

AN ACT concerning health.

**Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois,
represented in the General Assembly:**

Section 1. Short title. This Act may be cited as the Outdoor Rx Program Act.

Section 5. Intent. Studies have shown that time outdoors can be a valuable adjunct therapy in addition to more traditional health care, while also reducing reliance on prescription medication. The therapeutic benefits of time spent outdoors is clinically proven and known to help reduce stress, improve concentration, and promote overall well-being, both physical and mental. Natural resource-based and outdoor-based therapy programs, including adventure therapy, wilderness therapy, horticultural therapy, walk-and-talk therapy, and other nature-oriented programs, are currently being used by mental health professionals and are shown to have benefits, including, but not limited to, reduction of stress, restoration of attention, and an improved sense of well-being. Such outdoor programs aim to connect people with nature, thereby proving to be particularly beneficial to individuals undergoing a recovery process. Recognizing the healing benefits of natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs to residents of the State, particularly

veterans and individuals recovering from substance abuse or a physical or mental trauma, the General Assembly supports the establishment of an Outdoor Rx Program.

Section 10. Definitions. In this Act:

"Department" means the Department of Human Services.

"Director" means the Director of Natural Resources.

"Fund" means the Outdoor Rx Program Fund.

"Secretary" means the Secretary of Human Services.

Section 15. Outdoor Rx Program; Department rules.

(a) Subject to appropriation, the Outdoor Rx Program is created to provide grants for outdoor environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs serving the citizens of the State of Illinois. The Department shall establish, implement, and administer the Outdoor Rx Program to provide grants for natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs.

(b) The Department shall adopt any rules necessary for the implementation and administration of this Act.

Section 20. Advisory committee.

(a) The Department of Natural Resources shall establish an advisory committee to assist and advise the Department in the development and administration of the Outdoor Rx Program. The advisory committee shall consist of at least 7 members,

appointed as follows:

- (1) at least one member, appointed by the Director;
- (2) at least one member, appointed by the Director of Public Health;
- (3) at least one member, appointed by the Director of Veterans' Affairs;
- (4) at least one member, appointed by the Director of the Environmental Protection Agency;
- (5) at least one member of the business community, appointed by the Director;
- (6) at least 2 members of an outdoor organization, appointed by the Director; and
- (7) any other members the Director deems necessary to ensure a representative cross section of participants.

(b) The advisory committee shall develop an application form that eligible applicants shall complete and submit to be considered for a grant under the Outdoor Rx Program.

Section 25. Outdoor Rx Program Fund.

(a) The Outdoor Rx Program Fund is created as a special fund in the State treasury. Moneys deposited into the Fund shall be used solely for the administration of the Outdoor Rx Program. The Department may accept gifts, grants, donations, or moneys from any source for deposit into the Fund. Any public agency in this State may use moneys in the Fund, subject to approval by the Director under subsection (c) of Section 35,

to develop and implement natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs. The Department may award grants to public agencies and contract with any public or private agency or person to develop and implement natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs under the Outdoor Rx Program.

(b) The Department shall establish limitations on the availability and use of Outdoor Rx Program moneys. However, any limitations shall be defined in the application package, and the Department shall establish the limitations only after considering the following:

(1) consistency with the purpose of the Outdoor Rx Program, as stated in subsection (a) of Section 15; and

(2) availability of moneys.

(c) The Department may require applicants to make a matching contribution to be eligible for a grant under the Act.

(d) The Department may limit the amount of funding available for any element of natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs.

(e) The following conditions are placed on the use of moneys from the Fund:

(1) For every funded program, a contract shall be executed on behalf of the Department and by the grant recipient. The grant recipient shall not be reimbursed for costs incurred prior to the execution of the contract by

both parties.

(2) The grant recipient shall ensure that all natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs are in accordance with any technical standards established by the Department.

(3) The grant recipient shall submit any reports required by the Department as directed in the funding contract.

(4) The grant recipient shall agree to and certify compliance with all applicable federal and State laws, rules, regulations, and policies.

