



ASHE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PARKS AND RECREATION MASTER PLAN

November, 2021



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Parks & Recreation Advisory Board

Carol Coulter
Marc Payne
Martin Little
Steve Johnson
Judson Blevins
Marty Peters
Michael Vannoy
Maggi Birdsell
Michael Lea

County Commissioners

Todd McNeill, Chairman
William Sands, Vice Chairman
Jonathan Jordan
Jerry Powers
Charles Perry "Chuck" Olive

County Staff

Adam Stumb, County Manager
Kevin Anderson, Parks and Recreation Director

Consultant

McGill Associates, P.A.
1240 19th Street Lane NW
Hickory, NC 28601
(828) 328-2024





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY







EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Parks and recreation are an integral piece of any community. They provide people with high quality-of-life standards that include health and wellness benefits, the opportunity for leisure, and the ability to connect with other people and the surrounding natural resources. It is commonly accepted that physical activity through recreation activities and park use improves one's overall mental and physical health. Availability of recreation resources is a factor that influences individuals' physical activity behavior. (Availability of Recreation Resources and Physical Activity in Adults, AmJ Public Health. 2007 March; 97(3): 493-499.)

Ashe County provides public recreation to its citizens as a means of supporting a high quality of life. Studies have shown that quality of life is very important to residents and visitors. Extensive research also demonstrates the positive economic impact of recreation, parks, and tourism on local economies. Lively programs and events also have a major impact on community economic development and a sense of unity within a community. Ashe County has the potential to attract new residents and businesses eager to experience the quality of life the County provides.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has affected the population on a global basis, parks and recreation has become a critical outlet for many people. It has provided for the necessary physical, mental, and social well being for individuals. This trend has been a positive influence for communities as a whole, however the negative impact on a parks and recreation system is the increased need for maintenance due to high usage. According to the NRPA 2020 National Report, 1 in 5 parks and recreation agencies are reducing operations spending by at least 33% with 66% of agencies facing a median reduction of 10-19%. The County will need to evaluate their budget and determine what efficiencies may need to be incorporated.

The County recognizes the importance of *planning* as a means of improving recreation opportunities for all its residents and visitors. As a result, Ashe County hired McGill Associates, PA to assist with the creation of a 10-year Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan.



“...THERE IS NOT A SINGLE SET OF STANDARDS FOR PARKS AND RECREATION BECAUSE DIFFERENT AGENCIES SERVE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES THAT HAVE UNIQUE NEEDS, DESIRES AND CHALLENGES.”

- 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review



Ashe County's 2021-2031 Comprehensive Recreation Master Plan provides the framework for guiding Ashe County's board and staff. The framework for this master plan is based upon conducting an inventory of the existing park system, recording site observations, discussing needs from County staff, and evaluating public comments made through community input. In addition, state and national standards were used as a guide to support the recommendations made for the County recreation facilities. The assessment of existing park facilities, or lack thereof, will identify the immediate needs in the community and predict future needs.

Another purpose of the master plan is to analyze and recommend the addition or renovation of parks, programs, and recreational facilities. It also prioritizes certain projects, such as recommended park upgrades or possible expansion, by taking into consideration the identification of user population and the development of recreation standards. The master plan is action oriented and will provide Ashe County with a practical guide for the enhancement of its facilities and programs for the next ten years. It is intended to maintain the type of location that fosters community spirit, activism, and bonding between local citizens.

The Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is divided into five sections. A brief summary of the findings provides the County with a snapshot of what the future of parks and recreation in Ashe County can be.



Section 1 gives a brief synopsis of the local history, provides insight into the community, looks at the people that make up Ashe County, and addresses population trends and projections.

Section 2 provides a detailed inventory of the recreational facilities in Ashe County provided by both public and private entities.

Section 3 looks at the needs of the County through public input gathered by the community, state, and national guidelines for recreation, facilities, programs, and staff.

Section 4 provides goals and recommendations to improve upon the current parks and recreational offerings within Ashe County.

Section 5 provides the County with actionable items to implement improvements as well as offer insight into funding opportunities.



EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

Ashe County currently owns, operates, and maintains two parks. Each of these facilities provide both active and passive recreational opportunities for residents who live in the County as well as tourists who come to experience all that Ashe County has to offer.



ASHE COUNTY PARK — 65 ACRES

Ashe County Park is a beautiful park that provides visitors access to 65 acres of open space, woodland, a small lake, and various active recreational amenities. As people move through the park, they will be greeted with an open view of what the park has to offer.

As of the writing of this document Ashe County was entering into a deal to acquire an additional 149 acres adjacent to the southern border of the park. This expansion would make Ashe County Park **214 acres**.



FAMILY CENTRAL — 28 ACRES

Family Central is the principal active recreation facility in Ashe County. It is also the location of the Ashe County Parks and Recreation Department. This park is truly a central place for families and individuals to participate in active sports and fitness opportunities.

POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS

The people that make up a community play an integral role in how to plan and prepare for the future of a sustainable parks and recreation system. A study of the demographic profile of County residents is a key factor in making specific and accurate recommendations. The US Census Bureau showed that the County's overall population estimate

in 2019 is 26,863 with the average age of residents within the County being 38 years old.

As well as demographics, understanding population trends and projections is an integral part of proposals. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NCOSBM) projects that by the year 2030 1 in 5 North Carolinians will be 65 years old or older. NCOSBM also projects that the county will have an increase of around 12% in their population by the year 2031.

Another population of people to consider for Ashe County are the tourists that flock to the mountain region and all that it has to offer. Determining how the seasonal population impacts the County can be difficult due to the range of factors that must be considered in estimating the peak population. While the permanent residents of Ashe County are the key members to plan for, it is also important to understand that the seasonal population plays a big role in how the park facilities are used and any necessary recommendations must account for this large group of people.



PUBLIC INPUT

In preparing the recreation master plan, the County appointed a steering committee who guided McGill's team in the development of the public survey and plan goals and recommendations. A key objective in the development of the master plan was the solicitation of community input, thereby identifying additional needs for County residents and visitors, such as renovation, construction, property acquisition, development, and operational policies— for both now and in the future. Community input, along with the comparison to state and national standards, are the initial steps in the master plan process.



In addition to a public survey that was made available, there were three public meetings that provided important knowledge that aided in the process towards making recommendations for the Ashe County Parks and Recreation Department.

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The master plan emphasizes practical and more desirable improvements to the existing recreation system including parks and recreational facilities. It is not designed to be exclusive but rather to enhance recreational opportunities in the community.

The master plan focuses on providing Ashe County with an accurate, usable guide for decision making as the County begins to implement projects, such as:

- Renovating existing facilities currently owned by Ashe County
- Exploring the possibilities for developing new facilities within Ashe County
- Developing facilities and programming for future greenways that will promote walking and cycling
- Updating policy and ordinances to meet community needs and desires

IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The County can leverage its many natural, historic, and recreational resources, as well as develop its visitor tourism, by improving public spaces, park facilities, programming, and events. Developers and community leaders recognize the importance of greenways and trails, open spaces, water based recreation amenities, athletic facilities, and cultural programs. Recommendations provided in the comprehensive master plan provide achievable actions that support Ashe County's goals and ability to serve its residents.



VISION

MISSION STATEMENT

“The mission of Ashe County Parks and Recreation is to provide a range of quality wellness and recreational programs that enrich the quality of life for all our citizens and visitors. The department will strive to design programs that create tourism and encourage long-term economic stability and growth for the community.”

GOALS

Exploring possibilities for developing new amenities, developing facilities and programs for future parks and greenways, renovating existing County-owned facilities, and seek funding opportunities and partnerships.

PROCESS

DISCOVERY + DATA COLLECTION

Demographics

Existing County Facilities and Programs

Understanding the community and what is offered is essential to know prior to improving upon the current parks and recreation system. Who the County is serving correlates directly to the necessary improvements. Just as important as the community is the current recreation offerings and the condition of the facilities.

ASSESSMENT

County Staff

Public Meetings

Community Survey

Standard Guidelines

Staffing

The future of Ashe County’s parks and recreation is determined by listening and understanding what is successful and what can be improved upon. After discovering who the community is and what facilities are offered, the needs of the County and the people it serves is key. Through open conversations, online surveys, and recommended standard guidelines this master plan is able to gain insight into how to move forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Needs of the County

Input from the Community

Recommended Standards

All of the needs to improve the parks and recreation facilities for the future of Ashe County that were identified through the discovery phase and needs assessment were evaluated and analyzed to look for suggestions that will benefit the County in the future. Recommendations for improvements were made based on the findings through the planning process. These recommendations are presented and prioritized based on immediate needs (0-5 years), short-term needs (5-10 years), and long-term future needs (10 years and beyond).

PLAN

RECOMMENDATIONS + ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN + STAFF COMMITMENT



GETTING TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY







GETTING TO KNOW THE COMMUNITY

Ashe County is located in the most northwestern corner in North Carolina at the borders of Tennessee to the west and Virginia to the north. The mountainous region of the County lends itself to beautiful terrain, amazing vistas, and provides an abundant variety of ecosystems. Ashe County also provides a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation, including rivers, streams, and forests in addition to miles of various trail types for hiking, running, and cycling. Ashe County also offers a unique agricultural resource by growing Christmas tree throughout the region.

As of the 2019 US Census American Community Survey (ACS) 5-year estimate, Ashe County is home to 26,863 permanent residents. With the outdoor recreation opportunities provided by the surrounding environment, Ashe County also has a large tourism industry. Ashe County is located approximately 100 miles north of Charlotte and 100 miles northeast of Asheville. The County seat is Jefferson, North Carolina and other communities of note are West Jefferson and Lansing. Whatever the recreational activity, Ashe County delivers a plethora of opportunities for both residents and visitors.

COUNTY HISTORY

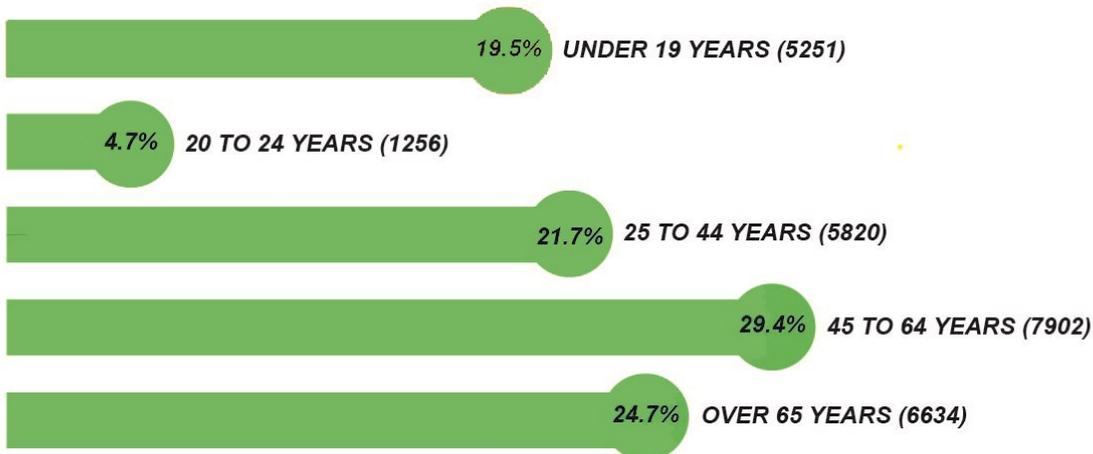
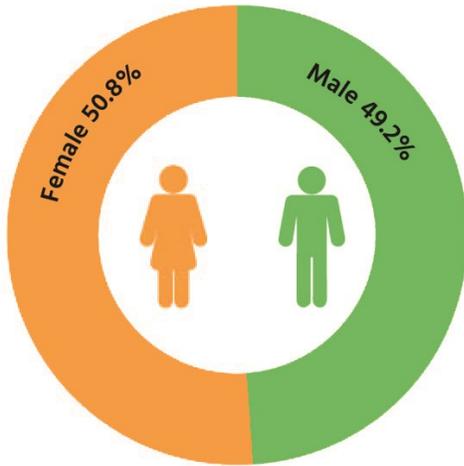
Ashe County was originally populated with the Cherokee, Creek, and Shawnee Indians who used the region for hunting and fishing grounds. Bishop Augustus Spangenberg of the Moravian Church of America came to the area looking for 100,000 acres to aid in settlement. It was also a popular area for hunting expeditions for people like David Helton and Daniel Boone in the late 1700's.

The County seat of Jefferson was established at the turn of the 18th century and was the first town in the nation to be named after Thomas Jefferson. Transportation throughout the County was a struggle due to the mountainous terrain and as such hunting, trapping, and farming were the dominant economic drivers for the County. Cattle farms and Christmas trees became the dominant agricultural operations. Manufacturing also became a dominant part of the County's economy during the industrial revolution.



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

A review of the demographic information for Ashe County has been evaluated to better understand the characteristics of the community. It also serves as a tool to identify future trends and projections that may influence recreation and park planning. Information concerning age and gender are important factors in determining the needs for recreation in the community. The general demographic characteristics for full-time residents of Ashe County, is obtained by the 2019 US Census Bureau American Community Survey.



<i>RACE</i>	<i>POPULATION</i>	<i>PERCENT</i>
White	24,853	92.5%
Black or African American	197	0.7%
Hispanic	1,330	5.0%
Asian	113	0.4%
American Indian / Alaskan	110	0.4%
Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	26	0.1%
Total:	26,863	100%

Demographics from 2019 US Census Bureau ACS 5-year Estimates



Over the years there has been an increase in population — a trend that is likely to continue as more individuals are attracted to the mountain lifestyle and the opportunities that it provides. When planning recreation, it is important to consider the impact of vacationers, visitors, and temporary residents visiting the community on a seasonal basis. Typically, the seasonal population has the greatest impact on services and resources from the end of May to the beginning of November.

Populations in mountain regions can vary throughout a given year. Determining how the seasonal population impacts the County can be difficult due to the range of factors that must be considered in estimating the peak population. In addition, year round population figures established by the North Carolina State Demographer and the US Census Bureau do not account for the seasonal population. While the permanent residents of Ashe County are the key members to plan for, it is also important to understand that the seasonal population plays a big role in how the park facilities are used and any necessary recommendations must account for this large group of people.

POPULATION TRENDS AND PROJECTIONS



According to the North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2020-2025, senior citizens comprise the fastest growing age group. The senior population is expected to have significant impacts throughout society because of income levels, population, and unique needs. The North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management (NCOSBM) projects that by the year 2030 1 in 5 North Carolinians will be 65 years old or older.

This growing segment of the society is a significant user of recreational programming and facilities. The parks and recreation department will have to





increase the number and type of activities and facilities to effectively serve this population, both now and in the future.

To meet the demands of residents and visitors, the County's parks and recreation department will have to continually evaluate its recreation and ancillary facilities, as well as offer more types of recreational programs as the population changes.

Much like seasonal and peak population estimates, population projections can vary widely due to intervening factors such as the strength of the economy, availability of jobs, and housing prices. Population projections identify potential challenges and needs that may confront the community in the future.

The NCOSBM provides projections for County populations across the state. The state demographer's population growth estimate for Ashe County indicates population increase will mostly occur from migration into the county, while natural growth from births will have a minor change in the county's population. According to NCOSBM, in 2030 the permanent population of Ashe County is projected to be 30,294 people. This is an increase of about 3,431 people or 12.8%.



PARKS AND RECREATION INVENTORY







PARKS AND RECREATION INVENTORY

Recreation is a necessary part of any community to provide places to play, opportunities to improve health and wellness, and conserve and protect natural resources. This section will look at the typical parks and recreation facilities that can be offered to a community. An inventory of all the facilities offered to the County is also provided to fully understand the recreational opportunities that Ashe County has access to. These recreational facilities are derived from many different sources, including the following:

- County owned parks and other recreational facilities
- Publicly owned facilities (national, state, and local municipalities)
- Schools
- Privately owned facilities

A brief analysis of Ashe County's recreation facilities was performed noting any visible improvements needed for that facility. This method of study served as a guide for Ashe County in its efforts to develop a plan for present and future needs.





TYPES OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES

A comprehensive park system is made up of a variety of park types ranging from small neighborhood playgrounds to larger parks with athletic fields, playgrounds, community centers, and open space. The type of park reflects the differing recreational preferences of diverse users. Park models are used as guidelines for fulfilling the future recreational needs of communities. Not all of these types of parks are the responsibility of the County government; several agencies (federal, state, county, and other local municipalities) play roles in providing recreational opportunities as well. To further understand the County's role in providing recreation services to its citizens, it is necessary to understand the elements of a comprehensive park system. These types of parks and recreation facilities may or may not be included in comprehensive park systems and are delineated in the following pages of this section.

REGIONAL PARKS

DISTRICT PARKS

COMMUNITY PARKS

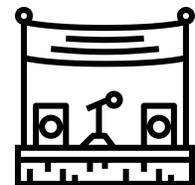
NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS

MINI PARKS

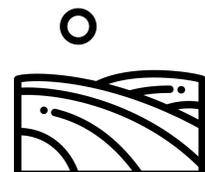
LINEAR PARKS / GREENWAYS



SPECIAL USE FACILITIES



OPEN SPACE

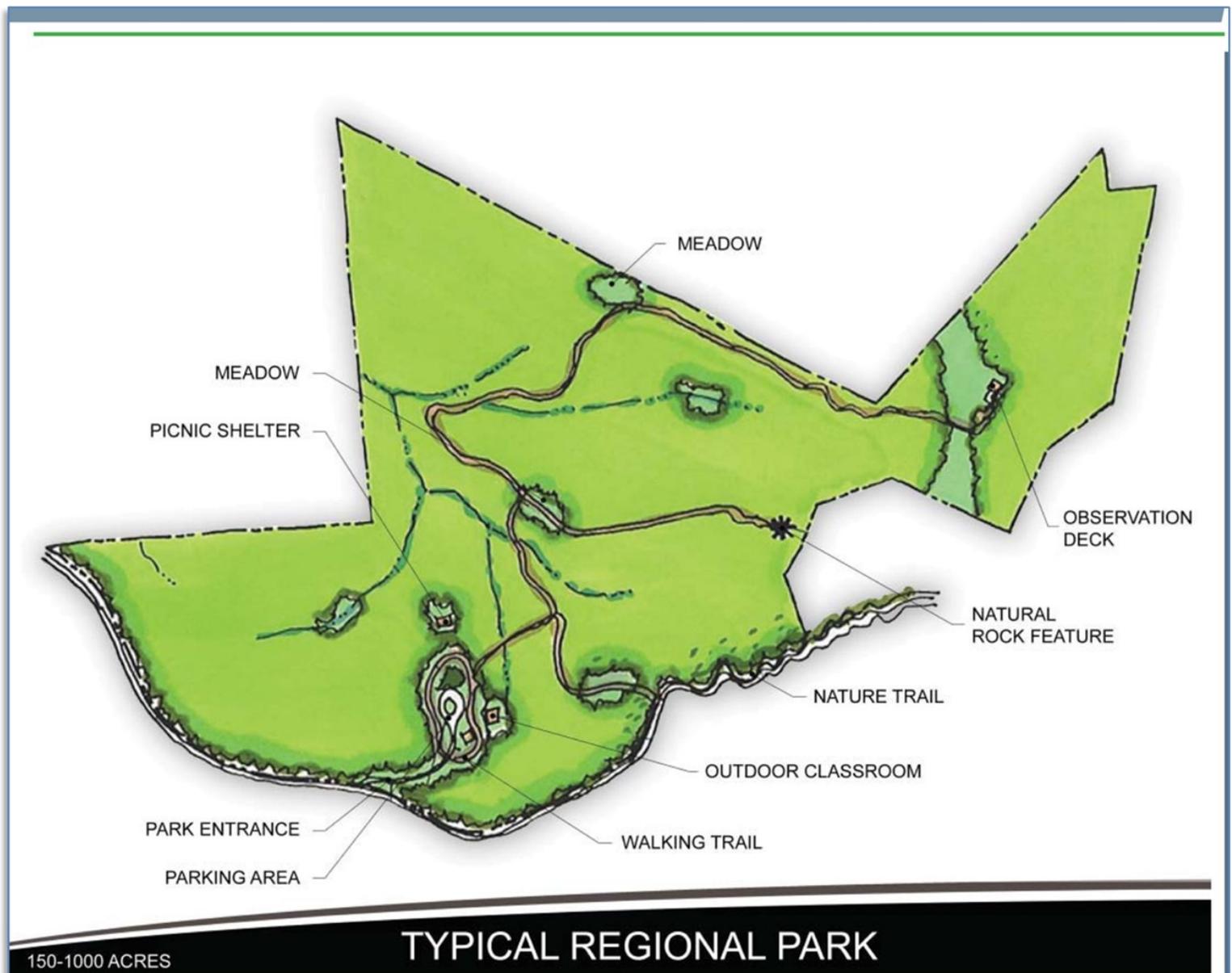




Regional Parks

Regional parks are typically very large sites. On these sites, the unique qualities that exemplify the natural features found there, such as diverse land formation, vegetation, and wildlife, are preserved. Most regional park facilities contain environmental centers, campsites, nature trails, observation decks, and picnic areas. In addition, open fields for non-structured activities, such as frisbee throwing or kite flying, are also generally found there.

When land is acquired for the development of regional parks (or the expansion of existing sites), the land should be comprised of the previously mentioned characteristics and, whenever possible, accompanied by natural water features, such as lakes, rivers, or creeks. The majority of the site should be reserved for passive recreation, with the remaining acreage used for active recreation. Both the acquisition and the development of regional parks are typically undertaken by a federal or state agency.





Specific standards / criteria for developing regional parks are as follows:

Service Area:

10 acres per 1,000 persons

Acreage / Population Ratio:

Region wide

Minimum Size:

150-1,000 acres minimum with sufficient area to encompass the resources to be preserved and managed (10% of the site may be developed with facilities found in community parks.)

Typical Facilities:

- Environmental center
- Equestrian center
- Group camping
- Nature trails
- Picnic shelters and grills
- Boating
- Parking
- Fishing piers / boat docks

- Caretaker's house
- Primitive camping
- Recreational vehicle camping
- Observation deck
- Picnic tables with grills (not under shelter)
- Swimming
- Restrooms / vending



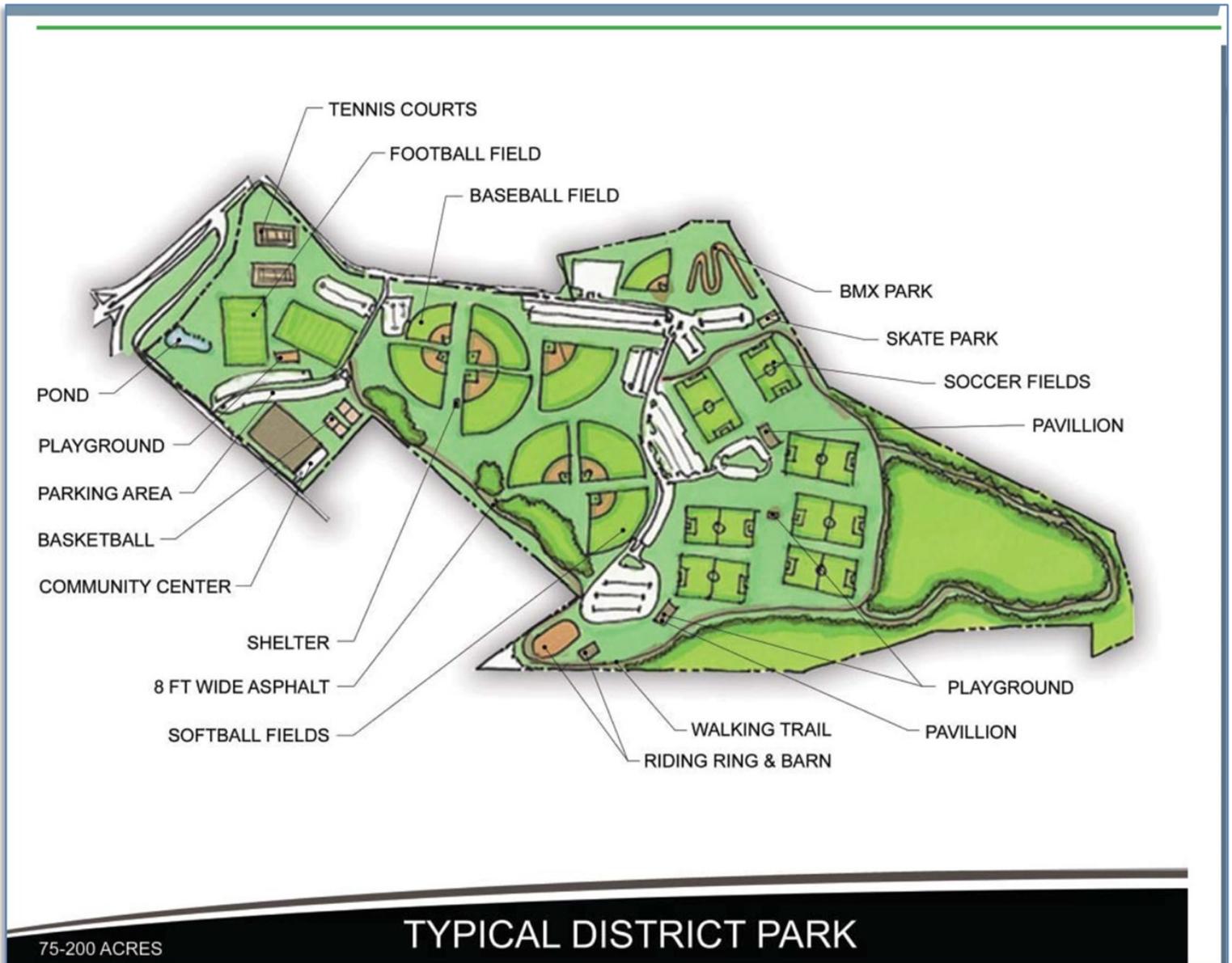
New River State Park, located in Ashe County, is a regional park that provides recreational opportunities to citizens within the County and draws tourists to the area that benefit the local region economically. New River State Park also is a natural jewel within the County that protects the natural environment and is a protected area for wildlife.



