



LOFT  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE OF  
FISCAL TRANSPARENCY

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## Oklahoma Senate Interim Study 21-12

State parks: current and future needs for the State  
Park system

October 19, 2021



## *Overview*

- National & regional trends observed in state park systems
- Trends in Oklahoma's park system
- State park collaboration with non-profits, other federal and state government entities

## *Key Findings*

1. Only **4 states' park systems were profitable** on a per-acre basis.
2. Preliminary data from 2018 indicates that Oklahoma's park system is becoming **more profitable and attracting more visitors**.
3. **Declining acreage and temperature increases** are correlated with **declines in attendance** in Oklahoma.
4. Other states are piloting public/private partnerships, partnerships with other government agencies, and parks as buffers against heat.



## National Trends

**Net revenue per acre**, or the amount of revenue generated by state park systems (excluding operational and capital expenditures) divided by the number of acres in the state park system, **is negative in 46 out of 50 states.**

Rank	State	Amount
1	Utah	\$ 18.58
2	Colorado	\$ 3.25
3	New Jersey	\$ 2.61
4	New Hampshire	\$ 0.16
5	Alaska	\$ (3.06)
6	Wisconsin	\$ (22.34)
7	Maine	\$ (37.27)
8	Nebraska	\$ (38.55)
9	South Dakota	\$ (45.14)
10	Kansas	\$ (50.79)
41	Oklahoma	\$(400.67)

## National Trends



Total attendance at state parks **increased** from 730 million visitors in 2007 to 807 million visitors in 2017.



Total revenue from state park systems **increased** from \$1.03 billion in 2007 to \$1.35 billion in 2017.



Total expenditures, including operating and capital, from state park systems **decreased** from \$3.75 billion in 2007 to \$3.35 billion in 2017.

