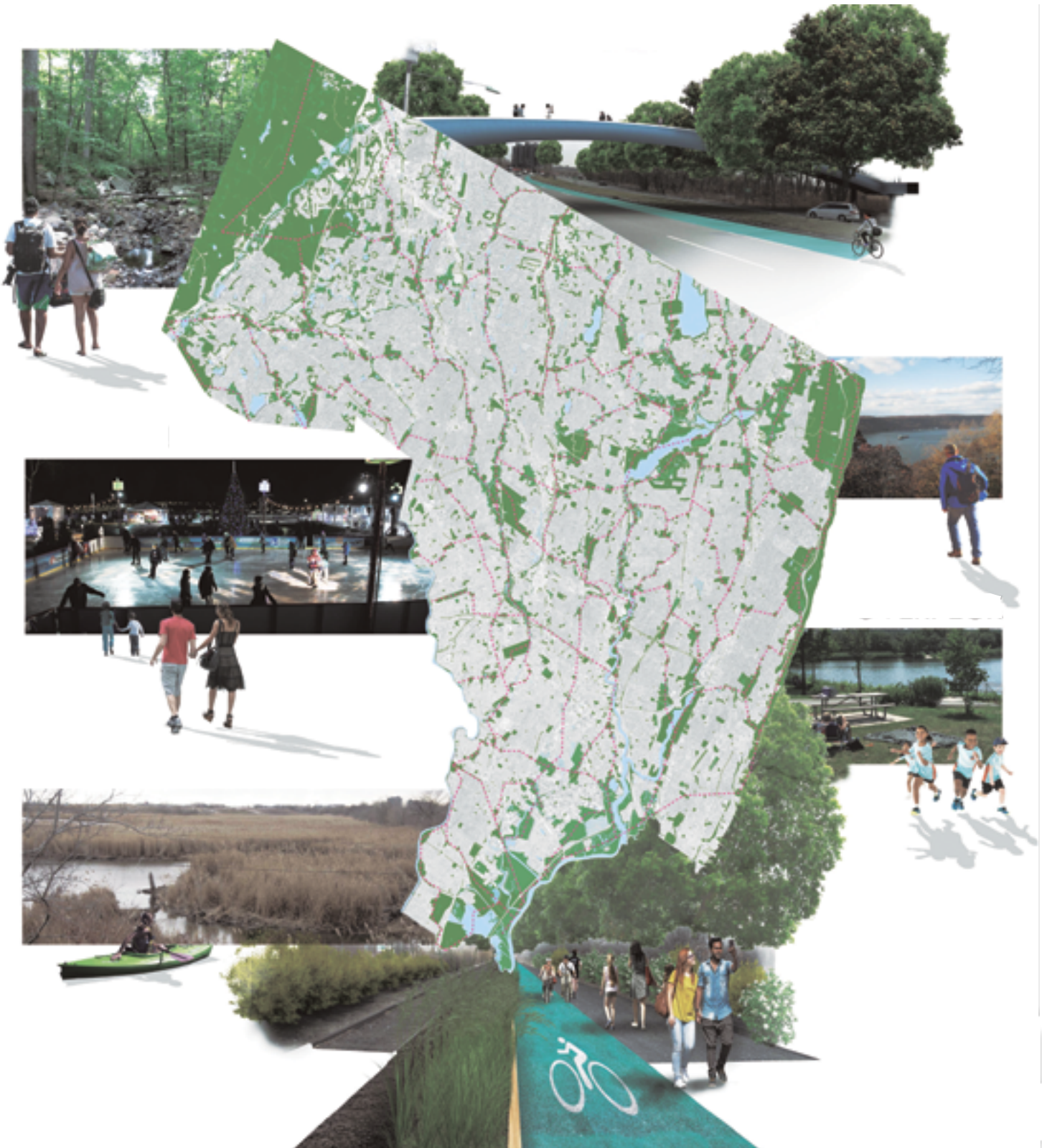


**RUTGERS**

CUES — Center for Urban  
Environmental Sustainability

# BERGEN COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN



## **Acknowledgments**

The Rutgers Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES) and their project partners acknowledge and appreciate the participation and efforts of the Bergen County Parks and Planning Departments, the Technical Advisory Group, many non-profit groups, recreation groups, municipalities, and the general public who gave their time to attend public meetings and offer suggestions to help develop this plan. Throughout the Master Planning process, CUES received many constructive comments, suggestions, and corrections regarding the plan recommendations and content. This public participation and support was essential to our efforts to develop a plan that addresses the need for public Open Space and outdoor recreation, and the future parkland needs of Bergen County.

The consultants responsible for the preparation of this plan have made every effort to correctly identify places and names. Any misspellings or misidentifications are unintentional and subject to future correction.

### **JAMES J. TEDESCO III**

Bergen County Executive

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# **BERGEN COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN**

Prepared by

**The Bergen County Department of  
Parks, Recreation, Historic and Cultural Affairs**

November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019

In collaboration with:

**Rutgers Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES)**

**Biohabitats, Inc.**

**DNA**

**Eventage**

**Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC), Rutgers University**

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# Executive Summary

## *A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE PARKS MASTER PLAN*

Parks and open space play a vital role in the quality of life enjoyed by Bergen County residents. However, for over seventy years the Bergen County parks system has had no comprehensive Master Plan. Realizing the critical importance, this administration seeks to remedy the seventy-year deficiency of a parks Master Plan to establish goals and objectives for County parklands. The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation commissioned the Rutgers Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability to draft this Master Plan.

The leadership of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation, along with the County Executive and the Board of Chosen Freeholders, has embraced the vision of the original Bergen County Parks Commission. This first Bergen County Parks Master Plan builds on the original park system, focusing on rivers and critical habitats, and setting forth enhancement for open spaces for all County residents. The plan also identifies amenities and connections that are generally beyond the capability of any individual municipality to provide.

To meet the open space needs of future Bergen County residents, the existing parklands must be well managed and ecologically enhanced, naturalized parcels and corridors must be connected, and new parklands acquired.



Figure 1. Parks are critical to health and quality of life in to Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES)

## Vision and Goals

This Master Plan envisions a diverse Bergen County park system From Marshes to Mountains, which stretches from the Meadowlands estuary in the south to the northern peaks of the Ramapos and the Palisades.

This vision for Bergen County parks is one in which parks are an integral part of each resident's life, providing easy access to the open spaces of Bergen County, while preserving our natural areas and making outdoor recreation available to all.

In this vision, Bergen County Parks compliment municipal, State, and non-profit open space, facilitating a regional network of diverse, connected recreational lands. Public open spaces are linked to each other and the surrounding communities, making a trip to the park safe, easy, and enjoyable for every resident and visitor.

The goal is to translate the informal analysis of current conditions into tangible implementation of an attainable future. Chapter Two describes this vision and Chapter Five outlines nine goals for this Master Plan. They are:

1. **Preserve and Balance Our Open Space**
2. **Improve Access and Connectivity**
3. **Steward Our Environmental Resources**
4. **Provide Diverse Golf and Recreation**
5. **Improve Amenities and Infrastructure**
6. **Program Park Spaces and Events**
7. **Increase Public Access to Information**
8. **Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks**
9. **Develop a Sustainable Business Model**

## Public Outreach

Public outreach and involvement is crucial to the successful implementation of any Master Plan. Chapter Three summarizes the Master Plan outreach meetings, surveys, and the public comments from these. Detailed survey responses and public comments received through the project website<sup>a</sup> are available in the Appendices.

A significant finding of the public outreach was the diversity of resident interests and needs. Another significant finding was the limited knowledge that many Bergen County residents had about the various programs and properties that compose the County park system.



Figure 2. Public information sessions were critical factors in the development of the Bergen County Parks Master Plan (Courtesy of CUES).

a) CUES. 2018 Bergen County parks masterplan. Website: <http://cues.rutgers.edu/bergen-park-system/>. Accessed 22 January 2018.

## Population and Parks

Planning a future park system requires an understanding of County demographic trends. Chapter 5.1 examines Bergen County demographic patterns. The analyses identify existing conditions and spatial patterns within Bergen County based upon population density, income, age, race and ethnicity, car ownership, and park accessibility.

Chapter 5.1 contains an analysis of Bergen County parklands that also includes public space owed by the seventy Bergen County municipalities, non-governmental organizations, and private groups and individuals. This analysis shows whether a municipality is well served or underserved with respect to open space based on Trust for Public Land criteria. A description of the open space in each municipality can be found in the Appendices.

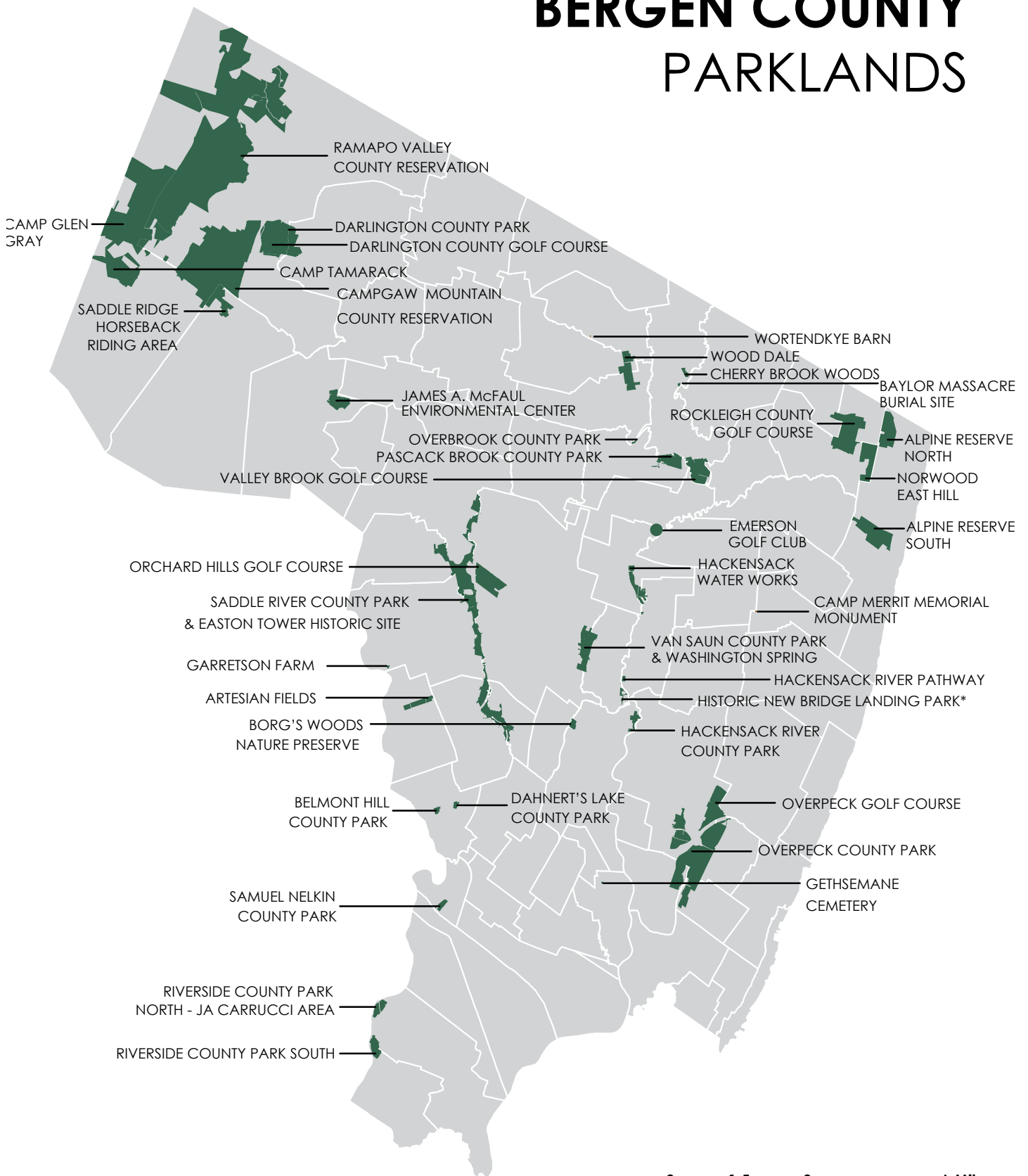
Open space owned by Bergen County now totals 9,335 acres, which is approximately fifty percent of the total available open space in the County. Based on Trust for Public Land standards, only twenty of the seventy Bergen County municipalities are currently well served by their amount of available public open space.

The southern region of the County was recognized as an underserved area seventy years ago by the Bergen County Parks Commission and this parkland deficit remains today. Demographic projections through 2040 predict that the fifty municipalities currently underserved by publicly available open space will see population increases, which will further increase their parkland deficit.

A transportation analysis in Chapter 5.2 examines access to parks. Pedestrian, bicycle, public transit, and vehicular circulation and parking issues were assessed. Traffic, parking, and accessibility were all concerns raised at the public outreach sessions.

Chapter 5.2 contains transportation recommendations to improve existing conditions in the Bergen County park system. Detailed individual park transportation analyses, mapping, and an analysis of parking demand are located in the Appendices.

# BERGEN COUNTY PARKLANDS



## BERGEN COUNTY PARKS PROPERTIES



### EMERSON GOLF CLUB

(acquired in December 2017 and will open in April 2018, therefore not included in the analysis)



## **Ecology and Stewardship**

Bergen County's landscape is derived from the region's glacial history. Early development and transportation patterns followed rivers and waterways, leaving mountainous areas sparsely developed. County open spaces are closely associated with natural features of the landscape. Chapter 5.3 of this Master Plan describes these ecological foundations.

The 9,335 acres of County-owned parkland contain valuable forests, wetlands, and aquatic habitats that are rapidly disappearing in Bergen County. These natural habitats support a number of species currently listed on the State of New Jersey Threatened & Endangered and Species of Concern lists, shown in Chapter 5.3.

The chapter discusses the ecology of the County parklands with an emphasis on surface water management.

## **Recreation and Amenities**

Recreational amenities within the parks provide places for Bergen County residents and visitors alike to exercise, socialize, and relax.

Events and programs within parks make them come alive – transforming them into places where things happen, where people go to participate, and where they can experience food, music, culture, and fun.

Golf courses are a significant portion of Bergen County parkland, at ten percent of the total acreage, and a major source of revenue. The six County-owned golf courses represent large tracts of open space that provide affordable recreation and create many opportunities for natural resource stewardship. Recommendations to improve the County golf courses are discussed in Chapter 5.4.

## **Visibility and Sustainability**

The need to improve the Bergen County parks “brand” and raise the visibility of the County park system became very apparent during the public comment sessions. Chapter 5.7 recommends branding, marketing, and communications options for the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation.

Operating and maintaining sustainable parks is one of the key goals in this Master Plan. Chapter 5.8 explores ways the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation can operate more sustainably and reduce the local and global impacts of park maintenance, events, and concessions.

## **Administration and Business**

Funding is needed to maintain and improve the Bergen County parks system. Significant revenues are being generated from for-fee amenities at some County parks and at the County golf courses.

In order to support the recommendations in this Master Plan, the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation may require modifications to current business practices and an expanded management and personnel structure. Chapter 5.9 provides recommendations that could strengthen the administration of County parks.

In addition, opportunities for increased collaboration with non-County park supporters, and approaches that could increase funding to support parks, are explored in Chapter 5.9.

## History and Inventory

A great challenge in developing the Master Plan is organizing a very diverse group of properties that do not naturally group into obvious categories. Conflicting user demands add a further challenge in conceptualizing a system that meets the needs of all residents.

The overall history and concept of the parks system is described in Chapter Four. This chapter describes the six types of parks reflected in this Master Plan, based on their size, purpose, emphasis, connectivity, and other characteristics. Chapter Four is an inventory of the Parks system that describes each individual park and the amenities and conditions found in them. Many opportunities exist to expand the parks system and enhance the visitor experience. Chapter Five also explores these expansion opportunities.

## Implementation

Implementation of the Bergen County Parks Master Plan is a long-term project that will span multiple administrations, and ultimately multiple generations. A detailed prioritization strategy could be based on the critical steps to begin this process noted in Chapter Six. It is the intention of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation to develop this strategy in an implementation matrix subsequent to the adoption of this Master Plan by the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders.



Figure 3. A significant finding that came from the public outreach highlighted the diversity of resident interests and needs, from additional activity opportunities to desired amenities (*Courtesy of CUES*).



# 1 Preface

## THE IMPORTANCE OF PARKS & A PARKS MASTER PLAN

### Why do parks matter?

Parks make our lives healthier, happier, and more enjoyable. They do this by:

- **Providing places to exercise, for better health**
- **Providing spaces to socialize, to connect to others**
- **Providing nature that helps us relax and escape**
- **Protecting habitats that could otherwise be lost**

This is how parks contribute to the high quality of life in Bergen County. Parks are also the public face of the County. For most residents and visitors, the first interaction they will have with Bergen County is through our parks.

### Parks add real value.

Parks add economic value. They raise the value of our property. Homes near parks sell for a premium anywhere in the world. Having great parks and investing in them creates better places and better people.

### Why do a Master Plan?

There are many reasons to develop a Master Plan. The Master Planning process gives the public a chance to participate in planning the future of our parks. Adopting a Master Plan ensures that our long-term goals and priorities will endure.

### What will the Plan do?

The Plan is a blueprint and a road map. It lays out the vision for the future of our parks and establishes goals and objectives that will make the vision a reality. This Plan calls for nine broad goals for the Parks System:

- **Preserve and Balance Open Space**
- **Improve Access and Connectivity**
- **Steward Environmental Resources**
- **Provide Diverse Golf and Recreation**
- **Improve Amenities and Infrastructure**
- **Program Park Spaces and Events**
- **Increase Public Access to Information**
- **Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks**
- **Develop a Sustainable Business Model**



Figure 1. Parks are critical to health and quality of life in Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES).

## General Benefits of Community Green Space



**\$162,000**

The U.S. Forest Service calculated that over a 50-year lifetime, one tree generates \$31,250 worth of oxygen, provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control, recycles \$37,500 worth of water, and controls \$31,250 worth of soil erosion.<sup>1</sup>



**\$8,870**

Average amount that street trees add to sales price.<sup>2</sup>



**+148%**

Increase in property value within a block of the Indianapolis Cultural Trail, a high-quality 8-mile biking and walking trail, since its opening in 2008.<sup>3</sup>



**22%**

Of adults 20 or older in Bergen County are obese. Adult obesity in New Jersey has grown from 18.5% in 2000 to 25.7% in 2015.<sup>4</sup>



**50%**

Of vigorous, heart healthy exercise and about 14% of moderate exercise takes place in nearby neighborhood parks.<sup>5</sup>



**\$1.92 - \$9.32**

Projected return to community for every \$1 invested in a proposed multi-use path in Charleston, SC. Return benefits were associated with reduction in air pollution, congestion, direct medical care cost, gasoline usage, and increased tourism.<sup>6</sup>

## Economic Value of NJ State Parks & Forests<sup>7</sup>



**\$953 million - \$1.4 billion**

Estimated annual gross benefits of NJ State parks and forests



**\$240-\$369 million**

Annual total recreational value of visits in 2000-2004



**\$359-\$605 million**

Estimated annual value of ecosystem services



**7,000**

Jobs supported

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# 2 Vision

## FROM MARSHES TO MOUNTAINS



## Why a Vision?

A vision is how we see the future. When written down, it is a statement of aspiration – where we want to be, without regard to constraints – and it guides and inspires our work. The vision for Bergen County Parks is one in which parks are an integral part of each resident's life, providing easy access to the open spaces of Bergen County. From the southern marshes to the northern mountains, preserving our natural areas and making outdoor recreation available to all is our goal.

Bergen County Parks compliment municipal, State, and non-profit open space, facilitating a regional network of diverse, connected recreational lands. Public open spaces are linked to each other and the communities around them, making a trip to the park safe, easy, and enjoyable for every resident. Green corridors, clean waterways, and robust habitats within parks support wildlife and provide every resident access to experience nature, whether kayaking in the Meadowlands, hiking in the Ramapo Mountains, or actively recreating somewhere in between. Recreational opportunities in the parks reflect the needs of Bergen County's tremendously diverse population. Engaging programming enlivens the parks year-round, and promotes socialization, encourages wellness, and adds to the quality of life.

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation is an efficient, responsive agency that works in partnership with residents and non-profit groups to provide an outstanding visitor experience. It encourages learning, participation, stewardship, and provides open space expertise and coordination on a regional scale. This stewardship includes a commitment to sustainability throughout park programming, activities, and amenities that conserve and improve parks. The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation provides exceptional programs and events while conserving the natural, cultural, and historic resources of the County for the enjoyment of current and future generations. The County of Bergen aspires to be home to the premier park system in the State.

This Master Plan describes tangible steps – as goals and associated objectives – needed to transform this vision into a reality. The recommendations on the following pages reflect our analysis of the opportunities and constraints that need to be addressed to achieve this future. Achieving this future will ensure that parks will always be one of the main reasons for residents and businesses to locate in Bergen County, and will remain a pivotal and iconic part of life in a healthy and vibrant County.

# 3 Public Outreach

## *FROM MARSHES TO MOUNTAINS*

In order to determine existing conditions and future needs, to solicit public response to possible changes in programs or park amenities, and to involve the many parks stakeholders, eleven public meetings were held throughout the planning process. Two meetings were held with members of the invited Technical Advisory Group (TAG) representing various organizations and local elected officials. As complex issues were articulated via public comments, a few informal conversations with community groups were held to help clarify these issues and brainstorm solutions.

During each round of meetings, participants had the opportunity to provide written comments and speak publicly about the project team's findings and recommendations. Each session was recorded in its entirety by a videographer and video excerpts of public comments were posted on the project website for those unable to attend in person. Individuals and groups also submitted comments directly through the Rutgers Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES) website and signed up for digital project updates.

In addition to the in-person meeting comments and digital communications, three random surveys were conducted. An online survey, approved by the Rutgers Institutional Review Board (IRB) and open to the general public, was available through a CUES website link for six months; this survey was completed by 2,245 participants.

An in-person park intercept survey, also approved by Rutgers IRB, was undertaken in five park venues and had 950 respondents. This survey focused on questions related to transportation and park access. In order to develop a marketing position statement, a phone survey was also conducted with elected and appointed leaders in the County about their perceptions of the County park system.

Highlights of the online survey results and concise summaries of park-specific public feedback are included in this chapter. More extensive summaries of park-specific comments, notes from public meetings, informal conversations with community groups, and raw public feedback data are located in the Appendices.



Online Survey

Park use is influenced by cultural interests, age, and income levels. To characterize the demographics of online survey respondents, participants were asked to identify their age group and annual household income level. Approximately half the respondents were in the 45-64 age bracket, followed by thirty percent in the 25-44 age bracket. Almost two-thirds of the people taking the online survey had an annual household income of \$100,000 or higher.

Age Group of Online Survey Respondents

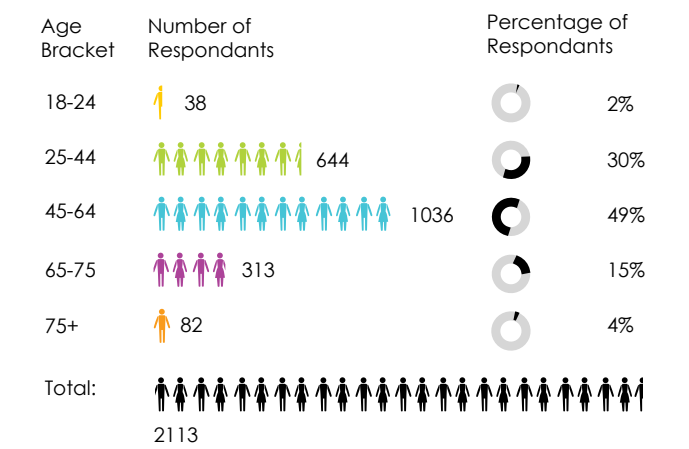


Figure 1. Approximately half of respondents were in the 45-64 age bracket, while one-third of respondents were in the 25-44 age bracket (Courtesy of CUES).

Annual Household Income of Online Survey

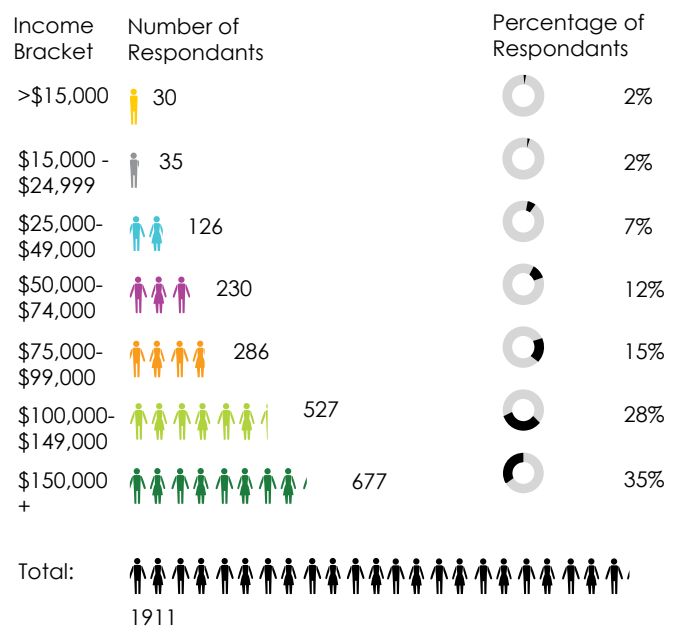


Figure 2. Almost two thirds of the respondents were in households with an annual income of \$100,00 or higher (Courtesy of CUES)

Online Survey Responses by Bergen County Municipality

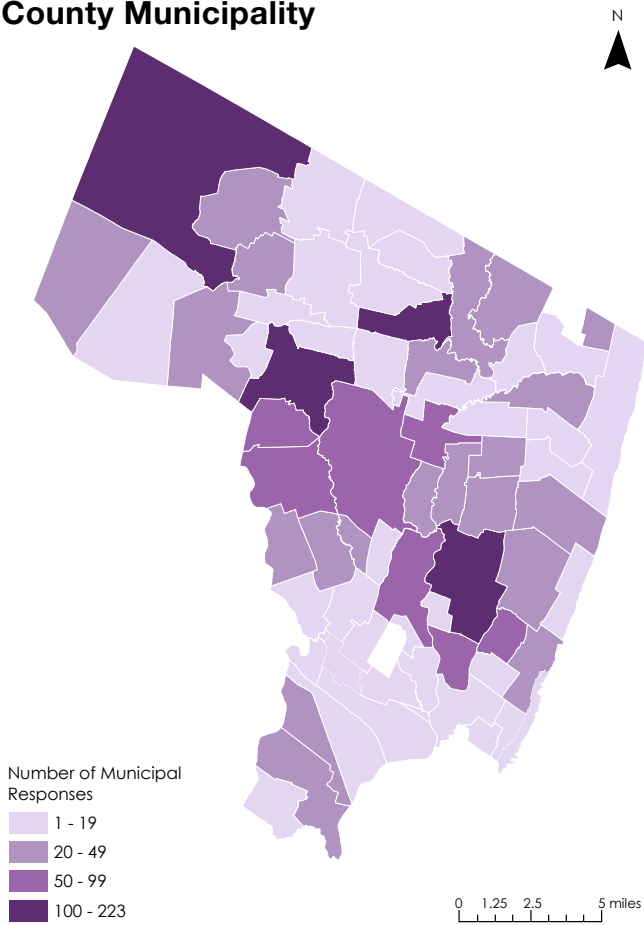


Figure 3. Map indicating the number of online survey responses per Bergen County municipality (Courtesy of CUES).

The number of online survey responses by municipality was determined based upon self-identification of home zip codes. A significant number of responses came from residents of municipalities that were home to some of the larger County parks, including Mahwah, Paramus and Ridgewood. There were no online survey responses from residents of the municipalities of Teterboro or Northvale.

## County Parks Visited by Respondents

		Amount	Percent of Total
Van Saun County Park		1875	85%
Overpeck County Park		1499	68%
Campgaw		1250	57%
Saddle River County Park		1241	56%
Ramapo Reservation		1233	56%
Darlington County Park		1160	53%
Historic New Bridge Landing		769	35%
McFaul Environmental Center		715	32%
Hackensack River County Park		607	28%
Bergen Equestrian Center		567	26%
Alpine Reserve		563	26%
Teaneck Creek Park		534	24%
Hackensack River Pathway		533	24%
Pascack Brook County Park		452	21%
Overbrook County Park		385	17%
Camp Glen Gray		340	15%
Darlington Golf Course		338	15%
Wood Dale County Park		312	14%
Baylor Massacre Burial Site		303	14%
Rockleigh Golf Course		298	14%
Wortendyke Barn		283	13%
Overpeck Golf Course		257	12%
Orchard Hills Golf Course		242	11%
Borg's Woods Nature Preserve		237	11%
Riverside County Park		224	10%
Garretson Farm		197	9%
Camp Merritt Monument		178	8%
Valley Brook Golf Course		175	8%
Camp Tamarack		172	8%
Saddle Ridge Riding Center		166	8%
Dahner's Lake County Park		153	7%
Washington Spring		108	5%
Easton Tower		77	3%
Norwood East Hill		77	3%
Belmont Hill County Park		67	3%
Artesian Fields		64	3%
Samuel Nelkin County Park		55	3%
Gethsemane Cemetery		47	2%
Cherry Brook Woods		31	1%
None		12	1%

**Total # of Respondents: 2204** Figure 4. (Courtesy of CUES).

To understand resident preferences and use of the various County parks, participants were asked to select from a list all the Bergen County Parks they had ever visited. The most frequently named was Van Saun Park, followed by Overpeck Park, Campgaw Mountain, Saddle River Park and the Ramapo Valley Reservation.

To elucidate preferred parks used frequently, respondents were asked which three County parks they had visited most recently. Saddle River Park was the most frequently mentioned, followed by visits to the larger Van Saun Park, Overpeck Park, and Ramapo Valley Reservation.

When asked “How often do you visit your preferred park?”, more than two-thirds of the survey participants visited the County parks daily, weekly, or monthly, suggesting a high degree of repeat park visitation. Reasons for visiting the

Bergen County parks reflect the County’s diversity. Most often cited activities included walking and hiking, access to the natural environment, exercise, being with family and friends, and child-centered family activities.

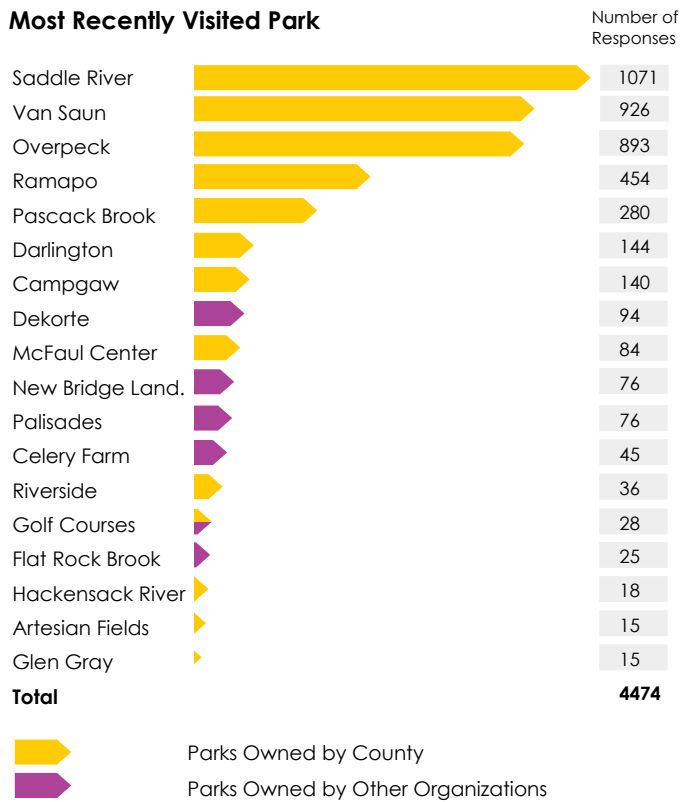


Figure 5. (Courtesy of CUES).

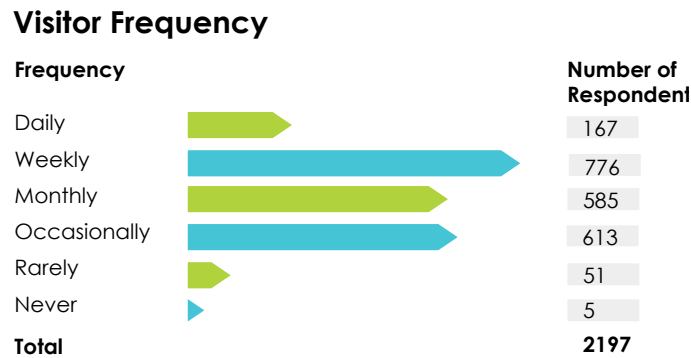


Figure 6. (Courtesy of CUES).

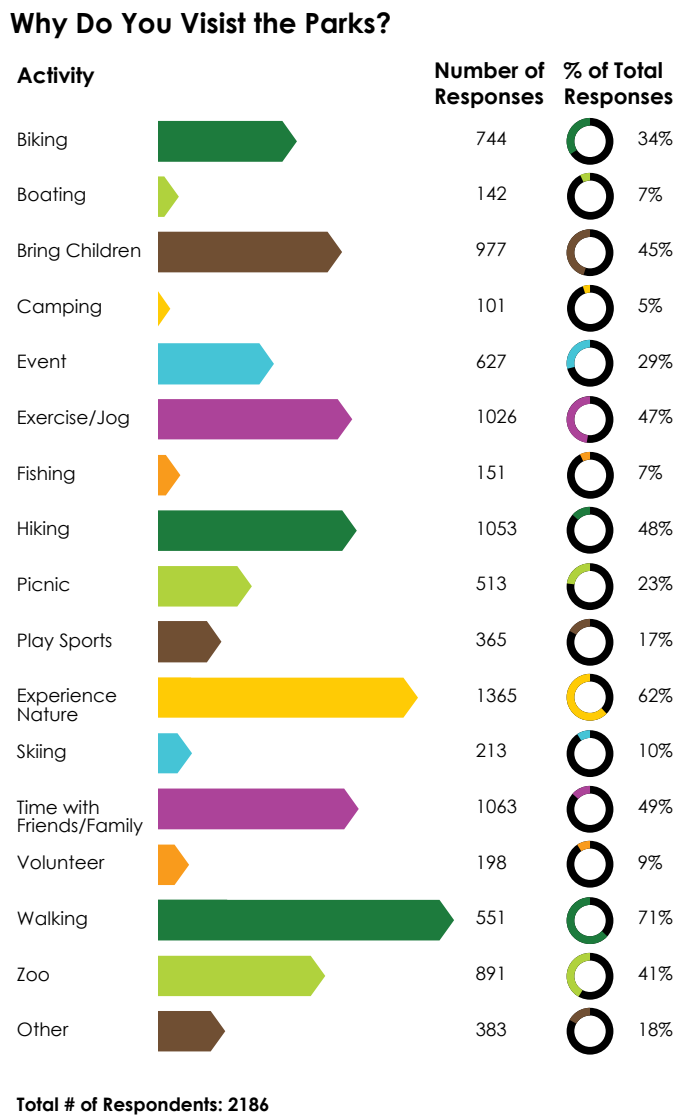


Figure 7. (Courtesy of CUES).

When asked to select from a list of non-Bergen County parks they had visited, New York parks such as Central Park, the Highline, and Harriman State Park were the most frequently named, followed by the Turtle Back Zoo in Essex County and DeKorte Park in the Meadowlands District.

Survey participants could also write in other favorite parks outside the County park system. The parks identified were predominately natural areas, such as the bi-state Palisades Interstate Park, Ringwood State Park and Garrett Mountain Reservation in Passaic County, Sterling Forest State Park and Harriman State Park in New York, and High Point State Park in Sussex County. In addition to Central Park, urban New York City favorites included Prospect Park, Riverside Park, and the Bronx Zoo.

Various botanical gardens were also named as destinations outside Bergen County. Survey participants were asked to name their favorite park in the world. Bergen County's connection to New York City was evident in the number one response of Central Park, named by 354 individuals.

This local icon was followed by a number of national parks such as Yosemite, Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, and Acadia. However, the strong feelings residents have for Bergen County parks, particularly Van Saun Park, were evident in the selection of their favorite park in the world.

### Parks Visited Outside of Bergen County

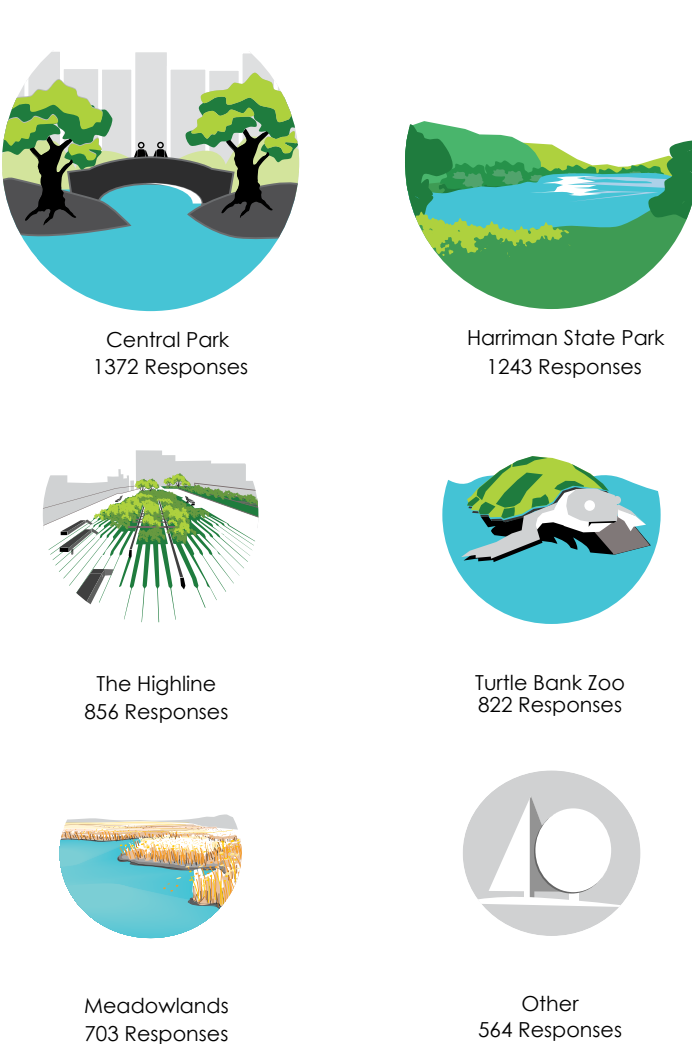


Figure 8. Parks selected from a list of options. For other responses, survey participants were able to write in names of other parks (Courtesy of CUES).