District Parks

A district park functions as the major source of active recreation for several neighborhoods within a community. District parks are intensely developed, offering a multitude of facilities in order to serve their intended geographic user area. Activities are balanced between active and passive recreation. District parks are typically developed to accommodate athletic league sporting events and tournament competition. Passive recreation opportunities, such as walking for pleasure, wildlife observation, and picnicking are found in the undisturbed areas, preferably within surrounding buffers. District parks present great opportunities for non-traditional types of recreation.

Sites for district parks should be relatively level to alleviate excessive grading for the active facilities. When possible, there should be an equal balance of wooded and cleared areas. If a natural water feature is present, the adjoining land should be developed primarily as passive recreation. Accessibility to neighborhoods should be an important consideration when choosing sites. The development of district parks is typically the responsibility of county or municipal agencies.





Specific standards / criteria for developing district parks are as follows:

Service Area:

1 - 2 ½ mile radius

Acres / Population Ratio:

5 acres per 1,000 persons

Desirable Range:

75-200 acres

Desirable Size:

+100 acres

Typical Facilities:

- Playgrounds
- Volleyball courts
- Soccer / football field
- Nature trail
- Restrooms / concessions
- Parking / service yard
- Tennis courts (lighted)

- Full or half-size basketball courts
- Baseball / softball / multipurpose field
- Soccer practice field (movable goals)
- Picnic tables with grill (with / without shelter)
- Benches or bench swings
- 50% of site remains undeveloped

***Alternate Facilities:**

- Tennis center
- Observation decks
- Recreation center
- * Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.

- Amphitheatre
- Fishing piers / boating / boat dock



Ashe County offers two parks to the community that are typical of district parks. Ashe County Park and Family Central deliver recreational opportunities that are very different, however both afford the members of the community and visitors the ability to play, relax, and enjoy the outdoors.



Community Parks

Community parks focus on meeting community based recreational needs, as well as preserving unique landscapes and open spaces. Compared to district parks, community parks have a smaller range of recreation facilities. They may host athletic league sports events and provide passive recreation. Fifty percent of the community park property should be developed for only passive recreation, with these relatively undisturbed areas serving as buffers around the park and / or acting as buffers between active facilities.

Community park sites should have varying topography and vegetation. A number of different tree species should also be present in forested areas. Community parks should contain cleared areas for the purpose of locating active recreational facilities. At least one natural water feature (lake, river, or creek) is desirable in community parks. The land acquired for use as a community park should be contiguous in nature and strategically located in order to serve all users within the designated community. The development of community parks typically falls within the realm of municipal responsibilities.





Specific standards / criteria for developing community parks are as follows:

Service Area:

1 - 2-mile radius

Acreage / Population Ratio:

2-5 acres per 1,000 persons

Desirable Range:

15-50 acres

Desirable Size:

25 acres

Typical Facilities:

- Playgrounds
- Swimming pool
- Nature trails
- Restrooms / concessions
- Baseball / softball fields
- Parking

- Full size or half size basketball courts
- Tennis / volleyball courts
- 50% of site to remain undeveloped
- Soccer / multipurpose fields
- Benches or bench swings
- Picnic tables / shelter with / without grills

***Alternate Facilities:**

- Recreation center
- Disc golf
- Observation decks
- * Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.

- Natural water features
- Amphitheatre



The Town of Lansing in Ashe County provides the Creeper Trail Park to the surrounding community to enjoy the outdoors. This great community park is adjacent to Big Horse Creek and provides visitors access to a variety of recreational resources.



Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks offer the public a convenient source of recreation while serving as the social focus point of neighborhoods. Usually located within walking distance of the area serviced, neighborhood parks provide both active and passive recreation opportunities that are of interest to all age groups. The smaller size of neighborhood parks, as compared to those previously mentioned, requires intense development with fifty percent of each site remaining undisturbed to serve as a buffer between the park and adjacent property owners.





Specific standards / criteria for developing neighborhood parks are as follows:

Service area:

¾ - 1-mile radius to serve walking

Acreage / Population Ratio:

2 acres per 1,000 persons

Desirable Size:

7-15 acres

Typical Facilities:

softball or baseball field
Half size basketball courts
Picnic shelter with grill
Benches or bench swings

Multipurpose field
50% of site to remain undeveloped
Picnic tables with grills (not under shelter)
Playground

***Alternate Facilities:**

Nature trails

Tennis courts

* Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.



West Jefferson Park, located in the heart of West Jefferson, is an example of a neighborhood park that offers a variety of recreational facilities for visitors to the park. Ashe County residents use the park as a meeting space to enjoy outdoor activities with their community.



Mini Parks

The function of a mini park is to provide very limited, isolated, or unique recreational needs. Mini parks are the smallest classification of parks. They are often provided by school and church playgrounds. These parks are located within walking distance of the area served and they provide limited recreational activities. Their very small size requires intense development and there is little or no buffer between mini parks and adjacent property owners.



TYPICAL MINI PARK



Specific standards / criteria for developing mini parks are as follows:

Service Area:

¼ - ½ mile radius to serve walking

Acreage / Population Ratio:

0.5 acres per 1,000 persons

Desirable Size:

±1 acre

Typical Facilities:

- Half size basketball courts
- Picnic tables with grills (not under shelter)
- Benches or bench swings
- Open play area playground

***Alternate Facilities:**

- Nature trails
- Tennis courts

* Alternate facilities may be added or substituted.



Backstreet Park in downtown West Jefferson is an example of a mini park that brings communities together with events, promotes local history, and delivers beauty to both residents and tourists.



Linear Parks / Greenways

A linear park is an area developed for one or more varying modes of recreational travel, such as hiking, biking, and driving. Linear parks are developed for several reasons:

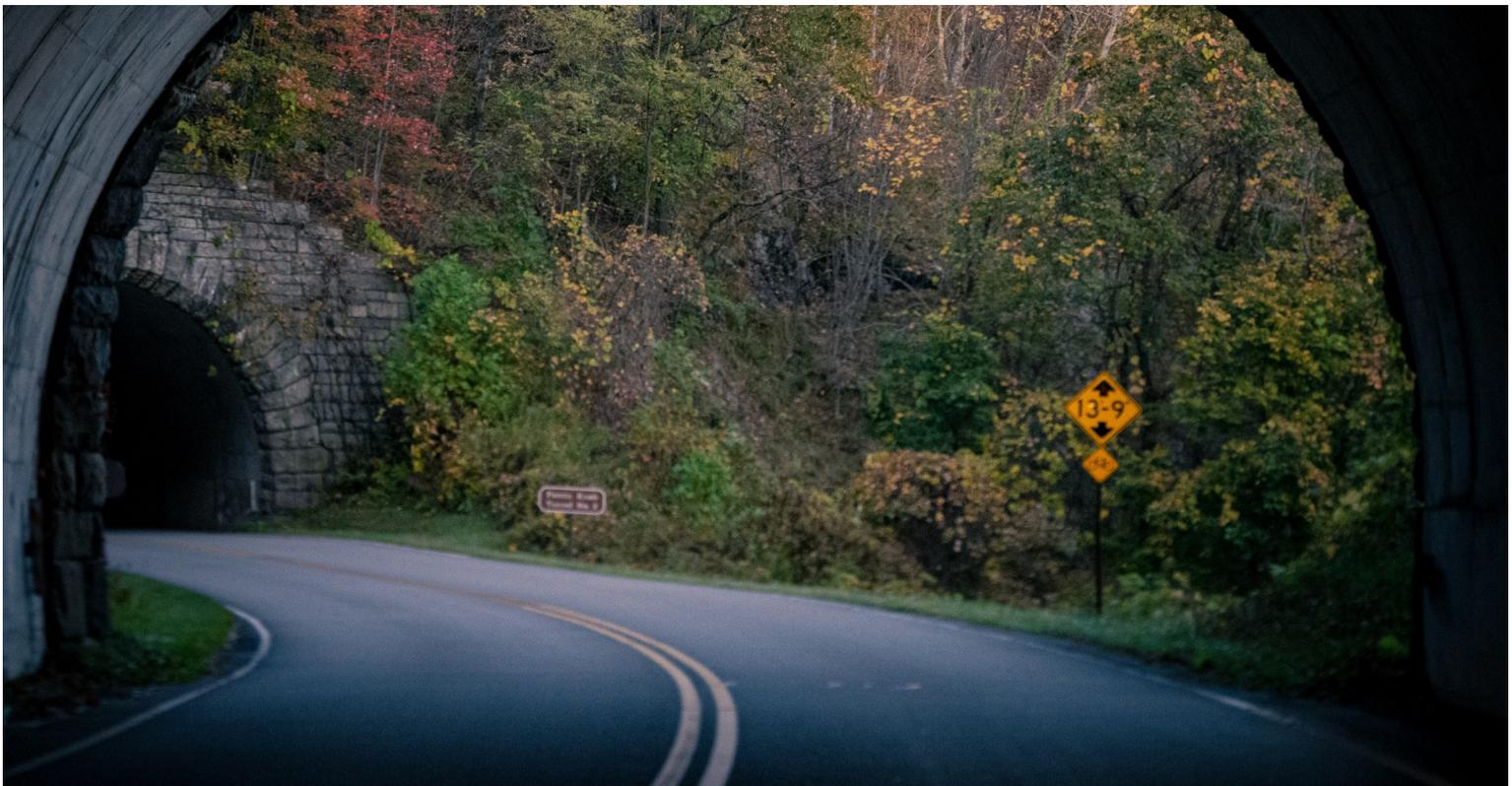
- To connect existing recreational facilities
- To facilitate public rights-of-way
- To connect destination points
- For scenic views and leisure touring



The length and size of linear parks vary considerably, depending on their intended use, terrain of the park land and the distance between entities to be connected such as parks, schools, cultural or historical resources, residential areas, businesses. Often, these linear parks are developed within a large land area designated for protection and management of the natural environment, with recreation opportunities as a secondary objective.

Unique or Special-Use Facilities

The unique or special-use facilities are park types that exist for the sole purpose of enhancing or utilizing a special man-made or natural feature. They can include beaches, parkways, historical sites, sites of archeological significance, swimming pools, conservation easements, and flood plains. Minimum standards relating to acreage or population have not been established by the park and recreation industry for this category of park. A size that is sufficient to protect and interpret the resource, while providing optimum use, is considered desirable.





Open Space

While it is realistic and appropriate to adopt population based standards for park land and facilities, it is not realistic to establish open space standards. The more reasonable method of establishing appropriate standards for open space is to determine the criteria necessary for the protection of significant natural areas contained therein.

Public open space is defined as any land acquired for the purpose of keeping it in a primarily undeveloped state. The functions of open space include:

- Preservation of drainage areas for water supplies (watersheds)
- Protection of areas which are particularly well suited for growing crops (farmland preservation)
- Protection of communities to prevent urban sprawl (greenbelts)
- Protection of wildlife habitat (sanctuaries)
- Protection of approach and take-off areas near airports (clear zones)
- Protection of undevelopable land (landfills)
- Protection of areas aesthetically pleasing for a corridor (viewshed)

While these areas are some of the more common open spaces, many others exist. Ashe County' park system has two parks that offer a wide variety of amenities and open spaces. Ashe County Park is predominantly an open space facility. This facility allows visitors to enjoy beautiful views of the surrounding mountains while providing a mix of other amenities such as picnicking, disc golf, playground, trails, fishing, and some more active type facilities such as two softball fields, a youth baseball / softball field, two tennis courts, a skate park, and an outdoor basketball court. Family Central is more of an active recreation facility but offers large open space playing fields with outstanding views of the surrounding mountains and natural landscape.





ASHE COUNTY RECREATION FACILITY OFFERINGS



LEGEND

- County Boundaries
- Municipal Boundaries
- Parcel Lines
- Water Body/Creek
- Existing Ashe County Park
- Existing Municipal Park
- Existing Public Schools
- Existing National/State Recreation

Map 2.1 Ashe County existing conditions (See Appendix A for 11"x17")





Ashe County Park

Description:

Ashe County Park is a beautiful park that provides visitors access to 65 acres open space, woodland, a small lake, and various active recreational amenities. As people move through the park they will be greeted with an open view of what the park has to offer. In addition to the opportunities provided by the park, the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge is located to the south and offers protection to natural flora and fauna. While the refuge is currently not open to the public the US Fish and Wildlife Service is actively working to grow the refuge and develop public use opportunities. As of the writing of this document Ashe County was entering into a deal to acquire an additional 149 acres adjacent to the southern border of the park. This expansion would provide the public with 214 acres at this facility.

Amenities include:

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 18-hole disc golf course | (1) 200' Baseball/Softball Field |
| (1) Outdoor Basketball court | (3) Playgrounds |
| (3) Picnic shelters | (2) Tennis courts |
| Skate park | Sand Volleyball court |
| Ashe Park pond | (2) Fishing docks |
| Multipurpose field | Ashe County Story Walk |
| (2) 280' Baseball Fields | 1 / 4-mile nature trail |

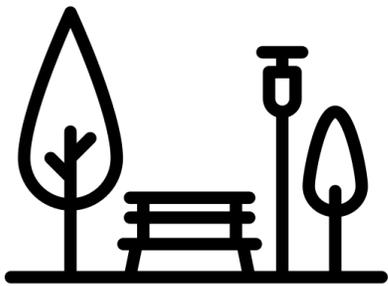
Challenges and Issues:

- Limited Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) pedestrian access between amenities
- Need ADA path around pond and between playgrounds and picnic shelters
- Need for additional seating near all amenities and on paths
- Lack of shade at basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park
- Parking areas need upgrades such as expansion and paving
- Audio / visual technology improvements needed for Blevens' Shelter

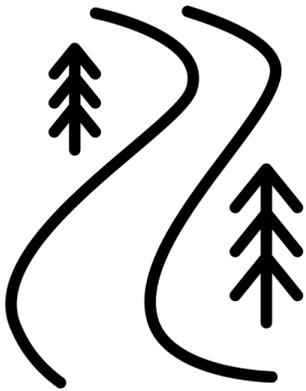




ACTIVE RECREATION



PASSIVE RECREATION



WALKING TRAILS



FISHING OPPORTUNITIES



Family Central

Description:

Family Central is the principal active recreation facility in Ashe County. It is also the location of Ashe County's Parks and Recreation Department. This park is truly a central place for families and individuals to participate in active sports and fitness opportunities. From the athletic fields to the indoor fitness center, there are multiple opportunities for health and wellness.

Amenities include:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Indoor gymnasium | (1) Multipurpose field |
| (1) Full and (2) half indoor basketball courts in gym | Playground |
| (1) 200' softball/tee ball field | Indoor fitness center |
| (1) 250' baseball field w / field lighting | Concession / restroom building |
| (2) 230' baseball fields w / field lighting | (2) Painted pickleball courts in gym |
| (3) Batting cages | Community center |

Challenges and Issues:

- Lack of shade for ballfield and multipurpose field seating areas
- Need for parking expansion
- Lack of ADA access to multipurpose fields
- Limited size of fitness room and need for locker-room
- Limited space in single gym (basketball, volleyball, pickleball, etc.) for four season programming
- Need playground expansion / upgrades
- Limited existing park area for expansion (Adjacent properties could support recreation development)





TEAM SPORTS



PHYSICAL PLAY



COMMUNITY BUILDING



HEALTH AND WELLNESS



ASHE COUNTY RECREATION PROGRAM OFFERINGS

Recreational programs offered by the County are an integral part of the parks and recreation system. Programs can be special classes, regular classes, summer camps, and special events that celebrate holidays or important community celebrations. Each of these elements can create a feeling of unity and pride within a community. An inventory of the programs offered by Ashe County was completed to gain an understanding of the offerings made available to the public.

Athletic Programming

- Ashe youth baseball
- Ashe youth softball
- Ashe youth tee ball
- Ashe youth basketball
- Ashe youth co-ed volleyball
- Ashe youth flag football
- Spring soccer league
- Adult basketball leagues
- Ashe adult co-ed volleyball
- Ashe adult co-ed softball
- Ashe adult co-ed soccer
- Pickleball
- Disc Golf

Educational Opportunities and Camps

- Ashe County Story Walk

Special Events

- Ashe County Parks and Recreation Annual 4th of July Fireworks Celebration
- Ashe County Bluegrass and Old Time Fiddlers Convention
- Annual Youth Trout Derby
- Ice Bowl Charitable Disc Golf Event
- Fridays in the Park Concerts
- High Country Throwdown Professional Disc Golf Tournament driven by Innova
- Challenger Day
- Catfish Derby





PUBLIC RECREATION FACILITY OFFERINGS

Public lands located within Ashe County play an active role in providing recreation opportunities to residents and visitor within the County. These public spaces are made available through multiple public land managers, such as local municipalities, the State of North Carolina, and national land management agencies.

Local Municipalities

Jefferson

Foster-Tyson Park

- Walking trails
- Gazebo
- Picnicking

West Jefferson

West Jefferson Park

- Baseball field
- Tennis
- Walking trails
- Playground

Backstreet (Caboose) Park

- Outdoor stage
- Picnicking
- Historical elements

Lansing

Lansing Creeper Trail Park

- Walking trails
- Mountain bike trails
- Outdoor stage
- Picnicking
- Water access
- Fishing
- Playground
- Community garden
- Camping

Ashe County Public School System

Public school recreation facilities are made available for use by the community. Ashe County Public School System operates seven public schools that have recreation facilities typical of most schools: playgrounds, baseball / softball fields, gymnasiums, etc. This includes three (3) elementary schools, 1 (1) middle school, one (1) high school, and two (2) special learning centers.

The North Carolina Community Schools Act (G.S. 115C Art. 13) was passed to allow “greater community use of public-school facilities.” Since school facilities represent an investment of the citizenry for the education of students and for the general benefit of the community and its citizens, their proper use and enjoyment shall be encouraged and permitted when such does not interfere with school activities.

- Ashe County High School
- Ashe County Middle School
- Blue Ridge Elementary School
- Mountain View Elementary School
- Westwood Elementary School
- Ashe Early College
- Early Learning Center





State of North Carolina

The State of North Carolina manages more than 250,000 acres through its state parks system. This public land is made available to provide recreational opportunities as well as protect and conserve the natural heritage of North Carolina. The North Carolina State Park system manages over 5,000 acres of parkland in Ashe County.

Another State public lands provider in Ashe County is the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC). This state public land manager manages and protects close to 6,000 acres of land. NCWRC goal is to “conserve and sustain the state’s fish and wildlife resources.” With this land set aside for conservation and research, NCWRC also provides recreational amenities.



North Carolina State Parks

Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

- Hiking
- Picnicking
- Nature observation

New River State Park

- Hiking
- Paddling
- Fishing
- Picnicking
- Swimming
- Camping
- Nature observation

Elk Knob State Park

- Hiking
- Camping
- Nature observation

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Pond Mountain Game Lands

- Hiking
- Camping
- Nature observation

Three Top Mountain Game Lands

- Hiking
- Camping
- Nature observation
- Birding



5,000 ACRES



6,000 ACRES



PRIVATE RECREATION FACILITY OFFERINGS

Private recreation providers, non profit organizations, and developers are an important component for the County by providing resources and opportunities for the County’s recreation system. Private developers can assist Ashe County by the dedication, construction, and / or reservation of future park sites, open space, and / or greenway corridors during the overall development process.

Private Organizations

Easterseals UCP — A non-profit organization that provides health and wellness services to people with disabilities, behavioral health challenges, and autism

Little’s Health & Fitness Center — Private gym located in West Jefferson

Ashe CrossFit — Private Crossfit gym in West Jefferson

Mountain Hearts Fitness Center — Fitness center located in Jefferson that is associated with Ashe Memorial Hospital

Ashe County Wildlife Club — Private Shooting club in eastern Ashe County

Zaloo’s Canoes, Kayaks, & Tubes — Private outfitter that hosts paddling trips and guided fly fishing trips

Buffalo Community Center — Community building available for gatherings, parties, and classes

New River Outfitters — Private outfitter that hosts paddling trips and canoe, kayak, and tube rentals

Riverside Canoes — Private outfitter that provides shuttle service for paddling trips and canoe, kayak, and tube rentals

River Girl Fishing — Private outfitter that provides equipment for paddling, tubing, bike trips, and fly fishing lessons and guided trips

Golf Courses

Mountain Aire Golf Course

1396 Fairway Ridge Drive
West Jefferson, NC 28694

Jefferson Landing Club

148 East Landing Drive
Jefferson, NC 28640





Private Campgrounds

Raccoon Holler Campground — Provides over 150 sites with full hookups or water and electric for RVs as well as areas for tent camping. Recreational amenities for visitors include a lake for fishing, traditional game courts, volleyball, basketball, walking and biking trails, disc golf, and a playground. A number of community events are also hosted by the campground.

Greenfield Campground — Provides over 100 sites with full hookups or water and electric for RVs as well as areas for tent camping. The campground also provides 8 camping cabins that are available to visitors. Recreational amenities include a playground, a club house, walking trails, and 2 fishing ponds.

Prathers Creek Campground — This is a paddle in only campground along the New River.

RiverCamp USA — Provides riverside camping for RVs and tent campers for individuals and families as well as group campsites. The campsite also offers canoe, kayak, and tube rentals as well as access to hiking and biking trails.

Twin Rivers Family Campground — Provides riverside camping for RVs and tent campers for individuals and families. The campground also offers canoe, kayak, and tube rentals as well as a shuttle service for visitors with their own equipment.

Helton Creek Campground— Provides camping along Helton Creek in the northern part of Ashe County.

RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT







RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The degree of need for parks, recreation, and open space is most directly influenced by the expectations of Ashe County residents — relating strictly to the quality of life to which they aspire. This comprehensive recreation master plan addresses, as its first priority, the parks and recreation facility needs envisioned by the residents and visitors of Ashe County.

This master plan inventories Ashe County's existing park facilities as well as listing the recreation facilities available at local schools, local municipalities, and other recreation facilities either within the County or easily accessible by residents within the County. This detailed inventory includes the facilities which are available within each park to create a better understanding of the existing recreation opportunities within the County. The recreational trends also provide information needed to understand the expected growth of Ashe County in the future. This master plan will be used as a guide for improving recreational opportunities for residents and visitors.

Community input and recreation standards were used as the primary method in determining the adequate types and number of park facilities needed for Ashe County. This master plan compares standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), an independent, non-profit professional organization for park / recreation departments nationwide. In 1996, NRPA published a manual entitled *Park, Recreation, Open Space, and Greenway Guidelines*, which is a widely accepted reference standard for communities.

Standards are guidelines, not requirements, for use by communities in estimating the demand for recreation in their given geographic areas. To assure that the Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan contains distinctiveness, yet versatility, input was sought from its integral components: The steering committee, Ashe County staff, Ashe County Board of Commissioners, and citizen representatives.





PUBLIC INPUT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The methodology used in establishing a comprehensive recreation master plan should always include citizen input. In order to ensure a successful study, it is vital that the public users of recreational facilities be able to share their issues, needs, and desires.

To facilitate community input, three public meetings were conducted during the master plan process as well as three focus group interviews. The public meetings were held in accordance with CDC and state recommendations for social distancing required to mitigate COVID-19 spread and the focus group discussions were held online meeting virtually using Microsoft Teams meeting software.

The public meetings were drop-in for two hours each on **May 4th, 2021**. Locations included **Ashe County Park, Ashe County Middle School, and Family Central Athletic Fields**. This provided the opportunity for a variety of information from many groups of people. Garnering information from multiple generations and people provides invaluable insight into the needs of the community.

The public meetings, along with the community survey, were advertised by the County on both their main website, the parks and recreation webpage, social media pages, and via flyers at park locations. Approximately **131 participants** attended the meetings and provided much needed feedback.

The community meetings included review of existing base maps and a visual preference exercise, as well as open dialog and question and answer opportunities. The meetings encouraged attendees to discuss their experiences with the Ashe County recreation system in an open setting that promoted opportunities to share comments, see amenity examples, and ask questions. This is a crucial step to ensure that all who want to are able to be heard, voice their concerns, and receive clarification.



Help Guide the Future of Recreation in Ashe County

Have a voice & share your ideas!

Please drop-in to one of the community meetings listed below. We would like to discuss your ideas and concerns related to recreation in Ashe County and our efforts to create a Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan.

Tuesday May 4th, 12:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Ashe County Park
Ashe Park Road, Jefferson, NC 28640

&

Tuesday May 4th, 2:30 pm - 4:00 pm
Ashe County Middle School
255 Northwest Ln, Warrensville

&

Tuesday May 4th, 5:30 pm - 6:00 pm
Family Central Athletic Fields
626 Ashe Central School Rd, Jefferson

For additional information please contact the Parks & Recreation Director, Kevin Anderson at: kevinanderson@ashecountygov.com
 336.982.6185





Public Meetings

Participants engaged in open conversation related to their opinions on the state of the existing recreation system including facilities and programs as well as their concerns and questions. Written notes were used to record participant comments and opinions. A visual preference survey of various park amenities gave participants the opportunity to place stickers next to the amenities they felt would be good additions to the County park system. Each participant was limited to two stickers to place on one of 32 typical amenity type images. (See Appendix B for 11"x17")

Two large maps provided participants with the existing locations of each of the recreation system's facilities and other destinations such as national forests, state parks, and area schools. Participants were asked to provide insight into where potential new recreation facilities might be located. These boards gave everyone an opportunity to share their opinions and thoughts to create a list of desired changes to the existing recreation system.



