring land.[58]

The Chicago Park District recently completed an expansion of Senka Park in a working-class neighborhood just east of Midway Airport. The neighborhood is listed as short on parkland but in 1989 it nearly lost one of the few undeveloped open spaces left in the area. A private company had announced plans to convert 13 acres of unused railroad property into a housing and commercial development.[59] When neighbors objected, the Park District asked the Trust for Public Land for assistance. TPL purchased the property and held it until money could be raised to add the parcel to a small adjoining park. According to TPL's Al Raymond, who negotiated the transactions, this was the first time in ten years that the Chicago Park District had invested in neighborhood parkland.[60]

Despite the city's obvious need, the lion's share of federal funds for parkland acquisition in Illinois has gone to projects in outlying areas. Since 1965,

Illinois has spent more than $11 per person statewide out of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, the largest source of federal park money. Chicago has gotten less than $2 per person out of that fund. This pattern persists nationwide.[61]

SHORTCHANGING URBAN PARKS

The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established in 1965 to provide federal funding for the acquisition of parks and other public lands. Financed primarily with money from offshore oil and gas leasing, the idea behind LWCF was to use money from the depletion of one irreplaceable resource to protect another irreplaceable resource—land. But most of the offshore oil and gas royalties that are supposed to finance the program—as much as $10 billion—have been spent for other purposes.[62] Over the past decade, less than one-third of the fund has been available for its intended purpose. Since 1984, LWCF appropriations have averaged only $251 million annually, sharply reducing the fund available for national park acquisitions or federal purchases of recreation and habitat lands, and leaving an average of only $35 million a year available for state and local projects.[63]

From a high of $805 million in 1978, appropriations from the fund were just $250 million last year. State and local projects got only $24 million, even though local grant requests exceeded $400 million.[64] And, once again, in many states only a fraction of that limited money made it into city projects.

In the early years of LWCF, many states lavished funds on lakeside resorts and lodges meant to attract tourism, while urban parks continued to decline.[65] Part of the difficulty for cities has been the requirement that every dollar granted be matched with local funds. Often, too many other urgent priorities have reduced the amount of money available for matching funds. While big cities in many states have fared better than Chicago—Oregon, for instance, has directed a substantial portion of its LWCF money to Portland—in most cases, cities have gotten less than a fair share. According to the National Urban Recreation Study, during LWCF's first 14 years, 40% of the grant money went to rural areas, 43% to suburbs, and only 16% for central cities.[66] An administrator in the grants division of the National Park Service says no one has calculated what the urban–suburban split is now, but he says there is no reason to assume that the trends reported in 1978 have significantly changed.[67] As the NURS report explained, "wealthy suburbs have been among the most successful beneficiaries of the LWCF [because] they know the grantsmanship game; they have funds available for the local match; and they benefit from state policies which encourage development of regional parks in suburban areas."[68]

Because of reduced funding for maintenance, many city parks had become unsafe and were no longer used. But after neighborhood groups got involved in planning the rehabilitation of their parks, people started using the parks again.

In 1978, Congress set up the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR) to help economically and socially distressed cities rehabilitate critically needed recreation sites.[69] UPARR was established in part to remedy the inequities in LWCF grants. Under UPARR, competitive matching grants are used to rehabilitate playgrounds, recreation centers, ball fields, tennis and basketball courts, swimming pools, and picnic areas. Most of th grants target inner-city parks that provide the only close-to-home recreation space available in many older, poorer communities. UPARR's annual report notes that because of reduced funding for maintenance, many of these city parks had become unsafe and were no longer used. But after neighborhood groups got involved in planning the rehabilitation of their parks, the UPARR report says, people started using the parks again. "In several jurisdictions, neighborhood volunteers assisted in the cleanup of the parks,

which often led to the reduction of vandalism and the renovation of entire neighborhoods."[70]

Although Congress originally planned to provide $100 million a year for UPARR, financing has always fallen far short of that goal. In 1994 UPARR is working with a total of $5 million. From 1985 through 1990 there was no money for UPARR at all.[71] Such limited resources will not go far in correcting the inequities in park funding. National Park Service Recreation Grants Supervisor Michael Rogers compares it to "using a teaspoon to bail the Atlantic Ocean."

