

Trends and Challenges

Meeting the park and recreation needs of all current and future residents should be a goal of all park and recreation providers in California. Towards that end, it is essential that all park and recreation stakeholders have a basic understanding of both the state's demographics and the trends that are likely to influence the demand for outdoor recreation now and in the future.

I. Robust Population Growth

One of the greatest challenges affecting park and recreation providers is the enormous increase in the number of new Californians. Fueled by births and migration, California's population grew from 29 to 33 million during the 1990s - an increase of almost 12.15 percent. The California Department of Finance estimates that as of January 1, 2008 California's population was 38 million - an increase of almost 11 percent. This robust pace of growth is expected to continue, with the population projection for 2020 increasing to over 44 million Californians.

A. Urbanization means greater population densities

Most of California's growth has been in its major metropolitan areas: Los Angeles, San Diego, and the San Francisco Bay Area. California now has 67 cities with populations exceeding 100,000 and 20 cities with populations exceeding 200,000. Cities are getting larger, squeezing out the open spaces for parks and disconnecting the state's biological resources. In 2000, California had an average of 217.2 persons per square-mile compared to the US average of 79.6.

It's not just the cities, the urban densities and per-square-mile population for urbanized counties is equally impressive. The ultimate urbanized county is San Francisco, which is both city and county and contains 15,935.77 persons per square mile. Eight of California's 58 counties have densities greater than 1,000 persons per square mile.

Most Urbanized Counties (Population per square mile)

County	2006 Pop Est.	Area (Sq. mi.)	Pop. per Sq. mi.
San Francisco	744,041	46.69	15,935.77
Orange	3,002,048	789.4	3,802.95
Los Angeles	9,948,081	4,060.87	2,449.74
Alameda	1,457,426	737.57	1,975.98
San Mateo	705,499	449.07	1,571.02
Sacramento	1,374,724	965.65	1,423.63
Contra Costa	1,024,319	719.95	1,422.76
Santa Clara	1,731,281	1,290.69	1,341.36

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

B. Intra-state relocation shifts demand into new areas

Many Californians are moving inland, away from high-cost, high-density coastal counties. The Sierra foothills are seeing the greatest percentage of growth in the state. The Inland Empire is the second fastest growing region, with Riverside County growing 26 percent and San Bernardino County growing almost 17 percent in the 2000s.