### Favorite Park in the World

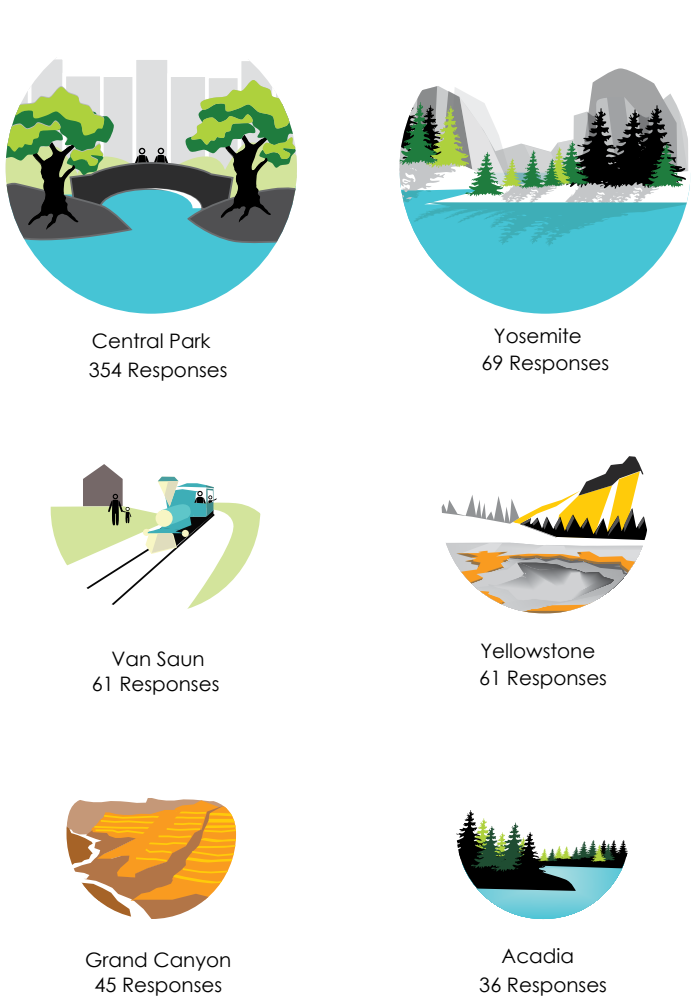


Figure 9. Favorite park in the world. Central Park received the highest number of responses (Courtesy of CUES).

The desire for activities related to the natural environment was also seen in response to the question “What are your preferred park activities?” The diversity of resident choices from a list of options ranged from walking to enjoying flowers, exercising, going to concerts and events, meeting people, and fishing. Nature walks and hiking were named by over half of the survey respondents as their preferred activity.

When asked to describe the best aspect of their preferred park(s), diversity among responses was again seen. Survey participants cited nature most often followed by amenities, accessibility, and cleanliness and safety.

Best Aspects of Bergen County Parks

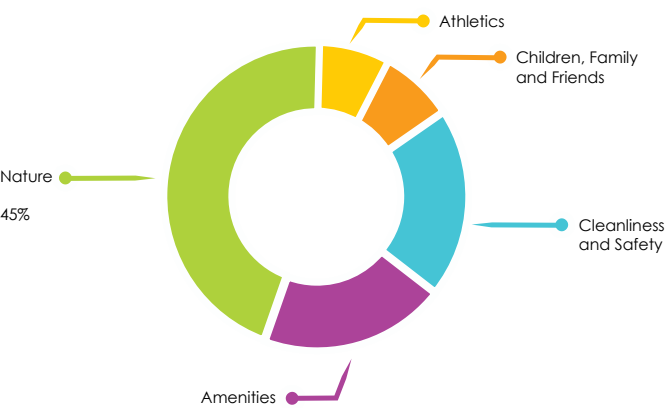
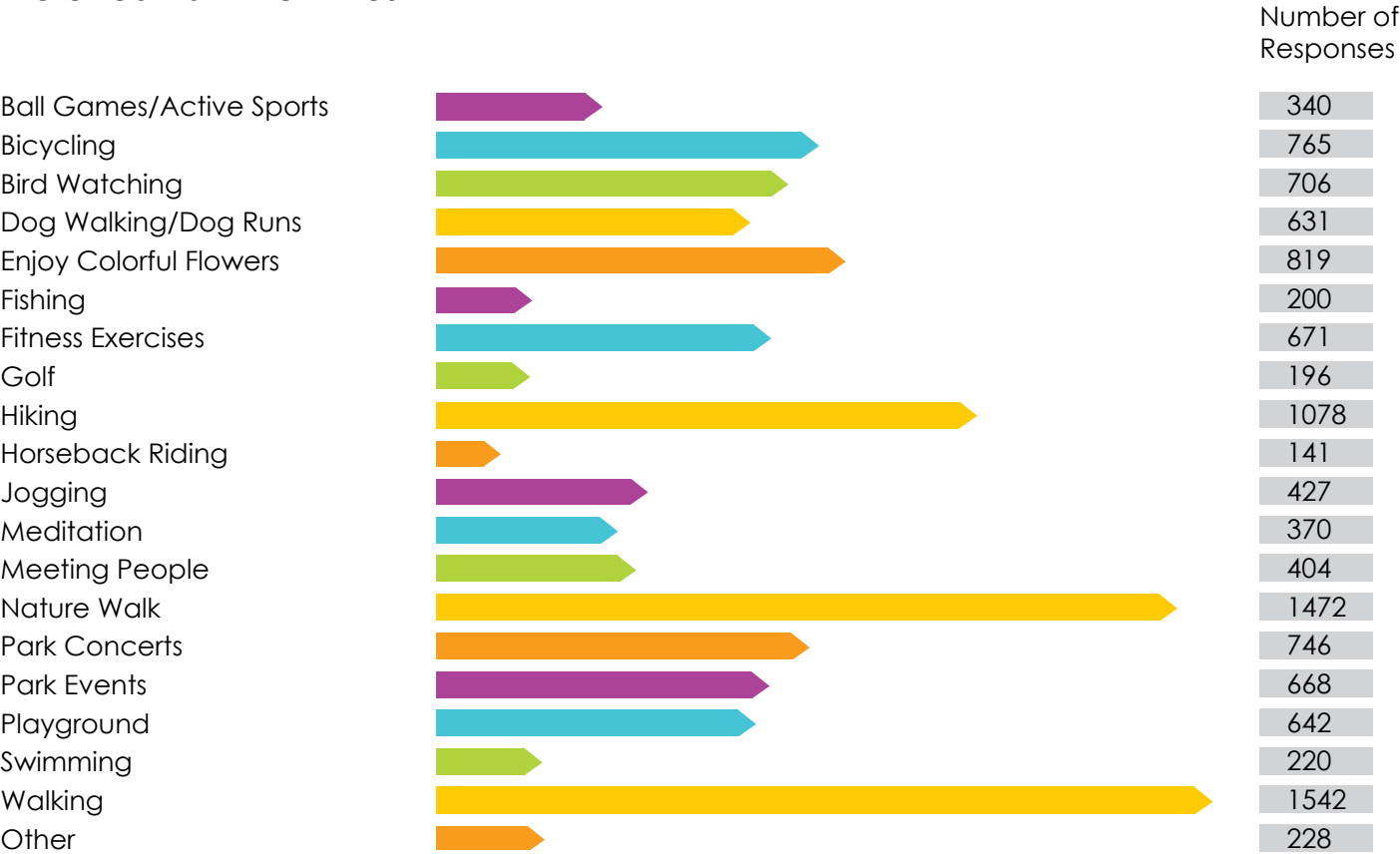


Figure 10. (Courtesy of CUES).

### Preferred Park Activities



Total #of Respondents: 2146

Figure 11. Similar to the diversity of answers illustrated in Figure 8, this question elicited a wide range of preferred activities from survey participants (Courtesy of CUES).

## Important Natural Resources Selected by Participants

To identify symbols that residents most associated with Bergen County survey participants were asked to write in “What is an iconic representation of Bergen County?” There was a very strong association with the region’s Revolutionary War Era history. However, the second most cited icon was Van Saun Park and its zoo.

There was an emotional attachment to Van Saun Park cited in a number of responses, with individuals referring to their childhood memories of the zoo or of taking their children and grandchildren to Van Saun Park. Malls, traffic, and crowding were the three most negative associations in response to this question.

In response to the question “What natural resources are important to you?” survey participants named trees and water features most frequently. Wetlands and landscape vistas were important to more than half the respondents.

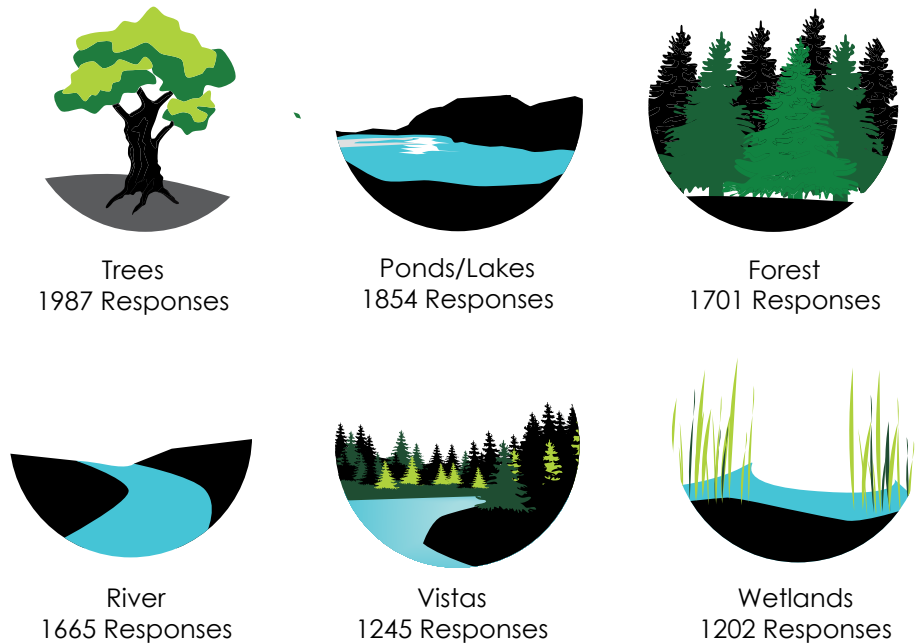


Figure 12. (Courtesy of CUES).

## Most Iconic Representation of Bergen County

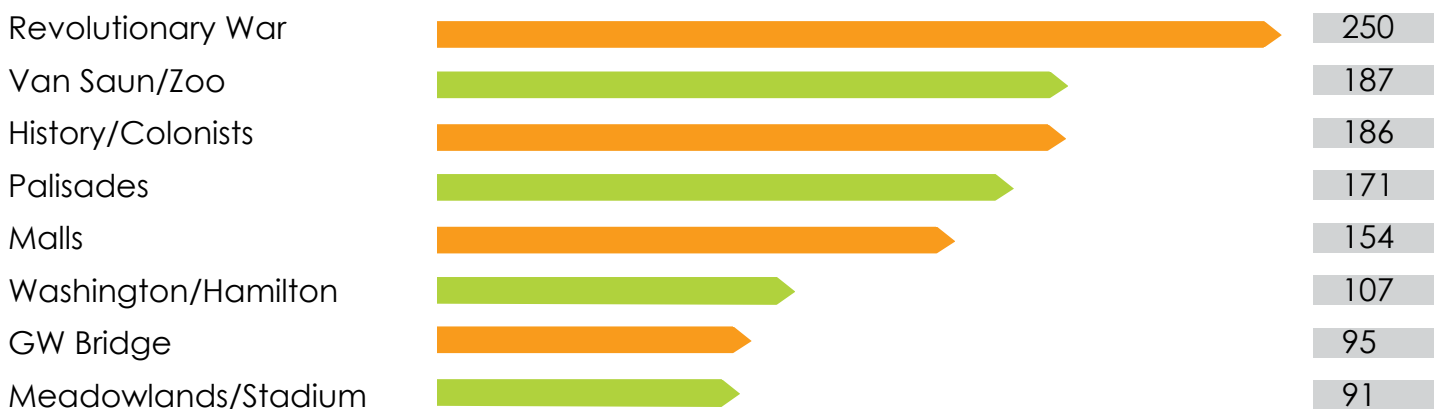


Figure 13. While there was a strong association with the County’s history, Van saun Park and the Bergen County Zoo had the second highest number of responses, followed by the Palisades (Courtesy of CUES).

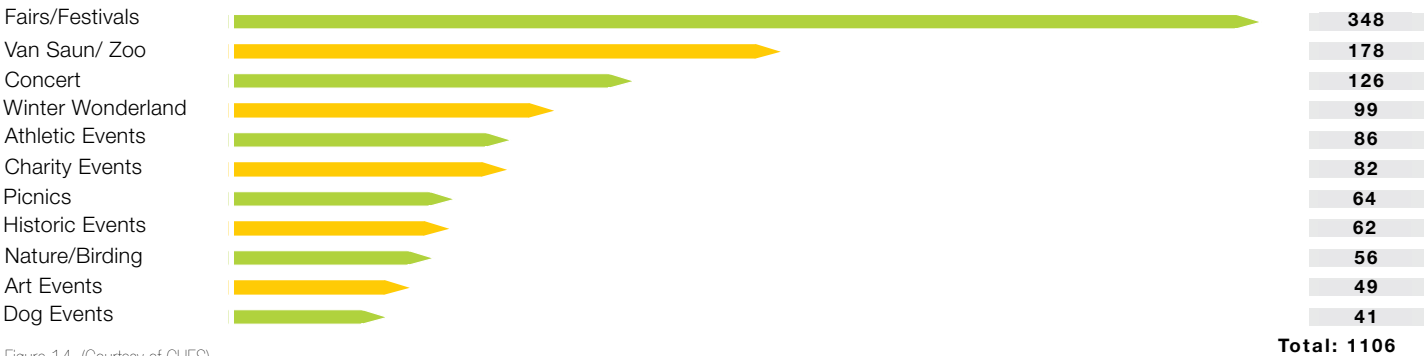


To determine the type of events residents would like to see in the Bergen County parks, survey participants were asked “Have you ever attended an event in Bergen County parks?” Over half had attended a County park event. For those who had participated in a park event, we asked which event(s) they had attended.

Survey participants who named specific events most often mentioned fairs, festivals, concerts, and events associated with Van Saun Park, specifically the zoo and Winter Wonderland. There was also a diversity of events that appealed to specific interests such as nature, history, and art.

Music and art events were most frequently identified as the type of event participants would most like to see offered by the County park system, followed by athletic and family events. Fewer respondents named ethnic or cultural events, although ethnic festivals and fairs were mentioned as events attended by the largest number of survey respondents. When given the opportunity to identify types of events other than the four choices listed, the largest number of survey participants identified nature-oriented events such as walks, hikes and bird watching. The number of survey respondents wanting “no additional events” was equal to those wanting to add mountain biking, more athletics, and events related to animals, primarily dogs. There were also requests for historical reenactments.

Type of Events Attended by Respondents



Type of Events Respondents Would Like to See Offered

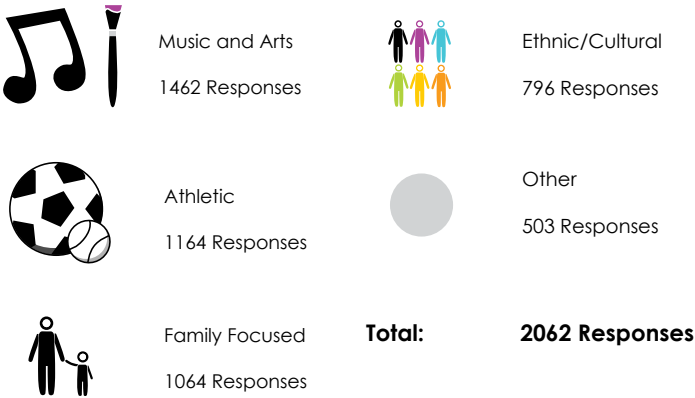


Figure 15. Responses indicate interest in a wide variety of events (Courtesy of CUES).

Amount of Respondents who Have Attended an Event in Bergen County Parks

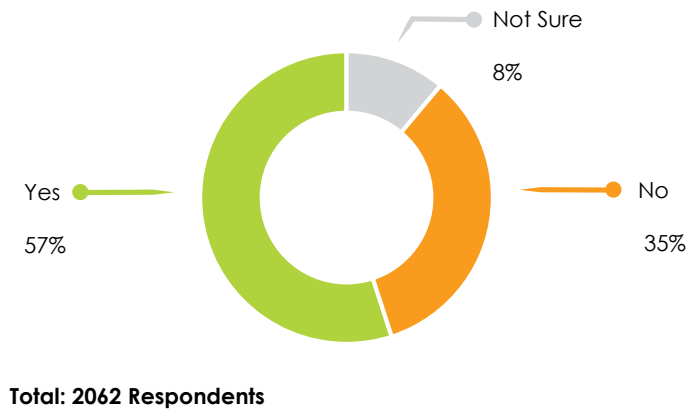


Figure 16. (Courtesy of CUES).

## Parking Space Frequency of Use

To augment the in-park intercept survey, transportation related questions were asked in the online survey. The overwhelming majority of survey participants drove to their preferred park. Relatively few bicycled to reach the parks, but some residents indicated they would bring their bikes to the park on their car and then bicycle within the park. The lack of safety when bicycling on Bergen County roads was mentioned frequently in the public meetings as a reason for not biking to the parks. Because of the reliance on automobile travel to the parks, eighty-five percent of the survey participants use the designated parking spaces within County parks. Twenty-five percent of respondents said they have experienced difficulties getting to or using their preferred park. Difficulties cited were related to traffic and parking availability and/or park overcrowding, especially on weekends and during events.

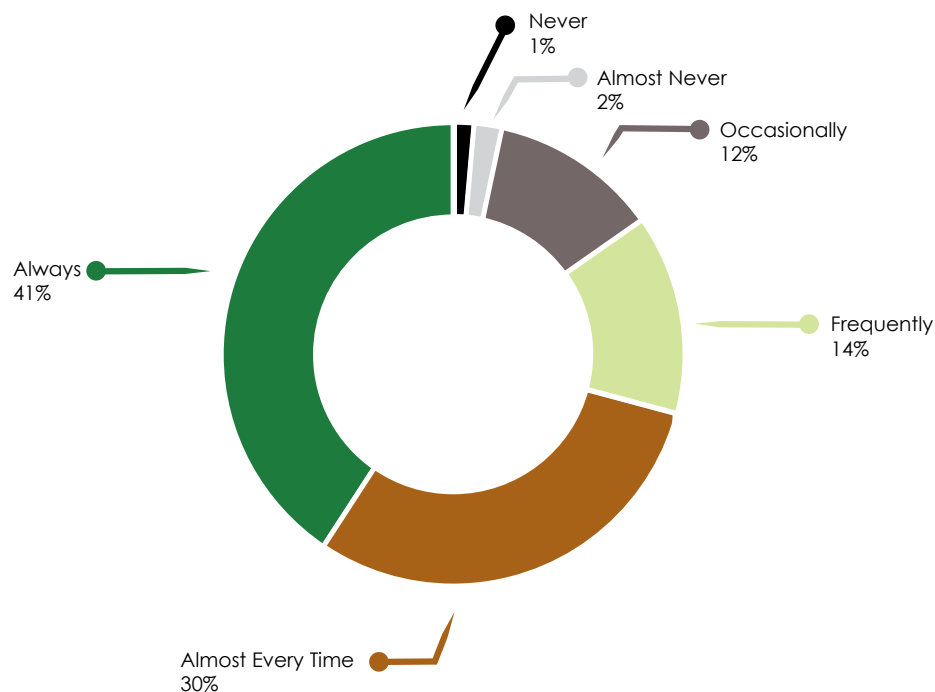


Figure 17. The majority of respondents use designated parking spaces when visiting the County parks (Courtesy of CUES).

## Mode of Transportation to Parks

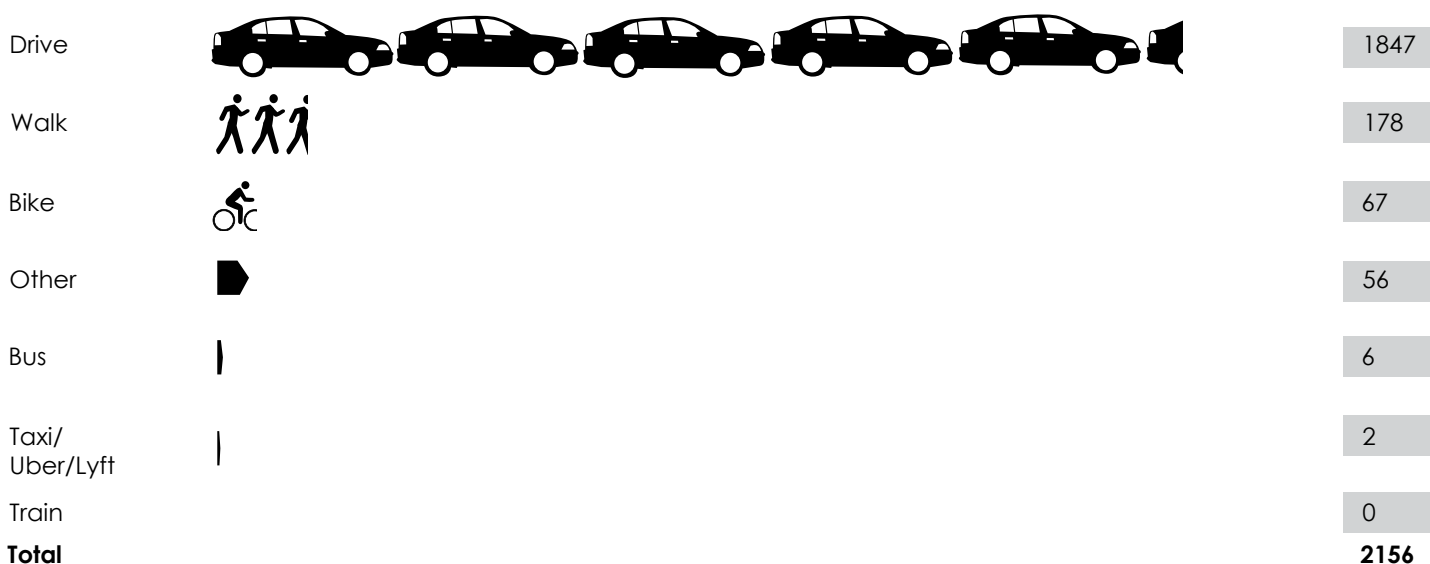
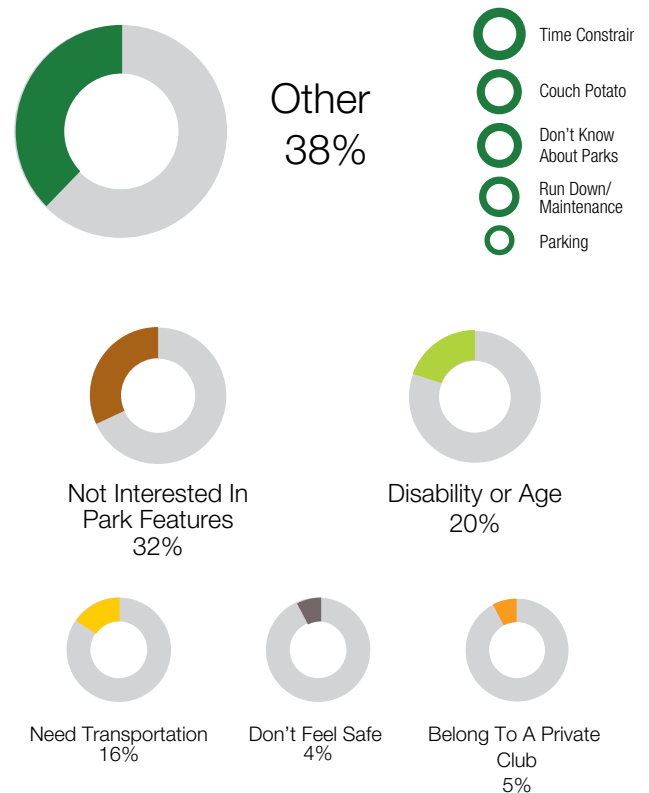


Figure 18. The overwhelming majority of respondents drive to the park (Courtesy of CUES).

## Reasons for Not Using County Parks



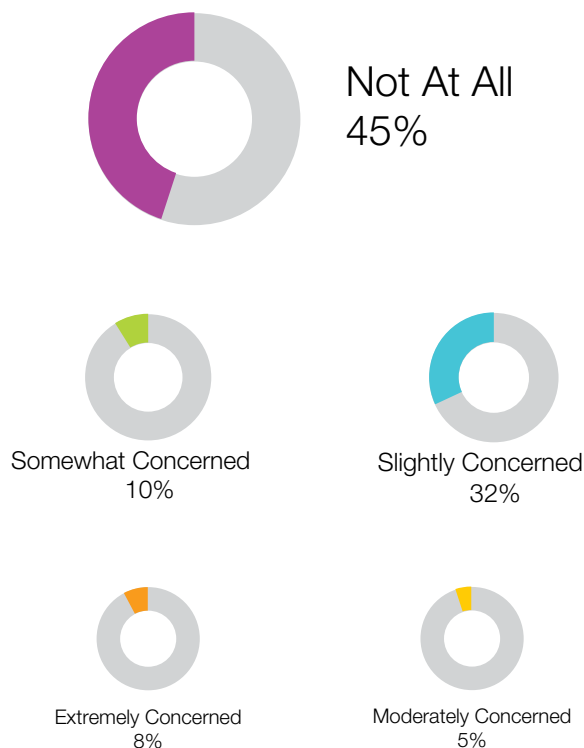
Total: 1102 Responses

Figure 20. Concern about personal safety was not a key reason in most respondent's household members not using the County parks. lack of desired amenities and being too busy were more common reasons (Courtesy of CUES).

Bergen County parks are viewed as safe by approximately eighty percent of the survey participants. However, about eight percent said they were extremely concerned about their safety in the parks. Issues related to safety expressed during the public meetings and in the survey comments mentioned lighting in the parks, especially if there was an evening event, and user conflicts involving pedestrians and bicyclists on trails.

When asked the "Reason household members seldom or never used the County parks?" only four percent of respondents cited safety as the reason. The reason cited most frequently was lack of desired amenities. The most common other reason for not using the County parks, survey participants responded, was that they were "too busy."

## Concern For Safety in Parks



Total: 2139 Responses

Figure 19. The majority of respondents did not feel significant safety concerns in the County parks (Courtesy of CUES).

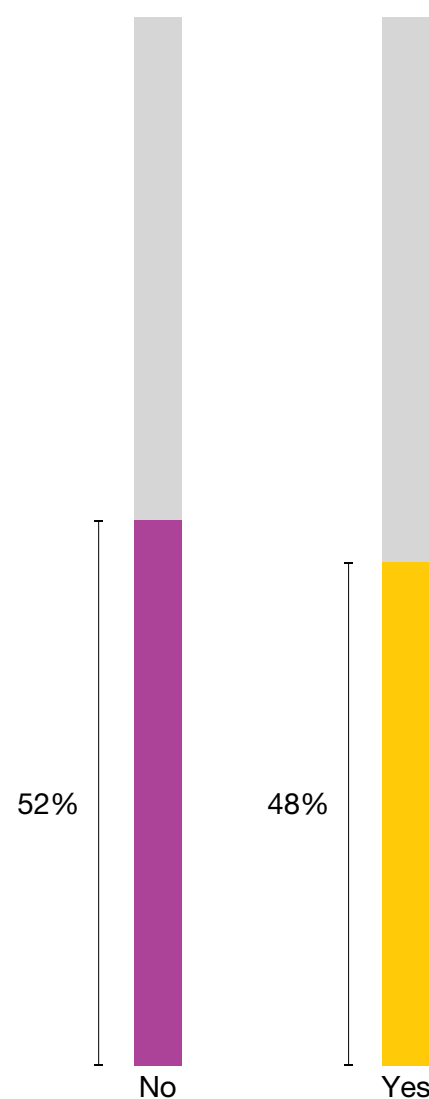
## Satisfaction with Park Amenities

Over ninety-six percent of the online survey respondents believe that Bergen County parks and open spaces provide an economic benefit to the County, and ninety-four percent believe that Bergen County parks positively contribute to their quality of life.

Survey respondents were asked if they were happy with the amenities offered in Bergen County parks. The number of participants who were dissatisfied was slightly greater than those who were satisfied. More survey participants were dissatisfied with the current food and beverage offerings in their preferred park than those who were satisfied. The most frequent comments related to food and beverage offerings were requests for cafes, food trucks, and water stations.

The amenity most frequently requested was a clean well-maintained bathroom facility that was open. Well-maintained walking and hiking trails were also frequently mentioned as a desired amenity. There were also a significant number of requests for bike trails, including legal mountain biking opportunities. The most often cited issues of poor maintenance were at Ridgewood Duck Pond and the condition of the golf courses.

There were requests for expanded or improved playground facilities and requests for splash pads for children. Amenities for dog owners in the form of dog runs or walking areas were requested. There were requests for lighting during evening hours and better availability of parking. Requests for new or better maintained facilities for tennis, pickle ball, and cricket were also mentioned.



Total: 1936 Respondents

Figure 21. A slightly higher number of survey participants wished their local park offered more amenities than those who were satisfied with current offerings (Courtesy of CUES).

## Most Frequently Requested Amenities



Figure 22. The amenity most frequently requested was a clean, well maintained bathroom facility, followed by well-maintained walking/hiking trails (Courtesy of CUES).

## Recurring Public Comments

A number of important, recurring themes emerged during the public outreach process that should be considered. These themes are drawn from comments made in the online survey, at public meetings, from in-person conversations, and via email.

### PROTECT OUR NATURAL RESOURCES

The majority of residents who shared comments cherish the open space that the Bergen County parks provide, especially given the density of development in the County. The desire to see the last remaining natural areas protected was commonly expressed, although opinions on the appropriate amount and type of recreational access to parklands varied. The following are some representative comments made about the issue of natural resource protection in the parks:

*“We are concerned about increased human use of the park reducing the feeling of pristine nature.”*

*“Protecting open space must be a priority, and then managing it in a way that educates and provides enjoyment for the public.”*

*“Certain places should be left for nature. It is important to leave habitat for wildlife and not just consider human recreation.”*



Figure 23. Residents were able to make oral comments as well as provide notes with suggestions at public meetings (Courtesy of CUES).

### WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT

The issue of wildlife management, particularly geese, arose as part of the concern about protecting the health of natural resources in the parks:

*“Deer are eating forest understory... this is a health and safety liability.”*

*“Get rid of the geese... they are a problem on the golf courses”*

However, other residents expressed a desire to see humans live harmoniously with animals. Protecting wildlife habitats, dealing humanely with problematic species, and enhancing education about appropriate ways to interact with wildlife were suggested.

### WIDER RANGE OF ACTIVITIES

With Bergen County’s changing demographics, residents requested access to a wider range of activities, particularly trail riding, kayaking, tennis, pickle ball and cricket.

*“Cricket.” “Kayaking.” “More disc golf!” “Mountain biking.”*

### SAFELY WALKING AND BICYCLING TO PARKS

The need for safe, non-vehicular connections to parks from surrounding neighborhoods was a common thread throughout public comments:

*“You can’t walk or cycle in Bergen County without getting run down.”*

*“We would rather walk, however most towns do not have a walking trail or path.”*

*“Please work on integrating the park into our neighborhoods.”*

The creation of greenways, particularly along the unused railroad and utility rights-of-way, was frequently requested.

## EASY ACCESS TO PARKS INFORMATION

Many public meeting participants were surprised by how many park properties the County owns. Providing residents with easy digital access to information about the entire park system is an important component to getting more people into and supporting the parks. Interactive phone apps or other ways to plan park visits were requested:

*“We need better access to information for parents to plan taking kids to parks.”*

Some information specifically identified as helpful if available online included event calendars, maps, current conditions, and even links to friends groups and concessionaires. Easy online permitting was also requested.

## TRAIL USER CONFLICTS

Public comments identified a number of significant, existing use conflicts that detract from the park experience. These were conflicts between bikers and pedestrians on shared-use paths, dog-related concerns like dogs off-leash and refuse left on paths, and unsanctioned activities occurring where adjacent landowners have different recreation rules.

*“Lack of safety is due to bikes... pedestrians are not safe.”*

*“Sometimes we find off leash dogs running in the parks where it is prohibited.”*

Dog issues arose most prevalently in discussions about the Ramapo Valley Reservation, where many residents

requested the installation of a nearby dog park although others suggested that this would not really solve the problem since many leash law offenders want to share the hiking experience with their dogs. Shared bicycle and walking path issues were most commonly associated with Saddle River County Park. Cyclists riding on the paths at high speed feel unsafe to many pedestrians, while some bikers expressed frustration that in spite of giving proper warning, many pedestrians do not step to the side. Unsanctioned mountain biking seems to occur chiefly in the Alpine Reserves North and South and around the Ramapo Valley Reservation. Representatives from several biking groups would like to cooperate with the local landowners and the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to develop a pilot project for building sustainable biking trails in these areas.

## EVENTS IN THE PARK

The topic of events elicited a wide range of responses from the very positive to the very negative as the comments below reflect:

*“Not a big fan of organized events in the parks which result in a lot of crowding, traffic, and trash.”*

*“They take over the place and other visitors are pushed out.”*

*“Nothing with loud over-amplified music that intrudes upon the peace of neighboring residential areas.”*

*“Small events, such as craft fairs, art shows, flea markets and farmer’s markets are welcome”.*



Figure 24. Public comments helped to raise important issues. (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 25. Images from public meetings (Courtesy of CUES).



## TRAFFIC AND PARKING ISSUES

Lack of parking spaces during peak use times was cited as a significant frustration, particularly at Overpeck Park, Ramapo Valley Reservation, Van Saun Park, and Darlington Park. For some, the challenge of trying to find a parking spot is enough to discourage residents from using the parks. According to public comments, parking and traffic-related issues are especially problematic during large events, particularly at Overpeck Park.

*“Parking at Overpeck is migraine inducing.”*

*“Van Saun can be overcrowded in the spring and summer.”*

*“Ramapo is usually filled to capacity... you cannot get in on the weekend unless you arrive before noon.”*

*“I prefer big events stay out of the parks... there is too much traffic which the local roads cannot handle.”*

## SUSTAINABLE FEATURES

Public comments often supported features that enhance the sustainability of the County parks, ranging from incorporating more recycling to using solar power to generate energy in the parks.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Bergen County has a plethora of community groups that have an interest in and support the parks. Many members of these groups indicated a desire for the County to “reach out to a broader spectrum of the non-profit community as partners.” Appropriate ways to involve these groups in the care and life of the parks should be explored.

