

RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

INTRODUCTION

Most of this element is an updated summary of the 2006 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update, Boone County, Kentucky. The element discusses the need for parks and open space and presents findings of previous studies which have some bearing on the issue. It includes data on the numbers, types, and acreages of parks in Boone County and recommendations for future parks and open space as presented in the 2006 master plan update.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Natural Areas Inventory of Boone and Gallatin Counties, 1989

This study, completed by the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission developed an inventory of Potential Natural Areas (PNA's) for the two counties. The study used a four step process which included (1) reviewing existing information such as flora and fauna, soils, geology and physiology and conducting interviews with knowledgeable persons within the study areas, (2) analyzing maps and aerial photographs, (3) conducting aerial surveys, and (4) conducting ground surveys. This process led to the identification of 55 PNA's in the two counties. Of those 55 PNA's, four received a significant designation and two received a notable designation. The final recommendations of the author were that these notable and significant designated areas should be protected in the future from possible development.

Western Boone County Study, 1998

Recognizing that the access, topography, urban services river frontage and general character are quite different in Western Boone County (WBC) than Eastern Boone County, the purpose of this study was to recommend a different way to develop this area in a manner consistent with its distinct characteristics. The study recommended that the Planning Commission should, through a list of projects, take a more pro-active approach and regulatory approach to addressing the future of WBC. Most of the recommended projects were designed to work directly with the land owners and affected people on a smaller scale. The study concluded that the traditional planning approach of a large land use plan and extensive regulations is not the best way to guide the future of WBC. The proposed list included the following projects that relate to the delivery of parks and recreation services:

- Form a non-profit Recreation Foundation (which had already been recommended by other planning efforts) and conduct an active search for riverfront public access/recreation properties. The focus would be toward county acquisition or tax benefit/contribution through the Recreation Foundation.
- Develop a preservation plan for the Middle Creek Valley through concentrated property owner meetings and discussions.
- Begin a process where Boone County and the Planning Commission take an active role in approaching the State Tourism Cabinet to create a plan for Big Bone Lick State Park:
 - Re-plan the park layout and theme.
 - Consider expansion plans for the park, including a land connection to the Ohio River.
 - Involve Tri-Ed because the parks are a quality of life issue for Northern Kentucky.
 - Explore potential for including corporate retreat facilities.
- Design a conceptual path system connecting large green areas and stream valleys of Western Boone County.

Natural Areas Inventory

The Boone County Conservation District asked Dr. Bill Bryant with Thomas More College to review the 2000 Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Study and to recommend which natural areas in Boone County should be considered under this inventory. Dr. Bryant's priority list for areas of concern in Boone County includes:

- Middle Creek Valley – Highly significant and once proposed for trail connecting these lands.
 - Boone County Cliffs State Nature Preserve and surrounding lands.
 - Dinsmore Woods State Nature Preserve and surrounding lands.
 - Split Rock – Illinois glacial material of historical significance.
- Bald Point – off Hathaway Road, near Camp Michael Boy Scout Camp – glacial material and prairie remnants.
- Steep Gut Creek (on maps listed as Steep Creek) – area owned by Don Stites – Illinois glacial material, steep alluvial soils and unique vegetation.
- Petersburg – Indian mound areas.
- Big Bone Lick State Park – land around the park.
- Elijah’s Creek – Carter Dolwick Preserve owned by the Hillside Trust and surrounding lands.
- Intact forested slopes along the Ohio River – should be kept in forest due to underlying Kope formations and possibility of slides.
- Beech-Maple forest communities – virtually gone from this area. There were some remnants on East Bend Road, privately owned, and also a section near the interchange of I-75 and I-71, privately owned.

2002 Florence Pedestrian/Bicycle Plan

This plan was requested by the Florence City Council in order to update the 1992 Pedestrian and Bike Path Plan. Some of the recommendations in the 1992 Plan have been implemented by the City of Florence. The City of Florence needed a formal strategy on which to base its capital decisions. This Plan provided that strategy based on impartial, technical data and needs assessment. This plan recommended that sidewalk improvements are more important than providing bicycle circulation system in the early stages of the plan implementation.

In general, this Plan assumed that all parts of Florence should be evaluated as to pedestrian/bike needs and that existing or future connections to adjacent parts of unincorporated Boone County should be planned. The major planning steps included:

1. Develop a list of sidewalk needs.
2. Develop criteria and score each project.
3. Adjust results of weighting process based on known projects and emergency situations.
4. Develop a bike circulation network.
5. Examine overlap between pedestrian and bike network recommendations.

