

Creating an Accessibility Advisory Committee modeled on Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Why have an Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC)?

“In order to facilitate accessibility, agencies need to find out what the needs are of the individuals with different disabilities, because it means something different to everyone. If you put everyone on the committee's disabilities and everyone's experiences together, staff end up with pretty good feedback on whether or not what they're proposing — this ‘great ADA thing’ — is going to be usable. If it's not usable, it doesn't work.” – AAC member

Who is involved?

“A lot of experienced voices who get together and brainstorm ideas about how to make state parks and wildlife areas more accessible for the ever-growing disability community.” – Chair

“One of my primary functions is amplifying the voice of the disability community and ensuring that voice is present in all levels of decision making at the agency. The AAC is one of the ways I am able to do this.” – ADA Coordinator

How is it run?

3-4 virtual meetings per year
last 2-3 hours

Staff invited to share projects with AAC members during meetings to hear their feedback and ideas

ADA Coordinator provides administrative support and facilitates meetings

New committee members identified by ADA Coordinator and appointed by Commissioner

Advice for replication

Ensure leadership is on board so recommendations are taken seriously.
Build relationships with the disability community to recruit diverse and engaged members.
Invite staff to *collaborate with*, not *talk at*, the committee.

“Do it no matter the barriers or the challenges you're facing. It is 1,000% worth it and valuable, and you will be glad that you did it. You will also feel much more confident in the decisions that you're making, knowing that you're not making those decisions in a vacuum for other people, that you have folks you can talk to and ask. Even if it's not the perfect representative sample from your state, just starting the conversation and getting folks in the room is really important.” – ADA Coordinator

This handout is a summary of a case study report which was compiled based on hours of interviews with members of the AAC and staff from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Creating an

Accessible trail for wildlife viewing

based on the Neidrach Trail at Barr Lake State Park, Colorado

What features of the Neidrach Trail support disabled wildlife viewers?

0.5 mile lollipop trail beginning near the Nature Center. Barr Lake State Park is famous for overwintering and breeding Bald Eagles, and 350+ species of birds have been recorded.

Not visible:

- Nature Center with accessible, all gender flush bathrooms unlocked 24/7.
- Travels over, or near, Barr Lake, which acts as a bird magnet in the prairie.
- Four bench areas; two are shaded.
- Roofed observation deck.
- Well-designed interpretive signs which include wildlife viewing tips.

Areas with open sky

Shaded sections

No steps or obstacles in the trail surface

Travels through different habitats including prairie, under cottonwoods, and over or near the lake

Majority of the trail has less than 5% grade

Minimum of 44" wide

Firm and stable surface: Hard-packed crushed stone and wooden boardwalk

This is a summary of a case study report which was compiled based on hours of interviews with disabled trail users and staff at Barr Lake State Park and Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

Creating an

Inclusive birding program

based on Get Outdoors and Get Together Day, New York

What makes this birding program inclusive for wildlife viewers with disabilities?

Get Outdoors and Get Together Day is an annual statewide event aimed at welcoming historically marginalized communities to DEC properties and introducing them to outdoor activities.

Held on an accessible trail near the Nature Center: firm and stable surface, no steps, benches, wide

Not visible:

- The wheelchair- and bike-friendly Nature Bus, which runs between downtown Albany and Five Rivers Environmental Education Center.
- Interagency collaboration between the Department of Environmental Conservation, Office for People with Developmental Disabilities, Office of Mental Health, Department of Veterans' Services, and other state agencies.

