

# HEALTHY PARK HEALTHY PEOPLE MOVEMENT - A PARADIGM SHIFT IN PARK MANAGEMENT

Neil McCarthy

Chief Executive Officer, World Urban Parks

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world for the last decade has seen some of the most dramatic changes international: Global Financial Crisis, Climate Change, Urban consolidation and technology advancements that are redefining what societies are.

For many decades, park management has been about conservation and protection of our natural landscapes and the provision of recreational opportunities. Over the last two decades a new paradigm has developed that has taken a step beyond this approach. This approach is called the Healthy Parks Healthy People philosophy; an approach that has captured the imagination of parks agencies and governments from around the world. For parks both national and urban, the Healthy Parks Healthy People concept has been a significant paradigm shift that has changed the nature and future of park management.

The underlying goal of Healthy Parks Healthy People is to ensure that parks are of significant benefit to society and not just an afterthought. As the world changes, parks and nature are becoming remote from society and their communities and thus park managers need not only adapt and change the “park service offer”, they need to significantly innovate and become part of the solutions that society is faced with.

Park managers today are confronted with a plethora of challenges ranging from climate change, increased urbanization and rapidly changing social demographics to name a few. The challenges internationally have been well researched and documented and are well known to park managers. However, the real challenge is how we respond to them and responding to them in ways that dynamically benefit society today and tomorrow.

In the 1990’s park management professionals realized with declining relevance to urban communities that they had to change the park paradigm. Leaders such as John Crompton and Brian O’Neill in the USA did this too great affect. We have also

seen innovative responses such as the global phenomena “Health Parks Healthy People” as a dramatic shift in how parks are valued and managed and more recently the National Park City concept.

In 1999 Parks Victoria, in Australia, developed a positioning strategy encapsulated in the slogan Healthy Parks Healthy People. The rationale at the time was to encourage more Victorians to visit parks by communicating a range of benefits - improved physical health, mental health and societal harmony. It was also to establish, in the minds of Victorians, that this potential to improve their health was inextricably linked to a healthy parks system.

The parks industry worldwide are now seeking to feature Healthy Parks Healthy People on their agendas. The concept has evolved into a management philosophy that has been furthered by a range of organisations including the World Urban Parks, Parks for Life and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the unique leadership from the USA National Parks Service.

This paper outlines this journey from the development of the concept to its evolution as a mainstream park management philosophy, from reforming an organisation to bringing leadership and unity to the parks industry, and the future challenges to achieve recognition by Governments and communities that “parks and Green space” are one of the key pillars of a healthy and civil society.

This paper will outline the new emerging goals and challenges for this concept and beyond.

*Imagine a world where people visit parks every day, where classrooms extend into the natural environment, where health care focuses on wellbeing rather than illness, young people are captivated by the natural rather than the virtual world and our streetscapes embrace nature.*

## 2. THE HISTORY OF HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE

---

### WHAT IS HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE?

The Healthy Parks Healthy People philosophy acknowledges the integral link between nature and human health. It is a philosophy that drives an impetus for divergent sectors to come together to tackle the issues facing our planet and our population.

Almost ironically, this is not new thinking, but a rediscovering of what our ancestors understood: that people and their environment are intrinsically linked. Indigenous populations from around the globe know that nature is something that we both live within and are a part of. Cities were designed with large parks and open spaces as designers intuitively understood the need for contact with nature.

When parks were first designed in the 19th century, city officials had a strong belief in the possible health advantages that would result from open space. It was hoped that parks would reduce disease, crime, and social unrest, as well as providing "green lungs" for the city and areas for recreation. At this time, it was also believed that exposure to nature fostered psychological well-being, reduced the stress associated with urban living, and promoted physical health. These assumptions were used as justification for providing parks and other natural areas in cities and preserving wilderness areas outside of cities for public use.

In the last few hundred years, however, there has been an extraordinary disengagement of humans from the natural environment, due mostly to an enormous shift of people away from rural areas into cities. Now, contact with nature is often only available via parks. Never have humans spent so little time in physical contact with animals and plants, and the consequences of this are only beginning to be explored. Modern society by its very essence insulates people from outdoor environmental stimuli and regular contact with nature. Detrimental effects on humans of this isolation from nature have been asserted by researchers who believe that too much artificial stimulation and an existence spent in purely human environments may cause exhaustion or produce a loss of vitality and health.

