

A photograph of two hikers with large backpacks walking away from the camera on a dirt path through tall grass. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow and long shadows. The hiker in the foreground is wearing a dark tank top and shorts, and the hiker behind is wearing a dark tank top and shorts. The path is narrow and appears to be a natural trail.

Outdoor Recreation In Iowa

Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

2023-2028

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Draft December 2023

DEAR OUTDOOR ENTHUSIAST:

Our outdoor spaces are dynamic, vibrant and provide natural, social, economic, health and wellness benefits improving the quality of life for all Iowans. They bring communities together. They provide meeting places for family reunions and weddings, and they are signature spots for community events and celebrations. These spaces are also where children learn new activities, understand what it means to work as a team and learn lessons in victory and defeat.

Our parks, forests, lakes, rivers, recreation and wildlife areas are vitally important as they are critical habitats for Iowa's plants and animals. Exploring the depths of these areas is where we can experience moments of pure quiet while fostering deeper connections to the outdoors. Continued protection comes from the next generation experiencing the resource with their parents, grandparents or friends through birding, hunting, kayaking or hiking through our wild places.

In developing this plan, we listened to Iowans about the outdoor recreation activities they enjoy, as well as the activities they'd like to do in the future. This document is a guide book for moving Iowa toward a balance of outdoor recreation and natural resource protection - not just for today, but for future generations. It's now up to city, county and state agencies to take recommendations introduced in this plan and act.

Kayla Lyon, Director
Iowa Department of Natural Resources



Outdoor Recreation in Iowa

The Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan provides a framework for outdoor recreation priorities and plans that will enhance Iowa's natural resources while contributing to the well-being and enjoyment of all Iowans.



Environmental benefits: people with a greater connection to the outdoors also support conservation and preservation of natural resources, contributing to a healthier environment through daily choices and actions.

Physical benefits: Walking, hiking, biking and other outdoor recreation activities keep Iowans active and healthy throughout their life.

Emotional benefits: Spending time outdoors, disconnected from technology, work and everyday tasks reduces stress and re-energizes us to take on the tasks of the day.

Social benefits: Natural Resource, parks and outdoor recreation areas are natural draws for people to come together and spend time with family and friends. Many communities rely on these areas for festivals and events as hubs of social structure.

Economic benefits: People who participate in outdoor recreation contribute to their communities through local spending. Potential employees also make job choices based on the availability of close-to-home outdoor opportunities, such as Iowa's lakes, waterways and trails.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

In 1963, President Kennedy proposed legislation that established the Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), carrying forward a recommendation made by the Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission in 1961. This fund was to assist states in planning, acquisition and development of recreation resources, as well as a guide to purchase new federal recreational areas.

After much debate and two years of discussions, bipartisan support was finally achieved and a Land & Water Conservation Fund bill was signed into law on September 3, 1964. This new act established funding for the creation of parks and open spaces, protection of wilderness, wetlands, and refuges, preservation of habitat, enhancement of recreational opportunities, and for matching grants to state and local governments for recreation planning and development. A condition of the Act for the dissemination of the matching grant funds was the development in each state of a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). These plans are developed, updated and submitted to the National Park Service every five years.



The funds received from the State and Local Assistance Program Fund are primarily oil and gas lease revenues acquired from leases on federal lands. By putting these revenues back into the hands of states the National Park Service is balancing the impact to the resource while providing additional close-to-home open space and recreational opportunities. States must match the federal grant funds with at least 50% of their own local resources or through donations. The sites must be available to all citizens into perpetuity. In 2017, the Land and Water Conservation Fund awarded \$94.3 million in grants nationwide, of which Iowa received \$1.2 million.

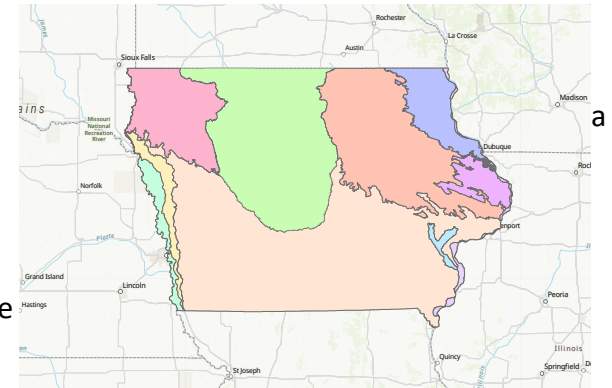
Year	Competitive Grants	State Projects	Planning Grant	Total Allocation	Reapportionment & GOMESA* Funds Available
2018	\$427,000	\$550,000	-0-	\$1,306,393	\$804,890
2019	\$1,065,665	\$1,846,115	-0-	\$1,306,393	\$923,451
2020	\$1,278,327.50	\$3,008,000	-0-	\$1,361,709	\$1,449,911
2021	\$1,325,000	\$745,010	\$37,500	\$2,723,418	\$1,019,478
2022	\$1,199,614	\$1,320,000	-0-	\$2,415,348	\$1,029,436

*GOMESA - Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act

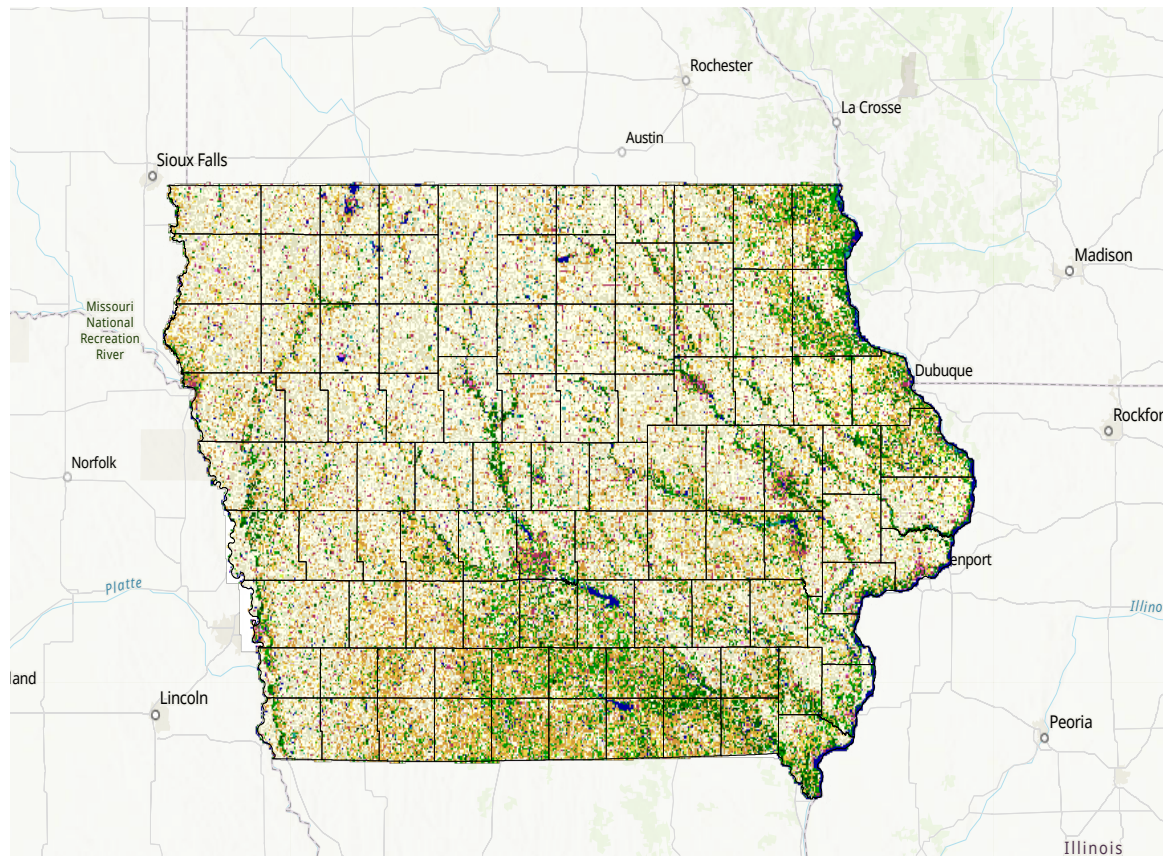
The Resource

Iowa is a state of 56,286 square miles (36,022,848 acres) bordered by the Mississippi River on the east and the Missouri River on the west. Iowa has relatively low relief - elevations running from high of 1,670 feet above mean sea level in Osceola County in northwestern Iowa to 480 feet above mean sea level in Lee County in the southeastern corner of the state.

Iowa's natural communities are as much a result of its recent geologic past as they are a result of climatic conditions. The boundaries of the ecoregions that resulted from this geologic history coincide well with the boundaries of other habitat based classification systems.



Landforms of Iowa



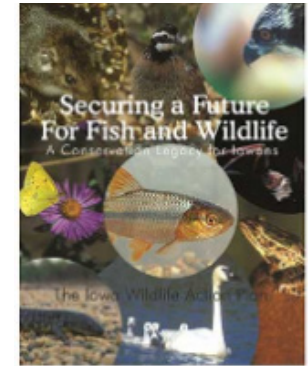
Iowa High Resolution Landcover Map (2009)

By the Numbers

- 19,000 Miles of Interior Rivers
- 176 Miles of Trout Streams
- 203,000 Acres of water in our Border Rivers
- 16 Natural Glacial Lakes
- 27 Shallow Natural Glacial Lakes
- 156 Constructed Lakes
- 52 On-Stream Impoundments
- 32 Oxbow Lakes
- 57,385 Acres in State Parks
- 9,825 Acres in State Preserves
- 45,246 Acres in State Forests
- 418,675 Acres in Wildlife Management Areas
- 39,096 Acres in City Parks
- 193,624 Acres in County Parks
- 283,680 Acres in Federal Lands
- 909 Acres in ATV Parks

Iowa's Ecosystems

[Iowa Wildlife Action Plan \(IWAP\)](#) is a ten-year, comprehensive conservation strategy for wildlife in all habitat types. The IWAP identifies several rare and sensitive ecological communities as land protection and management priorities. Forests, grasslands, wetlands and lakes and rivers are critical habitats for plants and animals. As you scroll through each habitat type you will find a simplified chart from this plan indicating species of greatest need of conservation.