Variety of binoculars and monoculars available to borrow

Binocular tutorial provided

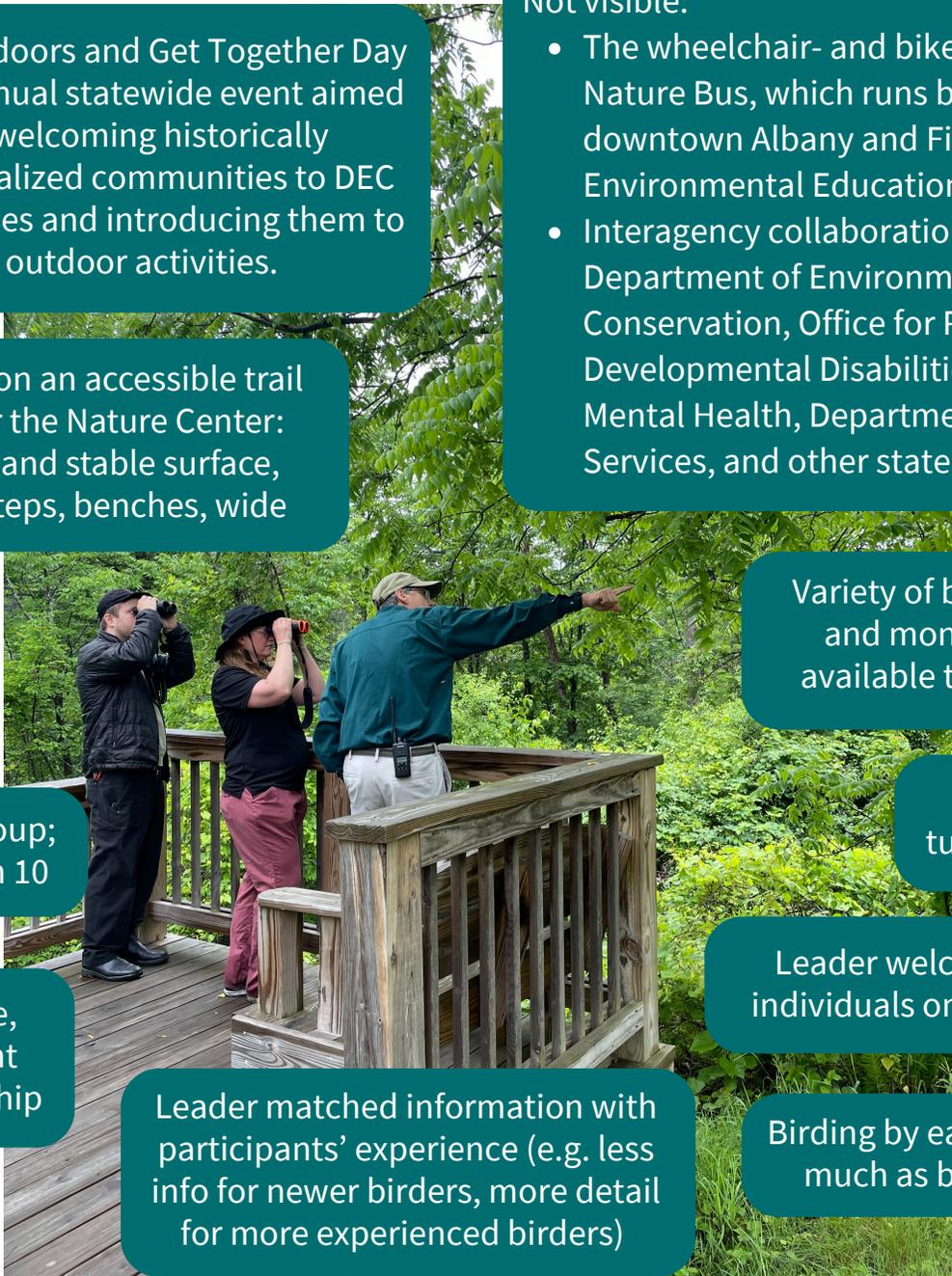
Leader welcomed individuals on arrival

Birding by ear emphasized as much as birding by sight

Small group; less than 10

Gentle, patient leadership

Leader matched information with participants' experience (e.g. less info for newer birders, more detail for more experienced birders)



This is a summary of a case study report which was compiled based on field observations and hours of interviews with staff at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

Considerations for creating an **Loaner Trackchair program** based on Ludington State Park, Michigan

1. Determine storage and transportation requirements

- Battery takes 8-14 hours to charge.
- Where will users store their own mobility devices while out on trails?

2. Determine trails Trackchair is allowed on

- Cannot climb steps or >36% grade.
- Battery life is 3-4 hours.
- Staff may need to retrieve it.

3. Determine guidelines for reserving

- Are staff or volunteers required to assist with orientation?
- Are volunteers required to accompany users throughout?
- Must users be independent in transfers or bring a buddy to assist?

4. Determine reservation process

- Embed in statewide online campsite reservation system?
- How far must a reservation be made in advance? Important if it must be transported to a separate location and/or a volunteer must accompany.

5. Provide staff and volunteer training

- All staff should attend annually.
- Include general disability etiquette, info re: standard mobility devices, Trackchair reservation system and orientation, using the Trackchair.

6. Get the word out!

- Adaptive loaner equipment is its own best marketing! Put it somewhere people will see it.
- Post flyers with Trackchairs on them anywhere the public visits.
- Invite local disability organizations.

7. Stay open to feedback; adjust as necessary

- Reassess annually for need/interest for multiple Trackchairs at any one site.
- Budget for replacement parts and ongoing maintenance.

This is a summary of a case study report, which was compiled based on field observations and hours of interviews with disabled Trackchair users and staff at Ludington and Grand Haven State Parks, and Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

For more info visit
viewing.fishwild.vt.edu/disabled-wildlife-viewers

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