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Forging a more inclusive future for our natural spaces

Recognising the value of inclusive public spaces, SA Water has joined forces with the National Parks and Wildlife Service and ForestrySA to make the great outdoors more accessible to everyone.

Through a partnership with community organisation Bedford Group, the new Accessible Outdoors Program will trial a range of cross-tenure initiatives over a 12-week program to assist people living with a disability when they visit sites managed by the three agencies.

SA Water's Manager of Land Catchments and Recreation Dr Brooke Swaffer said this innovative program is dedicated to breaking down barriers and helping to foster a deeper connection to nature within the state's national parks, reservoir reserves and forest reserves.

"A range of facilitated activities for people living with a disability or mobility issues will be made available, such as kayak fishing, where we can see first-hand and have a conversation about existing challenges people may face, such as getting into the water with a kayak or navigating the local terrain," Brooke said.

"Raising awareness about the barriers faced by some visitors to public open spaces is one of the core elements of this program, and we want to provide an opportunity for people to share their experiences and offer insights on the challenges and obstacles they face.

"This valuable feedback will inform how we can improve approaches to accessibility within each of the outdoor sites we and other agencies manage, to ensure as many people as possible can enjoy these amazing natural spaces."

ForestrySA Acting Chief Executive Michael Hanton said visitation to ForestrySA forest reserves eclipsed one-million people last year – more than twice the number recorded in the previous 12 months, proving they continue to be a highly valued community asset.

"Therefore, it's vital we ensure these areas and the recreational opportunities they provide are readily accessible and help enable the pursuit of a fulfilled life for everyone, especially those who face greater challenges accessing what some of us take for granted every day," Michael said.

National Parks and Wildlife Service Director Regional Operations Stuart Paul said there is an ever-growing body of evidence supporting the profound health and wellbeing benefits of spending time outdoors and everyone should have the same opportunity to connect with nature.

"Despite these proven benefits, people with disabilities often face numerous difficulties when trying to access natural environments, leading to poorer health outcomes," Stuart said.

"People with disabilities comprise around 20 per-cent of the population and creating inclusive and accessible spaces is essential to ensure equal opportunities for all.



"Natural spaces offer a wide array of opportunities for people to engage in physical activities and immerse themselves in the beauty of the environment."

Bedford's General Manager, Day Options and Experiences Stefanie Veitch welcomes more support for people with disability to gain access to the great outdoors.

"These outdoor activities perfectly complement Bedford's comprehensive program of around 50 experiences and offer increased choice and opportunities to explore our beautiful state," Stefanie said.

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For further information contact SA Water's media team on 08 7424 2477