

## **We can make nature more accessible for people with disabilities**

### **Video transcript**

#### **Carleton Montgomery**

We've learned from conversations with people with disabilities of various kinds that there are a number of different barriers discouraging them from enjoying natural places. Some of those are purely a matter of the physical layout of a trail. It's got too many obstacles. It's not even. It's tilted or tipped in ways that don't work, for example, for a wheelchair or a person using a cane.

#### **Sean Kane-Holland**

I live here in southern New Jersey in the beautiful Pinelands region, with nature all my life. I'm an avid outdoorsman, a kayaker. I find that being out on the water is a great equalizer for me. I was born with spina bifida, so I have crutches, and walking on the terrain out here is more difficult for me than going downriver. When I'm out on the water, I just get a surreal feeling of being out in nature and just sit back and relax and enjoy the sounds and smells of nature and get a little bit of exercise while doing it.

#### **Carleton Montgomery**

The people of New Jersey for many years have made big investments in preserving open space, creating parks and forests for people to enjoy, to recreate in, but they are not equitably available to people with disabilities, because there are so few trails and scenic sites that someone who has a physical disability or a disability that affects their ability to be in one of these settings for them to enjoy.

The inclusive Healthy Communities program has been absolutely critical to our creating this program. It got us thinking about what we hadn't been doing that we should have been doing when we promote recreation in the Pinelands. It was also managed in a way that worked very well for a new program, a new idea that we had to develop over time by learning from people with disabilities how best to go about making natural places more accessible.

#### **Sean Kane-Holland**

We began the Access Nature forum, which is an online meeting. It's for individuals with disabilities, their friends, their families as well as land managers, agencies, advocacy groups to come together, have a collective discussion, and figure out the issues that these folks are having with gaining access to these sites and developing ways to overcome those barriers through policy development and best practices these land managers can then institute in these sites to open up this space to those with disabilities.

#### **Carleton Montgomery**

And it's really important that people who have disabilities and are willing to share their experience, their wisdom, their ideas participate in those discussions and help make sure that anything that we do or that any state park or forest does is done right.