

# The Voice

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## Conservation in Our Parks

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NYSRPS

NYSRPS, Inc.  
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# THE GREAT ACCESSIBLE OUTDOORS!

## USEFUL RESOURCES

### Books and Journals:

- Anderson, L., & Kress, C. (2003). *Inclusion: Strategies for Including People with Disabilities in Parks and Recreation Opportunities*. Venture Publishing ([www.venturepublish.com](http://www.venturepublish.com)).
- Anderson, L. (Ed.) (2001). *Accessible Outdoors*. Special Issue of *Taproot*, (Volume 13, Number 1), publication of the Coalition for Education in the Outdoors ([www.outdooreducoalition.org](http://www.outdooreducoalition.org)).
- Brannan, S., Fullerton, A. Arick, J., Robb, G., & Bender, M. (2003). *Including Youth with Disabilities in Outdoor Programs*. Sagamore Publishing ([www.sagamorepub.com](http://www.sagamorepub.com)).

### Websites:

- US Access Board: [www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov)
- National Center for Accessibility: [www.ncaonline.org](http://www.ncaonline.org)
- Wilderness Inquiry: [www.wildernessinquiry.org](http://www.wildernessinquiry.org)
- Abledata: [www.abledata.com](http://www.abledata.com)
- Northeast Passage: [www.nepassage.org](http://www.nepassage.org)

Research has consistently shown that people with disabilities want the same experiences in the outdoors that all people want, from a pristine wilderness experience to a day in the park to a guided nature walk at the local nature center. Today, we have the knowledge and practices to facilitate a wide range of outdoor opportunities in a spectrum of outdoor settings. Whether facilitating physical or programmatic accessibility, by using this knowledge and these practices, recreation professionals can help facilitate outdoor experiences for all their constituents, regardless of ability level.

### Physical Accessibility in the Outdoors

Physical accessibility means that outdoor areas and facilities are barrier-free and people with disabilities can approach, enter, and use them unimpeded (Anderson & Kress, 2003). When planning for physical accessibility, ask yourself the following questions:

- Can the person with a disability *approach* the facility or area?
- Can the person with a disability *enter* the facility or area?
- Can the person with a disability *use* the area or facility once in it?
- What *conveniences* would facilitate inclusion?

### Approach

People with disabilities should be able to approach an area or facility without encountering obstacles. For example, providing curb





such things as an extended picnic table, a beach wheelchair, a sign language interpreter, or assistance from a volunteer.

#### *Conveniences*

Many accommodations available today for people with disabilities would be wonderful to have and agencies can provide many additional services. But the bottom line must be: Can a person with a disability *approach, enter, and use* the outdoor area or facility? If so, accommodations provided beyond that are considered conveniences. For example, a park could install an automatic door opener in the visitors center, but because an accessible entrance could be created by having a door that is lightweight to open and a lever handle that is easy to grasp, this would be considered a convenience. In another example, a beach could have an expensive beach wheelchair available for use. However, a roll of lightweight, fairly inexpensive plastic snow fencing material could be available to achieve equal accessibility. When rolled out on the sand, a person with a disability can use their own wheelchair to negotiate the beach area.

When working toward making outdoor areas and facilities physically accessible, managers must be sure they are meeting the standards set out by the American with Disabilities Act. Special standards have been developed for recreation areas that include boating areas and facilities, fishing piers and platforms, golf courses, and playgrounds. The Access Board, which oversees development of the standards for accessibility, has some preliminary standards available for developed outdoor areas, including trails, beaches, and picnic and camping areas. These accessibility guidelines are available at [www.access-board.gov](http://www.access-board.gov).

#### **Programmatic Accessibility in the Outdoors**

Physical accessibility is only part of making outdoor programs accessible. In order to achieve programmatic accessibility, recreation professionals must be sure that people with disabilities can fully participate in activities provided in your outdoor areas and facilities. Programmatic accessibility involves providing the necessary supports and accommodations for full participation. Programmatic accessibility may involve adapting equipment or materials used in an outdoor activity, changing the skill requirement needed for participation, or modifying the space. It may mean having an interpreter or extra volunteers available. It includes training your staff, so that they know how to assess what a person with a disability needs to participate in your outdoor programs, and how to provide the needed accommodations.

People with disabilities make up a large percentage of our American population, so it is only right to make sure outdoor recreation is accessible to all, regardless of ability. Interestingly, what the research shows is that changes to outdoor areas and programs that facilitate inclusion of people with disabilities benefit all people. The parents pushing a stroller will be equally happy for the accessible trail in the campground as the person using a wheelchair.

So much is now known on how to facilitate accessibility in the outdoors! Provided in the sidebar are some resources to help you on your way. Happy trails to all!

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cuts from the parking area to the trailhead or a ramp into the park visitors' center will allow for accessible routes of travel. Accessible, clearly marked and properly designed parking spaces are necessary as well.

#### *Enter*

Once a person with a disability approaches an outdoor area or facility, the entrance must be accessible as well. Whether it's a door into a park facility or comfort station, or the route into a camp site, the accessible entrances must be clearly marked and must not impede entrance in any way.

#### *Use*

Once inside an outdoor area or facility, people with disabilities must be able to use the facility. Are restrooms accessible? Can a person with a disability access the concession area? Is playground equipment accessible? Are accommodations available to use the beach area? If a person can approach and enter an outdoor area, but not use it like their peers, then it is not accessible. Often to use a facility or area effectively, some form of accommodation may be necessary. Accommodations may include