## SOCIALIZATION OPPORTUNITIES

As much as many residents enjoy active and passive recreation in the parks, they also requested enhanced opportunities for socialization:

*“I would like to see a piazza like in Italy, with fountains and vendors, so people can enjoy food, coffee, and time with family, get to know neighbors, socialize with community members, and sit outside and enjoy the evening.”*

## SENIORS AND SPECIAL NEEDS

In addition to desired park amenities like clean bathroom facilities, many public outreach participants asked that amenities for residents with special needs and seniors be considered so that everyone in the community can enjoy the parks:

*“Bergen County doesn’t have a park for kids and adults with special needs.”*

*“We need more than just handicapped parking accommodations.”*

*“Parks need to accommodate seniors, as well as other age groups.”*



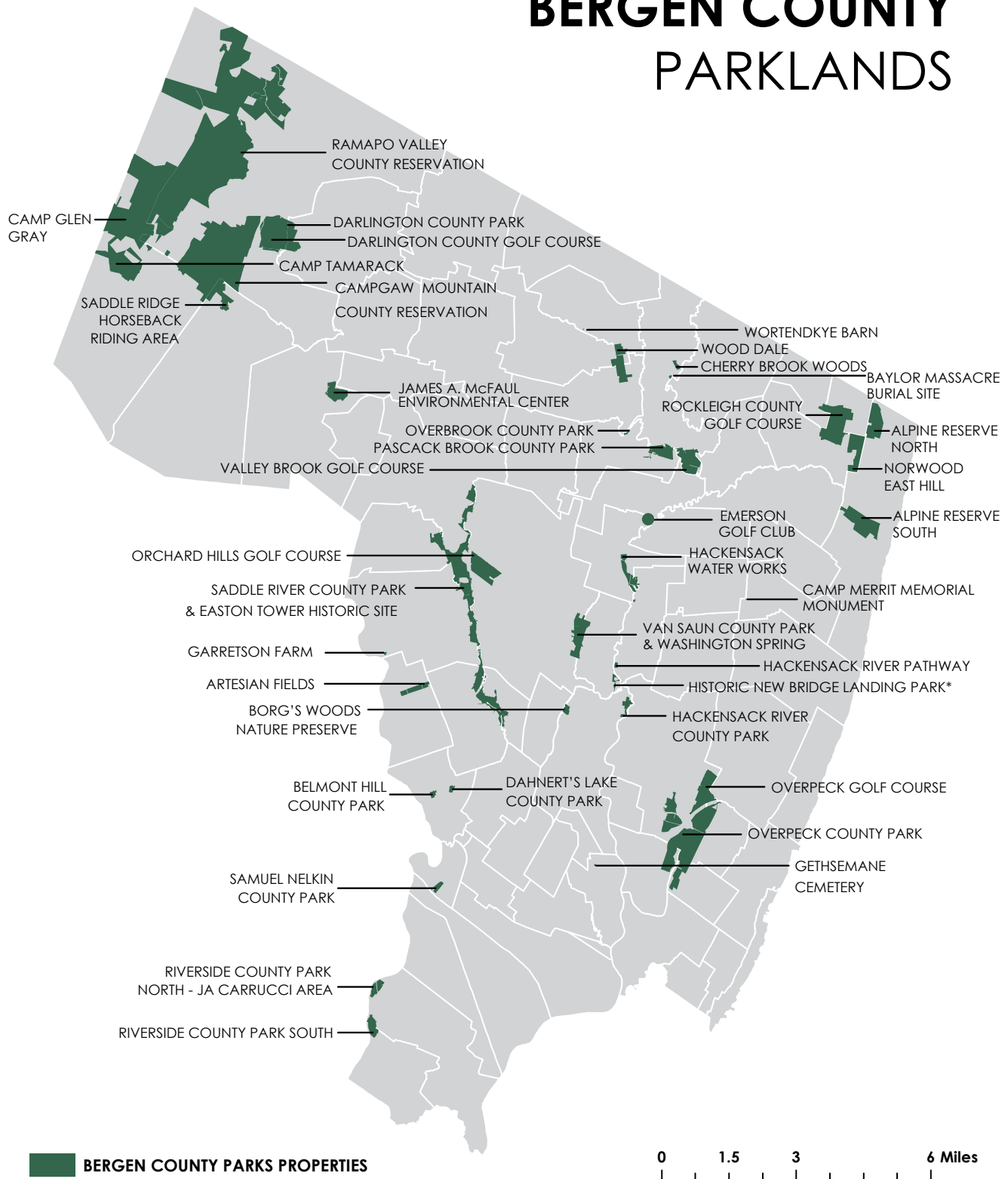
Figure 26. Images from public meetings (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 27. Images from public meetings (Courtesy of CUES).

# 4 History and Inventory

## BERGEN COUNTY PARKLANDS



The 9,335 acres of Bergen County parkland show a rich variety of open spaces that reflect the diversity of the County. Especially noteworthy are the three existing parks with regional importance: Overpeck Park, Ramapo Valley Reservation, and Van Saun Park. Many of the smaller parks serve distinct neighborhoods and function as their local park. Six golf courses provide affordable recreational opportunities for residents and visitors. This Master Plan is based on a two layer concept, in which each park property is described by:

1) a geographic category that supports strategies for spatial development – Park Type

2) by the range of experiences – Park Emphasis.

This means that each property is characterized by two designations that complement each other. The dual typology of Park Type and Park Emphasis reflects the distinction between emotions related to perception of place and the functional uses of specific properties.

## Park Types

Bergen County offers many different park experiences because of diverse settings and amenities. Designating park type is helpful for the development of programming, events, concessions, and maintenance of the overall system. Park types consider the overall role and function of each park in relation to its surrounding community and within the parks system as a whole. Parks are grouped into six distinct kinds based on size, geographic reach, potential for expansion, natural environment, amenities, and programming. Park types are also informed by the perceptions and expectations expressed by residents and key stakeholders. The six types of Bergen County parks are Anchor Parks, Linear Parks, Local Parks, Golf Courses, Nature Preserves, and Historic Sites. The inventory of Bergen County parks reflects a summary of existing conditions at the time of writing of this Master Plan.



Figure 2. Fountain and walking path at Samuel Nelkin Park (Courtesy of CUES).

## Park Emphasis

The Park Emphasis categories build on observed qualities and include consideration of interests and expectations expressed by residents and key stakeholders. There is a benefit to having these categories to help park managers focus on overall goals and management strategies for each category. Perceptions of the park experience may vary, depending on a visitor's interests and park uses. For example, someone who visits a park for birdwatching is likely to think of it as a nature park, whereas someone who uses the same park for playing tennis is likely to categorize it as a social or cultural park. The three emphasis categories are Nature Parks, Social/Cultural Parks, and Neighborhood Parks.

Nature Parks, including Nature Preserves, balance the public use and enjoyment of their natural resources with protecting and enhancing overall ecosystem health. They enhance the visitor experience while preserving the overall feeling of untouched nature. Nature Parks should only be used for appropriate activities, events, and programs that do not affect the sustainability of natural resources. It is recommended that a Stewardship Plan be developed for each Nature Park.

Social/Cultural Parks are closely linked to human communication and interactions. They provide an environment where social interactions between a diversity of visitors can flourish. Social/Cultural Parks are places where small or large groups can share experiences at cultural events, contributing to cultural identity. Year-round use of their facilities should be encouraged through additional seasonal programming, and uses and amenities should promote health and socialization in a sustainable manner.

Neighborhood Parks support small neighborhood activities and community-building. They provide basic amenities and celebrate the unique features of each site. Because of the close links between them and adjacent residential areas, planning for these parks should facilitate multi-modal access to promote better health, less vehicular dependence, and enhance existing infrastructure and programs. Neighborhood Parks can serve as nodes on future greenways and connectors.

# 4.1 Parks History

## Ecological History

Bergen County is a landscape defined by its glacial history. The development patterns, transportation corridors, and even the locations of the County's parks and open spaces were dictated by the hydrological and ecological features that developed as a result of the Wisconsin glaciation.

The Wisconsin glaciation covered the entirety of Bergen County. Its retreat 12,000 years ago left glacial drift deposits and postglacial lakes. Glacial Lakes Hackensack and Passaic were created from boulders carried by the glacier that formed dams. As sea levels rose and overtopped these dams, the glacial lakes drained and created the Passaic, Hackensack, and Hudson River valleys, tributaries, and floodplains.

The resultant Bergen County landforms bordered by the rivers are included within two physiographic regions – the New England Highlands west of the Ramapo Fault Line and the Piedmont east of the fault line. The Piedmont Region includes the Palisades Cliffs along the eastern border of Bergen County, rolling landscapes with river and stream corridors in the center of the County, the marshy Meadowlands in the south, and the mountainous Ramapos in the northwest.

Before Europeans arrived, members of what is believed to be the Leni-Lenape Native American tribe used the diverse land and water resources of the County, albeit with a light footprint due to low human density. Pre-colonial forests were dominated by oak and hickory with some elm, ash, cottonwood, maple, beech, and birch. There were also pockets of hemlock forest and hardwood swamps. Wildlife within the Piedmont region included black bear, wolf, cougar, red fox, rabbit, meadowlark, ruffed grouse, woodcock, thrushes, woodpeckers, ducks, geese, heron, mink, and muskrats. The region's open water, marshes, and wetlands provided critical habitat for migratory birds and other species.

## A Changing Landscape

Ecological resources of the region were used to support the early European settlers, who established communities in the southern portion of Bergen County adjacent to the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers, and the New York and New Jersey harbor. Natural resources in the southern portion of the County, dominated by the Hackensack Meadowlands, were extracted and ultimately two-thirds of the original marshes were drained or filled.

As development continued throughout the County, forests were heavily logged and forested freshwater river valleys were cleared for development. After clearing, the rich organic soils in the rivers' floodplains supported farming in the central and northern portions of Bergen County, growing European crops of wheat, corn, barley, flax, and hemp, which were later followed by celery, pumpkins, peaches, apples, and strawberries.

Colonial water management engineering such as diking, draining, and ditching came with the first Bergen County immigrants from Holland and England. The freshwater white cedar forests were logged for timber to build houses, ships, and the first "corduroy" roads. One of the oldest roads, Belleville Turnpike, led to the first colonial copper mine, Arlington Mine. Sand, gravel, and clay were also extracted, while high marsh salt hay was harvested for animal fodder and packing material.



Figure 1. Fertile riparian lowlands (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Human land use during the post-colonial era changed the ecological landscape of Bergen County. The rivers throughout the County supported industry and agriculture by providing power for factories and mills. By 1834, there were cotton and woolen factories and textile mills in Bergen County. By 1836, railroads provided transportation connections from New York City to Bergen County, crossing and fragmenting the Bergen Meadows. Ditching of the southern Bergen County marshes was undertaken at the end of the 19th Century in an effort to eradicate mosquito populations and to reclaim the marsh lands.

As residential neighborhoods, farms, and commercial developments were established and industry advanced through the County, native plant and wildlife species decreased in number and diversity, soil and water resources were tainted, and landforms were altered. The 1938 New Jersey State Planning Board noted that Bergen County “suffered greatly from development... [and] almost completely ignored amenities such as parks”<sup>1</sup>. Spurred by the opening of the George Washington Bridge and the post-war Baby Boom, Bergen County developed exponentially for decades. In 1946, the County requested the necessary State legislation to create a Parks Commission in order to provide recreational open space for Bergen County residents.

In November 1946, a County referendum, authorized by the New Jersey Legislature, was held to determine public support for creating a Bergen County Parks Commission. This referendum passed and on January 22nd, 1947, Bergen County Freeholders appointed the first Park Commissioners, who held their inaugural meeting on February 5th, 1947. For forty years, the Bergen County Parks Commission (BCPC) planned, acquired, and managed the County’s parklands, until April 3rd, 1987, when the BCPC was merged into a reorganized County government as the Division of Parks, Recreation, Historic and Cultural Affairs.



Figure 2. Map of the Bergen Meadows with the Adjoining Country (New York: Graham & Price, 1836) (Courtesy of Princeton University Library Historic).

## Early Years (1947-1949)

The first years of the BCPC’s existence were characterized by a methodical approach used to gather data, followed by application of this knowledge to develop the blueprint for building the Bergen County Park System. The first Commissioners considered the parkland acreage needed, the land acquisition costs, and the population of each municipality. Initial priorities included development of operating policies and identifying sites for future parks, followed by land acquisition. Although their vision was not written into a formal Master Plan, the BCPC established principles to guide their work.

The Commissioners decided County parks would focus on providing services that were too expensive or impractical for municipalities to offer. They prioritized waterways and adjacent riparian lands as sites for future parks and they decided that proportionate emphasis should be given to income producing facilities and non-income producing facilities within County parks<sup>2</sup>. These priorities and policies continue to influence the use and development of Bergen County’s park properties today.

1. Bergen County’s Park Program First Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1947.  
2. CUES. 2018. Bergen County Parks Master Plan. Website. <http://cues.rutgers.edu/bergen-park-system/>. Accessed 22 January 2018.



Figure 3. Map of the Bergen Meadows with the Adjoining Country (New York: Graham & Price, 1836) (Courtesy of Princeton University Library Historic).

BCPC engaged the National Recreation Association to inventory and appraise developed and underdeveloped land in the County<sup>3</sup>. Commissioners toured parks and analyzed park financial information from other counties. Using national statistics, they decided that ten percent of Bergen County land should be public parkland, about 15,000 acres, half municipally owned. The 1947 County-owned parkland deficit was estimated to be approximately 5,000 acres<sup>4</sup>.

The early financial beginnings of the park system can be traced from data in the BCPC annual reports. Initial funding came from a combination of Freeholder appropriations and County bonding revenues dedicated to the BCPC for land acquisition and capital construction.

One of the BCPC's first actions was to obtain a land inventory to view the Overpeck, Hackensack, Passaic, and Saddle River waterways. Based on recommendations from the Bergen County Planning Board, the Commissioners concluded that land bordering the County waterways should be under public control, especially lands bordering Overpeck Creek and the Hackensack River. The need for parks was determined to be greatest in southern Bergen County. However, there was little land available in the County's most densely populated southern municipalities. After collecting data, reviewing riparian boundaries, and identifying potential parkland parcels, the Commissioners embarked in 1948 on a campaign to engage the public. Municipalities were asked to donate public lands adjacent to rivers for the County park system<sup>5</sup>.

Private owners were also asked to consider transferring specific sites to the park system<sup>6</sup>. The public response was positive, and the first initiative in this land acquisition program saved land along the Saddle River in the Township of Rochelle Park from development<sup>7</sup>.

The City of Garfield passed a resolution to transfer seventy acres to the County for parkland, and Hackensack River marshes from Route 4 to Newbridge Road were dedicated as a game preserve<sup>8</sup>. The land acquisition program accelerated in 1949 when the first land transfer from the City of Garfield was completed. The Township of Teaneck transferred Overpeck lands, the Township of Lyndhurst and Borough of North Arlington transferred Passaic River lands, and the Borough of Lodi transferred Saddle River lands<sup>9</sup>.

However, it was soon recognized that the original legislation funding mechanism could not provide the monies needed to acquire lands for the proposed new park system. The State legislature amended the original law, authorizing the Freeholders to provide funds for parkland acquisition and capital improvements through bonding.

This amendment also authorized the Freeholders to appropriate for the use of the BCPC monies that came from park revenue producing facilities, in addition to Freeholder appropriations for BCPC expenses and debt service<sup>10</sup>. The public relations initiatives continued in 1949 with BCPC Commissioners holding 118 meetings or conferences<sup>11</sup>.



Figure 4. Deeds transferring municipal lands to the Bergen County Park Commission (Courtesy of Bergen County's Park Program Third Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1949).

3. Ibid.  
4. Ibid.  
5. Bergen County's Park Program Second Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1948.

6. Ibid.  
7. Ibid.  
8. Ibid.  
9. Bergen County's Park Program Third Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1949  
10. Ibid.  
11. Ibid.



## The A. Thornton Bishop Years (1950-1958)

Thornton Bishop became BCPC President in 1950, a transition that placed an architect in charge of the BCPC. He believed the “dominant feature [in planning] must be the community purpose” and urged citizens to have “deep regard for the shape [post-war] growth will take” because, “the responsibility will rest with them”<sup>12</sup>. This talented architect brought his public-spirited attitude to the leadership of the BCPC at a critical moment, when land acquisitions and funding permitted the BCPC to begin actual park construction.

The Commission’s policy was to find sites that could be easily expanded to one hundred acres; lands along waterways were prioritized to “protect streams against misuse, and to [have] a source of water for [park] installations requiring water”<sup>13</sup>. Park locations would be accessible to major highways to avoid traffic on local streets and the parks should not duplicate municipal facilities<sup>14</sup>. The BCPC’s emphasis shifted to site development and construction, which began with clearing and grading land in Lyndhurst. Trees and shrubs removed from a site were replanted in other park locations and a nursery was started in Van Saun Park. Due to funding limits, a general plan was created that described how park sites would be developed over a period of years based on four factors: character of the soil, urgency for recreational facilities in an area, suitability of land for development, and money available<sup>15</sup>.

The first Bergen County parks opened to the public in 1952. These properties included the Ridgewood Duck Pond, a softball diamond and play area in Saddle River Park, and picnic areas in Van Saun Park. Several hundred roses were donated by the Garfield Rotary Club for planting in the Belmont Hill oval. The Ridgewood Duck Pond was flooded for winter ice skating, and by 1954, 2,500 people were skating on the Wild Duck Pond and Dahnert’s Lake.

Drainage and water management were important features of park construction because the low-lying County rivers were subject to flash flooding. Freeholders retained a hydraulic engineer to coordinate Saddle River flood control with park development along the river<sup>16</sup>.

The emphasis on engineered construction included filling of land along the Saddle River<sup>17</sup>, changing the river’s flow path, and constructing a retaining reservoir for flood control<sup>18</sup>. A tide gate was installed in 1955 on Overpeck Creek and a sanitary landfill plan was developed to fill 400 Overpeck acres<sup>19</sup> in anticipation of future park development. The BCPC continued discussions with transportation entities in their attempts to avoid fragmenting Overpeck lands into multiple areas due to the construction of the New Jersey Turnpike.



Figure 5. Ridgewood Duck Pond ( Courtesy of Sixth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1952).



Figure 6. Estimated use of Bergen County Parks by resident population of 675,000 (Courtesy of Eight Annual Report of Bergen County Park Commission 1955).

By 1955, the Bergen County park system was identified as one of the fastest growing in the United States. County population totaled 675,000 residents and Bergen County was one of the fastest developing areas in the New York metropolitan region<sup>20</sup>. In response to this development pressure, the planning team for Overpeck Park included landscape architects, road planners, and engineers. Overpeck goals included relieving traffic congestion on Teaneck Road and Grand Avenue, creating a circulatory road system, and reclaiming land by dredging<sup>21</sup>.

12. Mark, R. 2011. Senior Thesis, Department of History, Columbia University. Reputation and Reality in America's Model Town: Remembering Racial Integration in Teaneck, New Jersey 1949-1968. [https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/download/fedora.../Mark\\_Senior\\_Thesis.pdf](https://academiccommons.columbia.edu/download/fedora.../Mark_Senior_Thesis.pdf) Accessed 23 March 2017

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Bergen County's Park Program Sixth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1952.

16. Ibid.

17. Bergen County's Park Program Seventh Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1953.

18. Bergen County's Park Program Eighth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1954.

19. Ibid.

20. Bergen County's Park Program Tenth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1956.

21. Ibid.

The tenth anniversary of the BCPC in 1957 was designated the “Year of Decision”<sup>22</sup>. Emphasis was turning to park amenities and programming, and events like the Van Saun Cerebral Palsy Horse Show and the Christmas Exhibit attracted over 25,000 visitors<sup>23</sup>. With a County population increasing by 100,000 residents every four years, the Commissioners believed that a planned acquisition program had to occur immediately before land became prohibitively costly and future construction would be curtailed<sup>24</sup>. By 1958, the Bergen County park system consisted of the eighteen hole Rockleigh Golf Course, a flood control basin on the Saddle River, a Museum of Arts and Sciences in Teaneck, thirteen ballfields, two football fields, one soccer field, four day camps, seven picnic areas, two play areas, three miles of bridle path, a horse show paddock and equestrian school, five ice skating areas, four lakes, and a formal rose garden<sup>25</sup>. The challenges in developing Overpeck Park were first acknowledged in 1958. These challenges included competition for land with transportation entities, conflicting engineering data regarding flooding and the lake, difficulties with drainage, problems with the tide gate, and lack of a financial schedule<sup>26</sup>.



Figure 7. Overpeck tide gate (Courtesy of Bergen County's Park Program 1957 Eleventh Annual Report County Park Commission).

## The Sixties (1959-1969)

Harold Hollenbeck, a lawyer and politician, assumed the presidency of BCPC following Thornton Bishop's death in 1958. At the end of 1959 Bergen County's population passed 700,000<sup>27</sup> residents, and the County park system consisted of 3,300<sup>28</sup> acres, hosting over 500,000<sup>29</sup> visitors annually. Permits to use ballfields, picnic or camping grounds were issued to over 500 groups<sup>30</sup>. By the end of the decade, bus service to the parks was initiated from southern Bergen County<sup>31</sup>, park revenues reached

\$700,000<sup>32</sup>, 3000 park use permits were issued annually<sup>33</sup>, visitors exceeded three million<sup>34</sup>, and thousands of trees, shrubs, and bulbs had been planted within the parks<sup>35</sup>.

As Bergen County population growth continued, public amenities were added to the park system, including new roadways. Conflicts between transportation entities and park planners emerged, particularly with respect to Overpeck Park. Construction of the Bergen-Passaic Expressway took 190 acres from Overpeck Park and forced redesign of the original plan<sup>36</sup>. Parking lots and park drives were added to older parks to accommodate visitors arriving by automobile. To meet the public demand for tennis, twelve courts and a tennis center were constructed in Van Saun Park in 1960, the same year the children's zoo opened<sup>37</sup>. Campgaw-Ramapo wilderness totaled 1,204 acres, and a ten acre nursery at Campgaw cultivated stock for use within the park system<sup>38</sup>. Bergen County parks celebrated a number of firsts in 1962. Park attendance reached two and one half million and Bergen County became the first public entity to be awarded State of New Jersey Green Acres funds<sup>39</sup>. The \$130,000 Green Acres grant supported the acquisition of land in the Borough of Norwood, which added a nine hole expansion to Rockleigh Golf Course, whose 1962 visits totaled 97,508<sup>40</sup>. The first County tennis tournament was held at the Van Saun Tennis Center and tennis center use doubled to 11,246 visits. A dam was installed in Wood Dale Park and the first rustic camping shelter was built in Campgaw. The first open air concert was also held. Golf, tennis, and pony rides were now activities that generated revenues for the BCPC. Revenues were also generated by the 1,325 park permits issued. Free park amenities included summer Sunday concerts and July-August tennis clinics. The antique replica train was added to Van Saun Park in 1963. Overpeck challenges were finally resolved in 1963<sup>41</sup> when a settlement was reached with the State that gave the County title to 800 acres of parkland. The State agreed to construct a bridge to connect the park sections split by Route 80<sup>42</sup>. The Darlington Country Club was also purchased in 1963, adding two swimming and diving lakes, and a fishing and boating lake to the park system<sup>43</sup>. Grant funding to purchase Darlington came from New Jersey Green Acres and a Federal grant<sup>44</sup>.

22. Bergen County's Park Program Eleventh Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1957.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Bergen County's Park Program Twelfth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1958.

26. Bergen County's Park Program Eleventh Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1957.

27. 1960 Fourteenth Annual Report

28. 1959 Thirteenth Annual Report

29. Bergen County's Park Program Twelfth Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission 1958

30. Ibid.

31. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report 1969

32. Annual Report, 1968 Bergen County Park Commission

33. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report 1967.

34. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report 1966.

35. Ibid.

36. 1960 Fourteenth Annual Report.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid.

39. Annual Report for 1962 Bergen County Park Commission.

40. Ibid.

41. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1983.

42. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1964.

43. Ibid.

44. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1965.

45. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1966.

In 1966, an eight acre lake for Overpeck golf course and a two and one-half acre pond on a former pig farm, now the McFaul Wildlife Center in Wyckoff, were excavated<sup>45</sup>. The Campgaw Visitor's Center was completed in 1968 and a machine to make snow for the ski slope was installed<sup>46</sup>. Park fees were introduced in 1965 for groups of fifty or more, as well as for the use of the Campgaw campsites<sup>47</sup>. The following year, bonding authority for park construction was increased from three million dollars to five million<sup>48</sup>. As the decade ended, the revenues and expenses associated with the park system were a primary focus of the BCPC annual reports.

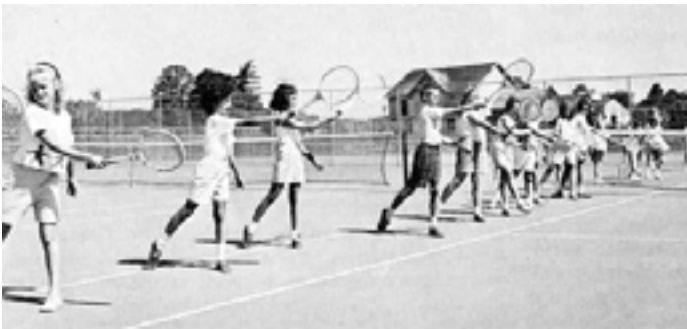


Figure 8. Van Saun tennis clinic (Courtesy of Annual Report for 1962 Bergen County Park Commission).

## The Growth Years (1970-1979)

During the final decade of the BCPC's existence, Bergen County parks and park programs were an integral part of resident's lives. In 1970, voters approved a two million dollar bonding increase, providing five million dollars for land acquisition and park construction<sup>49</sup>. Park revenues in that year approached one million dollars, generated by the golf courses, ski and tennis centers, and permit receipts<sup>50</sup>. Park naturalists conducted 640 programs for 20,000 children and seventy adult programs. A fifth recreation area was added to Saddle River Park, and a rope tow and second ski lift were added to Campgaw. Campgaw also added a refrigerated toboggan chute, the first lease agreement in the County park system<sup>51</sup>. A cafeteria opened in Van Saun Park and Overpeck athletic fields in Palisades Park opened. Park revenues exceeded one million dollars in 1971 and 98,635 residents registered to use the parks fee facilities<sup>52</sup>. This use resulted in weekend overcrowding and golf course wait times of four hours<sup>53</sup>. The Campgaw Visitor's Center expanded to accommodate ski rentals, first aid, and four new snowmaking machines were added.

Overpeck development continued with landfilling, excavation, and construction in Leonia. Extreme weather conditions affected park operations – the drought conditions of the 1960s gave way to summer flooding in 1971 from one of the five most severe floods in New Jersey history<sup>54</sup>. Rain caused damage in the streamside parks. The Darlington season was shortened, the golf courses were closed, and debris including picnic tables and trees washed into the streams.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bergen County Park Commission in 1972 saw the opening of the 624-acre Ramapo Valley Reservation for hiking, fishing, and tent camping. This park increased total County park acreage to 4,669 acres in twenty-three recreation areas<sup>55</sup>. The Commission acquired a show-mobile that included a stage and loudspeakers to support events in the parks. BCPC employed 260 people and owned 226 vehicles; Freeholder appropriations totaled \$3,309,361 and park fees generated revenues of \$989,758<sup>56</sup>.

By 1975 the County was supporting buses going to Van Saun and Darlington Parks that stopped in sixty-three municipalities in the summer<sup>57</sup>. There was also a year-round cross-county bus going to Van Saun Park and the Wyckoff Wildlife Center<sup>58</sup>. Riding centers opened in Franklin Lakes<sup>59</sup> at Saddle Ridge and Overpeck Park in Leonia, and a pony ring was added to Van Saun Park and hang gliding was introduced at Campgaw in 1976.

Park fees collected in 1976 exceeded one and a half million dollars<sup>60</sup>. Because of a State-mandated budget cap, the first BCPC cutback of park services occurred in 1977, when the free summer concerts were eliminated<sup>61</sup>. However, a mounted patrol was added to the Campgaw-Ramapo Parks, and a Saddle River Park trail addition brought the total length of the trail to six miles. A lawsuit, related to Overpeck development that had been filed by the Village of Ridgefield Park, was settled with an agreement to complete Overpeck Park construction by 1986<sup>62</sup>. The capital funds bonding limit was raised again by five million dollars in 1978 for the construction of facilities, Overpeck Park development, and the Van Saun Park Zoo<sup>63</sup>.

46. Annual Report, 1968 Bergen County Park Commission.

47. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1965.

48. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1966.

49. Annual Report, 1970 Bergen County Park Commission.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Annual Report, 1971 Bergen County Park Commission.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

55. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1972.

56. Ibid.

57. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1975.

58. Ibid.

59. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1974.

60. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1976.

61. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1977.

62. Ibid.

63. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1978.

Zoo attendance was over one million visitors, and the acquisition of one of the last wilderness tracts added 469 acres to Ramapo parklands<sup>64</sup>. Revenues topped one and a half million dollars and the overall park budget was \$5,803,409<sup>65</sup>, almost six-fold higher than at the start of the decade. The 1979 BCPC Annual Report noted that vandalism in the parks was an issue.



Figure 6. Harvesting high marsh salt hay. (Courtesy of Sebold).

## 1980-1987

The 1980 to 1984 Annual Reports of the BCPC mark a noticeable change from the reports of the prior thirty-two years. The focus of these reports was on challenges: vandalism, groundskeeping, increased operating costs, revenue needs, cutbacks in personnel, reduction in operating hours, and water shortages. There is also an enhanced focus on the amount of revenue specific activities produced and the ratio of revenues to park expenses. These reports do include discussions of smaller initiatives, but the tone dramatically changed from that of reports prior to 1980.

Each report mentions the issue of “rampant vandalism throughout the park system”<sup>66</sup>, a topic not noted prior to 1979. The number of scheduled programs were decreasing as were the number of zoo visitors<sup>67</sup>. A severe drought in 1980 and 1981 brought about restrictions on watering damaged plantings<sup>68</sup>. Budget limitations and inflation resulted in reducing operating hours, an end to professional tennis services and the tennis tournament at Van Saun Park, a shortened swimming season, and the holiday closing of some park facilities. The Van Saun Park Zoo aviary was closed due to deterioration<sup>69</sup>.

Equestrian activities were among the first to become concessions, at Saddle Ridge in 1981 and Overpeck in 1983. The final BCPC Annual Report in 1984 again noted the austerity imposed by the State budget caps. The golf courses closed two weeks early and the swim season opened three weeks late. Darlington Park closed one month early and the Van Saun Park railroad closed two days each week<sup>70</sup>. The BCPC continued to operate with 260 permanent employees.

On November 7th, 1985, the voters of Bergen County adopted the County Executive form of government. Subsequently, on November 4th, 1986, voters elected the first Bergen County Executive and seven members for the Board of Chosen Freeholders. This form of government is included in the 1972 Optional County Charter Law, N.J.S.A. 40:41 A-1, which allows increases in the centralization and management capacity of counties by separating the executive and legislative functions and by providing for a chief executive officer, primarily responsible for managing government operations<sup>71</sup>.

On March 4th, 1987, the Board of Chosen Freeholders adopted the Administrative Code of Bergen County, with an effective date of April 4th, 1987. As part of this government reorganization, the Bergen County Park Commission ceased to exist and the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation was created.

## County Executive William McDowell (1987-1991)

With the end of the BCPC, reconstructing history becomes more difficult. Annual reports were discontinued, so we rely hereafter on internal project files and the institutional knowledge of key personnel. The newly formed Department of Parks and Recreation presented a shift in the forty-year operation of the County's park system. The newly established County Executive form of government replaced the nine member autonomous Park Commission, and its executive director gave way to an appointed department director, accountable to the County Executive and Administrator. One constant from the Commission was the decision by the first County Executive William D.

64. Ibid.

65. Bergen County Park Commission Annual Report, 1979.

66. 1980 Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission.

67. Ibid.

68. 1981 Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission.

69. Ibid.

70. 1984 Annual Report of the Bergen County Park Commission.

71. County Government Structure: A State by State Report. National Association of Counties. <https://www.nacogov.org/dotAsset/98216b7d-e66c-4da6-a78b-1871b6c11439.pdf>. Accessed 19 April 2017.

McDowell to appoint the last Park Commission Executive Director, Charles Nurnberger, as the first Director of Parks and Recreation.

A second notable appointment that would have a direct impact on the parks system was the appointment of Chester P. Mattson as the director of the new Department of Planning and Economic Development. Mr. Mattson set out to conduct long-range planning studies for the County which focused on transportation and open space land preservation initiatives.

One of those earliest studies was an analysis of the amount of undeveloped privately-owned land in the County. In 1988, it was determined that less than seven percent of the County's privately-owned land was undeveloped, down from twelve percent just six years prior<sup>72</sup>. One area of the County that was under great development pressure was the Ramapo Mountain range located in the northwest portion of the County, as evidenced by the sale of forested land to land developers. One such transaction was the sale of the former Boy Scout Camp Todd in Oakland to a developer who intended to transform the parcel into a major development featuring townhomes and single-family dwellings<sup>73</sup>.

A second factor directing the County's attention to the Ramapo Mountain range was the construction of the last segment of Interstate Highway Route 287 in Oakland and Mahwah. While opposed by public officials, the completion of Route 287 was welcomed by land speculators who hastened the inevitable escalation in land values. The Township of Mahwah's development pace had already exploded in anticipation of Route 287, linking Westchester, Orange and Rockland Counties to Bergen, Passaic, and Morris Counties and points further west and south<sup>74</sup>.

Recognizing the rapid loss of open space, the County developed a \$40 million campaign to preserve it and twelve areas were identified for preservation, totaling some 2,500 acres of land<sup>75</sup>. The campaign was named: "The Best of the Last" in an effort to galvanize public support for land preservation, as well as from NJ Green Acres program administrators who provide grants and low-interest

loans to counties and municipalities to acquire land for preservation and recreation purposes. This State funding would supplement the commitment of County bonding.

"The Best of the Last" acquisition program identified specific tracts of land throughout the whole County, not just exclusively in the Ramapo Mountains. The land identified included tracts in Mahwah such as the Ramapo Hunt and Polo Club (461 acres), Cannonball Run (316 acres), Mahwah Heights (177 acres), Camp Yaw Paw (184 acres), and Camp Glen Gray (734 acres). In Oakland, Camp Tamarack (181 acres) was targeted. In the northeast section of the County, areas included the Emerson Country Club (125 acres); Pascack Brook Golf Club (96 acres) and the Haworth Golf Club (67 acres). Other areas included the Norwood East Hill Tract (75 acres) and lands in the middle of the County involving the Hackensack River, building from the thirty acre park behind Riverside Square Mall.

By 1989, in only the second year of the "Best of the Last" campaign, the County was successful in acquiring 1,263 acres of land in the Ramapo Mountain (the Hunt and Polo Club, Ramapo Mountain Top, and Cannonball Run tracts) at a cost of \$14 million. In 1990, an additional 505 acres in the Ramapo Mountain range were dedicated to the County's parkland inventory. Before the land preservation campaign started in 1988, 3,604 acres were already protected in the Ramapo Mountain; at the conclusion of County Executive McDowell's term, 5,397 acres were preserved in the Bergen County Ramapo Mountain region.

### **County Executive William P. Schuber (1991-2003)**

The "Best of the Last" campaign continued under County Executive William P. Schuber with Mr. Mattson and the Department of Planning and Economic Development striving to achieve the acquisitions as previously identified. In 1991, the Norwood East Hill property was acquired with 121 acres of the 151-acre tract serving as a major land preservation project outside of the Ramapo Mountain region. This preservation prevented the development of the forested property for single family homes and townhouses. This acquisition added to lands already held by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

72. "2,500 acres targeted by Bergen", *The Record*, December 15, 1988

73. "Strapped scouts sell camp to developer", *The Dispatch*, February 24, 1988

74. Memo, Chester P. Mattson, dated October 31, 1989

75. "2,500 acres targeted by Bergen", *The Record*, December 15, 1988

To the west of Norwood, in 1993 the County received a donation from the Hackensack Water Company of the New Milford Pump and Filtration plant and sixty-four acres of land along the Hackensack River. In central Bergen, the fourteen acre Borg's Woods was acquired in 1994; this tract is the sole surviving remnant of the once expansive, virgin old growth forest in the greater Hackensack area. It is on the New Jersey Register of Natural Areas. Two years later, a second parcel in the northeast portion of the County was acquired with the 134-acre Lamont Tract in the Borough of Alpine. Then finally, after years of pursuit, the County reached an agreement with the Boy Scouts of Northern New Jersey in the acquisition of 181 acre Camp Tamarack. Bridging off of this success, Camp Glen Gray was acquired in 2002 with the assistance of The Trust for Public Land aiding in the negotiations. As an added bonus, the County entered into a partnership with the Friends of Camp Glen Gray (FOGG) to have the former scout leaders manage the overnight camp facilities, thus providing camping experience and opportunities for a broader portion of our community.

While the Department of Parks and Recreation made strides to preserve the larger parcels of land, a grassroots group was formed in the summer of 1998 which petitioned the County to create a dedicated trust fund tax program to supplement County efforts and provide funding to help municipalities acquire smaller parcels of land suitable for municipal park purposes<sup>76</sup>. A 1997 State law permitted New Jersey counties to establish a dedicated trust fund to acquire land for conservation and open space purposes.

The County recognized the merits of a trust fund, and on November 3rd, 1998, placed a public question on the ballot to determine whether the County should establish such a trust fund. The ballot question was approved by a two-to-one majority of those who voted. The vote of approval allowed the Board of Chosen Freeholders to establish a trust fund, which they did via resolution on November 24th, 1998, entitling it, the "Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland & Historic Preservation Trust Fund".

Bergen County's Trust Fund had an initial life span of five

years, ending in 2003. Based on the success of this initial effort, the County sought to re-authorize the Trust Fund, via a public question to the electorate on the ballot of November 4th, 2003.

This second ballot question was also approved by a two-to-one majority of those who voted. The vote of approval allowed the Freeholder Board to re-authorize and modify the Trust Fund, which they on December 17th, 2003. In the summer of 2000, the Garfield City Council developed a proposal to sell to the County the largest undeveloped area in southern Bergen County. The forty-four acres, located in the Borough of Elmwood Park, provide Garfield's biggest water source with fourteen artesian wells. To protect the green space and provide water, the City retained its rights to the ground water and sold the land to the County<sup>77</sup>.

In February 2002, the Department of Parks and Recreation began plans for a baseball field for children who use wheelchairs. The field was designed to have a cushioned, flat terrain with no bumps, ruts, rocks, or grass where a wheelchair could get stuck or roll over. Bases would be painted directly onto the synthetic turf to eliminate any barriers to those with difficulty walking. The bases were large enough to accommodate wheelchairs and visible to those with visual impairments, and dugouts, stands, and restrooms were wheelchair accessible. Challenger field, which was estimated to cost approximately \$865,000, were one of four baseball diamonds to be built at Overpeck Park in Palisades Park. Believed to be the first completely usable facility in the State for youngsters with all types of disabilities, it was designed to enable kids to fully participate no matter what their ability so they didn't have to feel left out<sup>78</sup>.

Bergen County opened the "missing link" of pathway that connected what had been a divided Saddle River County Park in August 2002. From Rochelle Park to Ridgewood, park enthusiasts can now run, cycle, or skate a continuous eleven miles through six Bergen towns. The new one-mile section just north of the Otto C. Pehle area runs behind homes off Saddle River Road and under the bridge carrying Red Mill Road. The path travels on a new pedestrian bridge under the Route 4. Not only did the new pathway connect the two ends of Saddle River County Park, it also offers the first true access to one of the County's most obscure historic landmarks: Easton Tower, a century-

30 76. TINA TRASTER, B. (1998, June 12). BERGEN URGED TO PRESERVE GREENERY OFFICIALS WEIGH OPEN-SPACE TAX. *The Record* (New Jersey), p. 101  
77. D. HARRINGTON, S. (2000, August 1). GARFIELD T O WEIGH APPRAISAL FOR FOREST TRACT. *The Record* (New Jersey), p. L3.  
78. YELLIN, D. (2002, February 6). BERGEN T O BUILD MODIFIED DIAMOND FOR DISABLED KIDS. *The Record* (New Jersey), p. L1.