This Plan contained specific recommendations based on both scientific formula and on real world considerations. Even though this document included small scale map reproductions of the entire city, the information is readily available at any level of detail through the Boone County Geographic Information System (GIS). The Plan provided a guideline for the City of Florence to make decisions, and also enabled the staff of the City to draft realistic work programs for each fiscal year. Its implementation will help ensure that Florence remains the center of activity of the area, and maintains a high quality of life.

Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update, 2006

The 2006 Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update replaced both the 2000 Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan and the 1989 Boone County Open Space Master Plan.

The purpose of the Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan was to identify parks and recreation needs throughout the county and to develop strategies that could be implemented to provide services consistent with the existing potential resources and demands of the area. There are several reasons why this Master Planning effort, additional planning, and the future of Parks and Recreation in Boone County are important. First, local governments in Boone County manage approximately 1,894 acres of land designated for parks and recreation purposes. The schools operate several additional areas of campus and recreational area. Boone County cooperates with the Cities of Walton and Florence in the operations of parks within their jurisdictions. These agencies have the responsibility to manage this land in an efficient manner that is consistent with the health, safety and welfare of the community. Also, for many residents, parks provide their only access to active recreational opportunities in the natural environment. Furthermore, the quality of a community’s parks and recreation system is viewed as one of the indicators of the overall quality of life. Property values around parks

tend to be considerably higher than other areas, thereby making an annual contribution to the community in the form of higher property tax revenues, as well as additional profits to the owners at point of sale. More valuable properties also tend to be maintained at a higher level, improving the appearance of the communities. And lastly, parks preserve important cultural and natural features for future generations to enjoy.

The Needs Analysis contained in the 2006 Plan includes the following elements:

- An analysis of the participation levels of programs offered by the Parks and Recreation Department.
- The classification of existing Parks and Recreation facilities into standard park classifications.
- A discussion of the Parks and Recreation area needs by park types (see **Table 7.1**).
- A discussion of the geographic distribution of parks and recreation facilities.
- A summary of the public workshops.
- A summary of the parks and recreation surveys that were accomplished in 1996 and 1999.
- A facility needs analysis based upon accepted standards and guidelines and past experience of the Consultant.
- A summary of the overall parks and recreation facility needs.

TABLE 7.1 – PARKS AND RECREATION NEEDS BY PARK TYPE

PARK TYPE	MINI-PARK	NEIGHBORHOOD	COMMUNITY	COUNTY	SPECIAL USE	LINEAR	TOTALS
EXISTING DEVELOPED ACRES	23.7	128	158	221	495	0	1,025.7
RECOMMENDED ACRES PER 1000 POPULATION	0.5	2	2.5	5	N/A	N/A	10.0
RECOMMENDED ACRES : 2005	51	204	255	510	N/A	N/A	1,020.0
2005 SURPLUS (+) OR DEFICIT (-)	-27.3	-76	-97	-289	N/A	N/A	- 498.3
RECOMMENDED ACRES: 2010	60.95	243.8	304.75	609.5	N/A	N/A	1,219.0
2010 SURPLUS (+) OR DEFICIT (-)	-37.25	-115.8	-146.75	-388.5	N/A	N/A	- 688.3
RECOMMENDED ACRES: 2020	79	316	395	790	N/A	N/A	1,580.0
2020 SURPLUS (+) OR DEFICIT (-)	-55.3	-188	-237	-569	N/A	N/A	- 1,049.3
RECOMMENDED ACRES: 2030	94.3	377.2	471.5	943	N/A	N/A	1,886.0
2030 SURPLUS (+) OR DEFICIT (-)	-70.6	-249.2	-313.5	-722	N/A	N/A	-1,355.3

Source: 2006 Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update

Based on the Needs Analysis, including parks classification system and survey results, the 2006 Plan concluded the following:

- General shortage of park land in the areas of Hebron and north of I-275, the southern part of Florence to Richwood and Union and the Verona areas.
- The need for a wide variety of specific recreation facilities in primarily the same locations.
- The strong desire for more open space and land to be preserved as future green space and some land to remain as natural areas.
- The development of non-traditional activities such as a dog park, hobby park, and others.
- The realization that, as the population grows dramatically, the demand for park land, recreation facilities and programs will also need to expand dramatically to meet the County's demands and expectations.
- High demand for all types of trails including jogging, walking, nature, bicycle and horseback.

- Demand for open space for the future.
- Demand for indoor activities including an indoor swimming pool, youth center, gymnasium and other activities.

