

# Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey (ORAPS): A National System to Collect and Disseminate Outdoor Recreation Information

## Purpose

The ORAPS project aims to develop a rigorous standardized system for collecting and disseminating information on outdoor recreation participation by U.S. households at county, state, and national levels. This system will provide data to understand access and participation levels in different activities, detect participation constraints and needs, forecast future demand, identify recreation development opportunities, and enable comparisons across groups and locations. This information is critical for outdoor recreation decision-making with implications for human health, access, and environmental conservation.

**NSRE:** The original National Recreation Survey was collected every 5 years as required by the Outdoor Recreation Act of 1963. It became the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, an interagency effort run by the U.S. Forest Service that collected consistent state and national-level outdoor recreation activity participation data from 1994-2012.

**SCORP:** Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans are required under the 1965 Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (reaffirmed in the Great American Outdoors Act of 2020). and are administered by the National Park Service. SCORP must report within-state supply, participation, needs/facilitators, and identify priorities for outdoor recreation every 5-10 years. A lack of standardization makes cross-state comparisons and national trend identification unachievable.

## Background

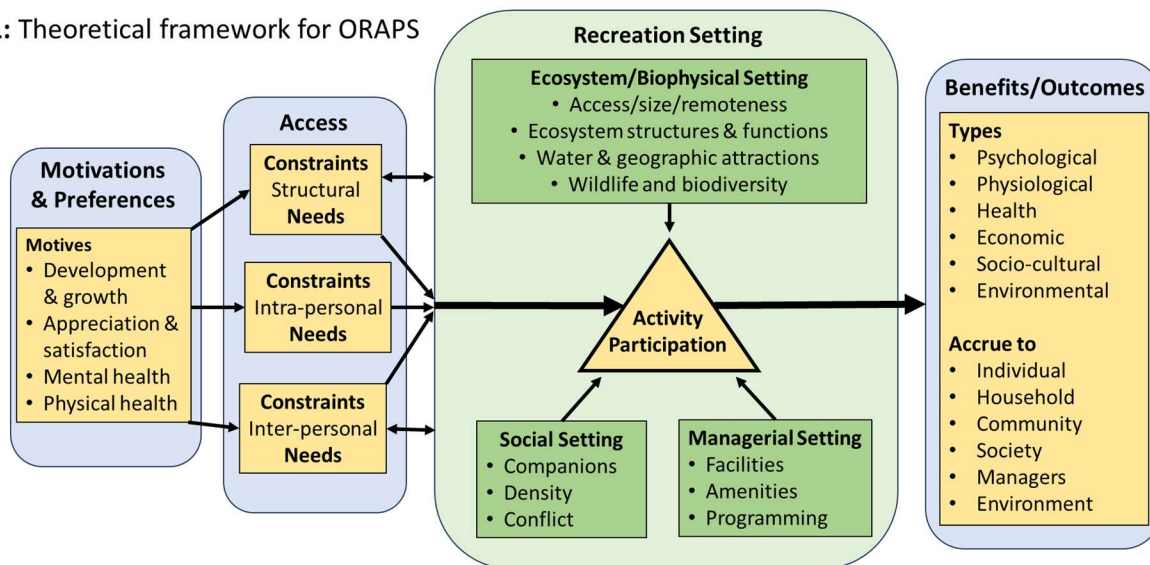
There are no consistent, standardized, and publicly available outdoor recreation data that identify national, state, and county participation trends and address local human health and access issues. The ORAPS augments and supersedes data from the retired National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE).

The ORAPS is designed to fulfill Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plans (SCORP) requirements with data on motivations, access, constraints, needs/facilitators (programmatic and structural), participation, and recreation benefits (Figure 1). The ORAPS will provide transparent, publicly available, nationally consistent, longitudinal, and multi-scale participation data.

## Project Objectives

- Identify information gaps that limit our ability to address human health and access to outdoor recreation opportunities.
- Develop a framework integrating ORAPS data with existing socioeconomic, health, and spatial data (Figure 2).
- Gather expert feedback and recommendations for implementing ORAPS to best serve public and private outdoor recreation and health providers and state SCORPs.
- Create a system to facilitate easy data access and reporting.

