FLATHEAD COUNTY

Parks & Recreation Master Plan

JUNE, 2009

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I. Purpose

In 2008, the Flathead County Parks Board, along with the Parks and Recreation Department initiated an effort to develop a Parks and Recreation Master Plan. The purpose of this plan is to:

1. Provide a framework for decision making regarding park development, land acquisition, recreation programming and partnerships.
2. Engage the citizens of Flathead County in developing a vision for Parks and Recreation and establishing program priorities.
3. Identify and promote the benefits of a county park system.
4. Determine needs through an analysis of existing facilities, level of service benchmarks and the examination of trends.
5. Develop an Action Plan that will identify next steps, roles and responsibilities and financial strategies.

II. Relationship to Other Plans

A. Growth Policy

In 2007 the Flathead County Board of County Commissioners adopted a Growth Policy. A growth policy is an official statement of public policy to guide growth and manage change for the betterment of the community. It is a general guide that provides a framework for public officials to make budgeting, programming, and land use decisions.

The Growth Policy includes a Park and Recreation element that provides goals and policies for parks. The Growth Policy recommended that a detailed Parks and Recreation Master Plan be undertaken and adopted as an appendix to the Growth Policy. This Master Plan expands the analysis that is contained within the Growth Policy and contains more detailed recommendations for park and recreation development.

B. Trail Master Plan

In addition to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the County is undertaking a Trails Master Plan. This plan considers the recreational and transportation aspects of a comprehensive pathways system. The Trails Plan is being developed by an Advisory Committee to the Parks Board and will be adopted by reference in this document as an addendum to the plan.

C. Previous Planning Documents

In 2001 the Park Board revised the Flathead County Park Management Plan. The plan's intent was to assist policy makers with general guidelines for administration, provide policies for purchase of new land and evaluate surplus parks for potential disposal. This Master Plan is an update of the information in that document and expands its purpose to include other aspects of park planning as stated above.

III. Planning Framework

The Plan is organized into four issue areas as illustrated in the diagram below. Each issue area is described in subsequent chapters and contains specific goals and policies to provide direction for decision makers. The organizational issues address staffing, advisory committee roles, and partnerships. Beneficial based management establishes policies based on the economic, environmental, social and recreational benefits of a park and recreation system. The needs assessment section inventories facilities and services and identifies gaps while the financial section examines strategies and funding resources to address those gaps.

Figure 1: Planning Framework

The Master Plan integrates these issues areas and contains the overall vision for a countywide park and recreation system. The Vision Statement reflects public input and underlies the goals and policies as well as identifies priorities and guiding principles for the Master Plan. The plan also contains an implementation section to identify action steps, partners, and resources to accomplish the goals of the plan. Primarily, the Master Plan is a strategic planning tool that provides a framework for public officials in making decisions regarding the Parks and Recreation system in Flathead County.

IV. Planning Process

The project approach was designed to develop a vision for a county wide park system to meet the current and future needs of the citizens of Flathead County. To implement this vision, the plan provides strategic direction to allocate staff and funding resources. The plan sets forth goals and policies to guide public officials in making decisions on land acquisition, budgeting, programming, partnerships, and park development. Basic components of this planning approach include:

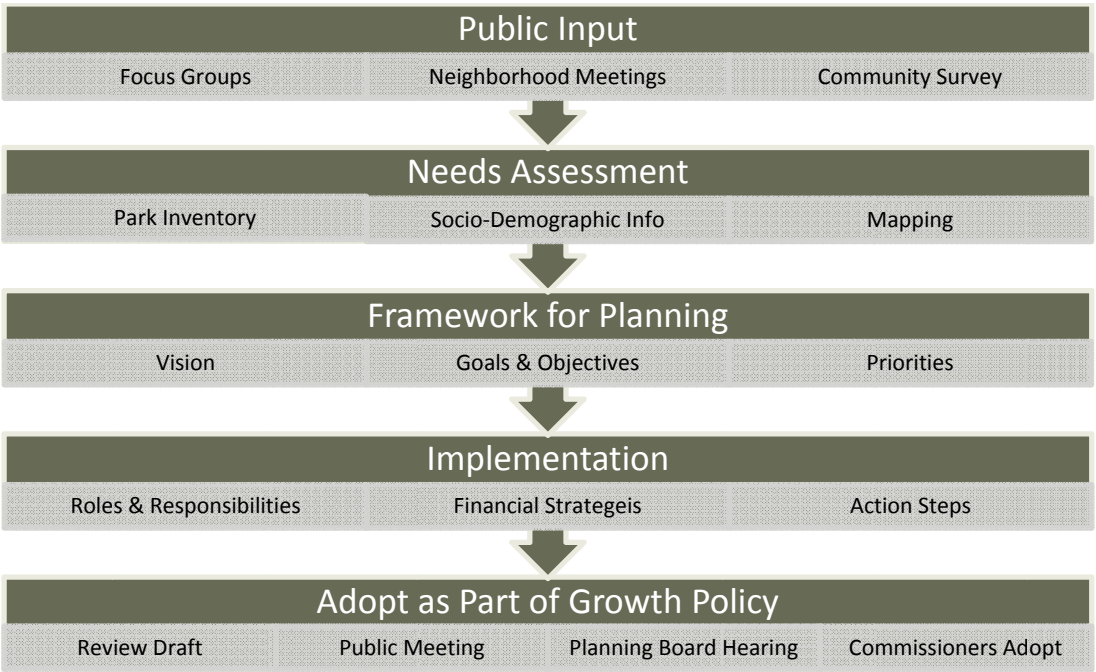
Needs Assessment: The needs assessment is based on community input, an analysis of existing facilities and operations, industry trends and socio-economic analysis. The needs assessment identifies gaps in services and potential partnerships.

Vision, Policies, Guiding Principles: The vision, policies and guiding principles provide the framework for evaluating proposals for new facilities or programs. The Plan is a dynamic document and the vision should provide guidance to meet future challenges.

Implementation: This component outlines action items and establishes priorities for realizing the vision. It reviews funding strategies and partnerships to optimize limited resources.

Public Input: Techniques to engage citizens in the planning process included six neighborhood meetings, focus group sessions with each advisory group and recreation providers, on-line surveys, web-site updates, media coverage and e-newsletters. The Master Plan reflects the citizen input that was gathered throughout the planning process.

Figure 2: Planning Process



Vision Statement

Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department will strive to provide a high level of service to the community through well maintained parks, facilities and recreational programs. Through a system of parks and recreation facilities the county will promote a variety of economic, social, environmental and recreation benefits. To optimize resources and achieve these benefits the top priorities of the Park and Recreation Department will be to provide outdoor recreation in a natural setting with an emphasis on water access, to provide opportunities and facilities for organized team sports and to provide a non-motorized trail system that provides large scale connectivity and safe routes to schools, parks and recreation facilities.

Guiding Principles

1. *Parks and recreation facilities should be developed and maintained in a manner to meet their intended function and to provides a safe and positive experience for users.*
2. *Plans for parks and recreation facilities should be made in accordance with sound fiscal policy to develop parks in a cost effective manner with adequate funding for long term operation and maintenance.*
3. *The County shall promote creative partnerships with other government agencies, citizens, schools, and non-profit groups to achieve the goals of the Master Plan.*
4. *The Parks District shall be good stewards of park lands by being a good neighbor to private property near parks and recognizing the conservation value of parks.*
5. *County residents should have convenient access to a system of regional and local area parks and programs that are accessible to all segments of the population.*

Chapter 2: Regional Context

I. Geography

A. Land Area

Flathead County is located in the northwestern corner of Montana and is the third largest county in State encompassing approximately 5,252 square miles. It stretches almost 100 miles from the border with Canada on the north to its southernmost boundary with Missoula County. Flathead County is another 100 miles at its widest point from the Continental Divide on the east to Lincoln County on the west.

In land area, the county is larger than the state of Connecticut.

Most development is located in the valley, an area of approximately 15 miles wide and 20 miles long surrounded by mountains on the north, west and east sides and bordered by Flathead Lake to the south.

B. Natural Features

There are over 40 lakes and 3 major river systems comprising 158 square miles of water. The largest water body is Flathead Lake extending from Flathead County into Lake County and encompassing nearly 200 square miles of surface area and 185 miles of shoreline. Flathead Lake is the largest natural freshwater lake between the Mississippi River and the Pacific Ocean and is a barometer of the ecological health for the entire Flathead watershed.

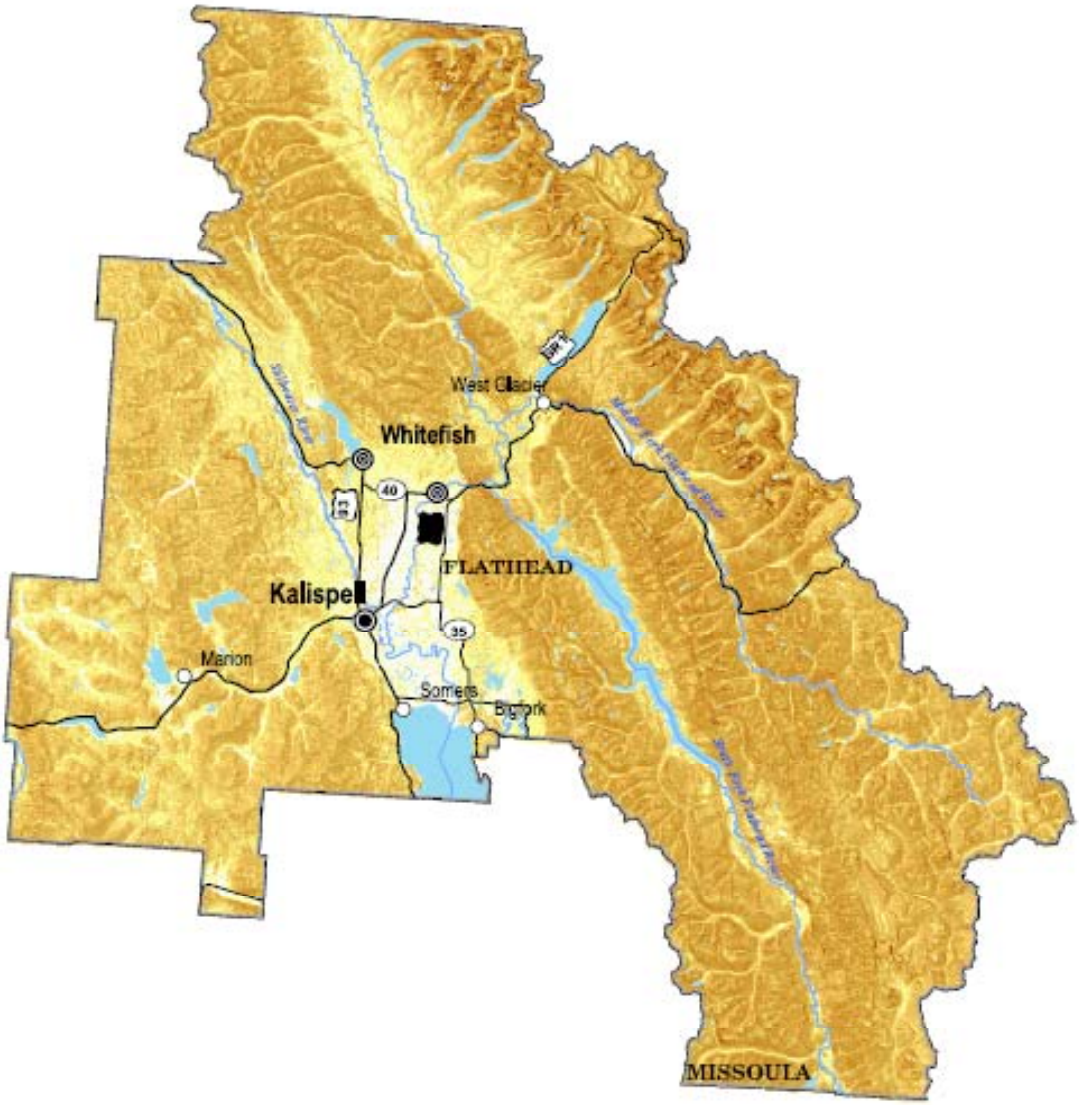
Among some of the major contributing waters to Flathead Lake are Whitefish Lake and the Stillwater and Whitefish Rivers, the North Fork, Middle Fork, South Fork and the main stem of the Flathead River and Swan River and Swan Lake. The Flathead River Basin's lakes range in size and character from nearly inaccessible alpine lakes of only several surface acres to such other significant large water bodies as Swan, McDonald, Whitefish, Tally, and the Little Bitterroot Lakes.

Figure 1: Flathead Lake

Approximately 10-15% of the valley area of Flathead County is designated as 100-year floodplain. An additional 10-15% of the valley bottom is designated or as 500 year floodplain. Most of the floodplain is located along the Flathead River corridor, between Columbia Falls and Flathead Lake. Areas of 100-year floodplain are also present along the Stillwater and Whitefish Rivers

Elevations in the County range from Mount Stimson in Glacier National Park at 10,142 feet to 2,893 feet at Flathead Lake. Most steep slopes occur in the public and corporate timberlands surrounding the valley bottom, as well as in Glacier National Park.

Map 1: Flathead County- Slopes and Major Water Features



Source: State of Montana, Natural Resource Information System

C. Public Land

The Federal government manages approximately 78.6% of the total land in Flathead County. The USDA Forest Service is responsible for management of National Forests (including wilderness areas). Flathead County contains portions of four National Forests and two Wilderness Areas. Flathead National Forest has approximately 1,875,5452 acres within the County. Other National Forests that have lands within Flathead County are Kootenai, Lewis and Clark and Lolo (totaling approximately 115,3903 acres). The National Forests and Wilderness Areas contribute approximately 59% of the total acreage of Flathead County.

Federal land also includes Glacier National Park. The Park is approximately 1,008,3064 acres, is split between Flathead County and Glacier County. Approximately 635,214 acres of Glacier National Park contribute 19% of the total land mass of Flathead County. Other Federally managed lands in Flathead County include the Lost Trail National Wildlife Refuge (7,885 acres), Swan River National Wildlife Refuge (1,568 acres) and the Flathead, Batavia, McGregor Meadows, Smith Lake and Blasdel Waterfowl Production Areas (totaling 5,189 acres). Combined, Wildlife Refuges and Waterfowl Production Areas contribute an additional 14,642 acres of land in Flathead County.

Within Flathead County, lands managed by the State of Montana include DNRC Trust Lands Management System account for approximately 129,670 acres of Flathead County. Fish, Wildlife and Parks manage another approximately 3,208 acres.

D. Open Space

Other open space in the valley consists of private timber land, conservation easements, and agricultural land. The three largest corporate timber landowners, F.H. Stoltze Land and Lumber, Plum Creek and Montana Forest Products together account for approximately 9.2% (310,000 acres) of the total land area and approximately 52.7% of the private land in the County.

The three organizations that manage the majority of conservation easements in the County include the Montana Land Reliance, Flathead Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy. There are over 21,000 acres of conservation easements recorded with the County Clerk. Easements protect critical riparian areas, wetlands, wildlife habitat and prime farmlands. In 2007, approximately 40% of the private land (251,597 acres) in Flathead County was being farmed.

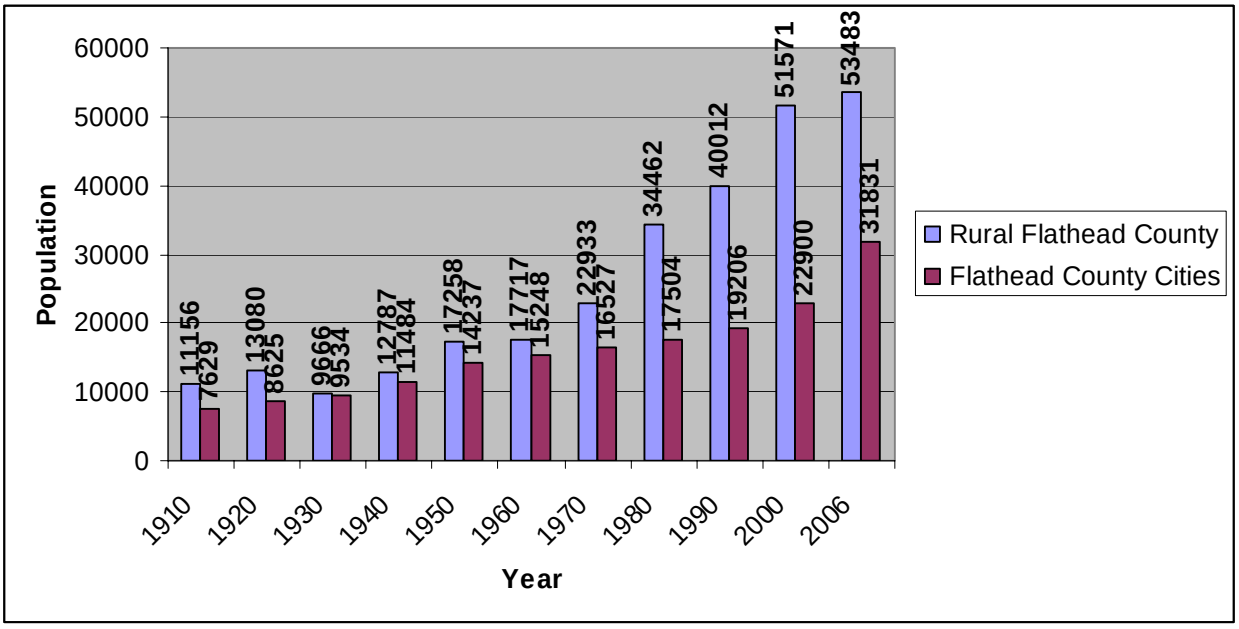
E. Transportation

There are no Interstate Highways in the County. The two major US Highways include US 93 the main north-south arterial and US 2 the main east-west arterial. The highways intersect in the City of Kalispell. Other major arterials include Montana Highway 40 and Montana Highway 260. Glacier International Airport provides commercial passenger service while private aircraft can land at Kalispell City Airport and other landing strips.

F. Settlement Patterns

There are three incorporated municipalities in Flathead County: Columbia Falls, Kalispell and Whitefish. As indicated in Figure 1, approximately 63% of the population in Flathead County, however, lived outside of the cities in 2006, the most recent year for which data is available.[1] Growth in the cities has increased notably since 2000. The cities have had far more growth than rural Flathead County, especially Kalispell and Whitefish, which have grown 36.6% and 53.5% respectively, compared to a 3.7% growth rate in rural Flathead County. Flathead County has had an overall growth rate of 14.6%.

Figure 1: Population Growth in Flathead County



Source: U.S. Census of the Population

Kalispell is the county seat and with an estimated 2006 population of 19,432 it has the largest population of the three cities. Whitefish had an estimated population of 7,723 and Columbia Falls had a population of 4,676 in 2006.

The U.S. Census recognizes eight additional communities in Flathead County as Census Designated Places (CDPs): Bigfork, Evergreen, Lakeside, Somers, Hungry Horse, Martin City, and Coram. Almost 16% of the population of rural Flathead County is located in CDPs. Table 1 shows the population increases from 1990 to 2000 in CDPs, cities, undesignated rural areas of Flathead County, and the county overall.