The vision for the future for Parks and Recreation in Boone County, included in the 2006 Parks Master Plan Update, and as determined from the surveys, workshops, community input, and the Consultant's recommendations, is as follows:

- Land is acquired for the development of parks in the areas that currently need parks and also land will be set aside for the expansion of these parks as the population grows.
- Land will be acquired to be preserved as open space.
- Develop a system of greenways, hike and bike ways, and linkages that connect the parks, schools, playgrounds, neighborhoods, and green spaces throughout the County. **Note:** *This recommendation has been met with tremendous opposition in recent years culminating in the defeat of a proposed Greenways Plan in 2009.*
- Unique or significant natural areas of Boone County are studied and preserved.
- The parks are developed for the most needed park and recreation facilities that were identified through the public input process.
- Indoor recreation facilities are developed to allow increased programming by the Boone County Parks and Recreation Department and to provide for the recreation and fitness needs of Boone County residents.

As of 2006, there were 1,906 acres of park land throughout the County. Of this amount, 973 were considered developed and another 384 acres were scheduled for development on land already acquired. Once that land is developed, it will result in 70% of park land being developed. The 2006 plan recommended a goal of a maximum of 50% of the park land to be developed. Of the existing land owned by the County for parks, acreage at England Idlewild, Waller-Stephenson Mill Park, Sperti Woods, and Camp Ernst will remain undeveloped. This results in about 428 acres of land that is currently owned that will remain undeveloped. **Table 7.2** lists all the existing and proposed parks recommended in the 2006 plan. The total development includes 1,643 acres. This acreage, added to the existing 973 acres, results in a total of 2,616 acres of park land that will be developed in the future. **Note:** *as of 2011, there are 1,882 acres of park land in Boone County.* To maintain a 50% undeveloped amount of property, an additional 2,188 acres will need to be acquired in the future.

The 2006 Update recommends 1,668 acres of new parks throughout the County and recommends that the County should establish a goal of limiting development of park land to 50% of the total park land owned by the County; the remainder to serve as open space and green space for the future. New parks that are proposed would be a mixture of neighborhood parks, community parks, county parks and special use parks that would be strategically located to provide convenient access to all residents of the County.

Recommendations for County Parks as stated in the plan included the following:

- Expansion of Central Park. The plan recommended expanding the park to the west across Camp Ernst Road onto the 117-acre former Seven Hills Property. That property has since been acquired by the Cooperative Extension District and is being developed. The Plan also recommended acquiring approximately 100 acres adjacent to the park on the east side of Camp Ernst Road and developing a master plan for the property to include a new entrance to the park, other amenities, and trail connections to Longbranch Elementary and Cooper High School.
- Expansion of England-Idlewild Park to include acquisition of (or easement on) approximately 80 acres to the west of the park and perhaps also to the east into the former Ethans Glen subdivision. A master plan for this park was completed in 2003.
- Expansion of Boone Woods Park to the east along Route 237. A master plan was completed in 2003.

Recommendations for Special Use Parks as stated in the plan included the following:

- Riverfront park and boat access in both the Belleview and Petersburg areas.
- Acquire and develop land for a Hobby Park somewhere in the county.
- Develop horse trails in the vicinity of East Bend Power Plant.

Recommendations for Major Facilities and Other issues as stated in the plan included:

- Develop family outdoor aquatic centers at the site of the existing Union Pool and a new southern facility in a park in the Richwood area.
- Develop a multi-generational community and recreation center to serve the southern portion of the County.
- Develop an indoor sports complex in central or southern Boone County.
- Develop indoor aquatic facilities in conjunction with Boone County Schools for competitive use and also provide a family aquatic center in the new indoor recreation center in the southern portion of the County.
- Develop athletic field complexes for baseball, soccer and other rectangular sports fields.
- Provide picnic areas at all new neighborhood, community and county parks.
- Develop a county wide greenway and trails plan.
- Develop the land across Camp Ernst Road from Central park to expand the Boone County Arboretum as a regional attraction with gardens, visitor center, education facilities and trails.
- Expand program offerings to include indoor programming, nature education programming and more as facilities are developed to support these activities.
- Develop a new southern maintenance base and satellite maintenance facilities at Hempfling Park, Waller-Stephenson Mill Park and Union Park, as the park system expands.

Florence Area Land Acquisition and New Parks

The City of Florence Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment and Park Land Evaluation Study, which was completed in May of 2001, identified several potential properties for expansion of parks in the Florence area.