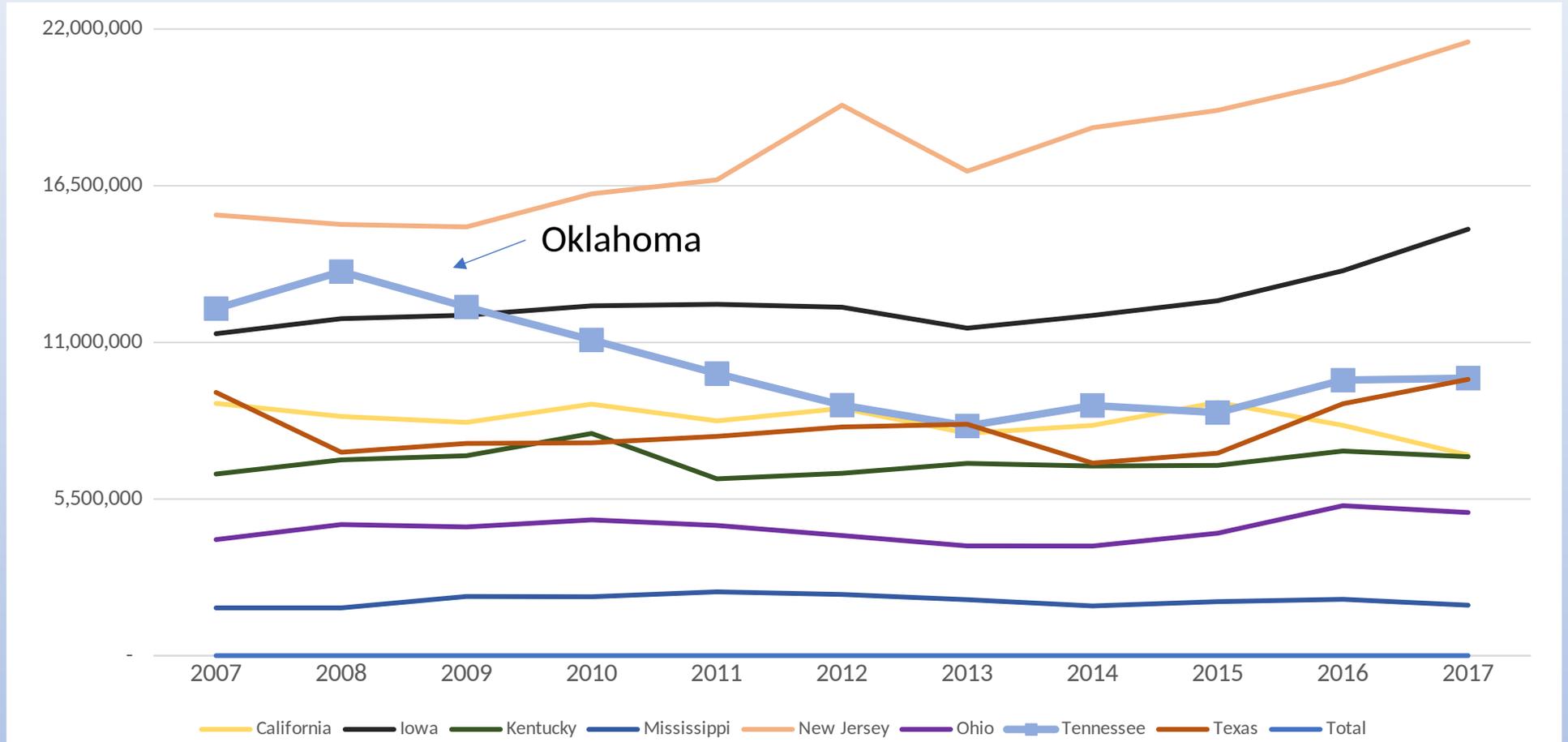


Total acreage from state park systems **increased** from 13.8 million acres in 2007 to 18.7 million acres in 2017.

# Regional Trends - Attendance (2007 - 2017)

From 2007 to 2017, attendance has averaged 1% growth per year, but this has growth has not been uniformly realized.

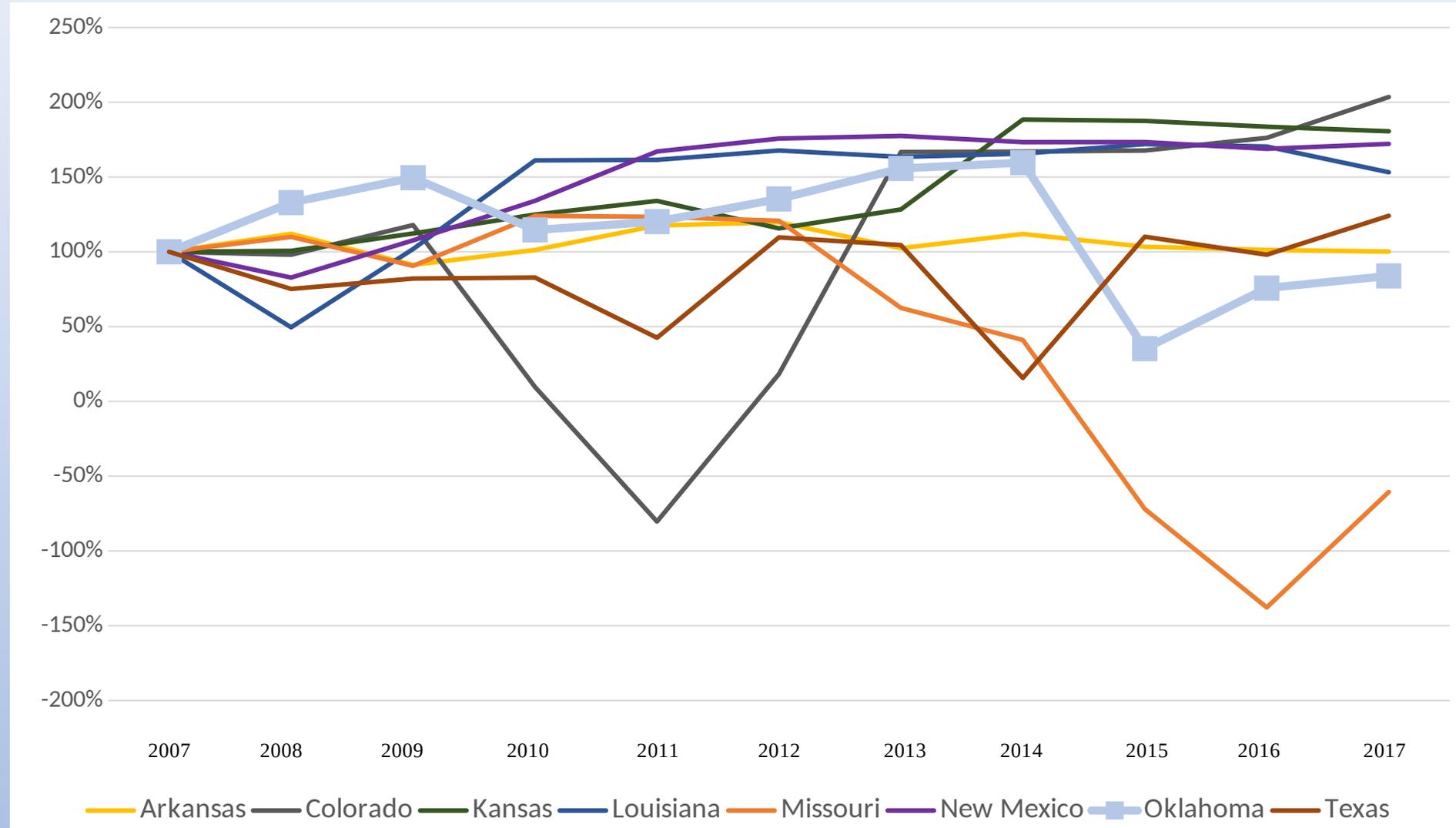
**Oklahoma and Arkansas** are the two states in the region where attendance declined over this time period.