"All these new and exciting initiatives are threatened by our inability to maintain and renovate our (facilities), which is where we do our business and where all these exciting things happen."

Michael Di Berardinis
Philadelphia Recreation Commissioner

Philadelphia Recreation Commissioner Michael Di Berardinis told a Senate Committee in 1993 that unless cities get more help for parks, they can't carry on the job training, anti-violence, and delinquency prevention programs they have started with assistance from businesses, universities, and cultural groups. "All these new and exciting initiatives are threatened by our inability to maintain and renovate our [facilities], which is where we do our business and where all these exciting things happen," Di Berardinis said.[72] In 1983 Philadelphia's recreation department had 1,200 full-time employees. In 1994 fewer than 500 workers have to take care of the same number of parks. Bushes don't get trimmed, trash doesn't get picked up, graffiti goes unerased, and vandalism is not repaired. "Local governments just cannot foot the bill," Di Berardinis told the committee. "We have lost federal funds over the years... our budgets are shrinking and we need help."

Philadelphia's ordeal is not uncommon. In 1993 Los Angeles County supervisors proposed closing 24 parks and 20 swimming pools and cutting staff,[73] and the same plan is expected to be revived during budget discussions in 1994.[74] New York City has cut back its park and recreation staff from 4,500 to 3,000 in four years and plans to cut 255 more staff members.[75]

These aging municipal giants are not the only cities in need of more park resources, however. A 1994 Texas A&M survey found that nationwide, the number of full-time parks employees in 1990 was lower than the number in 1978.[76] Rapidly growing urban areas in the South and West have also found it difficult to keep ahead of development in protecting open space.

In its 1993 report, "Setting Priorities for Land Conservation," the National Research Council, a branch of the National Academy of Sciences, pointed out that "(as) the result of budget constraints at all levels of government...the availability of state and local recreation opportunities is not keeping up with population pressures, especially in urban areas."[77]

The National Recreation and Park Association estimates that between 1989 and 1993 state and local governments needed about $37 billion for capital investments in land, park development, and rehabilitation.[78] The National Association of State Outdoor Recreation Liaison Officers has a list of $500 million worth of state and local projects that need doing immediately.[79] The U.S. Conference of Mayors listed money for open space and recreation among its highest priorities and requested that Congress appropriate $300 million to fully fund LWCF and UPARR.[80]

Senators Bennett Johnston (D-La.) and Dale Bumpers (D-Ariz.) have introduced legislation, S.721, mandating that Congress appropriate $1 billion annually to LWCF through 1998, with at least $200 million for state grants.[81] When President Clinton was governor of Arkansas he supported a similar bill, but now the Clinton administration has balked at supporting S.721 because of budgetary concerns.[82]

THE PUBLIC WANTS OPEN SPACE

Because it is sometimes dismissed as a frill, access to natural areas is a poor contender for limited public funds. But, by large majorities, people who live in cities regard access to open space as among the most important factors in their well-being and the vitality of their neighborhoods.

Consider the needs expressed by people in the neighborhoods hurt worst by the unrest in Los Angeles. In a 1993 survey conducted afterwards for Rebuild L.A., 77% listed improved parks and recreation facilities as "absolutely critical" or "important" to the restoration of their communities. The needs for better health care and the establishment of more businesses ranked lower in priority; only youth services were seen as more important.[83]