- Expand the Florence Nature Park with approximately ten acres of land surrounding this facility.
- Acquire and develop the McEvoy Site as a new park in southern Florence. A Concept Plan for the site is included in 2006 plan.
- Study the 73-acre Baird Property located off Old Route 42 in western Florence and the 13-acre Glenn Rose site in eastern Florence for potential development as city parks. A Concept Plan for the Baird site is included in the 2006 Master Plan Update.

Significant Natural Areas Study

The 2006 Plan recommended that the County perform a study of all of the watersheds and significant natural areas in the County to determine the most desirable areas to preserve. Several of the watershed areas have been studied and preliminary indications include recommendations to preserve many of the watersheds for natural areas. Some specific items on the priority list include the Split Rock area, the Bald Point area within the Gunpowder Creek watershed and the Steep Gut Creek area along the Ohio River. Some areas were identified as priority areas due to strong development pressures placed on them, including the Sand Run Creek watershed, the North and East Gunpowder Creek watersheds, and the Woolper Creek/Ohio River quadrant area. Other areas recommended for preservation include the Ohio River waterfront near Federal Hall (just south of the I-275 Carroll Cropper Bridge), expansion of the Middle Creek watershed including the lands adjacent to Middle Creek Park and the lands adjacent to Boone Cliffs Nature Preserve. Boone County acquired both the Dinsmore Woods and Boone Cliffs Nature Preserves from the Nature Conservancy in 2009.

The 2006 plan also identified the north/west Gunpowder Creek area, south Gunpowder Creek watershed, and East Woolper Creek watershed as priority areas for preservation. The plan noted that “The Boone Conservancy may pursue lands in these significant natural areas. Their priorities should be the protection of significant natural features followed by the riparian corridor for preservation, waterway protection and the development of greenways and trails followed by the acquisition of significant pieces of farmland and other properties that may be available in these areas. These acquisitions could be in a variety of methods. These could include fee simple purchase, purchase of development rights, scenic easements, conservation easements, and greenway and trail easements.”

TABLE 7.2 – 2006 NEW PARK DEVELOPMENT SUMMARY

PARK TYPE	PARK/SITE NAME	ACRES
NEIGHBORHOOD	Big Bone Landing addition	5
	Florence Expand Nature Center Site	10
	Florence Glen Rose Site	13
	North Pointe	5
	Subtotal	33
COMMUNITY	Boone Woods east addition	10
	Bullittsville Community Park	25
	Boone Conservancy Land	45
	Erpenbeck-Plantation Pointe	20
	Frogtown Park	25
	Green Mountain Baseball Complex	44
	Hopeful Church Road Area	50
	McEvoy Site	50
	North Bend Road Area	25
	Southwest Burlington	25
	Union Park	45
	Subtotal	364
	COUNTY	Central Park east addition
Central Park Seven Hills area		117
England-Idlewild west addition		80
Ethans Glen addition		100
Future Union addition		150
Hempfling		89
Richwood Park		100
Waller-Stephenson Mill future addition		100
Waller-Stephenson Mill Park		225
Subtotal		1,061
SPECIAL USE		Belleview River Park
	Hobby Park	50
	Petersburg River Park	5
	Power Plant Horse Trails	150
	Subtotal	210
TOTAL		1,668

Source: 2006 Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan Update

PREVIOUS PARKS AND RECREATION SURVEY RESULTS

1996 Survey

A survey was completed in 1996 with the results printed in the 1997 report entitled “A Strategy for Meeting Boone County’s Recreation Future” which was prepared by the Boone County Planning Commission and the Boone County Parks and Recreation Department. This project was overseen by a citizen group formed specifically for this purpose. This group, known as the Recreation Advisory Committee, provided guidance in preparation of the report. A survey was mailed to 1000 randomly selected Boone County residents. The results of the survey indicated that a combination of state and local taxes with 28% and land donation of 24% were most preferred

funding methods. The most utilized park in Boone County was Boone Woods with 51% of the survey respondents indicating they used this park. This survey found that 30% of the respondents believed that an indoor swimming pool was needed and 27% believed that an outdoor swimming pool was needed within Boone County. The other 'most needed outdoor facilities' included bike trails and horse trails.

1999 Survey

A survey was included in the July issue in the "What's Happening" newsletter which was sent to every household in Boone County. In addition, this survey was handed out at the Boone County Fair. A total of 595 surveys were returned through these methods. In addition, four thousand surveys were distributed through the Boone County School System and completed by school students and their families. The survey results guided management recommendations and produced a summary of parks and recreation needs that was updated by the 2006 plan.

