

# The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program

"We must acknowledge the value of our urban communities . . . the social value of cities to those who live in them and to the rest of those who live close to them—their services as centers of culture, entertainment, finance; the enormous variety of human exchange that's possible there; their creativity and their contribution to our common life; and the role they've always played as homes for people of all kinds and all circumstances who are searching for the American dream of opportunity."

President Jimmy Carter

The White House, March 27, 1978

"The Interior Department has always been looking to the frontiers. During much of its history, the Department's focus has been on the far distant horizon, rather than on the heart of our cities . . . Now we have come full circle, and the frontiers are most often right in the heart of our urban areas."

Cecil D. Andrus  
Secretary of the Interior

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program is a program to

- retrieve disappearing opportunities for enjoying the urban environment
- improve the physical environment of the city
- establish a federal, state, and local partnership
- conserve resources in which investments have already been made
- improve local planning and management capacity
- stimulate greater community involvement by neighborhood organizations and voluntary associations
- encourage private investment in the community life of the city

## The origin of the Urban Park and

On March 27, 1978, President Carter articulated a comprehensive set of policies to guide federal actions and programs for urban America. These commitments to a New Partnership to Conserve America's Communities are at the heart of the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program signed into law by the President on November 10, 1978.

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program was developed in response to the National Urban Recreation Study mandated by the Con-

gress and performed by the Department of the Interior during 1977 and early 1978. The Study evaluated the quality of urban recreation systems in 17 of the nation's most populous urban areas and found urban recreation in a virtual crisis state all over the country: **Over 70 percent of our nation's population lives in urban areas. For many urban dwellers, access to recreation opportunities is limited by geographic or economic factors. In a number of cities, opportunities have actually declined in recent years because of aging facilities and fiscal**

# Recreation Recovery Program

restraints . . . Urban residents in all jurisdictions studied placed high priority on close-to-home recreation facilities. However, neighborhood park and recreation areas are often deteriorated, inadequate, or entirely absent, despite their importance as community focal points.

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act (Title X of P.L. 95-625) was enacted in recognition of the severe deficiencies in urban recreation in the United States. It seeks to restore facilities which have fallen into disuse or disrepair; to

encourage innovations in recreation programming; to stimulate and support local commitments to recreation system recovery and maintenance; and to improve the management and delivery of recreation services to urban residents.

Responsibility for implementation of the Act is assigned by the legislation itself to the Secretary of the Interior. The Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, the administering agency within the Interior Department, is now working to bring the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program into operation by mid-1979.

# Grants available for urban recreation system recovery

Congress has authorized \$150 million annually for each of the program's first four years, and \$125 million in the last year.

These funds will be made available as matching grants under three program categories:

- **Rehabilitation grants** are matching capital grants (70 percent federal—30 percent local) to local governments for the purpose of rebuilding, remodeling, expanding, or developing existing outdoor or indoor recreation areas and facilities. Funds may be used to improve park landscapes, buildings, and support facilities, but are not available for routine maintenance and upkeep activities.
- **Innovation grants** are matching grants (70 percent federal—30 percent local) to local governments to cover costs of personnel,

facilities, equipment, supplies or services designed to demonstrate innovative and cost-effective ways to enhance park and recreation opportunities at the neighborhood level. Innovation grant funds may be used to address common problems related to facility operations and the delivery of recreation services. These funds may not be used for routine operation and maintenance activities.

Innovation grant awards nationwide are limited to ten percent of the total annual authorization for the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery program.

- **Recovery action program grants** are matching grants (50 percent federal—50 percent local) to local governments for the development of local park and recreation

system recovery plans. Eligible activities include resource and needs assessment, coordination, citizen involvement and planning, and program development activities to encourage public definition of goals.

Recovery action program grants are chiefly intended to assist local efforts to develop priorities and strategies for overall recreation system recovery. **See below Local Commitment to the Recovery and Maintenance of Urban Recreation Systems: the Five-Year Action Program.**

At the discretion of the applicant, and consistent with an approved application, funds received under the rehabilitation and innovation grant programs may be transferred to independent special purpose local governments, private non-profit agencies, or county or regional park authorities. Assistance provided through such a

transfer must support recreation opportunities offered to the general population within the jurisdictional boundaries of an eligible applicant.

## State participation

As an incentive to state involvement in the recovery of urban recreation systems, the federal government will provide a dollar-for-dollar match to state contributions to the local share of the cost of any innovation or rehabilitation project, up to 15 percent of the total cost of the project. The total federal share, however, is limited to 85 percent of the project costs.

States will be encouraged by the Interior Department to work with local governments and the Department in monitoring local plans and programs, and in assuring consistency with state urban and recreation policies and statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans.