Forests in Iowa

Upon settlement, Iowa was described as having 18% forested lands (6,700,000 acres), today there is about 8% remaining, most of which are located on steep slopes with sensitive soils or within riparian zones.

The largest contiguous tracts of forested communities reside in Iowa's four main State Forests (Loess Hills, Shimek, Stephens, and Yellow River) and six minor State Forests (Backbone, White Pine Hollow, Holst, Barkley, Pilot Mound and Gifford). There are also forested lands on much of Iowa's State Parks and Wildlife Areas. County Conservation Boards, City Parks and Tree Communities make up the other public lands with forested acres. Much of our major forested lands, however, fall under private ownership.

[Iowa State Forest Action Plan](#) is a statewide assessment of forests and their condition as well as 10-year goals and strategies for implementing forest practices in the state.

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Need - Forests

8 species of amphibians (e.g., frogs and toads)	10 species of reptiles (e.g., turtles and snakes)
30 species of birds (e.g., songbirds, owls, hawks, grouse and quail)	17 species of butterflies (e.g. swallowtails, hairstreaks, checkerspots, skippers)
5 species of terrestrial snails (e.g., Pleistocene snails)	14 species of mammals (e.g., bats, flying squirrel, gray fox)

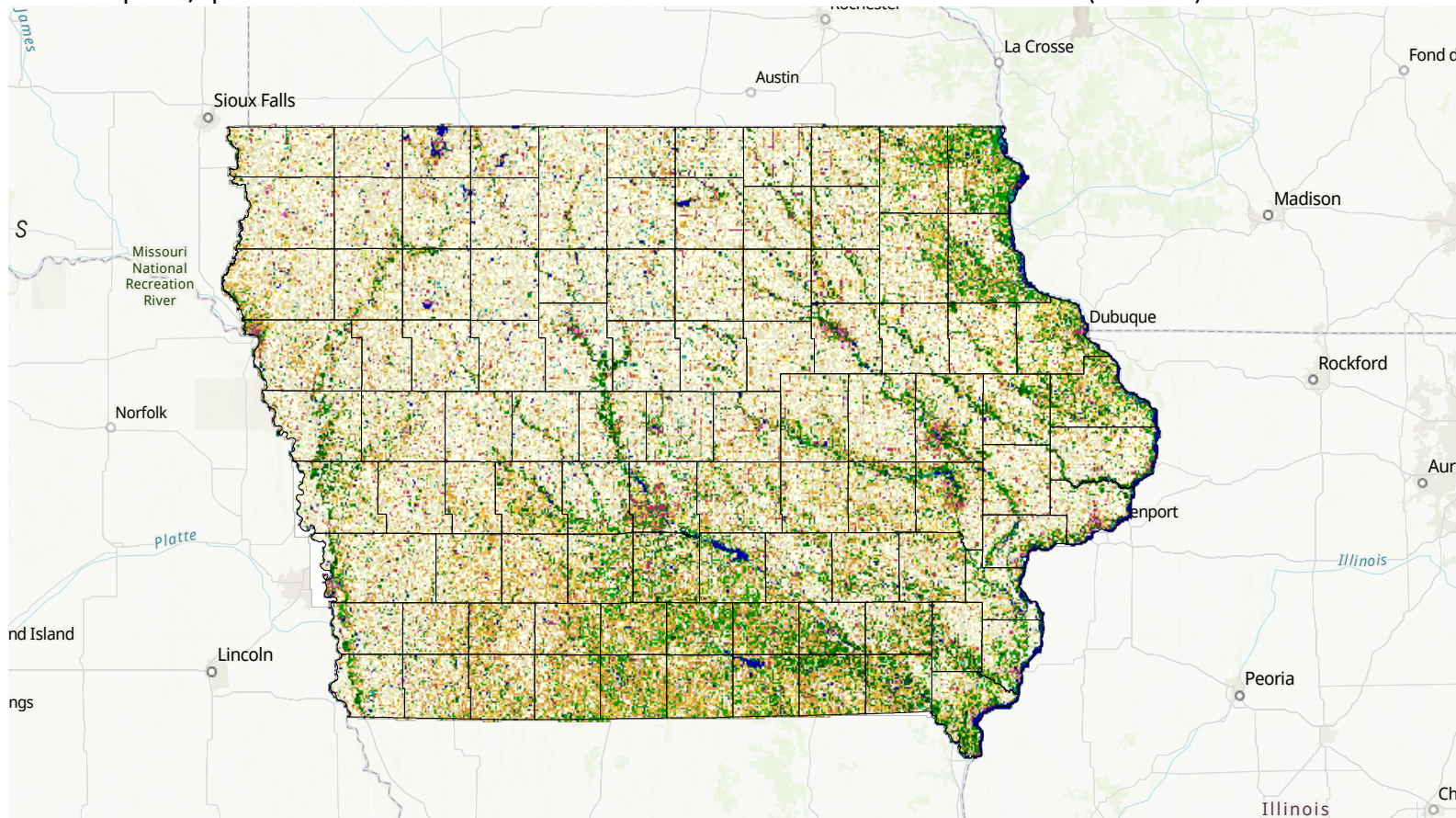


Forest-based Recreation

There are numerous opportunities for outdoor recreation on forested lands. Forested lands allow you to get away from the hustle and bustle of life and not a mile in on the trails and the noises of vehicles and people fade away. On public lands, forested areas allow for camping, picnicking, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, bird watching, hunting and fishing.

Forest includes 4 classes in the High Resolution Land Cover 2009 dataset:

- Coniferous forest - Spatial areas of evergreen forest.
- Deciduous Short - Spatial areas of broadleaf deciduous forest, trees or shrubs less than 3.5 meters (~15 feet) tall.
- Deciduous Medium - Spatial areas of broadleaf deciduous forest, or trees more than 3.5 meters (~15 feet) tall and less than 12 meters (~40 feet).
- Deciduous Tall - Spatial/spectral areas of broadleaf deciduous forest or trees more than 12 meters (~40 feet) tall.



NOTE: For high level data for all landcover types, forests, grasslands, wetlands, rivers & lakes visit the SCORP StoryMap. For each landcover type the viewer will have the ability to drill down to county level data.



Grasslands

Grasslands make up about 21% of Iowa's total acreage. Distributed unevenly across the state, the greatest density lies in the south-central portion of the state with remnant (unplowed) prairie in the Loess Hills landform in far western Iowa.

Due to habitat loss and degradation, grassland-dependent wildlife are in need of continued conservation efforts. Wildlife viewing is a popular recreational pursuit for all ages.

Grassland birds are facing steep, long-term declines, more so than any other group of birds.

Iowa Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Need - Grasslands

8 species of amphibians (e.g., frogs, salamanders)	21 species of reptiles (e.g., turtles, lizards and snakes)
34 species of birds (e.g., songbirds, owls, hawks, quail)	17 species of butterflies (e.g., blues, monarchs, fritillaries, skippers)
1 species of crayfish (prairie crayfish)	11 species of mammals (e.g., shrews, jackrabbit, weasels)

Grassland-based Recreation

As mentioned, grasslands are a great place to bird and to observe and photograph wildlife, use trails for walking, jogging, biking, camping or to hunt pheasant, dove or rabbit.

Another outdoor grassland experience Iowa has to offer is a visit to the Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge to view the thousands of acres of restored prairie, get a glimpse of bison or elk, or participate in a monarch butterfly tagging event.

Grassland includes two classes in the High Resolution Land Cover 2009 Dataset, Grassland 1, and Grassland 2.

- Grassland 1 - Spatial areas of grasses. Includes rural road ditch complexes, grassed waterways, some grassland/forest edge areas, and other grass not able to be separated into difference classes.
- Grassland 2 - Spatial/spectral areas of grasslands that exhibit lushness in their spectral signature in the spring image. This includes areas such as pastures, lawns, and other cool season grasses.



Wetlands

Historically, around 4 million acres of prairie pothole marshes dotted north-central and northwest Iowa. Another million acres of backwaters, sloughs and flooded oxbows were found in the floodplains of the Mississippi, Missouri and larger inland rivers.

Wetlands occur on about 258,000 acres, or 1% of Iowa's landscape. Due to its position in the continent and its historically lush, productive ecosystems, Iowa is a place of international importance for North America's migratory birds. The Prairie Pothole Region is an area of global importance of nesting habitat for migratory birds.

Wetland priority projects are those that demonstrate multiple benefits. Building wetland complexes either adjacent to or within the watershed of existing lakes and large marshes and as part of larger river corridor projects improves the recreational capacity of these investments as well as the ecological functions of the wetland habitats.

The [Wetland Program Plan](#) is focused on the following core elements of Iowa's Wetlands Program: monitoring and assessment, voluntary restoration and protection, wetlands regulatory program, water quality standards and education.

Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Need - Wetlands

8 species of amphibians (e.g., frogs, toads, salamanders)	13 species of reptiles (e.g., turtles and snakes)
47 species of birds (e.g., ducks, herons, rails, sandpipers, terns)	13 species of butterflies (e.g., fritillaries, checkerspots, skippers)
At least 1 species of crayfish	8 species of dragonflies and damselflies (e.g., spreadwings, bluets, darners)
2 species of fish (including the endangered Topeka Shiner)	6 species of mammals (e.g., shrews and weasels)

Wetland-based Recreation

Wetlands provide hunters, bird watchers and other nature enthusiasts with a rich and diverse natural environment to explore. Wetlands also contribute to the growing interest in citizen science, which is a form of recreation with the added benefit of contributing to scientific knowledge.



Lakes & Rivers

There are 19,176 miles of interior rivers and streams in Iowa and 199 natural and created lakes. The state of Iowa drains into the United State's longest rivers, the Missouri and Mississippi.

Iowans value their water resources. Multiple state and federal agencies, local governments and non-governmental organizations have worked tirelessly on both public and private lands to improve the quality of our rivers, streams and lakes.

The [Lake Restoration Program](#) and [River Restoration Toolbox](#) help guide efforts to protect and improve our river systems.

Wildlife Action Plan Species of Greatest Need - Lakes & Rivers

6 species of amphibians (e.g., frogs, salamanders)	18 species of reptiles (e.g., turtles and snakes)
36 species of birds (e.g., ducks, herons, rails, sandpipers, pelicans)	5 species of butterflies (e.g., harvester, hairstreaks, scalloping)
5 species of crayfish	20 species of dragonflies and damselflies (e.g., spreadwings, bluets, darners)
66 species of fish (e.g., sturgeon, paddlefish, eel, Topeka Shiner)	43 species of mussels (e.g., pocketbook, higgins' eye, wartyback)

Lake & River-based Recreation

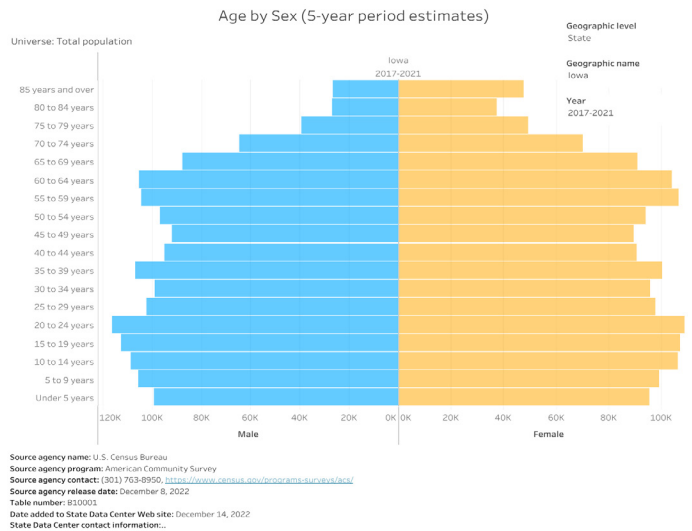
In a [survey](#) conducted in 2019-2022 by the Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, on average Iowans travel about 48 miles to visit Iowa lakes and they estimate spending on a single day-trip at \$35 and \$135 if there were overnight accommodations. Boating, kayaking, swimming, fishing, wildlife viewing are some of the most popular recreational activities.

The People

Iowa's population has remained stable for a long time while the overall population of the United States has grown significantly. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Iowa's estimated population in 2022 was 3,200,517 an increase of 54,806 since the last plan. Iowa has a land area of 56,286 square miles which is about 58 people per square mile.

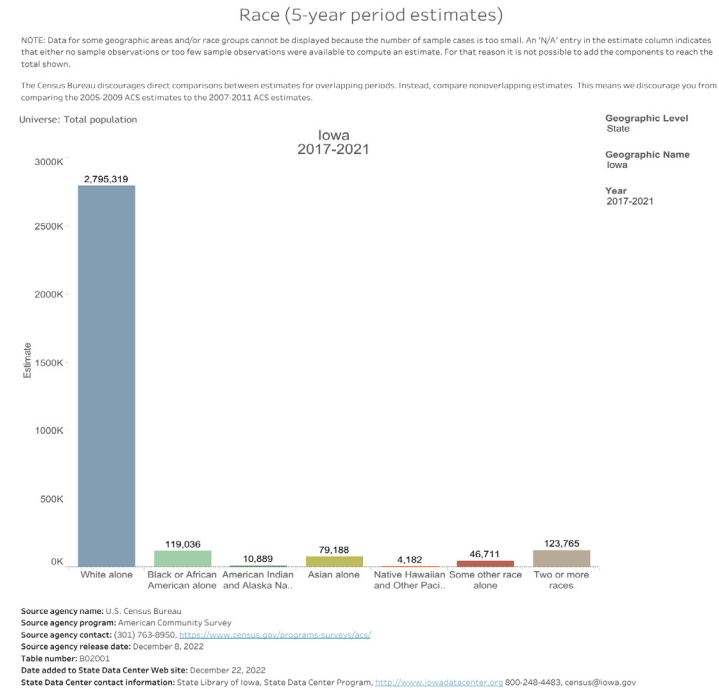
Age by Sex (Total Population)

The population of the United States is getting older and living longer and Iowa reflects this trend.



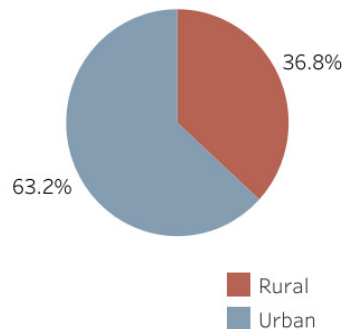
Race

Residents of Iowa are primarily Caucasian, however there are increasing populations of Hispanic, Black, Asian and other nationalities.



Urban and Rural Population

Data shows that more than half of Iowa's population, 63% live in urban areas.



Underserved refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, who have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life. This [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) provides information on census tracts that are overburdened or underserved. With the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020, increased funding for LWCF allowed for the faster pace with which to improve conservation and outdoor recreation access and well as expansion of access and participation in underserved communities. LWCF Grants as well as other federally funded grant opportunities have scoring criteria that takes into consideration these opportunities.



BONDURANT

GREAT WESTERN

The Opportunity

Iowa has a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities due to its diverse range of natural resource offerings and its unique in that public outdoor recreation is provided by:

City Governments

Parks and open spaces provide a wide variety of outdoor recreation opportunities through organized sports, swimming pools, splash pads, playgrounds, natural areas, picnic and rental facilities.

County Governments

Iowa is the only state in the nation that offers a County Conservation Board (CCB) in all its 99 counties.

Operating at the local level, CCB lands offer similar opportunities to state and federal offerings including areas for lodging, camping, picnicking and family reunions but also areas for hunting and shooting sports.

The CCB System also offers year-round outdoor educational programming, providing opportunities for local residents to grow, learn and connect with their resource.

State Government

Iowa Department of Natural Resources is responsible for outdoor recreation through state parks, preserves, forests, wildlife areas, and state lakes.

There are a wide variety of offerings in these areas from camping, rental facilities, hiking, bird watching & wildlife viewing, fishing, hunting and shooting ranges.

Federal Government

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Department of Interior (Fish & Wildlife Service and National Park Service) agencies comprise most of the federal government outdoor recreation opportunities.

Fish & Wildlife Service areas and refuge systems offer great opportunities for bird watching and wildlife viewing as well as hunting. While Effigy Mounds National Monument is an opportunity to explore a unique resource in the Upper Mississippi River Valley and learn about the indigenous people who lived here.

The most recognizable outdoor recreation offerings are found through the four flood control reservoirs (Saylorville Lake, Lake Red Rock, Coralville, and Rathbun Lake) which also offer boating, camping, fishing, rental facilities and hunting opportunities.



Public Lands

Iowa has about 56,286 square miles (36,022,848 acres) bordered by the Mississippi River on the east and the Missouri River and Big Sioux on the west with 3% of the land open to public access.

[Iowa's Land Inventory](#) is a StoryMap that provides information on State owned public lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of Natural Resources.

Iowa [County Conservation Board Land Inventory](#) is a StoryMap of public lands owned and managed by County Conservation Boards.

For additional information on outdoor recreation opportunities on public lands:

- [State Parks, Forests & Preserves](#)
- [Iowa's County Parks](#)
- [Public Hunting Atlas](#)
- [Fishing Atlas](#)

Land-based Trails

Iowa has approximately 1,163 miles of trails statewide. There are opportunities to walk, run, hike, bike, or test your skills mountain biking and cross-country skiing.

Iowa Department of Transportation and Iowa Transportation Commissions [Bicycle and Pedestrian Long-Range Plan](#) offers a look at the future of bicycle and pedestrian use/opportunities.

Also offered are opportunities to ride equestrian trails, tour [snowmobile](#) trails, or visit one of Iowa's designated [All-Terrain Vehicle and Off-Highway Motorcycle Riding Areas](#).

Water-based Trails

Iowa also boasts 14 state designated water trails. Traveling down these rivers you'll go through some of Iowa's most scenic landscapes and feel like you are truly transported back in time. Check out the [Iowa's State Water Trails Plan](#).



Participation in Outdoor Recreation

As part of the planning process for the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, a survey of Iowans is conducted every 5 years to assess participation in and attitude towards outdoor recreation. According to the 2022 survey:

- 88% of Iowans are satisfied with outdoor experiences
- 83% rated the availability as excellent or good
- 78% rated the state's efforts to provide opportunities as excellent or good
- 60% of residents say Iowa has just the right amount of recreation opportunities while 26% say there are not enough
- The most negative ratings for existing opportunity and the state's efforts to provide for the opportunity were in horseback riding and ATVing.