(5) The grant recipient shall maintain accurate accounting records on the expenditure of program moneys, provide the Department with such records consistent with the agreement or upon request, whichever is applicable, and permit the Department to audit the use of moneys in accordance with generally accepted audit practices and standards. The Department shall reserve the right to terminate its participation in any program that fails to perform according to the requirements of this Act.

(f) The Department may assess fees to grant recipients or Outdoor Rx Program participants for Outdoor Rx Program services.

(g) Moneys in the Fund shall be expended only for natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs approved by the Director. To the extent practicable, the Director shall

ensure that all moneys received during a fiscal year are expended prior to the end of that fiscal year.

Section 30. Eligibility criteria; applications; evaluation.

(a) The Secretary shall set priorities and develop criteria for the award of grants to outdoor environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy programs considering, at a minimum, programs that:

(1) use veterans for at least 50% of the program's implementation or administration;

(2) contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation;

(3) will commit matching and in-kind resources;

(4) create partnerships with public and private entities;

(5) maximize the number of participants who can be served, particularly participants who are veterans or who are recovering from substance abuse or physical or mental trauma;

(6) use a State park, other natural venue, or Department personnel as a resource;

(7) use research-based and effective environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy;

(8) provide citizens of the State of Illinois with opportunities to directly experience and understand nature and the natural world; and

(9) include ongoing program evaluation and assessment and reporting of program effectiveness.

(b) The Secretary shall select activities eligible for the awarding of grants. The activities may include, but need not be limited to, the following:

- (1) outdoor recreation;
- (2) outdoor environmental studies;
- (3) agricultural activities;
- (4) natural resource-based activities;
- (5) conservation;
- (6) ecological activities; and
- (7) stewardship or restoration.

(c) The following activities are ineligible for the awarding of grants from the Outdoor Rx Program:

- (1) activities that may be perceived to lobby or advocate for political purposes;
- (2) activities that are not in compliance with local, State, or federal laws; and
- (3) organized youth sports, such as a community league or school team.

(d) The following criteria shall be used to evaluate applications:

- (1) proposals that provide for public or private

partnerships;

(2) proposals that provide for innovative ways to increase the availability and use of outdoor recreation facilities;

(3) proposals that show consideration for the economics of installation or implementation to provide the greatest cost-to-benefit ratio, for example, where private parties contribute more than the minimum amount;

(4) proposals that commit matching and in-kind resources;

(5) proposals that use a State park, other natural venue, or Department personnel as a resource;

(6) proposals that contribute to healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and sound nutrition;

(7) proposals that contribute to the statewide network of facilities or programs;

(8) proposals that encourage community involvement;

(9) proposals that encourage sound environmental practices;

(10) proposals that maximize the number of participants who can be served;

(11) proposals that provide an opportunity to experience the outdoors directly and understand nature and the natural world;

(12) proposals that include ongoing program evaluation and assessment and reporting of program effectiveness;

(13) proposals that make use of research-based and effective environmental, ecological, agricultural, or other natural resource-based therapy; and

(14) proposals that demonstrate innovative approaches to outdoor-based therapy.

Section 35. Program selection.

(a) Completed applications shall be reviewed by the Department to determine eligibility and shall be evaluated in accordance with the purposes, eligibility requirements, limitations, and evaluation criteria in this Act.

(b) The Department shall consult with and consider the recommendations of the advisory committee and present final recommendations to the Secretary.

(c) The Secretary shall make the final decision on funding a natural resource-based or outdoor-based therapy program.

Section 40. Report. On or before February 1 of each year, the Department shall issue a report to the General Assembly. The report shall state how moneys from the Fund were used during the preceding calendar year and shall include:

(1) the amount of money deposited into the Fund during the preceding calendar year as the result of revenue derived under this Act;

(2) the amount of money disbursed from the Fund and the process used for such disbursements;

- (3) recipients of grants from the Fund;
- (4) the amount awarded to each grant recipient;
- (5) the purposes for which grants were awarded; and
- (6) a summary financial plan for Fund moneys, which shall include estimates of all receipts and all disbursements for the current and succeeding fiscal years, along with the actual results from the prior fiscal year.

Section 90. The State Finance Act is amended by adding Section 5.990 as follows:

(30 ILCS 105/5.990 new)

Sec. 5.990. The Outdoor Rx Program Fund.