## Participant eligibility and

Eligibility of local governments for assistance under the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act is based on need, economic and physical distress, and the relative quality and condition of urban recreational facilities and systems.

Those local governments eligible to participate in the first-year program will be listed in the Federal Register during early March, 1979, together with an explanation of the criteria used to determine eligibility.

At the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior, grants may be awarded to other general purpose local governments in standard metropolitan statistical areas. Discretionary funds are limited to 15 percent of the funds available annually for

rehabilitation, innovation, and recovery action program grants.

Draft guidelines on program development and application procedures will be published in the Federal Register in the spring of 1979. Guidelines and proposed regulations are being developed by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service in active consultation with a range of affected private, state and local interests.

Following a period for public review and comment, final project regulations will be published in the Federal Register.

It is anticipated that the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service will receive the first year's grant applications by the summer of 1979.

# the selection of projects

Projects will be selected according to criteria which measure such factors as:

- population
- condition of existing recreation areas and facilities
- demonstrated deficiencies in access to neighborhood recreation opportunities, particularly for minority and low to moderate-income residents
- public participation in determining rehabilitation or development needs
- the extent to which a project supports or complements activities undertaken as part of a local government's overall community development and urban revitalization program
- the extent to which a project would provide employment opportunities for minorities, youth, and low and moderate-income residents in the project neighborhood
- the extent to which a project would provide for participation of neighborhood, nonprofit or tenant organizations in the proposed rehabilitation activity or in subsequent maintenance, staffing, or supervision of recreation areas and facilities
- the amount of state and private support for a project as evidenced by commitments of non-federal resources to project construction or operation

## Limitations

- No federal grant funds, other than general revenue sharing and community development block grant funds, may be used to match Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program funds.
- No Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program funds may be used for the acquisition of land or interests in land.
- No property improved or developed with Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program assistance may be converted to other than public recreation uses without the approval of the Secretary.
- Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program funds may not be applied toward major sports arenas, exhibition areas, and conference halls used primarily for commercial sports, spectator, or display activities.

# Local commitment to the recovery and maintenance of urban recreation systems: The Five-Year Action Program

It is a primary aim of the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act to stimulate ongoing local efforts to revitalize and maintain troubled park and recreation systems. In addition to providing the immediate, visible benefits of grant assistance, the program is expected to serve as a catalyst for mobilizing private, state, and local resources in behalf of strengthened recreational systems.

Applicants for Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program assistance will be required to submit evidence of long-term local commitment to recreation system recovery and maintenance. These commitments—to continuous programs for

system planning, rehabilitation, service, operation, and maintenance—will be expressed in the form of a Five-Year Action Program. This plan must demonstrate:

- the systematic identification of recovery objectives and priorities, as well as strategies for achieving these goals
- adequate planning for the rehabilitation of specific recreation areas and facilities, including estimates of proposed project costs
- attention to the development of innovative and cost-effective recovery programs and projects at the neighborhood level

- the capacity and commitment to assure that facilities provided or improved with Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program assistance will continue to be adequately maintained, staffed, supervised, and protected
- intention to maintain local public outlays for park and recreation purposes at a level at least equal to that of the year preceding that in which grant assistance is sought, except in an instance of reduced outlays proportionate to a reduction in overall spending by the applicant
- the relationship of the park and recreation recovery program to overall community development and urban revitalization efforts

Funding to aid in the planning and development

of local recreation recovery programs is available through recovery action program grants.

While development of a Five-Year Action Program is a condition of eligibility to participate in the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program, this requirement may be satisfied initially by the submission of a preliminary action program. The preliminary plan should briefly define local recreation priorities and recovery objectives and commit the applicant to a scheduled program development process. Guidelines for the development of action programs will be published in the spring of 1979.

Further technical assistance in the development of the Five-Year Action Program is available upon request from the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

# Coordination

The central goal of the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Act is to enhance the quality of life in American cities. This objective is shared by hundreds of Americans at work on urban revitalization measures in their own communities, and it serves as the guiding principle of many other federal, state, and local government programs.

Opportunities abound for mutual private and public support in the accomplishment of this nation's urban revitalization goals. To insure that these opportunities are maximized during the implementation of the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program, the Department of the Interior encourages coordination between ap-

propriate state agencies and local governments, and requires grant applicants to seek active coordination with the private sector, as well as the fullest possible participation of community and neighborhood residents in program planning and project selection.

The Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program is intended to complement other federal programs in urban areas. In service to the goal of efficient, coherent federal programming, the Department of the Interior is committed to an ongoing, inter-agency partnership with all federal agencies working to restore the urban environment.

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