The full report prepared by Responsive Management, found in Appendix A, contains detailed information on 34 different outdoor activities as well as additional questions on Iowans' perspective on the outdoor resource and amenities.



Image courtesy of the Iowa Economic Development Authority, Photographer

Outdoor Recreation in Iowa must support the needs of Iowans in outdoor recreation participation and conservation of natural resources. The 2 priorities of this plan align with the goals and performance measures of the Land & Water Conservation Fund as well as bolster state plans from the Departments of Natural Resources, Health and Human Services, Transportation and Economic Development Authority and local planning through city and county agencies.

Priorities of this plan are in no particular order of importance. To move in a positive direction during the next five years, equal focus has to be on all areas of this plan.

Outdoor Recreation Priority 1: Enhance the Quality of Life of Iowans Through the Availability and Diversity of Natural Resources, Parks and Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

Park and recreation areas are natural gathering areas for people who like to spend time with family or enjoy the outdoors. Open spaces, provide room for outdoor recreational pursuits, but primarily offer protection for Iowa's plant and animal species through conservation, preservation or restoration of critical habitats. All areas contribute to environmental, physical, emotional and social well being while bolstering local economies.

Recommendation: Increase availability and access to outdoor recreation opportunities and amenities for Iowans and future Iowans.

Quality of Life: The standard of health, comfort and happiness experienced by an individual or group.

Research has confirmed that spending time outdoors improves our lives. Robin Mejia, author of a study in the Journal of Environmental Science and Technology states "In a meta-analysis of ten studies, they found that getting outside - and moving - for as little as five minutes at a time improved both mood and self-esteem." Iowa's landscape offers a wide variety of experiences and plays a significant role in enhancing the quality of life for Iowans.

In the Survey of Iowans, the top five reasons someone did not participate in outdoor recreation in the last 2 years was because:

- Lack of time/family or work obligations (32%)
- Lack of equipment (25%)
- Lack of access/lack of opportunities (15%)
- Health/ages (13%)
- Do not know where to go (9%)



With that said, Iowans view outdoor recreation as providing the following personal benefits:

- A sense of peace, relaxation or stress relief (95%)
- Positive family activities (92%)
- Mental or emotional health (92%)
- Health & fitness (93%)
- Healthy childhood development (86%)
- The healing power of the outdoors (85%)
- Adventure or challenging activities (75%)

On average participants prefer to travel 10 miles or less to participate in outdoor recreation, especially those participants that consider themselves casual users.

What opportunities are we creating for those casual users? What gateway activities (running, bicycling, hiking, camping, fishing) are we promoting and are we providing ease of access for those that have limited time and funds to participate?

Iowa has 99 counties, but according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2020 Census data there are 1027 incorporated communities in Iowa with an ever increasing number of Iowans moving into communities from the rural landscape, looking for opportunities to spend time outdoors.

The more you are engaged in a particular activity (multiple outings a month) the likelihood of increasing the distance of travel to participate.

To find what the top recreational activities are the most popular in your region see Appendix A, Responsive Management's Survey of Iowans.

Recommendation: Embrace diversity, equity and inclusion to improve access at all levels of need to enhance connection to the outdoors.



Iowa has had fairly consistent demographics but all indicators point to a coming change in the composition of race, culture, religion, age, socio-economic, disability (physical and mental), gender and LGBTQ populations of our state.

Do existing infrastructure and recreation offerings meet the needs of our current and future citizens? How do our areas become more inclusive of under-represented populations (age, gender, socio-economic, disability, cultural)?

Building a foundation of inclusiveness takes time and involves bringing to the table under-represented populations to hear their thoughts on barriers to participation and improvements to areas and facilities as well as a willingness to take action.

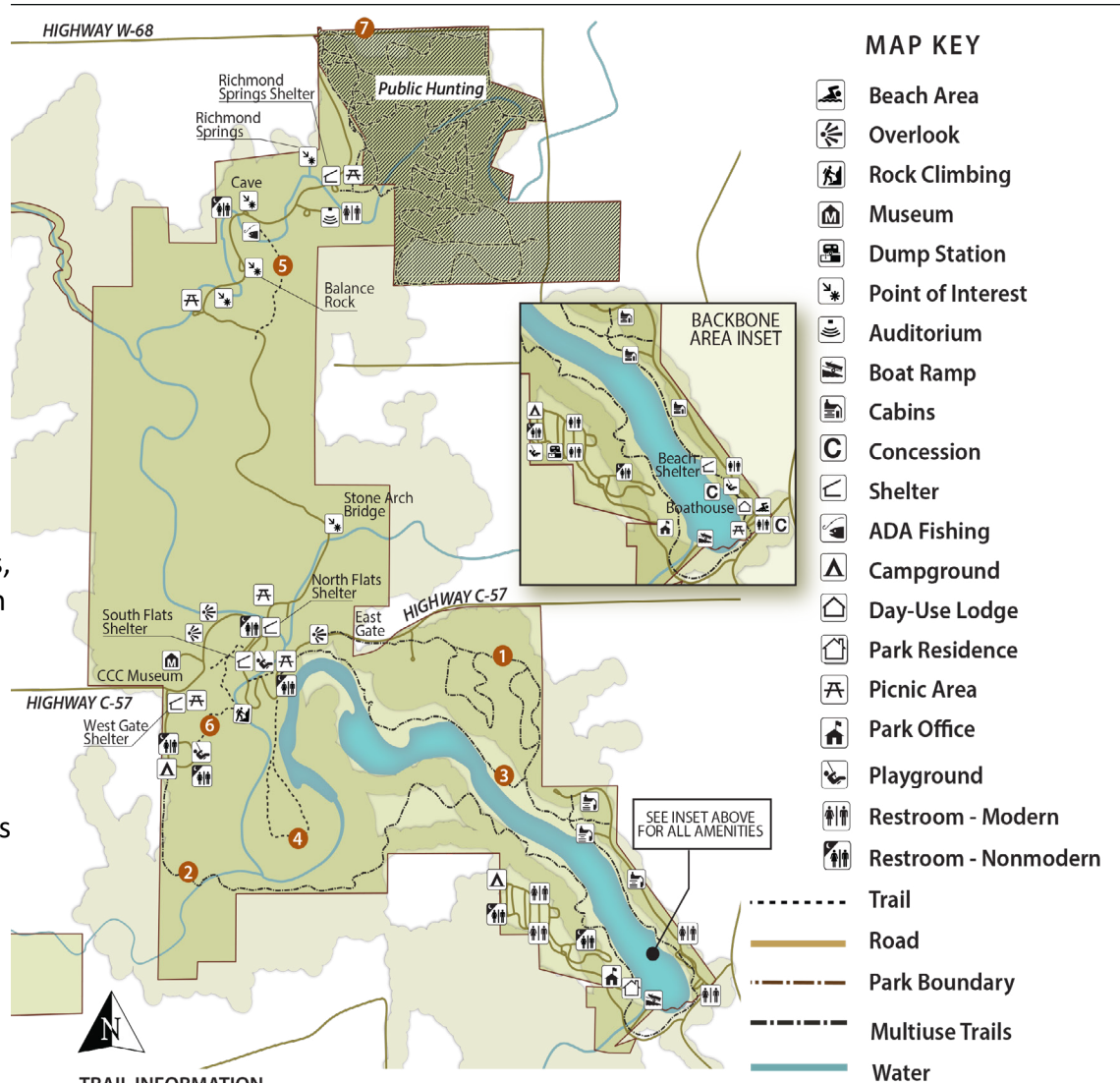
Agencies responsible for outdoor recreation should also consider representation in social media, websites and print media. People make decisions on what they read and see before they commit to participating in an experience. Images should show a wide diversity of people and gatherings of people participating in recreation opportunities.

In the 2023 Outdoor Participation Trends Report produced by the Outdoor Industry Foundation, there is an significant increase in numbers of senior (55+) participating in outdoor recreation. 2022 data showed senior participation hit 35% up from 28% in 2018.



Signage should consider design that offers greater understanding by visiting audiences. On site maps, consider including a description of the surface materials, difficulty and time to complete at an average of 2.4 mph walking speed.

All signage should include universal symbols as they are identifiers recognized by almost everyone throughout the world. For recreation, both the National Park Service and Fish & Wildlife Service use universal symbols that generally meet the needs for all natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation sites and are readily available.



TRAIL INFORMATION

Trail Name	Trail Activity	Length	Level of Difficulty	Estimated Hike Time
1 Bluebird Trail	Hike, Bike, Snowmobile	2.2 mi	Easy	1-1.25 hr
2 West Lake Trail	Hike, Bike, Snowmobile	3 mi	Moderate	1.25-1.5 hr
3 East Lake Trail	Hike, Bike, Snowmobile	2.4 mi	Moderate	1-1.25 hr
4 Backbone	Hike	0.8 mi	Moderate	30-45 min
5 Barred Owl	Hike	.4 mi	Moderate	10-15 min
6 Six Pines	Hike	.6 mi	Difficult	10-15 min
7 Forest	Hike, Bike, Equestrian, Cross-country Ski	7.39 mi	Moderate	3-3.5 hr

Recommendation: Invest in growing our communication systems to be credible, accurate and practical and make it convenient for lowans and future lowans to find and plan for outdoor recreation experiences.