Table 1: Population Growth in Flathead County

	Population 2000	**Population 1990**	**Increase 1990 - 2000**	**Percent Increase 1990 - 2000**
Bigfork CDP	1,421	775	646	83.4%
Coram CDP	337	257	80	31.1%
Evergreen CDP	6,215	4,109	2,106	51.3%
Hungry Horse CDP	934	507	427	84.2%
Lakeside CDP	1,679	949	730	76.9%
Martin City CDP	331	305	26	8.5%
Somers CDP	556	317	239	75.4%
Total in CDPs	11,473	7,219	4,254	58.9%
Total in Rural County (outside of cities and CDPs)	40,048	32,793	7,255	22.1%
Total in Cities	22,900	19,206	3,694	19.2%
Total in County (including cities and CDPs)	74,471	59,218	15,253	25.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Census of the Population

Several other communities throughout the county that are not designated as CDPs are experiencing growth as well. These communities include Marion, Kila, Ferndale, Creston and West Glacier. The more remote communities such as Polebridge, Olney and Essex have not experienced the rapid growth that the more accessible communities in the county are currently undergoing.

G. Population Density

For the most part, high-density development is occurring close to local services, such as public utilities, maintained streets, hospitals and medical facilities and shopping. It is often cost effective for developments that are within a reasonable distance to a municipal water and sewer supply, to annex into the municipality to receive these services, allowing for a higher density, than would be allowed in a rural area. This type of growth is occurring adjacent to and near the three municipalities of Kalispell, Whitefish and Columbia Falls. Kalispell has seen dramatic expansion on the north and west, Whitefish to the south and east and Columbia Falls is expanding to the west.

Development in the rural areas of the county has also been fast paced over the past two decades. A naturally occurring pattern is that the closer to local services that a development is, the higher the density. Rural residential development requires at least one acre per residence if on a private water and sewer system. There are several public Sewer and Water Districts throughout the county that will accommodate higher density. Several rural areas where services are available are experiencing development pressure and increasing population. Among these areas are the communities located on or near Flathead Lake and include Bigfork, Lakeside and Somers.

II. Socio-Demographic Information

A. Seasonal Population

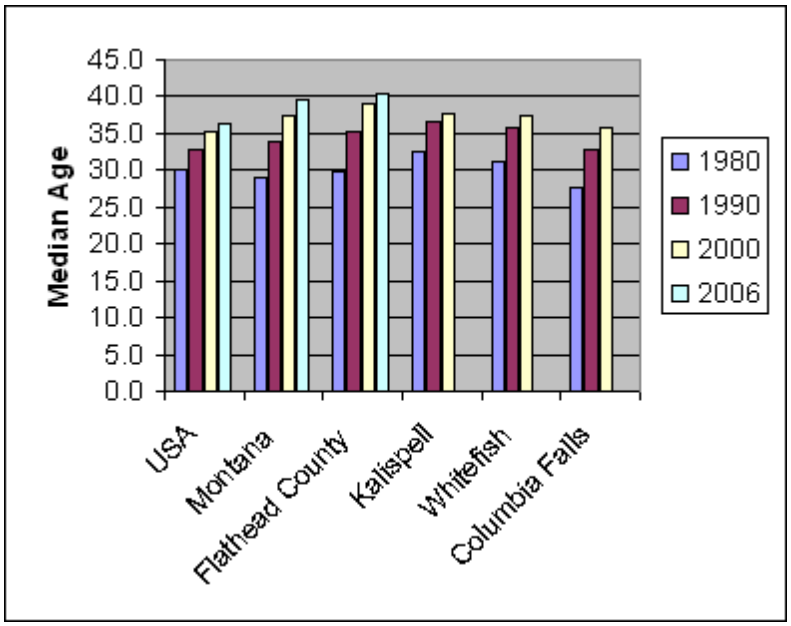
Due to its proximity to abundant natural amenities, Flathead County attracts a significant numbers of seasonal residents. The U.S. Census identifies housing units expressly dedicated for seasonal, recreational, or occasional use. The 1990 Census indicates that there were 2,517 housing units in Flathead County that were occupied for occasional use. In 2000, that number rose to 3,570, a 42% increase. During the same period, the total number of housing units in the county increased by 29%.

B. Demographics

The median age for the County is on the rise. In 1980, the median age for Flathead County was 29.7 years. Census 2000 data determined the median age of the population in Flathead County to be 39 years. The 2006 Community Survey determined the median age to be 40.3 years. Since 1980, the median age in Flathead County has increased by over 10 years.

Between 1990 and 2000, every age bracket except 25 to 34 experienced an increase in population. Between 2000 and 2006 however, the 25 to 34 bracket saw an increase, but a decrease occurred in the 35 to 44 bracket. The largest population gain and percent increase occurred in the 45 to 55 age bracket which has seen a 125.3% increase since 1990. The second largest increase occurred in the 55 to 64 age bracket at 110.3%, followed by the 85 and over age bracket at 84.8%.

Figure 2: Comparison of Median Age for Selected Areas

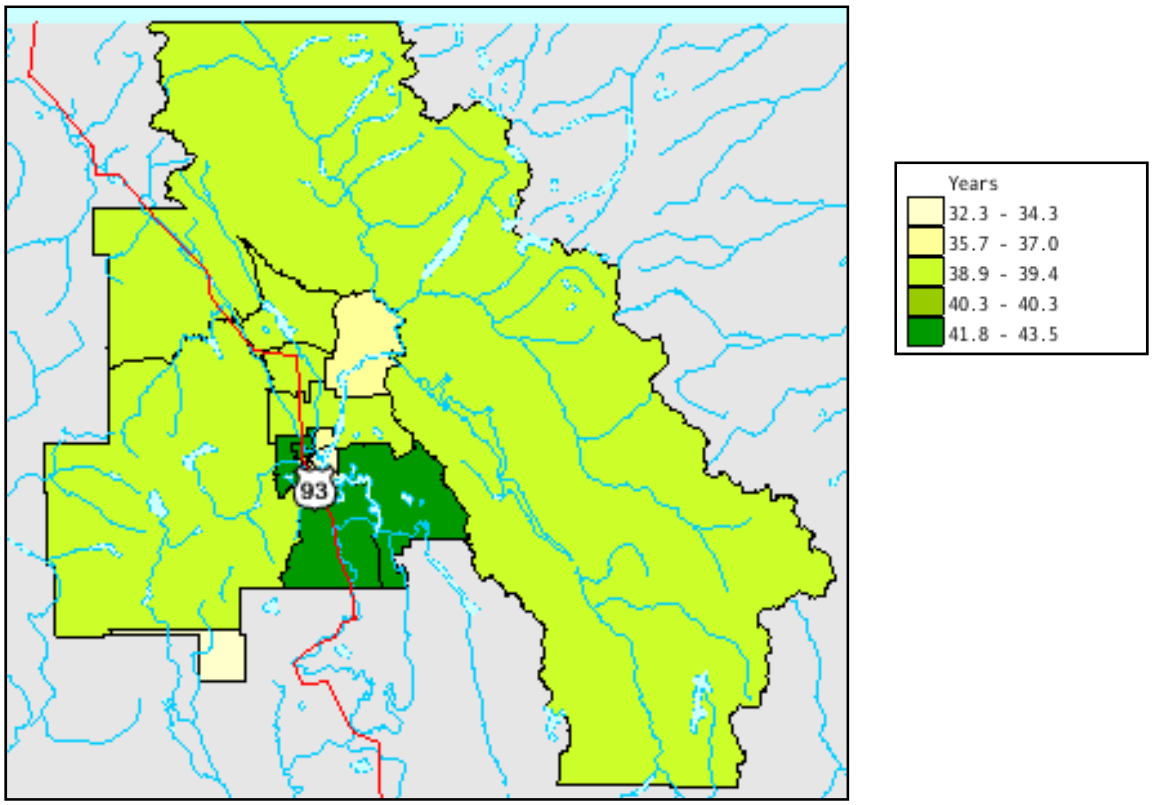


Source: U.S. Census

Map 3 shows the median age in Flathead County as designated by census tracts in Flathead County. It is notable that the median age is above the average in the southern portion of the county (Bigfork, Lakeside, and Somers), and lower than the average in the area around Columbia Falls.

Trends show that the population over 65 is generally healthier than previous generations. They are staying more active and demanding opportunities and facilities to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle. This age group typically prefers fitness activities as opposed to competitive sports.

Map 2: Median Age by Census Tract



Source: U.S. Census

C. Household Characteristics

Family households comprise almost 70% of households in the County compared to 64% of households statewide. Average household size in the County was 2.69 compared to 2.49 statewide. From the year 2000 to 2006 the average household and family size increased significantly. This is a reversal of a trend over the past 25 years towards smaller household size. This may reflect the cyclical nature of population trends and the increase in a family demographic with young children that are part of the echo boom – the children and grandchildren of baby boomers.

Table 2 : Household Characteristics - Flathead County

	Number: 2006	Percent of Total: 2006	Number: 2000	Percent of Total: 2000	Percent Change: 2000 - 2006
Total Households	31,409	**	29,588	**	6.2%
Family Households	21,699	69.1%	20,425	69.0%	6.2%
Family Households - Married Couple	18,287	58.2%	16,841	56.9%	8.6%
Non-Family Households	9,710	30.9%	9,163	31.0%	6.0%
Households with individuals under 18	9,709	30.9%	10,205	34.5%	-4.9%
Households with individuals 65 +	7,002	22.3%	6,577	22.2%	6.5%
Average Household Size	2.69	**	2.48	**	8.5%
Average Family Size	3.25	**	2.97	**	9.4%

Source: U.S. Census

D. Disability

The most recent information available from the U.S. Census states that 15.8% of the population five years and over is disabled. This statistic jumps to 42.4% of the population when range is reduced to those 65 and over. The U.S. Census includes the following categories for disabilities.

- Sensory Disability - blindness, deafness, or a severe vision or hearing impairment
- Physical Disability - A condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities, such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying
- Mental Disability - learning, remembering, or concentrating
- Self-care Disability - dressing, bathing, or getting around inside the home
- Mobility Disability - going outside the home alone to shop or visit a doctor's office
- Employment Disability - working at a job or business

The population over 65 is more likely to experience disabilities related to sensory, physical, self-care and mobility. Since this age group is among the fastest growing age cohort in the County, there will be a larger part of the population with these characteristics.

Disabilities, however, are not related solely to an aging population. Parks facilities should be designed and maintained to allow for the highest accessibility possible no matter the age.

III. Implications for Park Planning

1. The large geographic area of the County translates to long driving distances and spread out services. This increases the costs for maintenance and programming due to drive time for staff, fuel costs, and wear on vehicles.

2. Natural features such as lakes offer opportunities for water recreation but private development is limiting public access.

3. River systems with floodplains have ecological value that should be preserved through conservation parks to enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, and riparian systems. Such parks can provide natural recreation areas and provide connections between parks.

4. The extensive public lands offers ample opportunity for wilderness, hiking, camping, and other outdoor activities. Agencies that manage public lands are potential partners for development of county parks where agencies share common goals and provide connections or access to these public lands.

5. Open space and the rural landscape is the dominant characteristic of the County and should be enhanced with a park system.

6. The majority of the population in the county lives in the unincorporated areas. This population will demand park and recreation services from the county that would otherwise be provided for by municipalities in other counties in the State.

7. Population growth in the County has been concentrated in the valley in areas that has infrastructure to support denser populations. Remote areas such as Olney, Essex and Polebridge have not experienced the high growth and are not placing significant demands as other unincorporated areas.

8. There is a large seasonal population that increases the summer population and places demands on the park system that may not be reflected in the population numbers.

9. The population is aging and active seniors demand more fitness oriented activities.

10. As the rate of people with disabilities increase, park facilities should be designed with this population in mind.

11. Population trends are cyclical and long-term planning should account for this and design parks for all ages and abilities.

Chapter 3: Public Input

I. Survey

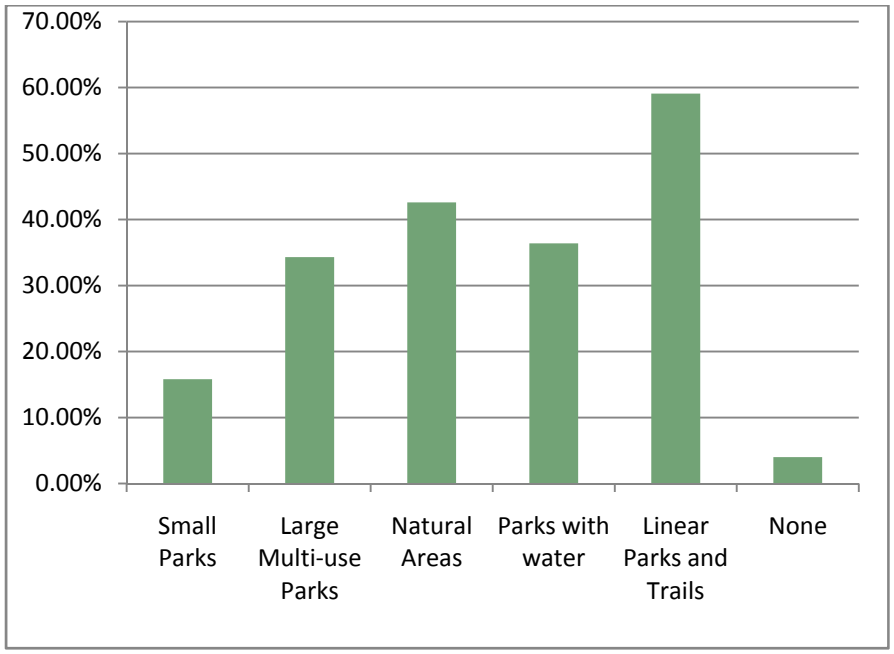
A. Methodology

From September, 2008 until January, 2009, the Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department conducted an on-line survey to provide residents an opportunity to have input in the plan. The survey was publicized through the Parks and Recreation list-serve, Flathead County Growth Policy List-Serve, and a number of civic groups that sent notices to their list-serves. There were also several articles in newspapers serving the county as well as radio and television coverage about the survey. Additionally, hard-copies of the surveys were available at all of the community meetings and were distributed at recreation league games. A total of 435 surveys were completed. (See Appendix E for complete survey with responses.)

B. Survey Responses

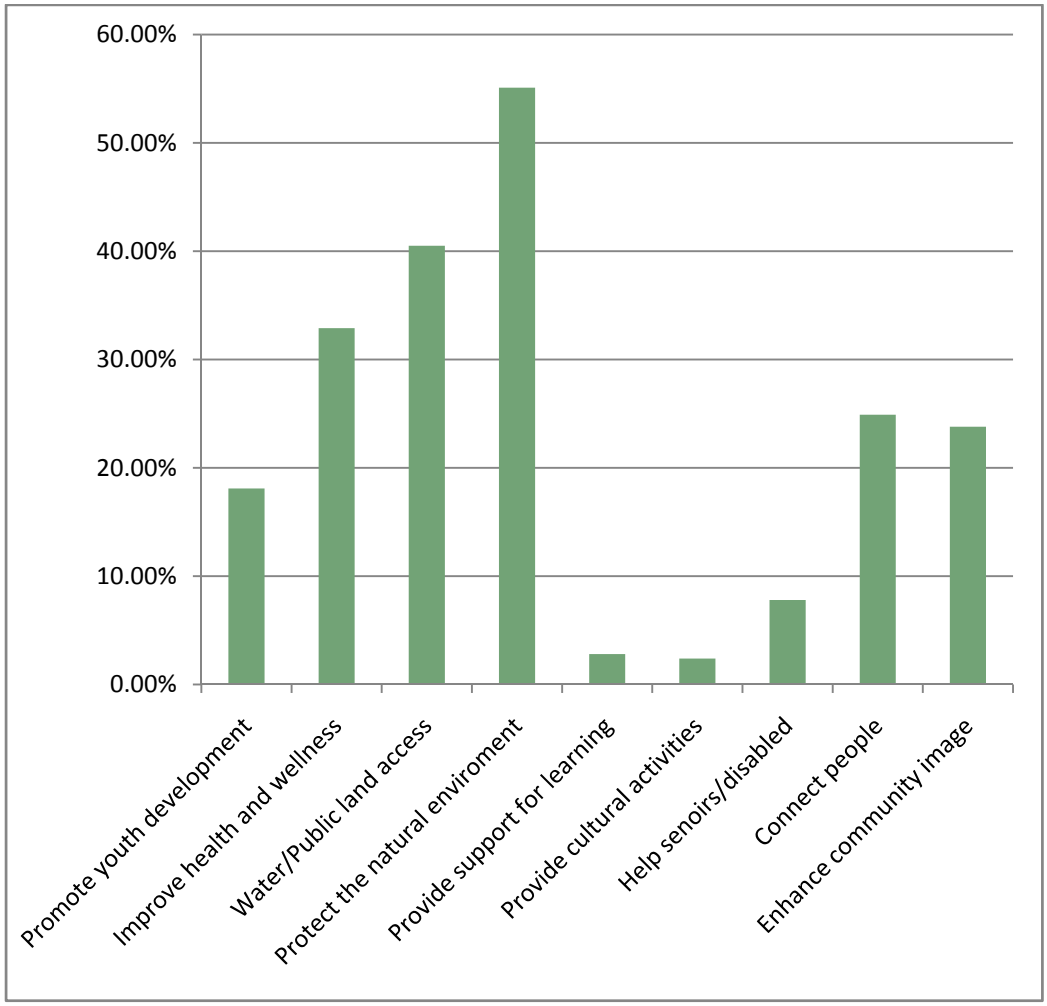
Survey respondents indicated that the types of parks most needed in the county are linear parks with trails, natural area parks and large multi-use parks. This correlates with the responses to the question regarding how people are using parks. The two most common responses to this question were, "Enjoy outdoors/nature" (71%) and "Walk or bike for exercise" (47%).

Figure 1: Types of Parks Needed in Flathead County



The survey also asked respondents to rate the public benefits of parks. The two most important benefits were protecting the natural environment and providing access to water and public lands.

