



2018 STATE OF PARKS & RECREATION MANAGEMENT



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ABOUT THIS REPORT

Prompted by a growing nationwide focus on advancing parks, recreation, and environmental conservation efforts, Earth Networks conducted a Parks and Recreation Management survey to help parks and recreation professionals identify best practices and recommendations. This survey, which focuses on parks and recreation threats, challenges, and sustainability, was fielded in April 2018. This will serve as a baseline for future studies to understand the overall direction of the industry. Our goals for this survey were to answer the following questions:

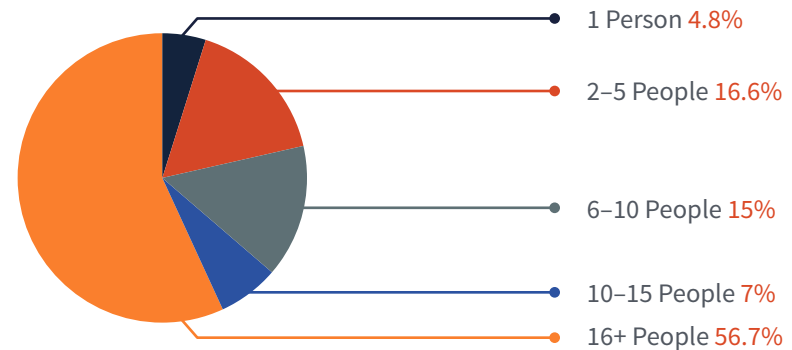
- ▶ **What are the focus areas for parks and recreation professionals in 2018?**
- ▶ **What types of challenges are professionals currently focused on solving?**
- ▶ **What severe weather threats are the most important to prepare for in the eyes of parks and recreation managers in 2018?**
- ▶ **What are the best ways for parks and recreation managers to enhance their professional skills?**
- ▶ **What types of investments are parks and recreation teams considering to improve community perception?**



WHO PARTICIPATED

Nearly 200 parks and recreation management professionals responded to our survey. These professionals oversee a wide variety of facilities as part of their roles. 56.7% of respondents are part of large parks and recreation departments with 16 or more employees while 4.8% come from a one-person operation. Most respondents also came from larger communities, with nearly 80% selecting the community they serve consists of over 10,000 people.

MEMBERS OF PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT



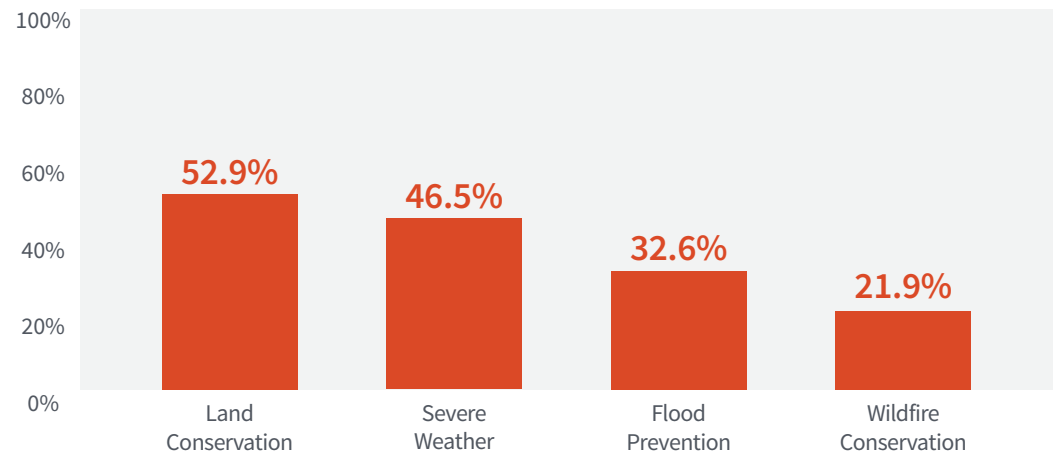
The facilities and services available from the surveyed professionals' operations varied greatly as well. The most common facilities and services overseen by respondents include playgrounds (91.4%), parks (90.9%), sports fields and/or courts (87.2%) and pools (57.2%). Some of the less common yet still represented services include golf courses, amusement parks, camp grounds, and dog parks.