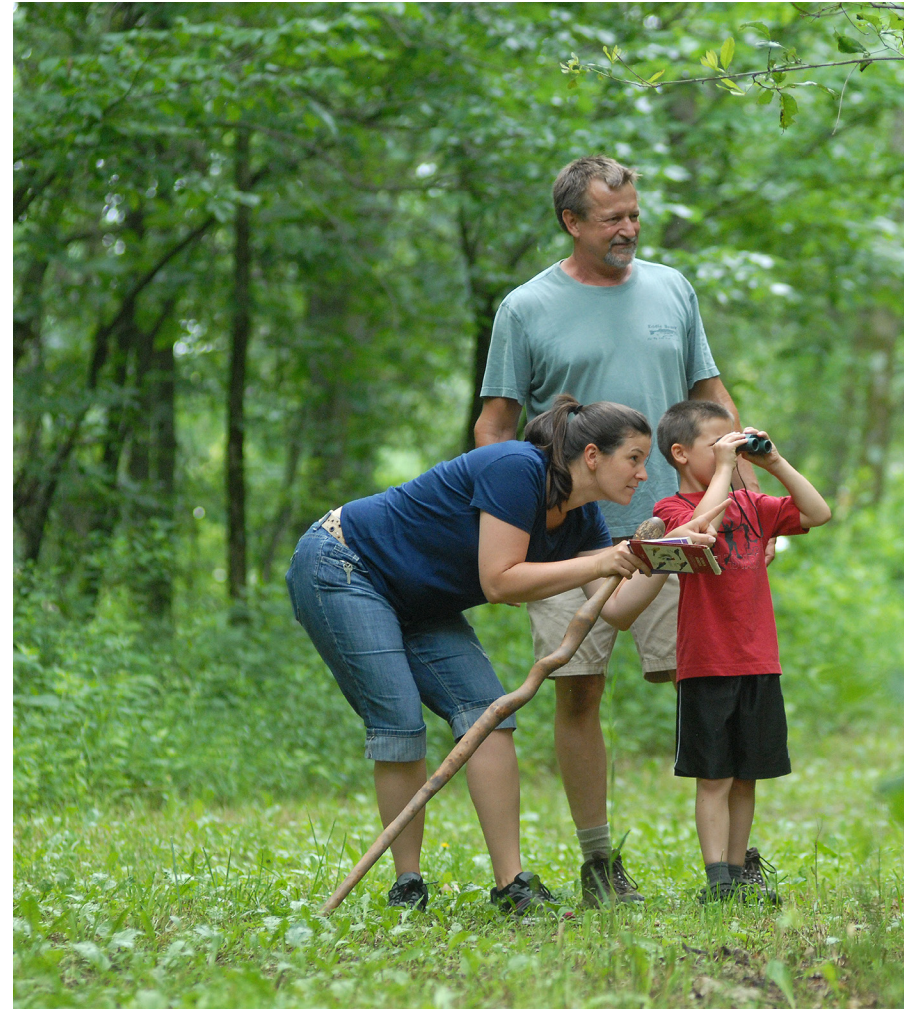
In a digital-first era, natural resource agencies and park and recreation organizations need to get information to platforms that are easy for lowans and future lowans to find. According to Expedia more than half (59%) of travelers don't have a specific destination in mind, they are looking for inspiration. In surveys of potential visitors conducted by the Iowa Economic Development Authority in 2018, 66 percent of respondents said that the fact that Iowa has 72 state parks and thousands of county parks makes Iowa a desirable place to visit.

Top Priorities when planning a trip

According to research completed by the Iowa Economic Development Authority of potential Iowa travelers, affordability and excitement are important factors when determining a vacation destination.

Iowa's landscape has a lot to offer. From the rolling hills and rock outcroppings, lakes, rivers and streams, wild areas and places of peace and beauty, there is something for everyone to experience.

In order to connect users to experiences, there is value building upon existing platforms, like Travel Iowa, to create the one-stop platform where anyone can easily search by activity or county to find outdoor recreation opportunities and experiences they want to engage in.

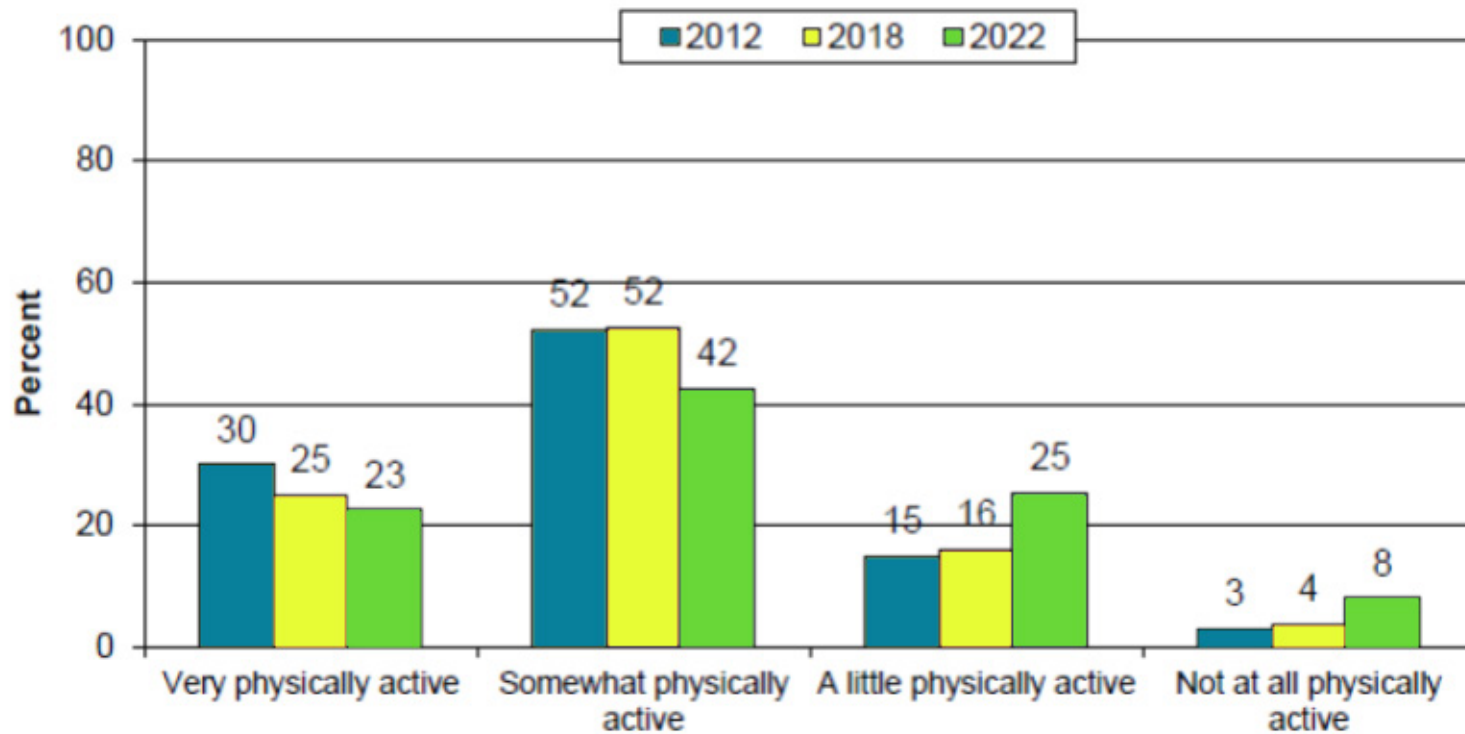


Recommendation: Increase lowan’s level of physical activity through outdoor recreation activities (active and passive) to improve lowa’s goals for public health and wellness and provide the education and resources necessary for their participation.

According to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) the average person spends 93% of their life indoors. Children aged 8-18 spend an average 7.5 hours per day on screens, adding up to 114 days over the course of a year!

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend that adults need 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week equating to about 30 minutes per day. Children, ages 6-17 need to be physically active 60 minutes each and every day.

When asked about their personal level of physical activity, the majority of participants in Responsive Management’s Survey of lowans indicated that they were somewhat or very physically active, but those percentages dropped in 2022 from levels in 2018.