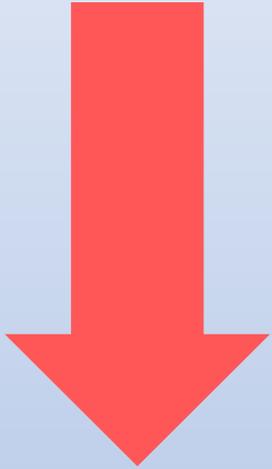
# Regional Trends – Net Revenue Per Acre

From 2007 to 2017, net revenue per acre varied across the region.

Oklahoma is improving its net revenue per acre figure, as shown in 2015, 2016, and 2017.

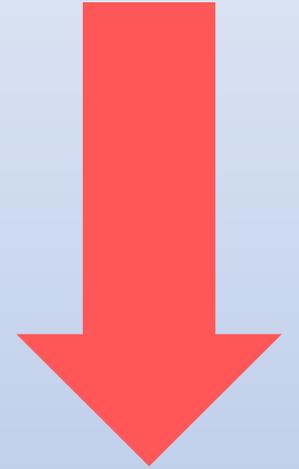


## *Oklahoma Trend Drivers - 2007 to 2017*



Temperature increases are **moderately correlated** with attendance declines.

Declines in state park system acreage are **strongly correlated** with attendance declines.





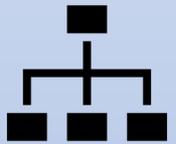
## Oklahoma Trends – Preliminary 2018 Data



Net revenue per acre is **improving**, from - \$400.67 to - \$293.90.