TOP INITIATIVES, CHALLENGES, AND GOALS

Land conservation is the #1 environmental initiative for 2018

When asked what the biggest environmental initiative for the year was, over half of our respondents chose land conservation. According to the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), parks are key to ensuring the health of our overall environment. This is because they play a critical role in maintaining healthy ecosystems, providing clean water and air, and enabling conservation of natural resources. Specifically, respondents focus on soil erosion, community garden upkeep, tree planting, and water conservation. Severe weather is the second most important initiative given the constant threat it poses to park visitors.

2018 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE FOCUS

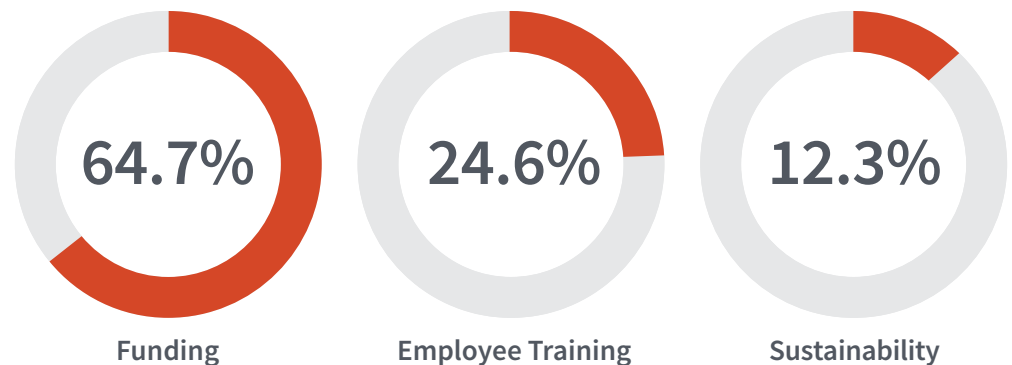


TOP INITIATIVES, CHALLENGES, AND GOALS

Funding is the biggest challenge facing parks and recreation management professionals this year

More than half of all respondents chose funding as the biggest challenge for parks and recreation departments in 2018. If you are trying to increase your funds, our friends at NRPA recommend getting creative. Some strategies that have worked for parks and recreation departments in the past include contributing to economic development through things like sport tourism, nurturing public support, and developing mutually-beneficial partnerships. It's important to note that just because funding is the number one challenge identified in this survey, it doesn't mean it's the only challenge. Employee training and sustainability are other top focus areas for 2018.

TOP FOCUS AREAS



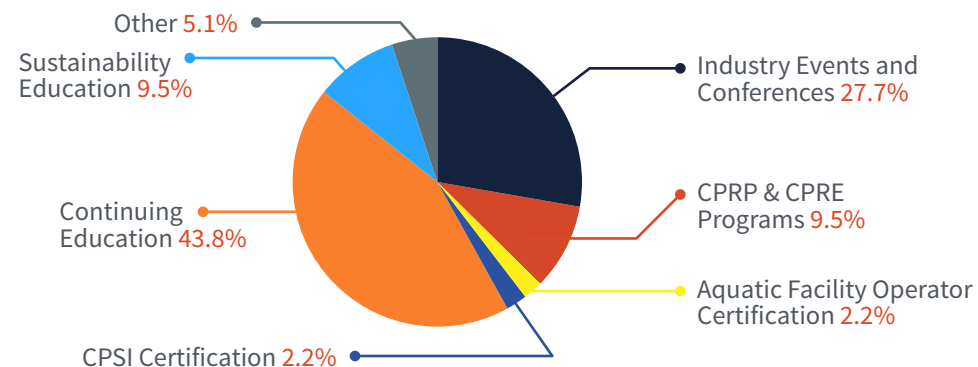
TOP INITIATIVES, CHALLENGES, AND GOALS

Develop professionals with continuing education and industry events

Training employees is an important area for improvement in 2018. The most popular professional development activity among those surveyed is continuing education.

- ▶ The second most popular option for professional development was industry events and conferences with 27.7% of respondents selecting this option.
- ▶ CPRP & CPRE programs tied with sustainability education for the third most important development needs.