In addition to an intuitive understanding of the health/nature link, we now have scientific evidence that suggests that people benefit so much from contact with nature that conservation/parks can now be viewed as a public health strategy.

The Oxford Health Alliance reports<sup>1)</sup> that four preventable

chronic diseases – heart disease/stroke, diabetes, lung disease and cancer – account for 50% of the world's deaths, with underlying causes being tobacco use, physical inactivity and poor diet. They have recommended bringing together stakeholders from all parts of society to focus on creating: Healthy Places, Healthy Food, Healthy Business, Healthy Public Policy and Healthy Societies.

Scientific evidence comes from fields as diverse as ecology, biology, medicine, environmental psychology, landscape design, health promotion and psychiatry to show that access to nature plays a vital role in human health, wellbeing and development.

Research indicates that humans may be dependent on nature for psychological, emotional and spiritual needs that are difficult to satisfy by other means. Nature contact yields surprisingly broad benefits. This contact may occur on a very small scale. Plants in the workplace or trees outside an apartment building or it may occur on a larger scale, a nearby park, a riparian, corridor in a city, or a wilderness area.

An extensive literature review, conducted by Deakin University (Australia) in 2002<sup>2)</sup> and updated in 2008<sup>3)</sup> and 2015<sup>4)</sup>, found well over two hundred respected studies indicating that the human health benefits of contact with nature could not be overstated.

Evidence in literature shows that viewing nature is positive for health, in terms of recovering from stress, and improving concentration and productivity. Other studies demonstrate that plants and nearby vegetation can have profound effects, including facilitation of healing in the elderly and mentally disadvantaged, improving job and life satisfaction of residents, improved mental capacity and productivity of office workers, attracting consumers and tourists to shopping districts and aiding community cohesion and identity.

## 3 WHERE HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE BEGAN

---

In 1999 Parks Victoria, in Australia, developed a positioning strategy encapsulated in the slogan Healthy Parks Healthy People. The rationale at the time was to encourage more Victorians to visit parks by communicating a range of benefits - improved physical health, mental health and societal harmony. It was also to establish, in the minds of Victorians, that this potential to improve their health was inextricably linked to a healthy parks system.

The clear and simple slogan "Healthy Parks Healthy People" was developed, implying that the environmental health of parks

results in a healthy community and that spending active recreation time in a well-cared for park environment can lead to greater health and fitness of both individuals and society.

Strategic alliances were established with the health sector and a marketing campaign was launched to promote this concept to all Victorians. At the same time Parks Victoria entered into an agreement with Deakin University to research the health benefits that derive from contact with nature. Support was obtained from the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Asthma Victoria, the National Heart Foundation, and Arthritis Victoria.

The initial program included a public campaign. An eight-week radio and print promotion program. A festival showcased state-wide park and recreational opportunities and displays from community and recreational groups celebrating the benefits of outdoor recreation.

A partnership has been established with a national television program "Postcards," which features an actual park ranger as a presenter and highlights park venues and visitor opportunities. Each segment was tagged with the "Healthy Parks Healthy People" message.

A significant contributor to the success of the campaign to date has been its endorsement by Parks Victoria staff, in particular it's championing by regional communication staff. Vital to the overall impact of the campaign has been the fact that it has been integrated into a wide range of activities, including staff awards, the Parks Victoria internal Web, everyday stationery and report covers, and rebadging of signage and existing sponsorship and media communications. All existing Parks Victoria brochures and promotional programs are now themed Healthy Parks Healthy People.

## **ADOPTING THE HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE PHILOSOPHY**

To achieve the ideals of the Healthy Parks Healthy People concept it is important to identify how parks and the natural environment can contribute to broader societal goals. To achieve this, collaboration is required with non-traditional partners, such as those within the health and community sectors. The aim is to forge a new role for parks as a provider of fundamental societal benefits rather than a custodian of natural values alone.

However, this kind of collaboration does not just happen; a shift in deep-seated, fragmented ways of understanding parks is required across a whole range of sectors. Political support, champions, leadership, innovation, strategic rethink, research and public awareness campaigns are all necessary to shift into a new park management paradigm.

The key elements an organisation must do are:

### **1. CREATE COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

**The Parks Victoria Example:** Parks Victoria has developed a 'can do' leadership style that has enabled the organisation to respond quickly to emergencies such as the recent wildfires that raged across the state, while also developing innovative solutions to more chronic problems. All senior managers participate in leadership development programs internally and externally and the majority of its executive managers complete the innovative, year-long leadership program conducted by Leadership Victoria.