79. D. HARRINGTON, S. (2002, August 23). Making ends meet - 'Missing link' under Rte. 4 unites county cycle path. *Record, The* (Hackensack, NJ), p. L01  
80. D. HARRINGTON, S. (2002, September 15). The price Bergen paid - Memorial is dedicated to 147 killed by terrorists. *Record, The* (Hackensack, NJ), p. L01  
81. DEENA YELLIN, B. (2005, May 6). A farm forever - Family tradition lives on, thanks to state program. *Record, The* (Hackensack, NJ), p. L01.



old sandstone irrigation tower and waterwheel that once pumped water to the lush estate of wealthy businessman Edward D. Easton<sup>79</sup>.

Land at the Henry Hoebel section of Overpeck County Park was deemed hallowed ground in September 2002, as county officials unveiled a memorial to honor the 147 county residents killed a year before in the September 11th attacks on America. The pathway around the granite towers is in the shape of the red, white, and blue ribbons so many people wore in the days following the attacks. Inside the raised stone walls of the walkway, two twelve foot towers rise from the memorial's center - on a brick and stone island in the shape of a teardrop. Ringing the memorial are pear trees whose leaves turn burgundy in the fall and bloom with white flowers in the spring<sup>80</sup>.

### **County Executive Dennis McNerney (2003-2011)**

During the administration of Bergen's third County Executive, Dennis McNerney, the County was able to purchase the earliest tracts of land lost to land speculation in the Ramapo Mountain range in the late 1980s with the acquisition of the seventy-three acre Camp Todd. With the acquisition of Camp Todd, the Ramapo Mountain range portion of the "Best of the Last" campaign was completed with the sole exception of Camp Yaw Paw. Not resting on its laurels, the County continued to monitor and acquired smaller tracts of land, adding to the large parcels acquired by the County under the campaign.

Demarest Farm in Hillsdale became the fourth farm in Bergen County to be preserved under the Farmland Preservation Program in May 2005. The eleven acres of the farm in Hillsdale were acquired using Open Space Trust funds and NJ Agriculture Preservation funding in the amount of \$3.4 million<sup>81</sup>. The following month, the County and State announced \$6.2 million to preserve nearly seventy-five acres of farmland in the Township of Mahwah. The development rights to Deepdale Farms, Kohout Farm and Mahrappo Farm were purchased by the end of 2005<sup>82</sup>.

County Executive McNerney and the Board of Chosen Freeholders opened a new \$9 million regional sports

complex in Overpeck Park, refurbishing the (forty-acre) park on Roosevelt Place in Palisades Park. The new park included Challenger Field, "specially designed for athletes who have challenges," within the mix of softball, baseball, soccer, and football fields. The five fields featured field turf, night lighting, electronic scoreboards, public address systems, press boxes, bleachers and concession stands. There is also an eight-lane running track, and areas for discus, javelin, shot put, long jump, and triple jump<sup>83</sup>.

The Valley Brook Golf Course became available to the golf-starved public, less than six weeks after Bergen County purchased the eighteen-hole semi-private club from United Water. Valley Brook became the fifth course run by the Department of Parks and Recreation, but the first to feature a 9,200 square-foot clubhouse which includes a pro shop, bar area with big-screen TV, 196-seat dining room, and liquor license. The course was opened to the public on May 2, 2016<sup>84</sup>.

A new forty-six acre nature preserve was re-dedicated as County parkland at Overpeck County Park in April 2006. The land had been neglected and overgrown for many years. Most of the debris was removed, thanks to a public-private initiative that raised more than \$1 million and turned the one-time junkyard into an urban oasis over a five year period. The new Teaneck Creek Park provides three connecting trails totaling 1.3 miles, and an outdoor classroom where teachers can take their students. While the public enjoyed the trails, Rutgers University scientists and students started work on restoring the degraded wetlands and studying Teaneck Creek in an effort to improve its water quality.

In developing the park, tons of litter and debris were collected and some of it was incorporated into the preserve. Large pieces of rubble are now mile markers etched with names of birds found in the park, and a middle school student created a sculpture made of discarded soda cans found in the area. Some debris still marks the landscape, including storm sewer drains left behind during highway construction<sup>85</sup>.

In June 2006, the County acquired the farm development rights to Mahrappo and Deepdale Farms in Mahwah. The seventeen acre Mahrappo Farm is a horse farm, while

82. ALLISON PRIES, B. (2005, June 24). 75 acres will be preserved as farmland - County, state paying \$6.2M to save three properties from development. Record, The (Hackensack, NJ)

83. (PETER J. SAMPSON, B. (2005, July 31). 'Awesome' Overpeck sportsplex opens - Baseball, soccer played on 5 fields as state-of-the-art facility debuts. Record, The (Hackensack, NJ), p. L03)

84. MATTURA, G. (2006, April 27). Bergen's main course: private feel, public fees. Record, The (Hackensack, NJ), p. S11

85. ABERBACK, B. (2006, April 26). How an oasis was won - Neglected land near Route 80 is reclaimed as preserve. Record, The Hackensack, NJ), p. L01

86. FABIANO, G. (2006, June 23). County, state ensure 2 Mahwah farms will be preserved. Record, The (Hackensack, NJ), p. L03.

87. PRIES, A. (2007, January 20). \$1 million makeover - Outdoors group to give new life to historic school. Record, The (Hackensack, NJ), p. A01.

Deepdale is a Christmas tree farm. While not considered part of the County park system, farmland preservation is a form of land preservation where the owners retain possession of the properties, but relinquish the right to sell the property for non-farming purposes. Since joining the State Farmland Preservation program in 2002, the County had preserved four other farms: Sun Valley Farm in Mahwah, Twinbrook Nurseries in Franklin Lakes, Brooks Farm in Closter and Demarest Farms in Hillsdale<sup>86</sup>.

In 2007, the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference, a nonprofit hiking organization, purchased the turn-of-the-century former Darlington schoolhouse for \$500,000 with \$250,000 in funding from the Open Space Trust Fund and a \$300,000 State Green Acres grant. The 1890s schoolhouse property connects hikers to the County's Ramapo Valley County Reservation. The Trail Conference has provided volunteers to help the Department of Parks and Recreation blaze and maintain hiking trails in many County parks<sup>87</sup>.

The County celebrated the 250th Birthday of the Wortendyke Barn in Park Ridge on June 6th, 2010. In 1997, the Wortendyke Barn opened as a museum with exhibits on agriculture that include 18th and 19th century farm implements and tools, the history of the Wortendyke family farm, and the history and evolution of farming in Bergen County<sup>88</sup>.

In June 2010, after much work and commitment, County Executive McNerney invited the public to attend the Grand Opening of Bergen County's own 138-acre "Central Park West," the new Overpeck County Park. More than fifty years prior, five Bergen County municipalities - Englewood, Leonia, Palisades Park, Ridgefield Park and Teaneck - donated hundreds of acres of land to the County with the intention of creating a central commons for art, sports, and other leisure activities. The new park provides amenities including a state-of-the-art playground, five miles of trails for pedestrian and bicycle use, observation and nature overlooks, two boat launches, a 3,000-seat amphitheater,

a forty-acre open field, softball, baseball, and soccer fields, six tennis courts, comfort stations and a concession area<sup>89</sup>.

## **County Executive Kathleen A. Donovan (2011-2015)**

In September 2011, the State Trust Fund Law was amended to include an additional purpose to acquire flood-prone properties, otherwise known as "Blue Acres Projects." Based upon this amendment, the County of Bergen again sought the approval of the voters, via a 2013 ballot question, to add this new program category. The ballot question was approved by nearly a two-to-one majority of those who voted. The vote of approval allowed the Freeholder Board to amend the Trust Fund, which they did on December 18th, 2013, and re-named the program the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland & Historic Preservation Trust Fund.

In October 2012, Bergen County hosted the first-ever County Fair and Fall Harvest Festival as a family-friendly event featuring carnival rides, games, live music, a "harvest festival" featuring local agricultural displays and exhibits, and a haunted hayride. Also, two nationally recognized and ranked football teams, Don Bosco Prep and Bergen Catholic High School, faced off as part of the Fair's festivities.

In fall 2013, County Executive Donovan announced a partnership with the non-profit Hackensack Riverkeeper for a new kayak center at Overpeck Creek, providing park users the opportunity to rent kayaks or use personal kayaks.

## **County Executive James J. Tedesco (2015-present)**

New recreational experiences have been key initiatives throughout County Executive Tedesco's administration. One such project, announced in April 2016, brought an interactive dinosaur display to Overpeck County Park. Located in a fourteen acre tract along Overpeck Creek in the Henry Hoebel area, "Field Station: Dinosaurs" provides

32 88. Hensley, S. (2010, June 2). BERGEN COUNTY EXECUTIVE ANNOUNCES WORTENDYKE BARN 250th BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION. US Fed News  
89. Hensley, S. (2010, July 17). BERGEN COUNTY OFFICIALLY OPENS OVERPECK COUNTY PARK. US Fed News (USA).  
90. Janoski, S. (2016, April 4). Dinosaur exhibition business coming to Bergen's Overpeck Park. northjersey.com (NJ)

91. South, T. (2016, June 8). Plan would double size of Bergen County Zoo over next 15 years. northjersey.com (NJ)  
92. South, T. (2016, September 26). Bergen parks planners turning to residents for a wish list. northjersey.com (NJ)  
93. KNITZER, D. (2018, August 24). Bergen County Will Enhance Rowing and Sailing Access in Riverside County Park Project Will Replace Boat Dock. T APinto.net (NJ)

an array of educational programming and experiences providing a unique focus on archaeology, paleontology, and environmental science<sup>90</sup>.

A long-term plan was proposed in June 2016 to transform the Bergen County Zoo over the next fifteen years, nearly doubling its size. The conceptual plan proposes adding twelve new species of animals, overhauling habitats, and adding centers and event spaces in an effort to double the number of visitors<sup>91</sup>. In September 2016, County Executive Tedesco announced a partnership with Rutgers University's Center for Urban Environmental Sustainability (CUES) to create a "comprehensive master plan" for the County park system. The master planning process gave the public a chance to participate in planning the future of the County park system. This effort was a first in the county park system's seventy year history<sup>92</sup>.

Winter Wonderland, a new family entertainment experience, opened in 2016 at Van Saun County Park to the delight of many park users, with festive decorations and atmosphere, making visitors feel like they stepped into the North Pole. In addition to skating on Winter Wonderland's ice rink and synthetic beginner's rink, guests enjoy visiting with Santa and Mrs. Claus, tasting treats from fantastic food trucks, and carnival-style holiday games for the whole family.

In the winter of 2017, the County added its sixth county golf course with the acquisition of the 134-acre Emerson Golf Club. The Par-71 course, which opened in the early 1960s, is located near the Oradell Reservoir on property that was once owned by United Water. A deed restriction on the property requires that the land remain a golf course forever. The course was renamed Soldier Hill Golf Course.

A park development project was announced by County Executive Tedesco in August 2018 to replace the existing boat dock located in the North Arlington section of Riverside County Park with a new, larger public boat dock. The project improved access as the new docks extend further into the water, to allow easier docking and disembarking for rowers and kayakers. This park feature has been managed by a nonprofit organization, the Passaic River Rowing Association, providing space for high school and collegiate rowing regattas. A future phase is a planned boathouse to support competitive rowing as well as public access to the waterfront<sup>93</sup>.

## 4.2 Anchor Parks

The large Anchor Parks serve as the backbone of the Bergen County park system. They are larger properties with multiple areas and uses that require significant resources and management expertise. Anchor Parks play a distinct role within the overall system, serving as regional destinations that provide a wide range of amenities and recreational opportunities supporting visitors from beyond a local community. They offer activities, events, and programming on a regional scale, and offer amenities that typically would not be possible in smaller parks. Anchor Parks have the space needed to host larger events. They also may offer potential opportunities to expand the parks system.

There are four Anchor Parks: Overpeck Park, Van Saun Park, Ramapo Valley Reservation, and Campgaw Mountain Reservation

### Overpeck Park

Originally envisioned as the “Central Park of New Jersey,” Overpeck Park is a regional destination for a wide range of passive and active recreation, as well as large events. Overpeck is the largest park in closest proximity to the densely populated southern portion of Bergen County. It is an urban-style, heavily used, diverse park of 834 acres, with vibrant social interactions, large events, sport attractions, and nature recreation opportunities. Overpeck Park has a Social/Cultural emphasis.

It is divided into eight activity areas spanning almost three miles, bisected by Overpeck Creek. Located less than four miles from northern Manhattan, it is easily accessible from the George Washington Bridge. Regional access is supported by the proximity of two interstate highways, I-95/New Jersey Turnpike and I-80. Given its location, the park attracts visitors from both New Jersey and New York. Overpeck boasts a wide range of attractions and amenities, including walking trails, a golf course, an equestrian center, an amphitheater, a boat launch, and multiple sports fields and courts.

The eight activity areas are referred to by number and/or by name. They are:

- **Area I/Teaneck Creek:** a forested wetland area that contains passive walking trails, EcoArt installations, and butterfly garden. Programming, the trail system, and butterfly garden maintenance are provided by the non-profit Teaneck Creek Conservancy in collaboration with Bergen County. This forty-six acre parcel showcases multiple samples of community art such as the Five Pipes Mural, Peace Labyrinth, and Migration Milestones. In addition, Area I also contains over a mile of trail that leads visitors through forest and wetlands.
- **Area II** – Landfill in need of closure, ongoing with remediation.
- **Area III** – Closed landfill redeveloped for active recreation: contains sports fields, tennis courts, pickleball courts, playgrounds, snack bars, rest rooms, amphitheater, boat launches and fishing docks. This part of Overpeck Park, which overlooks Overpeck Creek, offers climbing rope playgrounds, concession stands, comfort stations and miles of walking paths.
- **Area IV** – Unclosed landfill: This section is currently accepting waste material and will eventually be capped and closed.
- **Palisades Park Sportsplex:** Contains a football/track field with large stadium and press boxes, four baseball diamonds, a challenger ADA ballfield, four tennis courts, playground concession stand and playground. The Sportsplex’s football field is named for famed coach Vince Lombardi.
- **Bergen Equestrian Center:** Contains corrals and riding arenas for horses. The Center is a concession. This is a premier twenty-two acre facility that was renovated in 2009. The complex features a grass riding field, three outdoor riding rings with automatic sprinkler systems and a scenic riding path. There are two indoor riding areas for all seasons.

- **Henry Hoebel Area:** contains a dog park, football field, baseball diamond, soccer field, volleyball and tennis courts, track and field complex, cricket field, an event space, exercise park, and aerodrome launch. The 9/11 World Trade Center Memorial is in this section, near a pavilion and picnic tables, restrooms, and water fountain.



Figure 1. Relaxing at Overpeck County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

## Van Saun Park

Van Saun Park in Paramus provides a diverse range of activities, with 139 acres of land, it offers a wide range of year round activities for visitors of all ages. Throughout the park, multi-use pedestrian and bike trails connect attractions such as the carousel and pony ride. Park visitors can also enjoy the historic Washington Spring Garden and the Bergen County Zoological Park that hosts a variety of animal habitats. Other popular attractions include Walden Pond and the ADA-accessible Harmony Playground with a water sprinkler feature. The northern half of the park offers primarily for-fee activities, including the zoo, tennis courts, carousel, and pony rides. The southern half is primarily a passive recreation area, with a dog park, lake, and ecological areas.



Figure 2. Van Saun County park playground (Courtesy of CUES).

This park also hosts the Winter Wonderland Festival, a Bergen County event that includes skating rinks and other winter-themed activities. Van Saun Park has a Social/Cultural emphasis.

There is the potential to create new Anchor Parks in the County and expand existing ones. These opportunities exist in envisioning future links or coordination with adjacent properties to provide parks that serve a regional audience. There are opportunities to do this in three places: Meadowlands Anchor Park, Palisades Anchor Park, and Ramapo Mountain County Park.

## Ramapo Valley Reservation

Located on the edge of the Highlands region, the 3,268-acre Ramapo Valley County Reservation is the largest property in the County park system. This property boasts over twenty-two miles of maintained trails, a river, lake and reservoir in Mahwah, NJ. Including Camp Glen Gray, Camp Tamarack, and Camp Todd, its preserved parkland is just thirty miles from Manhattan. The park is adjacent to other forested lands owned by the States of New Jersey, New York, and Passaic County. There is a local Native American community with historic ties to this section of the Ramapo Mountains.

Visitors can hike and camp along the reservation's trails that connect Ringwood State Park, Skylands Manor, and Hawk Rock. There is canoe and kayak access to Ramapo River and several ponds to enjoy a calm day of fishing. In the winter, the Ramapo Valley County Reservation is a cross-country skiing destination. Ramapo Valley County Reservation has a Nature Park emphasis.

- **Camp Glen Gray** – Camp Glen Gray is a 981-acre overnight campground facility in the Ramapo Mountains in Mahwah. Hiking trails, a lake to fish, boats to rent, cabins, lean-tos, and tent sites for camping, sports fields, an amphitheater for outdoor events and a dining hall available for indoor events and meals all comprise this campsite. The Friends of Glen Gray (FOGG), a non-profit organization, manages Camp Glen Gray for the County. There is a lake near the entrance, trails, scenic vistas, and significant forested areas. Camp Glen Gray has a Nature Park emphasis.



- **Camp Tamarack** – This 249-acre property in Oakland is open to be public. Two lakes are onsite and there are hiking trails. Camp Tamarack has a Nature Park emphasis.



Figure 3. Lake at Camp Gray (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 4. Lake at Camp Tamarack (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 5. Reservoir at Ramapo Valley Reservation (Courtesy of CUES).

## Campgaw Mountain Reservation

This 1,194-acre property in Mahwah contains a ski area with two ski lifts, ski patrol building, ski school, and seasonal concessions. A frisbee golf course is adjacent to the ski slope. There are maintained hiking trails and the park has a campground. The Mahwah Environmental Volunteer Organization (MEVO) runs a sustainable community garden adjacent to the campsite area. Campgaw Mountain Reservation has a Nature Park emphasis.



Figure 6. Ski lift at Campgaw Mountain Reservation (Courtesy of CUES).



## **Visionary Consideration: Ramapo Mountain County Park**

Several County park properties are situated in the Ramapo Mountains. Ramapo Mountain County Park is visualized as a larger, expanded Anchor Park, consolidating, branding, and managing the County-owned properties in the Ramapo Mountains as one large regional park. This potential future Anchor Park would expand the existing Ramapo Valley Reservation, Camps Glen Gray, Tamarack, and Todd, by combining them with Campgaw Mountain Reservation, Darlington Park, and Saddle Ridge Riding Area. These properties could be connected via a multi-use trail and marketed as a single Anchor Park.

In addition to consolidating existing parks under one brand, this potential Anchor Park would require strong collaboration between the State, County, non-profit, and private landowners. The ultimate goal would be to create a unified nature experience in the Ramapo Mountains. Such a park could offer a wide range of unique amenities and programs that position the Ramapos to be better branded as the regional mountain recreation destination.

## **Visionary Consideration: Palisades Anchor Park**

Palisades Anchor Park could potentially be created by combining the existing Nature Preserves of Alpine North, Alpine South, and Norwood East Hill. Purchase of or collaboration with parcels would be necessary to form the structure of such a future park. These County-owned properties have tremendous potential for connections to nearby open space, and can create an extensive greenway in the northeastern park of the County. Situated along the Palisades, they provide unique passive recreational opportunities and the potential exists to connect them to adjacent, non-County owned open space, creating an Anchor Park with enhanced access and passive recreational opportunities with breathtaking views along the Palisades. Differing rules among the landowners regarding recreational use raise a challenge in ensuring appropriate protection as well as enjoyment of natural resources.

The County could initiate discussions with representatives of landowners and stakeholders in an effort to coordinate State, County, municipal, and non-profit open space. This potential future Anchor Park would be adjacent to the Palisades Interstate Park and therefore would expand the amount of contiguous permanently preserved critical habitat.

## **Visionary Consideration: Meadowlands Anchor Park**

Meadowlands Anchor Park could potentially be created as a new unique marshland-based recreational park in southern Bergen County, with land purchased from multiple adjacent landowners to provide for the underserved southern portion of the County. The conceptual Meadowlands Anchor Park could draw on its estuarine location to provide a water-boating and nature-based marshland recreational experience found nowhere else in the County. Developing a cohesive identity and coordinating with the various public and private landowners would be an important factor. Integrating a Meadowlands area into the rest of the County parks system completes the vision: From the Marshes to the Mountains.



Figure 7. Hiking in Norwood East Hill. Differing landowner rules across adjacent properties present a challenge to visitors (Courtesy of CUES).

## 4.3 Linear Parks

Long and narrow Linear Parks follow river corridors and extend through multiple municipalities, offering smaller scale amenities. Their long, interconnected pathways can provide a corridor for non-motorized transportation, as well as great recreational opportunities.

Like Anchor Parks, they may offer potential opportunities to expand the park system, and many contain separate areas that serve as de facto local parks to the residents nearby. Linear Parks follow the original vision of the Bergen County Park Commission by highlighting the waterways that are an important ecological feature of Bergen County.

There is currently only one Linear Park: Saddle River Park, which connects eight municipalities along six miles of the Saddle River. Saddle River Park has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.



Figure 1. Path through Saddle River County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

### Saddle River Park

Saddle River Park is 587-acre linear park with seven distinct areas and a historic monument connected by over ten miles of multi-use pathway. This linear park features a six mile bike and pedestrian path that runs through Ridgewood, Glen Rock, Fair Lawn, Paramus, Saddle Brook, and Rochelle Park. The path follows the Saddle River and Ho-Ho-Kus Brook and passes by the historic Easton Tower, a scenic waterfall at Dunkerhook Park, and other visitor attractions. The seven areas of the park are:

- **Glen Rock Area:** contains a playground, three picnic areas, two pavilions, restrooms, two tennis courts, and Glen Rock Pond. Model boating and fishing can be enjoyed at the pond. When the pond freezes over the winter, park-goers are permitted to ice skate under safe conditions.
- **Wild Duck Pond Area:** contains a pond, picnic area, a no-leash dog park, and playground. Other park amenities include a pavilion for large groups and pond activities such as fishing, model boating, and ice skating when winter conditions allow. A summer recreational program for uniquely-abled children and young adults is operated from a facility on park premises.
- **Dunkerhook Area:** contains clusters of picnic tables, a playground, and restrooms. There is an area off the Saddle River reserved for fishing and a lovely waterfall for nature lovers to enjoy.
- **Maple Glen Area:** contains tennis courts. A streambank stabilization project is occurring in this section.
- **Easton Tower:** occupies the site of a mill complex that is believed to have been established by the Zabriskie family in the mid-1800's. The tower itself was erected by Edward Denison Easton in 1899-1904 as a focal point within his large Arcola estate in Paramus. He was the founder of the Columbia Phonograph Company. It supplied water to fountains and gardens on the estate, and beautified the surroundings of the Easton home.

- **Otto C. Pehle Area:** contains a lake with a sand beach, a basketball court, a baseball diamond, Yitzhak Rabin Tree Grove, and a children's playground. Named after a former Bergen County Parks Commissioner, the Otto C. Pehle area continues along the multi-use path, and includes a  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile loop around the pond. Alongside this body of water, visitors can fish or enjoy model boating.
- **Rochelle Park Area:** contains three baseball diamonds, a playground, picnic tables, a basketball court, two tennis courts, and a hockey rink that doubles as basketball courts. The multi-use path in this area begins at Railroad Avenue and winds along the river for approximately one mile, eventually linking to the footbridge.

Building on the success of Saddle River Park, there are opportunities to create similar linear parks along both the Hackensack River and Passaic River.



Figure 2. The Hackensack River has potential for a linear park modeled after the already successful Saddle River County Park (Courtesy CUES).

### **Visionary Consideration: Hackensack River Linear Park**

The concept of a Linear Park along the Hackensack River is aspirational. Although there are three County-owned properties adjacent to the Hackensack River, a continuous greenway like Saddle River County Park does not yet exist. Drawing on the successful example of Saddle River Park, a Hackensack River Linear Park could combine existing parklands, including Hackensack River Park, the Hackensack River Pathway, Historic New Bridge Landing, the Hackensack Waterworks, and Van Buskirk Island. The Hackensack Waterworks in particular is a site of significant historic interest and has tremendous potential for adaptive re-use.

Like Saddle River Park, a Hackensack River Linear Park could have connections that allow users to access the park from both sides of the river. There are large residential neighborhoods less than a half mile from the river, yet easy and safe access to the river is lacking. Innovative solutions to connect neighborhoods to a greenway would be needed and could compliment future acquisitions and new partnerships that are needed to make this vision a reality.

### **Visionary Consideration: Passaic River Linear Park**

The southern portion of Bergen County, bounded by the Passaic River in the west, is the most densely populated section of the County and is the most underserved in terms of parkland. There is potential for the creation of a new Linear Park along the Passaic River. Two County park properties, Riverside Park North and South, could be the basis for a future Passaic River Linear Park. It could be expanded by working with property owners along the Passaic River and identifying connection opportunities and appropriate methods to construct a pathway adjacent to the Passaic River.

### **Visionary Consideration: Linear Rails to Trails**

Opportunities exist within the County to transform an unused rail line(s), or portions thereof into a park, commonly called a Rails to Trails conversion. Such opportunities are important because they capitalize on the principle of connectivity. They provide ways to join existing parks and form larger and/or longer open space corridors. The County could work together with its municipalities and non-profits to negotiate acquisition of these properties from the railroads. One such example is the Northern Valley Greenway, a grassroots effort led by the Rotary Club of Tenafly to establish a multi-use pathway on a little-used freight railroad line in the northeastern part of Bergen County. A recently commissioned study by NJDOT determined that such a project could be feasible. While not a County led project, the Northern Valley Greenway has great potential to achieve one of primary goals of the Master Plan by connecting Overpeck County Park to the Joseph B. Clarke Rail Trail in Rockland County, NY in addition to all the various green spaces along the way.



## 4.4 Local Parks and Recreational Facilities

Local Parks supplement municipal open space, primarily serving local residents and are interwoven into the communities around them.

Local Parks are also known as Neighborhood Parks and are typically smaller, with smaller-scale amenities and features than Anchor or Linear Parks. They have less parking, but have the potential for more multi-modal access and less vehicle dependence.

There are fifteen Local Parks encompassing a rich variety of experiences and purposes. They are:

- Artesian Fields
- Belmont Hill Park
- Camp Glen Gray
- Camp Tamarack
- Dahnert's Lake
- Darlington Park
- Hackensack River Park
- Hackensack River Pathway
- McFaul Environmental Center
- Pascack Brook Park
- Riverside Parks North and South
- Saddle Ridge Riding Center
- Samuel Nelkin Park
- Wood Dale Park

### Artesian Fields



Figure 1. Artesian Fields path (Courtesy of CUES).

This forty-four acre forested wetland site contains baseball fields and a walking pathway in Elmwood Park. It is a rectangular park that features two recreational fields. Artesian Fields has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

### Belmont Hill



Figure 2. Belmont Hill (Courtesy of CUES).

Located in Garfield, this park once contained a formal rose garden that has been replaced with a paver pathway and a mown lawn. It measures ten acres including a playground for general play and a lawn that can host football or soccer. It hosts a variety of other activities. Belmont Hill Park has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Dahnert's Lake



Figure 3. Gazebo at Dahnert's Lake (Courtesy of CUES).

This ten acre park in Garfield contains a lake, roller hockey rink, playground, pavilion, and restrooms. A bridge over the lake connects to the pavilion. Dahnert's Lake has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Hackensack River Pathway



Figure 5. Hackensack River Pathway (Courtesy of CUES).

Hackensack River Pathway is fifteen-acre strip of land along the Hackensack River adjacent to Historic New Bridge Landing in River Edge. Hackensack River Pathway has a Nature Park emphasis.

## Hackensack River Park



Figure 4. Hackensack River Park (Courtesy of CUES).

Hackensack River Park stretches over twenty-eight acres of land along the Hackensack River in the northern section of Hackensack. The existing entrance is located at the back of the Shops at Riverside parking deck, adjacent to Route 4. Hackensack River Park has a Social/Cultural emphasis.

## Pascack Brook Park



Figure 6. Fishing at Pascack Brook County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

Spanning eighty-two acres in the two northern Bergen County towns of Westwood and River Vale, Pascack Brook Park contains a pond, baseball fields, playground, picnic area, basketball and tennis courts. The park has forty-five picnic tables, two pavilions for larger events, and two walking paths. Pascack Brook Park has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Riverside Park North



Figure 7. Courts at Riverside County Park North (Courtesy of CUES).

The thirty-seven acre Riverside Park North in Lyndhurst contains sports fields, picnic areas, concession stands, bocce fields, and exercise stations. This park boasts a number of athletic areas including the ninety-foot wide, all-turf Breslin Field, tennis courts with a practice wall, a softball field, outdoor fitness areas, and a pedestrian walking path. There is also an off-leash fenced dog park, playground and pavilion. Riverside Park North has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Riverside Park South



Figure 8. Riverside County Park South sports field (Courtesy of CUES).

The forty-nine acre Riverside Park South in Lyndhurst and North Arlington contains baseball and soccer fields, tennis courts, and playground and picnic areas adjacent to the Passaic River. Similar to its twin Riverside Park North, the southern portion hosts a bevy of active reaction area, including four soccer fields, three baseball diamonds, two softball diamonds, five tennis courts including three with lighting, a boating dock and a multi-use stadium for track and field, soccer and football. In addition, there is a pavilion as well as walking paths for passive reactional use. Riverside Park South has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Samuel Nelkin Park



Figure 9. Samuel Nelkin County Park playground (Courtesy of CUES).

Tucked against a hillside and linked together by a pedestrian walkway, the eighteen acres of Samuel Nelkin Park provide a variety of activities in Wallington. This park contains a lake, dog run, playground, tennis and basketball courts, and ballfields. Samuel Nelkin Park has a Neighborhood Park emphasis.

## Darlington Park



Figure 10. Darlington Swimming area (Courtesy of CUES).

Darlington Park in Mahwah contains lakes used for swimming and fishing, picnic and barbeque areas, basketball and volleyball courts, and pavilion areas. Resting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains, the 127-acre Darlington Park offers a unique getaway. This active recreation park is surrounded by a diverse array of open space about one mile from Ramapo College. This area includes a children's playground as well as basketball and handball courts. Swimming is available from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Fishing is permitted all year except when the pond is frozen. Outdoor enthusiasts can enjoy the passive recreation opportunities that the paved pathways, picnic areas, open lawns, and wildlife observation areas present. Darlington Park has a Social/Cultural emphasis.



## Saddle Ridge Riding Center



Figure 11. Saddle Ridge Riding Center (Courtesy of CUES).

This County-owned facility in Franklin Lakes is a full service equestrian center set on over twenty-eight acres of mountains, field, and trails. It contains corrals and forested riding areas for horses where guests can take English and Western lessons, ride trails, board horses, and host horse shows. The complex features fully lit indoor and outdoor arenas, hot water wash stalls, a round pen, a second working outdoor arena and numerous turnouts. The riding areas are also open to the public for walking or hiking. Saddle Ridge Riding Center has a Social/Cultural emphasis.

## Wood Dale County Park



Figure 12. Gazebo near Wood Dale County Park lake (Courtesy of CUES).

The 118-acre park is surrounded by Park Ridge, Hillsdale, and Woodcliff Lake. It contains a lake, tennis courts, picnic areas, a baseball field, and forested and wetlands areas in Hillsdale. Around the pond, the park features shady picnic groves, a pavilion, and a gazebo. It is also home to a playground and an off-the-leash dog park. Wood Dale Park has a Nature Park emphasis.

## McFaul Environmental Center



Figure 13. Enclosure at Mcfaul Environmental Center (Courtesy of CUES).

This eighty-three acre park property in Wyckoff contains a nature education facility. The center includes wildlife exhibits, meeting rooms, and bathrooms. Outside there is a pond and animal enclosures, a two-story observation platform, walking trails, and arboretum-style plantings.

The park includes bird shelters, an auditorium, a browsing library, a memorial gazebo, and natural science exhibits. The indoor exhibit contains live native animals, freshwater aquariums, natural history displays, and monthly art displays. The McFaul Environmental Center has a Social/Cultural emphasis. The gardens have flowering displays throughout the warm-weather months, including specialties such as Daffodil Hill, rhododendrons, ornamental grasses, the herb garden, and various memorial plantings. Visitors can enjoy the grounds on a 2/3-mile gravel-surfaced woodland nature trail that connects the 300-foot boardwalk along the edge of the pond to a two-story observation platform. The observatory overlooks a butterfly and hummingbird garden and a pond which supports various species of waterfowl. For schools and other groups, a large selection of nature education programs and workshops are conducted weekdays throughout the year. Traditional activity highlights include a pancake breakfast, maple sugaring demonstration, the Haunted Hideaway of Horrors, Halloween Hayrides, Gingerbread Creations and Apple Cidering. The Center is also available for weddings or wedding photos



## 4.5 Golf Courses

The County owns a variety of golf courses that range in age from the newly acquired Soldier Hill Golf Course to the original sixty year old Rockleigh Golf Course. Golf courses are a stand-alone feature of the County park system, as they are not technically parks. They do not have a separate Park Emphasis, as the emphasis is obviously on golf.

Golf courses have very distinct management and maintenance requirements, and although they are an affordable public recreation opportunity, they are also large tracts of permanent open space. In view of contemporary and projected development pressures, the golf courses constitute tremendous potential for the aesthetic enjoyment of open space, as well as the potential for socialization and community functions within their spaces. Golf courses are also home to critical habitats. There is the opportunity with each golf course to enhance our natural resource stewardship and to use best management practices to increase the ecological benefits they provide. There are six Bergen County-owned golf courses:

- Darlington
- Orchard Hills
- Overpeck
- Rockleigh
- Soldier Hill
- Valley Brook

### Darlington Golf Course



Figure 1. Darlington Golf Course (Courtesy of CUES).

Adjacent to the police training site in Mahwah, this eighteen-hole course sits in the rolling foothills of the Ramapo Mountain range. Set within a thick forest of hard woods, the 6,547-yard, par 71 course and driving range occupy approximately 120 acres of natural settings that highlight seasonal colors. Players are challenged by the tree lined fairways, water features, and distinct changes in elevation. From the middle tees the par 72 provides a test for even the most skilled golfer. When pushed to the champion tees, the par drops to 71, as the 507-yard par 5 ninth hole changes to a 493-yard par 4. A par on this downhill signature hole is an accomplishment from any tee. The clubhouse was built in 1980 and sits next to a parking lot and forty-tee driving range.

## Orchard Hills Golf Course



Figure 2. Orchard Hills Golf Course (Courtesy of CUES).

Orchard Hills is a sporty nine-hole layout on the grounds of Bergen Community College in the heart of Paramus. This course was originally designed in 1925. In the late 1960s, the course was rerouted to its current nine-hole track. In 1969, a trailer was installed on the grounds as a clubhouse where visitors could check in, log onto the handicap system, or use one of the comfort stations. There are vending machines on the premises that offer soft drinks, water and snacks. Orchard Hills showcases the rolling hills that have personified the look of Paramus. A renovation in 2012 brought all new bunkers and tees, redesigned cart paths, an irrigation system, and new greens on several holes. The course plays a modest 2,776 yards, but small well protected greens will test the golfer's accuracy and finesse on the approach shots.

## Overpeck Golf Course



Figure 3. (Courtesy of CUES).

The 6,584 yard par 72 Overpeck golf course features ample fairways and large greens. This 140-acre property, including the original clubhouse, was designed in the 1960s and then renovated in 2002 as part of the Department of Parks and Recreation Golf Master Plan. In 2017, a trailer was placed next to the parking lot as a temporary structure where clubhouse activity can be conducted. Golfers can visit this course year round if weather permits. The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation chose to keep this course open twelve months, in particular, due to its centralized location and variety of play. Wind is always a factor, but the real challenge exists in skillfully avoiding the abundance of water. Situated on the northern tip of the New Jersey Meadowlands, holes cross over, run adjacent to, and are surrounded by hazards; every hole on the front nine has water in play.

## Rockleigh Golf Course



Figure 4. Rockleigh Golf Course (Courtesy of CUES).

The County's only twenty-seven hole facility lies at the base of the Palisade Mountain Range. Opened in 1946 and completely renovated in 2003, the Red and White nines combine to create a championship venue. In fact, this dynamic eighteen plays host to the annual Bergen County Amateur Championship and received second place honors in the national Renovation of the Year competition sponsored by Golf, Inc. Magazine. The unique routing ensures a variety of holes, where no two run parallel over the same terrain.

The nine-hole Blue course was constructed in 1961 and is a great short course to hone short game skills or come out and learn the game and get comfortable playing golf. This property also hosts a clubhouse that was constructed in 1958. This building contains ample room for guests to check in, use the comfort stations and locker rooms, and houses administrative space as well as concession areas. Specifically, there is a food and beverage area in addition to a pro shop.

## Soldier Hill Golf Course

The newest addition to Bergen County Parks, Soldier Hill Golf Course in Emerson offers superior playing conditions with many picturesque holes that demand accurate shot-making from tee to green while others offer ample landing areas and gentle sloping greens. The back nine winds through open terrain with strategic water hazards while the front nine is characterized by mature tree lined fairways. The layout of open and wooded holes on this traditional style eighteen-hole par 71 golf course provides challenges to golfers of all skill levels.

