Benton County Natural Areas and Parks System

Comprehensive Plan

Adopted 2012

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Executive Summary

The first comprehensive plan for Benton County parks was adopted in 1995, providing strategic direction for organizing and managing a system of parks and open space, natural areas, parks, and trails. Benton County's first trails plan was adopted in 2003. Almost all of the benchmarks of the comprehensive park system plan have been implemented, earning Benton County its reputation as one of the most progressive natural area and park providers in the Pacific Northwest.

This 2012 plan update is a long range, second-generation plan that builds on a highly successful program and charts a course for moving boldly into the future. The timing of this planning effort is especially fortuitous, as a confluence of events in the first decade of the 21st century has created a high degree of uncertainty – soaring energy and food prices, economic instability, and record floods, droughts, and temperatures – to name a few.

Clearly, Benton County residents treasure their natural areas, parks, and trails as touchstones for livability. And a legacy of leadership has demonstrated a commitment to firmly position the county in a way that will maximize economic, social, and environmental benefits for a sustainable future.

A New Vision, Goals and Plans to Shape the Future

Public outreach and stakeholder involvement efforts resulted in a new vision and goals for Benton County natural areas, parks, and trails. These assets are valued for health and well-being, sense of place and community, and economic prosperity. This theme reflects current trends in public policy and attitudes, with emphasis on priorities that promote well-being.

Benton County Vision Statement

Consistent with value statements and goals of the 2007 Benton County Comprehensive Plan, this vision statement reflects core aspirations of Benton County residents, and envisions a preferred future for natural areas, parks, and trails managed by Benton County.

What is most significant about the new vision statement is the emphasis on celebrating past achievements and commitments, while charting new initiatives including connectivity and emphasis on multiple benefits to residents. In this respect, the updated plan builds on past success and takes the program to a new level of vision and leadership.

Benton County Policy Goals

Eight goal statements provide policy direction for fulfilling the vision statement, and establish a framework for the new vision diagram to achieve a preferred future. These include:

- Maintain an exemplary system
- Strive for the highest quality of services
- Place a high priority on education and community awareness
- Assure highest level of safety and security
- Promote health and well-being
- Promote healthy natural habitats
- Develop an integrated, connected, and accessible system
- Maintain progressive and supportive leadership
- Strive for a sustainable future

Benton County Vision Statement

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan

Benton County celebrates its steadfast commitment to natural beauty, diverse habitats, and rich history.

Our community benefits significantly from outstanding natural areas and parks, connected by a well-established network of greenbelts and trails that provide public access, recreation, renewal and education for all.

We treasure, protect, and enhance these public places for connection to nature, sense of community, and sustained benefits to the economy, health and social well-being of Benton County.

Vision Diagram and Trails Plan

The Vision Diagram presents a graphic image of the future system of natural areas and parks. The needs assessment, vision statement, and policy goals provided a framework for the diagram, including:

- **Education** – emphasis on connecting the community with nature, especially youth; developing community awareness of the benefits to health and well-being
- **Connectivity** – creating an interconnected and integrated system of natural areas, parks, and trails that links all modes of transportation and promotes compatibility with other resource agencies.
- **Biodiversity** – importance of conservation biology in community health; implications of biodiversity loss
- **Collaborative Management** – implementing the vision through combined efforts with partners and the community; synergy
- **Best Management Practices** – stewardship of Benton County natural areas, parks, and trails; providing high quality outdoor recreation opportunities

Fitton Green - Trail Volunteers

A new Trail System Plan not only updates the 2003 plan, but also benefits from a concurrent initiative of the Benton County Trails Connection Committee to identify a more comprehensive list of trail projects for developing a county-wide trail network. These trail vision concepts and guidelines framed the trails plan:

- Link communities, parks, and natural areas
- Include water routes
- Utilize "Rails-with-Trails"
- Work with willing landowners
- Respect private lands
- Work with volunteers
- Facilitate multi-modal transportation
- Develop educational and interpretive trails
- Provide accessibility for all abilities
- Collaborate with others

Benefits are Compelling

While multiple benefits of parks and recreation opportunities have long been recognized, over the last several years mounting research has confirmed how essential these public services are to the quality of life and human happiness. It is therefore important to recognize that Benton County has been ranked the healthiest county in the state for the past two years (University of Wisconsin Populations Health Institute, 2010).

