

# URBAN PARKS, PROGRAMS + PARTNERSHIPS



# WHY THIS SESSION?

## **Urgent and important needs and opportunities**

- » Individual health (access to nature and recreation)
- » Community health and safety (water quality, flood events)
- » COVID impacts
- » Outdoor recreation customer base expanding and changing (increasingly young, female, and urban)
- » Historic and systemic patterns of inequity in public investments
- » New federal grants = opportunities to leverage public and private funding



***If the outdoor participant base does not become more diverse over the next 30 years, the percentage of outdoor recreation participants in the population could slip from 54 percent today to under 40 percent by 2060.***

Increasingly the accessibility to natural areas near urban centers and ensuring these centers are welcome, culturally relevant, designed with environmental conditions and climate impacts in mind, and co-created with the community members for whom these areas will serve should be a priority to ensure the outdoors are enjoyed by everyone, regardless of ZIP code, background, or income.



# CONTENT



*Overview: Why, What, Where – 20 min*

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*Stories – 20 min each + 5 min Q&A*

- » Muskegon
  - » Saginaw
  - » Detroit
- 

*“Team of 3” Consulting Exercise – 30 min*



## HEART OF THE LAKES

We believe places in nature have the power to create stories.

## PARALLEL SOLUTIONS

Helping people connect, navigate change and complexity, and create solutions.



## **What is a public park?**

Any area or portions of areas dedicated or designated by any federal, state, or local agency primarily for public recreational use.

## **What is a park conservancy?**

A nonprofit park-benefit organization that fills in the gaps of public park agencies, including raising money, overseeing construction and maintenance, and developing programming.

## **What is a community development corporation?**

A not-for-profit organization incorporated to provide programs, offer services and engage in other activities that promote and support community development. CDCs usually serve a geographic location such as a neighborhood or a town.

## **What is a land bank?**

A public authority created to acquire, hold, manage, and sometimes redevelop property in order to return these properties to productive use to meet community goals, such as increasing affordable housing or stabilizing property values.

## **What is a land conservancy?**

Land conservancies, also known as land trusts, are community-based nonprofit organizations dedicated to the permanent protection and care of land.



# WHAT IS URBAN CONSERVATION?

- » Urban farms and farming operations.
- » Developing and managing rain gardens.
- » Stewarding parks and green spaces.
- » Operating a nature center in a city.
- » Creating and maintaining trails and greenways.
- » Restoring and stabilizing wetlands and streams.
- » Tree planting and urban forestry.
- » Revitalizing a city-owned park.
- » Acquiring land for use as a public park, nature preserve, or passive recreation area.
- » Protecting the conservation values and use of a parcel through deeds, conservation easements, or fee-simple ownership.



# DEFINING URBAN CONSERVATION

There is no uniform definition or agreement regarding what constitutes urban parks or urban conservation.

However, a working definition that emerged through this process was, ***“Urban conservation involves improving and restoring, and in some cases preserving, environmental conditions in cities and densely populated areas.”***





# WHY DO URBAN PARKS + CONSERVATION MATTER?

## Elevated Threats and Challenges Facing Communities

- » Individual physical and mental health, air quality, drinking water quality, heat islands, flooding and storm surges, neighborhood connectivity (homes, jobs, schools, services), transportation and mobility, energy sources and uses, sustainability of cities.
- » Impacts to people living, working, and playing in more densely populated areas; people living near shorelines; people living in areas of historic disinvestment/disenfranchisement.
- » Investments in urban parks are a solution.