This investment in leadership has resulted in a more proactive and collaborative approach to common park management challenges and the development of several innovative initiatives

### **2. CREATE STRATEGIC ALLIANCES**

**The Parks Victoria Example:** The success of the Healthy Parks Healthy People direction for Parks Victoria has been dependent on developing a leadership that nurtures strategic alliances with potential partners and stakeholders, in areas such as:

- Sporting shooters - unlikely allies
- Connecting bicycle trails
- Bike Path Discovery Day
- Indigenous partnerships
- Indigenous employment
- Engaging with a diverse population
- People & Parks Foundation

### **3. EMPOWER STAFF**

**The Parks Victoria Example: Living it – Parks Victoria's Staff**

A significant contributor to the success of Healthy Parks Healthy People to date has been its endorsement by staff. Across the organisation, there is a growing appreciation of the relationship between a healthy parks system and a healthy society and programs that demonstrate the broader role parks can play are beginning to grow from the 'grass-roots'.

Parks Victoria's staff have initiated all kinds of programs with societal values beyond those traditionally associated with parks. Examples like "The World's Greatest Pram Stroll", an initiative to encourage young mothers to meet and mix in a pleasant environment, promote a healthy lifestyle and encourage people to use parks as a venue for healthy activities.

### **4. MANAGE STAFF WITH EMPATHY**

**The Parks Victoria Example: WALKING THE TALK – SUPPORTING Staff**

Parks Victoria aims to establish a working environment that provides the highest standards of health and well-being for

employees, volunteers, contractors and the public. Parks Victoria has implemented a range of staff support services that embody the Healthy Parks Healthy People philosophy such as:

- Work & Life Balance
- Occupational Health & Safety
- Equal Opportunity
- Peer Support
- Counselling Services
- Trauma Management
- Financial Planning Services
- Indigenous Cross-Cultural Awareness and learning Exchange
- Staff Conference and Awards Day
- Staff Exchange Program

## 5. REACH OUT

**The Parks Victoria Example:** The Parks Victoria experience beginning as a promotional campaign to highlight the connections between a healthy environment and a healthy community, Healthy Parks Healthy People has evolved into a new park management paradigm supported by many of Australia's leading park and health organisations.

The initial program included a public campaign:

- An eight-week radio and print promotion program.
- A festival showcased state-wide park and recreational opportunities and displays from community and recreational groups celebrating the benefits of outdoor recreation.
- A partnership has been established with a national television program "Postcards"

## 6. INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

**The Parks Victoria Example:** An extensive literature review, conducted by Deakin University (Australia) in 2002 and updated in 2008 and 2015<sup>2)3)4)</sup>, found well over two hundred respected studies indicating that the human health benefits of contact with nature could not be overstated.

## 4. HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE - THE FUTURE

---

Since the emergence of Healthy Park Healthy People concept there has been a range of interesting and exciting developments in park management. This section will touch upon four key emerging concepts and examples:

### 1 UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF PARKS

In today's world it is extremely important to revisit our

concept of parks and what they can provide for a changing world.

When parks were first introduced around the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was hoped that they would reduce disease, crime, and social unrest as well as providing "green lungs" for the city and areas for recreation and revival.

These assumptions were used as a justification for providing parks and other natural sanctuaries in cities and preserving wilderness areas outside of cities for public use. Today those early assumptions have been verified by research and experience, and current park management is progressively adjusting to its role in contributing to an array of such outcomes.

The primary role of the parks network is the conservation and management of natural values and provision of passive recreation opportunities. Natural values relate to the ecological and geological assets within parks, and encompass diverse flora and fauna including many threatened and endemic species, communities and ecosystems. The state of these values varies, ranging from ancient, pristine wilderness to parks whose natural ecosystems have been greatly modified by previous land uses.

Parks provide many other benefits beyond the fundamental conservation role, however. In the last twenty years, governments have recognised that parks and open space contribute greatly to a society's economic capital. In Australia, the nature-based tourism industry is worth over a billion dollars annually and many parks such as the internationally renowned Phillip Island Penguin Parade contribute as much as one hundred million dollars a year to Australia's economy.