MOST IMPORTANT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS





SAFETY THREATS

Most injuries at parks and recreation facilities come from sports

A common goal across most parks and recreation departments is helping community members stay healthy, fit, and active. This of course, comes with its own set of risks. It's no surprise that 58.3% of respondents claim that sports-related injuries are the most common way visitors are injured at their parks. Luckily, sports-related injuries vary in severity and are rarely life-threatening. 18.2% blamed personal health problems, which employees can't do much to prevent. Another 12.3% identified uneven walking surfaces as a source for their most common way visitors are injured.

TOP FOCUS AREAS



58.3%

Sports-related
Injuries



18.2%

Personal Health
Problems



12.3%

Uneven Walking
Surfaces



Children's safety outside at our parks and pools is our most important goal. Lightning moves in fast and most people don't pay attention to it. That's why our team has a weather alerting mobile app so we can make safety decisions quickly.



SAFETY THREATS

Lightning is the largest weather-related concern to parks and recreation management

Some of the most common and disruptive severe weather events that impact parks include tornadoes, droughts, floods, hurricanes, winter storms, and lightning. But which is the most severe in the eyes of parks and recreation management? The answer identified by our respondents is lightning. This isn't surprising given there are over 4 million lightning strikes per day in the U.S. According to the National Weather Service, lightning injures hundreds of people in the U.S. every year. Another problematic statistic for parks and recreation professionals is that leisure activities account for two-thirds of all lightning-related fatalities. Each year, more and more departments are turning towards real-time, hyperlocal weather data and alerts to keep visitors safe.

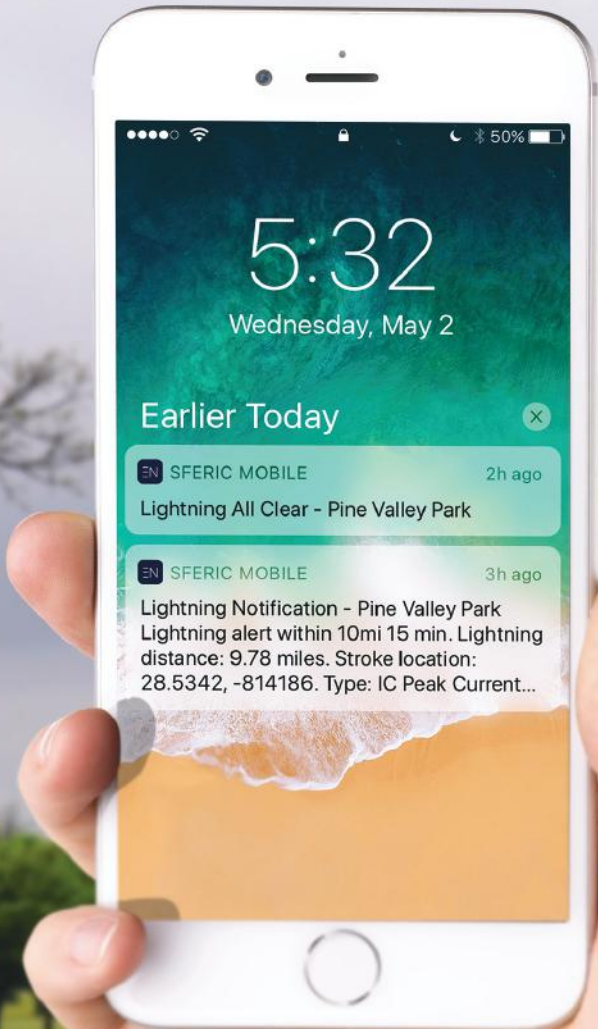
TOP 3 RANKED WEATHER THREATS	# 1	# 2	# 3	TOTAL
Lightning	31.0%	21.3%	22.6%	74.9%
Winter Storms	25.2%	14.8%	14.2%	54.2%
Hurricane	13.6%	14.8%	13.6%	42.0%

SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

Severe weather preparedness must be improved across the board

When asked how prepared facilities are for severe weather emergencies, the average response was 65% prepared. In fact, only 1% indicated that they are fully prepared to handle severe weather. We would love to replicate this survey next year and see this number increase given the wide availability of commercial-grade weather tools. Severe weather is a constant threat which parks and recreation departments can plan for with alerting and forecasting technologies.