DISC GOLF

10



ACCESSIBLE PLAYGROUND

40



COMMUNITY GARDEN

18



PICKLEBALL

4



EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE

7



PICNIC STATIONS

4



BENCHES AND SWINGS

11



MULTI-SPORTS COMPLEX

40



MULTI-PURPOSE ATHLETIC FIELDS

21



RESTROOM FACILITIES

6



OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

14



FREE FORM PLAYGROUND

24



PASSIVE/NON-PROGRAMMED OPEN SPACE

2



WALKING PATH DISTANCE SIGNAGE

1



DOG PARK

34



FISHING OPPORTUNITIES

48



Top Ten Visual Preference Results



Adventure Activities
48



Fishing Opportunities
48



Climbing Wall
43



Accessible Playground
40



Multi-Sports Complex
40



Dog Park
34



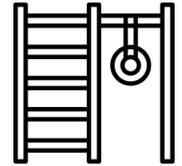
Indoor Fitness Area
32



Natural Surface Trails
29



Gymnasium
29



Free Form Playground
24



PICNIC PAVILION **6**



NATURAL SURFACE TRAILS **29**



FITNESS STATIONS **19**



AMPHITHEATER **16**



CLIMBING WALL **43**



NON-PROGRAMMED OPEN SPACE **8**



GYMNASIUM **29**



INDOOR FITNESS AREA **32**



ACTIVITIES/EVENTS LAWN **4**



TOT LOT **11**



COMMUNITY CENTER **17**



ADVENTURE ACTIVITIES **48**



OUTDOOR GAMES **18**



TRADITIONAL GAMES **6**



BASKETBALL **17**



PAVED MULTI-PURPOSE TRAILS **15**



Community Survey

The active participation of residents in Ashe County was crucial in developing a master plan that reflects the true needs of the County. With this in mind, community input was solicited throughout the entire planning process. A survey was created as a tool to gather information from the general public concerning the existing and future needs of the County’s park system. A project marketing card was developed to encourage awareness of the project and provide both a web address to the community survey as well as a QR code that interested individuals could use with mobile devices to reach the online survey and provide their input.

To gather further public input, and reach the broadest cross section of County residents, a printed version of the master plan survey was also made available at the County meetings. The following summarizes the results of the community survey. (See Appendix C for survey results).

The County had 954 household surveys accessed and received a total of **954** completed household surveys representing about **2,356** individuals for the recreation master planning data collection effort. These results included both the survey handouts and the online survey results. The survey data collected was a representative cross section of Ashe County in terms of age, household size, and geographic distribution.

The surveys were designed to elicit answers on resident’s needs and desires for recreation opportunities. It included a section where respondents rated their use of existing facilities both within the County limits and outside the County limits. The survey instructed respondents to rank the programs and facilities in order of importance to their household and to list the facilities they would like to see added to the park and recreation system.





Help Improve Recreation in Ashe County!

Community Survey

Please visit the link or use the QR code below:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AsheCountyParks>

This effort will help inform the Ashe County's planning efforts for Parks and Recreation in the community. Thanks for your participation!



 **Ashe County Parks and Recreation Comprehensive Plan Survey**

Please complete only one survey per household.

Ashe County Parks & Recreation is currently developing a master plan to help inform recreation planning for the next 10 years. We invite residents to complete the following recreation needs assessment survey. Your opinion matters.

1 What is your gender?

Female
 Male

2 What is your age?

18 to 24
 25 to 34
 35 to 44
 45 to 54
 55 to 64
 65 to 74
 75 or older

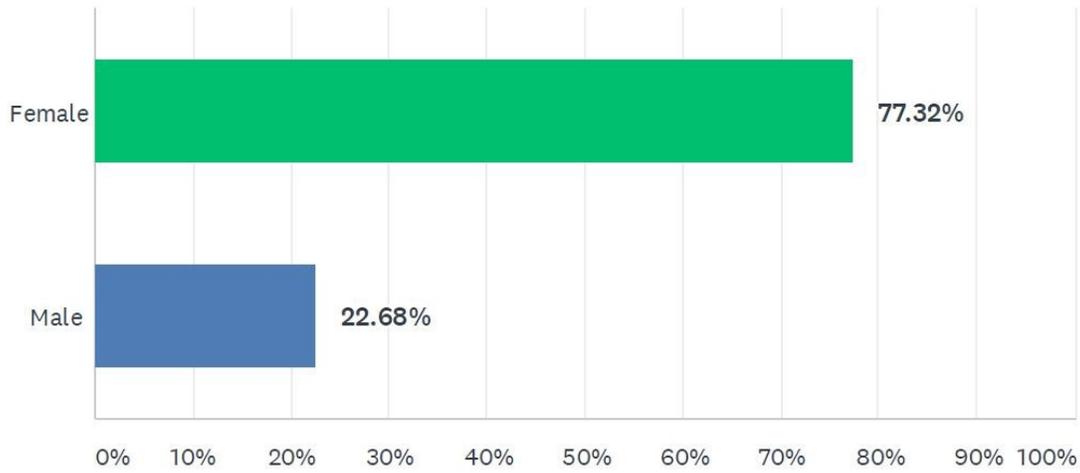
3 Are you a Resident of Ashe County?

Yes
 No
 If not where are you from?



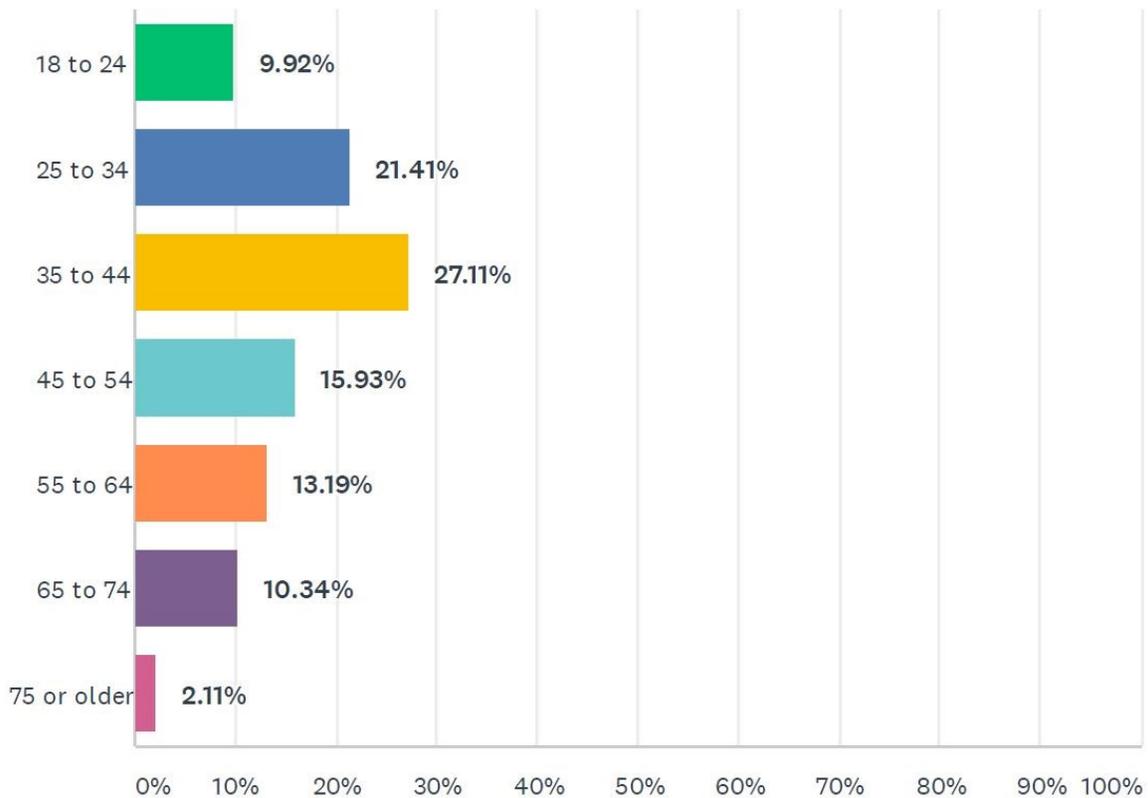
Q1 What is your gender?

Answered: 948 Skipped: 4



Q2 What is your age?

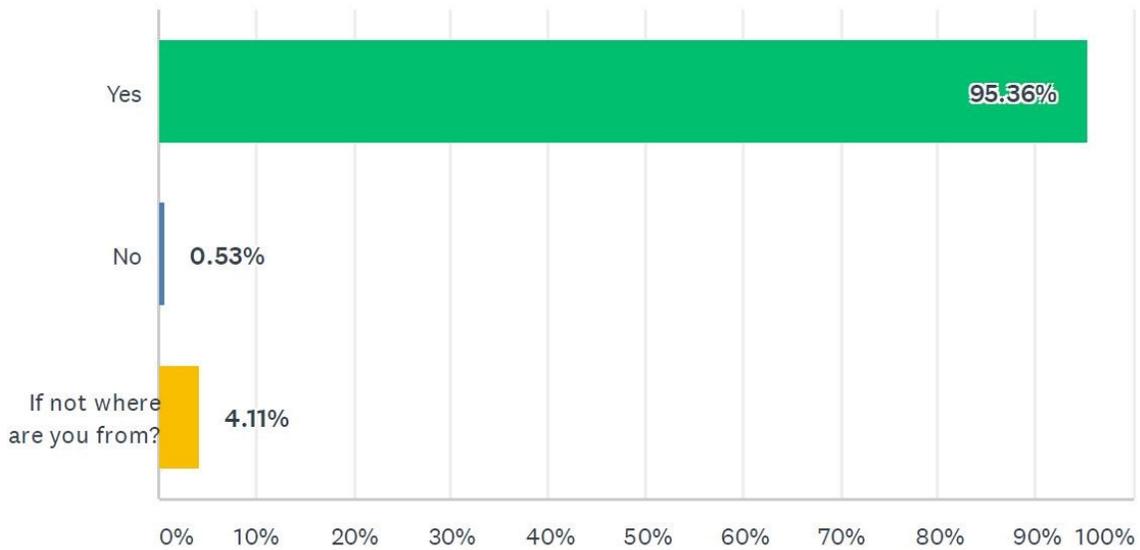
Answered: 948 Skipped: 4





Q3 Are you a Resident of Ashe County:

Answered: 949 Skipped: 3



Q4 What is your ethnicity?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
White	95.82%	895
Hispanic or Latino	2.68%	25
Multiracial or Multiethnic	0.54%	5
Native American or Alaska Native	0.32%	3
Another race or ethnicity, please describe below	0.32%	3
Asian	0.11%	1
Black or African American	0.11%	1
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.11%	1
Middle Eastern or North African	0.00%	0
TOTAL		934



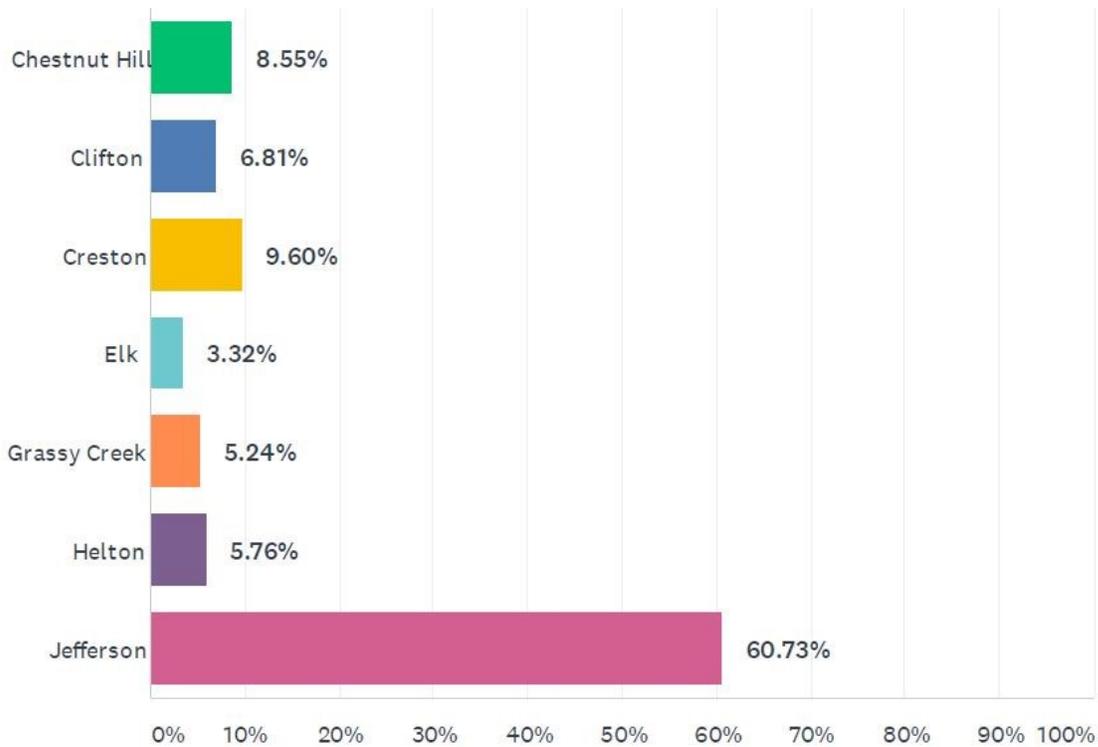
Q5 List the number of persons in your household, including yourself, who are in the age brackets below:

	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
0-5 years old	280
6-8 years old	200
9-12 years old	225
13-15 years old	170
16-18 years old	126
19-21 years old	83
22-29 years old	202
30-39 years old	309
40-49 years old	311
50-59 years old	215
60+ years old	230



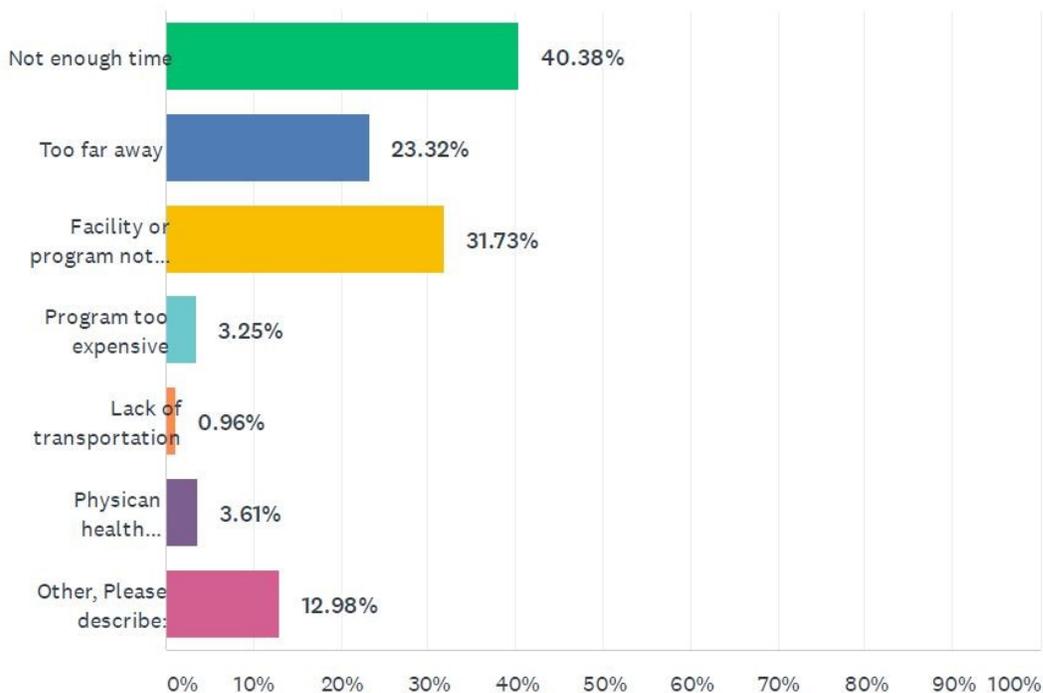
Q6 In what Township do you live?

Answered: 573 Skipped: 379



Q7 What is the greatest household barrier to more regular use of a park or recreational facility?

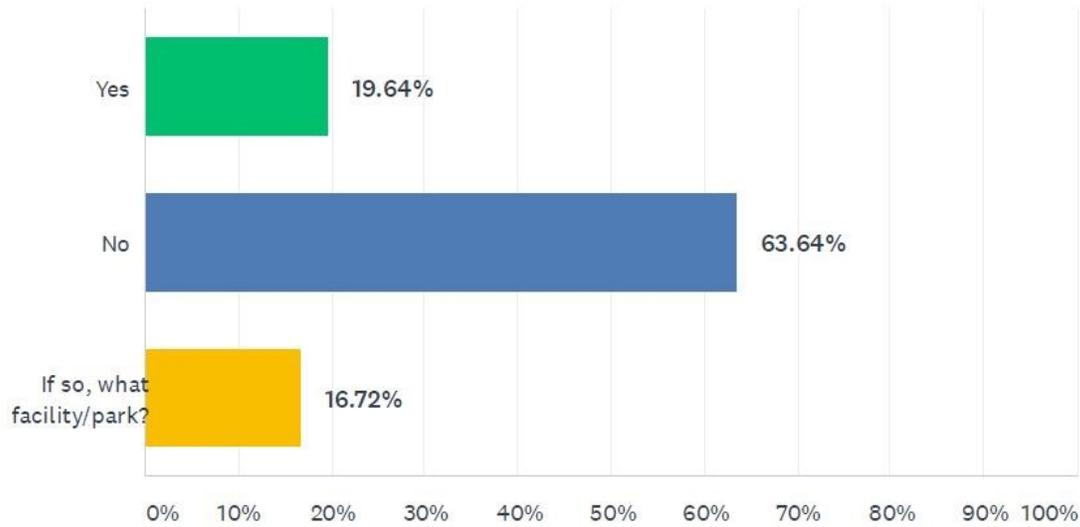
Answered: 832 Skipped: 120





Q8 Do you live within 3 miles of a public park or recreational facility?

Answered: 891 Skipped: 61



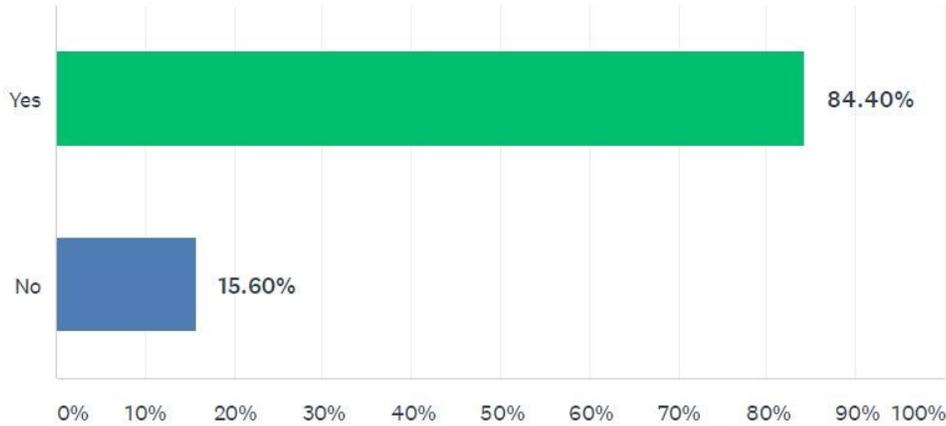
If so, what facility / park?

Ashe Park	18.79%	28
Park	18.79%	28
West Jefferson Park	18.12%	27
Family Central	12.75%	19
Lansing	9.40%	14
West Jefferson	7.38%	11
Lansing creeper trail	4.03%	6
Mt Jefferson	4.03%	6
WJ Park	4.03%	6
Library	4.03%	6



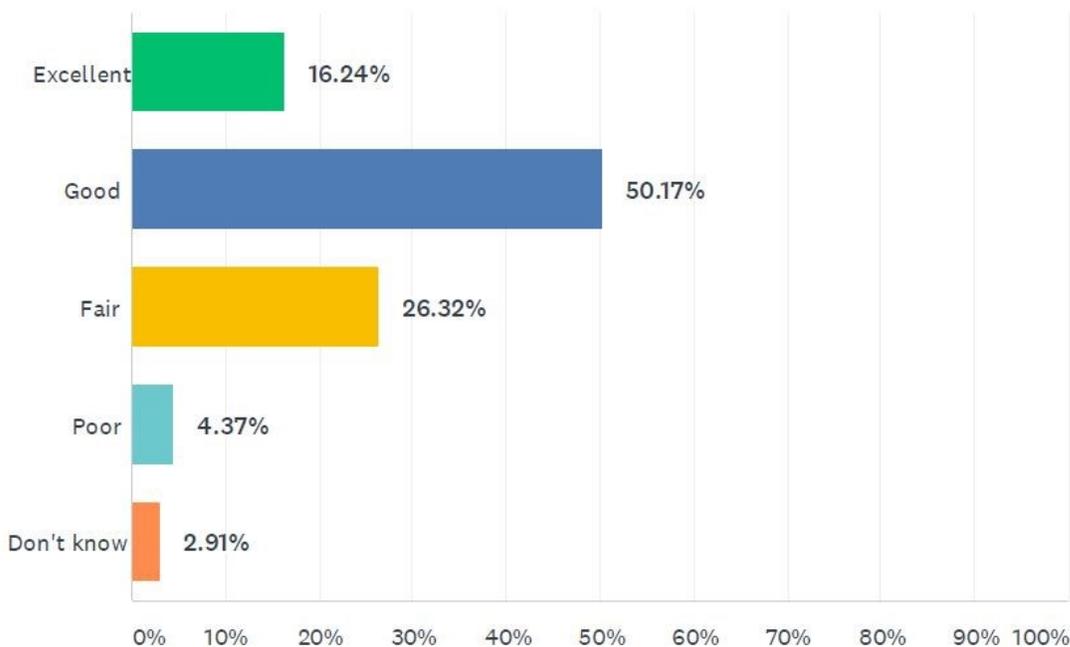
Q9 Would you use a park or recreation facility more if it were closer to your home or work?

Answered: 872 Skipped: 80



Q10 Overall, how would you rate the existing County parks and recreational facilities in Ashe County?

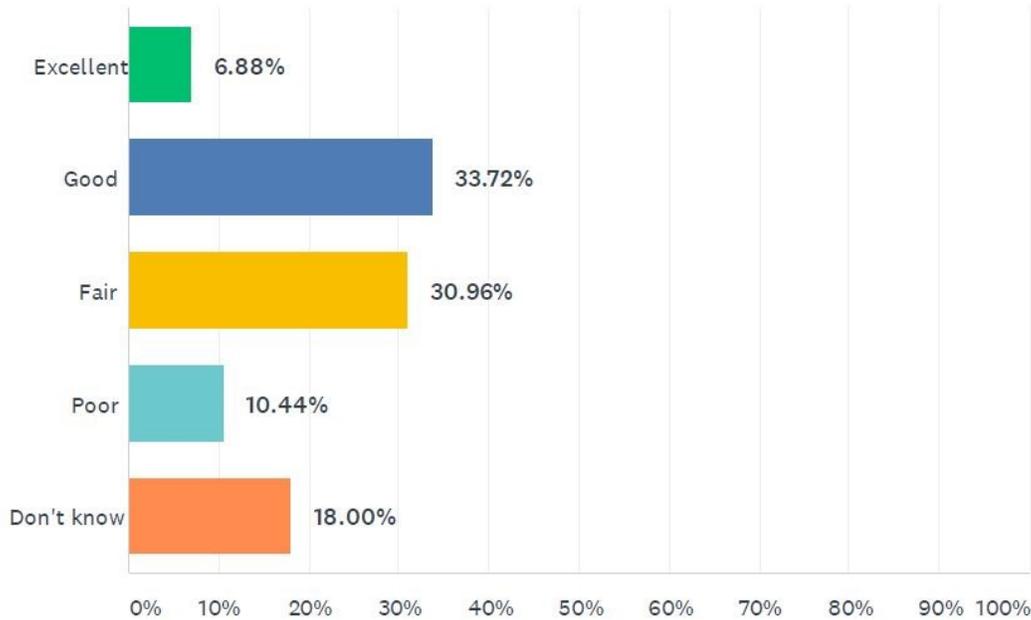
Answered: 893 Skipped: 59





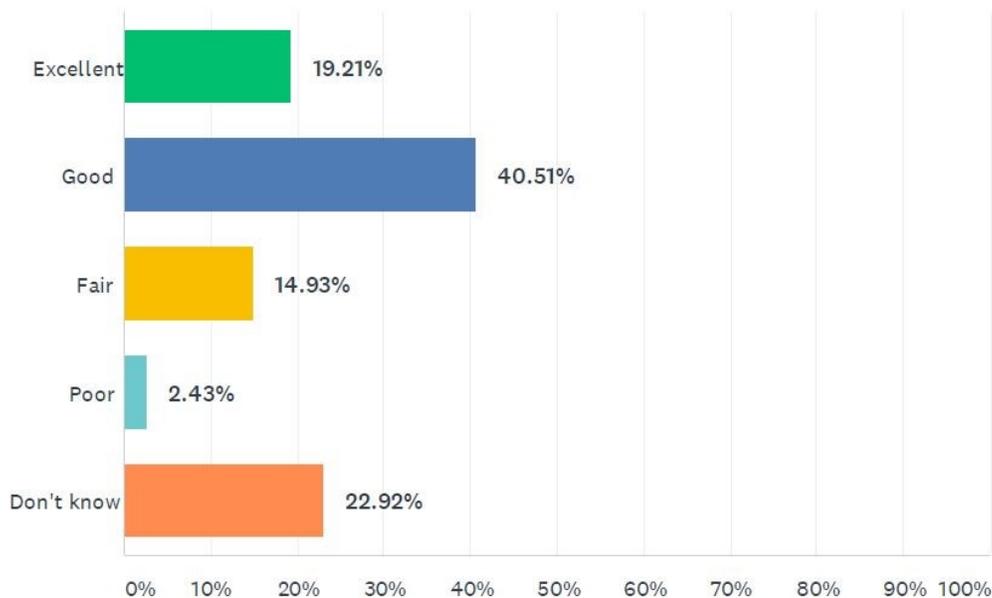
Q11 Overall, how would you rate the recreational programs offered by Ashe County?

