

Across the State of Maryland, residents can be found spending their summers backpacking along the Appalachian Trail, fishing at Point Lookout State Park, biking on the Potomac Heritage National Scenic Trail, taking in the view of wild horses galloping across the beach at Assateague State Park, or partaking in a number of other exciting outdoor activities.

Since 1985, Americans have been celebrating Recreation and Parks Month during the month of July. The designation by the National Recreation and Park Association enables park services to unite their communities around the initiative of Healthy Lifestyles and Livable Communities. During this time, local parks and recreation facilities are encouraged to promote the use of their sites for various leisure activities, community service days and overall community involvement.

According to recent research, 75 percent of Americans live within a two mile walking distance of a public park or recreation facility. In addition, more than 75 percent of the population utilizes their local parks and recreation facilities, adding up to an astounding 192 million people visiting parks each year.

The recently-passed House Interior Appropriations bill makes improving our national parks a key priority. Funding in the bill continues a 10-year initiative to upgrade the national parks before the Centennial of the National Park Service in 2016. Much of this additional funding is targeted at improving national park operations in order to help ensure that visitors to our national parks will experience enhanced levels of service.

I also fought to ensure that the Interior Bill contained key investments for Maryland's natural resources and parks, including \$50 million for programs to improve the health of the Chesapeake Bay and \$400,000 for the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network, an initiative that expands access to the Bay and works to make visits to parks, wildlife refuges, and water trails more meaningful experiences. The bill also provides an increase for National Wildlife Refuges for critically needed staff and funding to implement climate change strategies, and improve conservation efforts.

As always, I remain committed to preserving our natural resources by working to ensure the preservation of our parks, open spaces, and historic sites. Over the years, I have helped enable the expansion of the Patuxent National Wildlife Refuge by an additional 8,000 acres, making it one of the largest areas in the Mid-Atlantic dedicated to land and wildlife research; I have

secured federal funds for the restoration of Maryland's treasured historic sites, including Sotterly Plantation, the Historic Brick Chapel at Historic St. Mary's City, and several of Southern Maryland's tobacco barns; and I have worked to expand Piscataway Park, which preserves parklands along the Maryland shore to ensure that the river view from Mount Vernon continues to look the same as it did when President George Washington lived there over 200 years ago.

In addition to advocating for policy initiatives aimed at protecting Maryland's parks and resources, I would encourage the citizens of our state to become actively involved in their local parks. There are a multitude of ways by which one can volunteer their time to help improve their parks and public spaces. Serving as a guide, docent or participating in a park-wide cleanup not only serve to enhance the visitor's experience, but can also be personally rewarding.

As we celebrate National Recreation and Parks Month, I encourage you to take full advantage of the many beautiful parks and recreational facilities throughout Maryland and take a moment to appreciate how fortunate we are to have them. By making consistent investments, enacting thoughtful responsible policies, and taking personal responsibility to protect our parks and natural resources, we can ensure the continued enjoyment of our parks and natural resources for our children, grandchildren, and future generations.