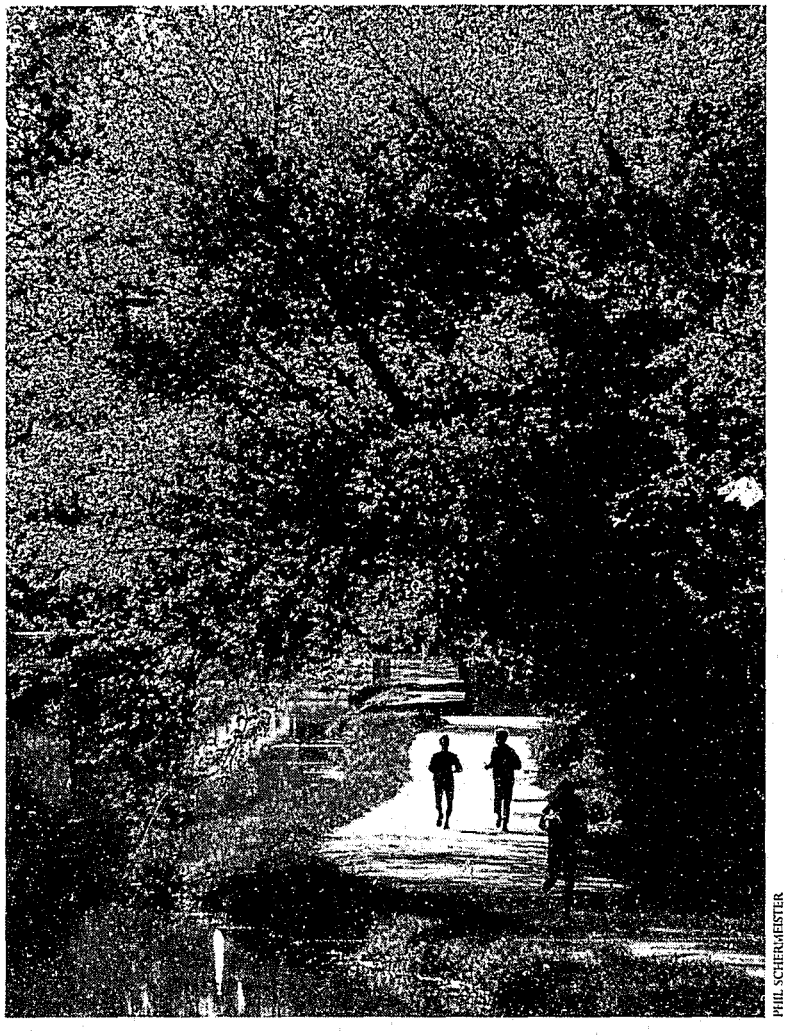
In a city stressed by crime, gang violence, unemployment, and pollution—complicated by wildfires, mudslides, flooding, and earthquakes—Los Angeles voters agreed to impose new taxes upon themselves for the purpose of buying more parkland. In 1992, shortly after the riots, 64% of Los Angeles County voters approved Proposition A, the Safe Neighborhood Parks Act—a special property tax surcharge that provides $540 million to redesign old parks so that they are safer, to buy land for new ones, and to build new recreation facilities.[84] During the previous 14 years, California's cities and counties had cut spending on parks dramatically in response to the tax revolt of the late 1970s. According to a *Los Angeles Times* survey, parks were among the public services most sharply reduced after voters approved Proposition 13, the 1978 state constitutional amendment that rolled back property tax rates to 1975-76 levels and limited future increases in property tax assessments.[85]

A Texas A&M study found that property tax ceilings adopted in several other states had the same effect.[86] According to a 1984 assessment in the *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration,* "in some cases, the very existence of municipal recreation and park services has been threatened due to changes in tax legislation affecting local budgets."[87]

Yet a survey sponsored by the National Recreation and Park Association and conducted by Pennsylvania State University found that the vast majority of people feel that providing funds for public parks is money well spent. Of the adults questioned, 75% said they supported either the current level of spending or an increase, while 45% said they would support an increase over current levels. 75% of those surveyed said they used parks, 24% of them frequently. Public parks were heavily used by children, and even more so by people between the ages of 65 and 74.[88]

Even so, the budget axe seems to have fallen disproportionately on parks and recreation. TPL vice president Ernest Cook says elected representatives are not reflecting the mood of the public. A 1994

C & O Canal Greenway, Washington, D.C.



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Louis Harris poll conducted for the Commonwealth Fund found that 62% of New Yorkers consider parks an "essential service" on a par with police, fire, and sanitation, and 67% want the parks budget increased. An almost unprecedented 96% agreed that parks make New York a more livable city, and nearly 85% wanted to see the parks and recreation system expanded through greenways, converting vacant lots into neighborhood parks and gardens, opening up waterfronts for recreation, and protecting wetlands from development.[89]

A 1994 Louis Harris poll conducted for the Commonwealth Fund found that 62% of New Yorkers consider parks an "essential service" on par with police, fire, and sanitation, and 67% want the parks budget increased.