Answered: 872 Skipped: 80



Q12 Overall, how would you rate the Ashe County Parks and Recreation staff performance?

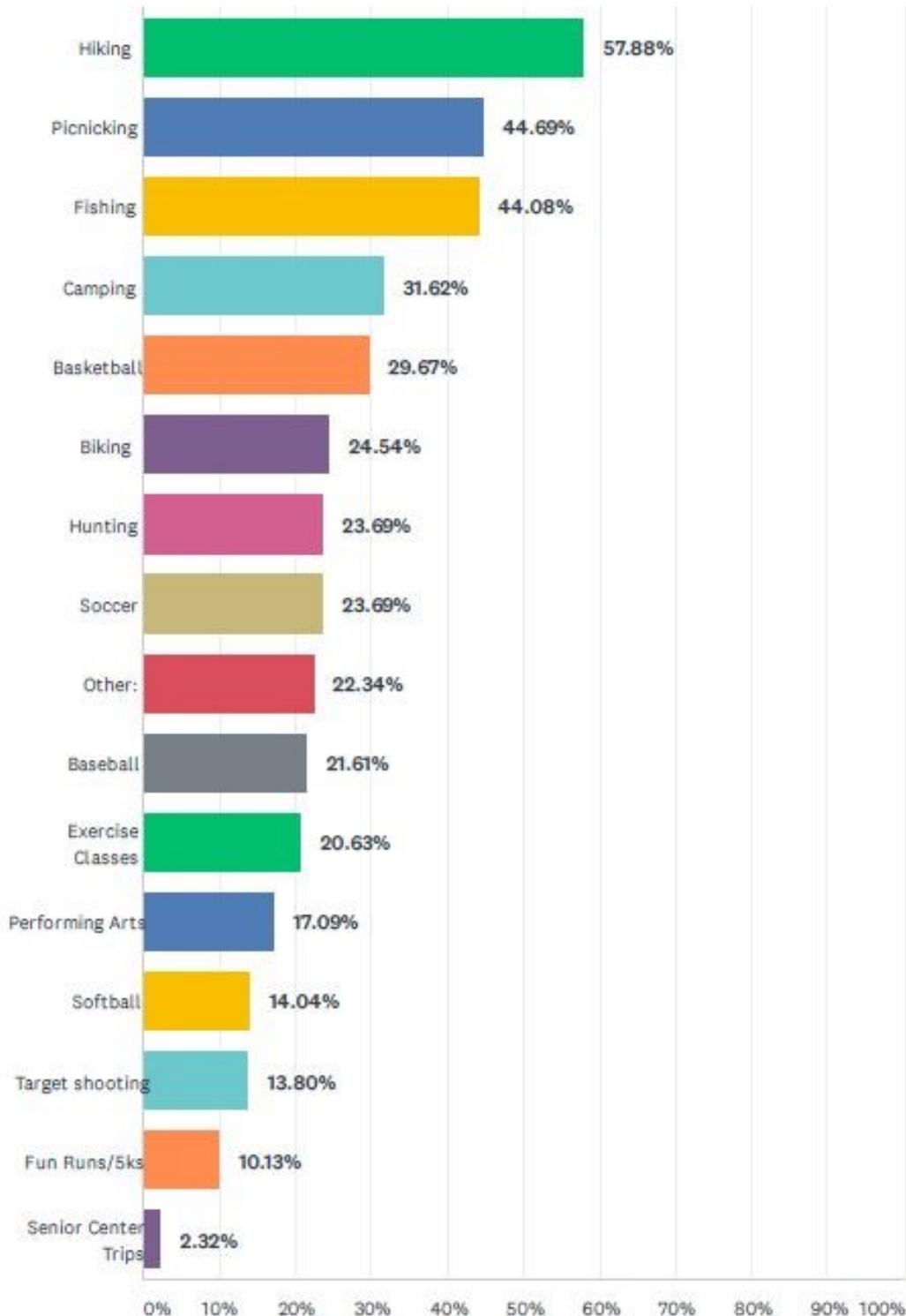
Answered: 864 Skipped: 88





Q13 (Prior to COVID-19) In which of the following recreation activities and/or special events do you or others in your household participate regularly? Please check all that apply.

Answered: 819 Skipped: 133



Continued on next page



Q13 Other?

▼ Walking		15.85%	29
▼ Volleyball		13.11%	24
▼ Swimming		9.84%	18
▼ Kayaking		7.65%	14
▼ Disc golf		6.56%	12
▼ Tennis		4.92%	9
▼ Playgrounds		4.37%	8
▼ park		4.37%	8
▼ Wrestling		3.83%	7
▼ Skateboarding		3.83%	7



Q14 Check below how frequently you or others in your household have visited the following recreation facilities in the last 24 months.

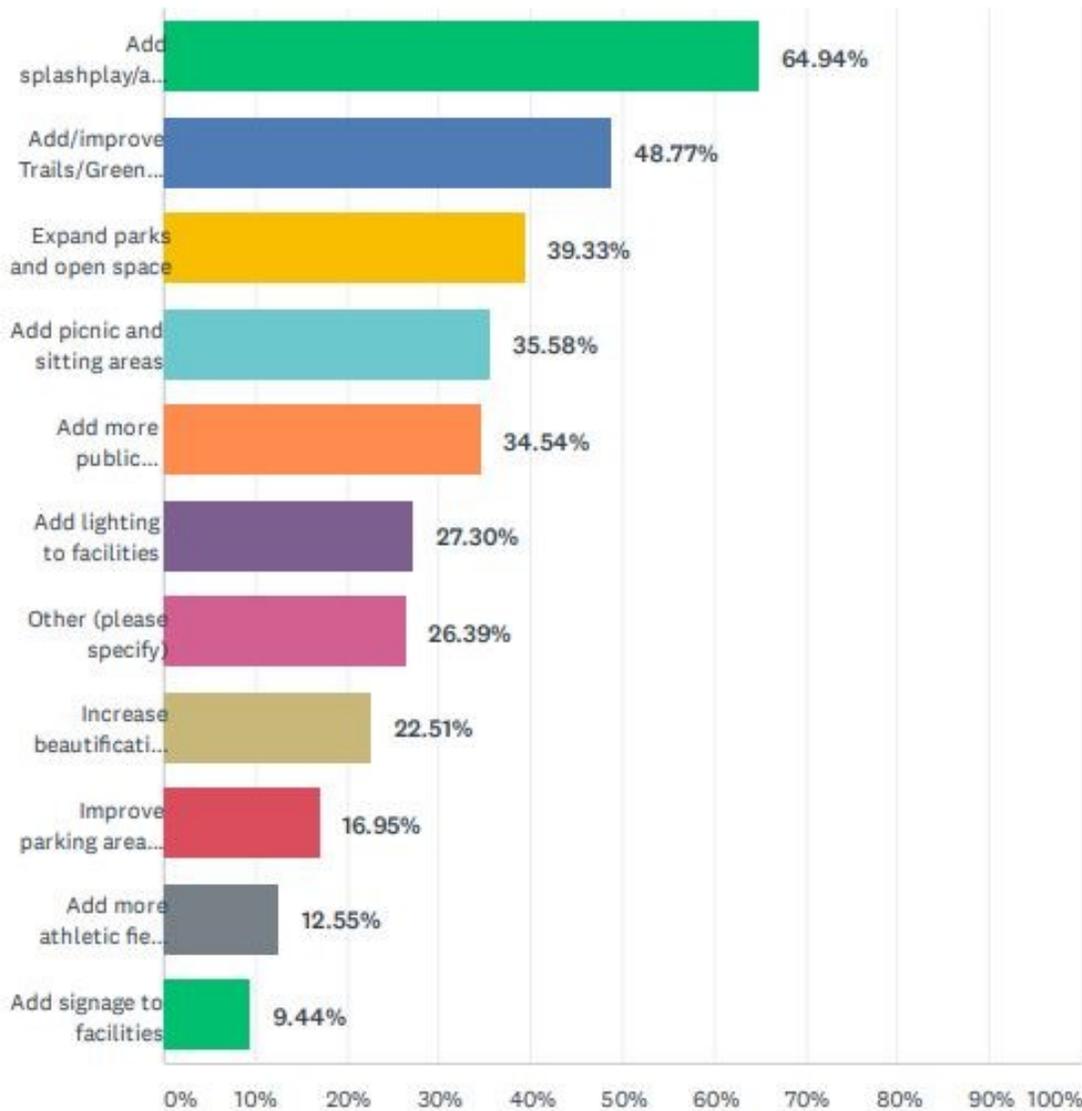
Answered: 832 Skipped: 120

	REGULARLY
Ashe County Park Playgrounds	18.66% 150
Family Central Ballfields	15.99% 127
Family Central Gym (any activities)	14.29% 114
Ashe County Park Nature Trails	10.15% 81
Ashe County Park Picnic Shelters	9.86% 79
Ashe County Park Fishing Pond	6.89% 55
Ashe County Park Basketball Court	6.73% 53
Ashe County Park Story Walk	6.29% 50
Ashe County Park All-Star Ball Field	6.10% 48
Family Central Fitness Center	5.04% 40
Ashe County Park Skate Park	4.54% 36
Ashe County Park Disc Golf Course	3.14% 25
Ashe County Park Tennis Courts	2.55% 20
Ashe County Park Sand Volleyball	1.66% 13



Q15 Check below improvements that could be made to EXISTING parks facilities:

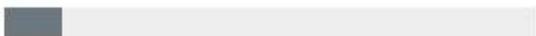
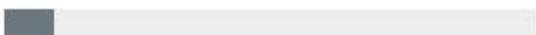
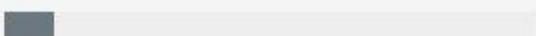
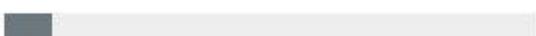
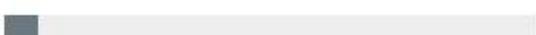
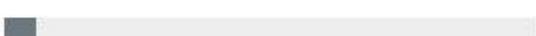
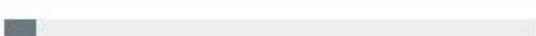
Answered: 773 Skipped: 179





ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Add splashplay/aquatic facilities	64.94%	502
Add/improve Trails/Greenways	48.77%	377
Expand parks and open space	39.33%	304
Add picnic and sitting areas	35.58%	275
Add more public restrooms	34.54%	267
Add lighting to facilities	27.30%	211
Other (please specify)	26.39%	204
Increase beautification in parks	22.51%	174
Improve parking areas in parks	16.95%	131
Add more athletic fields (type)	12.55%	97
Add signage to facilities	9.44%	73
Total Respondents: 773		

Q15 Other? Please specify. *Top 10 topics mentioned:*

▼ Add		10.78%	22
▼ parks		9.31%	19
▼ need		9.31%	19
▼ pool		8.82%	18
▼ facilities		6.37%	13
▼ dog park		5.88%	12
▼ county		5.88%	12
▼ area		5.88%	12
▼ kids		5.39%	11
▼ walking		4.90%	10



Q16 Please choose only five facilities that could be developed or improved in Ashe County and rank them in order of importance. (1 being your highest priority, 5 being your lowest) Please consider other members of your household as well.

	TOTAL RESPONDENTS
Indoor Swimming Pool	567
Greenway Trails	426
Jogging/Walking Trails	411
Fitness Facility, e.g. cardio/strength training	409
Special Aquatic features (Spray-ground)	391
Hiking Trails	389
Community Recreation Center	385
Bicycle Trails	375
Dog Park	359
Eco-Adventure Activities (Ziplines, Obstacle Course, etc.)	358
Multi-Sports Complex	341
Playgrounds	327
Amphitheater/ Performing Arts Stage	324
Teen Center	321
Shooting Range	310
Fishing	309



Q17 Please list below, any recreation programs or special events that you would like to see offered in Ashe County:

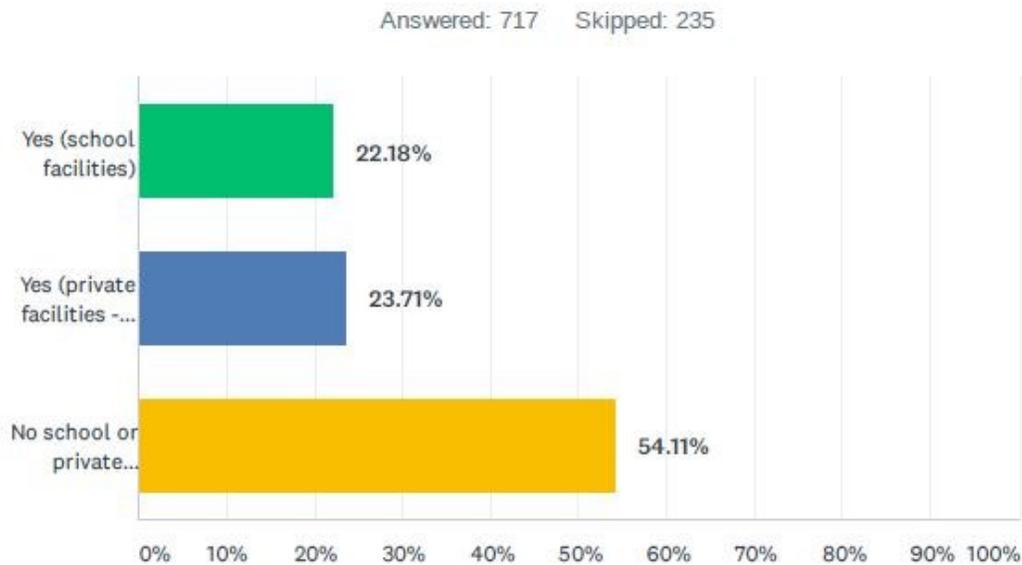
Answered: 343 Skipped: 609

Top 10 mentions:

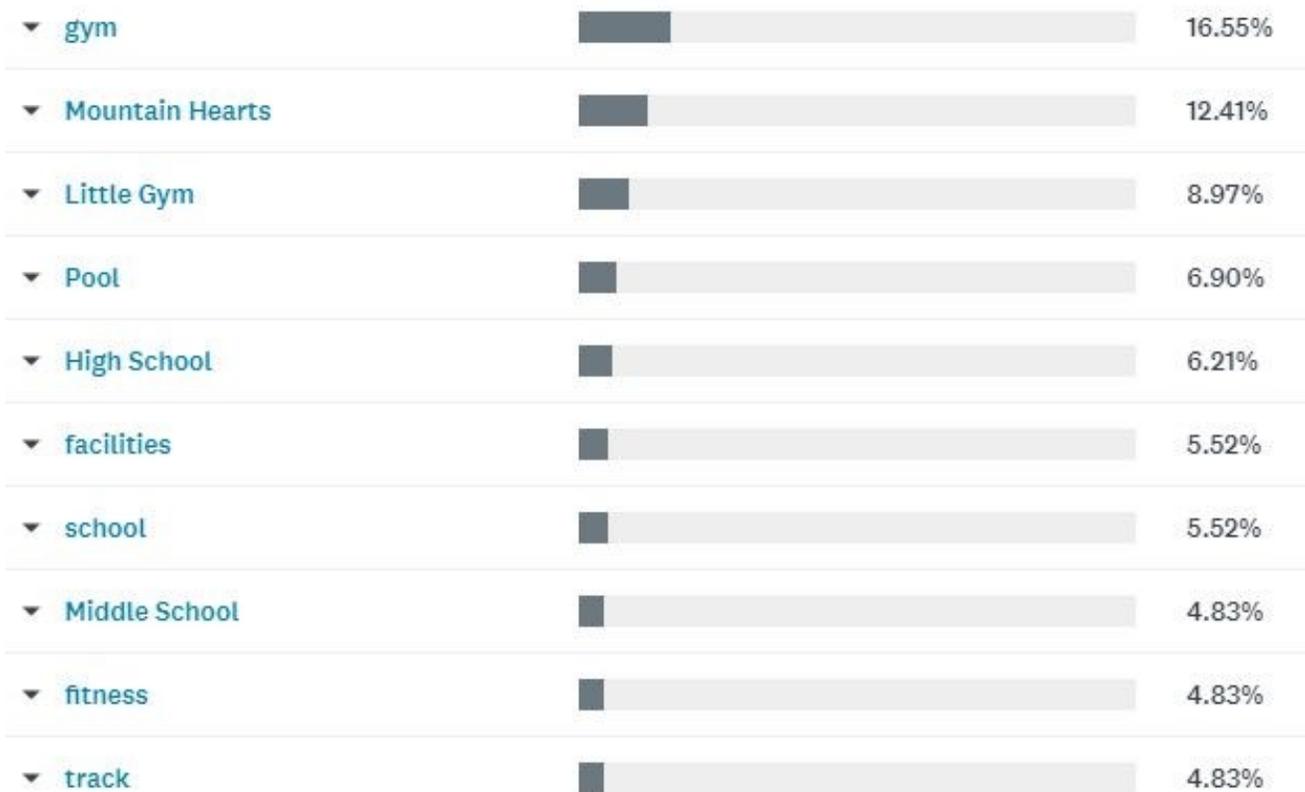
▼ kids		11.37%	39
▼ sports		9.91%	34
▼ pool		8.75%	30
▼ outdoor		7.58%	26
▼ county		7.29%	25
▼ programs		6.41%	22
▼ classes		6.41%	22
▼ area		6.41%	22
▼ Swimming		6.12%	21
▼ activities		5.83%	20



Q18 Do you or anyone in your household use school or private facilities for recreation or leisure activities?



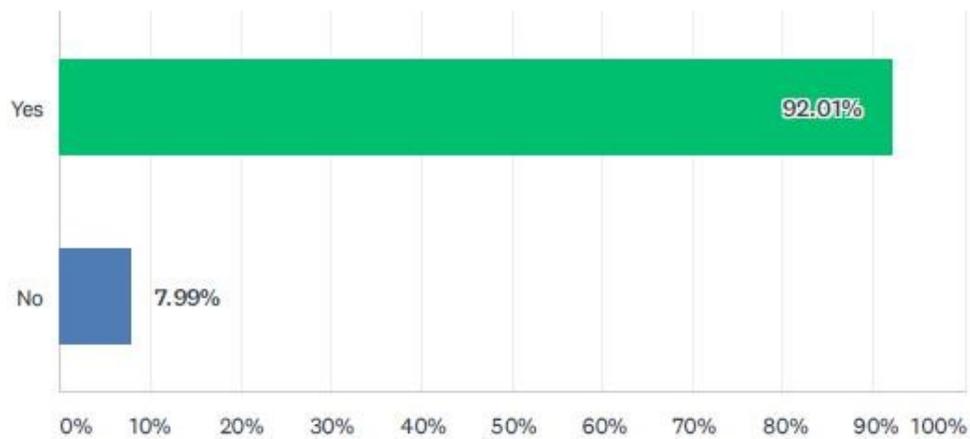
Top 10 Open-ended comments provided:





Q19 Would you support the development of Greenways/Trails that would connect to destination areas in the County or to other neighboring greenways?

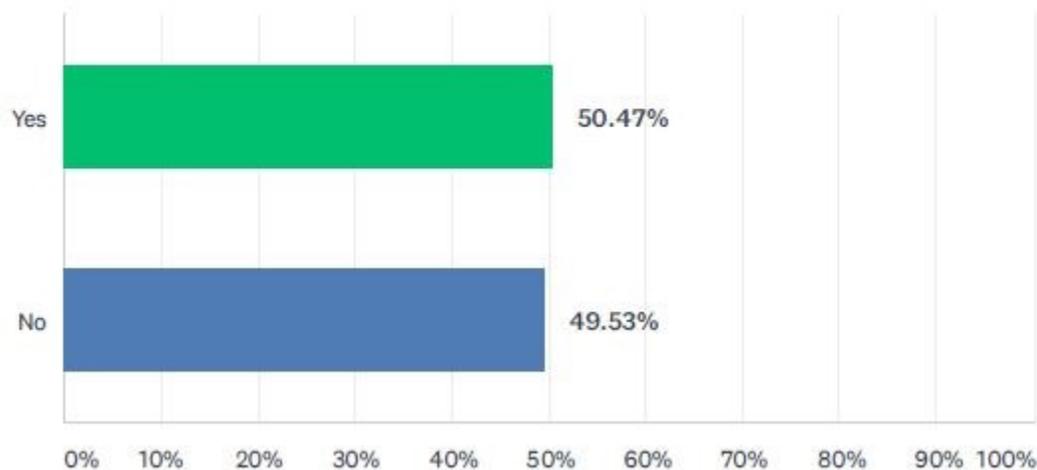
Answered: 738 Skipped: 214



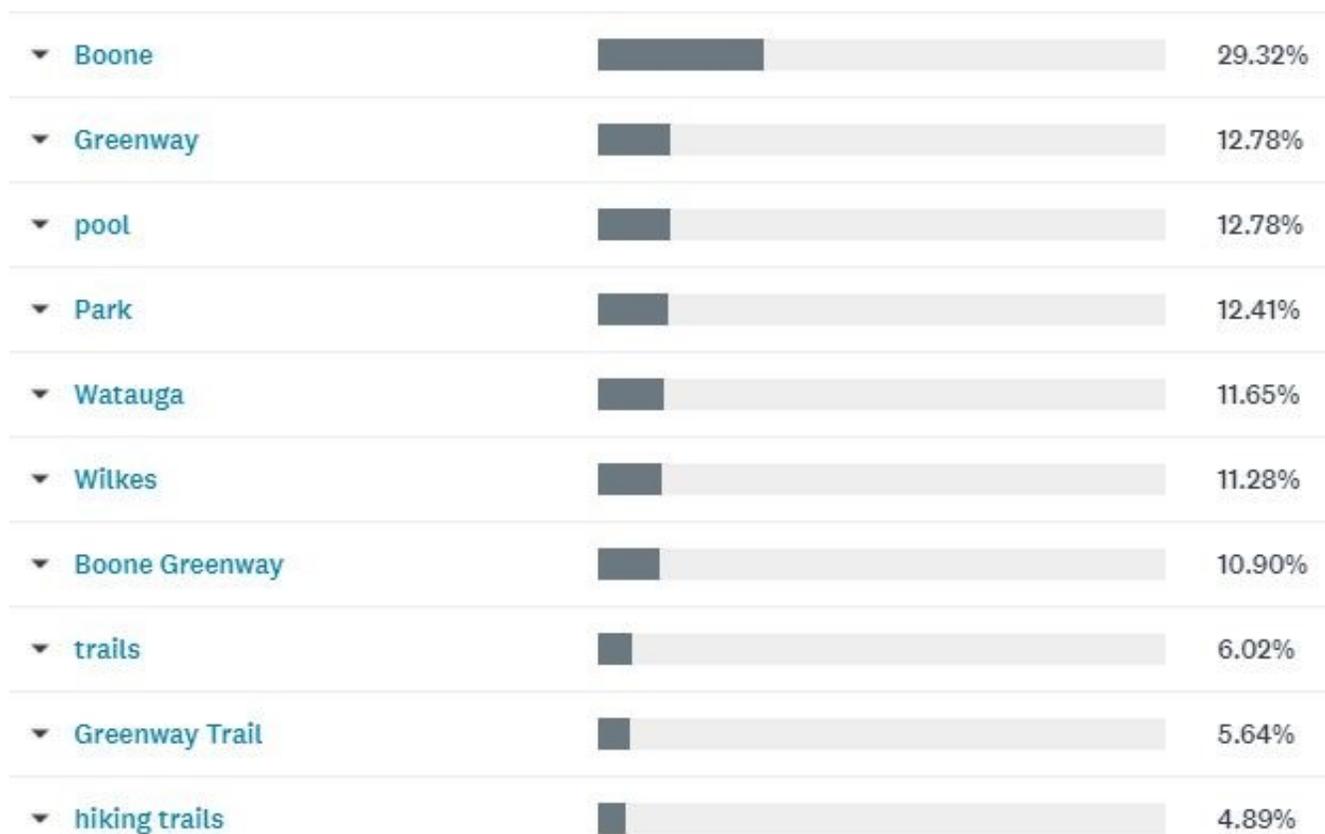


Q20 Do you travel out of the County to use a recreation facility?

