



Access Today

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Accessible Picnic Tables: Requirements and Recommendations

Families and friends often venture to outdoor recreation areas with the specific intent to picnic. Accessible picnic elements facilitate inclusion and socialization of park visitors. The provision of accessible picnic areas should be a consideration for facility

Accessible picnic elements facilitate inclusion, allowing family and friends to enjoy the recreational experience.

operators. Providing accessible picnic elements such as tables can be an easy process especially since accessible picnic tables come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The U.S. Access Board is currently developing accessibility guidelines for outdoor recreation environments for incorporation into the



Fixed pedestal square table with one bench removed for wheelchair access.

Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG.) The guidance set forth in this tech sheet is based on the recommendations of the U.S. Access Board's Regulatory Negotiation Committee on Outdoor Developed Areas Report (September 1999) and research by the National Center on Accessibility and the University of Minnesota. The results of the NCA-University of Minnesota research are available in the final report "Functional Aspects of Accessible Picnic Elements" (January 2001) from the National Center on Accessibility. The Outdoor Developed Areas Report is available on the U.S. Access Board web site at www.access-board.gov.

Technical Provisions for Accessible Picnic Tables

Consider the following scoping and technical provisions for accessible picnic tables:

- ✓ Number of accessible tables
- ✓ Dispersal of accessible tables
- ✓ Wheelchair seating spaces
- ✓ Surface
- ✓ Slope

Number of Accessible Tables

The Final Report submitted by the Recreation Regulatory Negotiation Committee section 16.5-16.6.7 refers to fixed picnic tables. The table below shows the total number of accessible picnic tables required and the number of tables required to be on an outdoor recreation access route as defined in the Final Report.

Number of Fixed Tables Provided	Number of Tables Required to be Accessible (50%, but no less than 2 when two or more are provided)	Number of Accessible Tables Required to be connected to an outdoor recreation access route (40% of accessible tables, but no less than 2 when two or more tables are provided.)
1	1	1
2-4	2	1
5-6	3	2
7-8	4	2
9-10	5	3
11-12	6	3
13-14	7	3
15-16	8	4
17-18	9	4
19-20	10	4
21-22	11	5
23-24	12	5
25-26	13	6
27-28	14	6
29-30	15	6
31-32	16	7
33-34	17	7
35-36	18	8
37-38	19	8
39-40	20	8
41 +	50%	40% of the accessible tables



The National Center on Accessibility is a program of Indiana University's

Department of Recreation and Park Administration and is funded in part by the U.S. Congress through the National Park Service. NCA focuses primarily on accessibility as it relates to parks, recreation, and tourism industries. Major objectives include: conducting research, providing technical assistance, developing resources and training materials, and conducting educational programs.

Access Today is a publication of the National Center on Accessibility. As a continuing service of technical assistance, the National Center on Accessibility has published a series of tech sheets on access to outdoor recreation environments. These tech sheets are intended to be used only a resource. They are not intended to be used as a design guide. As a result of evolving accessibility guidelines, some technical specifications presented herein may change as new accessibility guidelines are released. This publication is available in alternate format upon request.

National Center on Accessibility
2805 East 10th St,
Suite 190
Bloomington, IN 47408
(812) 856-4422 Voice
(812) 856-4421 TTY
(812) 856-4480 Fax
nca@indiana.edu
www.ncaonline.org

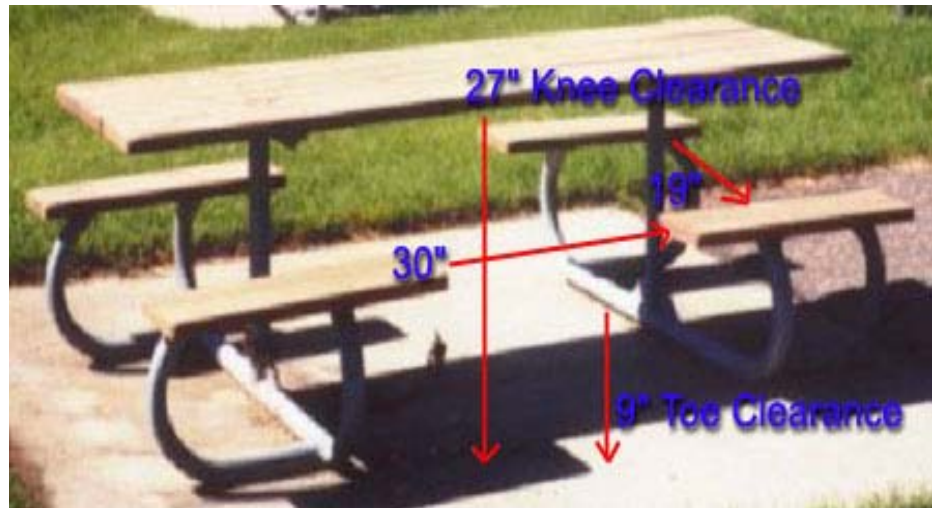
Dispersal of Accessible Picnic Tables

According to the Outdoor Developed Areas Final Report, accessible picnic tables should be dispersed among the different types of picnic areas provided. For example, if there are picnic areas near a lake and picnic areas near a playground, accessible picnic tables must be at each of the different picnic experiences. This provision for dispersing the accessible picnic tables does not require an increase in the total number of required accessible picnic tables.