Figure 2: Benefits of Parks

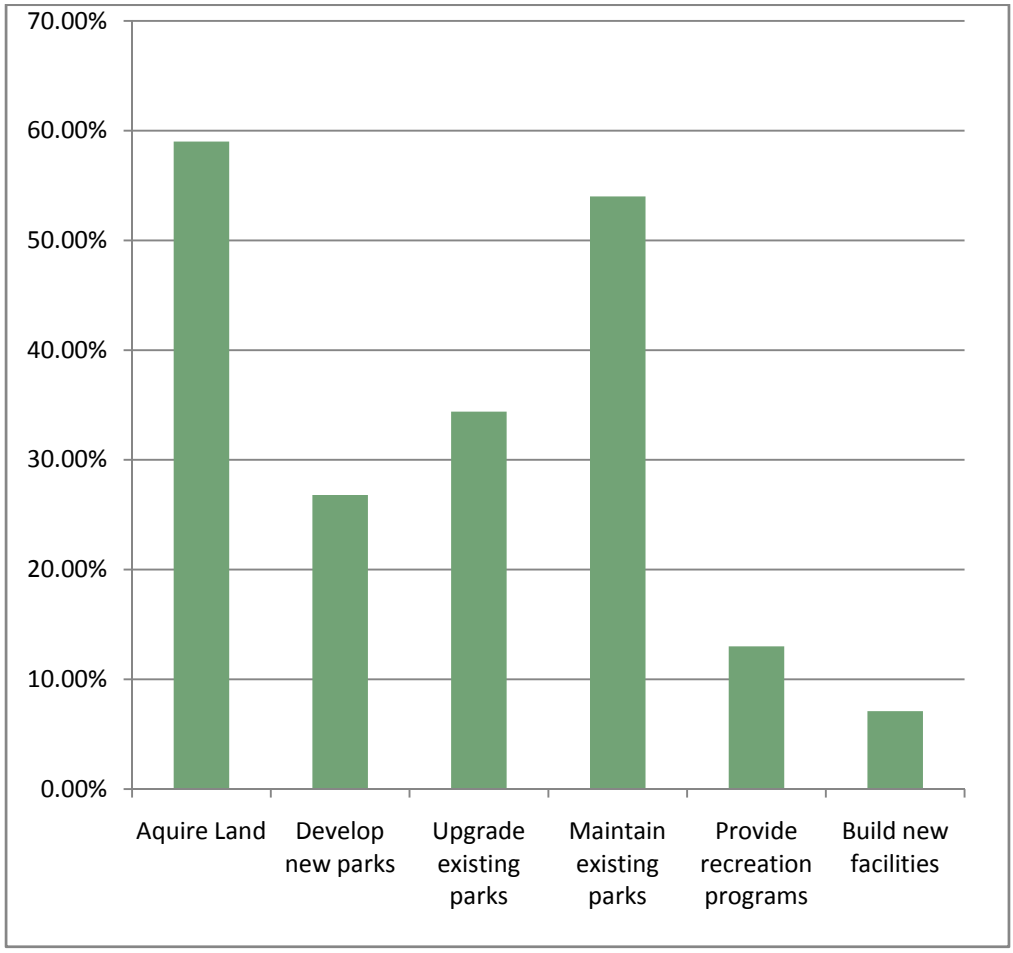


While providing access to water and public land was important for many respondents, access is most important when conveniently located to their home. The most common obstacle to use of county parks was distance from home. The top five reasons preventing park use are listed below.

1. Distance from home (40.8%)
2. Poor maintenance (31.5%)
3. Lack of restrooms (30.7%)
4. Doesn't contain desired features or facilities (29.5%)
5. Rowdy behavior of other park users (28.6%)

Several questions asked respondents about support for financial mechanisms to fund park improvements. Although more respondents (44.7%) indicated that they would support a county-wide tax than creation of a park maintenance district, (37.3%) neither option received more than the 50% approval that would be necessary to pass a ballot measure. In using the financial resources it does have, acquiring land while the opportunity exist and maintaining existing parks were the top two priorities.

Figure 3: Focus of Parks and Recreation Efforts



The five **most popular** policies for park planning were:

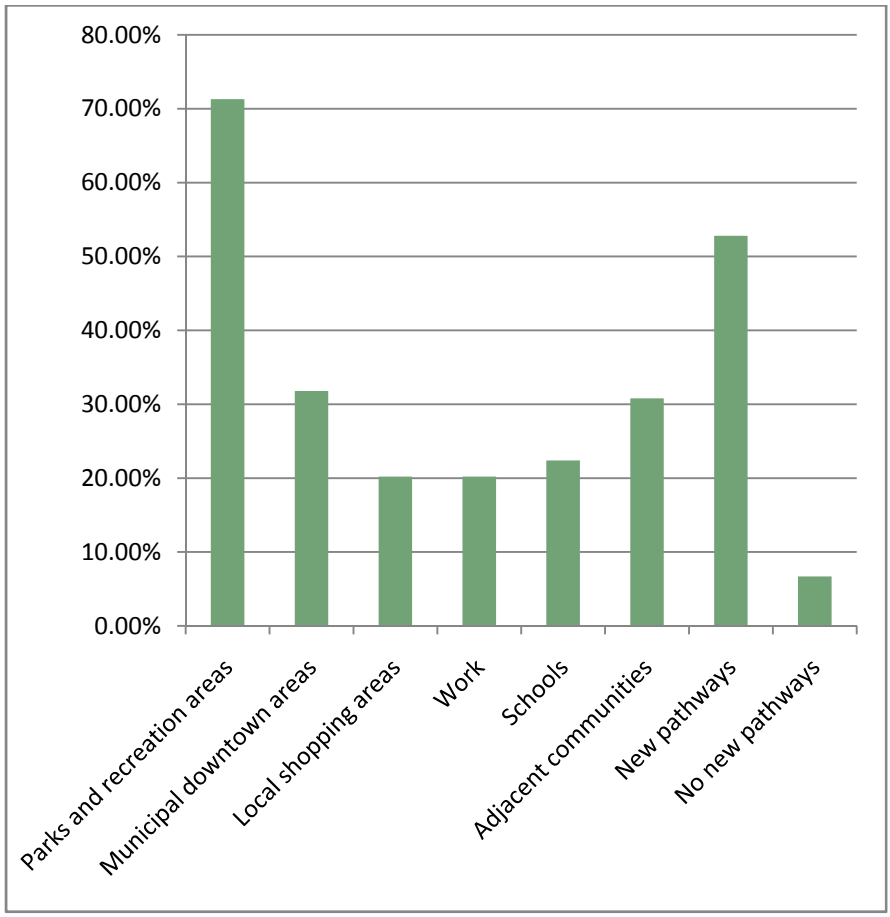
1. Parks should protect natural areas such as wetlands, floodplain and wildlife areas.
2. Connect parks with trails or pathways
3. Protecting access to public lands should be a priority
4. Develop a county-wide interconnected trail and pathway system.
5. Acquire new land for future parks

The five **least popular** policies for park planning were:

1. Provide alternative sports such as skateboarding, Folf, Bike jumps
2. Provide more athletic facilities such as tennis courts and basketball hoops
3. County parks should attract visitors from outside of the area
4. Provide a dog park in the county
5. Generate revenue from user fees

Three out of four survey respondents indicated that they currently use the trails trail system in Flathead County. When asked where additional trails should go, the most common response was to connect parks.

Figure 4: Preference for location of new trails



II. Public Outreach

Public outreach was an important part of the planning process. Public outreach provides an opportunity for citizens to be involved in the planning process and provides information about various planning issues, programs costs, and the difficulty or ease of program implementation. In addition to the survey, the following public outreach methods were used as part of the planning process.

Table 1: Public Outreach Summary

Technique	*Description*
Opinion Surveys	*An on-line survey was conducted as part of the planning process. There were 435 responses to the survey. Results were consulted to develop goals and policies. .*
Open House	*The Parks Board conducted an open house to present the draft plan and obtain public input.*
Community Meetings	*In the fall of 2008, there were six community meetings conducted at various locations in the county.* *Big Fork* *Columbia Falls* *Kalispell* *Lakeside* *West Glacier* *Whitefish*
Internet	*Draft documents were posted on the County Web Site. Meeting dates were posted on the web site. There was a list-serve of approximately 150 people who received regular e-updates regarding the plan.*
Focus Groups	*Focus Groups were conducted with each of the Park Advisory Groups and the Paths Committee. Additionally, there was a focus group comprised of representatives from municipal park departments and State and Federal public land managers. .*
Press Coverage	*Periodic press releases sent to media outlets in the County.*

III. Summary of Input

Certain topics were repeatedly mentioned in discussions at the community and focus group meetings. While many of the priorities expressed in these group discussions were similar to the responses in the survey, the group discussions provided more detail and insight into each of the topic. A summary of the most common topics are described below.

- **Partnerships -** Partnering with other agencies and civic groups will be essential to achieve the goals of the plan. Examples of successful partnerships include the Foys to Blacktail Trail effort, Kidsport Athletic Fields, Sliter Park in Big Fork, and Columbia Falls ballfields. Potential partners include the municipal park departments, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Dept. of Natural Resources and Conservation, and United States Forest Service. Civic groups and athletic groups are also potential partners.

- **Advisory Committees –** Advisory committees have worked well to engage citizens and take the initiative on promoting projects. The roles of the advisory committees should be better defined. There is a desire to form advisory committees in other parts of the county such as Columbia Falls, Kila, West Valley and the Canyon area.

- **Funding –** The Parks and Recreation Department is underfunded. There is not enough money for maintenance. Generally, participants felt that funding parks was a low priority for County Commissioners. There were questions about the use of cash-in-lieu of land fees that are collected as part of the subdivision process. Suggestions for financing improvements to the park system include impact fees, user fees, use of volunteers, forming a non-profit foundation, investigating a park maintenance district and privatizing some functions.

- **Opportunities to Improve Existing Parks** - There were numerous suggestions for improving or expanding the existing county parks. The biggest obstacle to implementing such improvements is funding.

- **Park Use Abuse** - Abuse of the park system by users was mentioned in almost every meeting. Issues included vandalism, illegal activity, partying after hours, litter, and uncontrolled dogs. Some of the problems were attributed to the heavier use of parks due to population growth. Parking congestion was a concern at Foys Lake and Somers Beach. There was concern about property values near parks where such problems occur.

- **Water Access –** There was general consensus among all groups that parks that provide access to water and rivers should be a priority. The crowds at Foys Lake and Somers Beach were noted as an indication of the demand for water access. Montana FWP is in the process of obtaining land for state parks on Flathead Lake. There is a proposed park on Flathead Lake in Lakeside that would result from the donation of

property. It was suggested that some County R.O.W. with lakefront access be converted to parks.

- **Trails –** Trails should be part of the park system. Trails should generally provide connectivity between parks and schools. There should be a trail connecting Kalispell to Lone Pine State Park and Foys Lake Park. Make trail maps widely available. Partner with trail organizations to build and maintain trails. Consider a canoe trail on some of the rivers.

- **Surplus Parks** - Park land that has been previously dedicated but is not functional as a park should be sold as surplus land. There should be a public process to evaluate the surplus parks before they are sold.

- **Park Values** - Natural area, riparian corridors, access to public lands are important park values that should be incorporated into the plan.

- **Recreation** - Participation in softball leagues is growing. There should be a long term solution to securing playing fields either through a long-term lease or owning fields. Rotary basketball competes with Park Department programs for gym space. Recreation programs provide a needed service for at-risk youths. Baby boomers will be more interested in health and wellness activities rather than competitive sports. There is a demand for tennis in Lakeside.

- **Accessibility –** Parks need to be easily accessible from roads. Handicap accessibility features are important.

Chapter 4: Organization

I. Governance

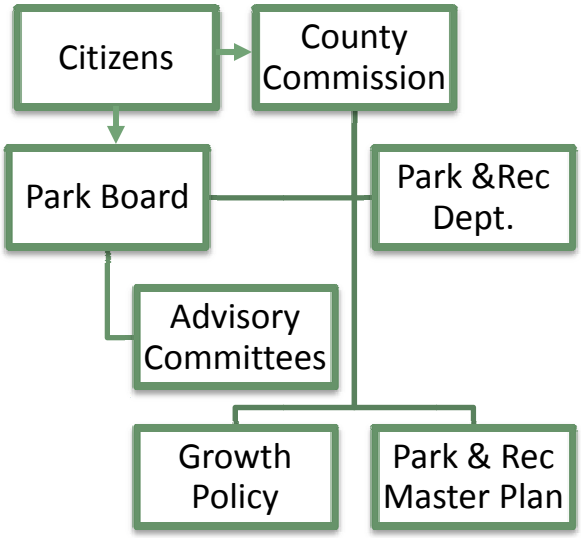
The Flathead County Parks Board oversees park and recreations services for the County. The board is comprised of five members appointed by the Flathead County Board of Commissioners to serve three year terms. The Board meets monthly and has responsibility for administration of the Parks and Recreation Department.

In July 1997, the County Commission merged the Parks and Recreation Department with the Weed Department. The two boards were merged and the Parks & Recreation Director currently acts as the noxious Weed Coordinator as well as the Facilities Manager in charge of grounds maintenance for the County.

The Parks Board advises staff and the County Commission on community needs and provides input related to parks and recreation issues. The Board is also responsible for long-range park planning. Park Boards are authorized under Section 7-16-2301 of the Montana Code Annotated (MCA). Under these provisions, the Park Board has authority to employ the department director and make rules for the use of parks and impose penalties for the violation of rules.

The Park Board does not have by-laws but must follow State law for open meetings, record keeping and decision making. By-laws could be adopted to establish more formal procedures for appointing committees, voting, meeting format and defining roles and responsibilities.

Figure 1: Organization Chart



II. Staffing

The Parks Department is comprised of two divisions: Parks and Facilities Maintenance Division and the Recreation Division. The Parks and Recreation Department employs nine people comprised of both full-time and seasonal employees. There are three building maintenance workers. The park maintenance staff consists of one full-time employee plus one seasonal employee. There is also a full-time recreation supervisor. In FY 2008 and FY2009, the budget for park maintenance and recreation has been approximately $300,000 dollars while the budget for the recreation division has been approximately $130,000.

Compared to other Park and Recreation programs in Montana and in the intermountain west, the Flathead Parks and Rec program has a significantly lower per capita expenditure for its parks program. Additionally, the staffing levels to maintain a comparable amount of park land ranges from one-half to one-tenth of the staffing levels of other park programs. Flathead County currently owns more than 70 parks and/or park sites. Approximately 32 parks are fully or partially developed.

Poor maintenance was cited by 31% of survey respondents as a reason for limiting their use of county parks. As the population in the County increases, there will be more use of parks resulting in more wear on facilities that will add to upkeep costs. In addition to lowering the quality of experience at county parks, deferred maintenance often requires more expensive repairs at a later date and can create liability issues.

More than half of residents said maintaining existing parks and recreation should be a top priority of the County ranking only behind acquiring land for future parks. In order to keep up with demand on existing parks and maintain new parks that are required to meet the needs of a growing population, it will be necessary to increase park maintenance staffing levels.

Table 1: Comparison of Staffing to Other Park Programs

	Flathead County	Bozeman	Missoula	Silverbow County	Average (CO, ID, WA)
Acres Developed Parks Maintained	383	425	500	276	1466
Maintenance Staff (FTE)	2	6	26	3	33.3
Staff per Developed Acres	1:191	1:20	1:19	1:92	1:37
Maintenance Budget Per Capita	$5.61	$33.84	$21.03	$19.62	$48.68

Source: Information compiled by Applied Communications from budgets and park plans

III. Advisory Committees

In 2006, the Park Board established Advisory Committee's in Lakeside and Somers to provide input on park and recreation issues in their respective communities. The Advisory Committee's are comprised of five voting members with two alternates. The members are appointed by the Park Board. Since the first two committees were established, the Park Board has created three more Advisory Committees. The Committees and their primary accomplishments are listed below.

- **Big Fork** – The Committee has completed an inventory of the county parks in the area and has made recommendations on improvements for each park.

- **Lakeside** – The Committee has prepared plans to develop Ben Williams Park and has conducted fundraising for playground equipment. The Committee is working with the community on a proposed waterfront park in Lakeside that would be acquired through a donation of land.

- **West Glacier** – The Committee was established to assist with the planning for developing Belton-Stage Park. There have been suggestions that the committee's function be expanded to include park issues in the entire canyon area from Hungry Horse to Essex.

- **Herron-Foys** – The Committee focuses on operations at Herron Park and Foys Lake as well as related projects such as the Foys to Blacktail Trail. The Committee works with the equestrian groups that use Herron Park on maintaining the various facilities.

- **Paths Committee** – The Committee was established to develop and implement a recreational trails plan. The Committee will be a permanent advisory committee to the Park Board. Upon completion, the plan will be adopted as an addendum to the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. It will provide direction in the allocation of Community Transportation Enhancement Program (CTEP) Funds.

- **Proposed Committees** - It is the goal of the Board to establish these types of committees throughout the county. During the public process there was support for additional committees to cover the Columbia Falls, Kila and West Valley areas. An Advisory Committee representing recreational programs and sports leagues is being created.

The roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Committees include:

1. Meet regularly to discuss local park issues.
2. Facilitate public input
3. Assess local park needs
4. Make recommendations to Park Board on improvements and programs for parks (See budgeting procedures on following page.)
5. Help identify funding opportunities for improvements
6. Have a representative attend Park Board meetings to report on Committee activities.

Recommended Procedures for Evaluating Park Project Requests

The Park Board and staff develop an annual budget for the county park system. After the budget is adopted, it is difficult to allocate additional funding for new projects that have not been included in the budget for that fiscal year. The following administrative procedures will help accommodate requests from the Advisory Committees, non-profit groups and citizens. It is recommended that the Park Board modify and refine these procedures to reflect their experience with the budgeting process.

1. Advisory Committee conducts assessment of park system in its service area and compiles list of proposed improvements. After completing the assessment, the Advisory Committee prioritizes needs.

2. Advisory Committee works with staff to develop cost estimates for improvements that rank as top priorities.

3. At the annual budget meeting with the Park Board, the Advisory Committee submits budget request to Park Board on a form to be provided by the Park Board.

4. The Park Board ranks the budget requests according to evaluation criteria and determines which projects to include in the next fiscal year budget.

Ranking Criteria

- This is a high priority project for the Advisory Group
- This project will improve safety and reduce liability
- This project will reduce overcrowding
- This project will fulfill needs for service as identified in the Level of Service analysis
- This project has an acceptable cost to implement
- This project will leverage other funding sources such as matching funds, grants, in-kind services or donations to make the project more cost effective or it will generate a positive revenue stream
- This project can be a successful pilot or model for other park projects
- This project has an acceptable maintenance costs or will lower current maintenance costs
- There is a high degree of public support for this project
- This project provides multiple benefits regarding recreation, conservation, social and economic assets
- The area of the proposed project has been under represented in past expenditures of park funds
- The project will advance other goals and objectives of the Park Master Plan

IV. Partnerships

The Flathead County Growth Policy notes the importance of establishing partnerships with other government agencies, civic organizations, non-profit groups and private businesses to accomplish the goals of the plans. Partnerships can create cost efficiencies through pooling resources, sharing costs, and joint programming. Multiple partners can generate a broader base of community support for projects. Grant makers are more likely to fund projects that are leveraging community resources from several partners.

There are a variety of partnership models that are available to local governments. Flathead County already has several examples of successful partnerships that are providing parks and recreation services. Types of partnerships are described below.

- **Intergovernmental Agreements** – Agreements with other government agencies may range from leases, maintenance agreements, joint purchase programs to joint development of park and recreation facilities. The Park and Recreation Department has arrangements with a number of school districts in the county to use gym space. Formalizing the arrangements through a lease or intergovernmental agreement may help avoid potential use conflicts. The lease with the Conrad Cemetery Association to use land for the softball complex is another example of an intergovernmental arrangement. These leases must be renegotiated periodically and securing long-term commitments is an issue.

- **Public – Private Partnerships** – These often include partnerships with other government agencies or private organizations to develop new facilities. Financing arrangements, maintenance responsibilities, and other roles and responsibilities are set forth in a contract or memorandum of agreement. Development agreements are sometimes used to construct new facilities as part of a large subdivision. The Kidsport Complex on the north side of Kalispell is an example of a sports complex that was developed through a partnership between Kalispell, Department of Natural Resources and Conversation and non-profit sports organizations.