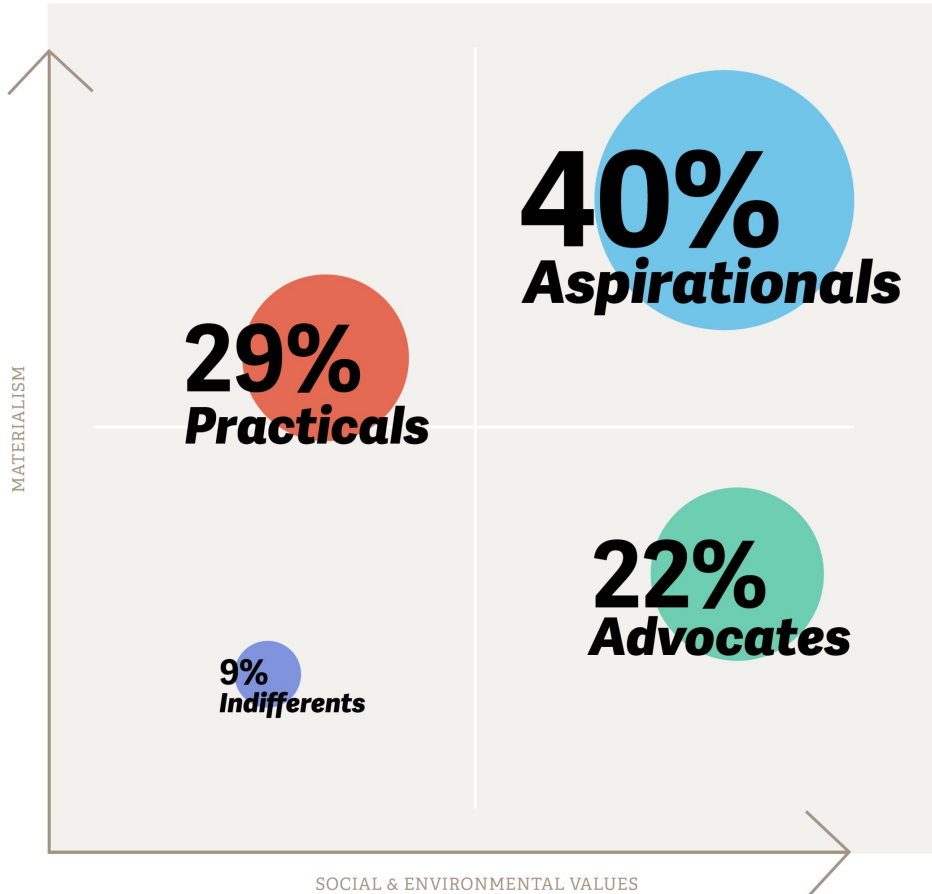
# OUTDOOR ACCESS + CONSERVATION

Prioritizing efforts that guarantee and increase access to green spaces and nature – ensuring that all Michiganders can experience the outdoors.

- » Continue and expand advocacy to protect public lands and increase funding to meet increased demand.
- » Advocate for sustainable funding prioritizing close-to-home access, especially in nature-starved areas.







The rise of Aspirational represents a fundamental shift in culture as the values, needs and priorities of a new generation move toward authenticity, wellbeing, sustainability and social purpose.

Aspirational can help brand leaders and marketers drive relevance, sales, loyalty, philanthropy and positive impact for businesses.

# ROLES PEOPLE + ENTITIES HAVE IN URBAN PARKS

## Technical or Tactical

- » Scientist (botanist, forester, hydrologist, biologist, etc.)
- » Engineer
- » Real estate advisor
- » Attorney
- » Park/public space designer or landscape architect
- » Property owner
- » Property maintenance or stewardship manager
- » Construction or crew supervisor
- » Field or crew laborer
- » Fiduciary or financial manager

## Relationship + Community Building

- » Educator
- » Advocate or champion
- » Community or neighborhood organizer
- » Visionary
- » Strategist
- » Diplomat
- » Networker
- » Fundraiser
- » Philanthropist or funder
- » Healer
- » Facilitator
- » Program, event or volunteer coordinator
- » Policy maker

# WHAT MOTIVATES CARE FOR URBAN PARKS + CONSERVATION?

“We need to plan cities with regard for green spaces. We need to have a practice of looking at things in relation to nature. What we often call urban “revitalization” is often devastating to the land and water.”

“For me, conservation has been stilted by a Western experience. I’m interested in working on conservation in small pockets, in yard space in cities.”

“What we were doing to manage vacant lots wasn’t working. The system of management was all complaint-based.”

“I work for a start-up and am new to urban conservation.”

“Our County’s Land Bank has 15,000 properties and 70% of them are vacant. We have an “adopt a lot” program and are planning to use ARPA funding to demolition some more sites. We are working with 67 different community groups to do things with this vacant land, including Clean and Green groups maintaining properties, but we are not connected yet to the conservation world.”

# WHAT MOTIVATES CARE FOR URBAN PARKS + CONSERVATION?

“I want to connect with neighborhoods to learn what urban conservation means to those communities. How do we do this? How do we start the conversation?”

“We think about our work in terms of quality of life: clean water, healthy habitats, and recreational opportunities. We apply these same criteria in urban and rural places. Being in this (conservation) work for a while, we go in thinking about how we can create lasting results. We look for projects where there are local community leaders who value and appreciate conservation, and where there is openness to learning more about positive impacts.”