Wheelchair Seating Spaces

The provision for number of wheelchair seating spaces in relation to the tabletop perimeter is as follows:

Table Top Perimeter	# Of Wheelchair Seating Spaces
Up to 24 Lf	1
25-44 Lf	2
45-64 Lf	3
65-84 Lf	4
85-104 Lf	5



Number of wheelchair seating spaces correlates to the linear feet of the table top. The seating space provides clear floor space and a minimum width for a wheelchair. In addition, the table provides knee and toe clearance. This table allows for more than one person using a wheelchair to sit at the same table, in addition to giving a choice of seating spaces to a person using a wheelchair.

Clearance for Accessible Wheelchair Seating Spaces

Provision of a wheelchair seating space size include a minimum clear floor space, width, depth and table clearance, in addition to knee space and toe clearance.

- ✓ Knee space should allow a minimum of 27 inches in height, 30 inches in width, and 19 inches in depth.
- ✓ Toe clearance requires a 9-inch minimum height and shall extend an additional 5 inch minimum from knee clearance, 30 inches minimum width and 19 inches in minimum depth.
- ✓ Clear floor space is a minimum of 30 x 48 inches, with one full-unobstructed side connected to an outdoor recreation access route.
- ✓ Table clearance requires a minimum of 36 inches clear floor or ground space surrounding the useable portion of the table, measured from the seat.

Surface & Slope

The surface of the clear floor space and accessible seating space at picnic tables must be stable and firm.

Compliance with surface provisions may not be necessary if one of the following conditions for departure apply:

1. Where compliance would cause substantial harm to cultural, historic, religious, or significant natural features or characteristics; or,
2. Where compliance would substantially alter the nature of the setting or the purpose of the facility, or portion of the facility; or,
3. Where compliance would require construction methods or materials that are prohibited by federal, state, or local regulations or statutes; or,
4. Where compliance would not be feasible due to terrain or the prevailing construction practices.

The slope of clear floor spaces is required to be 1:50 or less in any direction. However, where conditions require slopes greater than 1:50 for proper drainage, a maximum slope of 1:33 is allowed. In addition, the slope provisions do not apply where at least one of the conditions for departure exist as stated above.

NCA Recommendations

The guidelines in the final report produced by the Recreation Regulatory Negotiation Committee are minimum requirements to achieve accessibility. Where possible, going above and beyond is always encouraged to serve a greater number of users. As a result of a research study conducted by the National Center on Accessibility and the University of Minnesota "Functional Aspects of Accessible Picnic Elements," NCA makes the following recommendations:

1. **Allow space for more than one wheelchair.** This not only offers a chance for multiple people who use wheelchairs to sit comfortably at the same table, but also offers a choice of where each person may sit. Limiting the table to one available space for a wheelchair user denies people with disabilities the choice of where to sit and may cause them to sit in the sun when they may need to sit in the shade. For example, certain people with paraplegia are unable to control their body temperature due to an inability to sweat. If the only seat available to a wheelchair user is in the sun, the person may become overheated.
2. **Position wheelchair spaces for social interaction.** A space in the middle of the table places a person who uses a wheelchair closer to their friends and family increasing social interaction rather than always having to sit at the end of the table. In addition, for a parent with more than



Fixed center post 6 foot table with two 6 foot benches. The center post offers space on either end for a person using a wheelchair.



Picnic shelter at Barre Falls Dam, Hubbardston, MA. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

one child, a seat in the middle of the table enables the parent to care for multiple children by sitting in between them.

3. **Allow for extra leg space and knee clearance.** People who use wheelchairs are individuals of varying sizes and abilities. Each person's wheelchair is tailored to his or her specific needs; therefore wheelchairs come in various sizes. The standards reflect minimum guidelines for an average size wheelchair. Allowing additional leg and knee clearance provides comfort for a wider range of people who use wheelchairs.
4. **Increase amount of firm and stable surface around picnic table.** The firm and stable surface surrounding the picnic table can become an issue for visitors when the surface is not properly maintained. Providing a larger surface area requires less frequent maintenance because the inevitable deterioration occurring on the edge of the surface will not immediately effect accessibility requirements.
5. **Increase number of fixed accessible tables to prevent displacement of tables.** If accessible tables are moved away from their firm and stable surface, they are no longer accessible. Fixed tables preserve the accessibility of the picnic site by preventing visitors from moving them to an inaccessible site. Maintaining sites is key for accessibility.