The following describes some of the benefits that parks provide:

- PLANTS, WILDLIFE AND LANDSCAPES – protecting biodiversity
- NATURE'S HIDDEN GIFTS PROVIDER – ecosystem services and climate change adaptation and mitigation
- ECONOMIC GENERATOR – financial outcomes
- CONNECTIONS TO COUNTRY – respecting traditional ownership
- FEEL BLUE, TOUCH GREEN - assisting mental well being
- GREEN GYMS – recreational settings
- EMOTIONAL CONNECTION - inspiring our hearts and souls
- BONDING PLACES - connecting families and communities
- OUR LIVING HERITAGE – treasuring our identity
- NATUREWORKS – our outdoor classroom

Why the benefits of parks, understood by early landscape designers, park engineers, and public health campaigners, have been overlooked in recent decades is a mystery. Research on the

benefits of nature carried out over the last two decades indicates that our forefathers were right. Data so far have shown that access to "green nature" can reduce crime, foster psychological well-being, reduce stress, boost immunity, enhance productivity, promote healing in psychiatric patients, and aid community cohesion and identity<sup>5)</sup>.

Yet despite the burgeoning chronic health problems in industrialized nations, and despite the trend away from single-cause explanations of illness and disease, little if any attention has been paid to the potential for the "symbiotic" relationship between social capital and natural capital to be exploited as both a preventive measure and a restorative solution to the diseases prominent in modern society.

Parks and other natural environments are a fundamental health resource, particularly in terms of disease prevention. The initial evidence documenting the positive effects of nature on blood pressure, cholesterol, outlook on life and stress-reduction is sufficient to warrant incorporation into health strategies for priority areas of 'mental health' and 'cardiovascular disease'.

For these reasons, in the same way that protecting water and protecting air are strategies for promoting public health, protecting natural landscapes can be seen as a powerful form of preventive medicine.

Of course, there is still much we need to learn, such as what kinds of nature contact are most beneficial to health, how much contact is needed and how to measure that, and what groups of people benefit most? But we know enough to act.

However, few of the "park" benefits have been explored, developed and embraced by Society.

Only two benefits:

- PLANTS, WILDLIFE AND LANDSCAPES – protecting biodiversity
- GREEN GYMS – recreational settings

are central to park management and well understood. However, they are still challenging to deliver and achieve optimal outcomes. The other 7 benefits described above have only just started to be explored and much of this has been driven by the emergence of new concepts such as Healthy Parks Healthy People paradigm.

However, since the emergence of the Healthy Parks Healthy People concept, it has become apparent that there are more benefits to "parks" that will be of even more value to society. In recent years there has been development of and understanding of the concept around Liveability<sup>6)</sup>.

## 2 DESIGN LEGACY

### - RETHINKING THE DESIGN OF PARKS

With passing the point where over 50% of the world's population are now in cities, where society health issues that result from being disconnected from nature (obesity, diabetes, depression etc) have become the major cause of death, where the city heat sink is causing spike in power usage, where individuals are becoming disconnected from society, where history has shown us that the cost to infrastructure to retrofit "greenspace" into the urban jungle is prohibitive, where urban renewal is occurring everywhere to address poverty and well-being, designing "parks" for the future will be crucial. Parks will have to be designed in away so that they can adapt and change as society changes and the challenges that society faces become more significant

There are many examples in the World to draw upon and provide "signposts" to the future to demonstrate why "design" is essential such as:

- Centennial Parklands and the home of "federation" - a great park that was designed with a clear vision but has shown the ability to adapt and be flexible to changing needs.
- Canberra - Walter Burley Griffin - his legacy which was a city in a landscape with exceptional use of water (artificial) and a long run vision
- The Shrine - ANZAC Day - The People's Park (MCG) - a football game - defining our culture: Sir John Monash's leadership against Government wishes gave Melbournians one of the greatest landmarks that now (and it is hard to know if Sir John had this sort of insight) on one day each year defines being an Australian from the dawn service to the Australian Game at the greatest Stadium in a great parkland and city.
- San Francisco: Golden Gate National Park and the Presidio - a legacy of one man "Brian O'Neill". A great modern example of an individual who held a vision that is now carried by many.

There have been many developments in park design thinking with concepts of "way finding" and site "activation" however most are at the detail design level rather than a legacy scale.

Regarding the concept of "design legacy", Olmsted and Brown (landscape designers who have created significant park legacies) have given us a platform to ponder; why have their legacies (parks) lasted and adapted to different societies and maybe cultures over hundreds of years. Did they "perceive" something in their designs that created lasting legacies? Both Olmsted and Brown have given us "signposts" for the future regarding "designs" that can last more than a generation.

