

2008 Mass Envirothon Current Issue: Preliminary Ideas (September 07)

Comments welcome! Contact Will Snyder, wsnyder@umext.umass.edu or 413/545-3876

Outdoor Recreation and the Environment

The 2008 Mass Envirothon current issue asks teams to explore recreation issues in their own urban, suburban, and rural communities. Major themes to be explored include the impact of recreational use on land and water resources, energy use and outdoor recreation, and how a culture of outdoor recreation supports environmental protection. We will start at home with our own experiences and the question: What is recreation and why do we need it? We will look at outdoor recreation in our own communities, at open space, at organizations that provide for recreation, and at conflicts that arise among recreational users and between recreational uses and other “green infrastructure” values of outdoor places. Teams will identify a key recreational issue and make recommendations for next steps for their community.

Driving Questions. *You are on the right track if you and your team are developing your own answers to these questions:*

- What is recreation? Do we need outdoor recreation? Why?
- What are the negative effects of our recreational pursuits on natural resources, particularly land and water resources? How can we manage and minimize our impact?
- What are the conflicts among competing outdoor recreational uses of lands and waters? How can we manage and minimize these conflicts?
- Can encouraging outdoor recreation help protect the environment? How?
- How do concerns about recreation fit with concerns/plans to address climate change?
- What is the economic impact of recreation - the costs and benefits to communities?

Community Research Possibilities: *Take advantage of this year’s Mass Envirothon current issue to: Explore places. Meet people. Try something new.*

- Pool your knowledge about the forms that outdoor recreation takes in your community.
- Explore your community’s landscape and note local outdoor recreation spots. Some places may be officially recognized, some may be informal. Some are on public land, some are on private land. How do people access and make use of these places?
- Get some perspective. Interview someone over 60 years old about recreation when they were young. Investigate different cultural and family traditions about outdoor recreation (e.g. hunting and fishing). Contact other Envirothon teams to learn about the differences between recreation in your community and other Massachusetts communities -- rural, suburban, and urban.
- Survey the recreational habits of people in your community (e.g. where they go, when they go, how they travel, how far they travel). What is the carbon footprint of this outdoor recreation?
- Introduce yourselves to organizations, businesses, agencies, parks, and individuals who are involved in issues of outdoor recreation in your community. What are their interests and concerns?
- Review town master plans and open space plans and talk with the people who put them together about the recreation issues they encountered. What priorities (e.g. trails, land acquisition, etc.) did they identify? Do you agree?

- Investigate the role of recreation in the local economy. How do people make money and spend money on from recreation?
- Map what you find. Use MassGIS resources to organize and present your research, and your ideas, questions, and proposals about outdoor recreation.
- **Most of All: DO IT! Visit local recreation places that are new to you. Try different forms of recreation. Consider what the outdoors means in YOUR life.**

Background on the Issue. *Suggestions for organizations, web resources, and individuals who can offer experience, ideas, and perspective on:*

The need for recreation

- “Nature deficit disorder” and the human need for direct experience with nature
- Outdoor recreation and health
- Outdoor recreation and community building
- Value of a sense of place

Public lands and land & water use by the public

- Kinds of public lands in Massachusetts serving recreational purposes: federal lands (e.g. wildlife refuges, including Conte), state parks, state forests, town lands, city parks
- Kinds of private lands serving recreational purposes: private nonprofit reserves & sanctuaries, conservation restrictions, Chapter 61B, agri-tourism
- Private property laws and effects on recreation: trespassing laws, liability, “posted” land
- Massachusetts open space laws and planning (technical definitions and processes)
- Ownership and recreational use of Massachusetts lakes & ponds, streams & rivers
- High maintenance (golf courses, ball fields, pools, rinks) vs. low maintenance outdoor recreation

Land use conflicts

- Trail use - horses, hiking, atvs, skiing, snowmobiling
- Trail development (e.g. rails to bicycle trails)
- Hunting
- Watershed lands protection (e.g. Quabbin)

Water use conflicts

- Fishing
- Water supply protection
- Motor/nonmotor boating
- Wildlife/wetland values
- Dams (hydropower) vs. free-flowing streams
- Access

Who protects lands and waters for outdoor recreation?

- State agencies involved in recreation (DCR, . . .)
- NGOs (TTOR, Mass Audubon)

- Planning processes - SCORP, open space, and town master plans (recreation as one of several priorities that are considered and balanced)
- Volunteers: watershed groups, stream teams, AmeriCorps, AMC volunteers
- Forest landowners and farmers
- Who pays? taxes vs. fees & licenses

Role of Maps in Recreation

- Maps and GIS in recreation planning and decision-making
- Maps for recreation
- Making maps, especially using GIS

Energy issues

- Recreation's carbon footprint and impact on climate change/air pollution
- Opportunities for low impact/low energy recreation (kinds of recreation and distance travelled)
- Compatibility and conflict with renewable energy development
 - wind on hilltops
 - hydropower (dams and instream)
 - biomass from forest land
- Siting renewable energy in state parks (for sustainability and public education)