



*NatureAccess:*  
Serving People  
With  
Disabilities  
in the  
Outdoors



... Tools for  
Outdoor Educators,  
Rangers, Guides,  
and Other  
Group Leaders

# Making Outdoor Programs Accessible

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## Why do Outdoor Programs Need to Become More Inclusive?

Each year, parks and nature centers are visited by an increasing number of people with disabilities, including those whose needs are not apparent. As outdoor educators, interpreters, and guides, we are challenged to accommodate visitors with a variety of physical, cognitive, and learning disabilities.

Taking the necessary steps to accommodate people with disabilities actually improves our programs' effectiveness with all audiences. Research has shown that everyone's brains are wired differently for learning. Therefore, outdoor programs are most effective when they incorporate a variety of learning styles and are supported by appropriate aids and services.

## What is Involved?

In most cases, adapting your outdoor programs need not be costly or time-consuming. You can begin by considering the following aspects of your programs:

- Physical setting
- Instructional presentation
- Spatial arrangement
- Environmental considerations
- Appropriate aids and support

The *NatureAccess* model can provide you with specific tools to address a diversity of special needs in each of these areas.

*If your park or center is open to the public, it must serve a diverse public.*



## How Do I Gain the Tools to Make My Programs Accessible?



*NatureAccess* can provide outdoor leaders with specific strategies and accommodations to make their programs accessible. The Mohonk Preserve has successfully trained outdoor professionals at nature centers, parks, camps, and governmental organizations, based on this model. A hands-on workshop provides participants with effective instructional accommodations and strategies for adapting and modifying programs, advanced planning, and the skills to modify on the fly! Copies of *Making Outdoor Programs Accessible*, the 62-page training manual, is also available separately.



To schedule a workshop, or to order a copy of the *Making Outdoor Programs Accessible* manual, please contact:

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[www.mohonkpreserve.org/about/education](http://www.mohonkpreserve.org/about/education)

# About

## *NatureAccess*

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In 1994, we realized that students with disabilities were being left behind at school on days when their classmates attended outdoor programs at the Mohonk Preserve. As a result, *NatureAccess* began as a planned approach to inclusion.

*NatureAccess* aims to be proactive: to work in collaboration with teachers, special educators, and speech, physical and occupational therapists to ensure that the learning needs of all students are addressed through outdoor education.

The success of this program has inspired a variety of inclusive services at the Mohonk Preserve, including summer camps, interpretive programs, exhibits, and professional trainings.

Today, *NatureAccess* continues to offer accessible programs by adapting our outdoor school field studies program and by bringing nature indoors to those whose disabilities prevent them from venturing outside.

*NatureAccess* received the **1996 Accessibility Award** from the Association of Independent Living Centers in New York. Two years later, the Resource Center for Accessible Living, Inc. recognized the Mohonk Preserve for its *Outstanding Contribution to Expanding Access for People with Disabilities*.

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## Mohonk Preserve

*... saving the land for life™*

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The Mohonk Preserve is the largest member- and visitor-supported nature preserve in New York State. Founded in 1963, the Preserve manages extensive carriage roads and foot trails, while continuing to safeguard the fragile ecosystem and to provide recreational opportunities and educational programs.

A crucial part of the Preserve's mission is to encourage visitors to learn about the natural world around them. Our programs in environmental education, ecosystem research, and land management encourage visitors to respect the land and use it responsibly.

The Mohonk Preserve is part of a 40,000-acre natural area in the northern Shawangunk Mountains that draws hikers, bird watchers, rock climbers, skiers, and myriad researchers and ecosystem scientists.