(Continued on page 6)

Status of Rulemaking for Developed Outdoor Areas

The U.S. Access Board is currently developing accessibility guidelines for access to outdoor developed areas under the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines (ADAAG). In 1999 the U.S. Access Board's Regulatory Negotiation Committee submitted recommendations for scoping and technical provisions for campgrounds, picnic areas, scenic overlooks, trails and beaches. The final report is available on the Access Board web site.

The next step is for the U.S. Access Board to release a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) on Outdoor Developed Areas. The NPRM is expected to be released sometime before the end of 2003 and will provide the public with the opportunity to comment on the proposed rule. Once the public comment is reviewed by the Access Board and adjustments are made, the Access Board will issue a final rule and forward it to the U.S. Department of Justice for adoption in the current ADA Accessibility Guidelines. Follow the rulemaking on the U.S. Access Board web site: www.access-board.gov



An oval tabletop allows the center of the table to be within reach range while seated at any position.

Functional Aspects of Accessible Picnic Elements

January 2001

A collaborative research project of the National Center on Accessibility & the University of Minnesota.

This study ascertains the perceptions of persons with and without disabilities regarding the design and function of certain accessible picnic elements including picnic tables, grills and fire rings.

Executive Summary available on-line: www.ncaonline.org

Full report (\$15) available through NCA by calling (812) 856-4422 (voice) or (812) 856-4421 (tty).

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6. **Place some accessible sites in the shade for participants who may be photosensitive.** A crucial aspect of providing a service is to keep in mind the range of needs of individuals. Sitting in the sun may increase the risk of health issues such as overheating, sunburns or other heat related illnesses. Certain medications or impairments may also increase photosensitivity causing greater risk of illness due to heat.
7. **Increase number of curb cuts in various locations near popular attractions.** Curb cuts are essential for people who use mobility devices. Without them, people can be forced to travel along the street, which is not only an inconvenience, but can also be dangerous. Frequent curb cuts enable a person using a mobility device to easily enter the sidewalk from various locations, and prevent extended travel that is either out of the way or shared with vehicles.
8. **Provide information containing location of accessible sites.** Information such as maps, brochures and signage are preferably placed at the entrance to prevent long searches for the accessible site, and along the path traveled to the accessible destination. Any available maps should provide the appropriate accessibility information. The maps should also be placed in a readily accessible location.
9. **Signage to identify accessible picnic tables.** Until all sites are accessible, signage is the best indicator of an accessible site. For a family who has come for a day of fun in the outdoors, driving around searching for the accessible site is generally very frustrating. Posting signs leading to the accessible picnic sites can increase the time visitors have for their intended activity.



Some recreation areas may require reservations. If this is the case and there is only one accessible site, a person with a disability may have to plan further in advance to ensure the availability of that one site. Providing more accessible picnic tables above

The provision of accessible picnic elements dispersed throughout the park or facility give people with disabilities equal opportunity to participate in recreation.

and beyond the minimums allows for equally convenient services for people with disabilities and people without disabilities.

Accessible picnic tables and sites provide opportunities for a broader visitor base. If planned properly, access can occur with minimal stress on staff and budgets.

Research various options to discover what will best suit your facility and what resources are available.

Contact other facilities with similar activities, as they are a valuable resource in finding out what has and what has not worked in the past.

Equalizing Opportunities

A misconception regarding accessible picnic tables is that they must be rectangular with an extension on the end. In fact, accessible picnic tables come in many sizes and are fabricated from different materials. The NCA study focused on six different table designs and found each to have advantages. For example, an oval or round tabletop allows the center of the table to be within reach range while seated at any position. It also offers a person who uses a wheelchair a choice of where to sit, and enables everyone to sit together optimizing social interaction.

Another misconception is that the accessible tables have to cost more than standard tables. For accessible tables, prices range from \$200 to \$860 in comparison with standard picnic tables ranging from \$150-\$900. Accessibility does not have to equal excessive costs and labor. Price can be negotiated. Manufacturers often offer discounts or free shipping for bulk orders. Many manufacturers will sell the frame and tabletop separately. Facility staff can then make their own accessible tabletops for less cost.

While at the picnic site, access to utilities such as water is often necessary. Access to utilities includes an accessible route, appropriate heights of water faucets as well as an accessible operating mechanism that does not require tight grasping, pinching or twisting.

Picnic Tables*

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