“Capability” Brown has had a great focus on natural form and the feeling of the “landscape” and setting but it is the extensively studied “Olmsted” who has potentially given us a set of design principles.

Olmsted is not only famous for the parks he designed but his style and what I believe are important design principles that he established. These Principles are my version and are open for further development and discussion.

#### **The Foundational Design Legacy Principles:**

**Principle: Natural Form** - is the full utilization of the naturally occurring features of a given space;

**Principle: Blend** - is “subordination” - the subordination of individual details to the whole;

**Principle: Concealment** - is concealment of design, design that does not call attention to itself;

**Principle: Sense:** is design to enhance the sense of space;

**Principle: Utility** - is utility above all else

**Principle: System** - is where space is designed as part of a network

These principles are aimed at designing “parks” that can be valuable to communities as they evolve and change over generations. Similar “principles” of design can be found in other cultures such as in China and Japan. The application of the “principles” does require a sense of vision and purpose and an ability to look beyond the existing demands, societal norms and the existing trends and thinking.

#### **COMMUNITY PASSIONATE LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP**

Over the last 30 years a unique approach to park management has developed in the USA. This concept – Community Passionate Leadership & Partnership, is a central component of the Healthy Parks Healthy People paradigm.

This concept was developed and created by a unique park leader named Brian O’Neill. Brian served on the planning commission for the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), and it was his presentation at the White House to Richard Nixon that convinced the President to endorse the concept of a park in San Francisco. In 1981 O’Neill was named assistant superintendent with the GGNRA, and was promoted to superintendent in 1986.

Brian’s legacy developed over many years and seems to have been founded on his honest optimism that the community can achieve outstanding success. His leadership had an immense

impact on urban park managers but not yet by civic leaders world-wide. The Golden Gate model is an exemplar of what can be achieved with the right mix of individuals and community openness.

The Golden Gate model is unique partnership between the USA NPS, a Not-for-Profit Foundation (The Golden Gate Conservancy) and a broad range of partners. It is an open and very inclusive model rarely found elsewhere.

He is one of the few that could connect all sectors of society - Private/Public, Health to Welfare, Business to Education with a sense of purpose that was more than just “the park” in a traditional sense. His approach led to the Golden Gate National Park adopting Healthy Parks Healthy People as a central program in 2010, followed closely by the adoption of USA NPS.

However, I have tried to capture what are the key Principles regarding Community Leadership:

**Principle: Belief** - is the understanding that communities and individuals can achieve outstanding success;

**Principle: Community Fabric** - is that the fabric of the park and open space should reflect the sense of what the community is!;

**Principle: Connections** - is about making connections between all sectors of society and individuals and making “parks” relevant to them;

Another classic example of this approach is the Washington Parks and People organisation in Washington DC (USA).

#### **SYSTEM THINKING REVOLUTION - THE GREATER LONDON URBAN NATIONAL PARK CONCEPT**

Thinking differently can lead to interesting and surprising outcomes. The concept of System Thinking is well known but hardly conceptualised or leveraged. However, an example that is making us all rethink the concept of “parks” is:

##### **THE CONCEPT: A GREATER LONDON URBAN NATIONAL PARK**

The city of London covers more than 1,500 square kilometres, an area about the size of Surrey or South Yorkshire. More than 13,000 species, including humans, inhabit 3,000 parks, 30,000 allotments, three million gardens and two National Nature Reserves. Overall, 47 per cent of London is green space, and 60 per cent is classified as open space.

*“We have eight million trees in London; the world’s largest urban forest,” –*



Yes, there are national parks that form parts of great cities and the Finnish have furthered this concept of National Urban Parks. But nowhere in the world has anyone reimagined the whole landscape on such a scale to achieve (from the Greater London National Park website <sup>7)</sup>:

- Children – Growing up in a National Park City would have a profound influence on our children. It would open up new opportunities for young people to be healthy, spend quality time with family, improve their outdoor education and grow up as creative citizens.
- Health – Actively enjoying quality green space improves our mental health, physical health and well-being. It not only saves money on the health services but can also improve productivity in the workplace.
- Wealth – The Greater London National Park will put London on the map as the birthplace of a new National Park City movement. It will not only inspire new kinds of business in the capital, but actively work to promote opportunities for recreation and tourism in London's outer boroughs.
- Recreation – London is an incredible, inspirational and accessible landscape to explore. The Greater London National Park would promote the city's long-distance footpaths, 50 canoe clubs and numerous other often forgotten opportunities to enjoy open-air
- Environment – The National Park will create a common vision for the city that all Londoners will understand. Activities will lead to better management of the capital's green and blue infrastructure and as a result, increased resilience against pollution, flooding, climate change and other risks.
- Nature – Londoners share a long history appreciating and protecting wildlife. The Park would both celebrate our achievements in conserving green space and inspire a generation to think creatively about our future relationship with nature.