Answered: 739 Skipped: 213



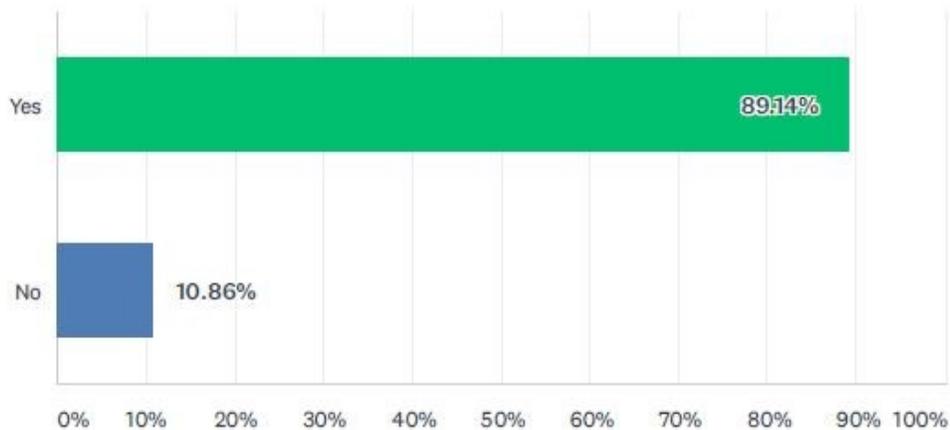
Top 10 Open-ended comments provided:





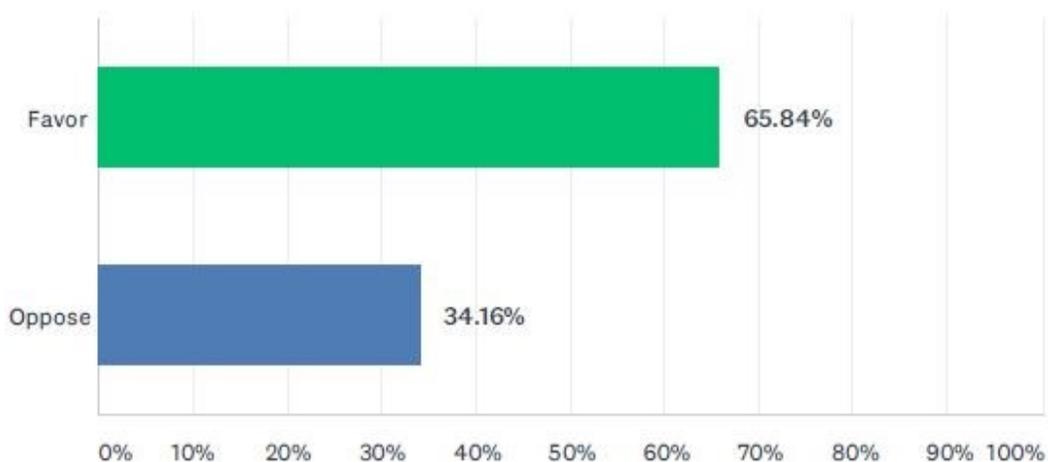
Q21 Would you be willing to pay a nominal fee to attend an event or use a special facility?

Answered: 746 Skipped: 206



Q22 Would you favor or oppose increasing taxes to expand recreation opportunities in the County?

Answered: 726 Skipped: 226





Q23 What, if any, sources of funding are you willing to support in order to make improvements, build new facilities, and create programs? Check all that apply.

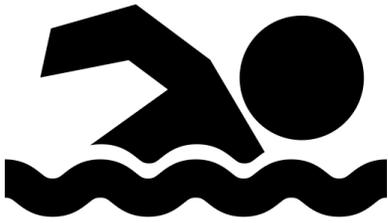
Answered: 703 Skipped: 249

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Taxes	49.22%	346
Project Specific Bond Referendums (example: Future recreational facility)	50.07%	352
Grants	80.09%	563
Fee-in-lieu of Contribution (example: Land from new subdivision)	22.33%	157
Partnerships (schools, state or local agencies)	60.88%	428
Contributions	62.30%	438
Local Gifts (Donations)	67.43%	474
User/Registration Fees (Program fees)	67.00%	471
Special/General Purpose Foundations (example parks and recreation foundation)	53.91%	379
Total Respondents: 703		

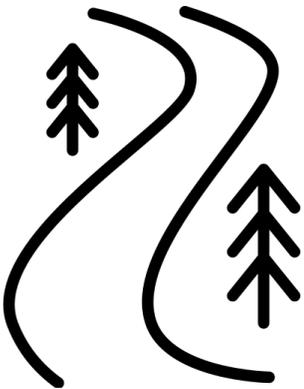


Survey Conclusions

An analysis of the survey response data and open-ended comments provided by survey participants indicate the desires and preferences of users of the Ashe County Parks and Recreation facilities and programs. This analysis reveals that a broad range of participants from all over the County have a positive opinion of the existing county recreation facilities and staff. However, there is a clear desire for water-based recreation (swimming pool / splash pad) and more trails and greenways. The majority of survey participants would like to see the existing county recreation system expanded including additional open spaces. The survey results show a need for a four season, indoor facility with varied programming offerings, additional picnicking, play areas, and more restrooms at existing facilities.



WATER-BASED RECREATION



TRAILS AND GREENWAYS



INDOOR FITNESS FACILITY



PASSIVE RECREATION

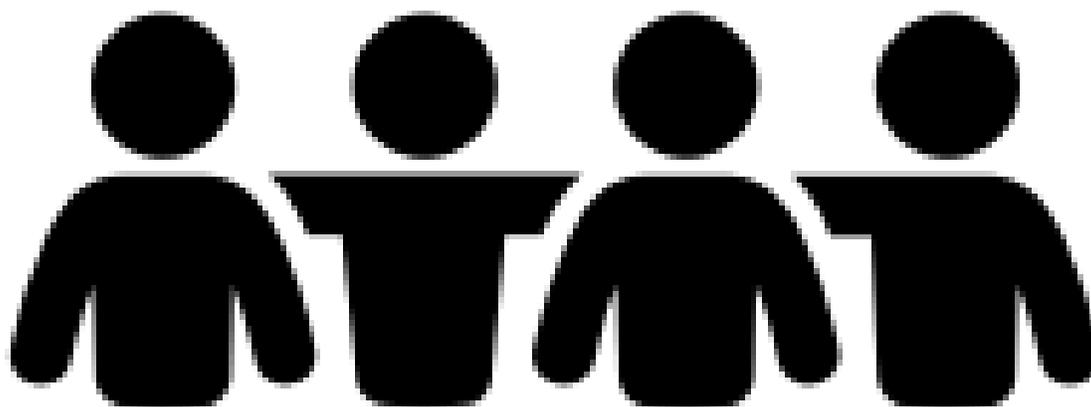


Focus Group Interviews

Open discussion and question / answer sessions were held with multiple County residents on three separate occasions. These three meetings occurred virtually using Microsoft Teams online meeting software. The individuals selected were from a broad range of stakeholders from general residents to members of the Chamber of Commerce, Recreation Advisory Board, and other stakeholder groups. (See Appendix D for focus group notes.)

The first focus group meeting occurred on July 14th 2021 from 2:30pm-3:30pm. Eight participants engaged in open dialog. The major topics of interest included the fact that Ashe County has great natural resources that attract tourists and those resources should be capitalized on. Overall, there was a feeling that the recreation department was doing a good job and had a good relationship with other recreation providers such as the State of North Carolina and Ashe County Schools. This group felt that additional County staff was needed to be able to grow programming opportunities for users. There was a desire from the group to see a large recreation center developed somewhere in the County. Fishing and trails were noted as very important activities for locals as were fitness and disc golf.

The second meeting was held on July 14th from 4:00pm-5:00pm. Seven participants had an open-ended discussion on the topic of recreation in Ashe County. The major topics of this discussion included the local Chamber of Commerce's role in attracting and marketing Ashe County's natural setting and seasonal events., the great need for four season recreation via indoor amenities, and the residents desire for an indoor pool, splash pad, fitness center, and leasable meeting space in the County. There was a desire to see more development to bring travel ball tournaments to the County as well as more activities for all age groups via a broader offering of recreation programming. The overall feeling was positive and existing staff and facilities were applauded.





The third and final focus group meeting was arranged to allow those that were unable to participate in the previously scheduled meetings to have another chance to share their ideas and concerns regarding recreation in Ashe County. This meeting was held on July 15th from 2:30pm-3:30pm. Six people were part of this open ended conversation. The main topics mentioned included how critical the Family Central facility was to County residents and the need for an expanded indoor facility to provide more space for recreation programs, classes, fitness, gym based activities, and four season swimming opportunities. The need for a dog park and more activities and communication to non-child households about recreation programming opportunities was also a topic of discussion. Performing arts and the need for a more technologically appropriate venue with modern audio / visual infrastructure was listed as critical to supporting live performance entertainment and tourism.





STATE AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENTS

Surveys that were designed to determine the demand for outdoor recreation and facilities have been conducted on both the federal and state levels by private, non-profit, and governmental agencies. This information is important as it sets a precedent for what popular activities may be expected by typical park users. Also, this information may highlight the difference between local and national trends. Significant facts have evolved from these surveys, as follows:

The top ten most popular outdoor recreational activities nationwide are:

1. Running / jogging
2. Hiking
3. Road biking
4. Freshwater fishing
5. Car camping
6. Wildlife viewing
7. RV camping
8. Hunting
9. Saltwater fishing
10. Birdwatching

The most rapidly growing outdoor activities nationwide are:

1. Stand-up paddling
2. Cross country skiing
3. BMX bicycling
4. Adventure racing
5. Boardsailing / windsurfing
6. Kayak fishing
7. Trail running / triathlon
8. Hiking

The top ten most popular outdoor activities in North Carolina are:

1. Visiting a beach or lake
2. Walking for pleasure or exercise
3. Visiting parks or historical sites
4. Hiking trails
5. Freshwater fishing
6. Viewing scenery
7. Fishing from a boat
8. Nature viewing
9. Swimming, all types
10. Gardening

Local governments (cities, towns, and counties) provide 39% of the public recreational opportunities in the United States. However, due to their proximity to the population density they provide key access to public recreational opportunities.

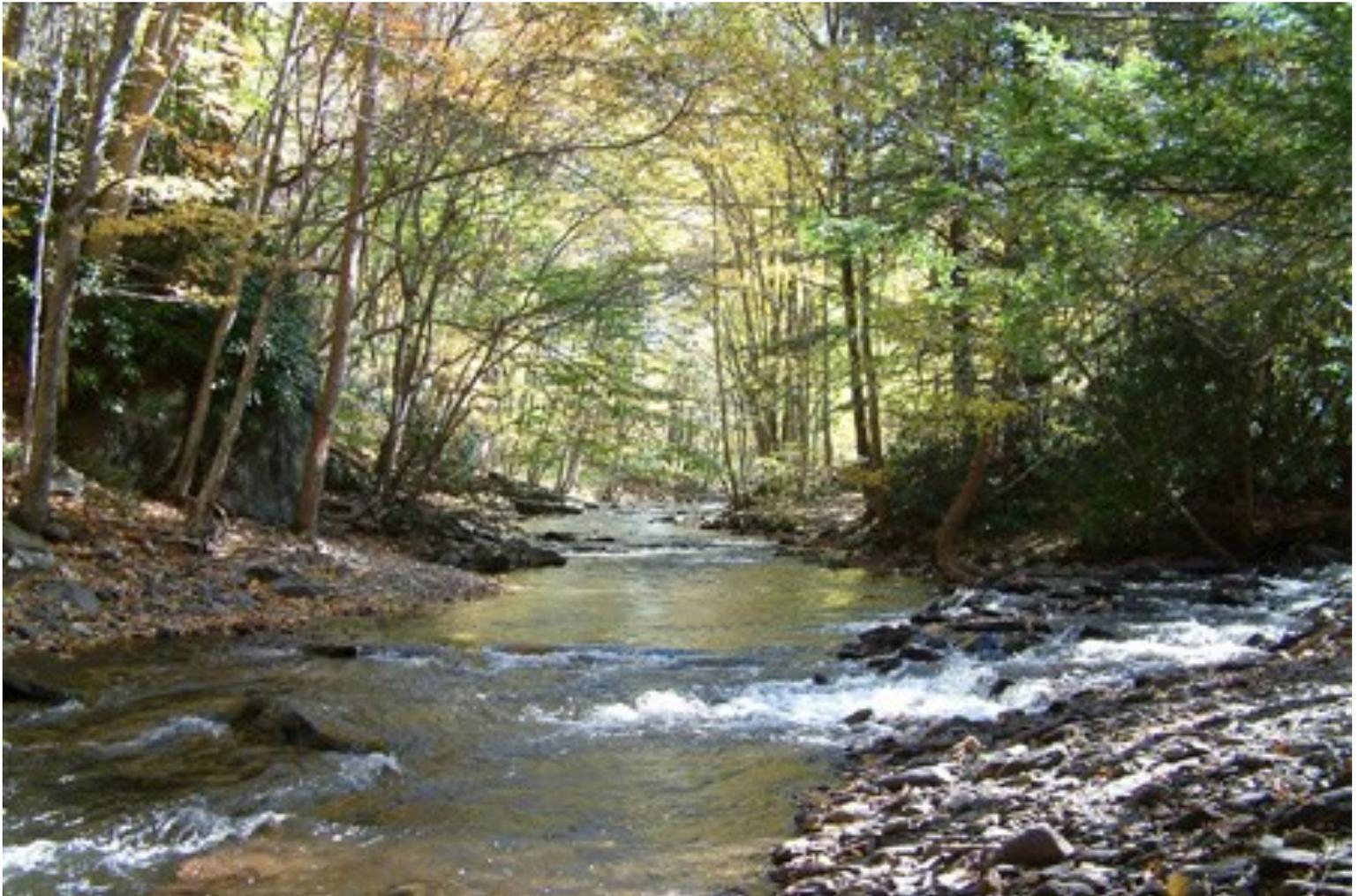


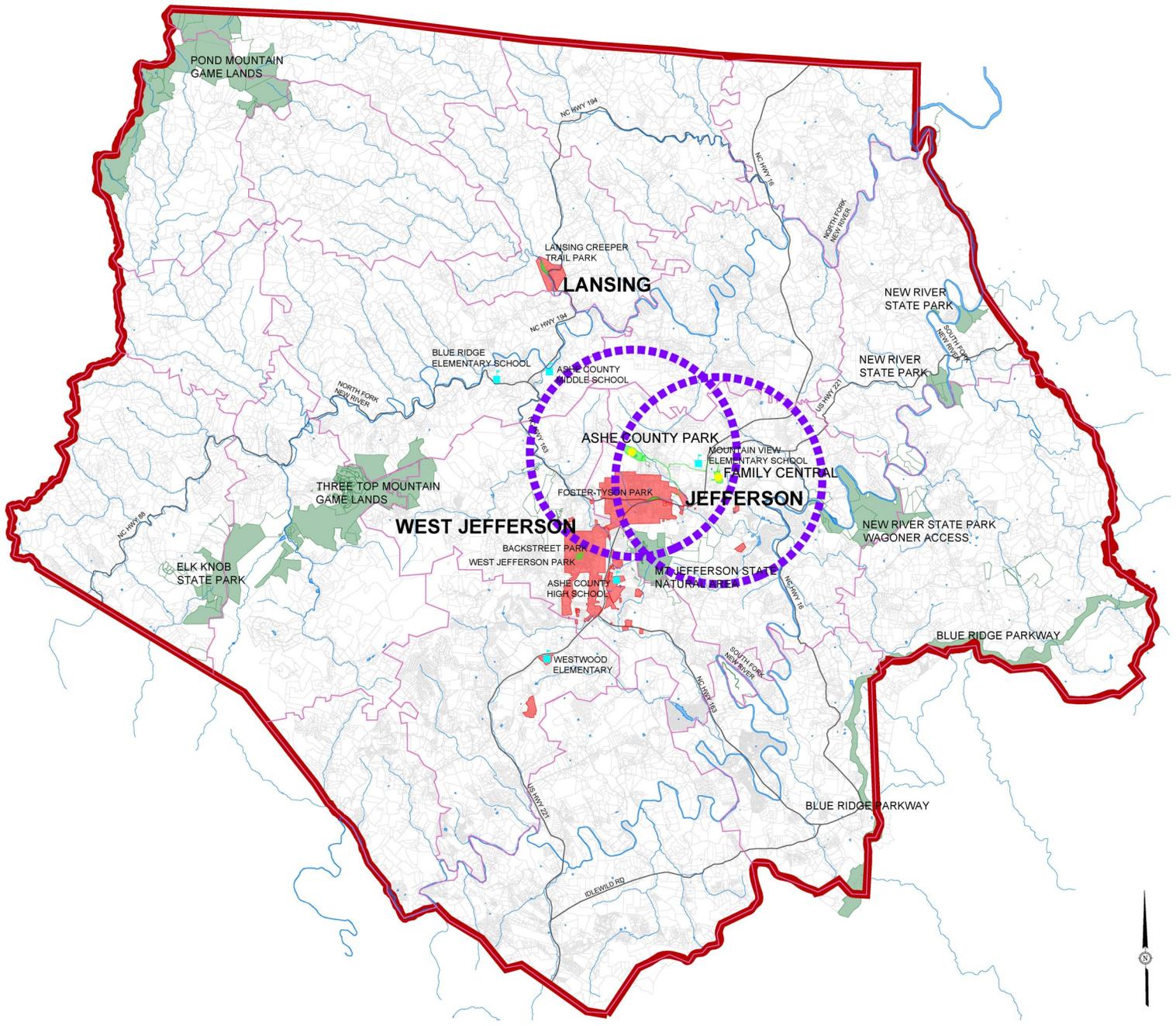
EVALUATION OF PARK LAND NEEDS

To better understand what recreation resources a community has and how accessible those facilities and programs may be to the general population, this study looked at typical service areas. Map 3.1 illustrates what portions of the community lie within or near the typical recreation service areas. The outcome of this exercise reveals that portions of the community live far enough from recreational facilities that they cannot easily access them. Populations typically affected include children and seniors that do not drive. Both user groups generally have greater leisure time and can directly benefit from access to parks and recreation facilities.

Solutions to improving recreation in Ashe County includes providing facilities and amenities that residents desire and need. It also considers where such facilities and amenities should be located. Existing recreation service areas illustrated indicate that the areas outside of the core of municipalities have the least access to parks. Planning for future parks and recreation system expansion should consider developing facilities outside of the County's core. As new residential and large commercial developments are planned the County should take an active role in working with developers on what types of recreation amenities should be provided per County's planning department requirements.

Ashe County's Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan considers community workshops, recreation survey findings, projected demand, service area analysis, and County staff input as the primary guides in prescribing the current and future recommendations for Ashe County parks and recreation development.





LEGEND

TYPICAL SERVICE AREAS

- County Boundaries
- Municipal Boundaries
- Township Boundaries
- Parcel Lines
- Water Body/Creek
- Existing Ashe County Park
- Existing Municipal Park
- Existing Public Schools
- Existing National/State Recreation

- 2.5 Mile
(Existing District Park)

Map 3.1 Ashe County existing service area (See Appendix A for 11"x17")





When comparing a park system to national standards, one method is to examine the total acreage of the park system. Park type acreage standards based on NRPA Park land guidelines (in acres) for the total service population of Ashe County are provided in Tables 3.1 and 3.2. Population figures in this analysis, estimated at 26,863, include the estimated population of residents in the County as of 2021. The acreage requirement is based on the population ratio method (acres of park land per population of 1,000) pre-established for each classification of park.



2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review Key Findings

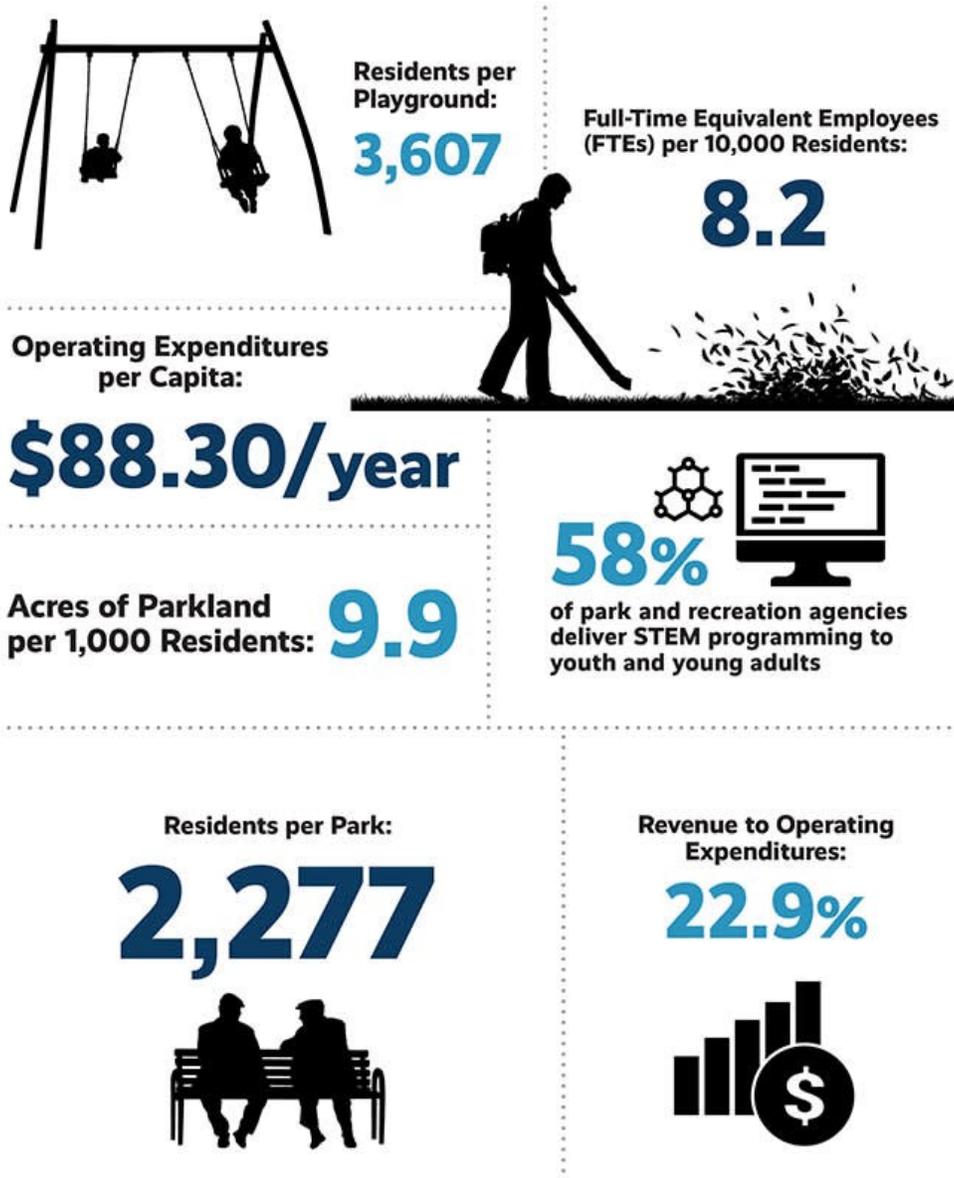




Table 3.1 Ashe County existing park acreage by classification

TYPE OF PARK	Existing Ashe County Acreage	Recommended for 2021 Population 26,863	Recommended for 2031 Population 30,294*
REGIONAL PARK (NPS and NC) 1,000 acres or 10 acres / 1,000 persons	N/A	N/A	N/A
DISTRICT PARK 200 acres or 5 acres / 1,500 persons	242 acres	90 acres	101 acres
COMMUNITY PARK 2.5 acres / 4,000 persons	0 acres	17 acres	19 acres
NEIGHBORHOOD PARK 2 acres / 4,000 persons	0 acres	13 acres	15 acres
MINI PARK 0.5 acres / 4,000 persons	0 Acre	3 acres	4 acres

Table 3.2 Ashe County existing park acreage

ASHE COUNTY EXISTING PARKS	
Ashe County Park (District)	214 acres
Family Central (District)	28 acres
ASHE COUNTY PARK ACREAGE	242 acres

Presently, Ashe County’s recreational facilities serve the central portion of the County. This part of the County is where the two largest towns are located. These facilities are a mix of active and passive recreation. Regional park resources are provided by state systems that are within the County.

Based on the information contained in Table 3.1, Ashe County exceeds the standard guidelines for the park acreage needs in the district park category. While the acreage for community, neighborhood and mini parks did not meet the typical guidelines (see table 3.1) the County does provide for ample recreational open space to meet the majority of residents needs. Due to the rural nature of the County and the amenities provided by local municipalities and state land managers operating in the County, the acreage listed above for the community, neighborhood, and mini parks is not critical for immediate implementation.

While County owned facilities are centrally located and not geographically spread out, this pattern is similar to where the majority of residential development is. The community workshops and the recreation survey will be used as the primary guides in prescribing the specific recommendations for Ashe County Parks and Recreation Development, for both now and for the future.



EVALUATION OF FACILITY NEEDS

Recreation standards were established based upon information gathered from NRPA, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ), and historical evidence from past projects. Recommendations based upon these standards have been compiled in Table 3.3 in order to assess the current and projected future (up to 10 years) facility needs for recreation facilities in Ashe County. The information does not consider community input, which is the primary guide for the development of the master plan.

Based on the information contained in Table 3.3, Ashe County meets the recommended standard guidelines for many of the typical recreational facilities for their permanent population. Due to the specific needs within the County, the facilities listed above may not be necessary for implementation. While some facilities show deficiencies, it is important to note that County resident’s recreational needs are also being provided for by local municipalities, state public lands, and other private recreational facilities as well as through shared use agreements with County schools. The community workshops and the recreation survey will be used as the primary guides in prescribing the specific needs for Ashe County Parks and Recreation development, both now and for the future.