**Fastest Growing Counties
2000 – 2008(est.)**

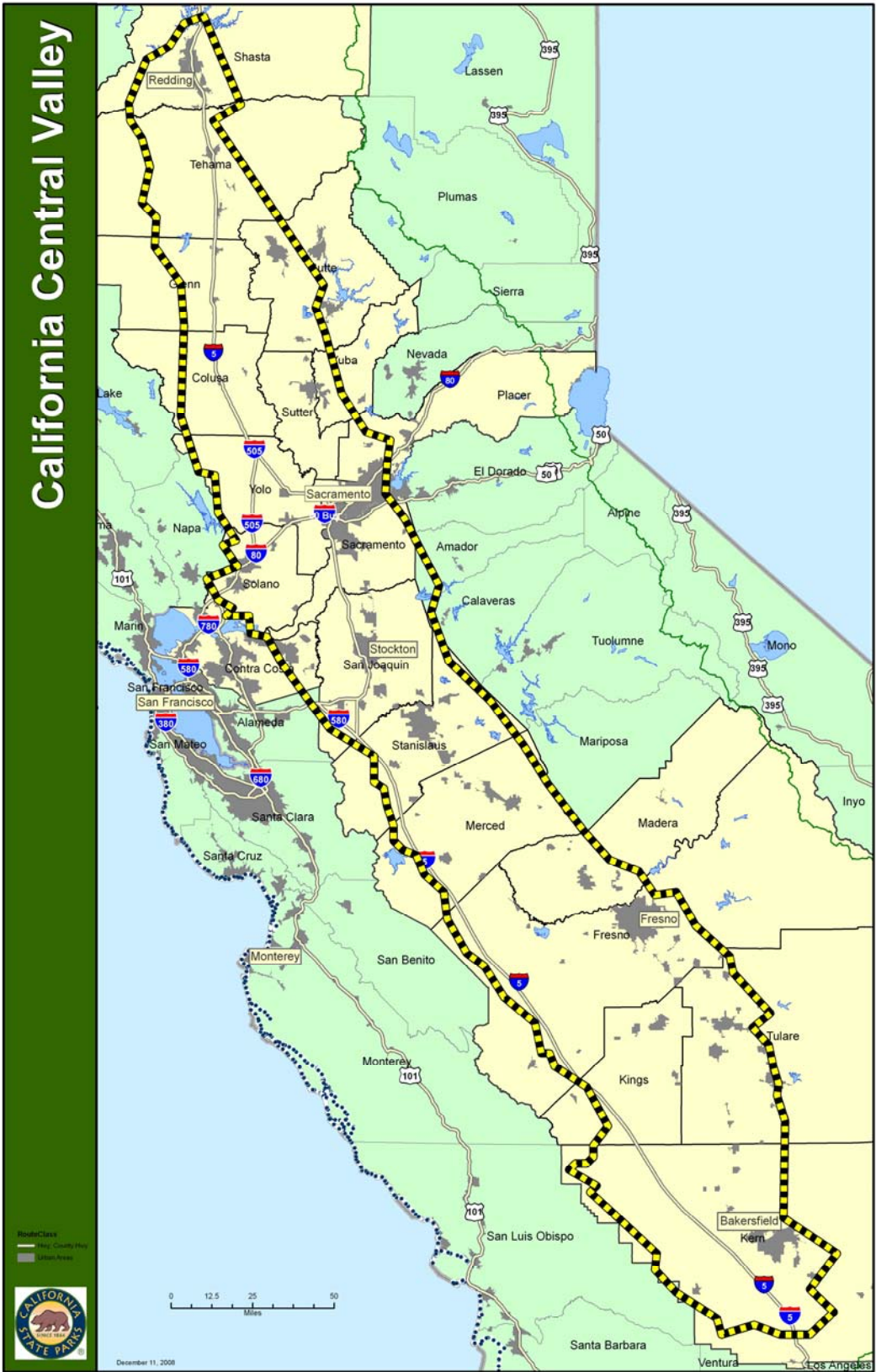
Riverside	26.00%
Placer	25.50%
Imperial	19.19%
Kern	19.07%
Madera	18.41%
San Joaquin	17.80%
Sutter	17.68%
Merced	17.51%
San Bernardino	16.81%
Yuba	16.28%

Regions

Sierra Foothills:	
Placer	25.50%
El Dorado	13.03%
Calaveras	12.08%
Mariposa	6.93%
Inland Empire	
Riverside	26.00%
San Bernardino	16.81%

Source for both tables: CA Dept. of Finance

The Central Valley’s population is projected to nearly double, from 7.8 million in 2000 to 14 million in 2030. The Central Valley makes up 19% of California’s land but only contains 4% of the state’s protected public lands. California State Parks has identified the Central Valley as an underserved region for parks and recreation facilities, programs and services. State Parks’ Central Valley Vision Implementation Plan seeks to redress this imbalance, assigning priorities to projects that provide or improve outdoor recreation opportunities in the geographic region outlined on the map on the facing page.



II. Demographic Shifts

A. Ethnic and Cultural Diversity

Today, California's 38 million residents are multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. Since the largest racial group (white) is now less than 50% of the population, there is no ethnic majority in the state. According to the U.S. Census 2000 data, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander populations accounted for 61 percent and 27 percent, respectively, of California's growth in the last decade. Census data also revealed that Hispanic population growth was driven mostly by natural increase, while Asian/Pacific Islander population increased mostly from immigration.