- **Foundations** - In some jurisdictions, citizens have formed non-profit foundations to raise fund for park projects. Foundations that are formed as a 501(c)(3) organization can accept donations, apply for certain grants, and conduct fundraising activities. The Foy's to Blacktail Trails and Rails-to-Trails groups are examples of non-profits that are raising funds for a specific project in the County.

- **Intergovernmental Coordination** – In addition to the three incorporated municipalities, recreation facilities and programs are provided by the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, Flathead National Forest, and Glacier National Parks. Montana Department of Transportation administers the CTEP program. Coordinating with the agencies to identify common issues and goals can suggest ways to work together to achieve these goals. As part of the planning process it was suggested that the agencies have regular joint meetings to facilitate such efforts.

Keys to a Successful Partnership

Following are recommended criteria for evaluating potential partnerships.

1. A Commitment from Executive Leadership:
A successful partnership can result only if there is commitment from leadership of both the government and private sector organization to work together. Well-informed leaders play a critical role in developing effective partnerships.

***2. A Statutory Foundation for Partnering*:**
There should be a statutory foundation for the implementation of public and private partnerships.

3. Direct Public Sector Involvement:
Once a partnership has been established, the public-sector must remain actively involved in the project. On-going monitoring of the performance of the partnership is important in assuring its success.

4. A Well-Crafted Plan:
A carefully developed plan will substantially increase the probability of success of the partnership. This plan should clearly describe the responsibilities of both the public and private partners and have provisions for dispute resolution

5. Effective Communication with Stakeholders:
More people will be affected by a partnership than just the public officials and the private sector partner. It is important to communicate with and involve all stakeholders. These may include affected employees, the portions of the public receiving the service, the press, and relevant interest groups. Successful implementation should positively affect the work environment and relationships with sponsoring organizations, employees and other stakeholders.

6. The Right Opportunity:
Not every situation is ripe for a true partnership. Partnerships should be carefully evaluated and both parties should set reasonable expectations.

7. The Right Partner:
The "lowest bid" is not always the best choice for selecting a partner. The partner's experience, long-term viability, and willingness to work with local governments are important factors in identifying the right partner.

8. Well-Defined Management Processes:
It is critically important that both public and private sector parties agree on key management processes early in the formation of the relationship. These include management responsibilities, quality assurance, reporting requirements, and financial arrangements.

V. Volunteers

During the community meetings and focus group sessions, citizens suggested that volunteers could assist in certain park operations and should be used as tools in maximizing limited resources. Benefits of using volunteers include contribution of in-kind services to perform tasks not within the county budget and boosting the number and types of various programs that can be offered. Additionally volunteerism engages citizens, help build supports for programs and can foster leadership skills in young adults. Adult volunteers often bring specialized skills to a project.

The recreation programs rely heavily on volunteer coaches and officials. Montana Conservation Corp provides trail construction and maintenance services. Often service clubs, businesses, or private individuals will offer to help construct playgrounds or maintain park facilities. Various challenges, however, limit the ability of the Parks and Recreation Department to utilize volunteer resources. The following table outlines typical practices to address these challenges.

Challenge	Recommended Best Practice
Staff time to manage volunteers	Monitor the number of volunteers and the amount of volunteer hours as compared to staff time to manage volunteer programs as a measure of effectiveness of program. Identify appropriate activities for volunteers in advance so they can be used most effectively
Liability and insurance issues if volunteer gets injured	Civic group or workplace of volunteers provides proof of insurance for their participants Insurance coverage provided through non-profit park foundation Work with County Risk Committee to develop policies and procedures for covering volunteers through county insurance
Quality control of volunteer projects	Written policies and procedures Background checks for volunteers in youth programs Screening and training for volunteers
Recruiting volunteers on an on-going basis	Volunteer Recognition Assign staff person as volunteer coordinator

Resources:

- National and Community Service Agency, www.nationalservice.org
- UPS Foundation, www.community.ups.com

Chapter 5: Level of Service

I. Level of Service – Methodology

Benchmarks provide a community with a quantifiable method to evaluate existing and proposed park and open space systems. National benchmarks have been the product of research, professional judgment and intuition of people having experience with the subject. National standards provide a basis for comparison but often are modified to meet local conditions.

The recommended approach to develop benchmarks for a region is to apply the 'Systems Approach to Planning' that includes a 'Level of Service Analysis' advocated by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) planning guidelines. The systems planning approach focuses on creating a comprehensive and interrelated system of parks, recreation, open spaces and pathways that:

- Respond to locally-based needs, values, and conditions;
- Provide an appealing and harmonious environment;
- Protect the integrity and quality of the surrounding natural systems;

To apply this systems approach the following methodology has been used.

1. **Develop Park Classification System** – The park classifications used in the master plan are based on the classification system that is commonly used in park planning. Definitions reflect some of the unique characteristics of Flathead County in regards to the large size of the county and the rural character of the service area.

2. **Inventory and Mapping** – A database was created to include not only county parks but municipal parks, schools, State parks and recreation sites, and Federal public lands. The complete database and maps showing these sites are compiled in a Technical Resource document.

3. **Develop Level of Service (LOS) Benchmarks** - The plan analyzes level of service based on the four criteria:

    - Per Capita analysis
    - Service area analysis
    - Functional analysis
    - Suitability analysis

    Each of these LOS criteria is described in more detail in subsequent sections.

4. **Identify Needs** – Based on the level of service analysis, current and future needs are identified.

II. Park Classifications

For purposes of the Flathead County Master Plan, the LOS analysis uses the following classification system.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

POCKET PARK: Pocket-parks, tot lots, and children's playgrounds are small, single-purpose play lots generally less than two acres in size. They are generally located to provide some passive open space in developments and to provide a small amenity where no other park sites are conveniently located. Park features usually include a small open grass area and may include a children's playground or a picnic area. In the County these are typically maintained by the homeowner's association.

NEIGHBORHOOD PARK: This park is generally within ½ to one-mile of the residential area being served. It is accessible by a safe route or trail and typically contains a turf area for informal play, a playground, and picnic facilities. It ranges in size from 3-10 acres. The land is fully developable for park uses; that is, it is not in environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains, a designated retention pond or containing steep terrain. Neighborhood Parks may be combined with a school. There may be both passive and active recreation opportunities

Figure 1: Picnic Shelter in Potoczny Park

COMMUNITY: A Community Park is a larger park that serves multiple neighborhood areas with a two-mile service area radius but will often attract residents from much larger area. The size range is 10-100 acres. The land is fully developable for park uses; that is, it is not in environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains, a designated retention pond or containing steep terrain. Community Parks may be combined with a school. A Community Park will include similar type of development as a Neighborhood Park and provide additional facilities that consolidate adult and youth programmed activities. Safe, non-motorized routes often link the park to other parks and the neighborhoods that they serve. Parking for vehicles is available, either on-street or adjacent to the park, so that crossing a road is not required. Generally, community parks include both ample active recreation opportunities with areas for passive use. Facilities for group activities and events are available.

OPEN SPACE - NATURAL AREA PARK: This type of park may include environmentally sensitive lands, steep terrain, flood plain and other natural areas that are only minimally developed and may serve as conservation areas, educational and wildlife watching opportunities. "There are no specific standards for how much conservation land a community ought to have. Instead, it is dependent on the number and quality of natural and historical resources in the area, public desire to preserve these valuable sites, and the willingness of the elected body to provide funds for their preservation." Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, National Recreation and Park Association.

Figure 2: Carlyle Johnson Park

SPORT COMPLEX: Athletic facilities include parking lot, drinking water, lighting, multiple organized ball fields, courts, and bathrooms. Serves people from the city and county. A minimum size of at least 20 acres is recommended for optimum use. Designed for active recreation use.

SPECIAL USE PARK: Covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose uses, such as a nature center, historic site, plaza, urban square, aquatic center, equestrian facilities, campgrounds and golf course. Often these are fee based activities and may or may not be public parks.

LINEAR PARK: Linear parks may be in a healthy, natural state or developed landscaped areas and other lands that follow corridors such as abandoned railroad right-of-ways, creeks, canals, power lines, and other linear, elongated features. This type of park usually contains trails, landscaped areas, viewpoints, and seating areas. They may compose portions of a system of green infrastructure and serve as links from one park to another.

WATER ACCESS PARK: Primarily designed to provide fishing, boat or swimming access or protect riparian areas.

REGIONAL PARK: Regional parks supplement neighborhood and community parks, serving a broader base of recreation needs in addition to what is provided in the smaller parks. The size range is 50 to 200 acres, servicing the entire County and visitors. At least 50% of the land is developable for park uses and the rest may contain environmentally sensitive areas such flood plains. Regional parks offer a balance of active and passive recreation, while including sizeable undeveloped areas with natural features and/or water features.

III. Inventory

An inventory of parks is included in Appendix A. The list classifies each park according to type and includes a list of facilities and water features for each park. Map 1 in this chapter indicates the general location of parks sites. The following statistics regarding the Flathead County Park system are derived from this inventory.

Table 1: Flathead County Parks Statistics

Item	Statistic
Total Number of County Park Sites	70
Total Acres of County Park Land	515
Total Number of Developed Park Sites	32
Total Acres of Developed Parks	383
Total number of Parks with Fishing, Boat or Swimming Access	14
Average Size of Water Access Park Sites	2
Total Number of Neighborhood Parks	14
Total Number of Community Parks	4
Total Number of Sports Park	2
Total Number of Special Use Parks	2
Total Number of Linear Parks	3

Source: Database Compiled for Master Plan (See Appendix A)

Notes:

1. *The Belton-Stage Park is classified as a community park but is currently under development.*

2. *Conrad Complex is a sports park that is leased by the county. It is not included in the inventory of county owned parks. Although several neighborhood parks have a ball field, they function primarily as neighborhood parks and do not meet the criteria for a sports park. Carlye Johnson is undersized according to recreation standards.*

3. *Herron Park functions as both a community park and a special use park with equestrian facilities. It is also part of the Foys to Blacktail trail system. The Foys Community Center is a special use park adjacent to Herron Park.*

4. *Parks that are undeveloped are classified as "open space". Sites should be evaluated to determine if they have potential to function as a recreation site or if they have conservation values to be treated as a "natural area".*

Insert Map

IV. Level of Service – Per Capita Analysis

A per capita analysis measures the level of service that is being provided based on the amount of park land compared to the population base. As indicated in Table 2, in order for the county to maintain the current level of service for future populations, it must add 143 acres of park land by the year 2025.

Table 2: Current Level of Service vs. Future Growth

Park Type	Acres	Current Acreage per 1000 pop.	Acreage per 1000 Pop. w/o new facilities in 2025	Additional acres needed to maintain current acreage per 1000 population
Land-Based	97	1.9	1.3	38
Water-Based	163	3.0	2.2	57
Special Use	123	2.3	1.7	48
Overall	383	7.2	5.2	143

Note: Analysis only includes developed park land sites.

Population base = 2006 unincorporated population.

The national standards in the following table are compiled from a number of sources including the National Park and Recreation Association, American Planning Association and park plans in Montana. While total county park land is equivalent to national standards, many of these parks are undeveloped or primarily provide water access. If the level of service analysis is completed for just neighborhood and community parks per capita park land is significantly below national standards. Neighborhood and community parks are needed to provide basic play and fitness opportunities for residents of unincorporated towns.

Table 3: County Level of Service vs. National Standards

	Acres Per 1000 Population	National Standard
Total Parkland	10	10
Developed Parkland	7	10
Land Based Parks –Non-Special Use	2	7-10

**Note: Land Based Parks = Neighborhood & Community Parks*

V. Level of Service – Spatial Analysis

The spatial analysis is primarily a mapping exercise that divides the county into sub-regions and then examines if there are any gaps in services or opportunities for expanding the parks system within each sub-area. The following factors are considered in this analysis.

1) Each population center should have convenient access to a neighborhood park with developed play facilities. This park could be a county park or a park in adjacent municipality. A school site with recreation facilities might double as a neighborhood park in small unincorporated areas that lack other facilities.

2) Are there opportunities to expand the park system and meet goals through partnerships with other agencies that have park and recreation sites or conservation land in the area?

3) Are there natural features such as lakes or river corridor that could provide water access or conservation opportunities?

4) Are there connections that can be made between county park sites and schools, other recreation sites or existing trails?

5) Are there opportunities to improve access to public lands?

6) Are there improvements that should be made to existing park sites that are underdeveloped or overcrowded?

Figure 3 : Foys Lake, Herron Park and Lone Pine State Park offer opportunity for connectivity

The following tables summarize the opportunities for each sub-area. The analysis encompasses the unincorporated areas that have concentrations of population. The level-of-service maps are included in Appendix B.

Table 4: Future Level-of-Service Analysis by Sub-Area (See Appendix B for Maps)

Area	***Park and Recreation Needs***
Marion *(See Future LOS Map 1)*	• *Regional park with play and sports facilities* • *Potential partnership with school* • *Little Bitterroot Lake and Ashley Lake access and open space* • *Potential partnership with FNF on Ashley Lake*
Kila *(See Future LOS Map 2)*	• *Community park with potential partnership with school* • *Potential to develop parks and cultural opportunities along the Great Northern Historic trail*
West Valley *(See Future LOS Map 2)*	• *Sports and open space park, potential partnership with school*
Whitefish *(See Future LOS Map 3)*	• *Whitefish Lake access and open space*
Happy Valley *(See Future LOS Map 3)*	• *Potential partner with state on Trust lands to meet park need* • *Community park with sports facilities and open space*
Columbia Falls *(See Future LOS Map 4)*	• *Red Bridge trail* • *Flathead River access* • *Continue Partnerships*
Hungry Horse *(See Future LOS Map 4)*	• *Regional park with river access and open space, also serving Coram & Martin City* • *Potential partner with the Forest Service*
Martin City *(See Future LOS Map 4)*	• *Regional park in Hungry Horse*
Coram *(See Future LOS Map 4)*	• *Flathead River access and open space* • *Regional park in Hungry Horse*
West Glacier *(See Future LOS Map 4)*	• *Belton Stage Park Development* • *Potential partner with NPS* • *Lake Five access and open space* • *Middle Fork of the Flathead River access and open space*
Kalispell *(See Future LOS Map 5)*	• *Opportunity to equitably partner or cooperate with City of Kalispell for park needs* • *Regional park with sports facilities, water access and open space*
Evergreen *(See Future LOS Map 5)*	• *River access and open space* • *Regional park with sports facilities, water access and open space*
Creston *(See Future LOS Map 6)*	• *Lake Blaine access and open space* • *Flathead River access and open space* • *Community park with sports facilities and open space, potential partner with school*

Somers *(See Future LOS Map 7)*	• *Flathead Lake access and open space* • *Potential for cultural park partnership* • *Flathead River access and open space*
Lakeside *(See Future LOS Map 7)*	• *Flathead Lake access and open space* • *Community park with sports facilities and open space, potential partnership with school*
Big Fork *(See Future LOS Map 8)*	• *Work with the Big Fork community and County Road Department to secure water access where feasible in Big Fork Bay.* • *Expand Carlyle-Johnson Sports Park* • *Echo Lake regional park with water access and open space*
County-wide *Water Access*	• *County R.O.W. – Ownership issues – need long term policy* • *Foys Lake, Whitefish Lake Park, Columbia Falls River Access* • *Large waterfront property/access*
County-wide *Natural*	• *Flood Plain/Riparian/Wetland* • *Open Space* • *River trail potential* • *Viewsheds* • *Sustainable*
County-wide *Special Use*	• *Cultural/Historic – Railroad/Early Communities/Native Amer.* • *Gymnasium* • *Other – As opportunities arises*

VI. Level of Service – Functional Analysis

Traditional needs assessments for parks and recreation have a facilities based focus. The per capita analysis and spatial analysis evaluate whether there are adequate park sites or facilities to meet the needs of the population. More recent park planning efforts, however, also consider the "function" of parks.

"New social mandates and needs are creating a complex environment, requiring a broader view, that takes more factors into account in the planning process and the decision equation, and that satisfies a wider range of needs and values."

(National Park and Recreation Administration, "Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines.)

Analyzing the need for parks according to function provides a community with a way to assess if the park system contains all of the components to meet the various open space and recreation needs of the community. The following table identifies the various park functions and describes how those functions are being met in the county:

Table 5: Flathead County – Park Functional Analysis

Function	Description	Comments
Wilderness	Birding, Habitat, Hiking, Camping…	National Forest, Glacier National Park, State Forest. As private forest land is developed, access to these public lands becomes a concern. These areas are used by county residents and non-resident visitors.
Forest Park	Trails, Nature Areas, skiing, Multi-Use	Herron Park. Foys to Blacktail. State and Federal parks and public lands.
Play Park	Play Ground Equipment, Passive Recreation	Municipal and County neighborhood parks primarily meet this need. Must be conveniently located to residents. Some underserved unincorporated areas.
Sports Park	Ball fields, organized sports	Conrad Complex, Carlyle Johnson are operated by the county. Kidsport and Whitefish soccer complex are operated by a partnership between the cities and sports groups. Parks with playing fields are used by local residents but are not suitable for tournaments. There will be growing pressure on these complexes with population growth.
Garden	Passive, formal landscape – garden	Conrad Mansion in the City of Kalispell. Public input indicated that this function was more suitable for urban areas. FVCC Arboretum

Group Activities	Events, Group gatherings	Group facilities at Foy's Community Center. Some state parks and USFS sites have picnic shelters. Lone Pine State Park and Tally Lake have group facilities. Municipalities have parks that have facilities for groups. Demand for these facilities has been increasing. Would be an appropriate use for a community or regional park.
Heritage	Interpretive Center, Museum, Arts, Cultural and Historic Sites.	None of the county parks have heritage sites or interpretive plaques. Some sites with signage within municipalities. Demersville Cemetery has potential Opportunities for sites regarding Native American and early settlement history could be incorporated into park designs.
Conservation	Wetland, Floodplain Preservation, Riparian, Wildlife Habitat	Leisure Island located in floodplain is primarily a natural site. State of Montana FWP has wildlife habitat preserves. Conservation easements protect some sensitive areas. Connecting scattered sites to preserve natural corridors would be most effective. Both urban and rural residents use county parks to access natural areas.
Water Access	Fishing, Boating, Swimming access	There are 14 county parks with water access. Montana FWP has additional sites. Whitefish Beach is a municipal park. County sites average 2 acres in size. There is growing pressure on these parks. There are no large community parks with water access suitable for group gatherings.
Fitness	Exercise equipment, gyms, Indoor Swimming,	This need is being met by private or quasi-public fee-based facilities. (See Chapter 6 for discussion on recreation needs)
Sports	Gym, Sports Complex	Two sports complexes for softball, soccer. No gymnasium except for space leased from schools.
Connectors	Trails, Greenways	Rails-to-Trails. Trails Plan being developed by PATHS committee. Public input identified demand for connector trails and greenway corridors
Special Interest	Equestrian, Golf, Skiing, Folf, Dog Park	Herron Park provides equestrian facilities. Golf courses are private or quasi-public fee based facilities. Downhill skiing private fee based facility. FOLF, skateboarding and dog park are more urban focused.