The concept is not only designed to engage communities and society with their environment and reimagine a liveable city but also to test the boundaries of the “National Park” concept. It is timely that we re-examine what is possible and what can be. This may be the future of parks of the next century.

There are two key Principles that can be derived from the London Concept and they are:

**Principle: Systems Rethink** - is about exploring “parks” as a broader component of a whole system and how it becomes the fabric of a city;

**Principle: Leadership without Fear** - is about considering ideas and innovations that not only challenge existing concepts but also change the concept.

## 4 IS HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE - A NEW DIRECTION IN PARK MANAGEMENT

---

The future of park management depends on Leadership at a local, National and International level. The Healthy Parks Healthy People story is an interesting reflection on this issue of leadership, what it means and what may be needed.

### QUESTIONS OF LEADERSHIP - THE HEALTHY PARKS HEALTHY PEOPLE STORY :

In 1999 a group of individuals decided to rethink the role of parks and their relevance to society and decided that parks have a central role in community health. The concept of HPHP was born: The medical and scientific evidence proves that parks and contact with nature significantly improve human well being.

The HPHP concept has led to significant changes in park management world-wide with major uptake of this concept world-wide including two major international congresses, the adoption of this concept by the USA NPS.

But it wasn't a new concept:

- When parks were first designed in the nineteenth century, city officials had a strong belief in the possible health advantages that would result from open space. It was hoped that parks would reduce disease, crime, and social unrest, as well as providing “green lungs” for the city and areas for recreation. At this time, it was also believed that exposure to nature fostered psychological well-being, reduced the stresses associated with urban living, and promoted physical health. These assumptions were used as justification for providing parks and other natural areas in cities, and preserving wilderness areas outside of cities for public use.
- The 1929 Plan for Melbourne identified the central philosophy of Healthy Parks Healthy People. So Healthy Parks Healthy People wasn't new in 1929, so why did it take until 1999 before anything was done.

*“Abundant evidence is available to substantiate the views if City Planners, the medical profession, and psychologists that proper outdoor recreation has the most beneficial effect on health, morals and business efficiency of communities” (Melbourne Metropolitan Plan 1929).*

In 1999 a creative group of individuals created the slogan “Healthy Parks Healthy People” that captured the imagination of park managers around the world. This creative and innovative approach ensured that a concept known for hundreds of years

was adopted but it was only because of the vision and leadership of a few who could see the importance of this concept not just for Victorians but the world.

So, utilizing Healthy Parks Healthy People concept was not necessarily about understanding but more importantly about leadership and innovation – and this is the central theme regarding the future of park management – Leadership & innovation.

## 5. CONCLUSION:

---

It is now recognised that parks offer both environmental and societal benefits.

*Healthy Parks (Conserving and enhancing the environmental and cultural values of parks)*

*Sustain*

*Healthy People (Broad societal benefits associated with the range of experiences available through parks)*

Like many natural resource management agencies around the world, Park managers also needs to remain relevant to communities and governments in the midst of many other important considerations. Issues affecting education, health, security, transport, energy, and water, among others, can overshadow parks when legislators are considering environmental priorities. However, there is no need to exclude one priority at the expense of another. Increasingly governments are encouraging more holistic strategies that foster partnerships between sectors and which involve collaborations that realign common interests.

By developing an understanding of the value of parks – agencies, governments and society will be able to broaden the role of protected area management beyond the traditional mandate and realize a purpose benefiting all facets of society.

From Parks Victoria's experience it is evident that by taking a wider perspective, park management agencies can take advantage of a diverse range of opportunities to assist with their particular challenges and to generate a greater sense of appreciation and recognition within the broader community.