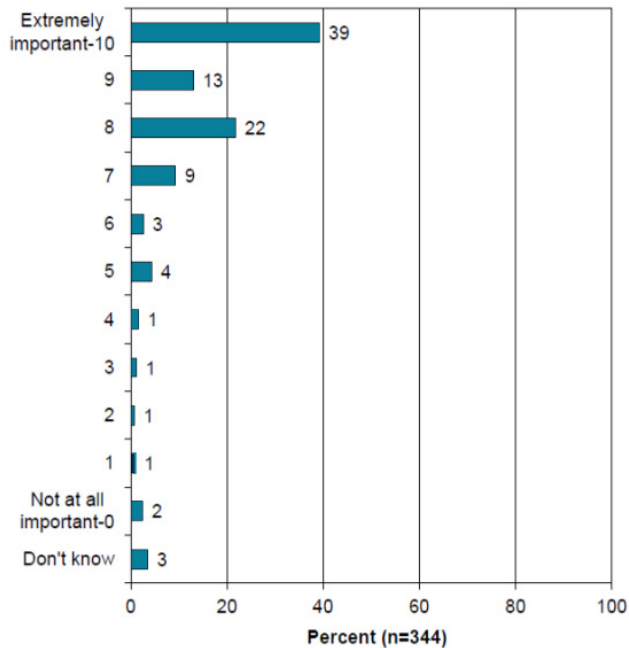
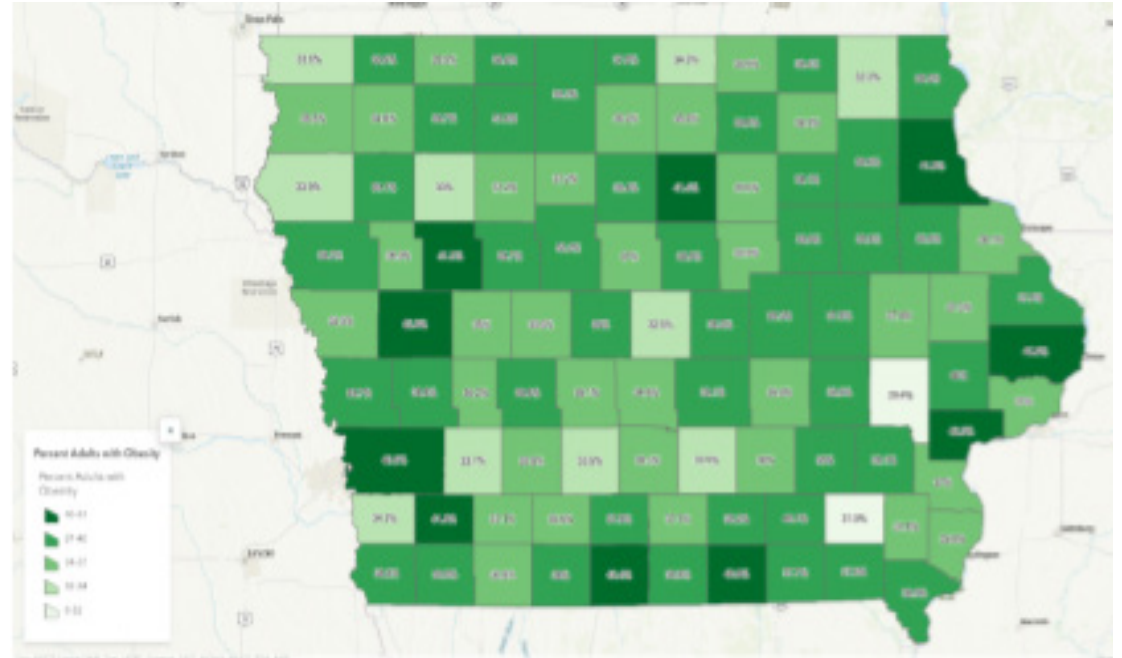


Percent Adults with Obesity: Percentage of adults that report BMI (Body Mass Index) greater than or equal to 30. This ranges from 29% - 42% across the state

[County Health Rankings and Roadmaps](#) used data from 2020 for this measure.

In comparison, one in six children (17.6%) ages 10-17 are considered to be obese. Iowa is ranked 17th among 50 states in childhood obesity.

For those participants in Responsive Management's Survey of Iowans who had children in the household, it was important for their children to spend time outdoors.

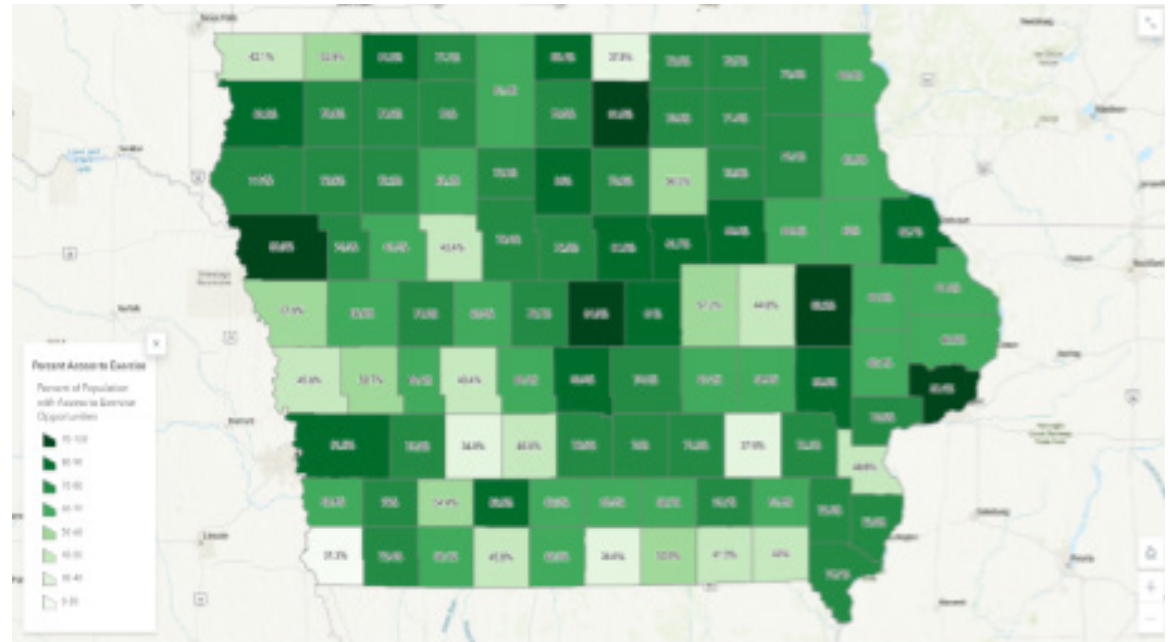


Access to Exercise Opportunities: Percentage of population with adequate access to locations for physical activity.

In Iowa, 79% of people lived close to a park or recreation facility. This ranged from 31% to 95% of people across counties in the state.

There are slight differences where someone lives (urban, suburban, small town or rural area) that lead to the choice of recreational activities and how much time someone has as available leisure time. On average commute time is around 19 miles for work.

Where there are gaps, what can we do to improve access to our outdoor spaces? What do those residents want and need?



County Health Rankings & Roadmaps used data from 2022 & 2020 for the development of this map

Ultimately, recreating outdoors can help Iowans:

- Improve physical health through daily movement
- Reduce stress
- Increase happiness and emotional wellbeing
- Improve creativity
- Reconnect with family
- Improve eyesight through reduced screen time
- Increase longevity of life

For goals, objectives and strategies to improve the health of Iowans go to [Iowa's Health Improvement Plan \(SHIP\)](#)



Outdoor Recreation Priority 2: The Right Opportunities. The Right Place. Done the Right Way

Our public areas showcase best practices for habitat management that private landowners can emulate, but with so few public acres, they are some of the only places where many types of outdoor recreation can take place. Natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation agency's responsibility is to maintain high quality resources that support a diverse ecosystem while also trying to navigate increasing recreational users and new recreational pursuits.

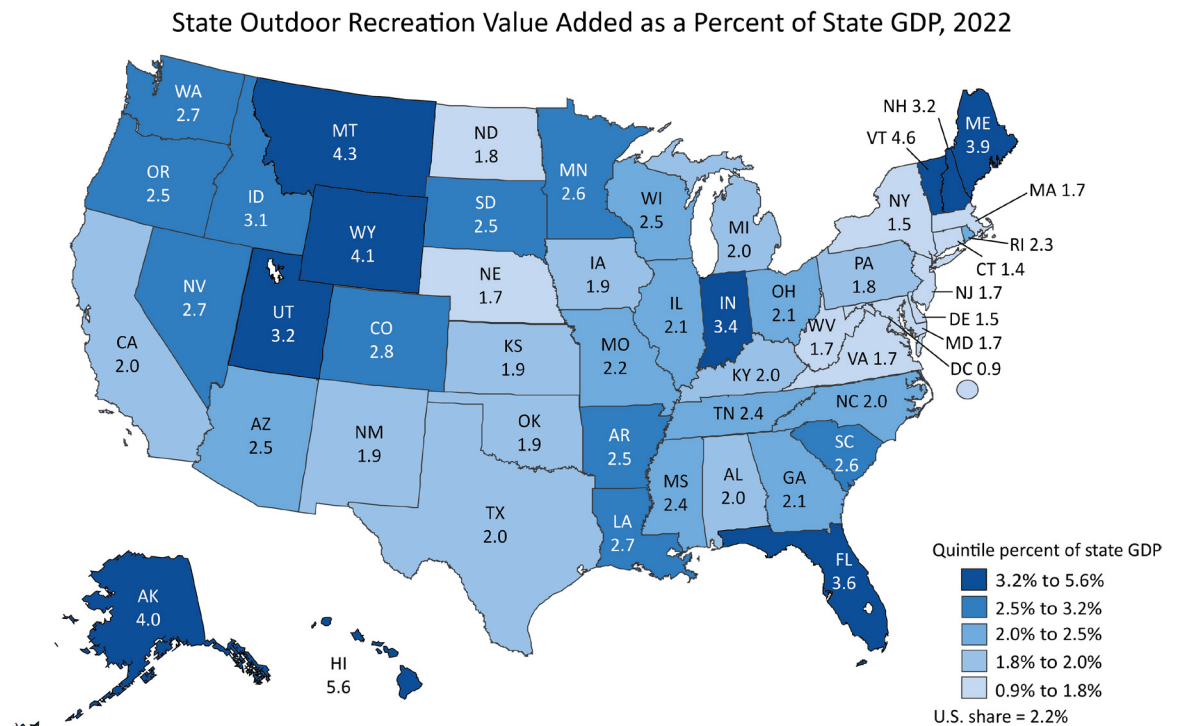
There has been a philosophical shift in how agencies approach engagement of people interested in outdoor recreation. It starts with an organizational commitment to planning and development of strong partnerships which are foundational to overall success. This will foster consistent messaging and public relations strategies will help resource managers find a balance between the resource and the user and ultimately result in strategic approaches that are also sustainable.

Recommendation: Develop partnerships with businesses, industry and recreation-affiliated user groups to stay relevant in the changing dynamics of outdoor recreation.

According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.2% (\$563.7 billion) of current-dollar gross domestic product (GDP) for the nation in 2022. This shows how significant outdoor recreation is to our way of life.

