

Celebrate Earth Day with Outdoor Recreation

by Wendy Nadherny Fachon

Outdoor play in a clean, healthy and beautiful environment leads to falling in love with nature, and people will protect what they come to love. Providing people access to outdoor spaces and activities helps them become passionate stewards of the Earth. Shannon Rozea, founder of Thrive Outside, based in Portsmouth, Rhode Island, states, “We believe that there is no better way to fall in love with nature than to have fun outside! That is why we dedicate ourselves to providing enjoyable outdoor activities that the whole family will love.” Thrive Outside (ThriveOutside.info) organizes family hikes, bird walks, scavenger hunts and outdoor activity challenges.

At a higher level, the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation (MOOR) seeks to promote the entire state of Massachusetts as a great place to come play outside. Suggested activities include hunting, fishing, boating, hiking, camping, mountain biking, climbing, swimming, skiing, sailing, paddling, bird-watching, star-gazing and so much more. Director of MOOR Paul Jahnige nudges people with the words, “Drive less. Play more. Stay in MA,” hinting at the advantages of accessibility, fuel/cost savings and more time for fun.

Beyond this, MOOR regards the state’s investments in outdoor recreation as vital to improving the economy, public health,



environmental equity and overall quality of life. Outdoor recreation accounts for \$11.8 billion of the state’s GDP and directly supports 100,000-plus jobs. More investment in this area will create even more jobs, boost tourism and help sustain local business communities. Furthermore, outdoor recreational opportunities are associated with a rise in physical activity and mental health benefits, including lower levels of stress, anxiety and depression.

Many of us lack mobility or access, and some are just plain uncomfortable when it comes to the outdoor exposure. Jahnige says, “We want to meet people where they are and help them feel more welcome outside.” To this end, MOOR offers grants to help build inclusiveness, diversity, equity and accessibility for everyone.

The MOOR website (Mass.gov/orgs/the-massachusetts-office-of-outdoor-recreation) provides links to 150 state parks, hundreds of outdoor recreation opportunities throughout the state and MassWildlife resources. The Visit Rhode Island (VisitRhodeIsland.com) and Visit MA (VisitMA.com) websites also list links to numerous outdoor events, state parks and wildlife management areas, and information about public access to rivers, estuaries, bays and beaches. Together, both states offer a great wealth of healthy outdoor fun for their residents.

A vital focus for MOOR and other outdoor recreation offices is sustainability—supporting low-impact use of land and water resources, building an outdoor ethic and promoting Earth stewardship. As friends and families experience the benefits of land and water conservation, they become ardent supporters and discover a lifestyle of fun and adventure that will promote a greater appreciation for the environment. Outdoor recreation is a wonderful way to connect with nature, fall in love and truly celebrate Earth Day.

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