New York's newly appointed Parks and Recreation Commissioner Henry Stern says the results "prove that New Yorkers love and appreciate their parks. Ninety percent of New Yorkers recognize how crucial neighborhood parks and playgrounds are to [their] quality of life...and in a city where consensus is unheard of, it's practically unanimous that parks make the city livable."[90] Unfortunately, half of those surveyed said they use parks less often now because of concern over violence. But to get improvements in the park system that might add to safety, 65% said they would be willing to pay a small additional voluntary tax.

TPL is assisting several communities in figuring out how to raise funds for green space. The organization provides technical advice to local groups on drafting and promoting bond issues or other financing tools. In King County, Washington, which includes Seattle, the Council has approved $60 million for parks and greenways on top of the $117 million already spent from a 1989 county bond issue. Seattle parks advocates are now considering how to fashion another bond issue to continue the work. In California in 1994, voters in Sacramento and San Diego will consider assessment district taxes similar to Los Angeles' Proposition A. Measures may also be up for votes over the next few years in San Antonio, Phoenix, Minneapolis, Miami, Charlotte, Austin, and Portland, Oregon. Denver is considering a unique financing plan: selling its Winter Park ski area to create a trust fund for city parks.[91]

OPEN SPACE PAYS

The hope expressed by those who promoted Proposition A in Los Angeles is that by remaking the city in a greener image, other difficulties of urban life will ease—violence will decrease, the economy will improve, pollution will lessen, and the impact of natural disasters will be mitigated. This is no dreamer's utopian fantasy. The case for more and better-managed open space is based in hard economic realities.

Studies of the experiences of dozens of cities show clearly how economic development follows the creation of well-designed and properly maintained parks, greenways, and other open spaces. In Baltimore, San Francisco, San Antonio, Seattle, New Orleans, and elsewhere, investments in waterfront and other open space development have succeeded in attracting new businesses and boosting tourism, with subsequent increases in tax revenues.

Proximity to open areas has also been shown to increase real estate values substantially. According to the 1994 Commonwealth Fund/Harris Poll, 57% of property owners living within two blocks of a city park in New York say that being located near the park enhances the value of their property.[92] In Salem, Oregon, urban land next to a greenbelt was worth $1,200 more per acre than urban land 1,000 feet away.

Floodways, riverside parks, streams, and wetlands are also money savers. Such natural areas can replace a good deal of expensive infrastructure to handle drainage, water supply, and water quality. A recent article in *The New Yorker* noted that the streams of southern Staten Island save New York hundreds of millions of dollars because they handle rainwater so

efficiently that there is no need to build more storm sewers.[93] Wetlands help lessen flood damage, reduce erosion, recharge the groundwater, and filter out sediments and pollution, cutting down on the need for expensive water-treatment facilities. According to the *New York Times*, over the next decade New York City plans to spend $250 million on watershed protection in order to avoid spending $5 billion on a federally mandated water filtration system.[94]

IMPROVING HUMAN HABITAT

While land preservation programs have justifiably focused on the habitat needs of wildlife, little attention has been given to the kinds of habitat essential to humans. The environmental benefits of green spaces in and around cities may be critical to human health. But the effects on the human psyche of interacting with the natural world could prove even more important.