2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review facilities provided per population by typical parks and recreation departments across the nation

FIGURE 3: OUTDOOR PARK AND RECREATION FACILITIES – POPULATION PER FACILITY (BY PREVALENCE AND POPULATION PER FACILITY)

Type of Facilities	Percent of Agencies	Median Number of Residents per Facility					
		Population of Jurisdiction					
		All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Playgrounds	94.4%	3,607	2,132	2,961	3,672	4,804	8,271
Basketball courts	87.4	7,187	4,051	7,000	8,790	8,477	11,632
Tennis courts (outdoor only)	81.4	5,089	2,748	4,819	5,726	5,818	9,997
Diamond fields: baseball – youth	78.0	6,763	3,000	5,099	7,560	12,914	23,619
Rectangular fields: multipurpose	66.4	8,750	3,895	7,400	11,212	10,792	22,538
Diamond fields: softball – adult	65.5	13,510	5,663	11,184	16,250	28,081	35,875
Dog parks	64.9	46,000	11,148	27,528	58,926	76,610	129,506
Diamond fields: softball – youth	59.3	11,287	5,447	9,891	11,884	26,073	43,670
Swimming pools (outdoor only)	51.5	37,569	8,591	25,402	43,100	67,004	93,534
Diamond fields: baseball – adult	51.3	20,159	7,989	20,522	22,366	38,899	48,657
Rectangular fields: soccer – youth	48.9	7,192	3,433	5,833	8,291	12,646	32,649
Community gardens	48.3	31,175	9,001	25,480	51,197	72,238	96,322
Tot lots	45.1	11,000	6,194	8,974	13,701	19,122	22,163
Multiuse courts: basketball, volleyball	44.6	20,000	6,200	18,850	24,644	36,979	70,287
Rectangular fields: soccer – adult	43.6	12,943	7,541	11,161	12,800	20,000	30,092
Skate parks	39.3	49,750	11,000	31,248	66,672	109,798	247,664
Rectangular fields: football	36.5	25,977	7,917	16,584	31,972	51,719	78,656
Multipurpose synthetic fields	21.0	38,328	13,200	22,041	40,305	53,550	112,707
Ice rinks (outdoor only)	17.9	16,664	10,000	13,049	29,386	112,000	472,688
Rectangular fields: cricket	12.1	128,393	ISD*	29,404	62,958	110,936	370,119
Rectangular fields: lacrosse	11.2	29,000	7,051	13,333	33,437	63,250	174,861
Overlay fields	8.7	15,385	4,385	8,935	10,724	42,139	87,438
Rectangular fields: field hockey	3.5	23,270	ISD*	15,007	ISD*	110,558	ISD*

*ISD = Insufficient Data



Table 3.3 Ashe County existing amenities and recommendations

Facility	Recommended Standards	Existing Facilities	2021 Recommended per Population	2031 Recommended per Population
Ashe County facilities			Population: 26,863	Projected Population: 30,294
Adult Baseball / Softball	1 / 12,000	5	2	3
Youth Baseball / Softball	1 / 10,000	2	2	3
Multipurpose Field	1 / 20,000	2	1	2
Basketball	1 / 10,000	1	2	3
Tennis	1 / 10,000	2	2	3
Volleyball	1 / 20,000	1	1	2
Pickleball	1 / 8,000	3	3	4
Horseshoes / Cornhole	1 / 20,000	0	1	2
Shuffleboard	1 / 20,000	0	1	2
Picnic Shelter	1 / 7,500	3	4	4
Benches / Picnic Tables	1 / 7,500	5	4	4
Playground	1 / 7,500	4	4	4
Walking / Running Trails	0.25 mi. / 1,000	1.25 mi.	6.75 mi.	7.5 mi.
Equestrian	0.5 mi. / 2,000	0 mi.	6.75 mi.	7.5 mi.
Community Center	1 / 30,000	1	1	1
Amphitheater	1 / 65,000	0	1	1
Swimming Pool - Outdoor	1 / 65,000	0	1	1
Disc Golf Course	1 / 40,000	1	1	1
Skate Park	1 / 80,000	1	1	1

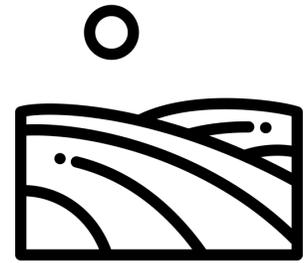
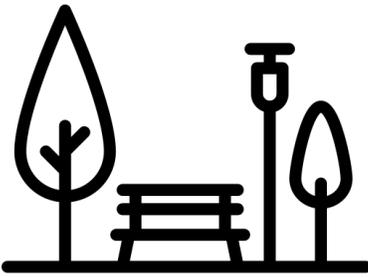


EVALUATION OF STAFFING NEEDS

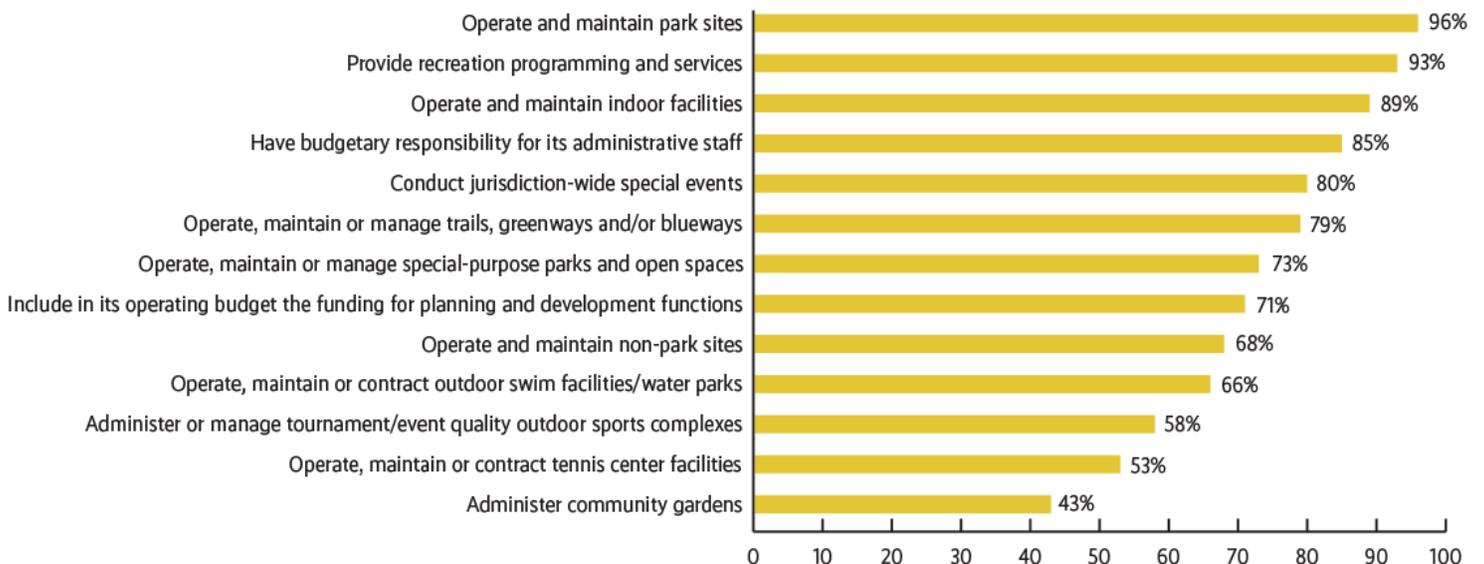


The people that make up a parks and recreation department are what makes up a successful agency. Everyone from the parks and recreation director to athletic specialists to maintenance staff work together to provide quality offerings to the community and visitors to the area.

Ashe County has seven full time employees that work to create the quality of life environment for users of the parks system. Based on the 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review the County is slightly lower than the average Full Time Staff Equivalent (FTE) for agencies in communities with populations between 20,000 and 49,999. Since Ashe County’s estimated population is 26,863, the current staffing levels are on par with typical agencies serving similar population sizes.



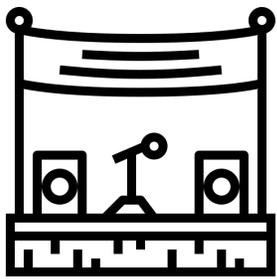
**FIGURE 8: KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**





9.6 FTE

Average number of Full Time Staff Equivalent per NRPA staffing guidelines based on current population



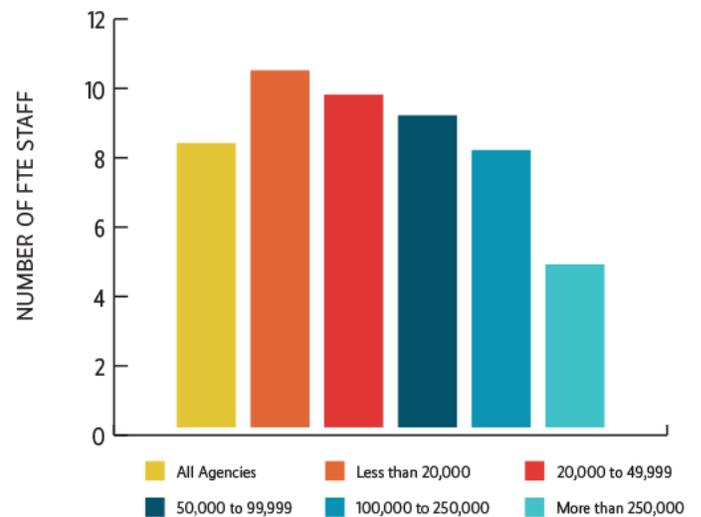
Ashe County Parks and Recreation Staffing

- Parks and Recreation Director (1)
- Assistant Director (1)
- Finance and Sports Specialist (1)
- Park Manager (1)
- Athletic Director (1)
- Athletic Specialist (1)
- Park Maintenance (1)

Please see page 94 for recommended staffing levels.

2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review

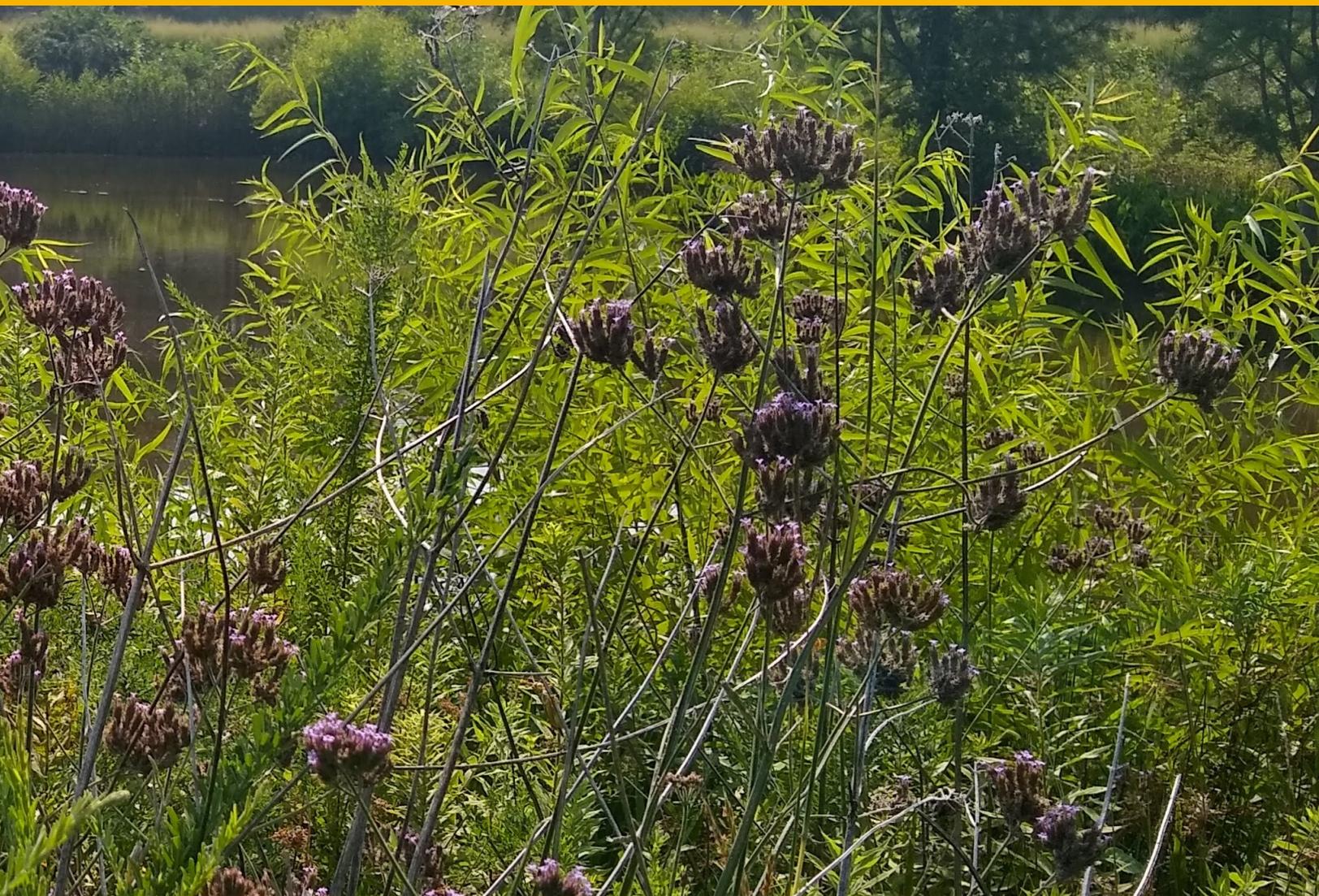
FIGURE 11: PARK AND RECREATION FTEs PER 10,000 RESIDENTS (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Median	8.2	10.3	9.6	9	8	4.7
Lower Quartile	4.5	6.4	5.3	5.1	3.3	2.3
Upper Quartile	14.9	22.6	17.8	15.8	13.4	8.2

GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS







GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the needs and desires of the County and the community members is essential before making recommendations to the existing park system and expansion possibilities. The community workshops, County staff discussions, and the recreation survey were integral in helping identify the primary interests and concerns of County residents.

As identified in the inventory portion of this report, there are two existing recreational facilities owned and operated by Ashe County. These facilities currently offer a mix of active and passive recreation opportunities.

This master plan serves as a map for the future development of existing recreation facilities for Ashe County. The plan incorporates recommendations to accomplish the objectives set forth by the County Board of Commissioners, the steering committee, and community members.







GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

General recommendations are designed to provide guidance for the operations, goals, administration, and growth of Ashe County. Many of these recommendations depend upon successful collaboration between the County and other County offices, such as the planning department.

Recommendation #1: Facility and Program Accessibility

Every parks and recreation facility Ashe County operates should respect and provide the needs of the disabled population through design and programming. All new facilities should be designed to meet current ADA requirements. Currently, the County meets compliance with these regulations at some of the existing facilities; however, there are areas within the existing parks that need to be updated to provide accessible access. As new facilities are acquired or developed, priority should be given to the continual upgrading of existing facilities that, perhaps, become non-compliant.

Recommendation #2: Design and Daily Maintenance

The facilities owned and operated by Ashe County should appeal to residents of the County and visitors to the area. Priority should be given to improving the design of facilities so that they are architecturally, functionally, and ecologically progressive. Daily maintenance practices should be implemented to improve the cleanliness and longevity of all facilities.



Master planning should always be completed for park improvements or new facilities prior to final budgeting and / or design; thereby, making the phasing / development more transitional and of higher quality. Design (and redesign) of all facilities should embrace ecologically responsible elements and methods such as the use of native plants for landscaping, the incorporation of wildlife habitats, the use of permeable surfaces to reduce stormwater runoff, where possible, and “green” building practices for structures.

Recommendation #3: Walkable Communities

Ashe County should promote land uses and site designs that make walking and bicycling convenient and enjoyable. They should also encourage the inclusion of public greenways or trails in private developments and the establishment of connectivity to and / or between both current and future public schools, parks, and other public destinations.

Recommendation #4: 10-Minute Walk Movement

NRPA, the Trust for Public Land (TPL), and the Urban Land Institute (ULI) have partnered together to promote safe, equitable park access for US citizens. The goal is to provide 100% of people access to a quality park or green space within a 10 minute walk of their homes by 2050. Ashe County should encourage municipalities within the County to pledge their support to the 10 Minute Walk Mission. For more information visit 10minutewalk.org.





Recommendation #5: Greenways / Multi-Use Trails

Based on state and national studies, walking and biking are highly desired activities, which are increasing by bounds. North Carolina's 2020-2025 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) found that 67% of survey participants reported that linear parks are the most needed facility within their park systems. The SCORP also found that 61% of respondents viewed walking for pleasure to be a common outdoor recreational activity.

Ashe County should encourage the coordination and planning for future utility easements with greenway facilities. The easements should be established to allow for the inclusion of recreation facilities where possible. Where new development occurs, the County should work with the developer to provide rights-of-way or easements for proposed and future greenway facilities.

Recommendation #6: Greenway Funding

Ashe County should consider including language in a development ordinance for fee in-lieu of sidewalk to fund greenway land acquisition and construction where the need for pedestrian connections cannot rely on the timing of private property development.

Recommendation #7: Bicycle Facilities

Given the high cost of fuel for vehicular transportation, air quality concerns, and the need to increase the health and fitness of the population, a planned network of bike trails, bike lanes, and shared roadways should be developed to support alternative transportation to recreation facilities and travel within Ashe County. Future roadway construction within the County should include provisions to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle travel. This network should connect both existing, as well as future park facilities and greenways. In addition, bike racks (sheltered at schools and other potential high-use areas) should be installed at all publicly owned facilities within the County. The County should work with North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) to ensure that bicycle and pedestrian facilities are provided as much as possible to promote alternative modes of transportation.



Recommendation #8: Entrance and Wayfinding Signage

To provide uniformity throughout the park system Ashe County should consider providing signage that is uniform and consistent to promote parks and recreation facilities. Entrance signage is the face of parks and therefore the face of the County's Parks and Recreation. To provide visitors with ease of navigation throughout the park system wayfinding signage should also be installed to elevate the parks and provide consistency throughout the parks system.

Recommendation #9: Interpretative Signage

Ashe County should consider placing signage that would identify any historic and natural landmarks along pedestrian corridors. This type of signage would not only enhance the pedestrian experience but also provide educational and cultural information to greenway users.

Recommendation #10: Intergovernmental Cooperation

Ashe County should seek to coordinate planning efforts with the Ashe County School System, local municipalities, the County planning department, and state park systems to provide greenway and park facilities. Representatives of the County and of these agencies should meet periodically to discuss



development and recreation projects that are planned or are underway within the area. The purpose of these meetings is to discuss upcoming project opportunities and development trends in demographics and growth, newly identified citizen needs in recreation and open space, and recreation master plan updates for local municipalities and adjacent counties. This will also ensure that redundancy in services is prevented and that all opportunities for partnerships and connectivity are being utilized.

Recommendation #11: Developers

The County should require new developments in Ashe County to incorporate open space into their development plans. The inclusion of public greenways, trails, and bike lanes in private developments should also be encouraged. If no suitable land for park or greenway development is available, the County should consider allowing developers to pay into a fee-in-lieu of parkland dedication.

Recommendation #12: Partnership Agreement

It is recommended that the County staff meet with existing and potential partners, such as local hospitals, not for profit organizations, local churches, and athletic associations, to determine needs and possible partnership opportunities. The County should begin this process by developing an approach to each potential partner to establish an understanding of each entity's needs and ultimately result in a partnership agreement. The process will require periodic progress meetings with each partner to facilitate the partnerships goals and objectives. This may entail presentations to the partner's board or committee.

Recommendation #13: Educational and Stewardship Programming

Ashe County should develop a consistent environmental education program and interpretative facilities at park locations and along future greenway corridors as opportunities arise for future park development. These programs should include stewardship and community volunteer programs geared to the management of natural areas and wildlife habitats.

Recommendation #14: Green Building

It is recommended that the County implement green building components into the existing and future parks facilities. Green building techniques consist of building materials and construction practices which reduce environmental impacts (greenhouse gases, water pollution, and air pollution) and promote energy efficient building materials and methods. These efforts will improve environmental stewardship for park facilities and also educate park users.

Recommendation #15: Contiguous Property Acquisition

When property that is contiguous to existing parks becomes available, all reasonable efforts should be made to acquire the property. Large acreage parks offer recreation amenities that can only be achieved on large sites. The acquisition of contiguous property next to County parks should be of high priority to Ashe County. Efforts should be made immediately to seek first option on all contiguous properties. At the time these options are sought, other possibilities should be presented to the property owner as well. Some property owners may be receptive to conservation easements while retaining the title to the property. Conservation easements will allow the County the opportunity to use properties for recreation while providing the immediate benefits of preservation. Numerous grant sources can be used for land acquisition. Extreme care should be exercised in choosing the correct process(es) and timing for acquisition to meet the full potential afforded by grants.





Recommendation #16: Acceptance of Fee Simple Land Donation

If land is offered to Ashe County as donation by fee simple title with no restrictions the property should be surveyed for natural heritage significance and relationship to existing plans and parks. If the land contains no environmental hazards, restrictive covenants, or restrictive easements it can be useful and beneficial for the County to assume ownership. Not all donated land has to be developed into a park to be useful. Any land donation to the County serves a great public need even if it is banked for the future because the development and public needs of the distant future (over 50 years) is unknown. If donated property were properly managed, the revenue and future significance of the property would far exceed its current contribution to the tax base. If the County chooses not to accept land donation of a particular property, efforts should be made to assist the property owner with contacting an agency that accepts land donations or conservation easements. Land donations (which the County has no interest in owning) could be donated to the local parks foundation.

Recommendation #17: Natural and Cultural Heritage Inventory

Ashe County should refer to the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program's Natural Area Inventory of Ashe County North Carolina. The intent of this study is to identify areas deemed to be significant natural resources, which should be evaluated for consideration of preservation and future use as recreational resources.

Recommendation #18: Technology Access

As the culture continues to move towards information accessibility, providing access to wi-fi connectivity within the parks is an amenity that can elevate the usership of park facilities. Ashe County should identify the locations within their park facilities to install the necessary equipment that will provide users the ability to access wi-fi connectivity.



Recommendation #19: Programs and Classes

To expand recreation programming, the County should continue to provide recreation classes and programs in appropriate County parks and facilities. The County should assess the need to contract future programming offerings out to concessionaires. This could extend the programs offered by non-profits and private recreation providers into future county-owned facilities, which may be more accessible to residents who are not currently served. It also would strive to increase programming options by starting new contract programs and activities in the following service areas: health and fitness, swim safety classes, environmental education, nature-based outdoor recreation, non-sports interest classes and fine / cultural arts programs.



Recommendation #20: Develop a Parks & Recreation Marketing Plan

To enhance public awareness of County Parks & Recreation facilities and programs, Ashe County should develop a strategic marketing plan that establishes a consistent brand image for the department, establishes marketing goals and purpose of the effort as well as defines target markets and segments that aim to serve the different communities and demographic segments of Ashe County. Existing and new resident's, and visitor's needs should be considered. Both physical and digital communication should be considered and match in information shared and visual quality.



ASHE COUNTY FACILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ashe County Park

Description:

Ashe County Park is a beautiful park that provides visitors access to 214 acres of open space, woodland, a small lake, and various active recreational amenities. As people move through the park they will be greeted with an open view of what the park has to offer. With the recent expansion of approximately 149 acres on the southern side of the park, an expanse of natural area for hiking trails help to make this flagship park a very desirable destination for residents and visitors alike. Future development of this area should respect the natural beauty and passive recreational opportunities county residents desire.

Challenges and Issues:

- Limited ADA pedestrian access between amenities
- Need ADA path around pond and between playgrounds and picnic shelters
- Need for additional seating near all amenities and on paths
- Lack of shade at playground, basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park
- Parking areas need upgrades such as expansion and paving
- Audio / Visual technology improvements needed for Blevens' Shelter
- Need for fitness par course or fitness stations
- No fenced in area for dogs
- Lack of indoor recreation space

Recommendations

- Develop site master plan for the newly acquired 149 (approx.) acres
- Provide 6' ADA accessible sidewalk to connect amenities
- Provide 8' ADA accessible walking path around pond
- Provide additional seating opportunities with benches and / or bench swings
- Provide shade structures near basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park
- Provide shaded seating at playgrounds
- Repave parking lot at multipurpose field
- Pave parking lot at baseball field, basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park
- Upgrade audio / visual technology at Blevens' Shelter
- Provide fitness par course trail through park
- Provide dog park





Family Central

Description:

Family Central is the principal active recreation facility in Ashe County. It is also the location of the County's parks and recreation department. This park is truly a central place for families and individuals to participate in active sports and fitness opportunities. From the athletic fields to the indoor fitness center, there are multiple opportunities for health and wellness.