**Figure 1:** Theoretical framework for ORAPS



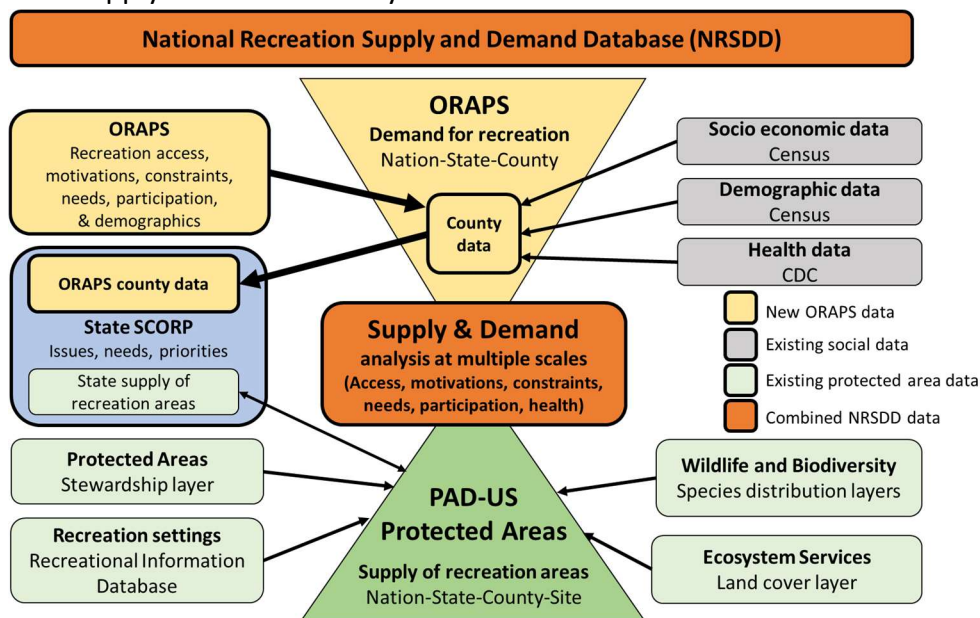
## Recent and Planned ORAPS Activities

- Hosted workshops/presentations: National Environment and Recreation Research Symposium [2022, 2023, 2024], National Outdoor Recreation Conference [2022, 2023, 2024], Basecamp [2021, 2024]
- Tested ORAPS survey modules for SCORP: Oregon [2022-3], Wyoming [2023-2024], Vermont [2024]
- SORP Webinar: What is the Outdoor Recreation Access and Participation Survey (ORAPS)? [2024]
- Conducted Expert Technical Review: 12 agencies and 12 academic members [2023-2024]
- Implement fully revised ORAPS in the Alabama SCORP [Fall 2024-2025]
- Present ORAPS special session, International Association for Society and Natural Resources [June 2025]
- Sabbatical: Dr. Morse, complete documentation, initiate Research Cooperative formation, formalize network of outdoor recreation industry, NGO, and state and federal agency supporters [Fall 2025]

## Project Outcomes

1. A finalized set of tested ORAPS question models with methodological documentation and implementation recommendations for a nationwide longitudinal study.
2. Establishment of a Research Cooperative and national ORAPS implementation strategy.
3. Standardized reporting and accessible, user-friendly data dashboard to disseminate information.

**Figure 2.** The framework is designed to integrate demand-side ORAPS data with socioeconomic, demographic, health, and recreation supply-side data to analyze access to and benefits from outdoor recreation.



## Project Leads

- Wayde Morse, Auburn University [morsewc@auburn.edu](mailto:morsewc@auburn.edu)
- Lee Cervený, USDA Forest Service [lee.cervený@usda.gov](mailto:lee.cervený@usda.gov)
- Randy Rosenberger, Oregon State University [r.rosenberger@oregonstate.edu](mailto:r.rosenberger@oregonstate.edu)

## Key Partners

- Society for Outdoor Recreation Professionals (SORP)
- Center for Outdoor Recreation Economy (CORE), Oregon State University

### Publications

Morse, W.C., Cervený, L.K., Blahna, D. (2022). Coordinating and standardizing outdoor recreation supply and demand databases to facilitate management and promote conservation, health and accessibility. *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 40(1), 175-194.

Morse, W.C., Stern, M., Stein, T., Blahna, D. (2022). Recreation as a transformative experience: Synthesizing the literature on outdoor recreation and recreation ecosystem services into a systems framework. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 38, 100492.