## Valley Brook Golf Course



Figure 4. Valley Brook Golf Course (Courtesy of CUES).

When it was acquired in 2006, Valley Brook added a shot maker's course to the County golf operation. Playing only 6,211 yards from the back tees, it is not a course to over power. Short winding holes and small greens test the players' ability to place the ball in just the right spot.

The aesthetic charm is plentiful at this property. A large pond confronts golfers as they start their round on the first tee. A winding creek and the Pascack Brook come into play on a number of holes. A second pond is there to greet the golfers as they return to the clubhouse at holes nine and eighteen.

The Valley Brook grass driving range is open to the public daily from March to early December, weather and conditions permitting. Golf balls can be purchased in the pro shop.

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## 4.6 Nature Preserves

This Master Plan envisions that natural resources in all parks should be protected and enhanced, and there is certainly no park without nature. However, Nature Preserves are parks that provide a relatively pristine natural equivalent and the greatest experience of a physical world undeveloped by humans.

These parks are essential places for residents to de-stress and feel rejuvenated. The amenities are limited primarily to those that may enhance the visitor experience while preserving the overall feeling of untouched nature. Nature Preserves typically have no recreational infrastructure and are only minimally maintained by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation. The ambiance of nature-dominated areas also makes them sought after venues for certain types of community gatherings. Nature Preserves are by definition Nature Parks under the Park Emphasis typology.

Nature Preserves provide many valuable ecosystem services, contain critical habitats for plant and animal communities, and often feature essential water resources. Given the relative scarcity of these habitats in Bergen County, Nature Preserves require a careful, on-going balance between public use and protecting the overall health of the ecosystems in them.

There are six Bergen County-owned Nature Preserves. They are:

- Alpine Reserves North and South
- Borg's Woods
- Cherry Brook Woods
- Norwood East Hill
- Overbrook Park

### Alpine Reserve North



Figure 1 . Alpine Reserve North trail (Courtesy of CUES).

This 135-acre forested land in Alpine sits adjacent to Palisades Interstate Park and the Palisades Parkway. Alpine North is not formally maintained and has limited park trails. Parking is very limited. This site is contiguous to other large forested areas, some of which are publically owned.

### Alpine Reserve South



Figure 2. Alpine Reserve South (Courtesy of CUES).

This 188-acre forested land in Alpine sits adjacent to Palisades Interstate Park and the Palisades Parkway. The park contains approximately forty acres of wetland. Alpine South is not formally maintained and parking is very limited.



## Borg's Woods



Figure 3. Borg's Wood (Courtesy of CUES).

This is a local nature preserve, primarily of forested wetlands and with a simple trail system. This fifteen acre property is located within the County seat of Hackensack. An old growth remnant of deciduous forest, Borgs Woods was purchased with Green Acres funding. The preserve features old growth trees, some of which are estimated to be over 200 years old.

## Norwood East Hill



Figure 5. Norwood East Hill (Courtesy of CUES).

Norwood East Hill is a 124-acre forest preserve located in Norwood. This property is adjacent to other publicly-owned forested lands.

## Cherry Brook Woods



Figure 4. Cherry Brook Woods (Courtesy of CUES).

Cherry Brook Woods is a ten acre forested preserve adjacent to the Suez Water Company reservoir in River Vale.

## Overbrook Park



Figure 6. Overbrook Park Stream (Courtesy of CUES).

Overbrook Park is a three acre mowed grass strip between Westwood Avenue and the Pascack Brook in Westwood. It has newly planted trees in the center area and old growth trees throughout the area.



## 4.7 Historic Sites

There are nine historic sites under the full or partial jurisdiction of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation. These properties which contribute to Bergen County's rich history are preserved, maintained, or provided with educational materials by the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs and include:

- Baylor Massacre Burial Site
- Camp Merritt Memorial Monument
- Garretson Farm
- Gethsemane Cemetery
- Hackensack Water Works/Van Buskirk Island
- Campbell-Christie House at Historic New Bridge Landing
- Wortendyke Barn.
- Washington Spring (in Van Saun Park, Chapter 4.3)
- Easton Tower (in Saddle River Park, Chapter 4.3)

### Baylor Massacre Burial Site



Figure 1. Baylor Massacre Burial Site (Courtesy of CUES).

This two acre Revolutionary War battle site contains a loop walking path, interpretive signage, and seating. This parkland commemorates the Baylor Massacre – a brutal surprise attack by British forces on the Third Continental Light Dragoons on September 28th, 1778.

### Camp Merritt Memorial Monument



Figure 2. Camp Merritt Memorial Monument (Courtesy of CUES).

This location is a historic monument to embarking World War I servicemen in Cresskill. It marks the center of an important World War I embarkation camp, where more than one million U.S. soldiers passed through on their way to and from the battlefields of Europe.

### Garretson Farm



Figure 3. Garretson Farm (Courtesy of CUES).

The two acre Garretson Farm is comprised of a mid-18th century home and outbuildings and barns that date from the 18th through the early 20th century. Master Gardener volunteers maintain a colonial garden to the rear of the house. The Garretson Forge & Farm Inc. volunteers provide regular programming including a Harvest Fair and reenactments.

## Gethsemane Cemetery



Figure 4. Gethsemane Cemetery (Courtesy of CUES).

This historic cemetery was identified in its 1860 deed of sale as the “burial ground for the colored population of the Village of Hackensack” in the 1800s, and is located in Little Ferry. In 1985, Bergen County acquired the cemetery and dedicated it as a County Historic Site.

## Hackensack Water Works and Van Buskirk Island



Figure 5. Hackensack Water Works and Van Buskirk Island (Courtesy of CUES)

This seventy acre property contains historically designated buildings on an island in the Hackensack River in Oradell. The Hackensack Water Works was a water treatment and pumping plant located on Van Buskirk Island, an artificially created island. The site was purchased in 1881 by the Hackensack Water Company, which developed it for water supply use. The facility was built between 1881 and 1911, and it includes a brick pumping station, a tall filtration tower, and huge underground infrastructure<sup>94</sup>. The Hackensack Water Works is listed on both the State and National Registers of Historic Places. While the building is maintained by the County of Bergen, significant works will be required for this facility to meet its potential as an event space or other innovative incarnation.

## Wortendyke Barn



Figure 7. Wortendyke Barn (Courtesy of CUES).

This Dutch colonial barn in Park Ridge contains the Wortendyke Barn Museum. The barn, built in 1760, is an outstanding example of the vernacular architecture, referred to as a “New World Dutch Barn”, found throughout 18th and 19th Century Bergen County. Today, there are probably fewer than 100 of these barns left; six are in Bergen County. The site has an apple orchard and is listed on the National Historic Register. Summer concerts and public events are held in this park.

## Campbell-Christie House at Historic New Bridge Landing



Figure 6. Campbell-Christie House at Historic New Bridge Landing (Courtesy of CUES).

Bergen County is one of nine members of the New Bridge Landing Park Commission established by the State of New Jersey to manage the historic site located in River Edge. The County is responsible for maintenance of the Campbell-Christie House which is leased to the Bergen County Historical Society. The 18th century sandstone house was built in New Milford in 1774 and moved to New Bridge Landing in 1977. It joins other sandstone houses, including the Steuben House which became a principal base of military operation during the Revolutionary War. Historical reenactments and other events take place at the site. The County also owns the swing truss bridge onsite.

94. Leiby, Adrian C. (1969), *The Hackensack Water Company, 1869-1969*, in collaboration with Nancy Wichman, Bergen County Historical Society, ASIN B0006C01Q0, OCLC 13847.



# 5 Goals and Objectives

## *What are Goals and Objectives?*

A goal is something that can be done to make our vision a reality. A goal is the future we imagine, and it is backed up by specific actions we can take. These actions are known as objectives – something we can do to achieve our goals – which in turn, make our vision become our future. Nine goals are identified in this Master Plan to help achieve the vision in the preceding pages.

These goals were informed by the public outreach process of this Master Plan and developed by the Bergen County Department of Parks & Recreation staff and their consultants. They reflect the desires of the community of park users and those who maintain these parks, and are shaped by professional expertise. The following nine sub-chapters explain the broad goals of this Master Plan and offer several objectives to help accomplish them.



Figure 1. The Parks Department is committed to improving park access and environmental stewardship so that everyone can enjoy the parks for generations to come (Courtesy of CUES).

# Master Plan Goals

1. Preserve and Balance Our Open Space
2. Improve Access and Connectivity
3. Steward Our Environmental Resources
4. Provide Diverse Golf and Recreation
5. Improve Amenities and Infrastructure
6. Program Park Spaces and Events
7. Increase Public Access to Information
8. Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks
9. Develop a Sustainable Business Model

# 5.1 Preserve and Balance Open Space

The County of Bergen wants to increase open space for conservation and recreation, especially in areas of the County that are underserved. We want to create and expand our parks to meet the Trust for Public Land (TPL) standards which dictate an appropriate amount of open space for a specified population. Research done for this Master Plan identified several areas of Bergen County that are underserved per TPL standards.

Open space preserves significant environmental resources. It protects threatened species, their habitats, and our water supply. It provides environmental and health benefits by sequestering carbon and protecting our air quality. Open Space also provides residents with the intrinsic value of nature and natural beauty. It provides areas for fitness and recreation and thus opportunities for healthy and active living. Open space has a positive effect on nearby property values. Preserving land as open space reduces the tax burden needed to support development that would have occurred on these lands.

The County of Bergen seeks to appropriately balance the types of open space we have, particularly between active and passive recreation. Diverse and balanced facilities will ensure almost everyone will find something to do or enjoy in the park system.

## Demographic Analysis

As part of this Master Plan, an analysis of Bergen County demographics was prepared that examines key trends and variables that might influence existing and future park needs. Existing demographic data patterns are reported by the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (ACS), 2010-2014. Several demographic themes were examined to characterize existing conditions, spatial patterns, and differences within the population of Bergen County.



Figure 1. Given the demographic composition of Bergen County, parks need to support a diversity of users (Courtesy of CUES).

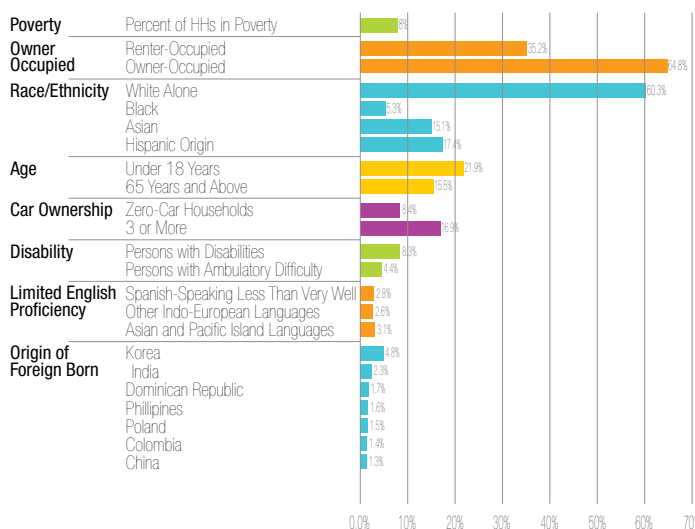


Figure 2. Select Bergen County demographics at a glance (Courtesy of US Bureau of the Census, American Community Survey, 2010-2014 and CUES).

Future-year population projections through the year 2040 are presented based on the official demographic forecasts of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), the region's designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO). Bergen County is one of the most densely populated of the northern New Jersey counties, with 936,692<sup>95</sup> residents and 3,700 people per square mile. The County has 335,700 households with family households comprising more than seventy percent of the households.

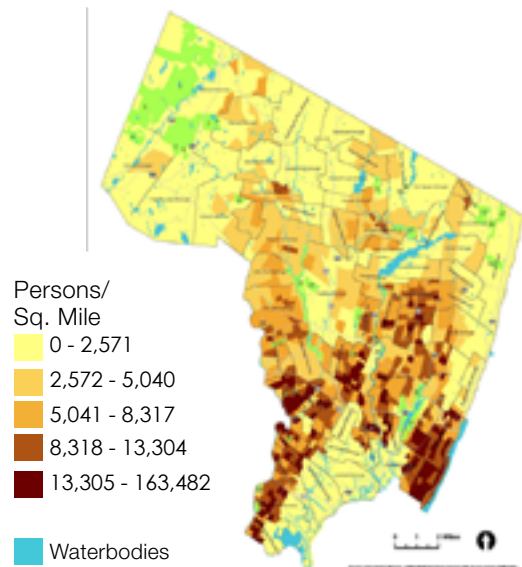


Figure 3. Population density by block group (Courtesy of VTC).

With a median household income nearing \$100,000, Bergen County contains a relatively small percentage of households in poverty. Median household income tends to increase in the northern half of the County, while the southern half has more lower-income residents. Family households also follow this division as well, with the northern municipalities containing a much higher number of family households than those in the southern portion of the County.

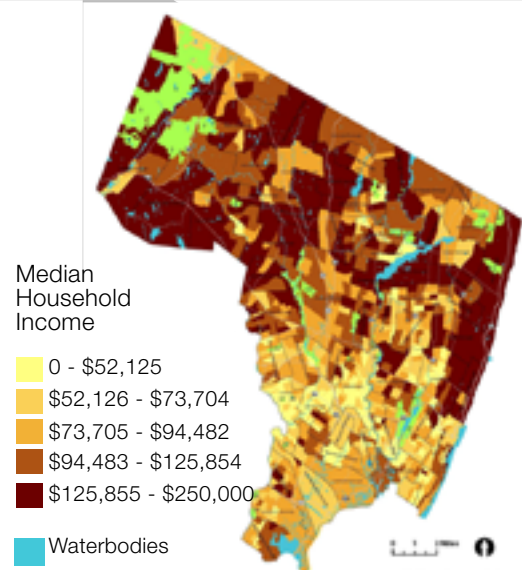


Figure 4. Median household income by block group (Courtesy of VTC).

Bergen County has a relatively high proportion of owner-occupied dwellings and consequently, a smaller proportion of renter-occupied dwellings. Since people who rent are less likely to have access to backyard space, they may rely on public open space for leisure and recreational activities. Several County parks (Overpeck Park, Riverside Parks North and South, Belmont Hill Park, and others) are near areas with proportionately more renter-occupied dwellings.

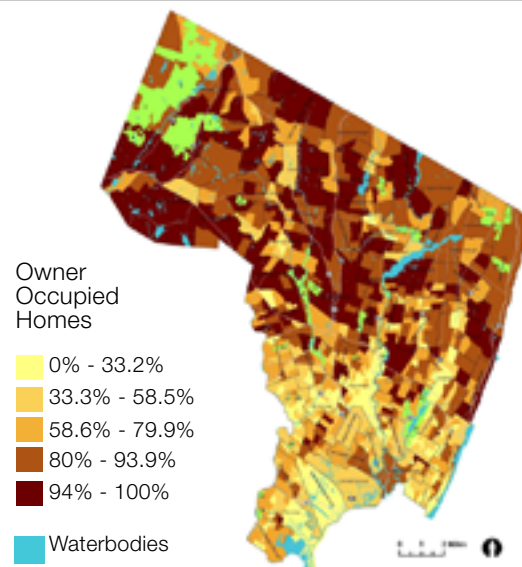


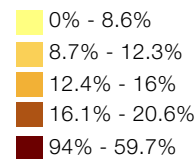
Figure 5. Owner Occupied Homes by block group (Courtesy of VTC).

95. State & County QuickFacts – Bergen County, New Jersey, United States Census Bureau. Accessed March 22, 2018.



The age distribution of the population near a park may influence park usage patterns, design needs, and programming. For example, older adults may be more interested in walking trails and passive uses. They may seek park spaces physically separated from children and youth, who in turn may be more inclined to use playgrounds and active recreational facilities. Younger persons are located in proportionately greater percentages near Darlington Park, Wood Dale Park, Pascack Brook Park, and the James J. McFaul Environmental Center.

65 Year and Older



Waterbodies

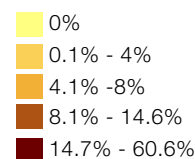
Figure 6. Population 65 Year or Older by block group (Courtesy of VTC).

Bergen County is diverse, with a relatively higher proportion of Asians and Hispanics, and a relatively lower proportion of African-Americans than elsewhere in northern New Jersey. Bergen County's Limited English Proficiency (LEP) population, who identify a language other than English as their first language, comprise only about two to three percent of all County households. However, there are concentrated areas of LEP persons in the immediate vicinity of certain parks. An implication of having a population of non-English speakers could be the need to adapt signage, marketing, and public outreach materials into other languages to accommodate all park users.

Park visitors with disabilities may have a specific set of needs related to accessibility and alternative recreation options. Census data pertaining to persons with disabilities is divided into several categories. Among these subsets, "total disability" and "ambulatory disability" are among the most relevant with regard to park analysis.

Car ownership in the suburban municipalities of Bergen County is generally correlated with income. The densest areas for zero-car households are located in southern Bergen County. The car ownership variable suggests zero-car households may only be able to frequent local parks or may rely on public transportation to visit parks.

Zero Car Households



Waterbodies

Figure 7. Zero Car Households by block group (Courtesy of VTC).

From the NJTPA forecasts, the population is projected to increase by 108,880 persons, or 11.8%, by 2040. Widely dispersed overall growth is expected, but sixteen of the seventy Bergen County municipalities may add as many as 2,000 persons, and four of these municipalities – Teaneck, Hackensack, Paramus, and Englewood – are projected to add more than 3,700 persons by 2040.

According to projections, many of the most densely-populated areas will grow even further. Particular attention should be paid to the southern portion of the County, where the currently high population density is projected to grow and the amount of open space per resident is the lowest. This demographic analysis has informed our goals and objectives.



Figure 8. Future population projections suggest that Bergen County will see an 11.8% increase of residents, thus the role of parks as critical open space will become more important in future years (Courtesy of CUES).

Open Space Availability

An evaluation of the amount of Bergen County parkland must include all public open space, regardless of the owner of the property. The total acreage is then compared to the population density of the area being evaluated to calculate the amount of open space per resident. Based on the NJDEP Green Acres Recreational and Open Space Inventory (ROSI), open space property in Bergen County totals 18,817 acres. Approximately fifty percent of this acreage is owned by Bergen County, 9,335 acres. The balance is owned by municipalities, with 6,453 acres; the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission with 2,251 acres; non-profit entities, with 867 acres; the State of New Jersey with thirty-two acres; and eight acres of private open

space. These numbers do not reflect privately owned golf courses or any other properties not included in the ROSI database.

In order to further quantify the totality of existing Bergen County open space, municipal data provided through the ROSI database was mapped for each municipality, where possible. A desktop aerial survey was conducted to identify municipal open space parcels not included in the ROSI database such as schools and sports facilities. The total parkland for each municipality was then calculated, mapped, and compared to standards established by the Trust for Public Land (TPL), to determine municipalities that are well-served or underserved with respect to their amount of available open space.

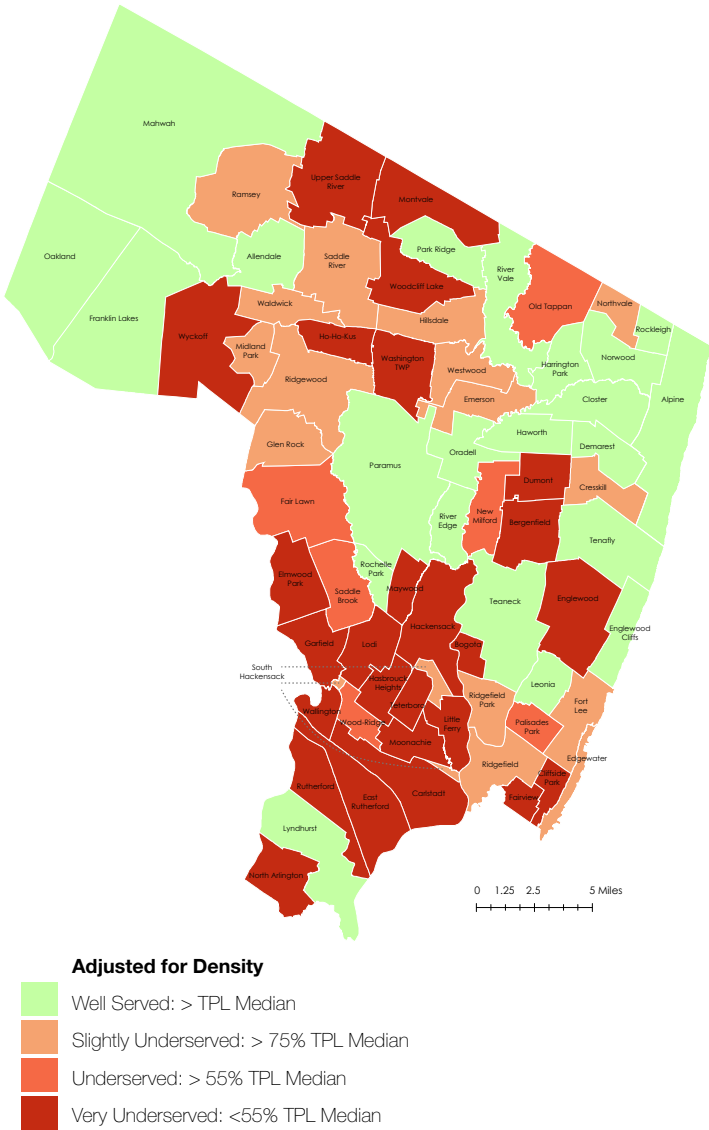


Figure 9. Evaluation of existing open space per 1,000 residents based upon Trust for Public Land criteria ( Courtesy of CUES).

Based on the TPL standards for parkland per 1,000 residents, there are twenty Bergen County municipalities that have an adequate amount of publicly available open space, from a combination of all landowners. There are fifty municipalities that are slightly underserved – defined as having at least seventy-five percent of the TPL median – to very underserved, defined as having less than fifty-five percent of the TPL median acreage available. However, some areas of the County that are underserved may be in close proximity to open space in surrounding Counties. The TPL standards describing the acreage of public open space needed are determined based on population density. Bergen County is one of the most densely populated counties, within the most densely populated State in the United States.

It is important to note that the open space availability metric of acres per 1,000 residents is a relatively crude indicator of where in the County residents may be less well-served. It does not consider distance to or access to the parks. Additionally, TPL standards do not differentiate between active and passive recreation. Therefore, for an individual seeking a specific type of recreation, they may be more or less well-served than the map indicates.

The current shortfall of open space is compounded by an increasing number of new high-density developments within Bergen County, driven in part to meet affordable housing obligations, as well as the financial model needed to offset the cost of acquiring expensive parcels of land for development.

Growth projections are highest in municipalities already underserved with respect to their amount of open space. Based on current development trends and demographic projections through 2040, this parkland deficit will continue to grow unless new lands are added to the public park system. Particularly critical areas are the most densely populated southern, western, and central northern portions of the County. This analysis informed the first goal, Preserving and Balancing Open Space in the County.

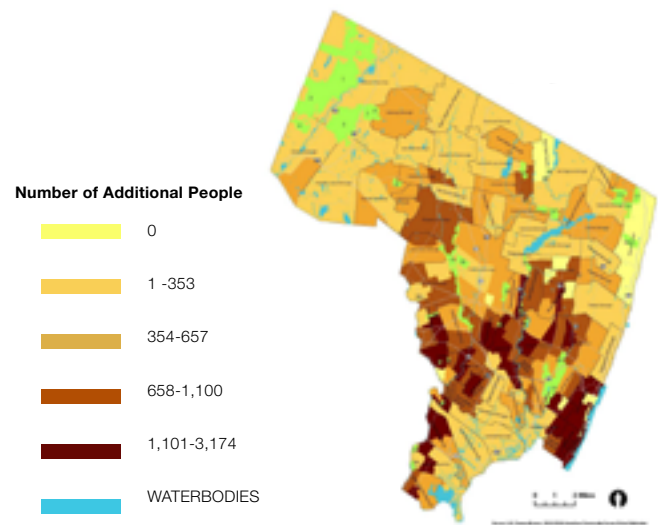


Figure 10. Projected additional people (2040) by traffic analysis zone (Courtesy of VTC).



Figure 11. An increasing Bergen County population will place higher pressures on natural resources in existing parklands. Additional lands are needed to help address current parkland deficits in the southern, eastern and western sections of the County (Courtesy of CUES).

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation (BCDPR) plays an integral role in leading initiatives to increase public open space. This responsibility can be met in a number of ways: as an acquirer of properties; an advisor or coordinator assisting municipal planning initiatives; and requesting funds from the State of New Jersey Green Acres program. The BCDPR, through its Division of Land Management, can identify and support acquisition of parcels in order to create parks that can potentially cross municipal boundaries where appropriate and/or when land becomes available.



## OPEN SPACE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

Open space acreage by municipality was compared to Trust for Public Land's (TPL) "Parkland per 1,000 Residents by City" from the 2016 City Park Facts Report. Determination of whether a municipality is underserved or adequately served is based on municipal density compared to all available public space acreage within the municipality (Table 1).

	RANGE (people per acre)	MEDIAN (people per acre)	PARKLAND % OF CITY AREA (acres)	ACRES PARKLAND PER 1,000 RESIDENTS	ACRES PARKLAND PER RESIDENT
High Density	45.2 – 12.1	18.8	12.5%	6.8 acres	0.0068 acres
Medium High Density	12.0 – 7.8	9.0	8.6%	9.7 acres	0.0097 acres
Medium Low Density	7.7 – 4.6	5.8	8.2%	13.7 acres	0.0137 acres
Low Density	4.5 – 0.3	3.5	7.3%	23.3 acres	0.0233 acres

Table 1. Municipal density compared to available public parkland (Courtesy of TPL 2016 City Park Facts Report).

Adequacy of the amount of existing Open Space in each municipality was categorized as follows:

- Well Served  $\geq$  TPL median
- Slightly Underserved  $\geq$  75% TPL median
- Underserved  $\geq$  55% TPL median
- Very Underserved  $<$  55% TPL median

## Objective: Underserved Areas

As the analysis suggests, in order to balance the amount of open space in the County, the underserved southern portion of the County should be a priority for development of new parklands. The northern municipalities near the New York border experience a parkland deficit and could be prioritized as well.

## Objective: Explore Connectors

A model for this approach is the highly successful Saddle River Park. Parcels adjacent to it and to other potential linear connectors could be explored to determine their potential to link parcels along waterways, pathways, and other rights-of-way, to expand existing and create new linear parks. New parklands adjacent to the rivers would address the currently significant parkland deficits in the southern portion of the County.

## Objective: Brownfield Opportunities

Brownfield land is any previously developed land that is currently underutilized. The term often implies past or present environmental contamination. Opportunities to create new parks or include public parks in brownfield redevelopment projects, particularly in the underserved southern municipalities, could be explored. While smaller, local parks might be more appropriately managed as municipal parks, the County could play a helpful role as an advisor or source of funding for property acquisition.



Figure 12. Bergen County should play a pivotal role in leading initiatives to increase public space for residents in the region (Courtesy of CUES).

## 5.2 Improve Access and Connectivity

The County of Bergen wants to make it safe, easy, and convenient to get to parks. Great parks are of little benefit when people cannot reach them. Improving access to parks will make it easier, more affordable, and more convenient for people to get to parks and enjoy their benefits. In particular, we want to solve traffic and parking issues, including cut-through traffic, speeding, and ensuring every park has adequate parking. We also want our parks to accommodate emerging transportation trends such as bicycle sharing, ride-sharing, car-sharing and electric vehicles.

Not everyone wants to drive to parks. Increasing walking and bicycling access can give more people the opportunity to enjoy their trip to the parks. It can give those who would normally drive to parks the opportunity to walk or bike there, reducing their vehicle use and encouraging a more active and healthy lifestyle. Establishing and maintaining full American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance can ensure County parks are safely and efficiently accessible for users with disabilities; easy access for everyone is a way of ensuring our parks are inclusionary.

Connections between parks, commonly called greenways, can serve to increase the amount of open space beyond just adding land area. It means users can readily enjoy the features of more than one park in the same visit. Greenways and other non-motorized connections between parks can provide the dual benefits of more recreational opportunities and alternative means of transportation.

Safe, convenient multi-modal connections for County residents to access parks are key elements in realizing the Master Plan vision. Easy, non-vehicular access to parks could reduce parking pressures, promote physical fitness, and reduce environmental pollution.

### Transportation Assessment

For this Master Plan, a transportation assessment was conducted that examined linkages between parks at the regional scale, as well as multi-modal access to parks at the local level. A park-specific analysis also looked at pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular circulation and parking issues within different sizes and types of parks to determine appropriate types and sizes of future park events. The assessment included the components of a Park User Intercept Survey, a Regional Connectivity Analysis, Multi-Modal Access and Circulation Studies, and an Event Planning Analysis.

The Park User Intercept Survey was conducted at five diverse parks: Hackensack River Park, Overpeck Park, Riverside Parks North and South, Saddle River Park, and Van Saun Park. In total, 929 park users completed surveys which offered participants the opportunity to share their experiences and opinions related to park access, getting around inside parks, and their perceptions of safety while using County parks.



Figure 1. Vehicular circulation elements in Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

The Bergen County parks system is highly accessible by car, and many parks are also located within walking distance of residential areas, public schools, and community institutions. According to the park user intercept survey:

- The majority of park users live within five miles of the park they commonly use. One in three users travels less than one mile to access a park. Among survey participants, Van Saun Park had the highest percentage of visitors travelling more than five miles, while Riverside Parks North and South had the highest percentage travelling less than half a mile.
- Nearly eighty percent of survey responders drive to the parks they use, while only seventeen percent walk. Three percent bicycle and less than one percent take public transportation.
- A majority of respondents said park entrances and exits were clearly marked.
- While responses varied between parks, overall, more than sixty percent of survey respondents ranked the walking paths within the park they were using as very good or good. Only one percent stated that walking paths were in poor condition.
- A slight majority of fifty-three percent stated they were not concerned about conflicts between bicyclists, joggers, and walkers on park pathways. Seven percent said they were extremely concerned.
- Two-thirds of survey respondents said they had no safety concerns in the neighborhood surrounding the park they were visiting. Among those who did have concerns, common responses included poor lighting and heavy traffic. Of those that had concerns, twelve percent reported a lack of lighting as the reason they felt unsafe, followed by nine percent who felt the lack of police presence made them feel unsafe.



Figure 2. Walking in the street Wood Dale County Park (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 3. Nearly 80% of Bergen County park users drive to the parks they use (Courtesy of CUES).



The Regional Connectivity Analysis explored a perceived lack of linkages between communities and parks, an issue raised by Bergen County residents at public outreach events. The analysis overlaid the park system with the existing transportation network and looked for opportunities to better connect County parks using State, County, and municipal roads, utility and railroad rights-of-ways, existing parklands, multi-use paths, and bicycle lanes. The Regional Connectivity Analysis revealed the following:

- While each individual park offers a variety of amenities and attractions, the idea of connecting parks has not been a significant focus of park planning or management activities.
- There appear to be opportunities to connect open spaces and parks across the County via existing streets, utility and railroad rights-of-way, walkways and trails within individual parks and with other trail systems.
- There have been limited County-wide efforts to study and plan for bicycle and pedestrian connections among and between parks. Some municipalities have undertaken steps to facilitate non-motorized transportation, but efforts vary widely from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Considerations in this Master Plan that are outside of County jurisdiction are provided as suggestions to improve the opportunities to connect parks. Improving the overall connectivity of the parks system is an important goal of this Master Plan. Developing safe, convenient, multi-modal connectivity between parks will increase resident accessibility, can improve environmental conditions, and can provide additional recreation opportunities and support for healthy lifestyle choices.

Multi-modal Access and Circulation Studies were undertaken to address issues related to park access and circulation within County parks. Transportation conditions in thirteen parks were analyzed: Belmont Hill Park, Campgaw Mountain, Darlington Park, Hackensack River Park, Pascack Brook Park, Riverside Parks North and South,

Saddle River Park, Samuel Nelkin Park, Van Saun Park, Wood Dale Park, and Wortendyke Barn. The parks were analyzed in the context of the surrounding neighborhood in order to identify access issues and highlight ways to improve conditions for drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders. The analyses of individual parks found a number of common conditions related to vehicle access and circulation:

- Wayfinding signage directing drivers to parks and parking areas varies in design and consistency. In most cases, signage installed along major routes does not meet the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards. Signage may not be visible to both directions of traffic, and is sometimes placed too late for drivers to take action. Signage at park entrances is also not consistent in design, size, or placement. For additional analysis of park signage, see Chapter 5.7.
- Parking is mostly well-placed near activity generators, such as playing fields, but does not always exist in the quantity appropriate for larger venues. Better traffic management is necessary in larger parks and before and after events to improve the parking situation.
- Speeding vehicles and cut-through traffic is an issue in certain parks. Modern traffic calming strategies could be implemented to slow vehicles and discourage cut-through traffic.
- Parking lots are generally in good condition, but landscaping could be improved, both at the parking entrances and within the parking areas.
- Parking lots and interior roadways lack lighting needed to support the use of parks after dark.
- Interior park paths are in good condition, and link parking areas to the various amenities within the park. However, most parks lack sufficient pedestrian access points from the neighboring communities, which may limit resident's abilities to access the parks without having to drive.
- While many neighborhoods adjacent to the parks were highly walkable with sidewalks, limited traffic, and a tight street grid, there are multiple instances where

sidewalks do not link the neighborhood street network to the park itself. Many parks are bordered by a major arterial roadway, but there are no crosswalks at intersections near park entrances.

- Many sidewalks into parks are not ADA compliant, with missing or inadequate ramps.
- While bicyclists can share internal trails with pedestrians, there are few bicycle-specific amenities within the parks, such as bicycle parking. There are few bicycle facilities connecting nearby residents to parks.
- Some conflicts have been reported between pedestrians and bicyclists when sharing trails.
- In larger parks, it can be difficult to safely walk from one area to another, due to barriers such as major roadways, waterbodies, and other obstacles.
- Internal pedestrian paths lack lighting and lighting is inadequate where pedestrian paths cross internal roadways.
- Most parks can be reached by multiple bus routes, but sidewalks between parks and the nearest bus stop are frequently discontinuous. There are situations where a bus stop is adjacent to a park entrance, but it is difficult and dangerous to cross the road to reach the bus stop.
- Very few bus stops near parks feature amenities for bus riders, such as shelters, benches, and trash cans. There is also no signage at bus stops providing directions to the parks, or in the parks informing visitors of the nearest bus stops.



Figure 4. Overall, most survey respondents indicated that they considered park paths as in good or very good condition (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 5. Improving linkages between neighborhoods and nearby parks could facilitate bike and pedestrian access to some parks. In this case, the sidewalk ends at Dunker Hook Road without crosswalks to facilitate easy access to Saddle river county Parks(Courtesy of CUES).

An Event Planning Analysis was done to consider the feasibility and benefits associated with programming park activities such as movie nights, cultural festivals, and even multi-day music events. To help understand how various park venues might accommodate events of different types and sizes, the research team explored potential access needs and parking demands for a range of event sizes at various park locations. The Event Planning Analysis can be read in the Appendices.

The Transportation Assessment revealed that Bergen County parks are easily reached by car. However, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit access showed significant deficits. This finding has informed the goal of improving access and connectivity.

## Transportation Recommendations

The transportation analyses highlighted several regional and local issues in terms of access to, and circulation within Bergen County parks. These conditions provide an opportunity to re-imagine the physical connections among, between, and within County parks, as well as the conditions and amenities at each park that can enhance user experiences in terms of access and circulation. The following recommended objectives can help achieve our second goal of Improving Park Access and Connectivity.

### Objective: Identify Greenways

A greenway is a trail found in both urban and rural settings that is on undeveloped land, frequently created from a disused right-of-way such as an abandoned railway or utility easement lands, and set aside for recreational use. Bergen County greenways could be created by taking advantage of opportunities to physically link County parks. A conceptual greenway plan in the accompanying figure depicts potential opportunities to connect open spaces across the County. This conceptual regional network consists of existing streets, utility rights-of-ways, parks, trails, and roads that could be used by bicyclists and pedestrians. Five main routes are proposed in this greenway system, three of which connect the County from north to south and two which span it from east to west. These potential routes were chosen based on directness and access to County parks.



Figure 6. Atlanta Beltline before and after construction (courtesy of CUES).



Figure 7. Potential Bergen County regional greenway (courtesy of CUES).

Best practices in greenway development around the United States were used as references for successful implementation in Bergen County. The Atlanta Belt Line in Georgia is one of the largest greenway initiatives in the United States, with about thirty-three miles of multi-use trails and twenty-two miles of pedestrian friendly rail transit<sup>96</sup>. The program has created jobs, transformed neighborhoods, and provided areas with an economic boost. Although already created, the Atlanta Belt Line is still transforming and expanding.

Similarly, a Bergen County greenway network could be phased in over time and eventually connect to the partially-realized East Coast Greenway (ECG), a network of trails that could potentially reach 3,000 miles from Maine to Florida<sup>97</sup>. The ECG comes into New Jersey and Bergen County via the George Washington Bridge and continues south along the Hudson River. In identifying greenways, how to connect to the ECG, or create an extension of the ECG into northern New Jersey, could be explored.

96. Atlanta BeltLine Overview. <https://beltline.org/about/the-atlanta-beltline-project/atlanta-beltline-overview/>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

97. About the East Coast Greenway. <https://www.greenway.org/about/the-east-coast-greenway>. Accessed 24 August 2017.

## Objective: Improve Signage

A unified identity and brand can be supported by adopting sign guidelines that ensure visibility for all users, promoting uniformity throughout the parks system and providing necessary, relevant, and interesting information. Signs should follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards. This objective also supports Goal Seven, Increase Public Access to Information, and is repeated in more detail in Chapter 5.7 in reference to all park signs. Here it refers specifically to transportation signage.