Challenges and Issues:

- Lack of ADA access to multipurpose fields
- Lack of shade for ballfield and multipurpose field seating areas
- Need for parking expansion
- Limited size of fitness room, and need for locker-room
- Limited space in single gym (basketball, volleyball, pickleball, etc.) for four season programming
- Need playground expansion / upgrades
- Limited existing park area for expansion (adjacent properties could support recreation development)

Recommendations

- Provide ADA accessible sidewalk to multipurpose fields
- Provide shaded seating for ballfield and multipurpose field
- Expand parking areas
- Expand indoor recreation facility
- Update playground equipment
- Develop indoor aquatic center







FUTURE FACILITY RECOMMENDATIONS

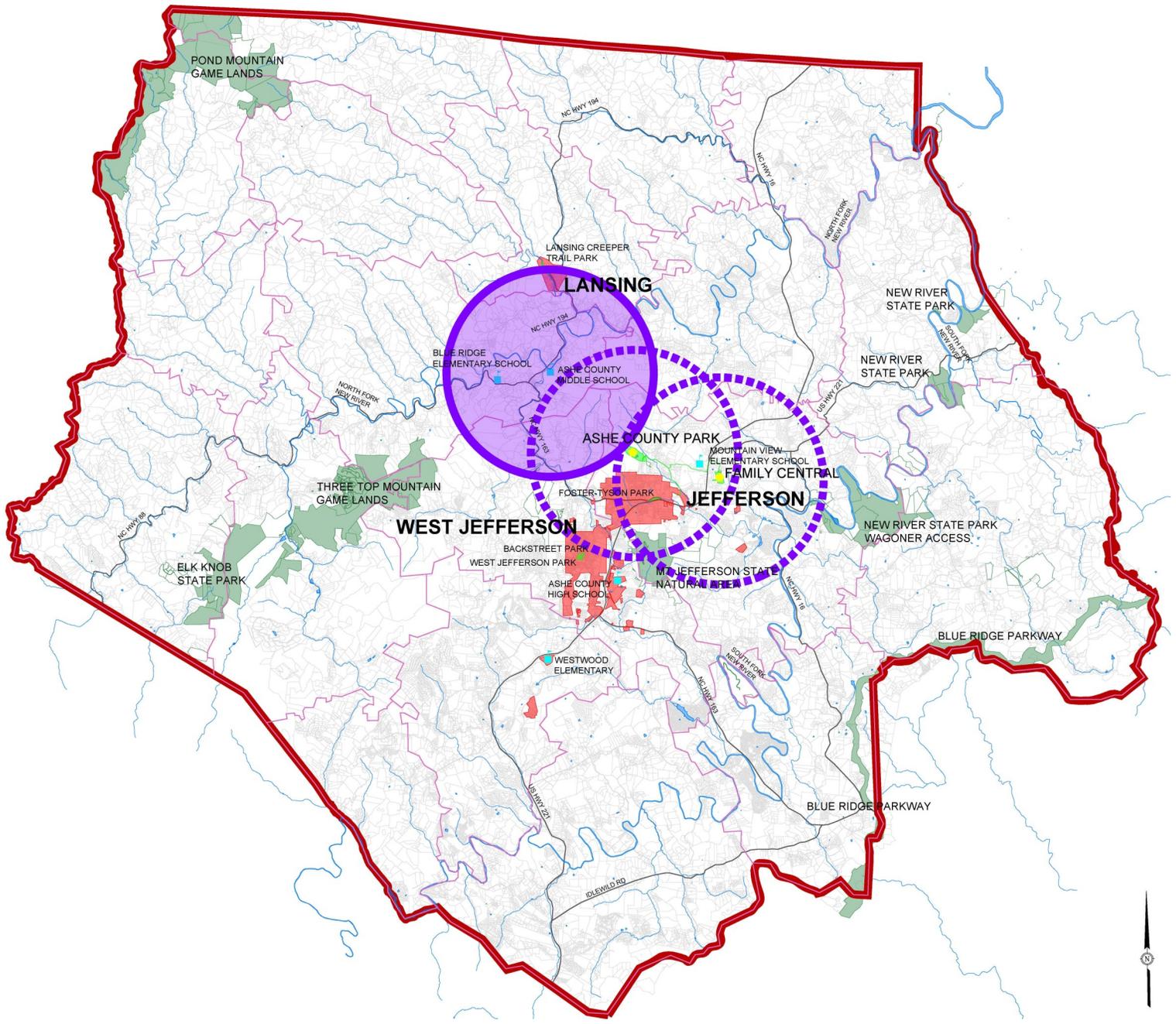
Geographic equity of park access is an important consideration to when planning for recreational facility access and service to all Ashe County residents. An analysis of recreation service areas can be used to make land acquisition recommendations for both current and future needs. Future park site acquisitions should see to provide balanced and proportional to service to County residents.

The Existing Service Area map, in the preceding Section, clearly demonstrates where park inequities or gaps in service areas may exist. In addition, the Existing Conditions Map in the Inventory Section also demonstrates the scarcity of existing county-owned land for park purposes. However, recreation within the County includes those resources from private entities and state and federal resources that residents have access to. The County should annually assess the rate of population growth and where planned development will concentrate residents, to be able to acquire the land needed in for future county-owned recreation facilities.

As of the writing of this plan, an opportunity to add 150 acres of land for open space preservation and recreational use has been offered to the Ashe County Parks & Recreation Department at a discounted cost. While the details of this opportunity have yet to develop, if a successful acquisition of this property occurred the County would gain the ability to offer a variety of recreation programming desired by residents, as evident in recent public survey responses.

This plan recommends that Ashe County do it's due diligence and determine the costs and benefits of this acquisition. The proposed use for the 150 acres could range from natural open space, trails, and a mix of active and passive programming.





LEGEND

TYPICAL SERVICE AREAS

- County Boundaries
- Municipal Boundaries
- Township Boundaries
- Parcel Lines
- Water Body/Creek
- Existing Ashe County Park
- Existing Municipal Park
- Existing Public Schools
- Existing National/State Recreation
- Proposed Pedestrian Path

- 2.5 Mile
(Existing District Park)
- 2.5 Mile
(Future District Park)

Map 4.1 Ashe County proposed service area (See Appendix A for 11"x17")



Map 4.1 shows possible park projects aimed at meeting established future recreation demand. This plan proposes one (1) new district park, expansion of existing facilities and new greenway trails (see more information below). These new recreation facilities will better serve the community and provide additional, needed recreation opportunities for the current and future Ashe County population.

The proposed projects will provide for both indoor and outdoor activities and program opportunities while also serving to provide better pedestrian connectivity between county-owned recreation facilities.

Northwest Community Center

The new Northwest Community Center would serve as a new district park that would be the conversion of the existing Ashe County Middle School into another much needed public resource. This facility is centrally located in the county, in Warrensville, and is a familiar landmark to most residents. This facility, once replaced with the anticipated future Middle School, could serve as a multi-activity community recreation center.

The school currently offers a basketball court, two tennis courts, a multipurpose field (soccer, football, lacrosse, etc.) as well as two baseball / softball fields; one 200' and one 300'. The existing middle school property also has a paved 200 meter track, gymnasium, classroom space and a swimming pool. Residents of Ashe County currently have the option to attend summer swimming sessions, swim lessons, and the pool is available to rent for parties. This County owned facility could support additional walking paths, court games, picnic facilities, park shelters, pickleball courts, and a large pavilion. It is recommended, due to the age and necessary updates for the pool, that the County pursue the option to repurpose the area where the swimming pool is currently located. Options could include an indoor fitness facility or nonprogrammed indoor recreation space. To further explore the possibilities for the existing middle school property, a site-specific park master plan should be pursued. Based on the community's desire for a County owned swimming pool, this plan recommends that space be considered at the existing Family Central facility for the development of a new indoor aquatic center.





Ashe County Greenway

Another major recreation project, Ashe Greenway, would consist of a 10' wide asphalt paved multi-use path that would connect Family Central to Ashe County Park via either a side path along Roby Poe and Ashe Central School roads to 221. The greenway would head south on 221 to either become a side path of Gum Branch Road or along Mountain View Elementary School property. A spur of the greenway would continue south to Wade Bare Road to eventually serve Ashe Memorial Hospital while another spur would go west along Wade Bare Road toward Ezra Fork Creek where it would meet Ashe Park Road and the Ashe County Park property. Future expansions of this greenway could connect Ashe County Park with the proposed Ashe County Community Center.





AMENITY PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Adult / Youth Basketball

The County currently has one basketball court. Based on the recommended guidelines the County does not meet the requirements. The County would need to add one basketball court to meet the requirements for the 2021 population. And two to meet the 2031 population.

Baseball / Softball

The County currently has seven baseball / softball fields. Based on the recommended guidelines the County does not need more fields to meet the requirements based on 2021 population or the 2031 population.

Football

The County currently has two multipurpose fields that can be used for football. Based on the recommended guidelines the County meets the needs for both the 2021 and 2031 populations. The County may rely on local municipality facilities for County Football Programming if partnerships are in place.

Soccer

Soccer has become a very popular sport among youth in this country and is a growing trend among young adults. The County currently has two multipurpose fields that can be used for soccer. Based on the recommended guidelines, the County meets the needs for both the 2021 and 2031 populations. The County may rely on local municipality facilities for County Soccer programming if partnerships are in place.

Tennis Courts

According to park standards, Ashe County currently provides two tennis courts. Based on the recommended guidelines the County meets the needs based on 2021 population. However for the 2031 population the County needs to provide one additional tennis court.

Pickleball Courts

Ashe County should consider further assessment of the need for pickleball courts as this is a rapidly growing sport that has been deemed desirable by County residents.

Picnic Shelters and Tables

The County currently has three dedicated shelters with picnic tables at various facilities. According to recommended guidelines, the County needs one more to meet the requirements for both the current and future populations.

Playground Activities

The County currently has four playgrounds at various facilities. According to recommended guidelines, the County meets the requirements for both the current and future populations. However, based on public input the County should consider additional playgrounds at either existing or proposed facilities.

Walking / Hiking Trails and Bikeways

Currently, the County provides limited trails for walking within their parks, however with the multiple hiking trails made available to residents and visitors throughout the mountainous region, the County will need to evaluate the types of trails to offer. The County does provide various types of walking trails with the story walk, paved paths, and nature trail.



1 PROPOSED / 1 FUTURE GROWTH



MEETS RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES



MEETS RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES



MEETS RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES



0 PROPOSED / 1 FUTURE GROWTH



0 PROPOSED / 1 FUTURE GROWTH



1 PROPOSED / 1 FUTURE GROWTH



MEETS RECOMMENDED GUIDELINES



1 MILE PROPOSED / 1 MILE FUTURE



STAFFING RECOMMENDATIONS



This master plan covers a planning period of 10 years. The facilities to be implemented during that time as part of the recommendations may require some level of additional staffing and additional funding for facility operation and maintenance. Consideration of these budgetary impacts should be made prior to facility implementation.

Multiple factors may come to influence what the future staffing needs of Ashe County Parks and Recreation Department will encompass. Those may include population growth, available tax dollars, capital improvement plans, and development of tourism efforts. Staff compensation should be fair and based on market precedents.

Maintaining adequate staffing for parks and recreation facilities and programs will be necessary to foster a good quality of life for County residents, and prospective businesses that may seek to relocate to Ashe County.

Proposed Parks and Recreation Staffing

Full Time

- *Park Manager (1)*
- *Aquatic Facility Manager (1)*
- *Assistant Aquatic Manager (1)*
- *Recreation Specialist (2)*
- *Park Maintenance (4)*
- *Athletic Specialist (2)*
- *Administrative Assistant/Marketing (1)*
- *Recreation Center Manager (1)*
- *Recreation Center Administrative Assistant(1)*

Contractual/Part-time/Seasonal

- *Lifeguards (as needed)*
- *Program Instructors (as needed)*
- *Park Attendant (as needed)*
- *Recreation Attendants (as needed)*
- *Athletic Attendants (as needed)*



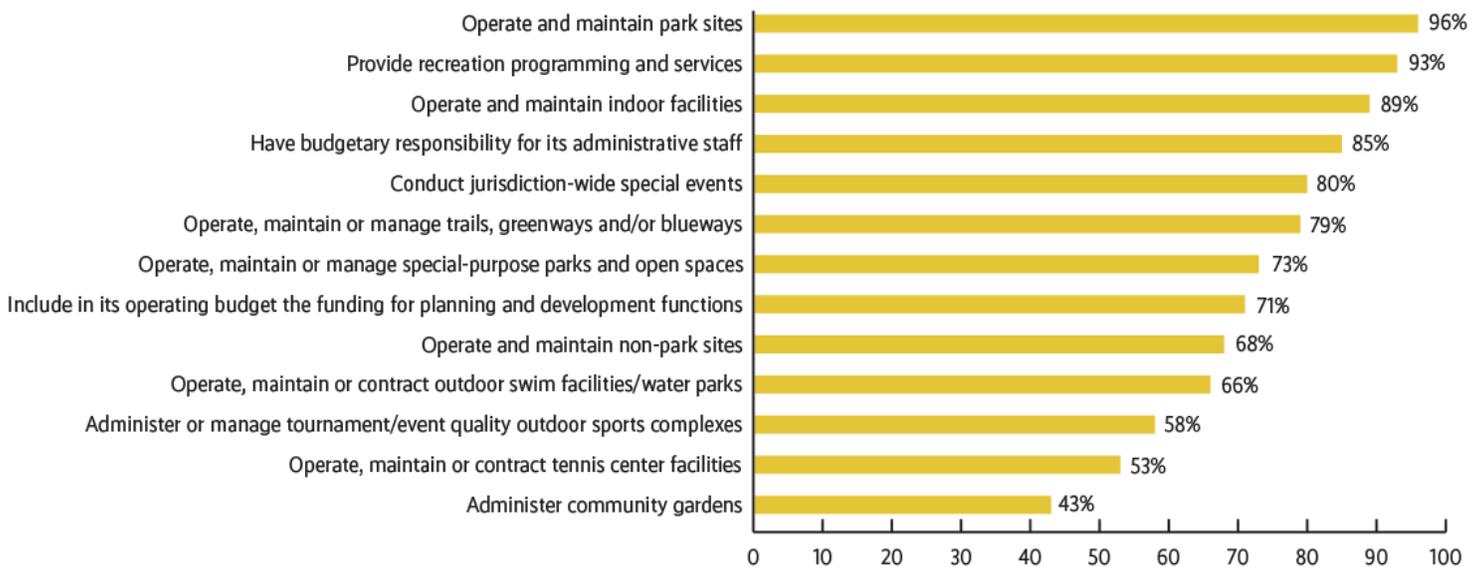


9.6 FTE

Number of Full Time Staff Equivalent recommended for Ashe County per NRPA staffing guidelines based on current population



**FIGURE 8: KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARK AND RECREATION AGENCIES
(PERCENT OF AGENCIES)**





PRIORITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

The park system for Ashe County should continue to grow and respond to changes in County demographics. Future planned facilities should be implemented incrementally to provide for these changes. The following factors guided the prioritization of individual segments of the master plan and were derived from input and desires specified by the residents of Ashe County:

- Needed improvements to existing Ashe County-owned facilities
- Development of planned facilities to meet the *current* needs of recreation for County residents
- Development of planned facilities to meet the *future* needs of recreation for County residents

The park facility prioritization is an essential tool that provides Ashe County's Parks and Recreation Department with a breakdown of the priority for each capital improvement. Given the magnitude of the budgets for improvements to existing parks and for new park and greenway facilities, prioritization of these needs is important.





2021-2026

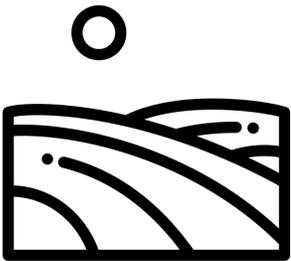
- Develop formal site master plan for Ashe County Park expansion 149 (approx.) acreage
- Provide ADA accessible routes to connect amenities at all facilities
- Provide additional seating opportunities with benches and / or bench swings at Ashe County Park
- Provide shade structures near basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park at Ashe County Park
- Provide shaded seating at necessary amenities at all facilities
- Repave parking lot at multipurpose field at Ashe County Park
- Pave parking lot at baseball field, basketball courts, tennis courts, and skate park at Ashe County Park
- Upgrade audio / visual technology at Blevens' Shelter at Ashe County Park
- Provide fitness par course throughout park at Ashe County Park
- Provide dog park at Ashe County Park
- Expand parking areas at Family Central
- Expand indoor recreation facility at Family Central
- Update playground equipment at Family Central
- Develop master plan for Northwest Community Center located at the existing Ashe County Middle School

2027-2032

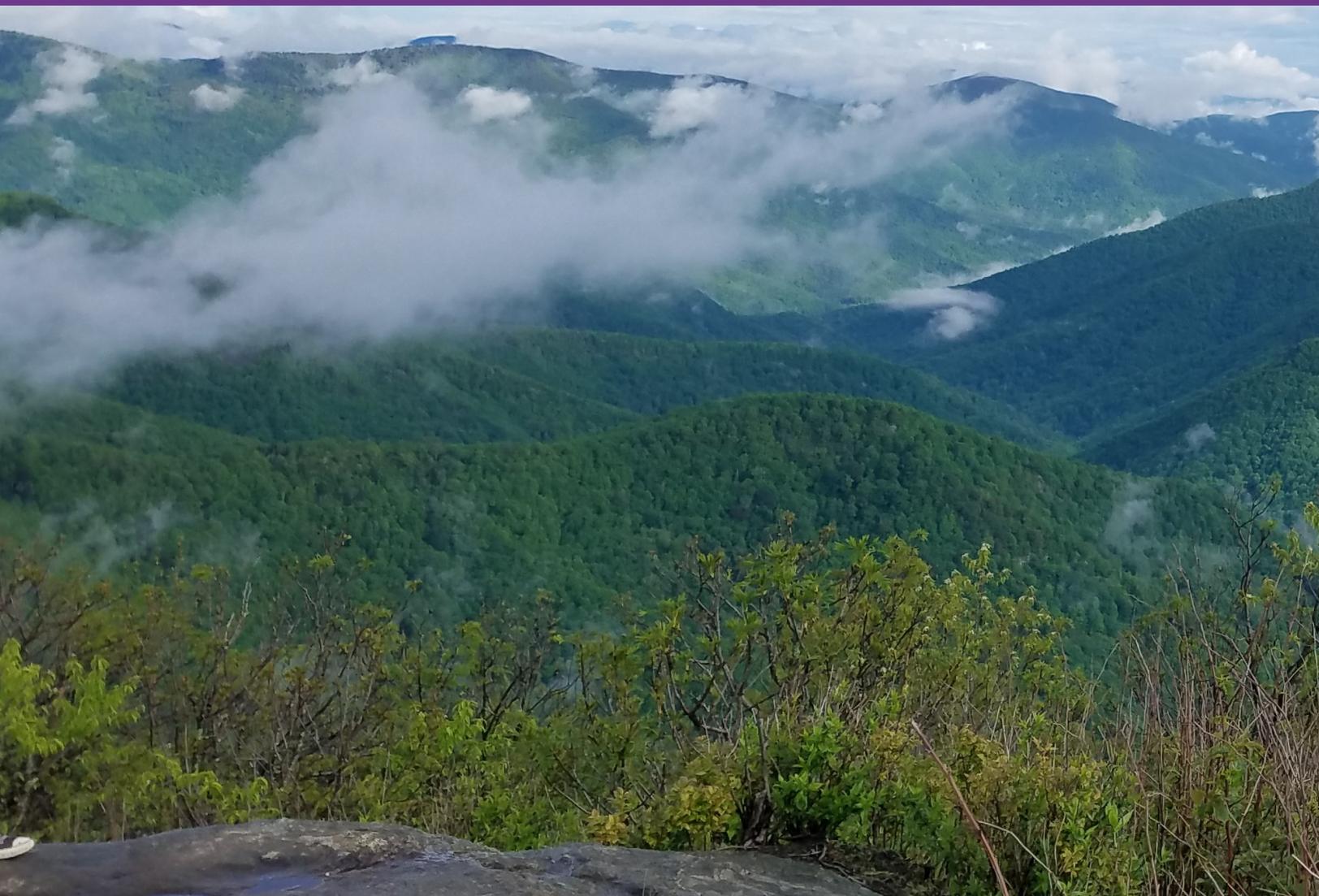
- Implement master plan for 149 acre land acquisition. (Ashe County Park expansion).
- Construct Northwest Community Center located at the existing Ashe County Middle School
- Construct Aquatic Center at Family Central
- Develop master plan for the Ashe Greenway system
- Begin construction on the Ashe Greenway system connecting Ashe County Park and Family Central Park

Future (Beyond 2032)

- Finish Ashe Greenway system connecting new Northwest Community Center and existing park facilities



ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN







ACTION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

This section describes how Ashe County can implement a safe, convenient, and usable park and recreation system through the execution of its established goals in the master plan. The strategy for achieving goals involves the recommended park and recreation facilities and programs and this section exhibits strategies and opportunities, key implementation steps and policies, necessary staffing, and methods for developing the facilities. Together, these sections form the implementation program.

The results of the Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan are based on the following discovery methods: (1) a review of the study area that is within the County limits, (2) an analysis of the existing parks and facilities, (3) community input, and (4) recreation standards that have been generically developed for municipalities and County governments. The master plan is designed to be action oriented and serve as a tool in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for Ashe County.

REVIEW THE STUDY AREA

ANALYZE THE EXISTING FACILITIES

GATHER PUBLIC INPUT

REVIEW RECREATION STANDARDS

Implementing the recommendations of this comprehensive master plan will require a combination of funding sources that include local, state, federal, and private money. This section provides a listing of the most commonly used funds for park and greenway facility projects in North Carolina. Fortunately, the benefits of protected greenways and parks are many and varied. This allows programs in Ashe County to access money earmarked for a variety of purposes including water quality, hazard mitigation, recreation, air quality, alternative transportation, wildlife protection, community health, and economic development. Competition is always stiff for state and federal funds. It becomes imperative that local governments work together to create multi-jurisdictional partnerships and to develop their own local sources of funding. These sources can then be used to leverage outside assistance. The long term success of this plan will almost certainly depend on the dedication of local revenue stream for park and greenway projects.

It is important that Ashe County fully evaluate its available options and develop a funding strategy that can meet community needs, maximize local resources, improve quality of life, and leverage outside funding. Financing will be needed to administer the continued planning and implementation process, acquire parcels or easements, and manage and maintain facilities. Further research into these programs is recommended to determine requirements for specific grants. McGill advises Ashe County to pursue a variety of funding options.



ANTICIPATED FUTURE RECREATIONAL PROJECT LIST

A recreation capital improvement program for the development of park facilities is designed to encompass, at a minimum, a 10-year period of the Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan. To assist the County in determining those needs this study provides a list of anticipated recreation projects based on plan recommendations. The proposed recreational project list provides costs based on recent (2020-2021) material / labor costs. The provided opinion of probable costs includes assumed general expenditures such as site preparation, building structures, access, site utilities, parking, and specific recreation improvements. The list provided also includes estimates for planning or design fees.

The proposed anticipated future recreational project list would cover a 10-year period and would serve to set recreation expenses for each fiscal year for implementation of specific projects. The opinions of cost are preliminary in nature and are for planning purposes only. As the time approaches to consider the recommended improvements, it will be necessary to receive up to date opinions of cost.

This total anticipated future recreational project cost of \$32,200,000 represents the proposed, cumulative figure to be spent for park and recreation development, improvements, and renovations by the year 2031. The total figure does not consider an inflation rate over the 10-year period through the year 2031. (See Appendix E for anticipated future recreational project list.)





FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

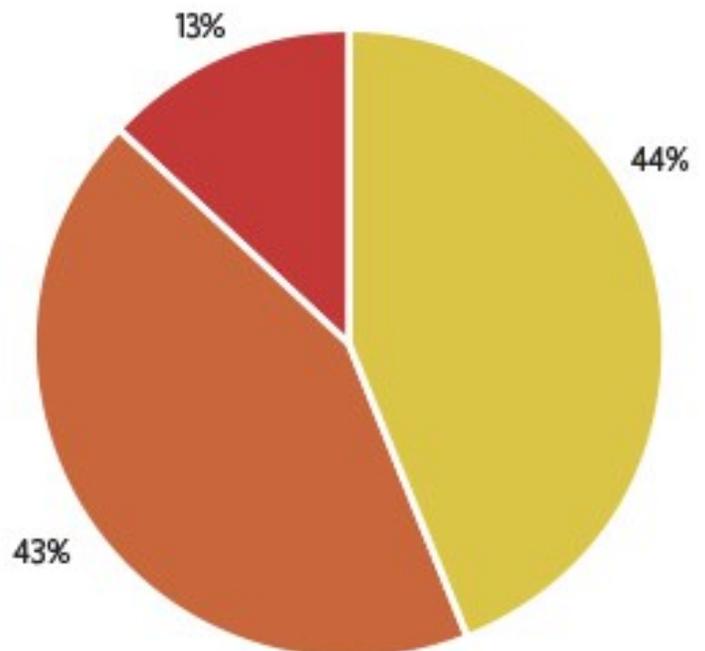
Identification of sufficient funding is a crucial element that is required to implement the master plan. The North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan is a guide by which funding sources for park and recreation facilities may be identified. Funding for future projects will be a key issue that will need to be addressed in the upcoming years if governments continue to provide basic minimum services.

To meet the existing and future needs of Ashe County, the goals and objectives that are identified in the master plan, must be seriously considered for implementation. The County will need to update their annual budget for the parks and recreation department based on projected capital improvement costs, staffing needs, and operations and maintenance costs.



FIGURE 18: OPERATING EXPENDITURES DEDICATED TO PARKS OR RECREATION (AVERAGE PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATING EXPENDITURES)

44%	Parks
43%	Recreation
13%	Other





Park and Recreation Capital Expenditures

The latest reliable recreation expense data per population (2018) has been used. The population estimates used in this report were certified county and municipal estimates on April 18, 2019 by Raleigh News & Observer - *US Census data for County and Metropolitan Area Estimates*. The budget figures were provided by NCOSBM facts and figures (LINC, Log Into North Carolina data system) for cultural and recreation expenses.