“I think environmental justice should be part of our purpose. It’s part of our strategy now. The objective is to get the land in shape so plants, animals, air water, and people are healthy.”

**What motivates you to be here?**



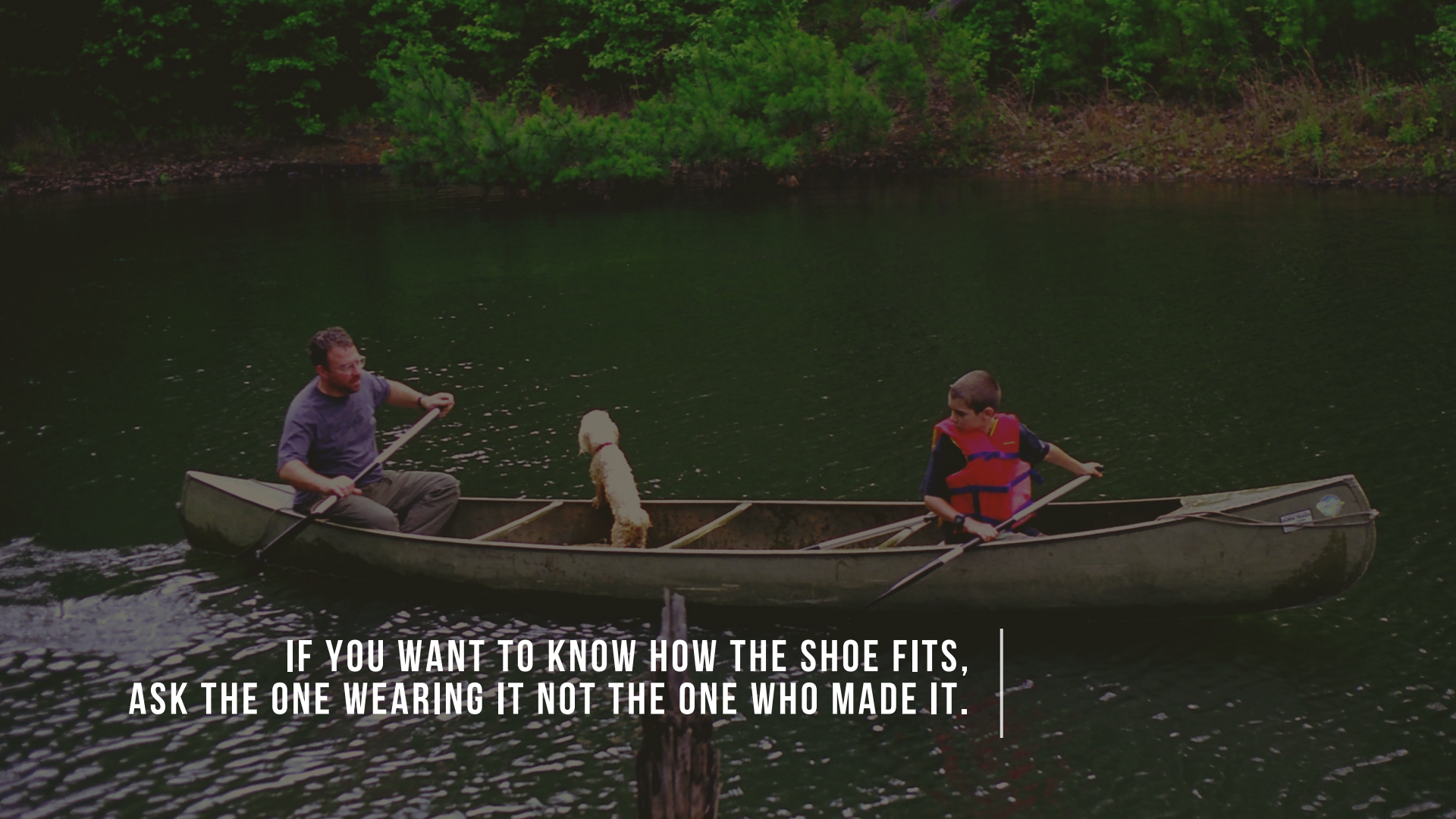
# OBSTACLES + BARRIERS



- » Personal beliefs, mindsets, and motivations.
- » Organizational and entity capacity limitations.
- » Lack of leadership or awareness among elected officials and community leaders.
- » Systemic and project-based patterns of public and private investments.
- » Systemic lack of equity and justice.