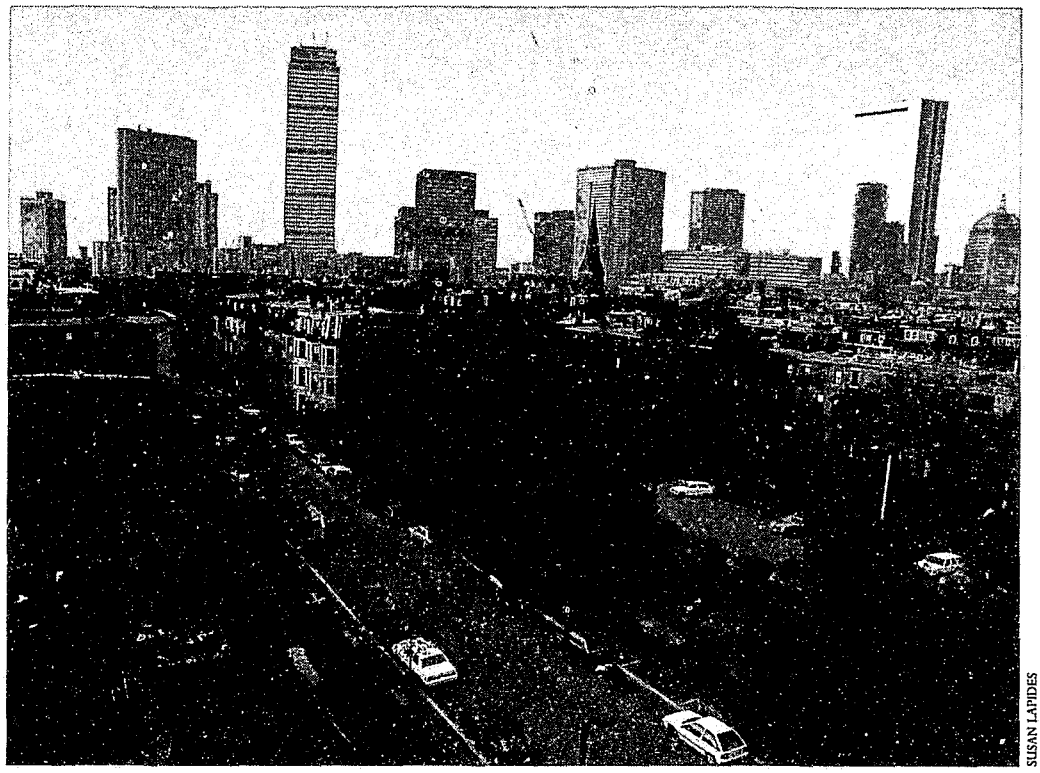
Anthropological and psychological evidence suggests a primal need in humans to connect with nature. Harvard's preeminent biologist Edward O. Wilson calls it the "biophilia hypothesis." The theory holds that the human need for association with the natural world goes beyond mere attraction or appreciation of nature's utilitarian values. Biophilia implies that we are inextricably linked with nature; that as we evolved in close association with nature, we developed an unshakable, biologically based emotional dependence on the living world.[95]

"This proposition suggests that human identity and personal fulfillment somehow depend on our relationship to nature," says Yale Environmental Studies professor Stephen Kellert. Because the natural world influences our emotional, cognitive, aesthetic, and even spiritual development, Kellert says, losing touch with nature exposes us to a "deprived and diminished existence."

One symptom of such a loss is stress. Kellert writes that "a consistent finding in well over 100 studies of recreation experiences in wilderness and urban nature areas" has been reduction in stress.[96] Because stress is a factor in many human illnesses, scientists are now beginning to explore whether exposure to nature can reduce disease and improve recovery. Environmental psychologist Roger Ulrich found that surgery patients with hospital windows overlooking natural scenes recovered more quickly and required less medication than matched patients whose only view was a brick wall.[97]

The biophilia hypothesis and stress research would argue for the need to protect natural areas as human habitat, including green spaces within cities that are safe for humans to use. But accomplishing that goal may require a change in the mind-set of environmentalists. At a Sierra Club round table on race, justice, and the environment, Earth Island Institute

South End Gardens, Lower Roxbury, Boston, Massachusetts.



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president Carl Anthony lamented that "the traditional environmental movement distances itself from the cities, denying that they are part of the environment." Anthony and other leaders of the environmental justice movement have been pushing for more environmental attention to the needs of humans in urban areas.[98] According to the President's Commission on Americans Outdoors, 80% of Americans will live in or near cities by the year 2000.[99] If natural areas are not protected within that context, many people will be deprived of a most basic human need.

A NEW VISION OF PARKS

"Any place you can create some open, green public space is critical to the spiritual and emotional well-being of the city—whether or not you call them parks in the traditional sense of the word."