Between 2000 to 2020, California's population is projected to grow by 31 percent. By 2020 California's population of European descent will have grown only 4 percent, while the Hispanic population will have grown 58 percent, and the Asian/Pacific Islander population will have grown 55 percent. The African American population will have grown 20 percent, and American Indian population will have grown 29 percent.

California's population mix will have shifted even more by 2030, when Hispanics will be the largest demographic group, comprising 43 percent of the state's population.

B. Baby Boom and Baby Bounce

Nearly one-third of the state's population is between 35 and 55 years of age. In 20 years, this group, which encompasses the Baby Boom generation, will be active seniors 55 to 75 years old. That is twice the size of the current 55-75 population. With life expectancy and good health increasing, researchers predict tomorrow's seniors will be more active, and will stay active as senior citizens for a longer period of life than previous generations.

At the other end of the spectrum are the 27 percent of Californians under 18 years of age. According to the California Department of Finance, while the nation's birth rates were flat during the 1980's, the birth rates in California rose sharply.

C. Income Inequality

As California's population increases, the number of people at the lower end of the income scale is increasing at a disproportionately higher rate. Recreation becomes a crucial quality of life issue, and people with lower income rely more heavily on public recreational facilities. Studies have shown that those with higher incomes have common interests: nature, saving time, willing to pay to avoid waiting, and interpretation, adding value to an outdoor recreation experience. Most want free time in large chunks to provide a psychological release from work.

Very little is known about the needs of those with low income. Most often surveys do not adequately reflect their values and opinions due to survey techniques that are not appropriate or relevant enough to solicit meaningful responses. It is suspected that outdoor recreation needs of low-income people are different, mostly due to the lack of discretionary income, time and transportation options for outdoor recreation. Access to recreation opportunities is a big issue with the poor and much of their leisure revolves around TV and activities close to home. Children learn their leisure patterns from parents, friends and school. One survey found lower participation in outdoor recreation activities based on income levels, education levels, and length of time in the U.S. Barriers to participation included lack of finances, lack of transportation, lack of free time, and lack of information about recreation opportunities.

D. Shifting Interests and Preferences

As the stress of jobs, traffic, and urban noise increases, so does the need to escape. Traditionally, people have 'escaped to parks,' and more so in difficult economic times when affordable recreation and vacations are a priority.

The use of California's park and recreation areas is heavy and continues to increase. With the softening of the national economy, rising amount of home foreclosures and the volatile nature of current gasoline prices, Californians are choosing to vacation closer to home, now called a 'staycation,' traveling more within the state, visiting in-state destinations such as state and national parks.

E. Heightened Importance of Outdoors for Recreation

It is no secret that Californians love the outdoors. In the study on Public Opinions and Attitudes on Outdoor Recreation in California 2007, 98 percent of the respondents indicated that viewing the scenic beauty is an important part of the enjoyment of their most favorite activities. In addition, 93 percent of the respondents said that feeling in harmony with nature was also important to their enjoyment of the outdoors. More than 87 percent of the respondents agreed that recreation programs help improve people's health. A majority, 78.1% of respondents agreed that recreation programs help reduce crime and juvenile delinquency and 74.9% agreed that recreation and park agencies create jobs and help the economy.

F. High Demand for Traditional, Outdoor Recreation

Californians spent approximately 2.15 billion days participating in outdoor recreation activities during 2007. Traditional recreation remains popular, and as more Californians take advantage of state, local and federal parks, the demand for recreation facilities will only increase.