# WHAT'S WORKING

- » Prioritizing urban conservation projects through collaborative, community-rooted, and neighborhood-led processes.
- » Collaborating across public and private sectors, and with new entities, and trying new approaches.
- » Investing in priority projects.
- » Policy approaches that center equity in conservation efforts.
- » Taking action at individual, organizational, and community and systems levels.



**IF YOU WANT TO KNOW HOW THE SHOE FITS,  
ASK THE ONE WEARING IT NOT THE ONE WHO MADE IT.**



# WHO INSPIRES US + WHO WE'RE LEARNING FROM

## Research/Data

- » Outdoor Industry Reports
- » SCORP effort

## People and Places

- » Flint, Benton Harbor, Plymouth, Kalamazoo, Lansing, Alpena...
- » Trust for Public Land, Western Reserve Land Conservancy – Thriving Communities (OH), Great Outdoors Colorado, “SHIFT Principles”
- » Today's speakers



# 2022 OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION REPORT

- » Outdoor participant base has increased 6.9% since the COVID pandemic began.
- » Youth participation is climbing but the frequency of their participation is declining.
- » New outdoor participants are more diverse than the overall outdoor participant base and are driving increasing diversity not only by ethnicity but also across age groups.
- » Core Participants, defined as someone who participates 51 times or more in outdoor recreation activities in the past 12 months, has declined from 71.9% in 2007 to 58.7% of the participant base in 2021.
- » Number of participants 55 and older increased more than 14% since 2019, and senior participants ages 65 and older were in the fastest growing age category with 16.9% growth since the COVID pandemic began in early 2020.
- » Despite increases in the number of participants, the number of outdoor outings is declining significantly.

## KEY FINDINGS

Since the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in March of 2020, the number of new and returning (lapsed) outdoor participants has increased 26%.

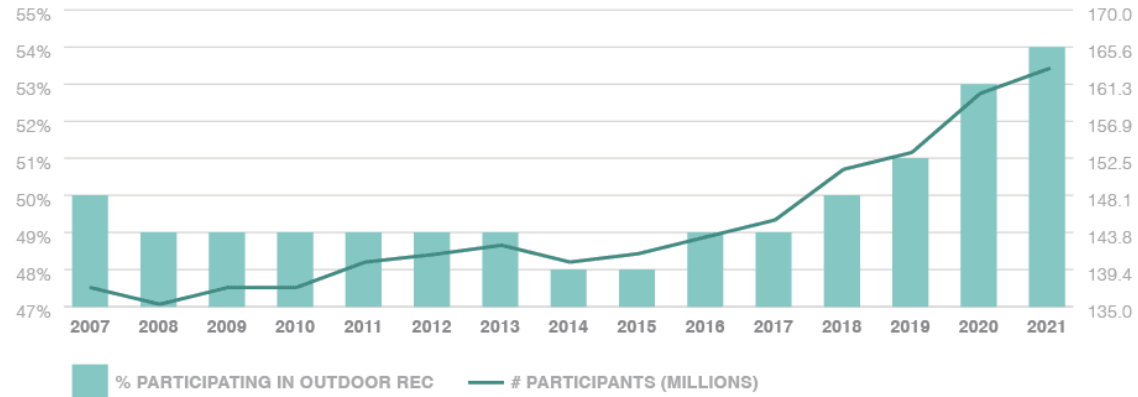
The growth in new participants and returning participants in 2021 was the highest ever recorded.

There was a reasonable expectation that during 2021, the second year of the pandemic, outdoor participation would return to 2019 levels as indoor activity including, dining, sporting events, and fitness centers and gyms, reopened.

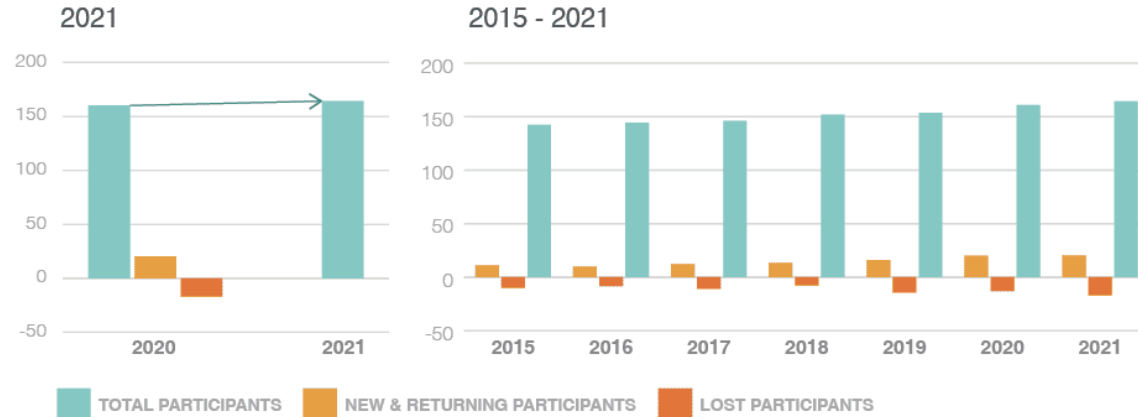
The 2021 data indicates that participation in outdoor recreation retained momentum in 2021. This data indicates that outdoor recreation is “sticky;” once someone begins to participate, they are likely to continue to participate.

## OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION GROWTH TRENDS

2007 TO 2021



## TOTAL, NEW/LAPSED, & LOST PARTICIPANTS (MILLIONS)

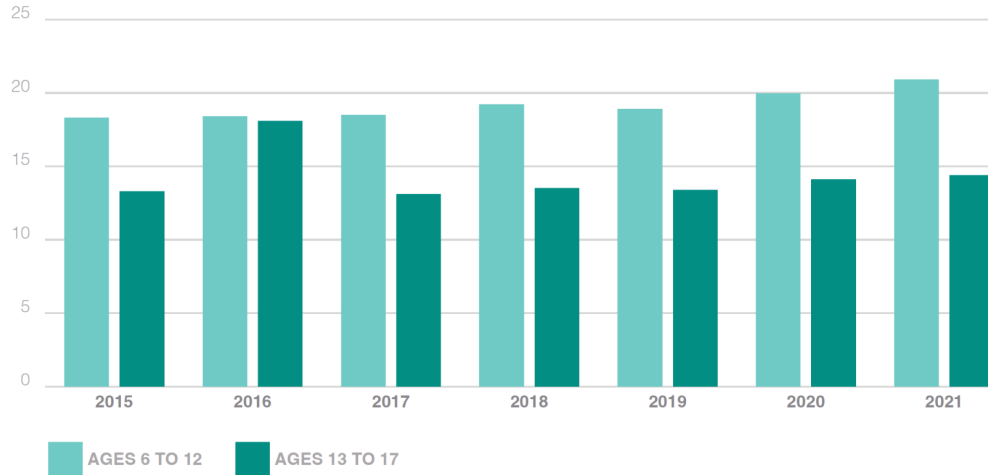




# THE NEXT GENERATION: YOUTH OUTDOORS

## YOUTH OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPANTS (MILLIONS)

2015 TO 2021



In 2021, OUTDOOR PARTICIPANTS INCLUDED:

**20.9 MILLION**  
YOUNGER KIDS (6 TO 12)

**14.4 MILLION**  
OLDER KIDS (13 TO 17)

Younger kids are more active in the outdoors than teens and adults regardless of ethnicity. Ages 6-17 who are white have the highest participation rates of any age or ethnic group with nearly 70% participation. African American kids participate at much lower rates most likely due to lack of access to outdoor spaces.

# STORIES FROM LEADERS IN THE FIELD

## This session's featured communities:

- » Muskegon - Pete DeBoer + Bob Lukens
- » Detroit - Sigal Hemy + Alex Allen
- » Saginaw - Brian Keenan-Lechel + Rob Brown

These leaders will share their approaches and experiences addressing technical, tactical, relational, financial, political, and systemic issues and challenges. They'll share their successes, as well as what they're working on now and hope to do in the future.

**Topical areas: planning and design, environmental conditions, community engagement, funding/financing, site development, maintenance and management, and partnerships.**

# WHAT ARE YOUR HOPES + WHERE ARE YOU FEELING STUCK?



## Team of 3 (“Troika”) Consulting Exercise

For each 10-minute round:

- » Client shares consulting question - challenge/help needed (0-2 min)
- » Consulting Team asks clarifying questions (2 min)
- » Client physically turns around, listens while Consulting Team generates ideas, suggestions & coaching advice (4 min)
- » Client turns around, shares what was most valuable to them (2 min)

Troika Consulting is a Liberating Structures meeting design. Purpose of meeting design: Including and unleashing everyone. Fostering a culture of innovation.



# HEART OF THE LAKES

[heartofthelakes.org](http://heartofthelakes.org)  
[@heartlakes](https://www.instagram.com/heartlakes)  
[#placescreatestories](https://www.instagram.com/heartlakes)

# PARALLEL SOLUTIONS

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