PREPAREDNESS LEVELS	RESPONDERS
0–20%	3.8%
21–40%	9.6%
41–60%	22.5%
61–80%	39.3%
81–100%	23.8%

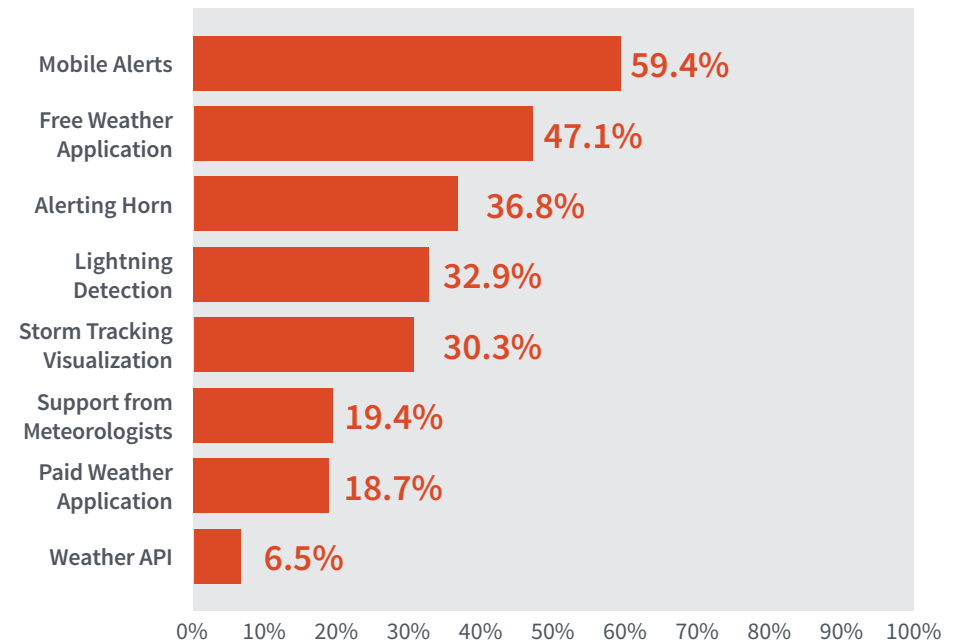


SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

Prepared organizations are leveraging multiple decision-support technologies

Our survey did find that 59.4% of those surveyed are current using mobile severe weather alerts, which is a great start towards severe weather preparedness. It's also encouraging that 19.4% of respondents are getting their weather data and advice directly from meteorologists. If you are going to make the effort to protect your visitors and employees from severe weather, it is important to gather your data from accurate sources in real-time.

SEVERE WEATHER TOOL ADOPTION

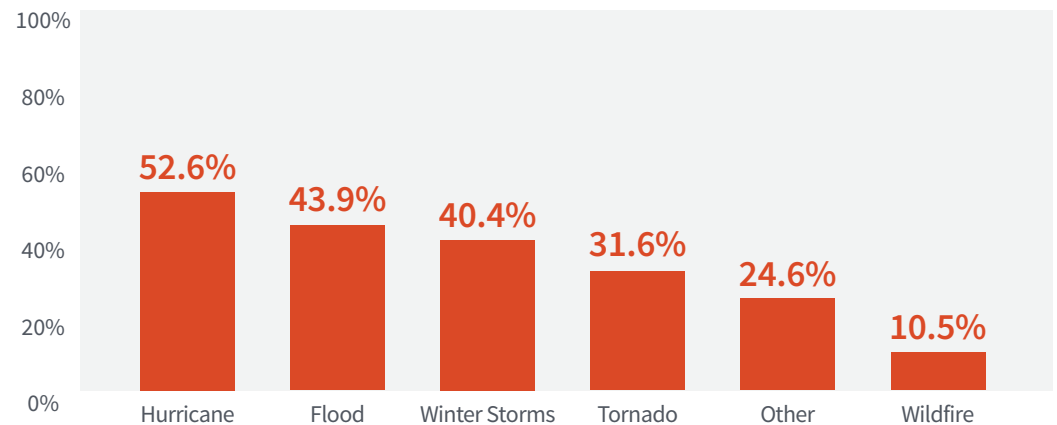


SEVERE WEATHER PREPAREDNESS

Communities continue to use parks and recreation facilities as emergency shelters for severe weather events

Over a third of all respondents indicated that their parks and recreation facilities double as emergency shelters during severe weather events. These events vary from hurricanes to tornadoes to extreme heat. For example, when Hurricane Harvey hit Houston in 2017, dozens of different YMCAs, camps, and schools were transformed into emergency shelters.