VII. Level of Service - Suitability Analysis

Existing undeveloped park land and future sites should be evaluated to determine the site's suitability for park and recreation use. The County Subdivision Regulations contain specific standards to address the suitability of park land that is proposed to meet the requirements for park land dedication in the subdivision regulations. The County subdivision regulations state the following:

> *Land dedicated for public parks or recreational purposes shall be useable land, shall be of appropriate shape and size and shall have convenient access by public roads meeting all appropriate County standards and specifications. Proposed public parkland with any of the following limitations may not be considered appropriate for park purposes*
>
> *i. Where more than five percent of the site has an average cross slope greater than 25 percent.*
> *ii. Where more than 50 percent of site has an average cross slope greater than two to six percent.*
> *iii. Where more than one percent of the park site is swampy or marshy.*
> *iv. Where the site is less than five acres in size, except in cases of providing public access to water based recreation.*
> *v. Where the site is an undeveloped open space area within a subdivision which does not have appropriate size, dimensions, or access to serve as a park.*
> *vi. Where proposed sites have been utilized in the past for industrial or other uses which could have hazardous waste implications.*

In some instances, sites with hazardous waste contamination, may be remediated and make a suitable park. The Belton-Stage park site is an example of an old landfill that has been remediated and accepted for use as a park. The county would need to work closely with property owners and regulatory agencies before accepting these parcels. Additionally, a swampy or marshy area if part of a riparian area that has high conservation value may be acceptable.

Figure 4 : Belton-Stage Park is a former landfill site

In addition to the subdivision standards, there are additional considerations in determining whether a particular site or facility is suitable for park purposes. These include:

- Are the costs to develop or maintain the site comparable to other county parks? If costs will be excessive, is there a specified revenue source to cover the extra costs?
- Is the site open to the public? Sites that are within gated subdivisions, are landlocked, or have limited access points are not suitable park land.
- Are there traffic safety issues associated with the site? Park sites adjacent to roads with heavy traffic or high speeds require safe pedestrian crossings.
- Dense vegetation limits usability, creates areas of seclusion that may conceal illegal behavior and could create a fire hazard. Some areas of dense vegetation may require thinning.
- Older play equipment, broken sidewalks, and remote locations create liability and safety issues.

Appendix B list park sites and contains a preliminary evaluation of the sites based on the above criteria. The table notes sites that are potential surplus sites. More detailed evaluation of these sites should be conducted prior to any action to dispose of them is taken.

The table also notes sites that are suitable for parks but require improvements or maintenance to bring them up to optimal conditions.

Chapter 6: Organized Sports

I. Background

Flathead County operates both youth and adult recreation programs. Recreation programs are exclusively devoted to competitive sports leagues and do not include alternative programming such as arts and crafts, fitness, or similar activities.

The County Park and Recreation staff is comprised of a Recreation Program Supervisor and a Park Concession Supervisor. The program is self-supporting with registration fees and sponsorships covering the costs of operating the program. Volunteers are used for coaching and some officiating of games.

The County leases gym space from school districts to operate indoor recreation programs such as basketball and volleyball. The County must compete with the school programs, traveling clubs, Flathead Valley Community College intramurals and Rotary basketball for gym space. Currently, the County is subject to the various school districts' use policies. There are no formal agreements securing long term use of the space.

The softball leagues primarily use the Conrad Complex. The county leases the land from the Conrad Cemetery Association and has constructed the facilities at the site. The County is responsible for maintenance of the facility. Registration fees for the leagues cover the annual costs to maintain and lease the land. The current lease is a short term lease and will be due for negotiation in 2014. When the lease was renegotiated in 2008, the annual fee is currently $15,000.

Following are some key statistics regarding the Recreation Program for 2008

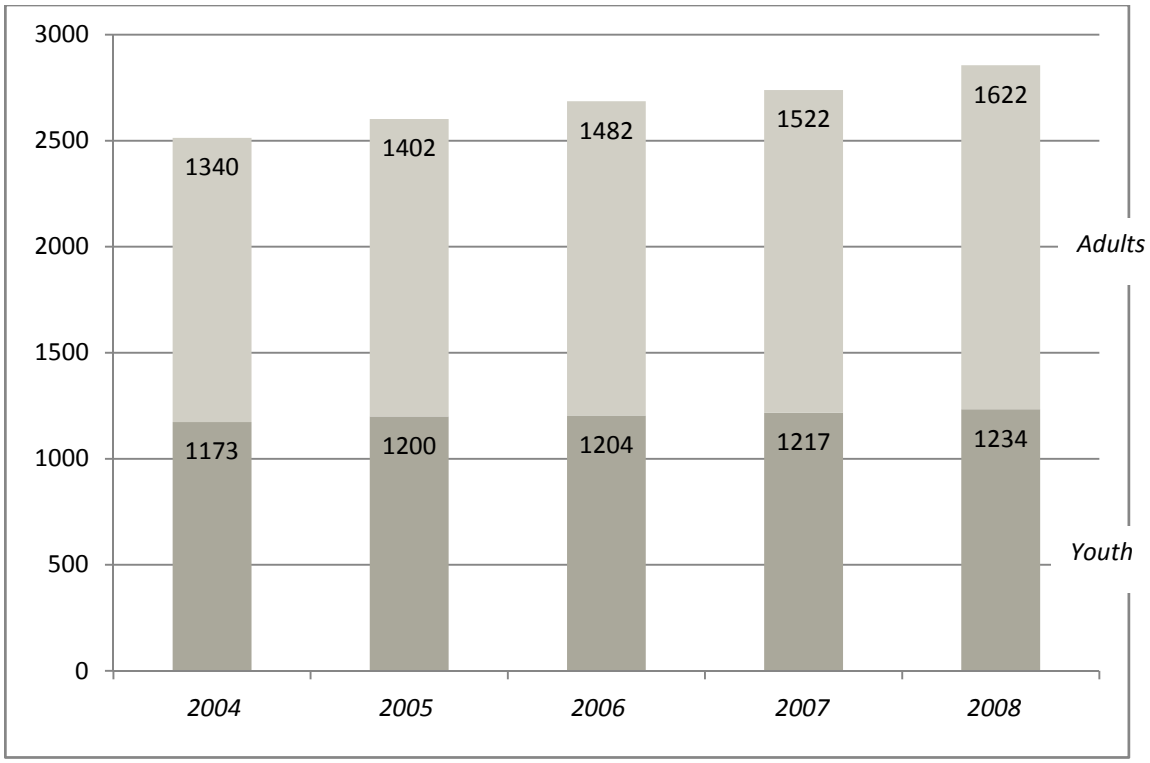
- Number of Adult leagues offered = 11
- Number of Youth leagues offered = 7
- Softball Tournaments = 8
- Number of Volunteers = 165
- Number of programmed times a gym is used = 350

II. User Trends

The County has youth programs for t-ball, basketball, volleyball, and flag football. It has adult programs for softball, basketball, and flag football. Softball had the most participants of all sports programs.

From 2004 to 2008 the number of participants in sports leagues increased every year. Participation in adult leagues (light gray) increased by 21% over this five year time period while participation in youth leagues increased by 5%.

Figure 1: County Recreation Leagues –Total Number of Participants



Source: Flathead County Parks and Recreation Department

In 1997, revenue from sports programs amounted to $59,000. Participation in sports has increased every year since then. Revenue collected from all team sports has increased 44% over the five year time period from $105,139 in 2004 to $151,106 in 2008. Softball accounted for half of the revenues generated by the recreation fees.

III. Recreation Trends- National

The National Sporting Goods Association conducts an annual survey that provides an indication of national trends in recreation activities. Table 2 indicates if respondents have ever participated in a particular activity and their median age at the time of participation.

As indicated in the table, participation in recreation activities vary according to age groups. Younger age cohorts are more likely to participate in organized sports while older age cohorts are more likely to participate in fitness oriented activities or activities that require a significant investment in equipment.

Participation rates also varied according to gender. Males were more likely to participate in organized athletics at some point over there lifetime than females. Baseball, fishing, basketball, soccer, and boating were the most popular among males. Aerobic exercise, exercise walking, volleyball, and softball were the most popular activities among females.

Table 2: Most Selected Popular Recreation Activities by Age Group

Activity	% of Males Participated	Median Age (Male)	% of Females Participated	Median Age (Female)
Aerobic Exercise	29%	37.5	71%	38.2
Baseball	76%	22.6	23%	32.1
Basketball	69%	24.5	31%	23.1
Bicycle Riding	53%	31.0	47%	29.4
Boating/Canoeing	57%	36.2	42%	36.0
Exercise Walking	37%	37.0	62%	40.0
Fishing	68%	37.0	37%	36.0
Running	52%	31.0	47%	28.0
Soccer	62%	19.9	38%	17.1
Softball	51%	31.5	49%	21.1
Tennis	53%	30.5	47%	30.6
Volleyball	42%	30.4	58%	24.4

Source: National Sporting Goods Association, 2007

The Parks and Recreation survey that was completed as part of this Master Plan was designed to ascertain use of park facilities. The survey did not measure participation rates for various sports programs. According to national statistics, however, there is significant demand for such programs. A separate survey designed specifically to assess recreation programming needs in the county is recommended. A telephone survey of a randomly selected sample would help determine general support for a recreation center, desired services and funding options. A survey of current recreation program users, might provide more in-depth information on programming needs and future demand for sports leagues.

IV. Recreation Center

A. Specifications

Due to increasing demand for gymnasium space in the schools, the Park Board is assessing the feasibility of a recreation center to provide gymnasium space for the County recreation programs. The following minimum specifications are the result of preliminary discussions on this concept. A feasibility study may suggest other alternatives.

- Primary mission is to provide gymnasium space for organized indoor sports leagues
- Provide services countywide – requires central location
- Minimum of approximately 13 to 15 acres of land
- There would be a small fitness center for use by county employees . This would not be intended to compete with private fitness centers.
- One regulation basketball court with three cross courts
- Seating capacity of 500
- Concession area
- Outdoor playground area
- Office space for Recreation staff
- Parking for 300 cars
- Room for future expansion

B. Evaluation of Alternatives

To date, three potential sites for a recreation center have been discussed. All of the sites are in the Kalispell Area. A feasibility study would include a more detailed analysis of each site and may identify additional options.

A feasibility study will estimate construction costs, projected revenue and expenses associated with a recreation center. These projections should be based on analysis that reflects local market conditions and consumer demand. Feasibility studies can provide detailed cash flow projections that will inform critical decisions regarding what to spend on the development, how much to build, where to build, what to offer, and what to expect in operating expenses, cost recovery, profits, energy consumption, and maintenance expenses. They may also address issues such as the organizational structure, competition, future trends in sports participation, and pricing, as well as a wide range of other factors.

The options outlined below include a preliminary analysis of the pros and cons of each alternative that should be considered in any feasibility analysis.

Option 1: Status Quo

In this option, the recreation program would continue to operate as it is currently run with leasing of gym space from school districts.

Pros	Cons
• Lowest costs of all alternatives • Ability to spend funds on other land acquisition/park development/ or trails • Opportunity to negotiate long-term formal agreement for use of gym space	• No opportunity to expand indoor recreation programs to meet growing needs due to limited gym availability from schools • Dependent on schools for gym time. Could lose access to gyms space and have to discontinue sports programs • Rec programs are low priority for schools and cancellation of gym time for other programs is not uncommon • Displace recreation users • Staff time used to schedule programs at multiple facilities is unproductive • No concession revenue or rental fees potential

Option 2: Partnership

In this option, the Parks and Recreation Board would work with a partner to construct a recreation facility. The partner could represent another governmental unit or a private partner. The details of the partnership agreement and configuration of a future recreation facility would be dependent on the type of partner, the recreation goals of the partner, and the resources the partner would commit to the project.

Pros	Cons
• New facility designed for recreation – No retrofitting • Partner could bring land and funds to project • Shared O&M expenses • Potential Revenue stream from rental of building	• Must identify partner with appropriate resources and compatible mission for joint venture • Share use of facility with partners – design would have to accommodate multi-purposes • Long term operating and maintenance expense • Commit substantial resources to build or purchase land (depends on partners)

Option 2: Stillwater Christian School

The County has had discussions with Stillwater Christian School located adjacent to the County Park and Recreation offices regarding purchase of the school grounds. As of the date of this report, the schools plans to relocate have been put on hold. Depending on future plans of the school, this option may or may not be viable.

Pros	Cons
• Reuse existing building • Architecturally sound • Classroom space can be used for alternative programs • Classroom space can be converted to offices and leased for revenue • Room for expansion • Fields available for outdoor sports • Centrally located – convenient to Lakeside/Somers • Potential for partnerships • If considered with adjacent county lands this could become an important regional park containing many park and recreation uses • Adjacent to state land	• Remodeling & Retro-fitting costs • School property is currently off the market • Timing horizon for potential purchase is indefinite • Gym is too small to meet needs and there would be a need to construct a smaller gym • Long-Term expense for O&M • Commit all funds to purchase facility – No funds left for other land acquisition or improvement to existing parks • Requires negotiation and agreement on purchase price

Figure 1: Stillwater Christian School Site

Option 4: Hillcrest Park

The County currently owns and operates Hillcrest Park located on Whitefish-Stage Road. The park has two ballfields and parking lot but not other facilities.

Pros	Cons
• New facility designed for County Parks – No retrofitting • Construction of gym is on economic stimulus wish list • No land purchase required • Centrally located – convenient to Whitefish, C. Falls • Trail access • Revenue stream from rental of building • Potential for partnership	• Neighborhood opposition • Increased traffic on WF Stage Road – Road is in poor condition • Lose use of ballfields (only limited use of facilities) • Long term operating and maintenance expense • Commit all funds to purchase facility – No funds left for other land acquisition and improvement to existing parks • 13 acres – Site is smaller than optimum. Limited potential for fields/Expansion

Figure 2: Hillcrest Park

Option 5: County Land on FFA Road

The county owns 129 acres on FFA Drive that is currently agricultural use for the Future Farmers of America program.

Pros	Cons
• New facility designed for County Parks – No retrofitting • Construction of gym is on economic stimulus wish list • No land purchase required • Centrally located – convenient to Lakeside/Somer • Potential Trail access from CTEP • Revenue stream from rental of building • Potential for partnership • Adequate land for expansion • Convenient to Park & Rec Office • If considered with adjacent county lands this could become an important regional park containing many park and recreation uses • Adjacent to state land • Potential for water access to river	• Possible sewer plant to be constructed on site • Dislocate Vo-Ag programs • Increased traffic on FAA – Road is in poor condition • Proximity to proposed pre-release center • Substantial earth moving costs • Long term operating and maintenance expense • Commit all funds to purchase facility – No funds left for other land acquisition or improvements to existing parks • Redundant gym space with school across street

Figure 3: County Land on FFA Drive

FEASIBILITY STUDY – CONTENT

A feasibility study for a recreation center can have different components depending on the needs of the community. Some components that are typically part of a feasibility study include:

Needs Assessment:

- Community Surveys – Community Outreach
- Consumer Profile – Service Area
- Recreation Trends – Projected Use
- Potential Partners
- Programmatic Options
- Competitive Analysis

Site Analysis:

- Traffic Analysis
- Utilities
- Site Analysis (Topography, lot configuration, soils, site constraints …..)
- Environmental Impacts
- Conceptual Designs

Financial Analysis:

- Land Acquisition Costs
- Construction Costs
- Operation & Maintenance Costs
- Revenue Projections – Cost-Revenue Analysis
- Funding Options
- Phasing

Other

- Marketing Plan
- Risk Analysis
- Legal Issues

Chapter 7: Benefits Based Management

I. Benefits Based Management Approach

The "Benefits Based Management" approach recognizes the benefits that parks contribute to the overall quality of life in the community. More often, local and federal agencies are using this approach to evaluate investments for parks and recreation. Identifying benefits offers a strategic framework to make decisions based on the long-term benefits associated with a quality park and recreation system.

"Benefits-based Management (BBM) is a framework for engaging recreation service providers as partners in managing quality recreation settings to produce desired recreation experiences, and personal, social, economic, and environmental benefits"

"A Unified Strategy to Implement BLM's Priorities for Recreation and Visitor Services" Bureau of Land Management, 1/09/07

This "Benefits Based Management" approach represents a significant departure from the traditional parks planning model. The benefits based model acknowledges that there are multiple providers of parks. Planning will be most effective when public agencies work collaboratively. Rather than competing to fill market niches, agencies work together to evaluate parks and recreation facilities as part of a regional system. Decisions to acquire and improve parks are based on management objectives that reflect the benefits the community derives from parks. By identifying a wide range of benefits, park agencies can identify a broad array of partners and funding sources to help them meet their goals.

Figure 1: Benefits of Parks and Recreation

II. Economic Development

A. Increased Land Values

An increasing number of studies indicate that properties located adjacent to or near an amenity such as parks or open space have higher resell values and consequently generate more property tax revenues. This phenomenon is known as the "Proximate Principle". Real estate developers use this principle to design subdivisions with amenities such as golf courses or common areas/green spaces.

To have a positive effect on property values, a park must be managed to be an amenity to nearby residents. Parks that are not well maintained, poorly designed, or have problems with traffic congestion and vandalism can negate potential for increased land values. When properly managed and designed, however, the increase tax revenues that are generated by premium locations to a park can greatly offset the costs of land acquisition and development of the park.

B. Attracts Business and Employees

Quality of life factors are often cited by professionals in site selection as an important factor in attracting businesses to a community. Schools, parks, safety, and cost of living all contribute to quality of life. Companies evaluating a relocation decision routinely examine these factors. A survey of business owners and managers in Montana reported that they considered "community setting, natural environment, and recreational opportunity" to be more important in location decisions than business climate. (Journal of Travel Research, 1995)

Recreational opportunities are also an important consideration in recruiting employees. A survey of 1,200 high technology workers in 1998 by an economic consulting firm, KPMG, found that quality of life in a community increases the attractiveness of a job by 33 percent. (City Parks Forum – American Planning Association, Briefing Papers, "How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development")

Parks and Economic Development

John L. Crompton, American Planning Association, PAS Report Number 502, 2001

Following are the conclusions from a review of studies on the impact of parks on land values:

- The effect on property values does correlate with the size and use of the park.
- Properties that are located near a large – community park with significant areas of passive recreation and natural features can increase values by more than 20% for properties up to a half-mile away.
- Parks that are small and have a heavy amount of use may have less than a 10% impact on property value and the increase in value is limited to a few blocks.
- Studies generally agreed that there was no negative impact from properties located adjacent to a greenway or trail.
- The potential positive impact on property from a greenway is dependent on design of the linear park and perceived benefits from access to a trail system.

C. Tourism and Visitors Spending

Tourists or visitors may travel to Flathead County to visit a County park, engage in activities that take place in a park or participate in a sports event. Attractions in county parks may entice out-of-state visitors to extend their vacations and spend more dollars at local businesses. Visitors spend money on a variety of expenses including admission fees, eating out, food, shopping, lodging, gas, and other entertainment. The income generated from visitors generally stays in the local economy creating employment opportunities and supporting local businesses.

The economic impact of visitors to parks or sporting events can be significant. According to data from the University of Montana, the average expenditure per day for a single visitor ranges from about $100 to $200 depending on the nature of the trip. For example, a softball tournament that attracts 200 out-of-town visitors for a weekend tournament has the potential to generate up to $100,000 of visitor spending.