Table 5.1 North Carolina counties with populations between 27,000 and 36,000

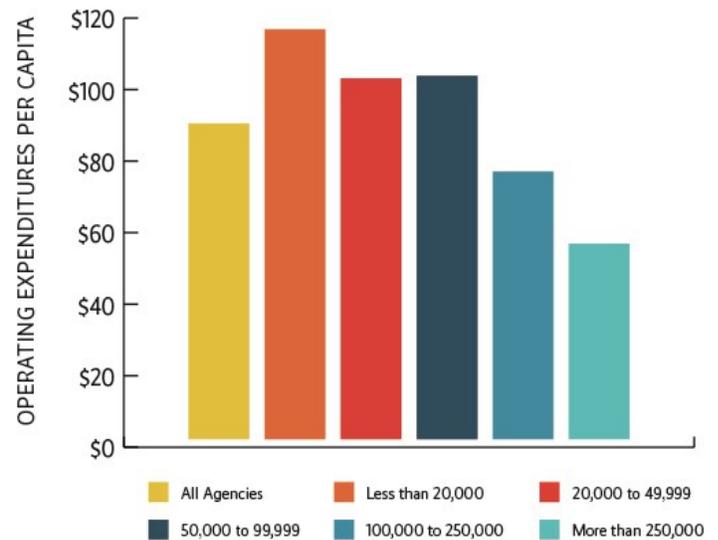
Counties with Populations Similar to Ashe County	Population Estimate 2018	Per Capita Expenditures 2018
Martin County	22,849	\$139.85
Hertford County	23,659	\$11.01
Currituck County	27,072	\$77.87
Ashe County	27,109	\$31.41
Montgomery County	27,271	\$8.36
Cherokee County	28,383	\$25.19
Bladen County	33,190	\$35.84

According to the NRPA 2021 Agency Performance Review, recreation department operating expenditures per capita for populations from 20,000 to 49,999 were between \$60.04 and \$195.81 with a median of \$100.93 per capita.

There is a wide range of recreation departments with a diverse mix of facilities, programs, and other services. For this reason, we recommend the comparison analysis of other similar sized North Carolina counties (Table 5.1).

2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review

FIGURE 14: OPERATING EXPENDITURES PER CAPITA (BY JURISDICTION POPULATION)



	All Agencies	Less than 20,000	20,000 to 49,999	50,000 to 99,999	100,000 to 250,000	More than 250,000
Median	\$88.30	\$114.62	\$100.93	\$101.65	\$74.87	\$54.68
Lower Quartile	\$48.84	\$64.02	\$60.04	\$58.77	\$45.39	\$21.77
Upper Quartile	\$159.07	\$222.94	\$195.81	\$166.17	\$154.56	\$85.33



Economic Development Initiative

Studies have shown that economies are impacted positively where bicycle and pedestrian tourism is fostered, promoted, and where investments are made in bicycle and pedestrian facilities. The number of people who feel comfortable walking or riding bicycles is a measure of the quality of life in that area.

Parks

Research has substantiated the direct proportion between economic growth and the existence of parks and open space in communities and municipalities around the country. This growth includes increased property values in residential, urban, and industrial communities, as well as the increased revenue from tourists.



Multi-Use Trails

Multi-use trails are extremely popular amenities for vacationing bicyclists and pedestrians. Tourists and visitors to the area often return to communities that provide places which are safely removed from busy roads for walking and bicycling. Multi-use trails offer scenic recreation, which is suitable for a wide range of ages and abilities. Many times, lodging is in close proximity to popular trails, thereby increasing occupancy for the owner. For residents in these locales investments in trails and greenways can increase property values and improve the overall livability of a community, as well as attracting, retaining, and expanding tourism and the associated revenues.

Investing dollars in multi-use trails yield substantial community wide returns. These returns are in the form of increased property values, business attraction, recreation revenue, and reduced water treatment and flooding costs. Not only are tourists attracted to these areas, but business leaders are selecting sites for the relocation and expansion of industries and corporations where the quality of life is high and recreation opportunities are abundant. Increasingly, corporations are recognizing the benefits of convenient fitness and recreation for their employees and are seeking these greenway amenities for potential locations.

Multi-use trails having vegetated buffers located adjacent to waterways act as filters to clean the water, trapping nonpoint source pollutants. These pollutants, including sediment, pesticides, fertilizers, oil, gas, and other chemicals, are transported into streams, rivers, and / or lakes by stormwater when rain or snow events occur.





Trail Development

The ongoing construction of bicycle and pedestrian facilities is proving to be a wise economic investment for the communities through which they pass. Ashe County's parks and recreation department should annually assess and include funding towards the maintenance of popular County trails to preserve the value that they contribute to the community. Trails and pathways have a positive effect on nearby property values with homebuyers and business owners realizing the effect that such facilities bring to a community. According to research by the Rails to Trails Conservancy, there are vast amounts of people who are using rail trails. It is easy to understand how communities can profit economically by meeting the needs of trail users. Entrepreneurs who invest in restaurants, convenience stores, bicycle and other merchandise shops, campgrounds, and alternate lodging attribute the location of a nearby trail to at least a portion of their success. Realtors and homebuyers alike are recognizing the benefits of properties located near trails. Both locally and nationally, the construction of trails has proven to be a cost effective use of public funds. Multi-use trails allow more visitors and residents to replace automobile trips with non-motorized trips, thereby moving the citizenry closer to achieving public health objectives, including increased opportunities for physical exercise.

Increased Property Value

The real estate market consistently demonstrates that residents throughout the country are willing to invest larger amounts of money in properties that are located close to parks and open space areas than they would for homes that do not offer these types of amenities. The higher values of these homes produce higher property taxes in the affected area. In some instances, additional property taxes are sufficient to recoup the annual debt charges on bonds, which were originally used to finance park acquisition and development.

Studies have shown that property values typically increase when parks or outdoor facilities, such as outdoor festivals, movies, and restaurants, are in the immediate locale. Studies indicate that commercial asking rents near park property exceed rents in surrounding submarkets.

Revitalization of Businesses

In recent years, there has been a trend to revitalize inner-County and urban areas to improve their quality of life. The success of this revitalization has included the addition of parks and recreational activity in County areas. Generally speaking, people do not want to live or work in an environment where they have no refuge from County buildings without having any place to go for a stroll, walk the dog, or just enjoy the outdoors. In studies of County revitalizations, the top recommendations include the dramatic expansion of parks and open spaces.

Tourism

A park often becomes the signature attraction for a community and it is often used as a marketing tool to attract residents, tourists, conventions, and businesses. Parks often shape the identity of the area and give residents a sense of pride.

Organized events held in public parks, such as art festivals, athletic events, food festivals, concerts, and plays, often bring substantial positive economic impacts to their communities by filling hotel rooms and restaurants and bringing customers to other local business enterprises.



Dedicated Source of Local Funding

In order to leverage and provide matching funds for many of the programs listed Ashe County should evaluate the existing departmental budget and funding for capital improvements.

Property / Sales Tax Revenues

General tax revenues traditionally provide sources for general operations and maintenance of park systems for local governments. Parks and recreation development is scheduled along with health, public safety, utilities, et cetera. in regular budgets established by the County. Assessed valuation of real and personal property tax and sales tax provides the framework for the major portion of the tax base for the County.



Traditionally ad valorem tax revenue has been the primary source of funding for the park and recreation enhancement of properties / facilities owned by local governments. Recreational opportunities are considered a public service and often are a standard line item on general fund budgets. Creative financial opportunities are possible; however, ad valorem taxes will continue to be the major revenue source to support the system. As such, communities often vote to raise their local tax rate temporarily in support of their park and recreation systems.

General Obligation Bonds

Many communities issue bonds, that are typically approved by the shareholders, to finance site development and land acquisition costs. The State of North Carolina grants local governments the authority to borrow funds for parks and recreation through the issuance of bonds. The amount is not to exceed the cost of acquisition or improvement of park and recreation facilities. Total bond capacities for local governments are limited for parks and recreation to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation. Since the issuance of bonds relies on the support of the voting population, the implementation of awareness programs is absolutely essential prior to a referendum vote.



General obligation bonds are the preferred financing approach of the North Carolina Local Government Commission and the general securities market because these instruments are backed by the full faith and credit of the issuer. That simply means that the bonds represent an encumbrance against the property tax base of the issuing jurisdiction and therefore offer the best available security to the bond holder. The State of North Carolina gives the issuance of bonds not to exceed the total cost of improvements (including land acquisition). In view of the recommended capital improvements suggested in this plan, the County may consider continuing to use general obligation bonds to develop new facilities. Total bonding capacities for local government is limited for parks and recreation to a maximum percentage of assessed property valuation.



The following are key factors to consider before using this financing instrument:

- In North Carolina, the issuance of general obligation bonds requires a referendum of the voters within the issuing jurisdiction
- The term of the debt may be extended to 20-30 years.
- The debt is publicly sold, so there are costs associated with the sale. These costs generally total 3% to 5% of the total bond principal. The issuance costs offset the lower interest rate and, therefore, this instrument becomes more attractive as the size of the issuance increases and the issuance costs are spread over the larger debt. It has been found that this financing option becomes financially superior as the debt principal exceeds \$10-\$12 million.
- Generally, prepayment of the debt cannot be accomplished until reaching a call date. This usually is around 75% of debt retirement.



Failure of the general obligation bond to be ratified by referendum could mean that the County could not go forward with an alternative approach to financing without substantially changing the scope of the project.

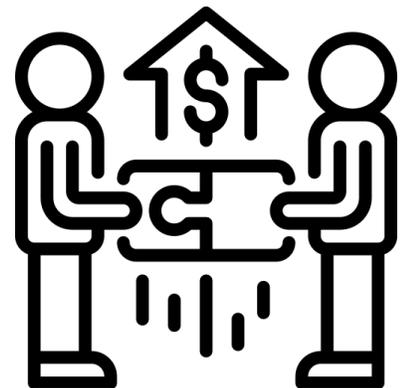
Fee in-lieu of Contributions

The County should consider providing developers with an option to pay a fee in-lieu of rather than to dedicate land for open space or recreation within conventional subdivisions. This program has proven to be successful for many local governments in providing a dedicated source of revenue earmarked for park development.



User Fees / Registration Fees

Communities throughout the nation employ a wide variety of user fees for public recreational programs and services within their recreation departments. The amount of the fee is usually determined by a portion of the recreation costs needed for improvements and operations. These user fees are typically levied for special facilities, such as water parks and golf courses; however, they can also be charged for the use of trails and ball fields. Ashe County should continue to generate revenue by charging user fees for use of facilities such as picnic shelters in order to cover operation and administrative costs. In addition, the County should continue to have a separate fee rate structure for residents and non-residents. As the park system continues to develop, the County should examine their fee structure to identify opportunities and additional revenue. The current user fees appear to be fair and reasonable for a majority of the County residents and non-residents. Elected officials should determine the fees and changes based on departmental input; the fees should not be so high that persons of modest income would ultimately be denied the use of park facilities.





Grants

State and federal agencies offer numerous grants to assist municipalities in the financing of their parks and recreation projects. This source of funding should definitely be investigated and pursued by Ashe County for present and future park and recreation improvements.



The Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) was established for local governments and the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation in 1994 as a funding source for the development and / or improvement of parks and recreation facilities and for the purpose of land acquisition. A state-funded program, PARTF matches monies spent by municipalities on parks and recreation, with each sharing 50% of the cost. The maximum matching fund amount provided by PARTF is \$500,000.



The Recreation Trails Program (RTP) is a \$1.5-million federal grant program designed to help states provide and maintain recreational trails for both motorized and non-motorized recreational trail use. The program is administered by the US Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration.

RTP is a reimbursement grant program. Funds must be spent and then reimbursed upon completion of deliverables. Eligible applicants must be a state, federal or local government agency or qualified nonprofit organization. All applications are reviewed by the North Carolina Trails Committee and recommendations are made to the Secretary of the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. The Secretary makes the final determination on grant awards.



Federal Aid Construction Funds are included in the National Highway System (NHS), Surface Transportation Block Grant Program (STBG), and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). The funds provide for the construction of pedestrian and bicycle transportation facilities. The primary source of funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is STBG Enhancement Funding



The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) is a federally funded program that was established for local and state governments in 1965 as a funding source for outdoor recreational development and land acquisition. LWCF monies are derived from the sale or lease of nonrenewable resources, primarily offshore oil and gas leases, and surplus federal land sales. Acquisition and development grants may be used for a wide variety of outdoor projects such as County parks, tennis courts, bike trails, outdoor swimming pools, and support facilities (roads, water supply, et cetera.) Facility design must be rather basic rather than elaborate and must remain accessible to the general public. No more than 50% of the project cost may be federally funded by LWCF, although all or part of the project sponsor's matching share may be obtained from certain other federal assistance programs.

SafeRoutes

DC Safe Routes to School Program



The Safe Routes to Schools Program is a federal aid program of the US Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). The program is a sub-program of the Transportation Alternatives Program, falling under the Surface Transportation Program. Under TAP the SRTS Program is combined with RTP to provide financial assistance to projects that fall under alternative transportation. Communities must come up with 20% of a project cost while the remaining 80% is funded through grant competitions. All TAP projects are administered by State departments of transportation (DOTs). The federal program provides funds to the states to improve the ability of primary and middle school students to walk and bicycle to school safely. The purposes of the Safe Routes to Schools program are outlined below:

- To enable and encourage children, including those with disabilities, to walk and bicycle to school
- To make bicycling and walking to school a safer and more appealing transportation alternative, thereby encouraging a healthy and active lifestyle from an early age
- To facilitate the planning, development and implementation of projects and activities that will improve safety and reduce traffic, fuel consumption and air pollution in the vicinity (approximately 2 miles) of primary and middle schools (grades K-8)

For more information on North Carolina's Safe Routes to School Program visit <https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/BikePed/pages/safe-routes-to-school.aspx>.



SAFETEA-LU

Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act:
A Legacy for Users

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient, Transportation Equity Act of 2004 (SAFETEA-LU), approved by the federal government in 2004, is a primary source for financing bicycle, pedestrian, and greenway projects throughout the country, at both the local and state levels. Providing as much as 80% for development and construction costs, this grant is earmarked for facilities such as sidewalks, rail trails, bike lanes and greenways. The Enhancement Program (a section of SAFETEA-LU) is used primarily by municipalities since this section focuses on bicycle and pedestrian corridors, environmental mitigation, historic preservation and scenic byways. 20% matching funds are required by the applying entity and applicants must meet several other criteria as well. Prior to applying for this grant a thorough engineering assessment should be performed to determine construction costs.

EEG

The Environmental Enhancement Grant Program (EEG) is used to fund projects that address environmental needs of North Carolina, specifically to protect water quality as well as conserve natural areas. To be eligible applicants must be nonprofit organizations or government entities for projects in North Carolina, with preference for programs focused on the eastern part of the state. The types of grants included are land acquisitions and easements, construction, remediation, restoration, and research, planning, education. The maximum award available is \$500,000 to be completed in 3 years from date of fully executed memorandum of understanding.

From agreement: “obtain environmental easements, construct, or maintain wetlands, and other such environmental purposes, as the Attorney General deems appropriate.”



The North Carolina Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) was created in 1996 by the North Carolina General Assembly and previously referred to as the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF), grants monies to local governments, state agencies, and not-for-profit conservation groups. The money is to help finance projects that specifically address water pollution issues. NCLWF will fund projects that contribute toward a network of riparian buffers and greenways for environmental, educational, and recreational benefits.



The USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) assists state and local governments in their operation and maintenance of watersheds whose areas are less than 250,000 square acres. The NRCS provides both financial and technical assistance to eligible projects for the improvement of watershed protection, flood prevention, sedimentation control, public water-based fish and wildlife enhancements and recreation planning. The NRCS requires a 50% local match for public recreation and fish / wildlife projects.



State construction funds (not including the Highway Trust Fund for Urban Loops and Interchanges) may be used for the construction of sidewalks and bicycle accommodations that are a part of roadway improvement projects.





Contributions

The solicitation of contributions is an acceptable method of fundraising for recreation departments. These donations, typically in the form of land, cash, labor, and materials, could be solicited to assist Ashe County with its enhancement program. Corporations, civic organizations, individuals, and other groups generally donate to a specific park project; however, donations may also be solicited for multiple project improvements or additions. NRPA recommends the use of private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt foundations as a means of accepting and administering private gifts to a public park system.

Park Foundations

Foundations are another source of financing by making direct contributions within communities, states, or the nation. These types of funds are usually described as special program foundations, general purpose foundations, or corporate foundations. Foundations can provide the needed resources to support park projects. Foundations generally have very few restrictions and / or limitations and are typically received from local entities. A list of appropriate foundations can be found at: <http://foundationcenter.org>.





Partnerships

To implement the recommendations contained in the comprehensive master plan, Ashe County should expand their partnership agreements with other public agencies and private sector organizations. There are many different types of partnerships that can be formed to achieve the goals established by the County. Many local governments throughout the nation are utilizing partnerships with public and private sector interests to accomplish community goals.



Listed below are the various types of partnerships that the County should consider in its efforts for the improvement and addition of parks and recreational facilities:

- Programming partnerships to co-sponsor events and facilities or to allow qualified outside agencies to conduct activities on properties which are municipally owned
- Operational partnerships to share the responsibility for providing public access and use of facilities
- Development partnerships to purchase land and / or build facilities
- Management partnerships to maintain properties and / or facilities

Ashe County is currently participating in partnerships with the Tar Heel League, Inc for youth baseball and softball, the Ashe Arts Council for outdoor concerts, and Innova Disc Golf for disc golf tournaments. The County should evaluate and update their current partnerships to ensure they are providing the best opportunities for the community. The County should also evaluate forming additional partnerships which address the needs of a comprehensive park system. Direct requests should be made to meet potential partners, inviting them to evaluate the possible benefits of partnering. This step should be made to generate interest and agreement prior to solidifying any responsibilities for each participating party.

Private sector partnerships can be beneficial. Developers can use private funds to develop facilities on municipal property and lease it to the County long term. Over a period of time, the developer returns a portion of the revenue to the County and at the end of the lease the facility is turned over to public ownership. This type of arrangement would typically be a large capital investment for a special-use facility.





LAND ACQUISITION AND DEVELOPMENT

The solicitation of contributions is an acceptable method of fundraising for recreation departments. These donations, typically in the form of land, cash, labor, and materials, could be solicited to assist Ashe County with its enhancement program. Corporations, civic organizations, individuals, and other groups generally donate to a specific park project; however, donations may also be solicited for multiple project improvements or additions. NRPA recommends the use of private, not-for-profit, tax-exempt foundations as a means of accepting and administering private gifts to a public park system.

Life Estate

A life estate is a gift whereby a donor retains the land during his / her lifetime and relinquishes title of the property after his / her death. In return, the owner (or family) is relieved of property tax for the given land.



Local Gifts

Donations of land, money, labor and construction can have significant impact on the acquisition and development of park property. The solicitation of local gifts is highly recommended and should be organized thoroughly, with the utilization of very specific strategic methods. This often untapped source of obtaining funds requires the contacting of potential donors such as individuals, institutions, foundations, and service clubs.



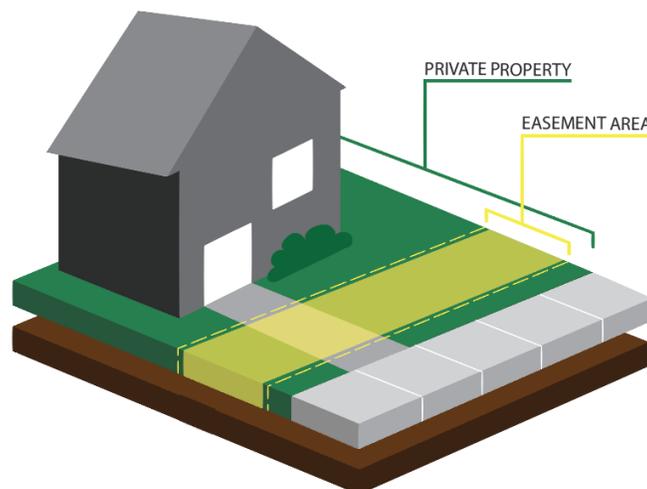


Long-Term Option

Long-term options allow municipalities to purchase property over a long period of time. This method is particularly useful because it enables the County to consider a particular piece of land that may have future value though it is not currently desired or affordable. Advantages to this method of property acquisition are that the County can protect the future of the land without purchasing it upfront, the purchase price of the land will not increase, and the County will have the right to exercise its option. The disadvantage to the County is that all privileges relinquished by the landowner require compensation in the form of securing the option.

Easement

An easement is the most common type of less-than-fe' interest in land. An easement seeks to compensate the property owner for the right to use his / her land in some way or to compensate for the loss of his / her privileges to use the land. Generally, the landowner may still use the land and therefore continues to generate property tax revenue for the County.



Fee Simple Purchase

Fee simple purchase is the most common method used to acquire municipal property for park facilities. Although it has the advantage of simplifying justification to the general public, fee simple purchase is the most difficult method to pursue due to limited monetary resources.

Fee Simple with Lease-Back or Resale

This method allows local governments to acquire land by fee simple purchase yet allows them to either sell or lease the property to prospective users with restrictions that will preserve the land from future development. The fee simple with lease-back or resale method of development commonly results from situations in which landowners, who have lost considerable monetary amounts in property value, determine that it is more economical to sell the land to the County (with a lease-back option) than to keep it.





PLAN ADOPTION

The first step in the implementation of the Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is adoption of the plan by Ashe County. By adopting the recreation master plan the community is able to help shape larger regional decisions so that they fit within the goals of the plan. The County also gives itself greater authority in shaping local land use decisions so that they achieve the goals and vision of this plan. In addition, the adoption of this master plan is essential in order to maximize available grant opportunities.

Among the opportunities available to promote the recommendations contained in the master plan is the ability to build upon an already committed and active base of residents, visitors, and enthusiasts in the area. Through their organizations, institutions, publications, and networks Ashe County can promote both the improved and new parks and greenway facilities and programs.

Second among the opportunities is the availability of the existing park facilities such as amenities, programs, and existing trails. Though some changes are being suggested in the short-term and an expanded network is suggested for the long-term, the presence of an existing network provides a strong foundation from which to build. Many County residents are already accustomed to using the existing park facilities and should become used to seeing new park amenities, programs, signage, and other improvements. Building on their existing awareness of what is available is much easier than building on no awareness.

Action Steps

Upon adoption of this plan, implementation of specific recommendations can begin. Many of these will occur simultaneously and include policy and facility improvement changes. The key steps are:

1. Secure a dedicated source of revenue to address the 10-year and beyond anticipated future recreational project list and address the goals of the master plan
2. Provide staffing necessary to support and oversee the implementation of this plan and the proper maintenance and operation of the facilities that are proposed
3. Develop and implement educational and awareness programs such as public events and promotion of parks awareness by civic and environmental advocacy groups. These programs can be used to announce new park facilities and upcoming projects
4. Begin working on the recommendations that are listed in the 10-year and beyond anticipated future recreational project list . From these opportunities come the framework for an initial implementation strategy. These recommendations include:
 - Aggressively begin to establish potential funding mechanisms for future park expansions. This high priority goal is essential for realizing the proposed recommendations for the future growth and development of Ashe County's parks and recreation facilities
 - Use the nucleus of park patrons to expand the awareness of the amenities and programming of Ashe County parks and recreation system
 - Expand and modify the existing park system into a comprehensive, multi-use system, distributed so that it better meets the needs of the community, provides opportunities to all and enhances the current park system
 - Continue making the critical pedestrian and bicycle connections between destination points that will allow for preservation of open space and offer an alternative mode of transportation



These steps represent the core of the implementation strategy. As the individual policy recommendations and physical recommendations are addressed, they should each fit within one of these four primary strategies.

The County needs to ensure that facility planning is integrated with other regional planning efforts at the state and local levels and with long-range and current land use, economic development, parks, environmental, and community planning. The following are mechanisms to achieve this action step:

1. Expand local capital improvements program for yearly appropriation for greenway and park development
2. Set aside money for future land acquisition, construction, and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities
3. Pursue and request pedestrian / bicycle projects to be added to NCDOT TIP
4. Pursue developing and expanding existing and new partnerships.
5. Apply for PARTF grants and other related recreation grants for future parks and recreation projects
6. Seek other sources of revenue funding for parks and greenway improvements, such as local assessment districts and developer exactions
7. Pursue funding from other sources listed in this section





MOVING FORWARD INTO THE FUTURE

“The mission of Ashe County Parks and Recreation is to provide a range of quality wellness and recreational programs that enrich the quality of life for all our citizens and visitors. The department will strive to design programs that create tourism and encourage long-term economic stability and growth for the community.”

In order to continue to fulfill this mission, Ashe County has pursued planning as a way to improve the parks and recreation system throughout the County. This comprehensive parks and recreation master plan has laid out a set of strategies for expanding and developing a safe, convenient, and usable park system. The plan has assessed the study area, analyzed the existing facilities, received and analyzed community input, reviewed recreation standards, developed recommendations, and provided strategies for implementing the plan. The Ashe County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a comprehensive guide to be used in the improvement and enhancement of the park system for Ashe County.



QUALITY OF LIFE



HEALTH & WELLNESS

healthy living



COMMUNITY





Back