Generally, Californians tend to participate in activities that are less expensive, require less equipment, and need fewer technical skills. The Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey 2007 discovered that Californians' top 15 activities (by participation) were:

1. Walking for fitness or pleasure	74.2%
2. Driving for pleasure, sightseeing, driving through natural scenery	59.8%
3. Beach activities	59.2%
4. Swimming in a pool	50.9%
5. Day hiking on trails	46.9%
6. Wildlife viewing, bird watching, viewing natural scenery	45.9%
7. Jogging and running for exercise	39.8%
8. Bicycling on paved surfaces	36.3%
9. Outdoor photography	33.3%
10. Using open turf areas	33.3%
11. Using play equipment, play structures, tot-lots	32.8%
12. Organized team sports such as soccer, football, baseball, softball, basketball	25.6%
13. Fishing – freshwater	21.4%
14. Bicycling on unpaved surfaces and trails	15.9%
15. Surfing or boogie boarding, windsurfing	14.1%

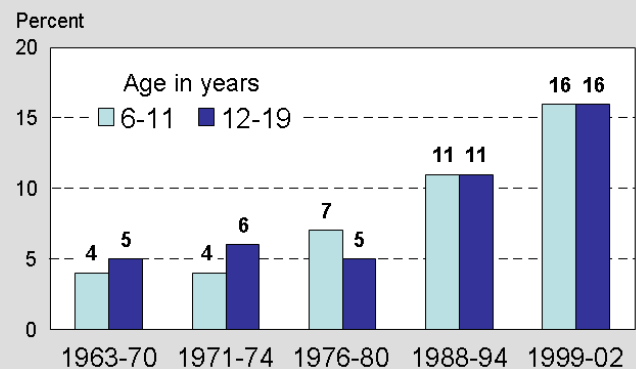
G. Health Concerns

1. Obesity rates in children and adults

Results from the 1999-2002 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES), using measured heights and weights, indicate that an estimated 16 percent of children and adolescents ages 6-19 years are overweight. As shown in Figure 1, this represents a 45 percent increase from the overweight estimates of 11 percent obtained from NHANES III (1988-94).

The prevalence of obesity continues to be a health concern for adults, children and adolescents in the United States. Data from the most recent

Figure 1. Prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents ages 6-19 years



NOTE: Excludes pregnant women starting with 1971-74. Pregnancy status not available for 1963-65 and 1966-70. Data for 1963-65 are for children 6-11 years of age, data for 1966-70 are for adolescents 12-17 years of age, not 12-19 years. SOURCE: CDC/NCHS, NHES and NHANES

NHANES survey shows that among adult men the prevalence of obesity was 31.1% in 2003—2004, and 33.3% in 2005—2006, a small but not statistically significant change. Among adult women, the prevalence of obesity in 2003—2004 was 33.2%, and in 2005—2006 was 35.3%, again a small but not statistically significant change.

Obesity increases the risk for serious health conditions like type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol — all once considered exclusively adult diseases. Obese kids may also be prone to low self-esteem that stems from being teased, bullied, or rejected by peers. Kids who are unhappy with their weight may be more likely than average-weight kids to develop unhealthy dieting habits and eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia, and they may be more prone to depression, as well as substance abuse.

Parks and Recreation systems throughout the country make a vital contribution to this fight against obesity. State and local parks, recreation facilities, and the recreation programs available to the public are true health promoters and the professionals who run the programs are effective health educators influencing concrete changes in the health of local communities.

2. Children and Nature

Children's lives have moved indoors and inside their handheld devices: essentially screen spaces have replaced green places. Access to and use of computers, the Internet and hand held devices increased dramatically in the past decade. Studies conducted in association with the Kaiser Family Foundation determined that:

- Between 1999 and 2005:
 - The number of 8 to 18 years olds with access to a home computer increased by 13%, to a total of 86%;
 - Internet access for 8 to 18 years olds increased by 27%, a total of 74% of children are now “on-line;”
 - The number of 8 to 18 year olds who spend more than an hour online each day increased by 17% for a total of 22%.
- Between 1987 and 2003, the average person spent 327 more hours, which is 13 and a half additional days, with entertainment media.
- Children between the ages of six months and six years spend an average of 1.5 hours a day with electronic media.
- Children between the ages of 8 and 18 years spend an average of nearly 6.5 hours a day with electronic media.
- Nearly one third of children from six months to six years of age live in households where the TV is on all or most of the time.