Table 1: Expenditures and Average Length of Stay by Purpose of Visit for Montana Visitors

	Avg. Length of Stay	Avg. Daily Expend.	Total Expend. (millions)	% Annual Expend.
Vacation/Recreation/Pleasure	6.02	$195	$1,674	52%
Visiting Friends/Relatives	5.50	$148	$612	20%
Passing Through	1.29	$102	$146	5%
Shopping	0.98	$202	$13	<1%
Business/Convention/Meeting	5.64	$154	$426	15%
Other	6.69	$144	$248	17%
ALL VISITORS	4.56	$153	$3,199	100%

Source: Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research, University of Montana

The County Park system has a variety of features and activities that can attract visitors. These include the following:

- Sports Tournaments
- Equestrian Events
- Hiking
- Cross-country Skiing
- Cultural Events – Festivals – Heritage Tours
- Fishing
- Boating – Canoeing
- Birding – Wildlife Watching
- Mountain Biking
- Weddings-Family Reunions

III. Environment

A. Water Quality

Floodplains and riparian areas perform valuable functions such as providing groundwater recharge areas, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, filtering pollutants from stormwater run-off and sediment control. Development in flood plains usually reduces, modifies, or eliminates their ecological functions. Protecting floodplains reduces property damage and saves taxpayers money by reducing the need for costly improvements or emergency services in areas subject to flooding.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which administers the National Flood Insurance Program, recognizes these benefits and now has a voluntary Community Rating Systems (CRS) that offers incentives in the form of discounts on flood insurance in localities that go beyond the minimum floodplain management requirements to achieve these ecological goals. Open Space preservation in floodplains is a means to attain credits in the program. Establishing parks in areas subject to flooding is an effective measure to preserving open space in accordance with the CRS program.

Local governments are knowledgeable, well equipped, and supported to conserve and protect wetland and riparian resources as they plan, develop, and implement programs and policies that enable them to cope effectively with rapid growth and development."

Montana Wetland Council

Figure 2 : Wetland in Flathead County

Wetlands have similar environmental benefits as riparian areas and have also become a focus of a number of conservation grants and programs. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality's (DEQ) Technical & Financial Assistance Bureau is responsible for coordinating and providing leadership to wetland conservation activities state-wide. Wetland grant projects are solicited each fall for projects that further the goals of the State of Montana "Strategic Framework for Wetlands".
www.deq.mt.gov/wqinfo/Wetlands/Index.asp

Case Study: Missoula, MT

"In Missoula, Montana, the Forest Service has been actively involved in a partnership of federal, State, and local land managers. The group originated in the fall of 2004 when the Lolo National Forest Supervisor and Missoula District Ranger met with county commissioners and the city of Missoula's Park Director to discuss the benefits of coming together to discuss common land management issues. Today the partnership includes key people at the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, University of Montana, local land trusts, and county and city planners and open space staff. In 1 year, the group has produced a useful product – a map with layers depicting major land ownerships, conservations easements, elk winter range, riparian areas, and other significant features. Mapping helps meet the goal of fostering ongoing communication and coordination in this rapidly developing area of Montana. Balancing open space and wildlife needs is often the focus of these informal and constructive discussions that take place approximately every 6 weeks."

Source: Cooperating Across Boundaries: Partnerships to Conserve Open Space in Rural America, USDA, Forest Service, FS-861, August 2006

B. Open Space

Open space includes natural areas such as forests and grasslands, as well as working farms, ranches and timberlands. Open space also includes parks, stream and river corridors. Protecting open space improves quality of life by providing amenities such as scenic beauty, preserving rural character and recreation opportunities. Environmental benefits from open space preservation accrue from habitat protection to improved water quality. Open space also creates economic benefits when land-based livelihoods like farming, ranching and forestry can continue to operate cost effectively in areas with rising land prices. Due to the multi-jurisdictional aspect of preserving open space, working collaboratively with other agencies is essential.

C. Reduce Pollutions

Studies have demonstrated that within one year an acre of trees can absorb enough carbon dioxide to equal the amount produced by driving a car 11,000 miles (Virginia Cooperative Extension, www.ext.vt.edu). The U.S. Forest Service calculates that over a 50-year lifetime one tree generates $31,250 worth of oxygen and provides $62,000 worth of air pollution control by absorbing pollutants from the air. (www.coloradotrees.org/). In addition to air quality, parks and green space are also common solutions to help remediate sites that are contaminated with hazardous wastes.

D. Wildlife

Many of the principles for wildlife habitat protection are basic conservation practices that also have other environmental benefits. Major principles for designing parks with wildlife benefits in mind include:

- Maintain natural habitat patterns
- Allow natural processes to continue
- Enable wildlife movement between natural areas
- Plan development according to the land's capacity
- Maintain key plants and animals
- Minimize the extent of disturbance

Source: Montana Fish Wildlife & Parks, "Building with Wildlife"

IV. Social

A. Health

Organizations and agencies that promote fitness and health are increasingly raising awareness about the way the built environment can promote healthy communities. Convenient and safe places to exercise, such as parks and trails, are key determinants in how often people will incorporate fitness activities into their daily routines.

> "The diseases of the 21st century will be "chronic" diseases, those that steal vitality and productivity, and consume time and money. These diseases - heart disease, diabetes, obesity, asthma, and depression - are diseases that can be moderated by how we design and build our human environment." (Source: "Creating A Healthy Environment: The Impact of the Built Environment on Public Health", U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Center for Disease Control)

Figure 3: Hikers in Flathead

Additionally, trends also show that the aging population is actually healthier than previous generations. The baby-boom generation is staying more active and is demanding opportunities and facilities to maintain an active, healthy lifestyle.

B. Community

The City Parks Forum notes that parks help build communities in the following ways:

- Parks provide places for people to connect and interact in a shared environment.
- Parks channel positive community participation by getting diverse people to work together toward a shared vision.
- Park improvements are often quick and tangible actions for local officials and citizens to work together on issues such as reducing crime, eliminating graffiti, or traffic management.
- Parks are important in providing cultural activities and promoting local history through interpretive signs, exhibits and preserving historic structures.

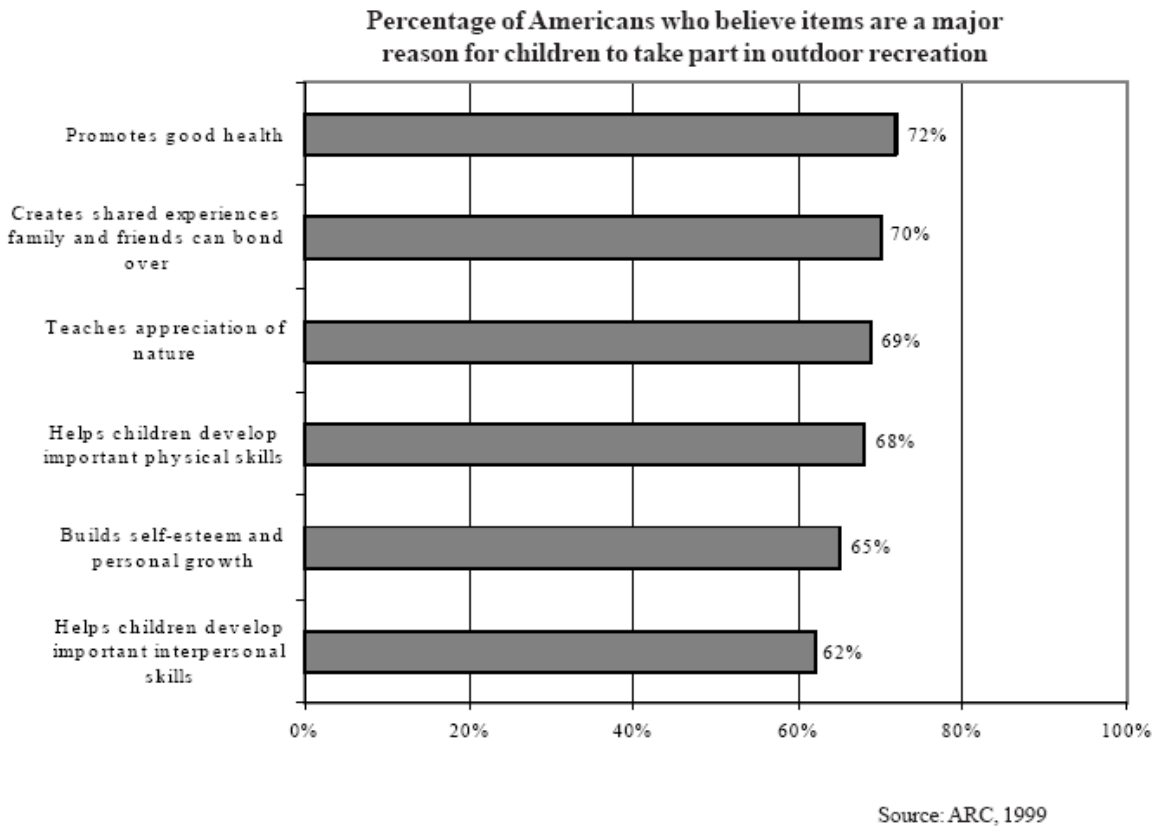
C. Less Crime

The National Association of Counties and the U.S. Conference of Mayors jointly sponsored a telephone survey of average citizens to determine their opinion of the parks in their communities. This survey consisted of random telephone calls of 1,200 people in 30 states and the District of Columbia. Seventy-four percent of the responding citizens agreed that parks and recreational opportunities would help prevent juvenile crime and delinquency.

V. Recreation

In a survey by the American Recreation Coalition respondents indicated numerous benefits to participation in outdoor recreation. Among one of the top benefits is promoting good health. Additionally, organized sports provide a healthy alternative for young adults to socialize and engage in physical activity. The county sports program is an affordable alternative for families to provide a competitive sports experience for their children.

Figure 1: American Recreation Coalition Survey Results



The book, Last Child in the Woods by Richard Louv notes that, "From 1997 to 2003, there was a decline of 50% in the proportion of children nine to twelve who spent time in such outside activities as hiking, walking, fishing, beach play and gardening …" County parks are an opportunity for children to get direct experience with the natural environment. There's been recognition on a federal level of the importance of children having access to natural environments and developing ecological literacy.

Chapter 8: Goals & Policies

I. Organization

Goal 1: Provide resources to the Park and Recreation staff and Park Board and consider innovative approaches to help them fulfill the responsibilities delegated to them by the County Commissioners.

A. Adequately fund existing parks to maintain a safe system and avoid liability.

B. Support funding for additional park staff positions as the parks, recreation, and trails system grows.

C. Explore the feasibility of contracting for services where it may result in cost-savings or shared revenue.

D. Use technology to create more efficient operations or revenue streams from applications such as on-line registration, web-cams, or leasing to wireless companies.

E. Monitor annual progress towards achieving goals of the plan and establish priorities for the next year.

F. Review and update the plan every five years to reflect changing needs and opportunities and to coordinate with the updates in the Growth Policy, state statutes, and transportation plans.

G. Use public outreach to communicate the Parks and Recreation vision and goals and to build support for parks and recreation development.

H. Provide for professional development for staff and board members through memberships in associations and training.

Goal 2: Develop a system of Advisory Committees to advise the Park Board on concerns, priorities and values of county resident.

A. Develop an Advisory Committee system to geographically cover all areas in the County by establishing new committees areas where there are interested citizens.

B. Create a Recreation Advisory Committee to provide input on recreation programs and issues.

C. Make the PATHS Committee a permanent advisory committee to assist with implementation of the Trails Master Plan.

D. Develop and keep up-to-date by-laws for the Board and Advisory Committees to clarify expectations, responsibilities, and roles.

E. Conduct an annual meeting with the Park Board, County Commissioners and Advisory Committees to set goals and priorities, allow various committees to share ideas and identify areas of joint concern and cooperation.

F. Create an orientation packet and conduct annual meeting to train Park Board and Advisory Committee members.

G. Create policies and procedures for evaluating budget requests from Advisory Committees.

Goal 3: Engage citizen volunteers in helping to implement the goals of the plan and to build support for a vital park and recreation system.

A. Work with the county risk management staff to establish policies and practices that will allow volunteers to perform various services to improve and maintain parks and trails while addressing potential liability issues.

B. Identify specific tasks that would be appropriate for volunteers to perform and establish written policies for what type of training is necessary to use certain equipment and materials.

C. Encourage and accept volunteerism as needed through an outreach program to civic organizations and schools.

D. Develop a volunteer recognition program.

E. Continue to use a process of background checks for volunteers that are working with recreational programs that involve youth.

F. Coordinate with other recreation agencies and non-profit groups to share resources on volunteer development.

G. Explore the development of a memorandum of understanding for programs such as adopt-a-park/trail for community groups that want to undertake such efforts.

H. Explore the establishment of a non-profit organization to support parks, recreation and trails through fundraising, grant writing, volunteer development, and community outreach.

Goal 4: Create partnerships with common interest groups and people within the county to achieve the goals of this plan.

A. Meet regularly with other park and recreation providers in the County to coordinate activities, identify areas of joint concerns, and potential for partnering.

B. Expand joint-use agreements with school districts on gym space and the Conrad Complex to formalize arrangements for costs and responsibilities and to secure the future use of gym space and ball-fields for recreational programs.

C. Develop an agreement with schools on trail maintenance for those paths and trails that are providing access to schools.

D. Whenever possible, County parks should be developed in conjunction with public or private schools.

E. Work with non-profit groups to establish public-private contracts to develop parks, secure funding, and build recreation facilities to meet the goals of this plan.

F. Develop partnerships with community civic groups and organizations, private sector building and development industry and others interested in parks and recreation activities.

G. Encourage parks, planning, maintenance and development coordination with other local jurisdictions, state and federal agencies.

H. Where mutually beneficial and appropriate pursue intergovernmental agreements with municipalities and state agencies on common issues such as joint purchasing, shared maintenance of trails and parks, development of recreation facilities, land leases, and other similar issues.

I. Encourage pocket-parks that are maintained and owned by Home Owner groups and Associations.

J. Engage in management practices to provide proper oversight, public input, and accountability to partnership arrangements.

II. Level of Service

Goal 1: *Maintain and/or increase the current level of service for existing park and recreation facilities in Flathead County.*

A. Existing parks and recreational facilities must be operated and maintained in quality conditions for a safe and enjoyable use as identified elsewhere in this document.

B. Evaluate undeveloped parks to determine if they meet the development guidelines in this plan and if not declare them as surplus property that can generate revenue for acquisition of parks that will better serve the needs of the population.

C. Conduct safety checks on all playground structures and park equipment and review and eliminate (where possible) areas of liability in parks.

D. Work with Advisory Groups to identify upgrades to current parkland facilities to meet the park development criteria in this plan and identify funding sources to complete upgrades.

E. Work with transportation planners to ensure safe pedestrian and vehicle access to parks.

F. When opportunities to purchase adjoining land arise, the County should explore expanding existing parks to alleviate overcrowding or address parking issues.

Goal 2: Acquire, develop and maintain new parks and recreation facilities to meet the needs of a growing population.

A. Ensure that future demands are met through the development of new facilities/services either by the County or through development or partnership agreements.

B. Pursue funding sources to expand the park system on parks that serve priority needs such as access to water, preserving natural areas, relieving overcrowding, providing rural community focus or trail/park connectivity.

C. Use the park development guidelines contained within this plan to determine whether to accept land through subdivision dedication or cash-in-lieu of fees.

D. New facilities should be built only after they are evaluated and determined to be financially feasible regarding costs to develop and long-term operation and maintenance costs.

E. Special use parks should be developed and maintained in partnership with interest groups who can demonstrate significant demand and contribute financially to the facility.

F. Secure long-term recreation facilities for sports programming to serve the population in the County that is in the unincorporated areas.

H. County may develop new sport fields but private groups should be primarily responsible for managing and maintaining the facilities.

I. Denser areas of settlement should have convenient access for families to Play Parks either through a homeowner park, school, or county park.

Goal 3: Develop parks that provide access to water features and natural areas.

A. Providing public access to lakes and rivers in the County should be a top priority of the County.

B. Accept donations of land that provide public access to water.

C. Support the development of water access parks by other public agencies and identify potential partnerships for development of these parks.

D. Identify county owned road right-of-ways that are undeveloped and are potential access sites to lakes or river and where feasible transfer ownership to County Parks and Rec Department.

E. There should be a large scale community or regional park on one or more of the major lakes in the county to accommodate larger crowds, events and gatherings.

F. Natural areas to be integrated in the park system should have high conservation values and provide connectivity to other public lands, greenways, conservation lands, riparian corridors or wildlife corridors.

G. Promote connectivity of natural areas through trails, public lands, conservation easements, protection of riparian areas and other means.

H. Creating isolated islands of natural areas is discouraged, unless it is an opportunity to acquire critical land that would be the first piece of a larger system or vision.

Goal 4: Partner with other agencies to develop a system of trails.

A. Coordinate with the goals and policies of the Trails Master Plan.

B. Generally attempt to connect parks and schools with trails and interconnect various trail systems.

C. Identify river access sites along the Whitefish River, Flathead River and Stillwater River to create a canoe trail.

D. Acquire trail easements in new subdivisions in accordance with the trails master plan.

E. Develop design guidelines for trails based on the projected use for recreation or commuting and user groups.

F. Develop a strategy with the County Road Department, Planning Department, Montana Department of Transportation, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, recreation agencies, community groups and schools to determine responsibilities to construct and maintain trails.

G. Partner with other agencies and landowners to provide recreation trails that connect lakes, public lands and other natural features.

Goal 5: Accelerate the development process for park, trail, and open space infrastructure to meet the challenges of community growth and development.

A. Acquisition of park and leisure facility sites should occur now to serve the future needs of the county, particularly water-based parks which provide public access to lakes, rivers and streams.

B. Develop strategies to fund, operate, and maintain new parks and recreational facilities.

C. Flathead County should preserve and increase recreational access to public lands and waterways by procuring or partnering to acquire necessary land, easements, or rights-of-way.

D. Coordinate park and trail planning and development efforts with initiatives to preserve open space such as conservation easements to achieve common goals.

E. If a county park site becomes surrounded by a municipality, evaluate on a case-by-case basis proposals from the municipality to transfer jurisdiction of the park based on whether there is a feasible plan for operating, maintaining, and funding the park.

III. Benefits Based Management

Goal 1: Manage parks to promote a positive economic benefit to the county.

A. Maintain parks so they are an amenity to the neighborhood.

B. Work with economic development agencies and professionals to promote parks and the quality of life benefits to potential new businesses.

C. Work with the tourism industry to identify ways to promote and develop parks to attract visitors to Flathead County particularly in the shoulder seasons.

D. Promote sports tournaments and events in special use and sports parks to generate park revenue and visitor spending.

E. Document economic impact of park usage and sports facilities to leverage other funding sources

Goal 2: Recognize the importance of the park system in achieving other environmental goals of the county.

A. Riparian buffers should be recognized for their recreational value and their ability to protect the quality of water along major streams and rivers in the County to enhance recreational opportunities, protect the quality of water (reduce erosion; surface runoff containing pesticides, fertilizers, etc.; stream bank depredation/defoliation; etc.) and their ability to protect the natural aesthetics of waterways.