Brenda Funches
Program Manager
Common Ground, Los Angeles

On prominent display at the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Los Angeles is a diorama of Uhuru Gardens, a planned community garden, urban forest, environmental education center, and farmers' market. The lot Uhuru Gardens may someday occupy is at 103rd and Grape streets in Watts. The property became vacant in 1965 when the buildings on it burned to the ground; the rubble is still there.[100] Portions of the money to build Uhuru Gardens will be raised locally from the people who will use it. Neighborhood craftspeople will be employed during its construction. A ranger trained in horticulture and human relations will be hired to live on the grounds and provide security.[101]

The sociologists and criminologists who have explored ways of making urban open spaces safer would agree that the plan for Uhuru Gardens holds promise. When people avoid parks out of fear, crime and vandalism increase.[102] The political scientist John Q. Wilson has suggested that when people feel a sense of order in their communities, it is less likely that crimes will be committed.[103] The disorder of a junk lot or a graffiti-splashed park can contribute to a sense of permissiveness that fosters criminal behavior. The theory explains, in part, why cutbacks in park maintenance have contributed to making parks unsafe and why community efforts to clean up public spaces have so successfully reduced crime and helped neighborhoods reclaim their parks.

Take the example of East Little Havana, a traditionally Hispanic area in one of the oldest sections of Miami. José Martí Park had been a center for drug dealers and a way station for the homeless in that area. But once neighbors organized and began cleaning up the park, the atmosphere changed. Nowadays schoolchildren play in the park and old people can be seen shuffling dominoes at night. The key is to bring the community into the decision-making process about where gardens, playgrounds, and recreation facilities should be located and how they are managed.[104]

Too often, parks and recreation programs have been developed without community input. But doing so, says Ira Hutchison, "is tantamount to planned failure." Hutchison is executive director of the Roundtable Associates, Inc., a nonprofit association of African American park, recreation, and conservation professionals. Hutchison says he has seen "monster" recreation centers built in public housing complexes that were quickly destroyed because residents felt no sense of pride or ownership in the facilities. To correct that problem, Hutchison says, people must have the ability to make choices about what happens in their community, and planners must make sure that citizens have enough information to make the best decisions.[105]

At the Cabrini–Green public housing project in Chicago, residents say they have often felt left out of the decision-making process. Now they are insisting that their ideas for open space and recreation be included in a planned $50 million renovation.[106] Cabrini–Green is the second-largest public housing complex in the nation, with clusters of highrises in various stages of disrepair.[107] Cabrini's Local Advisory Council (LAC) has drawn up its own master plan for improvements. LAC vice president Cora Moore says the people who live there know best what they want and what will be used. The LAC master plan calls for an activity center for all ages, with a skating rink and

rooms for music and computer classes. Each highrise unit would also house a recreation area for younger children so they don't have to stray too far from home to play.[108] Some vacant lots around the housing project are already in use as community gardens, where volunteers have taught children how to grow crops and market their produce.[109]

Such gardens are now a common feature in many cities, where it only makes sense for neighborhoods to turn abandoned land into centers of community activity. In Oakland, California, a newly formed nonprofit organization, East Bay Urban Gardeners, is working with the city's Recreation and Parks Department to convert vacant lots into community gardens. Neighborhood residents are clearing the sites where gardens are to take root.[110] On Dearborn Street in the Mission District of San Francisco, residents documented a 28% drop in crime after the first year of their garden project. Working on the garden encouraged residents to form a neighborhood watch group, which made the area an unattractive place for drug dealers. Now crime in the area is down by 78%.[111]

AN URGENT PRIORITY

Creating new open space is an urgent priority because opportunities to do so are rapidly disappearing. Despite an absolute need for more land for open space in urban areas, much of it is either being lost to development faster than it can be acquired or is priced out of range. Alan Front, TPL vice president for Federal Affairs, told a Senate committee in 1993 that the low levels of appropriations for land acquisition have created an "incredible backlog of conservation properties that are waiting in a line $3 billion deep." And, Front pointed out, "a lot of properties that do not make the backlog list are disappearing off the map."[112] William J. Chandler, conservation director of the National Parks and Conservation Association, added that land is being quickly gobbled up by development and that "failure to act now raises the real costs of buying the same lands later."[113]

In most urban communities, more open lands are needed on both a small and a grand scale. In Baltimore, Seattle, and Austin, TPL has been helping to set aside extensive greenways that connect a mix of neighborhoods with major urban parks and cultural facilities. In Atlanta, where TPL played a major role in establishing the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, the organization is reclaiming an abandoned industrial district to connect the King site to the Freedom Parkway and the Carter Presidential Center. In Minneapolis, TPL is looking at ways to assist with the Hennepin Community Works Project, an ambitious proposal to put people to work on projects that will improve parks, trails, greenways, watercourses, and recreation facilities in deteriorating neighborhoods.