To do so will require a commitment to:

- Internal capacity building;
- Learning from, and working collaboratively with, others (and developing systems to facilitate this);

- Encouraging innovative thinking;
- Communicating to urban communities (e.g., through a partnership approach with sister urban park management bodies) to demonstrate the value of parks beyond an environmental resource to include the economic benefits of nature-based tourism and the significant role parks play in the physical, mental, spiritual, and social well-being of society;
- Engaging the community and providing meaningful, rewarding, and mutually beneficial opportunities to participate in the planning, use, and care of parks, thereby building community capabilities and custodianship; and
- Adequately resourcing such initiatives. So why are park management agency and Governments taking such a proactive role? Put simply, our modern world is facing a challenging future. The human and natural environment is beset by dire circumstance and often worse predictions:
- If the world continues to burn fossil fuels at the current rate, temperatures are projected to rise up to 5.8 degrees Celsius by 2100.
- The prevalence of overweight and obesity among children and adults has reached epidemic proportions in developed nations.
- Deforestation and forest degradation contribute up to 25% of human-induced greenhouse gas emissions.
- Depression is the leading cause of healthy years lost due to disability, the burden being 50% higher for females than males.
- Global biodiversity is declining rapidly with human activity increasing the extinction rate by at least 100 times compared to the natural rate.

These are immensely complex issues, with far reaching impact. As a result, we are currently experiencing global expenditure on health by government and individuals. There has also been a major positive attitude change to the natural environment and human impact on it. But World Urban Parks, and many others, believes it is not enough.

## WHERE TO NEXT?

Parks are loved by just about everybody, which is in itself a measure of their inherent value to people. Yet, we often overlook the extensive benefits we derive from them. Apart from the obvious benefits of open space for physical activity, parks are sanctuaries from urban pressures, places for people to connect and havens for children to explore the wonders of the natural world. Parks help provide us with a sense of place, cultural identity and spiritual nourishment. We experience a greater sense of health and well-being, of connection and



meaning when immersed in the living systems that sustain us. Parks have a clear role to play enabling people to experience the health benefits associated with our precious natural environment.

In line with this more symbiotic approach to service delivery, the creative Park managers are repositioning themselves as a provider of services with deep societal benefits rather than a custodian of natural values alone. We are reshaping the role of parks in the community and their value to society.

## Reference

- 1) Abdallah S. Daar et al.(2007):Grand challenges in chronic non-communicable diseases: Nature450,494-496
- 2) Cecily Maller et al.(2002):Healthy Parks Healthy People -The Health Benefits of Contact with Nature in a Park Context:Deakin University and Parks Victoria,pp.50
- 3) Cecily Maller et al.(2008):Healthy parks, healthy people -The health benefits of contact with nature in a park context 2nd edition:Deakin University and Parks Victoria, pp.96,
- 4) Mardie Townsend et al.(2015):Healthy Parks Healthy People: the state of the evidence 2015:Deakin University, pp.103
- 5) Florence Williams(2017):the NATURE FIX:W. W. Norton & Company, pp.304
- 6) Apart from Melbourne (Australia) and Vancouver (Canada) always contesting yearly to be the World's most liveable city, few understand the role parks and greenspace play in city liveability. Melbourne Water has been exploring this concept through the Melbourne Water Liveability Panel.
- 7) London National Park City <http://www.nationalparkcity.london/> (2019.7.10)

## The author :

Neil is an international leader in natural resource management with a strong focus on policy and strategy, especially parks and waterways. He has extensive understanding and experience in the complexities required to achieve balance between environment and development for the betterment of the community.

Neil has spent much of his career developing best practice and strategic partnerships between parks and NRM agencies. He has been responsible for leading some of the most significant global initiatives in parks management, including Parks Victoria's 'Healthy Parks, Healthy People' program, the creation of Parks Forum (as founding Chair) as a peak Australasian organisation representing parks agencies, the creation of the International Urban Parks and Green Space Alliance, and the review of the International Federation of Parks and Recreation Administration (as President Elect), and implementation of World Urban Parks (as Vice Chair).

Neil held a number of operational, strategic and corporate executive roles in Parks Victoria before becoming the CEO of the North East Catchment Management Authority in Victoria Australia. He was originally educated in Forest Science with the University of Melbourne, holds an MBA in government policy and reform from Monash University, and did further Executive study at MIT in the USA.

Neil has been recognised for many of his contributions and was World Urban Parks' 2016 Distinguished Individual Award recipient. Neil has recently been appointed the CEO of World Urban Parks and Co-Chair of the International National Park City Commission.