



# Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities: Green Access and Equity for the Southern California Region

The City Project's policy report *Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities: Green Access and Equity for Southern California* maps and analyzes green access and equity in the nine county Southern California region. The report concludes with recommendations for equitable investments in green space throughout California and the nation.

## Lessons Learned

Throughout Southern California a similar pattern exists: Children of color living in poverty with no access to a car suffer first and worst in terms of access to green space and opportunities for physical activity. Health and quality of life disparities follow the same pattern as green access disparities.

While there is an abundance of green space, not all residents enjoy equal access to these resources. Each county has its own set of challenges, as well as unique opportunities to improve green access. But disparities in green access and health based on race, ethnicity, and class are present throughout the region and each county.

Our goal with is to engage, educate and empower decision makers and the community concerning access to parks and recreation, quality education including physical education, access to healthy eating, transportation to green space, and local green jobs in traditionally underserved communities. Knowledge is power. We believe that this report is the most comprehensive analysis of green access and equal justice ever published for Southern California.

The report helps take green access and equal justice from the local to the regional, state and national level; to discern patterns and practices; to define standards to measure progress and equity and hold public officials accountable; and ultimately to make real improvements in people's lives, give people a sense of their own power, and alter the relations of power. The report translates research, policy and law into recommendations for systemic social change so that "park poor" and "income poor" communities receive their fair share of resources.

## Recommendations

1. If you want green space, work for jobs, and equal justice. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the New Deal created 3 million jobs and 8,800 parks, appealing across the political spectrum, putting the nation back to work and giving people a sense of their own self worth. Other public projects built 40,000 schools. Parks today generate billions of dollars of economic benefits, far more than they cost. Keep parks open for all.
2. Prioritize projects in communities that are park poor and income poor. "Park poor" is below 3 park acres per 1,000 residents, and "income poor" is below \$47,331 household income under California law. This is a best practice to define standards to measure progress and equity and hold public officials accountable.
3. Prioritize projects that promote the full values at stake including physical, psychological, and social health needs. Applying public health criteria to infrastructure projects can improve health and quality of life.
4. Prioritize joint use of parks, schools and pools. Multi-benefit green spaces can clean air and water, provide flood control, promote climate justice, and convert brownfields to green fields. No Child Left Behind should require physical education, and



compliance with state physical education laws. The Los Angeles Unified School District physical education plan is a best practice example for the nation.

5. Infrastructure projects should create green collar jobs and apprenticeship programs for local workers, small, veteran, women, minority and disadvantaged business enterprises, and youth.

6. Prioritize cultural, historical, and public art projects to celebrate diversity, democracy and freedom. Native American sites must be celebrated and preserved.

7. Fund transit to trails to relieve congestion and pollution, and provide access for all to parks, mountains, beaches and rivers.

8. Ensure compliance with equal justice laws and principles for access to public resources, including parks, recreation and physical education. Combine compliance with other laws including environmental and education laws.

9. Implement principles of equitable development: invest in people, invest in stronger communities, invest in the open, and invest in justice.

10. Implement strategic plans to improve parks and recreation for all, including biking and hiking trails, green complete streets and safe routes to school.



### **The Values at Stake: Why Parks and Recreation Matter**

Parks and other green space provide important benefits to people and the environment. The values at stake include the simple joys of playing in the park or school field; physical, psychological and social health; improved academic performance; positive alternatives to gangs, crime, drugs, and violence; and economic vitality for all. Parks also offer conservation benefits: reducing air, water and ground pollution, land conservation, and habitat protection for animals and plants. Additionally, parks play an important role in mitigating climate change and promoting climate justice. Parks promote spiritual values in protecting Mother Earth and her people, and preserving Native American values and Sacred Sites. Parks provide places celebrate cultural, historic, and public art resources. Fundamental values of equal justice and democracy underlie each of these other values.

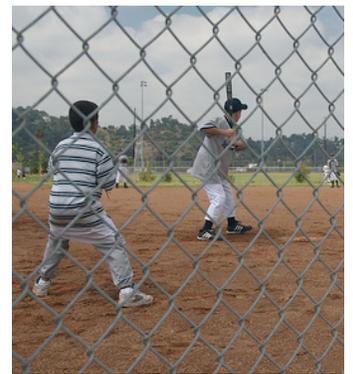


### **The Southern California Region**

The comprehensive regional report covering nine counties – Los Angeles, Orange, Ventura, San Bernardino, Riverside, San Diego, Kern, Santa Barbara, and Imperial – using narrative analyses, geographic information system (GIS) mapping tools, and demographic and economic data. We have also published more accessible, individual reports for six counties in English and Spanish. Each report documents best practice examples of projects or programs aimed at getting people more physically active in each county, and presents opportunities and recommendations for improving green access. Almost 50 stakeholders and individuals contributed community-based participatory research to produce these reports.



*Healthy Parks, Schools and Communities: Green Access and Equity for Southern California* is available for download at [www.cityprojectca.org/greenjustice](http://www.cityprojectca.org/greenjustice), along with summary reports for individual counties in English and Spanish, maps, and charts.



#### **The City Project**

Equal Justice, Democracy, and Livability for All

Visit our website and blog at [www.cityprojectca.org](http://www.cityprojectca.org)

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