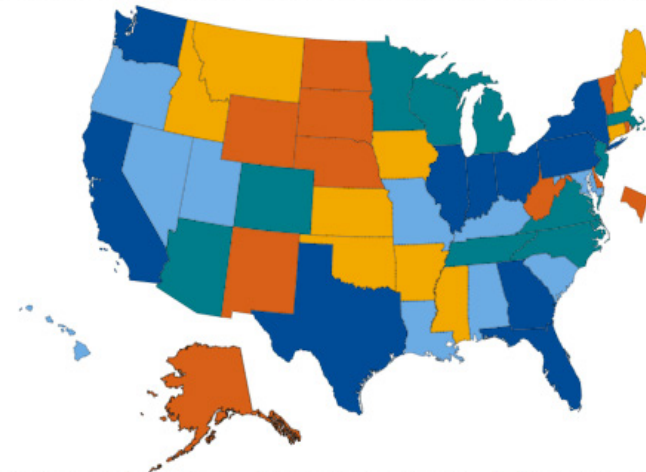
The outdoor recreation economy is made up of direct spending by users for equipment and gear, travel, food, lodging and entrance or participation fees as well as those industry and recreational service contributions such as salaries and wages, transportation and more.

Maps and Iowa specific data shown to the right and on the following pages can be found at the [Bureau of Economic Analysis Website](https://www.bea.gov/).



This map shows the isolated economic activity associated with outdoor recreation as it pertains to the value of outdoor recreation goods and services produced less the value of expenses incurred for their production. According to the 2022 report Iowa's value added GDP for all industries is \$4,583,470.

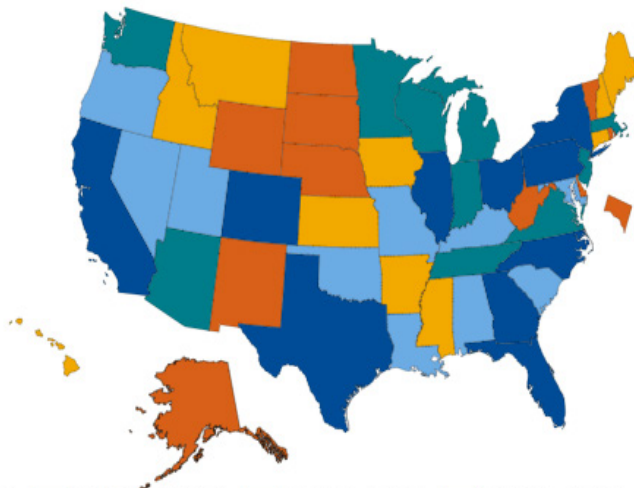
United States, ORSA Value added: All industries, 2022



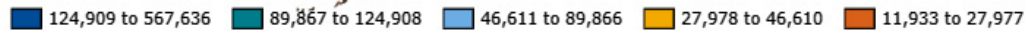
Source: BEA |



United States, ORSA Employment: All industries, 2022

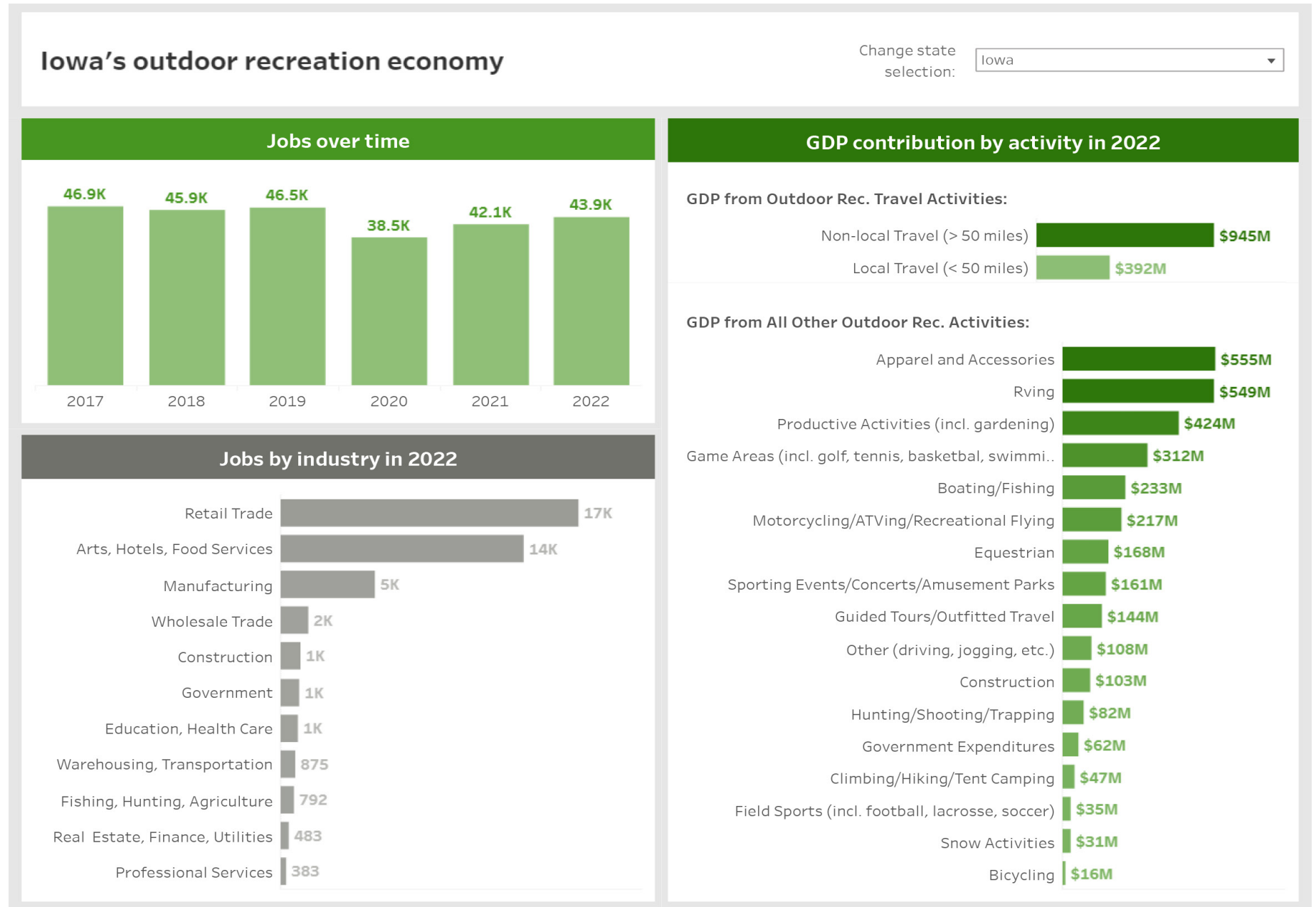


Source: BEA |



Outdoor recreation employment, according to BEA, consists of all full-time, part-time, and temporary wage and salary jobs in which the workers are engaged in the production of outdoor recreation goods and services. Self-employed individuals are excluded from employment totals. This map from the 2022 report shows Iowa's outdoor recreation has contributed to 43,902 jobs.

Data below is from the 2022 report of the Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account shows trends in Iowa over time. Image of Iowa's contribution courtesy of [Headwaters Economics](#).




Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account and Regional Economic Accounts.

Traditionally, natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation agencies are more reactionary. Once new products or activities arrive it is then determined if the activity is, or has potential to be, detrimental or compatible to the resource and if there are conflicts with other recreational pursuits already allowed that would become an issue.

Recreational providers, need to cultivate partnerships with local business and industry partners to stay ahead of the needs and trends of the community and those in pursuit of outdoor recreation opportunities. Each entity brings different knowledge to a discussion or project, but when one's strengths can shore up another's weakness that is when the true purpose of a partnership becomes reality. Communities that thrive are those that have mastered this unique balance.

The [Tedesco Environmental Learning Corridor](#) is a great example of how needs of outdoor spaces and opportunities by communities, business and industry and conservation and environmental education can intersect.



A man with brown hair, wearing an orange long-sleeved shirt and a yellow and black life vest, is smiling while kayaking on a river. He is holding a black paddle. The kayak is yellow. The background shows a lush green forest and a riverbank.

“Tourism creates a major positive lift on a destinations image”

“Tourism is a key driver of economic development”

Tourists, local or non-residents, increase the income, profit and long-term viability of businesses while adding energy and vitality to communities.

According to research conducted in 2021 by the Iowa Economic Development Authority, 64% of US adults seriously considered moving to a new place as the result of visiting. Therefore, with workforce shortages outlined as a crucial problem in the state, bringing new visitors into Iowa is an important way to attract new Iowa residents.

In further research conducted by the Iowa Economic Development Authority of what experiences and assets cause people to consider moving, natural landscapes and recreational opportunities were among the top considerations. Therefore, connecting and promoting Iowa’s outdoor recreation assets to visitors is key to attracting new residents, who will contribute to the state’s economy and support and enjoy Iowa’s parks and natural areas for years to come.

Image quotes are from [Longwoods International](#) , a market research consultancy and respected leader within the tourism industry.

Recommendation: Provide a diverse range of quality outdoor experiences through improved coordination and planning at the local level to meet outdoor recreation, public health and tourism demands, using data to drive decisions while continuing to protect and enhance the resource.