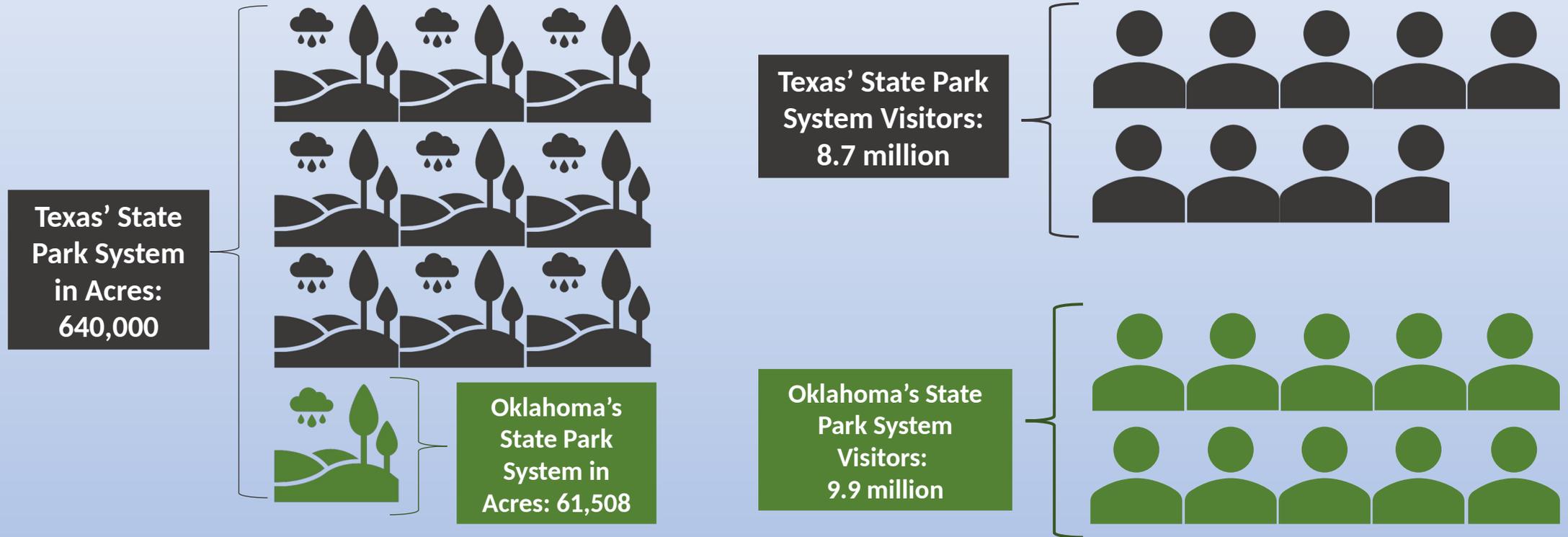
Attendance is **up** from 9.7 million to 9.9 million.



Having Parks embedded within Tourism has been recognized by LOFT's Peer Agency in Mississippi as a **best practice**.

# Oklahoma Trends – Preliminary 2018 Data

Despite having 1/10<sup>th</sup> the number of acres of Texas’ park system, Oklahoma has had 1.2 million more visitors in 2018





## *Trends in Park Management*

1. Non-profit partnership
2. Private sponsorships
3. Collaborating with Federal and State health agencies
4. Collaborating with localities
5. Parks as buffers against heat



## ***Non-Profit Partnerships***

- Using non-profit partnerships provides an opportunity for increased funding to state parks while also benefiting donors.
- **This framework is used in other states:**
  - ***Iowa Parks Foundation***
    - *\$6.8 million in public-private partnership funding for 3 “Parks to People” projects since 2014*
  - ***Georgia Natural Resources Foundation – Weekend for Wildlife***
    - *Raised over \$15 million since 2001, annual event held over one weekend*
  - ***Ohio State Parks Foundation***
    - *Announced in Spring 2021, a new non-profit group focused on enhancing and protecting Ohio’s 75 state parks.*