A growing body of research confirms that spending time in nature benefits everyone, particularly children. Studies across the United States have found that

children who directly experience the natural world are healthier in every major way — intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically.

III. Physical Activity Rates from the Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey

Californians were asked to indicate their level of physical activity in the past month. In general, the majority (77 percent) had been physically active. Eighty-seven percent reported participating in moderate activity for at least 10 minutes at a time and 52 percent reported participating in vigorous physical activity. Among those reporting moderate levels of activity, the highest percentage participated three times per week (21 percent) and most commonly spent an average of 72 minutes in the activity. Likewise, the highest percentage of those reporting vigorous levels of activity also reported participating three times per week and spent an average of 74 minutes in the activity. According to the National Center for Health Statistics (2007), approximately 31 percent of adults engage in regular physical activity during their leisure time. Results of the current research suggest Californians meet (and exceed) the national average.

When specifically asked about their levels of physical activity in parks, the majority of Californians reported participating in either light to moderate (77 percent) levels of activity during park visits. In fact, only 8.9 percent said they mostly sat while at parks.

During their time at parks, nearly 26 percent of Californians reported spending 31 to 60 minutes being physically active whereas the highest percentage (29.6 percent) spent 30 minutes or less. However, 22 percent said they spent more than 2 hours being physically active in parks. Parks clearly play an important role in encouraging physical activity among Californians.

H. Other Preferences, Favorites, Shifts, and Interests

1. Nature Study, including Wildlife Viewing

One of the activities that have shifted dramatically in the past decade is wildlife viewing, bird watching and viewing natural scenery. Between 1987 and 2002, it was one of the few activities that had steadily increased in popularity. According to the 2007 Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey on Outdoor Recreation, participation in nature study has dropped by almost 30% since 2002. Compared to the 2002 survey, fewer Californians participated in virtually all the recreation activities included in the survey. Even though activity participation percentages may drop, ongoing population growth can continue to hold steady or increase the real number of Californians participating in these activities.

2. Adventure and high-risk activities

There is a continuing interest in a broad range of adventure activities such as mountain biking, scuba diving, kite surfing, and wilderness backpacking. Included in this group are activities that are perceived to be high-risk, including rock climbing, bungee jumping, hang gliding, zip-lining and using sky bridges.

Research suggests that this demand is from a variety of age groups including the Baby Boom generation, which continues to hike, mountain bike, kayak, and engage in other physically active, resource-based recreation.

3. High-tech recreation

One of the outdoor recreation activities with a high-tech focus is geocaching. This activity is best described as a modern treasure hunt where participants try to find a hidden cache (treasure) using a map and a geographic positioning system (GPS) receiver. Since the first geocache was hidden in 2001 the amount of geocaches has reached over 700,000 globally by the end of 2008. To address the high-tech recreation trend, California State Parks has also added WiFi access to several State Park units. Many other technical advances are improving the equipment used for alpine and Nordic skiing, snow shoeing, kayaking, skate boarding, and mountain biking.

4. Some traditional activities in decline

Not all outdoor recreation activities are increasing in popularity. Hunting and fishing, for example, continue to decline. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, interest in hunting and fishing among young people has been in decline since the early 1990s. According to a comparison between the 2002 and 2007 Public Opinions and Attitudes Survey on Outdoor Recreation, participation rates among adults dropped from 34 percent to 21.4 percent. Hunting has similarly declined, with adult participation dropping from 9 to 3.8 percent in the last five years.

Millions of American golfers have left the sport in recent years. The total number of U.S. golfers has decreased from about 30 million to about 26 million since 2000. A study by the United States Tennis Association that also determined that the popularity of tennis has declined due in part to the amount of time spent with electronic games. Baby Boomers, at an early age, often grew up participating with their families in many of these activities, but Generation X and Generation Y children grew up with computers and video games.