B. Use best management practices to establish maintenance standards, vegetation standards and management plans for the various types of parks and their properties the County maintains.

C. When feasible, select durable materials that are sustainable, resource efficient and non-toxic for construction of new facilities.

D. Identify key areas on existing and future parklands with high quality native vegetation, wetlands or wildlife habitats, and manage to reduce existing invasive, non-native species and potentially detrimental effects associated with overuse.

E. Within parks preserve wildlife corridors, environmentally sensitive areas and areas of high quality, natural vegetation.

Goal 3: Develop parks to provide a positive social experience for users and neighbors.

A. Include interpretive signs and exhibits to promote the rich cultural heritage of the County.

B. Promote the development of cultural or heritage parks through partnerships with non-profit agencies or community groups.

C. Include picnic shelters and other facilities for group gatherings in larger community parks.

D. Support programs to connect children and families with nature through both educational efforts and unstructured play to promote health and stewardship values.

E. Provide recreational opportunities and facilities for people of all ages and abilities.

F. Be good neighbors to private property near parks by enforcing rules to ensure the safe and quiet enjoyment of parks by everyone without negatively impacting neighbors.

G. Work with the sheriff's department, neighborhood watch groups and advisory groups to monitor illegal or nuisance activity and respond to complaints in a timely manner.

H. Investigate the feasibility of caretaker arrangements for larger parks that receive heavy use.

I. Work with the Sherriff Department to establish rules, regulations and enforcement procedures for park users.

Goal 4: Promote the positive benefits of recreation and sports programs.

A. Have the Recreation Committee coordinate with schools, youth sports organizations and municipalities to identify areas of need for recreation programming and develop a plan to meet those needs.

B. Identify partners for promoting recreation programming for benefits such as physical fitness, public health benefits, sportsmanship and crime prevention.

C. Monitor participant trends and survey adult sports leagues to identify needs and demands for sports programming.

D. Involve the community in recreation programming by seeking sponsors for events and leagues and recruiting community volunteers.

E. The recreation program should be self-supporting through user fees, registration fees and sponsorships.

F. Develop a scheduling system for sports fields to avoid conflicts and allow for maintenance.

Chapter 9: Finance & Implementation

I. Overview

The current budget is not sufficient to meet the growing demands on the park system. It is likely that a combination of various types of funding resources will be necessary to achieve the goals of the plan. The County must investigate new and innovative funding mechanisms to support the parks and recreation program.

Table 1 indicates the type of funding mechanisms that are available and how various types of funding can be allocated to different park and recreation functions. As noted in the table, there are a variety of funds that can be used for land acquisition and park development. It is becoming more common for local governments to use a combination of these funding sources to meet their goals for developing a park system. Once the land has been acquired and parks have been developed, there are fewer funding options to cover the operation and maintenance costs of these facilities. Although the primary source for operation and maintenance costs is the tax levy, revenues generated by the tax levy have flattened. In order to cover the operation and maintenance costs for an expanded park system, these revenues will need to increase accordingly. As noted in Chapter 4, funding for operation and maintenance already lags behind recommended spending levels.

Table 1: Park and Recreation Funding Mechanisms

	Operating & Maintenance	**Land Acquisition**	**Park & Trail Development**	**Recreation Programming**
General Fund	x	X	X	X
Park Mill Levy	x	X	X	
General Obligation Bond		X	X	
Land Dedication		X	X	
Cash-In-Lieu		X	X	
Impact Fee		X	X	
User Fees	X	X	X	X
Grants		X	X	X
Donations - Sponsorships	X	X	X	X
Partnerships	X	X	x	X
SID		X	X	
Park Main. District	X	X	X	
Concessions				X

I. Revenue Sources – Statutory Based

The Montana Code Annotated authorizes certain funding mechanisms specific to parks. These include:

A. Authorization to levy tax for various cultural, social, and recreational facilities.

Section **7-16-2102** of the MCA authorizes the board of county commissioners to annually levy on a tax for the purpose, "… of maintaining, operating, and equipping parks, cultural facilities, and any county-owned civic center, youth center, recreation center, recreational complex, or any combination of purposes, parks, and facilities."

Flathead County does have such a levy. The amount of the levy has decreased from $1.39 2006 to $1.10 in 2008. Property valuations, however, have increased so the revenue generated from the levy has remained steady. Population, however, has increased as well and park revenues are generally not keeping pace with population growth. Increasing the park levy would be one way to generate additional revenues for park operations.

B. Park dedication requirement or Cash-in-Lieu of Dedication.

The Flathead County Subdivision Regulations (Section 4.7.25 Parkland Dedication) require the subdivider to either dedicate a cash donation or land for parkland. Requirement for dedication of cash or parkland must be made accordance with Section MCA 76-3-621. Lots over 5 acres are exempt. The County recently amended its subdivision regulations to require land dedication for minor subdivisions. The amount of land or cash is determined by the following formula.

> Parkland cash or land donation dedication requirements shall be based on the following formula:
>
> i. 11% of the combined gross area of the land proposed to be subdivided into parcels of 1/2 acre and smaller;
>
> ii 7.5% of the combined gross area of the land proposed to be subdivided into parcels larger than 1/2 acre and not larger than one acre;
>
> iii. 5% of the combined gross area of the land proposed to be subdivided into parcels larger than one acre and not larger than three acres; and
>
> iv. 2.5% of the combined gross area of the land proposed to be subdivided into parcels larger than three acres and not larger than five acres.

More recently the County has been excepting cash-in-lieu of land. As of 2008, the county had approximately $400,000 of funds accumulated from subdivision dedications.

C. Impact Fees

Impact fees are one-time payments that are used to fund capital improvements necessitated by new growth. The Montana Impact Fee Act (MCA 7-7-1601) specifies the process for enacting impact fees and how such fees may be used. Flathead County completed an "Impact Fee Feasibility Study" in October, 2007 conducted by the consulting firm of TishelerBise. The study concluded the following:

> "As development pressures continue in the County, new growth will place increasing demands on the County's park system, including demand for facilities the County does not currently provide, such as indoor recreation centers, including gymnasiums. TishelerBise feels that parks and recreation is a strong candidate for impact fees. The impact fee would contain several components assess only against residential development. The appropriate methodology would be determined during the fee study. It should be noted that the State of Montana Impact Fee Act requires a unanimous vote of the Board of County Commissioners in order to implement this impact fee."

In 2007, Per the State Act, the County had appointed an Impact Fee Advisory Committee to recommend an impact fee system. The Committee recommended that the county initially proceed with establishing fees for roads and a county justice center and consider fees for other facilities at a later date. In 2008, the County put all work on impact fees on hold and disbanded the Committee.

D. Park Maintenance Districts

The MCA - 7-16-2411 allows the creation of county park districts. A park district may be initiated by a petition signed by 10% of the voters within the proposed boundary of the district. The County Commissioners then conduct a public hearing and after the hearing if the county governing body determines that the proposed park district should be created, it shall by resolution:

(a) set the boundaries of the proposed park district;
(b) set the mill levy or maximum fee on each household for the proposed park district;
(c) set the number of members to be on the district commission; and
(d) call for an election on the question of whether to create the county park district.

Once a Park District is created, a Park Commission is established and Commissioners are elected from the district. The Park District Commission sets an annual budget for approval by the County Commission. There are currently no Park Districts within the County.

E. Special Improvement Districts

Under 7-12-4101, MCA, cities and towns can create special improvement districts for a number of activities including:

"5. The acquisition and improvement of land to be designated as public park or open-space land"

Special Improvement Districts require approval by 50% of property owners within the district. There are no special improvement districts for parks and recreation purposes in the County.

F. General Obligation Bond

General obligation bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of the county and must be approved by the voters in an election. General obligation bonds are generally payable from ad valorem taxes (based on the value of property) and expressed in mills. General obligation bonds are attractive to bond buyers because they have voter approval and are not as vulnerable to fluctuations in revenue. Cities and counties are assigned a bond debt limit based on a percentage of taxable valuation.

G. Revenue Bonds

Revenue Bonds—Under 7-7-4401, MCA, a city or town may issue revenue bonds to finance any project or activity authorized. Revenue Bonds are paid back with revenue sources such as TIF funds, fees, rentals or other sources of revenue. Some localities have used revenue bonds as part of the financial package for recreation centers when membership fees or facility rentals will generate enough revenue to pay off the bond. Revenue bonds do not require voter approval.

III. User Fees

User Fees are commonly mentioned as a method of supplementing park operating funds. The attraction of user fees is that at least part of the costs of operation and maintenance is funded by those who are receiving direct benefits from using the facility. The downside to user fees is that it requires additional administration to collect funds and develop an accounting system to ensure proper tracking and spending of funds. Sometimes these administrative costs exceed the amount of funds collected. Often County residents receive discounts from fees. Following is a review of the various types of user fees.

A. Facility Rentals

Currently the County averages about $5000 per year in facility rentals. Rental rates are comparable with other park facilities in the area. The focus groups indicated an increasing demand for these types of facilities so there may be opportunities to develop and market facilities for group rentals.

Table 2: Rental Fees

Meeting Rooms	• Foys Community Center - $135 per day • Lone Pine State Park - $125 per day • Saddle Club (Whitefish) - $72 per day
Park/Picnic Shelter	Flathead County - $50 to $200 per day depending on group size Woodland Park - $72 to $360 per day depending on group size. City residents get a 20% discount. Lone Pine Shelters - $75 per day

B. Park Entry Fees

National and State Parks often have park entry fees. To institute such fees requires an attendant at the park to collect fees. To ease administration, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks collects fees along with vehicle registrations. Vehicles with Montana plates do not pay an entry fee. County parks generally do not generate the visitor traffic to justify park entry fees. There was very little support for this funding option in the community survey.

An alternative to entry fees is to install a collection box to allow visitors to voluntary contribute donations towards the maintenance of county parks. There is currently a donation box at Herron Park. Vandalism sometimes occurs with this system and it would need to be monitored.

C. Special Events

Events such as tournaments, festivals, fishing derbies, and farmers markets can generate revenues. The cost of hosting the event, however, must be considered to make sure there would be a positive revenue stream from the event.

D. Stable Fees

Herron Park has equestrian facilities including stables that can accommodate 60 horses. During events at the park, the horse club collects fees for stabling horses and turns these over to the Park and Recreation Department. The average amount collected is $1500 per year. The fees do not cover maintenance costs of the stables.

A telephone survey of private boarding facilities indicated that an average overnight boarding fee in western Montana ranges from $20 to $35 dollars. If a mandatory fee were collected for boarding at the stables at a competitive rate, this would generate additional revenue that would off-set the operating costs for the stables. According to the Flathead Combined Training Association calendar of events, the stables are used approximately 10 to 15 nights over the summer. Minimal stabling rates of $10 to $20 could easily generate $500 to $1000 per night and contribute significantly more income for operation and maintenance.

The Flathead Combined Training Association is conducting a fundraising campaign for Herron Park. This includes selling sponsorships and naming rights for the barn. (http://www.flatheadeventing.org/herron_park.html)

Additionally, overnight campers that use the facilities voluntarily donate $10 per night for camping. State Parks camping fees are $15 per night. A mandatory system would generate additional revenues to cover maintenance costs at the park.

E. Recreation Licenses

The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation have a recreation license that is to be purchased for anyone who recreates on School Trusts Lands. The license requirement is difficult to enforce and often residents are even unaware of the requirement. Consequently, participation rates of those purchasing licenses are low. This system worked best when fees are collected as part of another program.

F. Parking – Boat Launch Tags

Fees to use parking facilities or boat launch facilities are a revenue option at some parks but generally require an attendant to collect the fees. These could be instituted on peak weekends. Montana FWP charges $5 a day for use of a boat slip.

G. Commercial Outfitters

Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks has a commercial outfitters fees for guided trips that are using state park facilities. With the development of a trail system such as the Foys to Blacktail Trail or a canoe trail it is possible that these will be attractive to commercial outfitters. The FWP “Commercial Use Fee” is 3% of a commercial user’s yearly, unadjusted gross revenue for that portion of their commercial business.

IV. Grants

In addition to taxing and bonding authority, government agencies can fund some improvements through grants and donations. Grants are available from Federal and State agencies as well as non-profit foundations. Grants can be linked to economic development benefits, wellness benefits, environmental benefits and other strategic planning goals. There are also numerous sports organizations that will fund recreational programs and local foundations that often contribute to civic improvement projects in parks.

Researching grants, grant writing and grant administration can be a time consuming endeavor and it will be necessary to determine what resources are available to pursue these specific grant programs. Many grants will require a match. Cash, in-kind labor and land are possible ways to provide a match.

V. Other

Sponsorships for the organized recreation leagues are an important source of revenue to off-set costs of the recreation program. Local businesses sponsor teams, newspaper ads, and tournaments.

Although there is no formal program to solicit donations, the County does receive between $3,000 and $4,000 per year in donations for county parks. Some park programs offer opportunities for memorials or adopt-a-park programs to generate revenue from donations.

Concessions at sporting events are a significant source of revenue for the recreation program. In 2008, concessions generated $38,000 in revenue.

Adopt-a-Park has been instituted in other jurisdictions and allow local civic organizations and businesses to donate time and money to maintaining area parks.

VI. Funding Strategies

The following administrative strategies are recommended for funding the recommendations of this plan. The Park Board may review and refine these strategies to improve their effectiveness.

Operation and Maintenance

1. At a minimum, maintain existing funding using a benchmark of expenditures per acre of developed parkland service for operation and maintenance for existing developed parks.
2. Increase revenues to reduce the funding gap between the county and peer communities.
3. Staffing, operating and maintenance should be funded from the existing park mill levy.
4. Revenues generated from the mill levy should increase in relation to inflation, the development of existing parks and the expansion of the park system due to population growth.
5. Promote an adopt-a-park program and use of volunteers to assist with maintenance of parks.

Park Land Acquisition

6. Establish a park land acquisition fund with revenues from through cash-in-lieu fees, impact fees (if implemented), grants, fundraising, and donations.
7. Establish procedures to accept donation of land for parks that meet the goals and priorities of this plan.
8. Proceeds from the sale of surplus park land should be dedicated to the acquisition of park land in more appropriate locations.
9. The funds in the park land acquisition fund should be used to purchase large tracts of land or water access to meet the goals and objectives of this plan.
10. Unless the land provides water access or helps meet other priorities of this plan, the preference for new subdivisions is to accept cash-in-lieu fees of land so funds can be compiled for larger land acquisitions to meet the needs for community parks.

Park Improvements

11. Establish a Park Improvement fund with revenues from grants, fundraising, special improvement districts, park maintenance districts, and annual surplus from revenue generated by the park levy.
12. A portion of revenues from the mill levy should be set aside as a park improvement fund. The fund would be supplemented through donations, fundraising, rentals, and revenues generated from special events. The park improvement fund would be a discretionary fund to consider request for parks improvements per the procedures established in the organizational chapter.

13. Advisory Groups and Community groups may initiate fundraising activities for the purpose of financing specific improvements in parks in their areas.
14. Establish an adopt-a-park program to allow civic organizations and local business conduct fundraising or provide volunteer labor for maintenance of a specific park.

Recreation – Organized Sports

15. A portion of the cash-in-lieu fund may be used to leverage funds for the construction of a recreation center – gymnasium.
16. Upon completion of a feasibility study, a recreation center-gymnasium capital costs should be funded through a financial package that represents a combination of funding sources. (Down payment, debt financing, grants, partner contributions, fundraising, …..)
17. If county land is used for a recreation center-gymnasium, the value of the land should be used as a matching contribution for grants.
18. Recreation programming should be self-supporting through registration fees, concessions, and sponsorships

Trails

19. Existing trail should be maintained per the policy adopted by County Commissioners, Park Board and Road Department.
20. New trails should be maintained through a combination of resources such as volunteers, homeowners associations, MOUs and other mechanisms identified in the Trails Master Plan.
21. Trail construction costs should be funded through grants such as CTEP, partnerships, or fundraising and other sources identified by the Trails Master Plan.
22. Trail easements and right-of-way should be obtained through exactions during the subdivision process, grants, transportation improvement projects or fundraising.
23. Establish an adopt-a-trail program to allow civic organizations and local businesses to conduct fundraising or provide volunteer labor for maintenance of a specific park.

Special Use & Natural Spaces

24. On-going maintenance for special use facilities should be funded through user fees, partnership, endowment or other long-term maintenance plan.
25. Park land acquisition should be coordinated with open space preservation programs.
26. Expansion of natural areas and environmentally sensitive lands should be coordinated with conservation partners.
27. Special use functions should have a partner to share in costs.

VII. ACTION PLAN

The Action Plan is a matrix that lists the task and identifies staffing, costs considerations, and timeframe for each task.

Table 3: Action Plan

Action	***Staffing***	***Cost***	***Timeframe***
1. Create Sports Advisory Committee	*Park Staff*	*N/A*	*Immediate*
2. Create Advisory Committees for Columbia Falls and Kila	*Park Staff*	*N/A*	*Work with Community*
3. Conduct Recreation Feasibility Study and develop action plan for securing gymnasium space per results of the study	*Consultant*	*Study Costs $25,000 to $50,000. Grant to fund.*	*After Rec. Committee Forms*
4. Complete and adopt Trails Master Plan	*PATHS Committee*	*NPS Technical Assist Grant*	*Fall 09*
5. Evaluate existing parks in accordance with Master Plan guidelines and policies and prioritize recommendations for improvements	*Advisory Committees*	*N/A*	*Per process in Chapt. 4*
6. Evaluate undeveloped park land in accordance with Master Plan guidelines and policies. Commence process to sell surplus parks.	*Staff* *Contract work as needed*	*Administrative costs. Fees for professional services (Appraisals….)*	*Before 5-year master plan update*
7. Create development plans for lands to remain in park system	*Contract work*	*Fees for professional services. Look for grants to fund.*	*Before 5-year master plan update*
8. Park Board conduct annual meeting with Advisory Committees	*Park Board and Park Staff*	*N/A*	*Fall*
9. Develop by-laws and rules for Park Board and Advisory Committee	*County Staff*	*N/A*	*On-going*
10. Establish volunteer program and an adopt-a-park/trail program.	*Park Staff*	*Administrative Costs*	*Following resolution of insurance issues*

11. Conduct annual inter-agency meeting	*Park Staff*	*N/A*	*Fall/Winter*
12. Negotiate Memorandum-of-understanding (MOU) or joint agreements with schools regarding use of gyms and trail maintenance	*Park Staff*	*N/A*	*As needed*
13. Work with community groups to establish Park Foundation or Park Fund for charitable donations	*TBD*	*Grants – Donations*	*TBD*
14. Evaluate county properties with water frontage to determine viability as water access sites	*Staff*	*Administrative Costs*	*Before 5-year update*
15. Map existing river access sites as part of effort to establish water trail	*County GIS*	*Administrative Printing*	*First year action*
16. Develop on-line scheduling/reservation system for use of park facilities and sports fields	*County Staff*	*Administrative*	*As time permits*
17. Acquire new park sites in accordance with policies and LOS analysis in Master Plan	*Park Board*	*See financial strategies*	*On-going*
18. Evaluate user fees and revise according to policies in the plan.	*Park Board*	*N/A*	*First year action*

Chapter 10: Park Development Guidelines

I. General Guidelines

The following park classifications and their associated development guidelines and design standards are intended to be used to inform decision-making pertaining to park development, land acquisition, and recreation opportunities within the county-wide park system. These parks can be developed as stand-alone types or as hybrids (example: a Neighborhood Park could be developed adjacent to a School Park for a larger park fabric; or a Cultural/Heritage Park could be developed within a Community, Regional or Linear Park). Flathead County park and open space classifications are:

A. Pocket Park
B. Neighborhood Park
C. Community Park
D. School Park
E. Regional Park
F. Sports Complex
G. Special Recreation Park
H. Cultural/Heritage Park
I. Water Access Park
J. Open Space/Natural Area Park
K. Trail/Linear Park

The County's park classification system is similar to that identified by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Other information is referenced from several parks and recreation documents developed by various counties in the State of Montana.