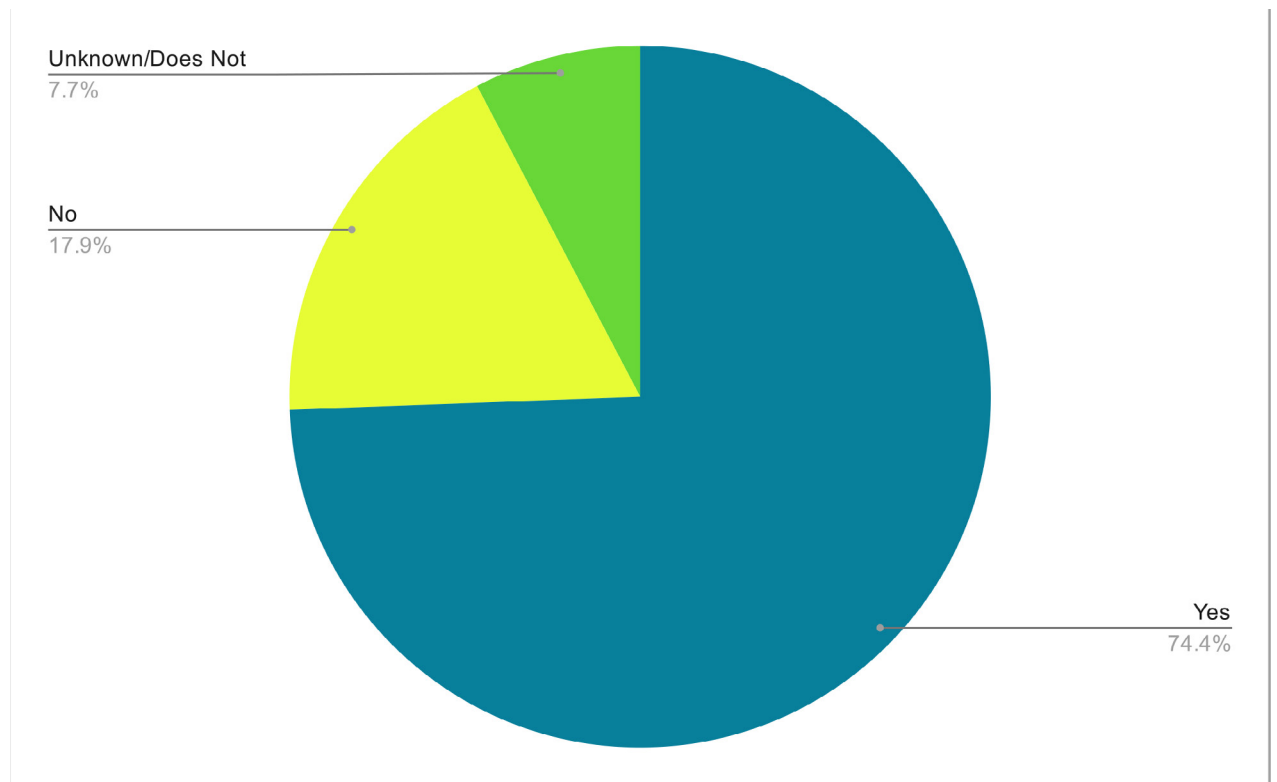
Natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation agencies have a responsibility to maintain high quality resources that support diverse ecosystems while trying to navigate increasing recreational use and new recreational pursuits.

Routine natural resource, parks and outdoor recreation planning ensures that recreation opportunities and the associated natural resources are safe, well-constructed and maintained, provide easy and sufficient access, and relevant to the current demands and within the limitations of the resource.

Planning helps maintain equally distributed recreational opportunities so everyone within Iowa has a relatively close-to-home opportunity in which to participate and has offerings for year-round participation, for all ages and those with physical limitations. In the spring of 2023 a survey of recreation providers was conducted to:

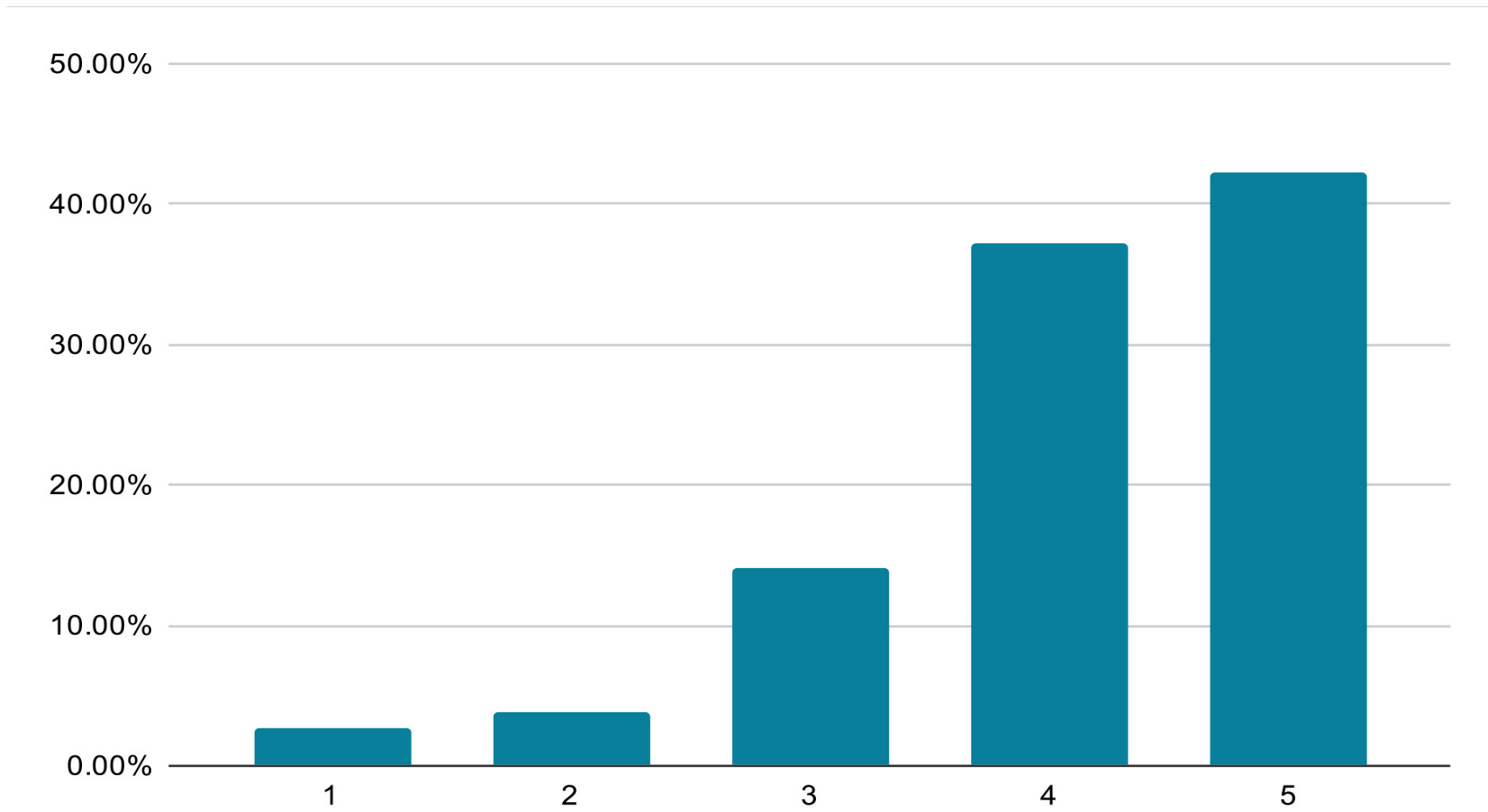
- Assess the availability and condition of outdoor recreation amenities and opportunities,
- Outdoor services supplied to the residents of a community or county
- Funding and grant opportunity needs and issues

When asked if the organization has planning documents to guide decisions related to parks, natural areas and outdoor recreation, 74.4% of the 78 respondents said yes.



When asked on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being of high importance, about how important it was for the organization to coordinate with others that manage outdoor recreation 42% reported it was of high importance.

Planning, at the local level, encourages groups to consider all city, county, state, federal and private areas and efforts to help eliminate redundancy, develop consistent messaging and promotion, and help foster private/public partnerships that create the best opportunities for outdoor recreation and natural resources conservation in the community.



Outdoor Recreation Provider Survey results based on the 78 responses received. Survey results are located in Appendix B. To gain knowledge in your community or county, print and distribute the Outdoor Recreation Provider Survey blank, found in Appendix C, or use the tool launched at Resource Enhancement and Protection Assemblies in the fall of 2023, found in Appendix D, to get started on your local planning.

Outdoor Recreation Funding

Cities, County Conservation Boards, the DNR and federal agencies continue to increase the quantity and quality of recreational opportunities throughout the state. Through the assistance of grant funding, mostly from state or federal funding sources, these agencies have developed small and large projects across the state. Projects range from playground upgrades, development of new shelters, upgrade of large campground electrical systems or land acquisitions and habitat improvements. Most projects are not accomplished by a single entity alone, they usually involve working with partner groups such as Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and local organized clubs or foundations.

The Department and its other agency partners are committed to providing better assistance to local governments for the preparation of grant applications. Hover over the images below to see what grant opportunities in Iowa exist for the different types of outdoor recreation.

All 99 counties have received some level of grant funding for outdoor protection and recreation. Grants are awarded primarily to city and county agencies putting funding directly into their communities to improve, expand or add new open spaces and outdoor recreation amenities. Below are links to each of the grants Iowa DNR offers. The map below shows a compilation of where grant funds have been spent in Iowa. An interactive version is located on the SCORP StoryMap

- [Land & Water Conservation Fund](#)
- [Resource Enhancement and Protection Fund](#)
- [Water Recreation Access Cost Share](#)
- [Wildlife Habitat Stamp for Local Entities](#)
- [Fish Habitat Program](#)
- [Water Trails Enhancement Grant](#)
- [Dam Mitigation Grants](#)