The key is to bring the community into the decision-making process about where gardens, playgrounds, and recreation facilities should be located and how they are managed.

Small spaces are also crucial. In Newark, for instance, where only one-sixth acre of developed parkland exists for every 1,000 people,[114] Tubman Elementary, a highly regarded magnet school, has only a tiny asphalt-covered lot to serve as a playground.[115] Children in Newark and 28 other cities are currently learning to kick soccer balls on vacant strips of land through a program called Soccer in the Streets. But the players will need real soccer fields once games get under way. Soccer in the Streets founder Carolyn McKenzie points out that while soccer fields are available in the suburbs, inner cities have few. What there is plenty of, however, is unused vacant land. "All we need to do is cut the grass, clean them up, and put in sufficient lighting," McKenzie says. "We shouldn't have to bus them to Timbuktu to play soccer. We've got to have facilities in their immediate environment."[116]

RESPONDING TO THE NEED— TPL'S *GREEN CITIES INITIATIVE*

After years of disinvestment, it has become increasingly apparent that the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) and other traditional funding sources are not enough to meet the needs of newer, growing cities and older urban centers. As more mayors have recognized the economic importance of parks and open space, they have raised the issue to the top of their agendas, and citizens have voted to tax themselves to pay for better parks—even during recessionary times. But additional federal investment is critical, whether it is through jobs programs, anti-crime legislation, watershed protection, or full funding of the Urban Parks and Recreation Recovery Program and LWCF. Federal matching dollars provide increased incentives for state and local governments to multiply the investment.

The Trust for Public Land's unique role has been to bring together a mix of public and private resources so that preservation of important land is not entirely dependent upon the slow wheels of government. The National Research Council's report, "Setting Priorities for Land Conservation," praised TPL and other nonprofit organizations for "extraordinary and useful work as entrepreneurs, innovators, and deal makers. They exercise quick discovery and response capabilities that government agencies may lack. They have the skills, experience, and reputations to forge multi-parcel assemblages and arrange complex transactions that cross agency boundaries and overcome public and private property distinctions." [117]

For the past 20 years the Trust for Public Land has been working to protect land for people to enjoy, but the benefits go far beyond pleasure. Communities across the nation have discovered that investments in parks and recreation pay real dividends in terms of reduced crime, more stable cities, increases in tourism, cleaner environments, and a better quality of life. It is for these reasons that TPL is looking forward to expanding public open spaces even further through its Green Cities Initiative.

TPL has developed a plan for addressing the park and open space needs of America's cities and metropolitan areas as well as individual strategies in specific locations. Weaving together its extensive experience in urban land conservation and its research findings, TPL has identified 12 metropolitan and urban areas for intensive assistance over the next five years.

TPL will continue to help civic groups and public agencies at all levels create more public parks and cultural resources by structuring real estate transactions that accommodate the fiscal limitations and the public land-buying process. TPL will also become more active in public policy, constituency building, park planning, public finance campaigns, and other long-term strategies.

Through the Green Cities Initiative, TPL will work with civic and business leaders to pursue its goal of bringing more functional, accessible, and safe parks and public open space to urban communities.

I & M River Parkway, Sacramento, California.

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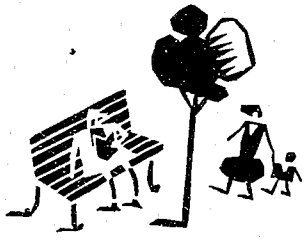

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The Trust for Public Land
116 New Montgomery Street, Fourth Floor
San Francisco, CA 94105
800-714-LAND FAX (415) 495-4103

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