2018 ENVIRONMENTAL INITIATIVE FOCUS



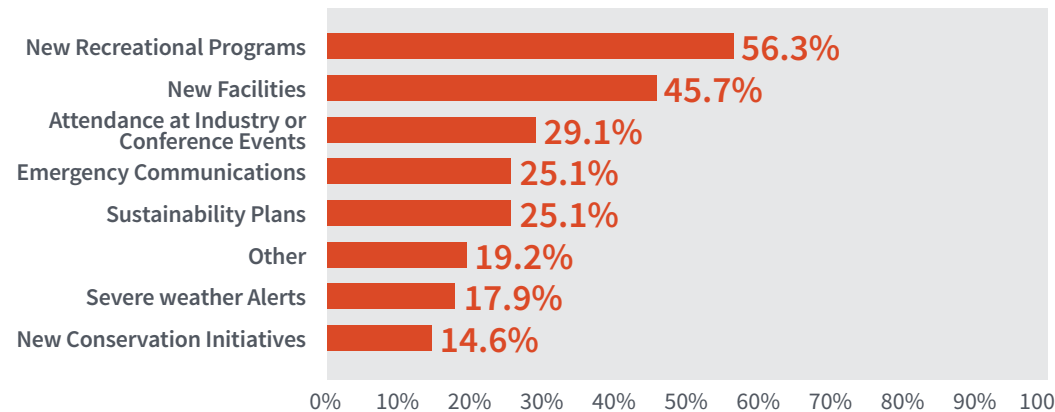
- ▶ A large amount of Other/write-in responses indicated extreme heat as a cause to warrant their facilities being used as a shelter.

MOST POPULAR INVESTMENTS 2018

New recreational programs and facilities are a big area of investment this year

The lives of parks and recreation professionals are filled with more than just bad weather and emergencies. Looking forward, those surveyed are excited to advance their operations in several ways. The number one area of investment identified was new recreational programs. As a focus on health continues to grow, parks and recreation managers are implementing new programs to engage people of all age levels. New recreational programs motivate more community members to frequent parks and recreation facilities and stay active. Health and wellness is also one of NRPA's three pillars (the other two are conservation and social equity). Gaining funding for new health and wellness programs will help parks reach their health and wellness initiatives.

2018 INVESTMENT AREAS FOR IMPROVED COMMUNITY PERCEPTION





ADVICE FROM INDUSTRY PEERS

When asking parks and recreation professionals what their single biggest priority is for 2018, respondents often cited long-term planning and increasing the quality of their parks.



I think having a long-term plan in place is the most important topic for our field. From capital improvement plans to succession models to exploring outside funding, we must think years in advance, not just a brochure cycle, programming year or fiscal year ahead.



Parks and recreation departments must focus on quality. Quality facilities and programs bring communities together and are key to the quality of life for our citizens.



Recreation is always changing. There are new trends and a large-scale transition to doing things online such as registering for programs, booking facilities, etc. It's important for recreational professionals to keep up.



Continuing education classes are the most important to get up to date information on things that change the most. Continuing to learn new ideas helps the community be better prepared for unforeseen events and know the reasons why actions were taken.





CONCLUSION

As community wants and needs continue to change, parks and recreation management need to align their facilities and programs to better fit their community. In 2018, a community-first approach is necessary and helps back important departmental initiatives like training, funding, launching new programs, and tackling severe weather. While funding is the biggest problem for those parks and recreation professionals surveyed, fostering a deep connection with members of the community through safety systems and wellness programs should help gather support.

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If your organization is ready to combat the challenges severe weather poses to Parks and Recreation, Earth Networks has a variety of solutions to fit your situation.