## Objective: Improve Lighting

Lack of lighting was cited by park users as a reason parks felt unsafe. Lack of lighting limits the time available for park use. Lighting could be installed to make pedestrians and bicyclists visible at intersections and to highlight areas that are safe for users after dark. To limit light pollution into natural areas and neighboring properties, overhead lighting fixtures should be designed with either full cutoff fixtures or be fully shielded. This ensures that the light is directed only where it is needed – such as on the trail or parking area.



Figure 8. park lighting directed only where needed (Courtesy of Dallas Park and Recreation Department).



Figure 9. Design for mid-block crossing lighting layout (Courtesy of VTC).

Consideration should be given to deploying adaptive lighting that helps to ensure the parks are not over lit when not in use. Modern Light Emitting Diode (LED) fixtures allow the operator to set the brightness amount based on the time of day or the expected use of the park. This limits light pollution and saves money and energy. This objective is shared with Goal Eight, Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks.

LED installations also allow control over the color of the lighting. The color selected affects how visitors perceive their safety and how animals regulate their daily cycle. Higher Kelvin ratings mimic daylight and can confuse and disrupt wildlife. Lower ratings do not disrupt wildlife but can appear “eerie” to visitors due to their red hue. An adaptable system allows the color of the lighting to change as the evening progresses.

## Objective: Event Parking

The overall goal of Improving Access and Connectivity must consider the feasibility of parking associated with park events and activities such as movie nights, cultural festivals, and multi-day events at various park locations. Each event and each park have unique characteristics. A hypothetical event program used to inform this Master Plan considered proposed events that could attract a volume of visitors larger than usual park attendance. Park managers and event planners should estimate parking demand to consider what types of events might be most appropriate in different park locations. In instances where access and parking demand is likely to exceed capacity, Bergen County should require event planners to provide access and traffic management plans.



However, many of the Bergen County parks do not have the parking capacity to support large events. One way to address this issue is to coordinate with nearby businesses or community organizations with parking garages and lots with excess parking to create satellite parking. Developing shared-use agreements with these nearby organizations could help address parking shortfalls. Satellite parking could require the use of shuttle bus services, which would necessitate cooperation with other County departments and potentially public and private transit providers. In addition to satellite parking, other parking management options could be explored. This objective is shared with Goal Six, Program Park Spaces and Events, in reference to large events held in County parks.

### Objective: Pedestrian Improvements

Bergen County parks should prioritize pedestrian amenities, including the improvement of American Disability Act (ADA) compliance, so that all park users, including those with strollers and in wheelchairs and other mobility devices, are able to easily enter and move about the parks. This would require utilizing ADA compliant ramps at park and trail entrances. Crosswalks should also be installed regardless of whether or not a park entrance is located at an intersection. Crosswalks should be designed according to the characteristics of the road network surrounding each park entrance and could include simple striping, raised crosswalks, or High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) beacons. HAWK beacons, also called Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons, are designed to allow safe pedestrian crossing while pausing vehicular flow only as needed, particularly at mid-block crossings where traffic speeds are high or gaps in traffic are few<sup>98</sup>.



Figure 10. HAWK beacon (Courtesy of BPRC).

### Objective: Bicycle Improvements

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation should work with municipalities to improve conditions for bicyclists wishing to access the County park system. This should include designating a network of dedicated bicycle paths and bicycle lanes where appropriate in communities surrounding the parks. It is important to note this would require the cooperation of other County departments and municipalities.

Providing secure bicycle parking facilities is essential in encouraging park users to arrive at the parks by bicycling. The presence of bicycle racks sends a message that bicyclists are expected and welcomed. Bicycle parking should be located near park features that attract visitors. This includes playgrounds, sports fields, and trail access points.

To be successful, bicycle parking must be visible from the road or trail where the bicyclists arrive, with appropriate signage directing bicyclists to the parking area. Additionally, the racks should be conveniently located, with many guides suggesting that the bicycle parking areas be no more than fifty feet from the entrance. Attention must be placed on how visible the bicycle parking is from the nearby amenity. In an area where a large amount of bicycle racks are installed, an attractive amenity for bicycle riders is a bicycle maintenance station. These installations allow bicycle riders to add air, adjust their brakes, and make other quick fixes to their bicycle using tools that are chained to the support post.



Figure 11. Bicycle tune-up station (Courtesy of Pedal Minnesota).



## Objective: Transit Connections

Some bus stops and rail stations located in the County do not provide safe pedestrian access to nearby parks. Ensuring that sidewalks and crosswalks are installed along these routes will help to ensure the safe arrival of visitors utilizing public transit.

Bicycle share programs at local train stations, modeled after Hoboken's Hudson Bike, could provide an opportunity for transit users to access parks more easily, especially if marked bicycle trails are provided along the route. Including transit directions, in addition to the driving directions provided on the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation website, could help encourage more park visitors to utilize public transportation. It is important to note this would require cooperation with other County departments, municipalities, and public transit providers.

## Objective: Vehicular Improvements

Several County parks experience problems with cut-through traffic. These conditions could be improved by installing traffic calming devices such as fifteen mile-per-hour speed limits, roundabouts, speed humps, and other strategies. Raised crosswalks could serve the dual purposes of slowing down vehicular traffic and helping improve pedestrian visibility and safety.



Figure 12. Walking and biking should be encourage for regular park use as well as events  
(Courtesy of CUES)

## Objective: Improve Pathways

Many Bergen County parks include internal pathway systems. The design of paths could be reviewed to ensure they are adequately sized to meet user demand. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) recommends that heavily used shared-use pathways be a minimum of ten feet wide, with two feet of grading on either side. However, if more than thirty percent of the pathway's total traffic is pedestrian, a wider path of eleven to fourteen feet is suggested. Ensuring these standards are met can help alleviate trail congestion.

Path design should also keep in mind the importance of smooth surfaces for longevity as well as ease of use for bicycle riders and those utilizing mobility assistance devices. In areas where paving is not possible, dirt or gravel pedestrian paths could be installed alongside paved pathways for added width. Improving pathways should start with an assessment to determine what percentage of internal pathways are compliant.

## Objective: Future Trends

This Master Plan is an excellent opportunity to plan for a changing transportation future, including the growth in popularity of electric vehicles, ride-hailing services, and car-sharing. With the growth of ride-hailing services, designating "Drop-Off Zones" is becoming more common. The designated drop-off zone eliminates the challenge of riders having to communicate their location, which can be particularly daunting in some of the larger parks that span multiple municipalities. These zones could be especially helpful during large events.

Electric vehicle charging stations could be installed in parks where appropriate. Those parks with significant daily attendance, the ability to host large events, and where parking is plentiful would be likely candidates. Accommodation of electric vehicles is an objective shared with Goal Eight, Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks.

## 5.3 Steward our Environmental Resources

The County of Bergen wants to protect critical environments and habitats, and mitigate flooding by managing stormwater in our parks utilizing green infrastructure where appropriate. It is our priority to protect and conserve our natural areas. The parks system is home to sizeable natural resources in woodlands, wetlands, stream valleys and other natural areas. By protecting these areas, we preserve their biological diversity and their ability to provide clean waters. Some of the ways this can be done are to remove invasive species, reduce the impacts to critical habitats, expand natural areas, and ensure buffers around water bodies.

Protecting our natural areas brings additional benefits when they are used to better manage stormwater. Natural areas slow rain and flood waters, filter pollutants, and reduce the need for hard infrastructure systems and their associated capital and operating costs. Natural areas are themselves a system for absorbing stormwater and preventing flooding. Recommendations on operating sustainable parks that safeguard environmental resources are further explored in Chapter 5.8.

### Existing Ecologic Conditions

Bergen County parks are critical natural resources. Parklands are primarily located along river and stream banks in riparian floodways. The Ramapo Highlands in the northwest area of the County, the Palisades in the northeast, and the Meadowlands in the southeast are less developed than other areas, largely due to the geologic and hydrologic patterns that make building in these areas more difficult.

The State has recognized the unique resources of Bergen County and two of the State's three planning regions create additional protections for the resources within these areas. Although most of the County is developed, the Highland's freshwater aquifers and surface waters of the Ramapo River provide drinking water to more than half the families in New Jersey. The Ramapo River is a popular destination for fishing since the Highlands are relatively preserved. The Meadowlands, which forms the estuarine boundary where the freshwaters of the Passaic



Figure 1. Common reed monoculture (Courtesy of Biohabitats).

and Hackensack Rivers drain to the saline waters of the Atlantic Ocean, provide important habitat and breeding grounds for many species. Both areas are under constant development pressure, and efforts are repeatedly made to relax the environmental protections put in place that preserve these unique and important resources. In addition, the Meadowlands are threatened by invasive plants, animals, and pests, and have been impacted by dumping and pollution. In some areas, they have been contaminated by organic compounds and heavy metals.

These pressures from invasive species, development, and pollution affect all of Bergen County and its natural resources. Contaminants in the southern portion of the Hackensack River include arsenic, mercury, lead, zinc, and nickel. The tidal portions of the Passaic and Hackensack Rivers are closed to commercial fishing and crabbing due to the presence of contaminants including chlordane, dioxin, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) concentrated in the river sediments. Although some portions of the lower Passaic River are now undergoing cleanup, the river is currently designated as the largest Superfund site in the United States.

Forested areas are concentrated in the northwestern portion of the County. Those forests that do exist tend to be highly fragmented and under constant threat due to invasive species, changing climate, diseases, and development. Similarly, intertidal, wetland, and riparian habitats are limited, fragmented, and typically border vertical upland, bulkheads, or riprap shoreline which further reduce opportunities for foraging and nesting wildlife and avian species.



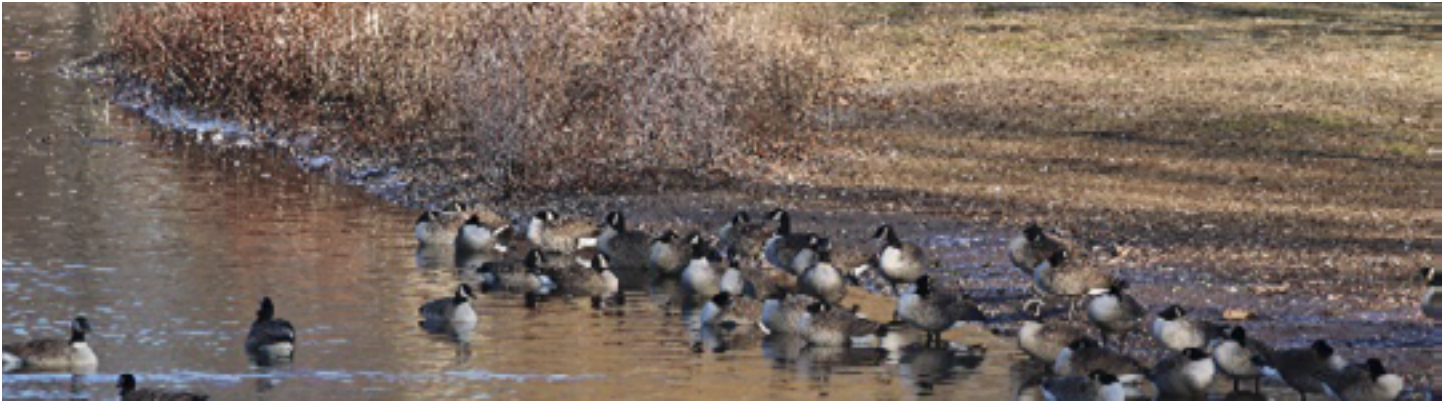


Figure 2. Isolated faraging and fragmented forest (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 3. Bulk headed shoreline (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 4. Ramapo Valley County Reservation (Courtesy of CUES).

## Hydrologic Conditions

Watersheds and sub-watersheds that bound the landforms within Bergen County include the Lower Hudson River, Hackensack River, Pascack Brook, Ramapo River, Saddle River, and Lower Passaic River. These watershed areas are designated as Principal Watersheds of New Jersey by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and fall within three Watershed Management Areas (WMAs): WMA-3, WMA-4, and WMA-5.

WMA-5 includes the Lower Hudson River, Hackensack River, and Pascack Brook watersheds, and is one of the most densely developed watersheds in the State. The Lower Hudson River Watershed lies along the County's eastern border, with a few tributaries draining into the Lower Hudson River from the northeastern section of the County. Approximately 11,000 acres of land lie within the Lower Hudson River Watershed, which accounts for seven percent of the County and makes up only two percent of the overall Lower Hudson River Watershed.

The Hackensack River Watershed is bifurcated by the Oradell Dam, which separates the tidal brackish estuary in southern Bergen County from the drinking waters north of the dam. The northern portion of the watershed, which is dammed to create the drinking water reservoirs, is less developed than the highly urbanized southern portion. The majority – fifty-eight percent – of this watershed is located in Bergen County. The southern tidal reach of the watershed, comprised primarily of the Hackensack Meadowlands, continues to be affected by historic contamination, associated primarily with the river's sediments. The Pascack Brook Watershed, located within the Pascack Valley in the center of the County, drains to the northern freshwater section of the Hackensack River above the Oradell Dam.

WMA-4 includes the Lower Passaic Watershed and the Saddle River Watershed. The Lower Passaic Watershed originates from the confluence of the Pompton River, and continues downstream to discharge into Newark Bay. The watershed includes areas within Bergen County, but also encompasses areas in Hudson, Passaic, and Essex Counties.



Figure 5. Bergen County Watersheds (Courtesy of Karl Musser).

The Passaic River continues to be one of the most polluted rivers in the United States. Available habitat is limited and fragmented after a long history of industrialization, contamination, and municipal waste disposal. Intertidal foraging areas for birds are limited to isolated mudflats. Bergen County surface waters receive permitted discharges from a number of sources, including Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs). The CSOs are primarily in the southern portion of the watershed, and during heavy precipitation can divert untreated stormwater and raw sewage into the Hackensack and Passaic Rivers.



Figure 6. Stormwater management practices within the parks have an impact on the health of critical water resources, such as the Saddle River (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



## Stormwater Management

Management of stormwater and surface water runoff is a critical aspect in enhancing and protecting the ecologic values provided by the Bergen County park system. When properly managed, stormwater becomes a resource that not only irrigates the County's parklands, but also contributes to enhancing the natural experience enjoyed within the parks. If unmanaged, stormwater flows contribute to erosion of streambanks and flooding of park venues. These waters can also transport excess nutrients and urban pollution into receiving surface waters.

To understand current stormwater management practices in the County park system, a desktop analysis of stormwater landscape considerations was conducted, followed by a series of site visits to observe stormwater flows, hydrologic conditions, opportunities for infiltration, green infrastructure, and management and maintenance practices. Some general observations that were evident in all parks included the following:

- Buffers along streams and rivers have been removed or are compromised, creating conditions that can increase further erosion and destabilization
- Impervious surfaces in many locations drain directly to surface water bodies. Structural improvements are needed to capture runoff and promote infiltration
- A small number of inlets were serving large drainage areas, causing these inlets to clog
- Stormwater flows are directed down steep slopes, eroding forest and riparian habitats
- Impervious surfaces concentrated flows into erosion gullies located on steep grades
- Impervious surfaces concentrate flows into open areas causing isolated ponding and sedimentation
- Runoff from maintenance and storage facilities, which may contain organic matter, sediment, nutrients, or contaminants, is flowing directly into surface water bodies



Figure 7. Without interventions to capture runoff, impervious surfaces can drain directly into adjacent water bodies.



Figure 8. Outfall on steep grade contributes to erosion at Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



## Streambank Erosion

Current management of park areas affects surface water bodies. Sheet flow to pervious surfaces in the vicinity of paved areas is already helping to disperse and infiltrate water in some locations, and is a better alternative than piping runoff directly into a stream or other surface water body. However, observations of conditions in County parks are listed below:

- Incised streams are disconnected from the floodplain, creating conditions that lead to downstream flooding, bank erosion, and stream destabilization
- Some programmed park uses within the floodplain may increase the potential for bank instability and erosion, as well as the flooding of park amenities
- Natural edge conditions along streams are narrow and constricted, limiting flood protection
- Large flocks of geese contribute to poor water quality due to the flow of unmanaged runoff through areas filled with goose droppings
- Nutrient inputs from manicured lawns within the general parklands, as well as from the County golf courses, impair water quality
- Limited forested buffers do not provide enough root protection from destabilization, increasing the risk of stream bank erosion where shallow, concentrated flows enter water bodies



Figure 9. Incised stream channel at Van Saun Park is disconnected from the floodplain, creating conditions that lead to degradation and destabilization downstream (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 10. Limited vegetative buffer do not provide enough root protection, increasing the risk of stream bank erosion (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 11. Oak-hickory dominated forest (Courtesy of Biohabitats).

## Critical Habitat

The County's parklands are defined by valleys, ridges, waterways, and historic land uses. The northernmost County parks are on lands where farming and development were historically difficult due to steep slopes; central and southern parks are in areas with historically wet conditions. As a result, County parks tend to encompass significant habitats including forests, wetlands, streams and creeks, and contain sensitive plant and animal species that rely on these resources for nesting, breeding, cover, and food. However, due to different histories of protection and development pressures, these resources vary in condition from near pristine to greatly altered.

The largest contiguous forested areas in the County are found in the Ramapo Valley County Reservation and Alpine Reserves North and South. However, since the County was logged extensively in the 18th and 19th Centuries, most wooded areas within the parks are second-growth forests. There is one old growth forest remaining in Bergen County: Greenbrook Sanctuary, a 165 acre preserve that contains about ten acres of old growth, dominated by oak species. Greenbrook Sanctuary is located south of the Alpine Reserves.

The Alpine Reserves are typical, and are dominated by a mixed oak-hickory forest along the steep upland slopes. Vegetative species found within these areas are typically observed within other wooded areas of Bergen County. Tree species include maple, birch, beech, ash, cherry, and dogwood. Shrub species typically include maple-leaved viburnum, arrowwood, pink azalea, mountain laurel, and black huckleberry. The herbaceous layers often contain mayapple, wild sarsaparilla, wood anemone, false Solomon's seal, white wood aster, sweet cicely, and jack in the pulpit.

American chestnut trees once dominated the area, but were decimated by the chestnut blight fungus in the early 1900s. The Tenaflly Nature Center, located south of the Alpine Reserves, is working with the Chestnut Foundation and has set up an education demonstration plot with a variety of chestnut hybrids.

Significant wetland resources are found throughout the County, from the emergent tidal wetlands in the Meadowlands to the floodplains and riparian areas found along the County rivers, to the wetlands located within the highland sections of the Ramapo Mountains, to the vernal pools found in small sections of many parks.

Significant wetland acreage remains within County parks in the Ramapo, Hackensack, and Saddle River watersheds. The vegetative species vary greatly, dependent on the type of wetland and its hydrogeomorphic location, defined as the landscape position, source of water, and direction and strength of water flow. For example, the tidal marshes of the Meadowlands are dominated by the common reed as well as salt marsh grass species, whereas forested wetlands tend to be dominated by trees such as maples, birches, and willows.

Despite the number of sensitive and significant habitats found within the County parks, many of these habitats have been greatly altered. Steep slopes are flattened, wetlands filled, trees and other native species cut or mowed, or the landscape developed for some other use.

## Threatened and Endangered Species

Bergen County parklands provide habitats for a number of species included on the New Jersey State lists of Threatened or Endangered Species and Species of Special Concern. The figures on this and the following pages contain tables of these species.

A species is designated as endangered if its prospect for survival within the State is in immediate danger due to one or several factors, such as loss or degradation of habitat, over-exploitation, predation, competition, disease, or environmental pollution. An Endangered Species likely requires immediate action to avoid extinction within New Jersey. The designation of Threatened Species applies when a plant or animal may become endangered if conditions surrounding it begin to or continue to deteriorate.

The designation of Species of Special Concern applies to plants and animals that need special protection because they are vulnerable to environmental threats, but do not yet warrant an endangered or threatened status. This category would also be applied to plants and animals if scientists know little about their population status within New Jersey.



Figure 12. Bald eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) on the list of New Jersey Endangered species (Courtesy of Peter k. Burian).

TYPE	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	STATUS	HABITAT NEEDS
Animal	Bobcat	<i>Lynx rufus</i>	S-E	Coniferous and mixed forest
	Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	S-E	Close proximity to water
	Barred Owl	<i>Strix varia</i>	S-T	Riparian woodlands
	Black Crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	S-T	Forest, scrub/shrub, marshes, ponds as nesting and roosting habitats
	Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	S-T	Marshy areas, nesting in trees or shrubs near water
	Henslow's Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus henslowii</i>	S-E	Sedge meadows, high, dense vegetation and thick layer of ground litter
	Red-Headed Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes erythrocephalus</i>	S-T	Open upland and wetland forested areas with dead or dying trees and sparse undergrowth
	Yellow Crowned Night Heron	<i>Nyctanassa violacea</i>	S-T	Forests with open understory or suburban parks with suitable habitat
Reptile	Timber Rattlesnake	<i>Crotalus horridus horridus</i>	S-E	Rocky hillsides with underground crevices below the frost line, areas lacking tree canopy
	Wood Turtle	<i>Glyptemys insculpta</i>	S-T	Waters relatively remote and clean; undisturbed uplands (fields, meadows, forests)
Insect	Gray Petaltail	<i>Tachopteryx thoreyi</i>	S-E	Forests with cold water streams and seepages, skunk cabbage

Table 1. Bergen County State Threatened & Endangered (T&E) Species. S-E= State Endangered List; S-T= State Threatened List (Courtesy of Biohabitats)



TYPE	COMMON NAME	LATIN NAME	HABITAT NEEDS
Bird	Black Throated Blue Warbler	<i>Debdriuca caerykescebs</i>	Understory of deciduous and mixed woodlands and partially cleared forest
	Broad-Winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>	Deep deciduous forests in spring and summer
	Brown Trasher	<i>Toxostoma rufum</i>	Shrub area in deciduous forests in clearings and edge
	Cerulean Warbler	<i>Dendroica cerulean</i>	Mature deciduous forest in river valleys and swamp
	Cooper's Hawk	<i>Accipiter cooperii</i>	Deciduous and mixed riparian or wetland forest.
	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegardis falcinellus</i>	Marsh, swamp ponds, estuaries
	Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea Herodias</i>	Nesting in wetlands or uplands near water bodies
	Hooded Warbler	<i>Wilsonia citrina</i>	Deciduous woodland understory near streams
	Little Blue Heron	<i>Egretta caerulea</i>	Wetland forest bordering water bodies
	Northern Parula	<i>Parula americana</i>	Deciduous or mixed forests near water
	Red-Shouldered Hawk	<i>Buteo lineatus</i>	Forested wetlands, fragmented woods forest edge
	Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	Wetland and forest bordering water bodies
	Veery	<i>Catharus fuscescens</i>	Forested wetlands with shrubby understory
	Wood Thrush	<i>Hylocichla mustelina</i>	Deciduous or mixed forest with dense canopy and well developed understory
	Worm-Eating Warbler	<i>Helminthos vermivorum</i>	Upland deciduous forest usually on steep sloped with patches of understory
Reptile	Eastern Box Turtle	<i>Terrapene carolina carolina</i>	Woodlands and meadows near streams or ponds
	Northern Copperhead	<i>Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen</i>	Rocky wooded hillsides, rocky fields, berry thickets, wooded wetlands
Insects	Arrowhead Spiketrail	<i>Cordulegaster obliqua</i>	Forests with cold water streams and seepage, skunk cabbage
	Brush-tuooed/enerakd	<i>Sinaticgkira waksuu</i>	Open swamps with small streams flowing through
	Sable Clubtain	<i>Gomphus rogersi</i>	Forests with cold water streams and seepage, skunk cabbage
	Tiger Spiketail	<i>Cordulegaster erronea</i>	Forests with cold water streams and seepage, skunk cabbage

Table 2. Bergen County State Species of Concern (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 13. Great Blue Heron (*Ardea Herodias*), on the list of New Jersey Species of Special Concern (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 14. Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*), on the list of New Jersey Species of Special Concern (Courtesy of Uncultured/Wikipedia Creative Commons).

Environmental pollution including acid rain, chemical and heavy metal pollution, pesticide use, oil spills, emerging pathogens and pests, road mortality, and predation are factors contributing to native species endangerment, as is competition from invasive species. Additional threats to bird species are habitat destruction, cutting of dead trees and thinning of forests that eliminate nesting cavities, competition with European starlings, disturbance to nesting colonies, vegetative succession, and feral cats. Additional threats to reptile and invertebrate species in the County are groundwater disturbances, while additional threats to mammals in the County are rapid development and deforestation. The successful long-term preservation, management, and possible expansion of the Bergen County park system is of great relevance to preventing further loss of public open space and critical habitats. The analysis of existing ecological conditions has informed our goals.

## Ecological Recommendations

The forests, wetlands, and surface waters found within the County's 9,335 acres of parkland provide some of the last remaining areas of critical habitat required by vulnerable species. Therefore, stewardship and the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in County parklands are critically important. Recommendations to protect sensitive species and their habitats are presented below. As a stated goal of this Master Plan is to Steward our Environmental Resources, these recommendations are the objectives – the actions to take – towards accomplishing this goal.

### Objective: Protect Forested Habitats

Existing forest habitat should be conserved, particularly large areas of interior forest and contiguous riparian forest that contains mature forest buffers. Forest regeneration can be supported through restoration, enhancement, support of native species, avoiding deforestation and protection of mature tree canopies. Forests should be restored with native trees, with a focus on reconnecting habitat corridors. Fragmentation of existing forest patches should be avoided and where forests have been fragmented, they should be restored. Biodiversity should be enhanced using appropriate native plants and the use of non-native species should be avoided. As more specific management practices are beyond the scope of this Master Plan, a Forest Stewardship Plan should be developed for all County-owned forests.

### Objective: Soften the Edges

Edges around parks and park waterbodies need to be softened by planting buffers of native species. Areas need to be identified where limited mowing can re-establish grasslands and meadowlands, ensuring that mowing does not occur during breeding seasons. Native shrubs should be planted along roadways and park pathways. In appropriate areas, turf should be replaced with native meadow to improve water infiltration and create habitat that is not conducive to supporting Canada geese. Low maintenance landscaping that encourages retention and planting of native vegetation minimizes the use of fertilizers and pesticides.



Figure 15. Replace lawns mowed down to the water's edge with native plant buffers around water bodies. Native shrubs should also be planted along roadways and paths (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 16. Common reed (*Phragmites australis*) monoculture (Courtesy of Biohabitats).





Figure 17. Feral cat colonies pose a threat to native bird populations (Courtesy of Dimitris Vetsikas/Pixabay).

### Objective: Invasive Species Management

Invasive species need to be removed or managed and control measures enacted. The common reed is particularly problematic in areas of Overpeck Park, along the shorelines of the Hackensack River, and on golf courses. Other predominant invasive species include Japanese knotwood, mile-a-minute vine, Japanese stilt grass, porcelain berry, barberry, and multiflora rose. Although a controversial issue, predatory animal populations need to be reduced and controlled to diminish threats to birds and allow forest understories to regenerate. Particularly destructive populations include white tailed deer, the largest wild herbivore in New Jersey. Deer are an edge species, and thrive in habitats that are found within parks. There are no natural predators in New Jersey that control the deer population, which is destroying the understory of forests. This understory must be preserved in order to provide habitats required for birds and small mammals and to provide seedlings that replace maturing trees. Regenerating forest tree species and the understory can be addressed in a Forest Stewardship Plan.

Feral cats are another destructive population. Domestic pets should be excluded from natural areas that contain sensitive wildlife species or critical habitats. In addition to feral cats and deer, Canada geese are also contributing to environmental degradation in parks. Geese contribute high nitrogen and phosphorous loadings, which impair water quality and cause eutrophication in park surface waters. Planting native species along shorelines reduces the appeal of water bodies for geese, causing them to find alternative feeding areas.



Figure 18. Signage providing rationale for not feeding wildlife (Courtesy of Philadelphia Water Department).



Figure 19. Signage describing the importance of forest soils (Courtesy of Noel Design, LLC).



Figure 20. Signage describing benefits provided by wetlands (Courtesy of Interpretive Graphics).

### **Objective: Encourage Park Stewardship**

Interpretive signs could be installed along park pathways that describe habitats and native vegetation, and aid in educating park users in the best practices for management of parks and the treatment of certain areas. Interpretive signage for Green Infrastructure is also recommended.

### **Objective: Forest Stewardship Plan**

As previously mentioned, a Forest Stewardship Plan that includes an adaptive management approach should be developed in order to ensure Bergen County's remaining forests can be sustainable in light of current threats from development, herbivory, pathogens, and a changing climate.

### **Objective: Habitat Management Plan**

A Habitat Management Plan, supported by the McFaul Environmental Center, should be developed through partnerships with municipalities and park stakeholders. These collaborations could form the basis for citizen science monitoring programs in partnership with local colleges and non-profit groups.

### **Stormwater Recommendations**

The County parks may require a management and maintenance approach that saves time and money by minimizing areas of mowed lawn. Where possible, in every park, unused areas should be managed less to improve the overall ecosystem resiliency and water and soil quality. The use of Green Infrastructure (GI) rather than pipes to slow water down should be standard, and no non-native plants should be used as part of these GI technologies. Public access to and interaction with surface water features in a safe and educational manner coupled with interpretive signage could be employed.

However, to undertake GI practices, a paradigm shift is needed that integrates parklands into stormwater management. Current practices in most United States cities and counties include using parkland for treating, storing, and beneficially reusing stormwater as a means to improve water quality, as well as increasing ecological function, habitat diversity, and user experience. Stormwater management in new park projects could include the capture and retention, with no discharge, of the Stormwater Quality Design Volume, defined as the

first one and one-quarter inch of rainfall. When planning and designing stormwater management and GI for Bergen County parks, the following guidelines should be met:

- GI practices should provide a clear case for solving a problem and place the proposed park-based GI in context with the rest of the park improvement
- GI designs should minimize impacts to the park
- GI practices should maintain or enhance the public functions of the park
- GI practices should be for public purposes and management of the GI should remain the responsibility of the County

Point and non-point sources of pollution within the parks need to be managed where possible through BMPs and GI. It is critical that the County undertake an integrated and sustainable stormwater strategy that meets stormwater management regulatory requirements, and provides functional and integrated landscapes in the parks. Creating Green Infrastructure systems provides multiple benefits and a focus on GI practices can be integrated into County parks. There are a number of opportunities to improve the current conditions in various County parks, listed as the following objectives:

### **Objective: Permeable Surfaces**

Disconnecting and reducing impervious surfaces is a key part of stormwater management. Existing parking lots, playing fields, courts, and underutilized sidewalks and pathways could be converted to permeable surfaces. Where appropriate, converting these surfaces to permeable may help mitigate flooding. It should be noted that different maintenance practices are required for permeable pavement and the feasibility of implementing permeable pavements must be studied in further detail.

### **Objective: Implement Bioretention**

Existing curb cuts or drainage inlets could be converted to bioretention to reduce the impact of stormwater on adjacent water bodies. Bioretention features and bioswales could be designed to treat stormwater, while providing new planted amenities using native species.



Bioretention treats stormwater runoff close to the source and reduces the need for structural systems and their elements such as curb cuts, drains, inlets, and piping.

#### **Objective: Restore Gullies**

Existing erosion gullies could be restored using regenerative stormwater conveyance techniques to slow and retain stormwater. Protecting areas that are susceptible to erosion and sediment loss is a GI practice recommended as a New Jersey Stormwater Best Management Practice applicable for parks.

#### **Objective: Restore Shorelines**

Robustly vegetated and appropriately graded shorelines could be restored to create more resilient edge conditions. Providing vegetated open-channel conveyance systems discharging into and through stable vegetated areas is another GI practice that is recommended as a New Jersey Stormwater BMP.

#### **Objective: Stormwater Management Plan**

Creating a Stormwater Management Plan will help the parks transition from practices that degrade the environment to creating working landscapes that perform important ecological functions. In some cases, codifying a Stormwater Management Plan for an individual park may be optimal.



Figure 21. Low maintenance plantings in stormwater interventions can reduce chemical inputs and boost biodiversity (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 22. Implementing stormwater best management practices, like the parking lot rain gardens above, can protect and enhance the ecological health of natural resources in the parks, as well as improve user experience (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



## 5.4 Provide Diverse Golf and Recreation

The County of Bergen wants to provide diverse types of fields and athletic facilities, and a variety of other places to exercise, relax, and socialize. Public recreation in the form of participation in a team or group activity, or a stroll along a walkway, or a visit to a zoo, is essential to the quality of life in Bergen County. Recreational facilities in parks provide places for the general public to engage in physical fitness, rest and relaxation, and socialization. We want to ensure nearly every park has a space for both active and passive recreation of some kind. Where possible, we wish to provide inclusive spaces for all park users.

County park sports fields include tennis and basketball courts, running tracks, ballfields, hockey rinks, soccer fields, lawn bowling courts, exercise stations, volleyball courts, shuffle board stations, swimming pools, horseback riding complexes, ski runs, and playgrounds. Some active recreational facilities have fencing and require permits and/or fees to use their infrastructure. While every effort was made in this Master Plan to portray accurate conditions in County parks, recently added amenities or improvements may not be reflected in its inventories.



Figure 1. Fitness station at Wood Dale County Park (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 3. Tennis courts at Wood Dale County Park (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 2. Football/soccer/track facilities (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 4. The parks system offers many playgrounds (Courtesy of CUES).

The County of Bergen has, in prior decades, run recreational programs such as tennis tournaments. Today, our main role is providing spaces for municipal, non-profit, and private active recreation such as sports leagues and fitness classes. We desire to continue to work with our partners to ensure the spaces for their programs are exceptional.

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation is the prime provider of public golf in the County and surrounding areas of northern New Jersey. The six golf courses and their associated programs provide affordable, challenging, and accessible golf to residents and visitors. We wish to continue to do so and to further diversify and improve the County golf courses. Increasing the diversity of recreational opportunities can help more people realize the benefits of these activities, and the County will realize a greater return on its investment in facilities when more people use and enjoy the park system.

## Golf Recommendations

Bergen County golf courses comprise ten percent of the County's park acreage, 933 of 9,335 total acres. The courses contribute the majority of annual revenues earned by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation, over seven million out of nine million total dollars. These properties form a critically important component of the parks system.

In view of contemporary and projected development pressures and the closure of private golf courses in Bergen County, these courses constitute large tracks of essential open space with tremendous potential for providing broader service to the community and an opportunity for creative natural resource stewardship. Many of the environmental conditions in other County parks exist in the golf courses. Water quality issues due to excess nutrient inputs causing eutrophication, eroding stream banks, and invasive species in wetland and riparian corridors are all present.

### Objective: Diversify Golf

The current portfolio of golf courses could be evaluated to determine the possibility of offering more varied golf experiences. Existing courses could be renovated to create one or more championship-caliber courses, a Scottish links style course, an executive short course, and one or more Par 3 or Pitch and Putt courses. Opportunities to acquire additional golf course properties could be considered if private courses become available. A diversity of golf course types would provide new experiences for area golfers, the possibility of hosting regional or national tournaments, and could provide justification to update the greens fees structure.



Figure 5. Rockleigh Golf Course streambank erosion in march, 2017 (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 6. Valley Brook Golf Course Phragmites in March, 2017 (Courtesy of CUES).



Objective: User-Friendly Website

The Bergen County golf website could be updated to make it more functional, user-friendly, and an enticing public face of Bergen County golf. Instead of relying on players phoning the County to obtain information, a newly designed website could feature information regarding events, clinics, instruction, and specific course calendars in a modern, interactive format.

Selection of tee times should be efficient. A forgotten login could be sent automatically via email and not require a phone call to the County.



Figure 7. Eutrophication and invasive Phragmites at Valley Brook (Courtesy of CUES).

Rockleigh Green Fees				
Green Fees - Resident	Weekday	Weekday Twilight	Weekend	Weekend Twilight
Adult Registered Resident 18 Holes	\$50	\$22	\$55	\$27
Adult Reg. Res. 9 Holes *	\$22	NA	\$27	NA
Adult Reg. Res. 2nd 9 *	\$8	NA	\$8	NA
Se/ Jr Reg. Res 18 Holes	\$22	\$16	\$32	\$23
Se/ Jr Reg. Res 9 Holes *	\$16	NA	\$23	NA
Se/ Jr Reg. Res 2nd 9 *	\$6	NA	\$9	NA
Fully Disabled Reg. Res. (All Ages)-	\$22	\$16	\$32	\$23
Not Registered 18 Holes (All Ages)	\$50	\$25	\$60	\$30
Not Registered 9 Holes* (All Ages)	\$25	NA	\$30	NA
Green Fees - Non County Residents (All Ages)	Weekday	Weekday Twilight	Weekend	Weekend Twilight
Not Registered	\$50	\$25	\$60	\$30
Registered - 18 Hole	\$37	\$25	\$42	\$30
Registered - 9 Hole *	\$20	NA	\$25	NA

Figure 8. Bergen County golf course website (Courtesy of Bergen County Golf).

Objective: Update Fee Structure

The greens fees structure could be updated. Bergen County fees are the same for all courses, regardless of size or condition. Other New Jersey public courses adjust greens fees depending on the course itself and the time of day and day of the week, with high demand timeslots and upscale courses contributing higher revenues than older, smaller courses and twilight timeslots. This can increase both use of the courses and overall revenue from golf, by filling up unused time slots during less popular times by offering them at a discount. It should also be noted that a non-registered non-county resident pays the same fee as a non-registered Bergen County resident.

