



Office of Public Health

Exploring the Role of the NPS in Health Promotion

The Director of the National Park Service, Jon Jarvis, recently established an NPS Health and Wellness Executive Steering Committee. This committee, chaired by the Office of Public Health, is tasked with exploring the role of the NPS in improving our nation's health, while at the same time, continuing to uphold the core mission and values of the Service.

NPS Health and Wellness Steering Committee Members:

CAPT Chuck Higgins, Director, Office of Public Health (Chair)

Ernie Quintana, Midwest Regional Director

Peggy O'Dell, National Capitol Regional Director

Jerry Simpson, Associate Director, Workforce Management

Celinda Pena, Assistant Director, Communications

Dr. Gary Machlis, Science Advisor to the Director

Ali Kelley, Special Assistant to the Director

Howard Levitt, Director of Communications and Partnerships, GOGA

Diana Allen, Rivers, Trails & Conservation Assistance Program, Saint Louis, MO

Dr. Margaret Wild, Lead NPS Veterinarian, Wildlife Health and Management Program

Dr. David Wong, Chief, Epidemiology and Health Promotion Branch, OPH

The steering committee has issued a draft statement of purpose along with a set of guiding principles. This document will guide initial actions and activities until an inclusive meeting with stakeholders and partners can be conducted (tentatively, in the first quarter of 2011) to establish a consensus charge and action plan for this initiative.

The draft statement of purpose also acknowledges all of the past and current work in this area which the steering committee will build from, but for brevity that information is not included in this announcement.

Draft Statement of Purpose and Guiding Principles - September 16, 2010 NPS Health and Wellness Executive Steering Committee

A growing body of evidence suggests that human health is linked to the health of our natural world. The integrity of our minds and bodies is related to that of our surrounding ecosystems, both on the local and landscape scales. Protected areas, including parks, trails, and waterways provide recreational venues for humans, and often constitute critical habitats and migration corridors for wildlife. Aspects of the environment that support human health, such as clean air and water are more accessible in these places than in developed areas, where 80% of the population now resides.

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Preserving these areas for the enjoyment and wellbeing of all Americans is critical to the mission of the National Park Service as well as to the health of the nation. As we seek to define our role in the nexus of public health and the outdoors, we are guided by the following principles:

- We define “public health” as an interrelated system that links human health to that of our natural landscapes and all other species
- We will seek expertise and resources from an innovative range of partners in the public and private sectors. We will work with these people to develop an NPS health strategy that includes the following components: research, demonstration, and education/awareness.
- Our work will take place both within and beyond park boundaries, extending through units of national park system and affiliated areas and into our community-based and technical assistance programs
- Our aim includes, but is not limited to, offering opportunities for outdoor activities that contribute to physical and mental health. In addition, we will work with our concessioners to increase access to healthy foods in parks, in a way that is both economically feasible and appealing to the broader public.
- We will promote healthy activities that impart a light footprint on our parks, encouraging uses that promote the health of all species and avoiding those that impair resources.
- Our commitment to improving public health will be mirrored in internal programs that promote wellness, stewardship, and development within our workforce

In support of this new effort, the NPS Office of Public Health would like to announce the following immediate actions:

- ✓ The Epidemiology Branch will take on expanded duties and be renamed the Epidemiology and Health Promotion (EHP) Branch
- ✓ The EHP Branch Chief, a pediatrician and epidemiologist, will redirect his time in support of this new initiative
- ✓ Two new positions will be established within the EHP Branch: a Deputy Branch Chief for Health Promotion and a Disease Surveillance Coordinator
- ✓ The Field Services Branch will temporarily reassign one Public Health Consultant to the EHP Branch and will redirect time of three other Public Health Consultants in support of health promotion