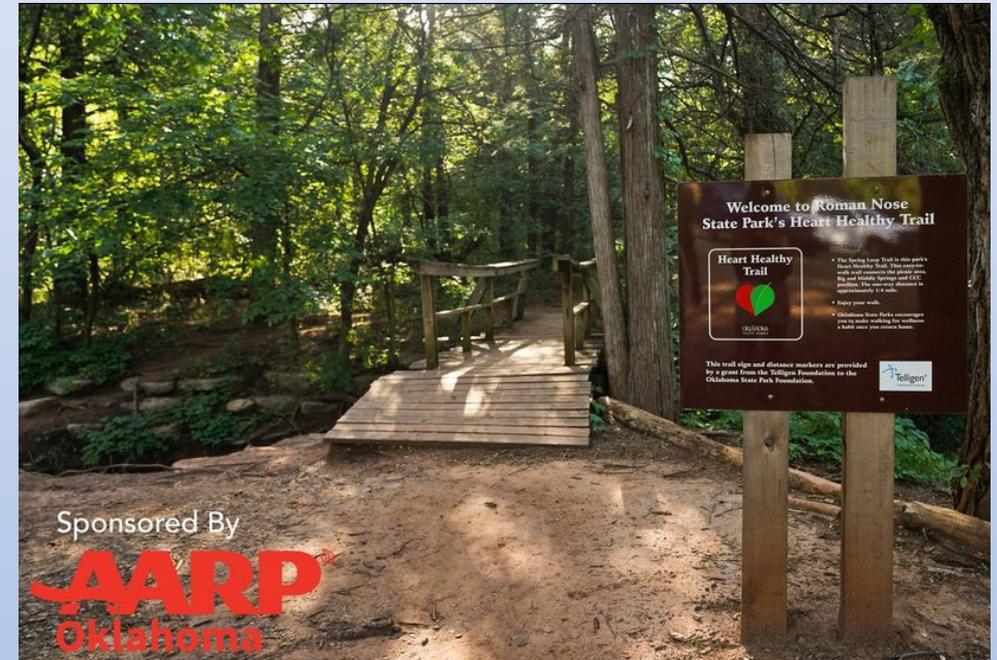


## ***Non-Profit Partnership Opportunities in Oklahoma***

- **Oklahoma Statute authorizes the establishment of a, “not-for-profit state park foundation for the purpose of encouraging contributions by private individuals, companies, foundations, corporations, and others in the private and public sectors.... for the support, preservation, and development of state park properties.”**
  - O.S. 74 § 2225

## *Private Sponsorships*

- **Example of State Park Sponsorship in Oklahoma:**
  - Heart Healthy Trails sponsored by AARP
  - Corporate Partnerships with State Parks provides benefits to both the public and private partners.
  - States have seen multi-million-dollar sponsorships in the past, in addition to volunteer support and other non-monetary benefits.



## *Partnership: Collaboration with Federal and State Health Agencies*

- Empirical research shows the [physical](#) and [mental health](#) benefits of outdoor activity and recreation
- State Parks may partner with entities that promote health and wellness
  - Federal Government- “Healthy Parks, Healthy People” – National Parks Service
  - State Agencies Collaboration:
    - South Dakota - “Park Rx”
    - Tennessee – “Health Parks, Healthy Person”

## *Partnership: Collaboration with Localities & Non-Profits*

- Shared service utilization
  - Mississippi: Utilizes relationships with local law enforcement to help support park operations for events and programs
    - Paul B. Johnson State Park
- City + non-profit partnership for outdoor programs and resources
  - Through community-based grants, Tobacco Settlement Endowment Trust ([TSET](#)) partnered with Guthrie and Logan County Health Department to create community gardens.



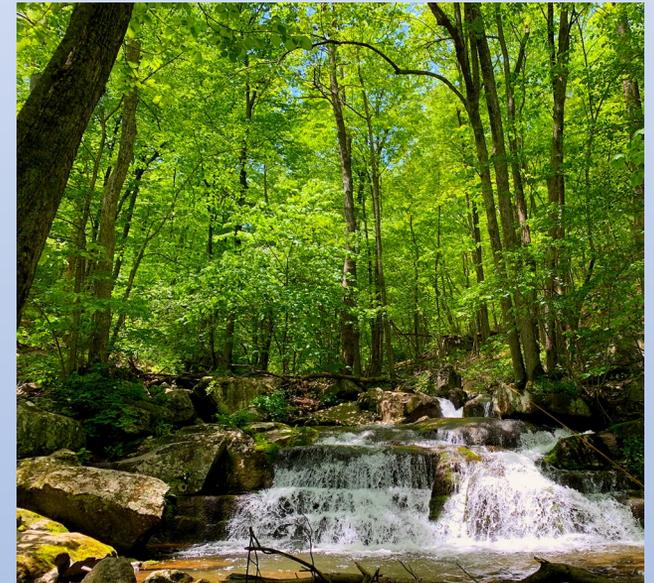
*Guthrie Community Garden*



## *Parks as Buffers Against Heat*

- Parks with adequate tree canopy coverage have been found to cool cities by 16 degrees, providing a respite from heat for nearby neighborhoods, and reducing heat-caused illnesses and injuries more common in city environments. Cities that have invested in tree-planting programs include Houston, New York City, Baltimore, and Washington DC.
- Utah and New York are investing in tree-planting programs for both urban and rural parks to maximize this cooling effect.

Shenandoah National Forest, Virginia. This picture shows the kind of canopy that can reduce heat-caused illness.





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