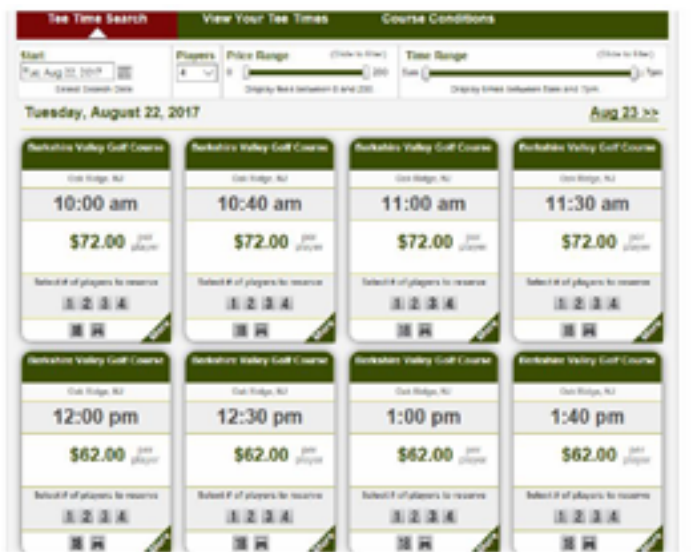


Figure 9. User-friendly online tee time booking interface for Morris County golf course (Courtesy of EZLinks Golf LLC).



Figure 10. Rockleigh Golf Course summer 2016 (Courtesy of CUES).

### **Objective: Enhance Amenities**

The amenities at Bergen County golf courses could be improved in order to be comparable with the best and highest quality public golf courses in other counties. In particular, higher standards for amenities could make them more competitive as places to host life cycle events such as weddings. Upgraded clubhouses, restrooms, unique food concessions, and modern golf concessions could be considered. If higher standards are met, the Bergen County golf courses could offer a greater opportunity for residents and visitors to use them as event venues.

### **Objective: Enhance Aesthetics**

As with enhanced amenities, enhancing the aesthetic appearance of the golf courses can make them more competitive both for recreation and as event venues. The addition of landscaping and vegetative color to entrances, tee boxes, and bridge crossings, and using native plantings to beautify natural areas and to control erosion, can all contribute to more visually pleasing courses. Repairing physical infrastructure such as buildings, bridges, roadways, and cart paths can improve the quality of the experience as well as the visual appeal.

### **Objective: Courses as Resources**

Golf courses can be used for much more than golf. Promoting them as community-friendly resources can be achieved by reaching out to and accommodating the needs of all golfers as well as other community groups and programs. Courses could be offered as venues for events, tournaments, leagues, meetings, reunions, and other non-golf experiences. Hosting non-golf events has the additional benefit of encouraging year-round use of the facilities.



Figure 11. Rockleigh Golf Course summer 2016 (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 12. Native plants added to delineate tee box (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 13. Rockleigh Course Summer 2016 (Courtesy of CUES).

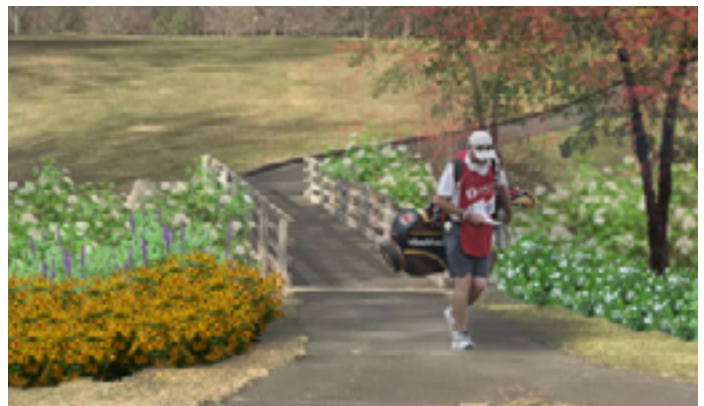


Figure 14. Addition of vegetative buffer to intercept surface runoff and reduce streambank erosion (Courtesy of CUES).



## Course Management Practices

Best management practices for golf courses have much in common with the objectives listed under Goal Two, Steward our Environmental Resources. However, objectives listed here apply specifically to the natural resources, habitats, waterbodies, and ecosystems within County golf courses. The recommendations below are Best Management Practices for golf courses developed by Audubon International and the United States Golf Association (USGA).

### Objective: Map Courses

The first step the County could take is informational. The County could develop a map of each course that highlights existing habitats, such as mature woodlands, wetlands and stream corridors, and special habitat concerns such as endangered or threatened species on the properties. Each map could also identify potential threats to existing habitats such as pathogens and invasive species.



Figure 17. Map of Rockleigh Golf Course showing habitats, water resources and flow paths (Courtesy of CUES).

### Objective: Maintain Plants

The County could maintain, or plant, various heights and types of native plants, from ground cover to shrub and tree layers in habitat areas such as woods. Most plants, including landscaped trees, shrubs, and flowers, but not turf, should be indigenous to the native plant community of the ecological region and that are well suited to existing soils on the course. The understory should be left in woodlands, and grasses and herbaceous plants maintained in tall grass areas. A water source should be maintained for aquatic plants and shrubbery and native plants along shorelines.

### Objective: Naturalize Areas

A majority of the out-of-play areas could be left in their natural state. Using buffers, mounted signs, fencing, or designated environmentally sensitive zones per USGA rules, appropriate out-of-play areas should be off-limits. Vegetation removal should be confined to existing roads, trails, cart and walking paths, and other necessary areas. This would protect wildlife habitats, endangered or threatened wildlife or plant species, and shorelines from disturbance by golfers and maintenance activities.

### Objective: Enhance Nesting

Where appropriate in out-of-play areas, nesting boxes or other structures could be maintained to enhance nesting sites for birds. Golfers and maintenance activities should avoid disturbing known bird nests or den sites, and these areas should be staked or flagged when needed. Removing shrubs or trees during bird nesting season should be avoided if nests are present, and fields should not be mown until after bird nesting season.



Figure 15. Enhancing habitat for native birds (Courtesy of Brian Beckner).



Figure 16. Enhancing habitat for pollinators with low-to-no maintenance areas (Courtesy of NYS BMP for Golf Courses).

### **Objective: Improve Water Quality**

Changes in water management strategies are recommended to improve the water quality in the golf course water bodies. Potential nutrient loading to water bodies could be reduced by using slow-release fertilizers, spoon-feeding, and filtering drainage through vegetative or mechanical filters prior to entering water bodies. Environmentally sensitive plant management techniques could be implemented within twenty-five feet of all water bodies to minimize nutrient and chemical inputs. Raising mowing heights along shorelines to slow and filter runoff should be considered. A twenty-five foot buffer of only three-inch turf provides significant filtering benefits. Potential chemical runoff near water bodies could be eliminated by designating “no spray” zones, using spot treatments, increasing thresholds for pest problems, using covered booms, and taking the weather into account prior to application. Water bodies could be visually monitored for water quality problems, such as erosion, algae, aquatic weed growth, fish kills, and sediment buildup. Proper aeration, bio-filters, vegetation management, and bio-controls can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical algae control. When aquatic weed management is required, a physical solution such as hand removal of plants could be sought first, and the least toxic method of weed control second.

### **Objective: Reduce Water Use**

Reducing water use is also an objective under Goal Eight, Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks. Many of the recommendations here are repeated in that Chapter in reference to all park properties, but here they refer directly to Golf Courses. The County could reduce or eliminate irrigation on all unused or minimally used portions of the courses. Watering of “hot spots” could target area of need only, rather than running the entire irrigation system. At peak evapotranspiration times, using the irrigation system should be avoided, and sprinklers should be set to run during the dew period. Soils and turfgrass could be maintained to maximize water absorption and reduce runoff and evaporation. This may mean maintaining soil cover, improving soil structure, improving soil drainage, and adding or maintaining natural organic matter in the soil. Daily water use should be monitored and monthly usage tallied, with targets set for yearly improvement.



Figure 18. Watering “hot spots” to target areas only rather than deploying the full irrigation system during the peak of the day (Courtesy of USGA10).



Figure 19. Moisture meters as part of an integrated irrigation management system (Courtesy of John J. Genovesi/Maidstone Club11).



**Objective: Minimize Chemicals**

To ensure safe storage, application, and handling of chemicals and to reduce actual and potential environmental contamination, Best Management Practices below are recommended.

The County could minimize the use of fertilizers and herbicides through a site-specific assessment, including soil type and properties, to determine the most suitable plant species and/or the dominant native plant community for each course. Soil types could be inventoried for all playing surfaces and conditions such as soil structure, nutrient levels, organic content, compaction, and water infiltration assessed regularly.

Fertilizer applications should be based on soil test information. Soil health could be regularly improved by amending organic content, aerating, and improving water infiltration to cultivate a diverse, living biotic soil community. Records of treatments employed and their effectiveness could be maintained and used to guide future pest control decisions. Green, tee, and fairway mowing heights should be at levels that can be reasonably maintained on a day-to-day basis without continually stressing turf or maximizing chemical inputs.

Pest-resistant or stress-tolerant cultivars could be planted on playing surfaces and in landscaping. Plant species best suited for climate, soils, and growing conditions should be used. Turf “hot spots” where disease or insect outbreaks first occur should be identified and recorded, along with other areas where poor growing conditions often lead to problems. Aesthetic and functional thresholds for insects, fungal disease, and weeds could be established for all managed areas.

Avoiding applications of chemicals during high winds or prior to heavy rains can eliminate potential runoff. Chemicals used to operate and maintain equipment such as gasoline, motor oil, brake, and transmission fluid should be prevented from contaminating soils, surface waters, or ground water.

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# 5.5 Improve Amenities and Infrastructure

The County of Bergen wants to fix areas in need of repair, maintain parks to high standards, and invest in infrastructure, particularly in golf courses. Better infrastructure will improve visitor experiences, which can result in more numerous and more satisfied park users. Improving running or biking trails can provide both better recreation and transportation opportunities, as can adding amenities like bike parking and storage. Particularly, having trails that are compliant with the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) will ensure they can provide a safe user experience. The County of Bergen wants to ensure adequate bathroom facilities in parks, enhance on site food options, and explore other amenities. An enhanced Bergen County Zoo can continue to provide for the physical, environmental and behavioral needs of the animals in its care, and could provide a diverse array of programs that would accommodate the interests of residents and visitors alike. An improved McFaul Environmental Center can better educate residents about local and global wildlife and habitats. Learning more about animals and plants and conservation programs can encourage respect for and conservation of natural resources.

Improved Bergen County golf courses can continue to provide affordable, convenient golf to residents and visitors. The quality of the infrastructure, facilities, and programming are instrumental to the attractiveness of the courses. Improving the visitor experience, and optimizing the use of facilities for food service and social gatherings, and providing expanded food options, can result in greater use and enjoyment of the courses while contributing additional park revenues. To meet requests from park users asking for additional amenities, including clean and well-maintained bathroom facilities and on-site food options, various amenities and concession options are recommended. New amenities and concessions that enhance existing park facilities can be developed that meet user requests.

## Objective: Inclusive Parks

Currently, the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation (BCDPR) is following American Disabilities Act (ADA) standards that ensure access for all users. However, these standards do not provide an equally rich experience for all groups. The BCDPR is committed to serving all residents and visitors, providing inclusive facilities for children, adults, the elderly, and those with special needs such as limited mobility or visual and hearing impairments. The sixteen existing playgrounds in the County parks system do not address children with special needs or limited mobility. There is only one inclusive playground in the County parks system, located in Fair Lawn. Further exploration is needed to identify playgrounds that are suitable for incorporating universal design principles and adding amenities that can cater to the needs of all. One of those principles is to provide spaces where all residents can play together and enjoy appropriate physical and mental stimulation. Another is to fulfill resident's needs to recreate without any physical obstacles. Improvements for the elderly with limited mobility include safe and barrier-free access, an appropriate number of designated parking spaces, benches along pathways, and short walking distances with appropriate resting areas. Offerings that provide stimulation for the senses, such as gardens that feature plants with scents, tactile sensations, and color, could provide enjoyment for all residents, but especially for those with special needs.



Figure 1. Inclusive playground design (Courtesy of North Carolina State Recreation Resources Service).

### **Objective: Restroom Facilities**

The amenity most often requested during the public outreach for this Master Plan was well-maintained, accessible, working bathrooms. A system-wide evaluation that inventories the type and condition of existing facilities, and explores locations where new restroom facilities are needed could be completed by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation.

### **Objective: Food Options**

Slightly over fifty percent of the public survey respondents asked for new food options in Bergen County parks. While not every park is an appropriate venue for adding a food concession, there are opportunities at some County parks to enhance the park experience with expanded food options. Food options should be considered in the overall context of the park experience. For example, child-friendly food offerings would complement playground and zoo experiences.

Portable or temporary options, such as food trucks or pop-up huts, would provide opportunities to test various food offerings without incurring the large investment required for permanent restaurant facilities. Temporary options can range from a complicated gourmet experience to a simple ice cream cart, depending on the specific park. The possibility of adding restaurant infrastructure could be explored, especially in properties that have a high number of visitors, underutilized facilities, or the space to add new amenities. Bergen County parks should exhibit a commitment to sustainability in food and other concessions. It is recommended that concessions be required to follow environmentally sound practices, such as minimizing glass, plastic, and metal, provision of water refill stations, using compostable utensils, and composting where feasible. A long-term Sustainability Plan could be developed to set standards for concessionaires and to facilitate converting existing park practices and concession requirements into sustainable practices. This objective is shared with Goal Eight, Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks.



Figure 2. Temporary concessions provide opportunities to test food offerings before investing in permanent structures (Courtesy of Jerome Barth).

### **Objective: Athletic Amenities**

The following athletic amenities could be installed where appropriate:

- Bike/Surrey/Pedal car concessions that give visitors a chance to explore parks
- Bike repair facilities that also provides a hot and cold beverage station
- Outdoor Rock Climbing/Repelling concession in spring, summer, and fall.
- Zipline/Treetop Adventure/Tree Climbing/Repelling concession
- Winter Bubble concession to cover tennis courts and allow year-round use
- Paddleboat, Canoe, and Kayak rental concessions in addition to existing ones
- Sustainable, non-motorized biking trail.

The County could explore the opportunity for adding a year-round athletic facility to the Bergen County park system. This amenity would provide additional support for healthy lifestyles and encourage participation in recreation sports and fitness.





Figure 3. Rock climbing and repelling for outdoor fun (Courtesy of Pixabay).



Figure 4. Ziplines can be a fun way to enjoy nature from a different perspective (Courtesy of Pixabay).



Figure 5. Bike rental concession (Courtesy of Pixabay).



Figure 6. Activities like paddleboarding would expand water-based recreational opportunities (Courtesy of Pixabay).

## Objective: Historic Properties

Historic properties offer potentially unique public event venues. In particular, the Hackensack Waterworks offers a great untapped opportunity in the Bergen County park system. The Hackensack Waterworks is an exceptional asset that could be converted to modern productive use. The following principles could guide the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation and its Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs should they seek to open this historic site for public use:

- The built infrastructure of the Hackensack Waterworks and the outdoor spaces of Van Buskirk Island offer opportunities for a variety of events and uses
- The architecture and layout of the Hackensack Waterworks are spectacular and have tremendous re-use potential if used in appropriate ways
- Competing visions for renovation and re-use of the Hackensack Waterworks exist, but no public entity has agreed to commit large financial resources needed to execute these visions

It is recommended that Bergen County develop a proposal for long-term lease through a Request For Proposals (RFP) process that would include the incorporation of various elements that stakeholders are looking for in this historic restoration.

A park, featuring nature walks, biking trails, use of the waterways, and other amenities, could connect this unique property to a potential Hackensack River Linear Park. To initiate redevelopment of this site, public support is needed from the local community and interested stakeholders.

Other historic properties, such as Wortendyke Barn and Garretson Forge, offer venues with great potential to provide public amenities. These properties could be evaluated as event spaces that could be rented for weddings and other life cycle events. They may also be appropriate for local “farm to table” events open to the public, farmer’s markets, and providing a venue for local produce growers.



Figure 7. The Hackensack River Waterworks has national historic significance and great potential for vibrant re-use (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 8. Wortendyke Barn has wonderful potential as an event space with unique character (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 9. Garretson Forge and Farm is well-suited to a wide range of activities and could serve as an event space for private and community gatherings (Courtesy of CUES).

## Objective: Social Amenities

The following social amenities should be explored where appropriate:

- Expanded Family Movie Nights during the summer months that extend park hours
- Artisan Markets that attract craftspeople, sellers, and artists
- Seasonal Events such as Halloween Events and Winter and Spring Festivals
- Giant Maze concession for groups of all ages
- Glamping concession providing an upscale camping adventure



Figure 10. Seasonal festival (Courtesy of Jerome Barth).



Figure 11. Outdoor movie night in the park (Courtesy of CUES).



# 5.6 Program Park Spaces and Events

The County of Bergen wants to give people many reasons to visit parks by having diverse, exciting, and educational programming for all ages and backgrounds. Several of our parks have spaces large enough to hold regional scale events like food and cultural festivals, outdoor concerts, or fairs. The Bergen County wants to bring more of these events to the general public by hosting them in parks at appropriate venues. Offering educational programs, particularly environmental and historic, is a way for people to learn what the natural and historic resources of the County are and why they must be conserved. Educating children ensures that knowledge carries into future generations.

By increasing the seasons, days, and hours of programs offered, and by offering them in more locations, The County of Bergen can encourage more people to visit parks and enjoy the benefits of them. More people using parks can also raise the visibility of the park system.

## Programming and Events

Events of all sizes and types can enrich the park experience, provide new opportunities for recreation and socialization, and activate underutilized spaces. It is critical for events to occur at venues that have the appropriate size, level of accessibility, infrastructure, and ecology to sustainably and successfully accommodate participants. Bergen County parks were assessed regarding their potential for increasing the number of events and programming.



Figure 1. Good concessions at the appropriate location can enhance the park experience, encourage social interaction, and help support the spaces residents love (Courtesy of Jerome Barth).

## Appropriate Event Size for Specific Parks



Figure 1. County parks have diverse sizes and amenities that determine their suitability for various types of events (Courtesy of Eventage and CUES).

A small number of Bergen County parks, Campgaw Mountain Reservation, Overpeck Park, Van Saun Park, and Darlington Park, may be conducive to large events. Large events are only appropriate at the larger parks, but many of the smaller parks could host small-to medium-sized local events and programs that could benefit neighboring communities. Limited parking options and proximity to residential neighborhoods are factors determining appropriateness and where events could be accommodated successfully.

New programs could increase the appeal of smaller parks, making them destinations that provide more social interaction. Existing offerings of movie nights, public art exhibitions, fitness activities, music events, storytelling, fundraising walks and runs, and community celebrations can be expanded or added at a number of the smaller parks.

There is also the potential for sponsorships to offset costs and in some cases, produce revenue. For example, a movie night has non-intrusive possibilities for sponsorship that are easy to implement and have the potential to offset event production costs. A smaller-scope music series that provides many locations and performances could also be an attractive sponsorship opportunity. Production costs could be kept manageable by utilizing existing pavilions, gazebos, and platforms, and making an investment in a basic sound system that travels with the series to the park venues. Many of these events can be hosted in partnership with local civic and cultural organizations. An expansion of the current fitness and wellness series could partner with local gyms, yoga studios, and other similar organizations. These businesses might be amenable to providing an instructor to lead a class in exchange for the opportunity to get in front of a larger audience and the potential to distribute marketing materials.

The offerings by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation's Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs recognize the value of the arts, history, and civic pride.

Their partnerships include local libraries for storytelling, community groups assisting in presenting art, dance, and craft shows, and educational and environmental partners for programs like bird watching, ecological tours, historical tours, and other programming.

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation manages events internally through its Division of Special Events. The Events Manager and event management staff is responsible for seeking out opportunities for events and promotions and effectively vetting and managing client produced events, while protecting the public enjoyment of the park, its natural environment, and physical assets. Additionally, the Events Manager coordinates with other relevant Bergen County departments, including the Health Department if food is served, the Fire Marshall if temporary structures are erected, and the Sheriff if security is provided, to ensure clear communication and the successful production of events.



Figure 3. In collaboration with community groups, Bergen County parks have the opportunity to support a wider range of events that celebrate the arts, environment, history, culture, and healthy lifestyles (Courtesy of Eventage).



### Objective: Simplified Digital Permitting

The current array of special event applications is complex and could be consolidated into one or two documents that gather required event information and allow staff to quickly assess them. These online applications should be in a format that allows forms to be completed electronically. Additional information to determine the event feasibility should be gathered via follow-up conversation and potential subsequent site visits.

Although events are internally scheduled and tracked digitally, paper applications and checks are still used to apply and pay for permits. The County could move to an online application and payment system that could accept credit cards. This would save paper and make applying for permits easier and more convenient for residents and schools. It is also recommended that permit applications be accepted on a rolling basis, rather than annually as is currently done.

The long-term vision is for an integrated, all-in-one platform for the intake, payment, processing, review, reporting, and internal communication of permits. The service platform should be as simple as possible and allow staff to quickly assess the proposed activity, feasibility, and permit fees. The final permit package should include the main permit language and as addendums, all site plans, operations timelines, required insurance certificates, vehicle lists, security plans, and any other required permits. This system requires the permittee to sign off on their own production plans. This would provide the BCDPR with the ability to oversee and enforce the permit parameters on an event-by-event basis.

### Objective: Create an Event Guide

An easy to understand Event Guide that gives event planners the information they need to understand the BCDPR parks system as a venue could be available. The Event Guide should have photos and data about recent events in the parks and pertinent information that would help event producers determine if a particular venue is a good fit for their event.

## Positive, Efficient Communication with Producers

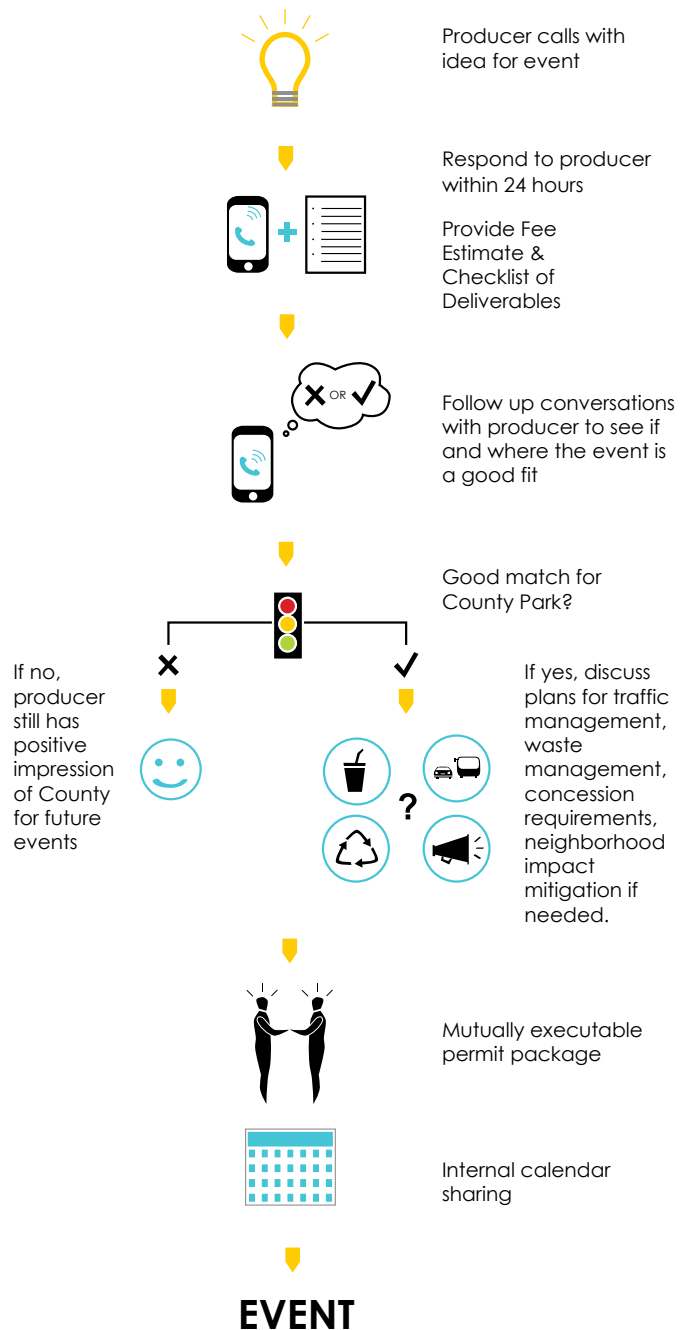


Figure 4. Communication with event producers needs to be positive, efficient, and solution-oriented from the time a producer with an event idea first initiates contact with BCDP to the conclusion of the event (Courtesy of CUES).

**Objective: Communicate with Producers**

Initial staff contact with potential event producers should be information rich and provide a general estimate of usage fees and a checklist of deliverables that would be required in order to issue a permit. If producers know that they can contact the BCDPR and get a quick response about a potential event, they will keep in contact and consider the parks system as an event venue. In general, event producers favor venues that are responsive and solution-oriented, and those that they feel they have a personal connection with. Communication in this manner leaves a positive impression with event producers.

Once an initial event agreement is in place, it is vital to continue ongoing communication with event producers throughout the pre-production process. Production meetings and site visits that include relevant staff members from the BCDPR and other County departments are important to the event production process. The amount and frequency of meetings and site visits should be based on the overall scope of the event, but at least one in-person pre-production meeting should take place for any event that will have an impact on park operations and maintenance.

**Objective: Sustainable Events**

As part of the production process, event producers should be required to develop a formal plan to minimize the event's environmental footprint. The Special Events Division should encourage producers to choose event sites and facilities that minimize impacts to the natural environment in parks. When appropriate, larger scale events should develop water diversion plans and waste management and recycling plans that strive towards zero impact.

Event producers should also attempt to use alternative or renewable energy sources and potentially offset the carbon footprint of event operations, while also implementing initiatives that conserve water and reduce the environmental impact of water runoff, wastewater and litter, and in particular, plastic litter. This objective is shared with Goal Eight, Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks.

**Objective: Unify Events Calendar**

Although different entities, such as the Van Saun Park Zoo, the Golf Courses, and the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs, publicize their own events, there is currently no unified marketing plan for all of the events that take place in Bergen County parks. The creation of an overall internal and sharable events calendar is vital to ensuring all staff is up to date on events and programming throughout the parks system.

This calendar should be editable only by the Events Division, but viewable by the entire BCDPR staff. Event calendar entries should consist of not only top-line event information like date, time, and location, but also be updated throughout the event pre-production process to include all relevant event documents like site plans, operations timelines, vehicle lists, and security plans. Access to the calendar should be given to other divisions or departments to add information that could impact events. For example, the Operations Division could enter information regarding scheduled maintenance to facilities that could impact availability for events. This information would be accessible by events staff and could be discussed with a potential event producer at the initial point of contact. This objective is shared with Goal Seven, Increase Public Access to Information, in reference to the creation of an events calendar.

**Objective: Update Fee Schedule**

The current BCDPR fee schedule is not consistent with current park system operations and industry standards. The fee schedule for events is based on the expected number of participants and does not place sufficient weight on the scope or type of event activities. This system can lead to event producers misstating potential attendance to keep permit fees low. The current system limits accurate forecasts of event operations and leads to the inability to accurately project internal event needs and requirements. The fee schedule could be amended to be based on the designated area or venue within the park system in which the event is to take place. Secondly, it should be based on the type of event activity and on the expected event revenue. A potential permit fee system is depicted in the following graphic, which is modeled on current industry standards, categories, and definitions.

## Amended Fee Structure

Fees Based on:

1 Venue Level	2 Activity Type
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A - most attractive</li> <li>• B - very attractive</li> <li>• C &amp; D - attractive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commercial/Private</li> <li>• Athletic, Non-Charitable</li> <li>• Charitable</li> <li>• Community</li> <li>• Picnics/Parties</li> <li>• Camp/School</li> </ul>
3 Expected Revenue	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A - high</li> <li>• B - low</li> <li>• C - none</li> </ul>	

Figure 5. Current fee structure for BCDP event venues is not current with park system operations and industry standards. An updated fee structure would take into account the venue's level of event attractiveness, event activity type and expected revenue (Courtesy of CUES).

BCDPR should divide venues into four categories: A-Level, B-Level, C-Level, and D-Level. A-Level venues would be the most event-attractive, well-used, and operationally suitable for special events. Special event permit activity types should be split into the following categories:

- **Promotional/Commercial/Private:** These events would include exclusive use of a venue for any purpose via ticket or events that promote or advertise a production, company, or corporation to the general public. Examples could include regional scale concerts or festivals, public sampling events, or product launches.
- **Athletic Non-Charitable:** These recreational or sporting events are designed for public participation that is not associated with not-for-profit charitable fundraising.
- **Charitable/Not-For-Profit:** These events are directly associated with not-for-profit fundraising. Examples might include walks, runs, tournaments, dinners, or other events that raise funds for a tax exempt charity.
- **General/Community:** These events include but are not limited to; dance recitals, music, community group activities, artistic and cultural performances, and other non-commercial programming open to the public.

Other permit categories could include:

- **Picnic, Party, and Gatherings:** These events are not commercial or promotional in nature and the space requested is not reserved for exclusive use. Gatherings that exceed one hundred people could be categorized as General/Community events, unless there are additional elements that would classify the activity as Promotional or Commercial.
- **School/Camp Events:** These events would have reduced or no charges for use of park areas for groups of less than 200 people, but would still require reservations.

Protection of the resources and integrity of the park system is a priority for every event. Permits for large events could minimally include a clean-up fee to cover the cost of any post-event repairs or staff clean-up required. Larger events should provide a funding mechanism to cover major repairs incurred due to an event. All events and activities, regardless of permit fee or fee waiver, should be required to submit a permit application to the Special Events Division. This objective is shared with Goal Nine, Develop a Sustainable Business Model, in reference to updating the permit fee structure.

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## 5.7 Increase Public Access to Information

The County of Bergen wants every resident and visitor to know about parks and the resources, facilities, amenities, events, and programs in them.

The County of Bergen wants to utilize the most up-to-date and convenient digital technologies to communicate with residents about parks. The County wants to connect to park users with informative emails and an intuitive website, including providing an easy digital contact to the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation. Improved and consistent signage within parks is another way to ensure users have up to date and accurate information. Increased public access to information can provide people with the information needed to fully realize the benefits of parks and the programs in them, which in turn can increase the use of, care for, and involvement in parks.

### Branding, Marketing, and Communications

During the public outreach for this Master Plan, it became clear that many of the residents who attended these meetings lacked knowledge about the number of parks owned by Bergen County, or the many programs and amenities available in them. Young families were especially vocal about wanting to know more about family and child-friendly options. While familiar with the parks in their own municipalities, residents who responded to the online survey had trouble actually discriminating municipal from County parks.

It is recommended that the County develop a brand strategy that communicates both the diversity of County owned parkland as well as the positive value these parks provide to enhance resident quality of life. Through online and stakeholder interviews, three marketing issues emerged about Bergen County parks:

- **Awareness:** the public needs to be able to easily find events, programming, and amenities offered in all Bergen County parks
- **Distinction:** the public needs to know about the variety of unique experiences that Bergen County parks offer

- **Benefits:** the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation needs to better communicate the contributions parks make to the high quality of life in the County.

To address these needs, brand strategy recommendations, including brand positioning, brand drivers, perspectives, and experience traits, and communication methods are recommended in this Chapter.

### Objective: Brand Positioning

Positioning is a single statement of whom the brand is for, the value the brand delivers, what sets the brand apart from the competition, and why the brand is important. After analyzing comments from multiple park users, the following Brand Positioning is proposed for the Bergen County parks system:

- **Bergen County Parks Are For:** Residents and visitors who feel the stressors of modern life;
- **Bergen County Parks Provide:** An experience that leaves visitors feeling more energized;
- **Because of:** Today's constantly plugged in reality,
- **We Believe:** A day spent in the park has never been more essential for healthy lives.

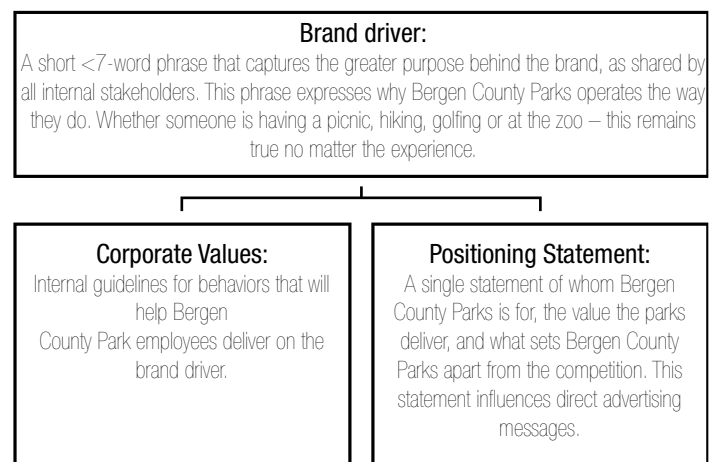


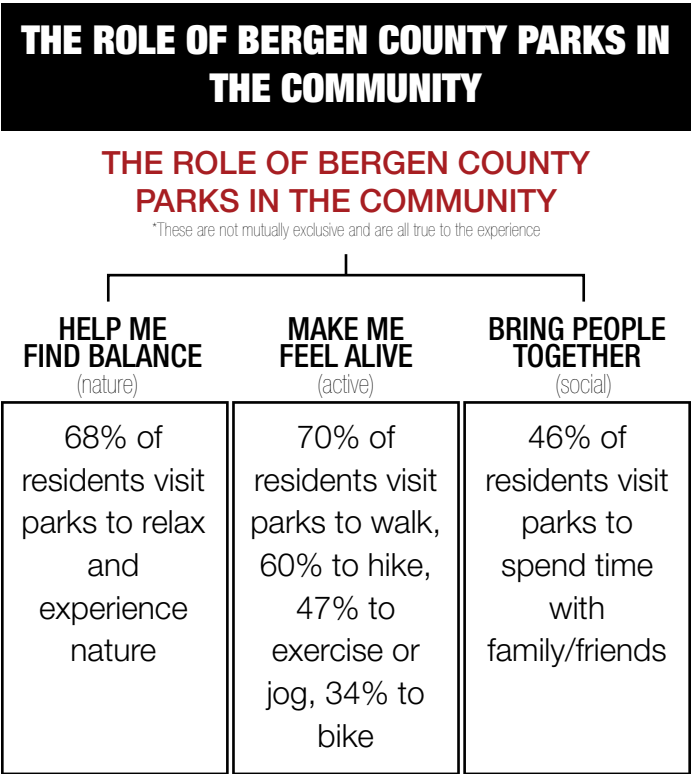
Figure 1. A strong brand driver captures the purpose behind the brand and expresses the rationale for the Bergen County Parks system (Courtesy of DNA).

Objective: Brand Driver

A Brand Driver is a short, less than seven word phrase that captures the purpose behind the brand. The following Brand Driver phase is recommended for the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation:

“UNPLUG to RECHARGE”

Time spent outdoors offers one of the most reliable boosts to mind and body wellness. Everyone knows that happy and healthy residents are the foundation of a strong community. That is an important reason parks exist: to provide opportunities for residents to reconnect with themselves, each other, and the larger community. “UNPLUG to RECHARGE” drives the BCDPR to create experiences that leave residents feeling more energized and engaged. Park spaces can be designed to help residents escape daily stress, and activities can be available to energize residents as they enjoy the outdoors.



## Objective: Create New Logo

To help County Park identity, a new logo for the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation could be created that reflects the Brand Positioning. A strong, easily identifiable logo is a key element that visually communicates the BCDPR brand – what the Department represents and offers to the community. This logo identity should work for the integrated park system, as well as for each park location and for wayfinding signage. At present the BCDPR logo, along with the logos of other County departments, are based on the Bergen County Seal.

Although the current logo supports the overall Bergen County brand, this logo does not speak to the reasons residents visit parks. BCDPR should have an easily identifiable logo that better represents the park system; similar to the way the green maple leaf sign on all New York City parks identifies them. With the Brand Positioning, Brand Driver, and Experience Traits in mind, six potential logo options were developed for the BCDPR to consider. Each logo intends to capture the vision of this Master Plan and its theme “From Marshes to Mountains”. However, it is recommended that the County engage the services of a brand consultant to determine the final logo.



Figure 4. The current Bergen County logo system is based on the County seal (Courtesy of Bergen County).



Figure 5. Additional logo option that supports the Master Plan Vision From Marshes to Mountains (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 6. Detailed descriptions of these five initial logo options are found in the Appendices (Courtesy of DNA).

## Objective: Marketing Plan

An annual marketing plan with goals, and strategies and tactics for accomplishing those goals, should be created. The marketing plan would be responsible for collecting data describing park visitors and their desires. This is to better understand and meet the needs of park users and to coordinate potential programs, events, and amenities with a wide range of users and partners. It should consider communication approaches that reach audiences in relevant and targeted ways, based on what parks offer during different times of the year.

## Objective: Unify Parks Signage

One observation made during the research for this Master Plan was the need for consistency in park signage. The array of shapes, sizes, colors, typefaces, and materials was as diverse as the parks themselves. The age and condition of signs across different locations also varied tremendously. Some parks could benefit from more wayfinding signs, while others have an overabundance of signs. This objective is shared with Goal Two, Improve Access and Connectivity, in reference to wayfinding signs.



### **Objective: Public Awareness**

Implementing a new brand across the park system, emphasizing signage, digital technologies, public relations, and social media, requires a public awareness campaign that communicates the BCDPR Brand Position and Brand Driver. The public awareness campaign could be liaison between the BCDPR and the general public, other government entities, non-profits, and park stakeholders. The campaign would coordinate with the Special Events Division in conceptualizing and planning events.



Figure 7 & 8. A Marketing and Community Outreach Department could collect demographic data about park visitors and work with a range of local organizations to develop programs, event, and amenities that better meet the needs of County residents (Courtesy of Eventage).