The Flathead County classification system corresponds with the inventory and level of services maps in Appendix B. A trail system providing park connectivity is recommended. Trails, other than water trails, are not indicated on the level of service maps. For trail information and proposed locations, please reference the Flathead County Trails Master Plan.

Several factors that influence the type of park system that should be developed in Flathead County are 1) the majority of the population is living in the unincorporated areas of the county; 2) currently limited funding and staff dedicated to the maintenance of existing parks, and limited funding available for land acquisition and the development and maintenance of new parks; 3) the opportunities to develop equitable partnerships with other agencies and organizations; 4) the large amount of public lands within the County that provide recreational opportunities and amenities; 5) the opportunities to engage citizen volunteers.

Based on these factors, the following general guidelines should apply:

1. All parks should be developed in accordance with other goals, guidelines, and policies within this plan.

2. Parks should be developed and upgraded in a manner that minimizes maintenance efforts over time. These efforts include preserving, to the greatest extent possible, areas of naturalized and/or native landscape, an emphasis on hardy, drought-tolerant plantings and low-grow grass mix, and minimizing lawn planting to areas that are appropriate.

3. Parks that have significant infrastructure components should receive careful consideration regarding long-term operations and maintenance commitments.

4. The Park Board and the Advisory Committees can use this information in evaluating the maintenance of existing parks, development of new parks, land acquisition and the acceptance of park land dedication by developers.

II. Specific Guidelines

A. Pocket Park

Description: Pocket Parks, mini-parks, tot lots, and children's playgrounds are small, single-purpose play lots generally less than two acres in size. They are generally located within ¼ mile of a residential area, provide some passive open space for local residents and provide a small amenity where no other park sites are conveniently located. Park features usually include a small open grass area and may include a children's playground or a picnic area. In the County these are typically maintained by the homeowner's association.

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. No pocket parks should be acquired or developed in the unincorporated areas of Flathead County, unless it is owned and maintained by a private homeowners association.
2. These sites should have good access and visibility from a public street.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. Appropriate facilities include:
    - Children's playground area
    - Open grass area
    - Picnic areas
5. Off-street parking is not required.

B. Neighborhood Park

Description: Neighborhood parks are generally within ½ to one-miles of the residential area being served. This park is accessible by a safe route or trail and typically contains a turf area for informal play, a playground, and picnic facilities. The parkland, ranging from 3-10 acres, is fully developable for park uses and is not in environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains, a designated retention pond or containing steep terrain. Neighborhood parks may be combined with a school. There may be both passive and active recreation opportunities. In the County these are typically maintained by the homeowner's association.

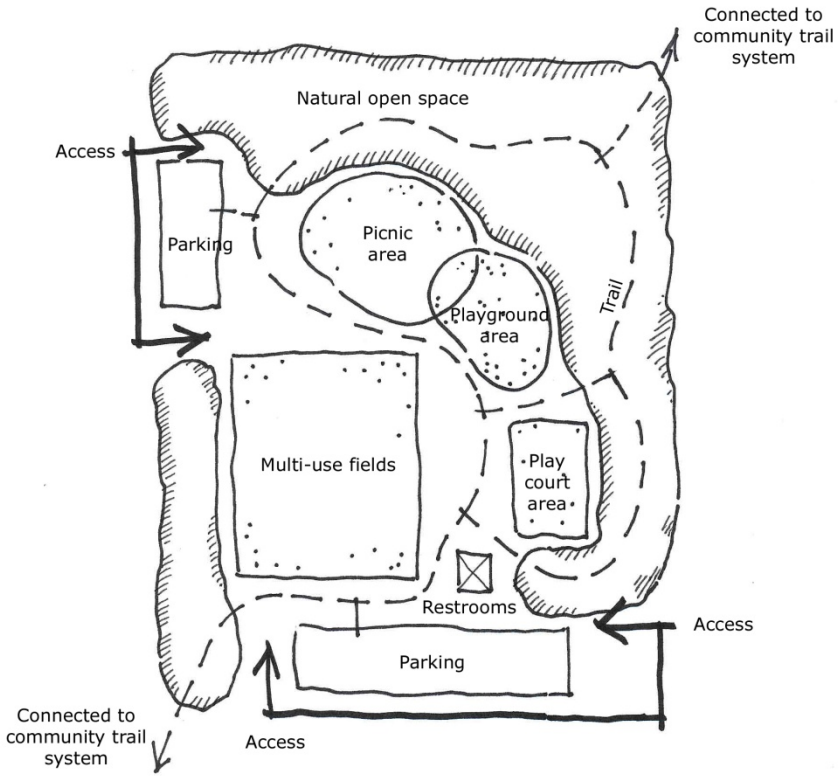
Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. This park type should have a balance of active and passive park uses. Active recreation facilities are intended to be used in an informal and unstructured manner.
2. Neighborhood parks should have at least 100 continuous feet of street frontage for access and good visibility.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. At least 50% of the site should be flat and usable for both active and passive recreation.
5. Parcels of land that have aesthetic value are desirable for neighborhood parkland.
6. These parks should contain areas landscaped with trees and grass where appropriate. Areas of natural vegetation should be preserved to increase aesthetics and habitat value.
7. A site should accommodate 7-10 parking spaces. On-street or off-street parking, or a combination thereof, is acceptable. On-street parking is acceptable only if the street is adjacent to the park.
8. Appropriate facilities may include:
    - Multi-use field(s) for informal active recreation
    - Children's playground area
    - Paved courts or multi-use area
    - Picnic area with shelter building
    - Natural open space
9. Restroom facilities are discouraged.
10. To minimize noise and lighting impact on adjoining homes, active and noisy facilities, and those that may require lighting, should be located a minimum of 75 feet from the property line.

C. Community Park

Description: A Community Park is a larger park that serves multiple neighborhood areas with a two miles service area radius but will often attract residents from a much larger area. The size range is 10-100 acres. At least 50% of the land is developable for park uses and may contain environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains, a designated retention pond and/or steep terrain. Community Parks may be combined with schools. A Community Park will include similar type of development as a Neighborhood Park and provide additional facilities that consolidate adult and youth programmed activities. Safe, non-motorized routes often link the park to other parks and the neighborhoods that they serve. Parking for vehicles is available, either on-street or adjacent to the park, so that crossing a road is not required. Generally, Community Parks include ample active recreation opportunities with areas for passive use. Facilities for group activities and events are available.

Figure 1: Concept Plan – Community Park



Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. This park type should have a balance of active and passive park uses. Active recreation facilities are intended to be used in an informal and unstructured manner.
2. Maintaining a large portion of natural open space should be a priority. Trails and other appropriate amenities can connect the open space with other developed portions of the park, and also provide buffering between the park and adjacent residential areas.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. The site should be accessible from an arterial or major road.
5. Off-street parking should be provided. On-street parking can supplement off-street parking and is acceptable only if the street is adjacent to the park.
6. These parks should be located on the edges of residential areas rather than in the interior of developments because of the traffic and noise they generate.
7. Appropriate facilities may include:
    - Multi-use field(s) for informal active recreation
    - Children's playground area
    - Paved courts or multi-use area
    - One or more picnic areas, with one or more picnic pavilions of varying size
    - Restroom facilities
    - Internal trails or pathways, connecting to a community trail system
    - Facilities for cultural activities, such as plays and concerts
    - Natural open space and natural features

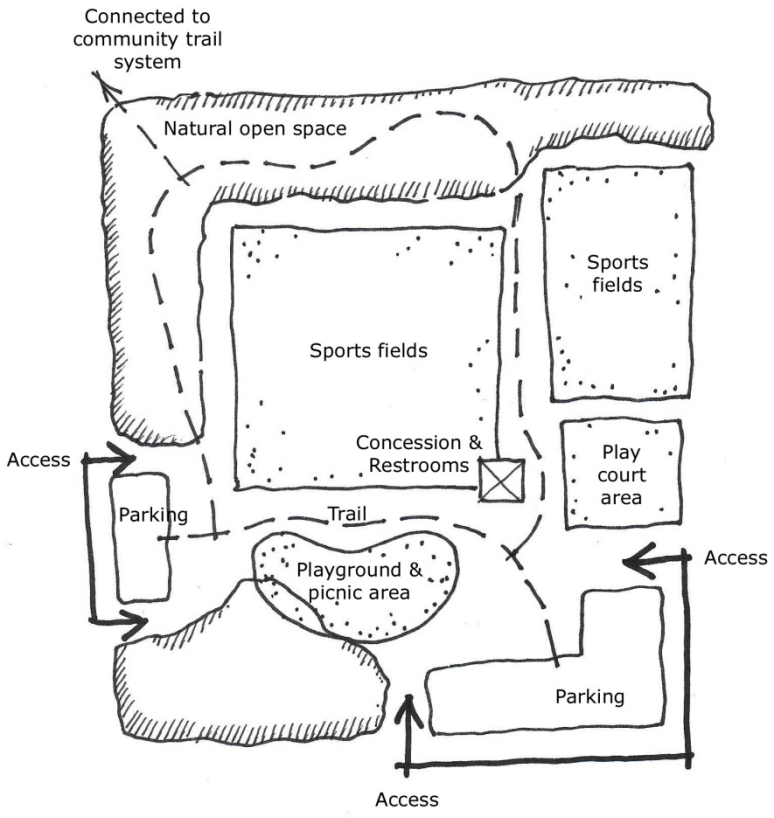
D. School Parks

School Parks are not included in the County park classification system but can be used in combination with other park types

E. Sports Complex

Description: A Sports Complex consolidates heavily programmed athletic fields and associated facilities into larger sites that are located strategically throughout the County. Sports Complexes should be a minimum size of at least 20 acres and serve people from both incorporated and unincorporated areas of the County. Designed solely for active recreation use, these parks should accommodate the specific needs of the County athletic programs, athletic associations and other user groups. Athletic fields and facilities can be used for a variety of sports so as to be inclusive of more participants.

Figure 2: Concept Plan – Sports Complex



Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. This park type is strategically located and solely for active and programmed recreation.
2. Sports Complexes should be located adjacent to non-residential land uses. Where these parks are adjacent to residential areas, buffering (topography, vegetation, etc.) shall be used.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. Sites should be easily accessible from major thoroughfares. Park access through residential areas should be avoided.
5. Topography and soils should be appropriate for developing sports facilities.
6. Natural vegetation along the perimeter of the park or in non-field areas may be preserved to increase aesthetics and habitat value.
7. Parking areas should be off-street and be large enough to accommodate an identified number of participants and spectators.
8. Appropriate facilities may include:
    - Multiple ball fields and courts
    - Parking lot
    - Play structures
    - Restroom facilities
    - Multi-use buildings/shelters
    - Concession stand
    - Internal trails or pathways, connecting to a community trail system
    - Lighting
    - Drinking water

F. Regional Park

Description: Regional Parks supplement neighborhood and community parks, serving a broader base of recreation needs in addition to what is provided in the smaller parks. The size range is 50-200 acres, servicing the entire County and visitors. At least 50% of the land is developable for park uses and may contain environmentally sensitive areas such as floodplains, a designated retention pond and/or steep terrain. Regional Parks offer a balance of active and passive recreation, while including sizeable undeveloped areas with natural vegetation, features and/or water features. Safe, non-motorized routes often link these parks to other parks and the neighborhoods that they serve. Facilities for group activities and events are available.

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. This park type should have a balance of active and passive park uses. Active recreation may be a combination of structured and informal fields.
2. Maintaining a large portion of natural open space should be a priority. Trails and other appropriate amenities can connect the open space with other developed portions of the park, and also provide buffering between the park and adjacent residential areas.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. The site should be accessible from an arterial or major road.
5. Minimum street frontage of 1,500 feet
6. One or more parking lots (i.e. 100-300 cars each) possibly serviced by an internal road.
7. These parks should be located on the edges of residential areas rather than in the interior of developments because of the traffic and noise they generate.
8. Appropriate facilities may include:
    a. Multi-use field(s) for informal active recreation
    b. Sports complex (lighted) with 3 or more fields per
    c. Children's playground area
    d. Paved courts or multi-use area
    e. Multiple picnic areas, with one or more picnic pavilions of varying size
    f. Restroom facilities
    g. Swimming pool with bathhouse or natatorium (indoor pool)
    h. Internal trails or pathways, connecting to a community trail system
    i. Facilities for cultural activities, such as plays and concerts
    j. Natural open space and natural features
    k. Multiple access points to water, if applicable

G. Special Recreation Park

Description: This park classification covers a broad range of parks and recreation facilities oriented toward single-purpose uses, such as a nature center, aquatic center, equestrian facility, arboretum, campground and golf course. These parks should serve a broad cross section of the community. Often these parks offer fee-based activities and may or may not be public parks. The size of these parks is dependent on facility requirement and specific uses.

Figure 3: Equestrian Facility at Herron Park

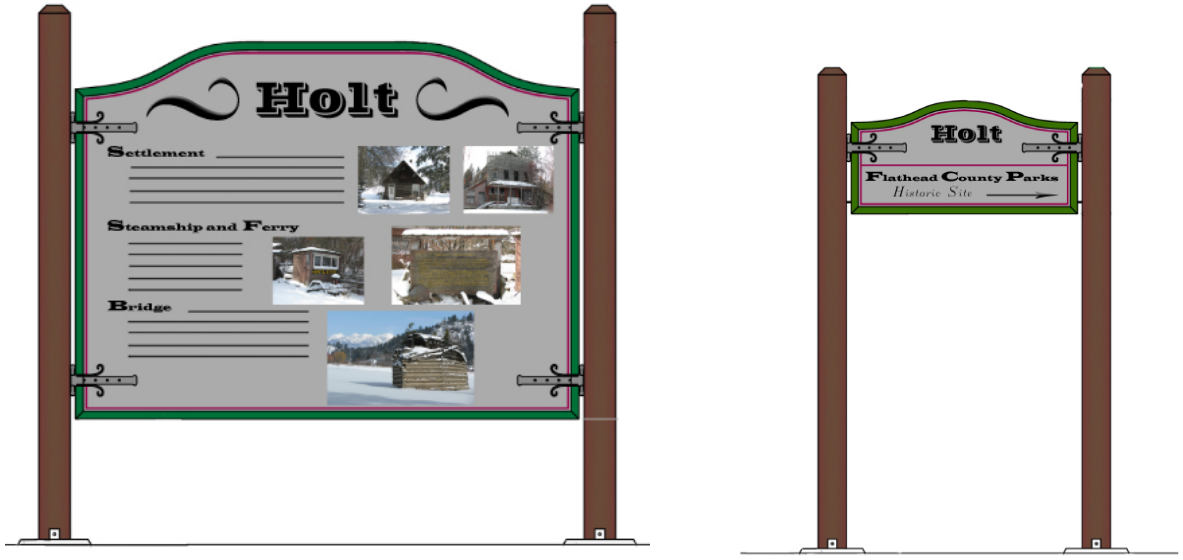
Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. Special Recreation Parks are often developed with partnerships.
2. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.

H. Cultural/Heritage Park

Description: The Cultural/Heritage park classification recognizes that Flathead County has a rich history which could be incorporated into the county park system. Cultural and heritage facilities include interpretive signage areas along trails, specific sites that are historically significant and may or may not contain remnants of historical significance, and areas incorporated into larger park types where appropriate.

Figure 4: Example of Interpretive Signs



Cultural/Heritage Signage Concepts

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. The primary function of park type is to preserve, enhance and educate park users about the cultural and historical foundation of Flathead County.
2. Parking is dependent on facilities provided.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. Appropriate facilities may include:
    a. Interpretive signage
    b. Seating and/or picnic areas

I. Water Access Park

Description: Water Access Parks range in size from small to large sites. These parks can include road rights-of way, riparian areas, or be a component of other park types, like a regional park and others described in this chapter. This type of park is primarily designed to provide fishing, boat or swimming access. Often these parks inhabit environmentally sensitive areas. Planning, design and development should be conducted carefully to ensure the protection of natural systems, water quality and habitat.

Figure 5: Foys Lake

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. The primary function of this park type is to provide public water access on a variety of water bodies around Flathead County.
2. In the public input process, water access parks were identified as highly desirable components to the county park system.
3. Safe walking and biking routes should provide access.
4. Parking is dependent on use and facilities provided.
5. Appropriate facilities may include:
    a. Trails/trailheads
    b. Docks
    c. Boat ramps
    d. Designated swimming areas
    e. Picnic areas
    f. Natural open space

J. Open Space / Natural Area Park

Description: This type of park that may include environmentally sensitive lands, steep terrain, forested areas, water bodies, flood plain and other natural areas that are only minimally developed and may serve as conservation areas, educational and wildlife watching opportunities. The size range of this park type varies but should be linked to other open spaces and parkland to maintain park system connectivity. Trails, wildlife viewing areas and other amenities can be integrated to provide passive recreation opportunities.

"There are no specific standards for how much conservation land a community ought to have. Instead, it is dependent on the number and quality of natural and historical resources in the area, public desire to preserve these valuable sites, and the willingness of the elected body to provide funds for their preservation." Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, National Recreation and Park Association.

Figure 6: Leisure Island

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. The primary function of park type is to conserve open, natural space (including sensitive ecosystems and species, natural resources, wildlife habitat, and viewsheds).
2. The secondary function is to provide passive recreation opportunities with trails and other amenities.
3. Parking areas – Dependent on use of park
4. Appropriate facilities may include:
    a. Trails
    b. Interpretive signage
    c. Scenic/wildlife viewing areas

K. Trail / Linear Park

Description: Linear parks and trails provide non-motorized transportation and recreation opportunities and connect parks, open spaces and other areas with greenways to form a cohesive park system. Linear Parks may be in a healthy, natural state or developed landscape areas and other lands that follow corridors such as active or abandoned rights-of-way, creeks, canals, power lines and other linear, elongated features. These parks may compose portions of a system of green infrastructure and serve as links from one park to another.

Figure 7: Great Northern Trail

Planning Guidelines and Design Standards:

1. In the public input process, trails were identified as a highly desirable component to the county park system.
2. Trailhead parking areas should be strategically located and sized appropriately.
3. Appropriate facilities may include:
    a. Trails
    b. Interpretive signage
    c. Scenic/wildlife viewing areas
    d. Seating areas
    e. Restroom facilities may be desired at trailhead areas