2006 Survey

The most recent Parks and Recreation Survey of Boone County residents was conducted in January through April of 2006. The survey was web-based but promoted widely through other media and direct mailings to residents without computer access. Just over 1,100 households responded to the survey, representing an estimated 3,300 county residents, with the highest number of responses came from the Florence and Burlington zip codes.

The 2006 survey gathered data on residents' use of and satisfaction with existing parks, maintenance, and programming but also asked residents about future needs. Some, but not all of these data, may be relevant to land-use planning. Respondents for the most part were at least "Somewhat Satisfied" with current facilities. However, 64% replied that they did not feel that existing facilities were adequate to serve Boone County's future needs. A similar number (65%) replied that they were Somewhat or Very Likely to support additional taxes to meet projected future needs. About ¼ of responses (24%) indicated that they were not likely to support new taxes. Concerning needs for outdoor facilities, the top 10 responses were for Open Space (85%), Jogging/Walking Trails (84%), Hiking Trails (82%), Bike Trails/Paths (80%), Picnic Shelters (79%), Children's Playground (78%), Open Picnic Tables (76%), Environmental Education Center (71%), Fishing Lake (69%), and Outdoor Aquatic Center (64%). The most needed indoor facilities included a Youth Center (74%), Gymnasium (72%), Senior Citizen Center (71%), Exercise Equipment (70%), and an Indoor Swimming Pool (70%).

Nature Parks, Greenways, and Bike Trails

The acquisition of the nature parks, greenways, and the development of the bike trails that are identified in the 2006 Plan are also very important in providing the quality of life that is desired in Boone County. However, the defeat of the 2008 Parks Tax Referendum by a 67% to 33% vote (46,531 votes total) and the decision to withdraw the Boone County Greenways Plan from consideration by the Boone County Planning Commission in 2009 has essentially removed this as a priority. Instead, the legislative units should concentrate on the funding for the basic parks and recreation services that are recommended in this Plan.

THE BOONE CONSERVANCY

In late 1999, The Boone Conservancy was created upon recommendation of the county Parks and Recreation Task Force. The Boone County Parks Master Plan recommended the creation of such a foundation ten years prior. The Boone Conservancy is a non-profit 501©(3) organization with the purpose of assisting in the Master Plan by working with all sectors of the community who recognize that planning for appropriate land conservation improves the quality of life and increases economic prosperity in Boone County.

The Conservancy consists of a twenty four member volunteer Board of area residents, including landowners, farmers, business leaders, developers, local government and individuals who share the vision and mission of conserving some of Boone County's unique natural resources for future generations. The Conservancy has established bylaws and identified priority project areas. It is also a member of the national Land Trust Alliance and a member of the Kentucky Land Trusts Coalition.

The Boone Conservancy raises funds through grants, private foundations, fundraising events and donations from private individuals and corporate entities. The Boone Conservancy accepts donations of land meeting certain specific criteria that advance its mission. The organization does not have condemnation or eminent domain powers.

The conservancy works as a facilitator in bringing together partners interested in conservation in Boone County. In appropriate projects that fit within The Boone Conservancy's conservation mission, the organization works collaboratively with other county, local and state entities to achieve conservation of a particular area. Much of The Boone Conservancy's work is focused in the major watershed areas of Boone County.

The Boone Conservancy currently holds conservation easements on approximately 29 acres (28 along Gunpowder Creek and 1 in Walton Park) and owns approximately 175 acres in the Middle Creek watershed. The land will either remain in its natural state or be developed as park land open to the public for educational purposes such as: bird watching, plant identification, establishment of wildlife habitat and native plant species or recreation such as: hiking, fishing and horseback riding.

CONCLUSION

Since the completion of the 1989 Boone County Open Space Plan, the 2000 Boone County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and its 2006 update, major improvements have been made including the development of England-Idlewild Park, Central Park, Conrad Park, Gunpowder Creek Nature Park, and initial development of Waller-Stephenson Park. The land for most of these parks was the result of taking advantage of opportunities that presented themselves during site development. Boone County today is faced with the reality of providing parks and recreational opportunities to a population base that is continuing to grow. At the same time, revenues and resources become more and more limited. Therefore, the Boone County Fiscal Court and City Councils are forced to make difficult decisions regarding services to be provided and techniques to be used to develop, finance, operate, and maintain park areas, facilities, and recreation programs. Boone County will be in much better condition to serve its citizens with park land if they can take a more pro-active approach to meeting future needs.