### **Objective: Unify Events Calendar**

Although different entities, such as the Van Saun Park Zoo, the Golf Courses, and the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs, publicize their own events, there is currently no unified marketing plan for all of the events that take place in Bergen County parks. The creation of an overall internal and sharable events calendar is vital to ensuring staff is up to date on events and programming throughout the parks system.

This calendar should be editable only by the Special Events Division, but viewable by the entire BCDPR staff. Event calendar entries should consist of not only top-line event information like date, time, and location, but also be updated throughout the event pre-production process to include all relevant event documents like site plans, operations timelines, vehicle lists, and security plans. Access to the calendar should be given to other divisions or departments to add information that could impact events. For example, the Operations Division could enter information regarding scheduled maintenance to facilities that could impact availability for events. This information would be accessible by events staff and could be discussed with a potential event producer at the initial point of contact. This objective is shared with Goal Seven, Increase Public Access to Information, in reference to the creation of an events calendar.

### **Objective: Digital Infrastructure**

A common theme heard during the public outreach for this Master Plan was the lack of knowledge about the diversity, amenities, and programs provided about the Bergen County parks system, especially among younger families. This could partially be due to the lack of an updated website and lack of a digital communication strategy. The BCDPR website needs to be updated to support the needs of both park and golf course visitors, to highlight weekly programs and events, and to allow ease of filling out permits and applications. In addition, a constant contact type email system is needed to notify residents about special events and programs. An interactive app that allows park visitors to easily find parks that offer their desired amenities and experiences would also help residents plan their visits and explore new opportunities within the parks system.

The proposed changes in business procedures and processing of permits and events, and for golf information and reservations, detailed in Goals Nine, Six, and Four, respectively, should also be supported by a digital infrastructure. This infrastructure should allow the BCDPR to set financial goals, access financial results easily, and analyze these results on a timely basis in order to make the best decisions possible.



# 5.8 Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks

The County of Bergen wants to operate parks in the most organized, efficient, and sustainable manner. Sustainability means that operations and maintenance ensure the current enjoyment of our parks without compromising their ability to meet the needs of future park users. It means conserving the natural resources, ecology, and habitats in the parks for future generations, and mitigating the impacts of operating and maintain parks on the broader environment and planet as a whole. This could mean using alternative, renewable energy sources to power operations, employing environmentally sound concessions, and using sustainable maintenance practices.

Adequately maintaining and operating the parks system now ensures that it, and all the benefits and opportunities associated with parks, will be available to future generations. We want to manage parks in sustainable ways and be responsive and accountable to residents and visitors.

## Sustainability Recommendations

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation has a unique opportunity to publicly showcase practices that contribute to sustainability. Incorporating sustainable practices into the County parks will give large numbers of residents a personal experience with the benefits of sustainable approaches.

### Objective: Renewable Energy

Bergen County has shown leadership in placing solar panels on public facilities such as the parking deck at One Bergen County Plaza. Similar panels could be installed as appropriate in parking lots in County parks, where they will generate energy while providing shade in the summer that can help mitigate the heat island effect related to parking lot blacktop. The energy generated could be available to park visitors via charging stations added for electric cars, which are growing in popularity. Where feasible, the energy could be used to power park infrastructure.



Figure 1. Solar panels on Bergen County facility (Courtesy of Solar Energy Directory).

### Objective: Water Conservation

Sustainably managing and conserving water resources is the responsibility of all. In common with several objectives under Goal Three, Stewarding our Environmental Resources, opportunities to remove or replace impervious pavement with pervious surfaces should be encouraged. Many paved park roadways and parking lots are adjacent to waterbodies. Methods of decreasing the use of road salt during winter storms, such as use of brines, could be explored. When environmentally friendlier options are available at comparable or reduced cost, they should be adopted for use in County parks. This objective is also shared with Goal Four, Provide Diverse Recreation, in reference to golf course management practices.

### Objective: Sustainable Events

As part of the production process, event producers should be required to develop a formal plan to minimize the event's environmental footprint. The Special Events Division should encourage producers to choose event sites and facilities that minimize impacts to the natural environment in parks. When appropriate, larger scale events should develop water diversion plans and waste management and recycling plans that strive towards zero impact. Event producers should also attempt to use alternative or renewable energy sources and potentially offset the carbon footprint of event operations, while also implementing initiatives that conserve water and reduce the environmental impact of water runoff, wastewater and litter, particularly plastic litter. This objective is shared with Goal Six, Program Park Spaces and Events.

### Objective: Waste Stream Reduction

All efforts should be made to first reduce, and then recycle, waste streams. This could mean restricting the sale of non-biodegradable products, particularly plastic, and composting organic waste. It also could mean installing recycling bins where there are none currently. Signage could be considered that encourages park visitors to carry out their waste where the placement of recycling bins is not feasible. Bottled water use could be discouraged by offering water bottle refill stations where appropriate and with signage.



Figure 2. Water bottle refill stations can help reduce plastic litter and help conserve resources (Courtesy of Mary Bakija).



Figure 3. Recycling bin in park to reduce waste stream (Courtesy of St. Anthony Village).

### Objective: LEED Infrastructure

Any new park infrastructure could be built according to the United States Green Building Council (USGBC)'s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. LEED standards are used to design a building that improves energy savings, water efficiency, reduces CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, improves indoor environmental quality, and ensures stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.



Figure 4. Educational signage can help park visitors understand the benefits of enhancements (Courtesy of A. Richard Miller).

### Objective: Efficient Lighting

Consideration should be given to deploying adaptive lighting that helps to ensure the parks are not over lit when not in use. Modern Light Emitting Diode (LED) fixtures allow the operator to set the brightness amount based on the time of day or the expected use of the park. This limits light pollution and saves money and energy. LED installations also allow control over the color of the lighting. The color selected affects how visitors perceive their safety and how animals regulate their daily cycle. Higher Kelvin ratings mimic daylight and can confuse and disrupt wildlife. Lower ratings do not disrupt wildlife but can appear “eerie” to visitors due to their red hue. An adaptable system allows the color of the lighting to change as the evening progresses. This objective is shared with Goal Two, Improve Access and Connectivity.

### Objective: Sustainable Concessions

Bergen County parks should exhibit a commitment to sustainability in food and other concessions. It is recommended that concessions be required to follow environmentally sound practices, such as recycling of glass, plastic, and metal, provision of water refill stations, using compostable utensils, and composting where feasible. A long-term Sustainability Plan could be developed to set standards for concessionaires and to facilitate converting existing park practices and concession requirements into sustainable practices. This objective is shared with Goal Six, Program Park Spaces and Events

## 5.9 Develop a Sustainable Business Model

The County of Bergen wants to administer parks as a net-zero business operation, providing the best experiences to residents and visitors at the most reasonable cost. There are several ways this can be accomplished, such as utilizing grants, enlisting volunteer support, and offering unique programming to increase revenue. The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation may need to be reorganized to become more efficient and flexible. The Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund, while separate from, but staffed by Department of Parks and Recreation personnel, may play a role in a more sustainable overall operation. A sustainable business model will help keep programs and activities, and the parks themselves, affordable or free for residents and visitors.

### Administration and Business Practices

To maximize the benefits to residents provided by Bergen County parks, the existing Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation (BCDPR) organizational structure, competencies, and management practices should be reviewed, and if necessary, restructured. There are various options that could be considered to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the BCDPR in delivering park services and programming. The prior parks management entity, the Bergen County Parks Commission (BCPC), was dedicated to meeting the demands for publicly managed open space. To support their mission, the BCPC had access to significant funding from County budget appropriations and Freeholder bonding initiatives. Beginning with the opening of Rockleigh Golf Course in 1958, various amenities in County parks began generating fee revenues. By 1970, funds available to the BCPC approached the equivalent of forty million in 2017 dollars, more than triple the annual expenses of the current BCDPR.

The BCDPR now cares for 9,335 acres of parkland, operating on roughly one-third of the funds the BCPC had fifty years ago when total parkland acreage was approximately 4,000 acres. It should be noted that current

expenses charged to BCDPR do not include employee fringe benefits, debt service on bonds that fund park capital projects and land acquisition, or trade services obtained from other County departments. Bergen County is currently investing less in park operations than other northern New Jersey counties with similar populations. The Morris County 2017 parks budget totaled \$15,995,721 to support 18,000 parkland acres<sup>99</sup>. The Essex County 2017 parks budget totaled \$26,171,771 in support of 6,000 parkland acres, including the Essex County Zoo<sup>100</sup>. The Essex County parks generated audited revenues in 2014 of \$12,856,984, primarily from their zoo, approximately thirty percent greater than Bergen County park revenues in 2016.

The BCDPR spending per resident is approximately thirteen dollars, versus a Trust for Public Land (TPL) survey of cities across the country, where spending per resident ranges from nineteen dollars in Jersey City to \$478 in Saint Louis, Missouri<sup>101</sup>. Total 2017 parks spending per resident in Morris County was fifty-one dollars. The Bergen County parks system currently generates significant revenues from a limited number of sources, including \$7,300,000 from golf courses, \$985,000 from the Van Saun Park Zoo, \$880,000 from permits and rentals, and \$200,000 from the Saddle Ridge Riding Center, plus lesser amounts from food and recreation concessions. However, these proceeds are not dedicated for reinvestment in the parks system. Instead, they are placed into the Bergen County General Fund, which supports a wide variety of programs. The BCDPR operates on an annual budget and capital project appropriations approved by the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders.

### Objective: Collaborative Partnerships

Managing 9,335 acres of public land in one of the most densely populated counties in the United States is challenging and complex. The ability to leverage resources, attract volunteers, supporters, and collaborators is an important tool for the financial sustainability of the Bergen County parks system. Using volunteers for park clean

99. 2017 County Budget. <https://morriscountynj.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/2017-Budget-Statement-Amended.pdf>. Accessed 29 August 2017.

100.5 2016 Essex County Parks Recurring Expense Survey. 6/6/2017. David Delvecchio, Parks Business Manager.

101.6 Trust for Public Land. 2017. City Park Facts. [www.tpl.org/cityparkfacts](http://www.tpl.org/cityparkfacts). Accessed 29 August 2017.

up, weeding, and other activities can provide residents a way to give back to their park. Community volunteers could augment the current activities of the Rutgers Master Gardeners and the Bergen County Environmental Commission. Community volunteerism, in addition to preserving the well-being of the park system, is also an attractive initiative for corporate sponsorship that could offset the cost of the tools and equipment need for stewardship activities. A defining characteristic of the original Bergen County Parks Commission was the importance of public outreach and the amount of support and cooperation given by elected officials, civic groups, and private individuals. These collaborations facilitated acquisition of parkland properties, programming within parks, and support for park infrastructure development.

#### **Objective: Public-Private Partnerships**

Athletic, artistic, educational, environmental, historic, and social organizations have provided input into this Master Plan. There could be an ongoing and institutionalized County program to engage these various groups in order to develop new programming, increase volunteer activities within parks, and encourage the public use of and support for the Bergen County park system. Opportunities to partner with other organizations on mutually beneficial initiatives should also be explored.

The BCDPR currently has ad hoc collaborations with many non-profit groups, including the Bergen County Historical Society, the Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Bergen County Audubon Society, and the Friends of the Bergen County Zoo. These collaborations provide amenities and programming that enhances the visitor experience in parks. The County could prioritize the expansion of these types of volunteer opportunities, and the County could also consider the possibility of establishing a Bergen County Parks Conservancy that could provide support for the system as a whole. The expertise and focus of many non-profit groups could be engaged when considering various types of events within the parks, particularly at smaller venues that are targeted to local neighborhoods.

The County could partner with and support these groups when they are organizing, marketing, and managing events within the parks. The County could also establish a mechanism, with input from the public and municipal representatives, to consider new programming and athletic offerings in the parks and to improve existing park programming.

	BERGEN COUNTY (2015)	MORRIS COUNTY (2016)	ESSEX COUNTY (2016)
Population	921,562	499,509	810,187
Total Acres	157,888	308,480	83,200
Density (people/acre)	5.8	1.6	9.7
Parkland Acres	9,335	18,700	6,000
Spending (Operations)	\$11,900,517	\$13,675,000	\$15,297,954
Ops Spending/ Acre	\$1,275	\$731	\$2,550
Ops Spending/ Res	\$12.91	\$27.38	\$18.88
FTEs	143	159	N/A
FTE/10,000 residents	1.55	3.2	N/A

Table 1. Comparison of Park Department spending and staffing levels. FTE = Full-time equivalent. Data Sources: TPL 2017, VTC, North Jersey Transportation Authority, BC 2016 financial reports, US Census data, Budget Appropriations enacted 2017 in Morris and Essex Counties (Courtesy of CUES).

\*Estimate based on VTC projected population

\*\*Operations spending estimate assuming spending per parkland acre remains \$1,275. Note: Essex County Department of Parks Revenues (2016) = \$14,400,000



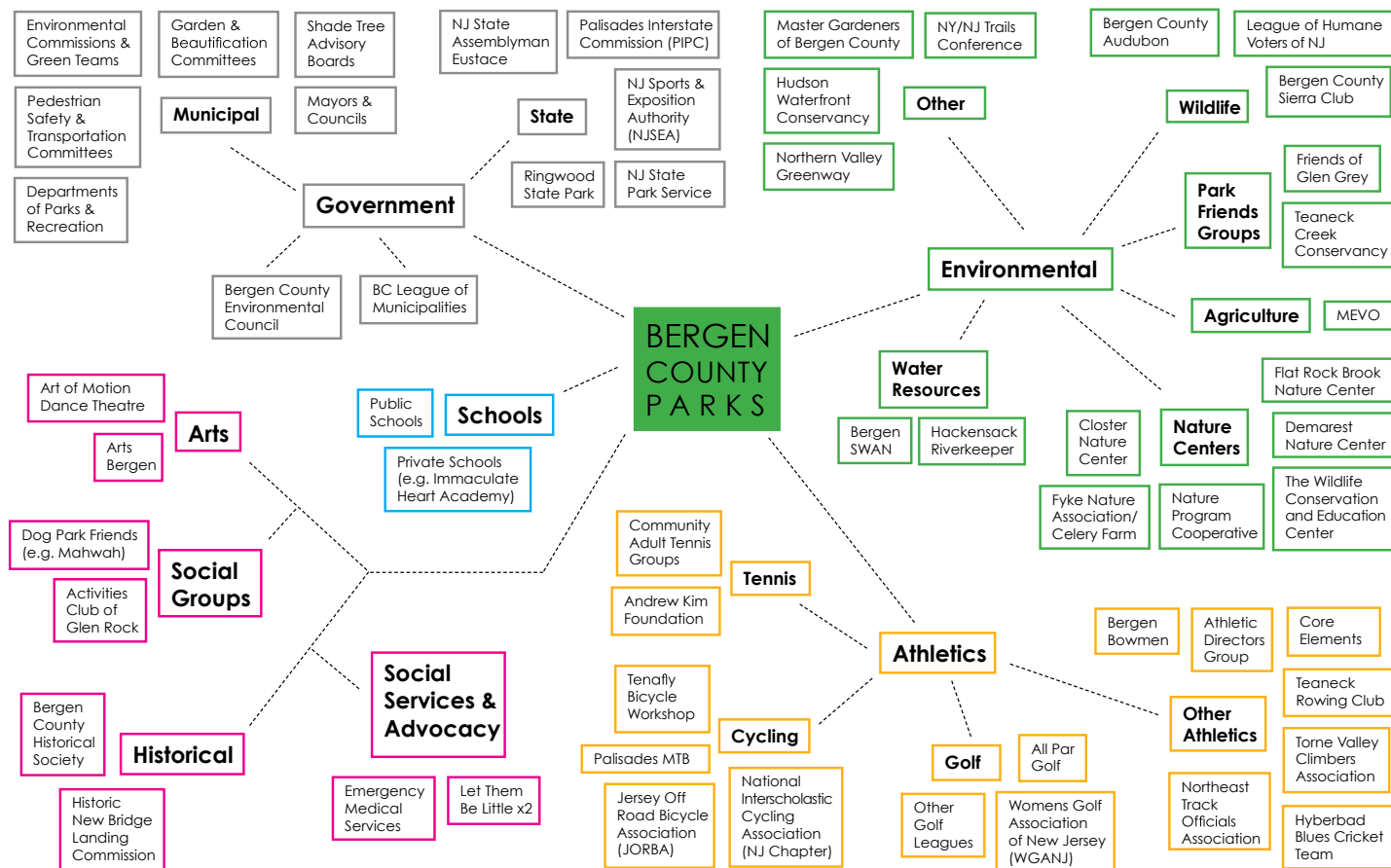


Figure 1. Community groups that provided input during the Parks Master Planning process. These groups offer the opportunity for an ongoing and institutionalized Bergen County program to engage the public to develop new programming, increase volunteer activities in the parks, and encourage public use and support for the Bergen County park system (Courtesy of CUES).

## Objective: Explore Funding Options

In order to acquire parklands for the future, to build, repair, and replace park infrastructure, add new programming, and maintain existing parkland, the BCDPR must secure the required funding on a consistent basis. As illustrated in previous goals and objectives, higher revenues could be obtained from events, golf courses, and opportunities for new or enhanced concessions in certain parks. However, the maximum benefit from efforts to increase park revenues can only be realized if park-generated income can be used by the BCDPR for reinvestment in County parks.

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation could explore other funding options. One option may be to dedicate revenue generated in the parks and by the BCDPR specifically to parks, instead of the County General Fund. Another option would be to explore outside funding in the form of donations, used by many county park commissions. In this case, a distinct entity legally separate from the County conducts fund raising for the parks programs and then turns the money over to a

parks commission or department for specific purposes or purchases. A variation on this option includes donations made directly to the County for specific parks-related projects managed by the County.

Campaigns could also be taken to add to the parks-specific trust funds the BCDPR already has, those that support the Van Saun Park Zoo, the McFaul Environmental Center, and a golf scholarship. Donors could be solicited for specific programming and amenities at these facilities and to increase the scholarship fund. Lastly, the BCDPR may apply, during each annual funding cycle, to the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. In this way, the Open Space Trust Fund supports a number of County park improvements and in some cases may fund the acquisition of land for County park purposes. The Open Space Trust Fund is supported by a small tax on real property in the County whose rate is subject to annual review by the Board of Chosen Freeholders. An increase in funds available in the Open Space Trust Fund would

mean more potential support available for County park improvements and expansion of the County park system. Administrative structures could be explored that would allow the BCDPR to retain park-generated revenues for the benefit of the parks system.

In many other New Jersey county park systems, their donations and internally generated revenues are reinvested strictly for the benefit of parks. Some potential administrative structures that might be explored are: a dedicated parks utility; the re-creation of a County parks commission; a recreational authority; and a recreational trust fund. These options could be studied in more detail to see how they could maximize fiscal sustainability and increase funding capacity for the Bergen County parks system.

## Advertising and Sponsorship

Revenue streams that might contribute funds for Bergen County parks are outdoor advertising and sponsorships. Implementation of these types of programs would need to comply with applicable State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres rules. Advertising and sponsorship programs should be based on matching products and services to the needs of park users.

There are obvious qualities to the Bergen County park system that would attract such opportunities, including the large, active population of park users, and the fact that Bergen County is one of the most densely populated counties in the nation. Staff of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation could be trained in how to offer advertising and sponsorship opportunities that could bring in revenue and support requested park amenities with minimal impact of the commercial messages on the parks themselves. There is an art to this blending so there are no jarring visual presentations that could alienate park users.

Two initial programs could be considered in the short term: outdoor umbrella and table advertising, and food and beverage sponsorships.

### Objective: Outdoor Advertising

The umbrella and table signage program could be explored at parks that have a food concession, whether that is a kiosk, food truck area, or an indoor or outdoor restaurant. The umbrellas could be part of a movable furniture program in parks with food concessions. After taking an inventory to determine how many table and umbrella units could be placed, the system-wide package could be sold as one yearly advertising opportunity.



Figure 2. Sponsorship of an event or particular amenity can help generate funds for re-investment into the parks (Courtesy of Jerome Barth).

### Objective: Food Sponsorships

Sponsorship opportunities may exist in the park system and could be an addition to the overall revenue stream that supports Bergen County parks. Sponsorship can come in many forms, from promoting a specific one-time event, to “pouring rights” for a particular beverage at food concessions, to sponsoring the equipment rental program related to a specific activity, such as biking or tennis. A sponsorship program could focus on food and beverage infrastructure within the parks system.

### Objective: Voluntary Contributions

Bergen County parks can explore the feasibility of asking park users for donations to be used for specific amenities and events. While the public expects parks to be free, by providing information about the cost of certain activities and asking for public support, managers may recoup part of the costs of programming and public events. Donations can also be made to the existing Trust Funds that support the Bergen County Zoo at Van Saun Park, the McFaul Environmental Center, and a golf scholarship. Donations to these funds can expand programming and amenities at these specific facilities and to support Bergen County students in golf course-related studies.



Figure 3. Simple advertising on movable furniture can help bring in revenues to help support the parks (Courtesy of Jerome Barth).

### Objective: Practice Capital Planning

The BCDPR should ensure that capital improvements, acquisition projects, and services are consistent with the goals and objectives in this Master Plan. An additional step of capital planning is necessary to link actions in this Master Plan to a capital budget. Projects could be prioritized based on their ability to meet the goals and objectives identified in this Master Plan. Projects that improve existing resources, expand recreational opportunities, enhance partnerships, serve diverse communities, and improve maintenance and efficiency could all be prioritized.



Figure 4. Campaigns to add funds to existing trust funds for specific park offerings, such as the Bergen County Zoo, could help expand programming (Courtesy of CUES).

### Objective: Business Office

Behind every great park and every event in a park, there is a lot of organization and behind the scenes work. A dedicated BCDPR business office could track spending, income, events, and programs for each park and set permit and concession fees. This office would work with outside vendors, concessionaires, and event planners providing amenities to the Bergen County park systems. Based on other large public park systems, significantly more revenue could be generated and used to cover costs related to maintaining, improving, and increasing park resources, programs, and infrastructure. However, to manage this business office, functions need to be expanded and reorganized into a distinct unit. A new BCDPR business office could provide:

- Tracking and revenue reporting for all parks, including concessions, programs, and for-fee activities along with projections of future park revenues
- Financial tracking and reporting that generates monthly and annual revenues, accounts receivable and payable, projections, and historic financial reports
- Simplified documents, requests for proposals, manuals, and contracts related to permitting and concession operations, along with a digital platform for permit application and submission of fees

This objective is shared with Goal Six, Program Park Spaces and Events, as it refers to the permitting and scheduling of park events, as well as the collection of fees for permits.



Figure 5. Carousel concession at Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

## Objective: Personnel Structure

There are various options for a Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation organizational structure responsible for delivering the services and amenities recommended in this Master Plan. However, there are a number of functional staff positions that need to be added under the direct control of the Director of Parks. The proposed organization structure in the following chart provides an example of how these functions could fit within the current BCDPR structure. Should a different type of parks organizational structure emerge, these functional categories would still need to be filled.

The Director of Parks interfaces indirectly with County purchasing and legal functions, as well as the Board of Chosen Freeholders that approves annual budgets and bonding for capital improvements. There is currently a staff of 143 Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs) responsible for park operations and maintenance, or 1.5 FTEs per 10,000 residents. This number is comparable to one of the lowest FTE rankings in a 2017 Trust for Public Land survey<sup>102</sup>. As

a point of comparison, Morris County Park Commission FTEs are 3.2 per 10,000 residents. BCDPR FTEs dedicated to park operations and maintenance could be increased to a total of 275 in order to equal 2.9 FTEs per 10,000 residents, which would still place Bergen County on the low end of the TPL scale

New positions needed to support public communication, stewardship and sustainability, and fund raising initiatives recommended in this Master Plan include Business Office, Marketing and Public Outreach, and Environmental Stewardship and Education employees. There should be an individual or individuals capable of providing digital support, such as maintaining a website and social media presence, directly to the BCDPR. There should also be a financial analyst capable of functioning as a Chief Financial Officer supporting the Director of Parks in strategic and financial planning initiatives. Establishing a modern organizational structure for the BCDPR and providing the staffing needed to maintain the parks system is a critical element in achieving the goals in this Master Plan.

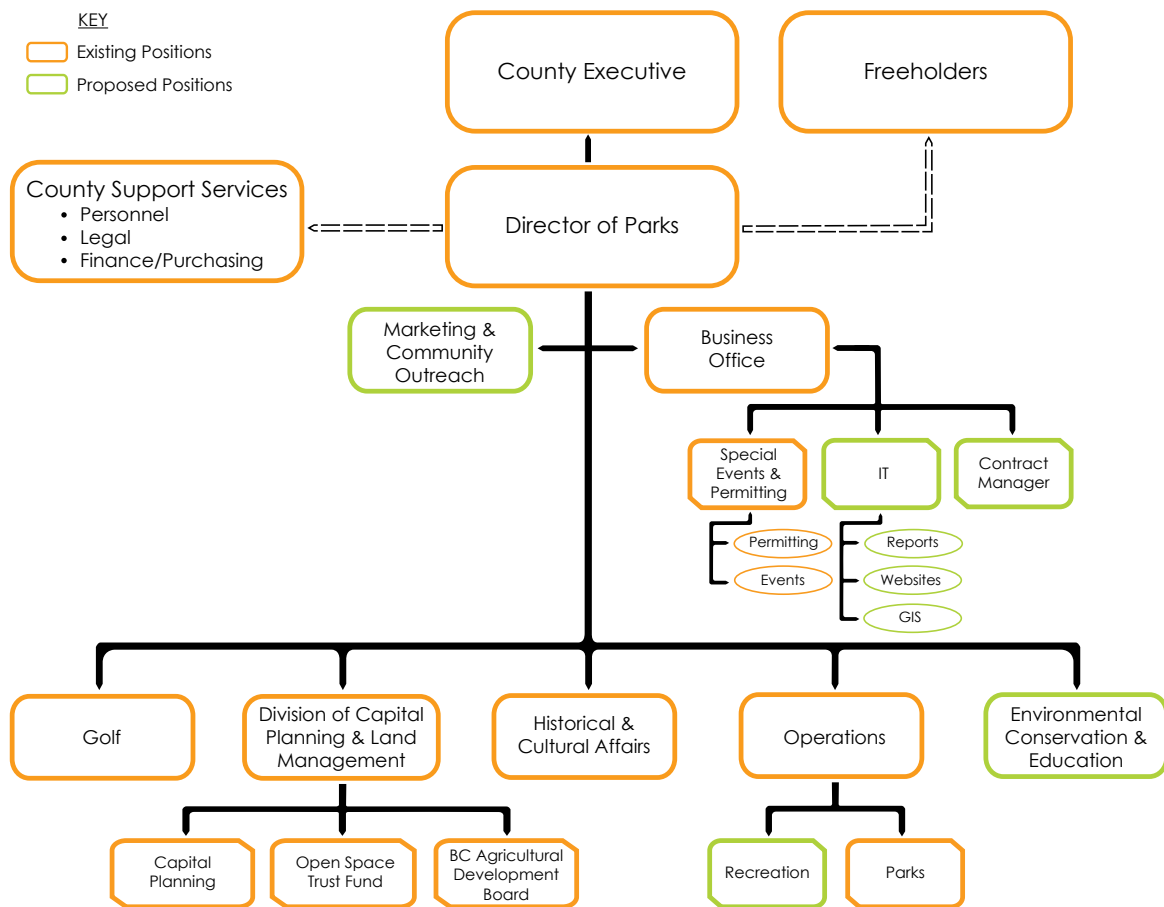


Figure 5. Example of possible reorganization of the Parks Department structure (Courtesy of CUES).



# 6 Implementation Strategies

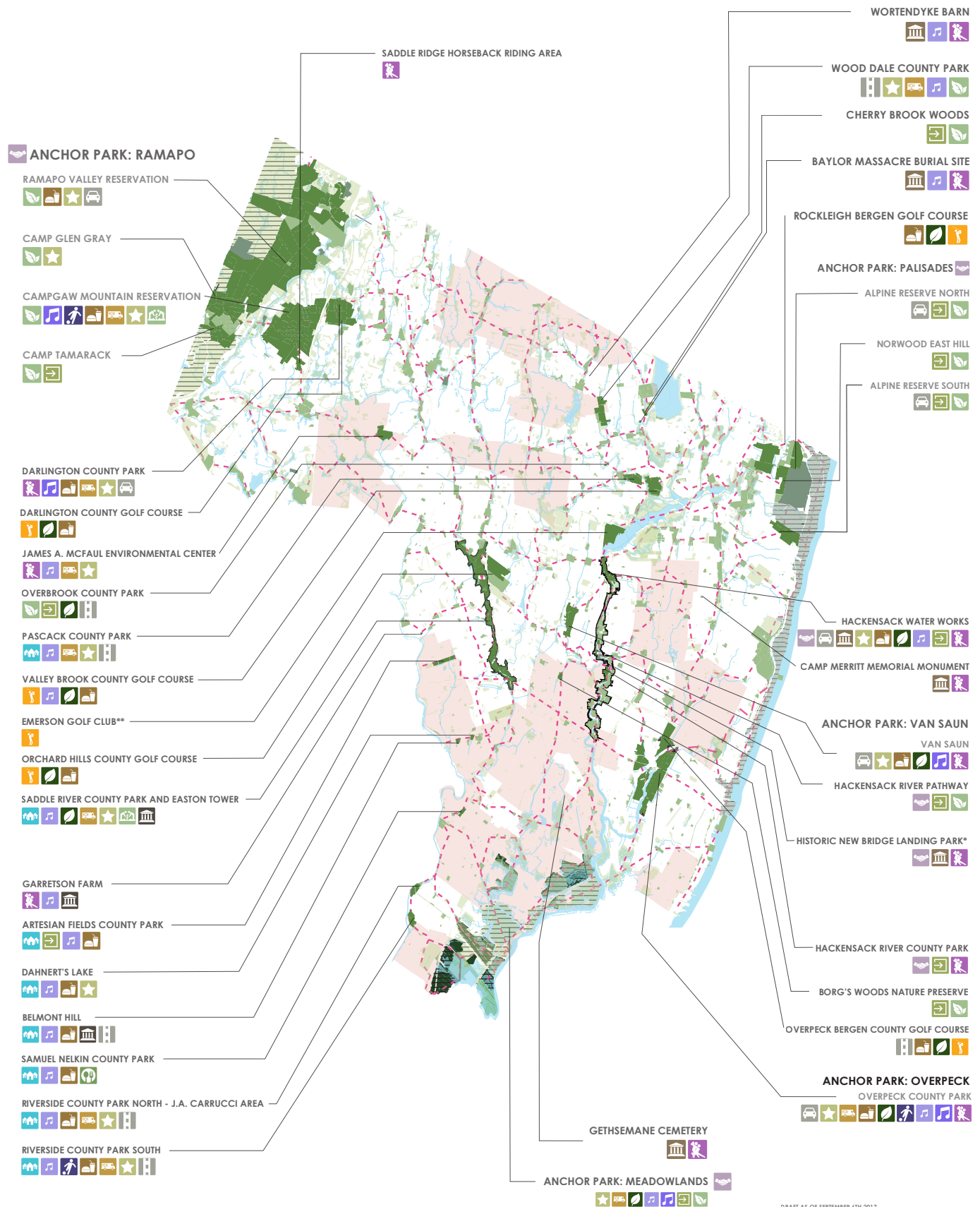


Figure 1. Map of Bergen County parks by Park Emphasis: Nature, Neighborhood, Social/Cultural and Golf (Courtesy of CUES).

The vision of the Bergen County Parks Master Plan – From Marshes to Mountains – seeks to support Bergen County quality of life by connecting every resident with a premier County parks system. An implementation strategy for this Master Plan could be structured around five critical elements:

- Enhancing and developing the four existing regional Anchor Parks: Campgaw Mountain, Overpeck Park, Ramapo Valley Reservation, and Van Saun Park; exploring options to add new Linear Parks.
- Developing countywide connectors and greenways to safely link every resident to a County park
- Developing a modern digital platform to support communication with residents and the daily operations of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation (BCDPR)
- Organizing the BCDPR to support the operation, maintenance, and capital improvements required by a premier County park system
- Further studying the visionary, aspirational concepts in this Master Plan for their feasibility

To enhance and develop Anchor and Linear Parks, individual park Master Plans are needed that identify proposed park improvements. These plans should include connector pathways, amenities, programming, and rules and regulations coordinated with municipalities, stakeholders, and the general public. The maintenance and amenity needs of the smaller Local Parks must be met, and Golf Courses must be brought up to standards found in competing public courses.

Initiatives that increase park sustainability should be implemented wherever possible, and sustainability should be a core element of environmental education and policy directives. The McFaul Environmental Center could become a showcase for pilot demonstration projects related to environmentally sustainable practices.



Figure 2. Maintaining, enhancing, and increasing public access to County parklands are key components of the Parks Master Plan (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 3. Continuing efforts to improve the Parks Department digital interface could help residents plan park visits and discover the diversity of recreational programming available in Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES).

The vision for the Bergen County parks system cannot become a reality, or once a reality, cannot be maintained, without predictable funding sources, a dedicated staff, and support from volunteers and the public. Based on historic Bergen County Park Commission reports, comparison with other park systems, and Trust for Public Land (TPL) benchmarks, the County park system is currently understaffed. Based on TPL comparisons, the approximately 120 BCDPR Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) are far short of the number of employees needed to maintain the parks system.

Implementing this Master Plan requires hiring personnel with expertise in finance and business, marketing, digital technology and environmental stewardship. Maintaining and growing the parks system may be enhanced by having dedicated staff within the BCDPR to provide some of these key functions. Obtaining these services from other Bergen County departments may not always provide the support desperately needed to preserve, maintain and grow the County park system.

The current technology applications and BCDPR website need to be modernized to communicate with County residents and to support the operational and financial functioning of the Department. Park users and business partners require a modern digital interface that communicates park programs, amenities, and events, while supporting seamless transactions related to permitting, fee associated activities, contracts and grant funding applications and requirements.

Resident awareness of County park properties, programs, and events is low, although a large number of residents believe the parks enhance Bergen County quality of life. In addition to modern digital communications, the County park system requires a strong brand identity. A distinctive logo is needed that supports the park brand position as a place to experience nature, connect with family and friends, and incorporate recreation into a healthy lifestyle.

In order to realize the goals set forth in this Master Plan, park funding must be enhanced. Revenues can be significantly increased by adding park amenities, including for-fee concessions and events in appropriate locations. However, a modern business office and marketing support is needed to realize this additional income, which could be dedicated to supporting the parks system. The BCDPR administrative organization and County policies need to support retention of park revenues for enhancement of park facilities and to projects that support the goals of this Master Plan.

## Additional Plans

There are a number of additional planning documents that will provide the direction needed to implement recommendations in this Master Plan. These additional plans include a Conceptual Master Plan for each Anchor Park, Linear Park, and Golf Course; a Historic Property Plan; a Forest Stewardship Plan; a Habitat Management Plan; a Capital Plan that includes long-term needs and ongoing operations and maintenance costs; and a Marketing Plan and Public Outreach Program.

In particular, protecting forest lands and critical habitats requires a documentation of baseline conditions and recommendations to sustainably manage these natural resources on a countywide basis. Forest Stewardship and Habitat Management Plans should include an inventory of existing forest, waterways, and habitats critical for the survival of Threatened & Endangered Species and Species of Concern along with recommendations to protect and enhance these habitat resources. The Forest Stewardship Plan should also address Green Infrastructure and sustainable practices that will improve the ecological health of parkland habitats. These plans should be completed as soon as possible.



Figure 4. Continuing efforts to improve the Parks Department digital interface could help residents plan park visits and discover the diversity of recreational programming available in Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 5. Continuing efforts to improve the Parks Department digital interface could help residents plan park visits and discover the diversity of recreational programming available in Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES).



## Historic Sites

With roots that extend from Native Americans of the Lenape Nation through pivotal roles in the Revolutionary War and the growth of our country, Bergen County reflects the rich heritage of our nation in seven BCDPR-owned historic sites. Through educational and celebratory events, the BCDPR's Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs (DCHA) serves as the major source of historic preservation information for County residents. The Division also supports efforts by municipalities, individuals, and non-profit organizations to preserve and represent our cultural heritage. This Master Plan focuses on County parks and the many recreational activities those locations provide. However, it is also critical to address the cultural and educational opportunities that are possible in these parks and at the notable historic sites owned by Bergen County and managed through the DCHA.

Arts and cultural opportunities can help to define and strengthen our parks and our communities through shared experiences and shared spaces in the park system. The Division, through musical, artistic, and cultural offerings that highlight the work of local artists, and permanent or short-term installations of significant artwork, enhances the individual parks and the communities they serve. These opportunities can broaden the audience currently using our parks and also serve as economic stimulators for the County. Although there are Preservation Plans for the individual historic properties, this Master Plan does not address the properties and their existing cultural and historic elements in depth. A future planning document, created by the DCHA, will provide more detailed current conditions and long-term goals.

## Test Before You Invest

Implementing the proposals in this Master Plan will require time, effort, and potentially multiple funding sources. It is recommended that where appropriate, a process that utilizes demonstration and pilot projects be used to test new ideas and concepts before significant effort and funding is expended for full implementation. These test projects can be conducted with municipal, for-profit, or non-profit partners that provide volunteers, thus minimizing costs and increasing the ability to judge public acceptance and demand for new amenities and programs. Resident talent and support for the parks in the County is substantial, and is currently an untapped BCDPR resource.

In addition to the above planning documents, it is the intention of the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation to further develop this implementation strategy in a detailed matrix, subsequent to the adoption of this Master Plan by the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders. A separate implementation matrix that describes specific priorities, activities, and timelines would begin the long-term process of implementing the recommendations contained in this Master Plan.



Figure 6. Stewardship plans are needed to protect and enhance natural resources in County Parks for future generations (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 7. Collaborations with NGO volunteers provide opportunities to test new park amenities (Courtesy of CUES).



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