For a second time, the county received a No. 1 ranking for child well-being by the Oregon Progress Board, which monitors the progress of each county in meeting state benchmarks. Despite this achievement, it is important to recognize that not all residents have had equal access to these opportunities, a need that is addressed within the goals of this plan.

Benton County has positioned itself well to capitalize on the benefits of natural areas, parks, and trails. This plan uses a benefits-based approach to help strengthen the social, economic, and environmental health of the county in the 21st century. These benefits include:

- Community health and well-being
- Sense of community, family solidarity
- Education
- Economic health
- Biodiversity and economic health
- Connectivity and multi-use transportation

Jackson-Frazier Boardwalk - Science Education

What We Learned from Residents and Stakeholders

Benton County residents and stakeholders actively participated in a number of venues and generated an extraordinary depth and quality of information to provide a framework for the plan update based on community and benefits. They take great pride in the quality of the natural areas and park system, place a high value on the intrinsic benefits, and have a strong desire to reach another level of excellence.

Irish Bend Public Meeting

However, they are also concerned with an uncertain future as a threat to maintaining resources to support the program and identified a number of opportunities and gaps in service. These include the need for a more cohesive system linking communities, parks, and natural areas – especially with multi-modal trails – and improving access and connections to the Willamette River. More camping opportunities are desired, and more engagement of children and youth in the outdoors.

Benton County natural areas and parks are considered safe, but there are concerns for the future with some indicators of unsuitable uses and lack of respect for site values and maintaining behavioral norms.

Residents and stakeholders believe education to be an essential community need, with emphasis on developing greater public awareness of the values and benefits of natural areas and parks. They value connections to nature and outdoor recreation activities for health and well-being, especially for children and youth.

A major theme emerged for future direction – moving to more of a facilitator role for Benton County, developing strong collaborative and partnering efforts with adjacent counties, public agencies, non-profits, volunteers, and private landowners. Stakeholders see more of a need for connectivity and enhancing existing county properties, less of a need for land acquisition.

Meeting recreational needs of all residents is a high priority including all ages, cultures, incomes, and abilities. Benton County's Healthy Kids-Healthy Community program is an example of public policy focused on addressing special needs of youth and children, including a large number of residents whose incomes are below the poverty level. An increasing number of Latino families are locating to Benton County and seeking group and multi-family recreation opportunities.

Major Features of the Plan

The Vision Diagram and the Trail System Plan chart a new future for the Benton County natural areas, parks, and trail system. The diagram and the trails plan are both conceptual in nature – adaptive planning and management will be required to respond to shifting priorities, recreation needs, and resources required to maintain the system.

Highlights of the Vision Diagram

The Vision Diagram includes the following projects that respond to the policy framework for the plan, including the vision, mission, and goals.

Willamette River Recreation Access – Create a strong connection between the community and the river by improving public access at existing public sites (Hyak Park, Norwood Island, Irish Bend Park, Anderson Park), both to the river as well as to day-use and camping opportunities for users of the Willamette River Water Trail; emphasize public information and education, and protection of private lands; collaborate with Oregon Parks and Recreation Department, Linn County, and others.

Willamette River

Willamette River Habitat Restoration – Continue to work with others to improve and restore the riparian forest and ecosystem, with experimental and adaptive projects; focus on Anderson Park (Harkens Lake Oxbow) as a river restoration prototype (featured in the "Willamette River Basin Atlas").

Beazell Memorial Forest

Adair Park

Jackson-Frazier Wetland

Alsea River Recreation Corridor – Develop an information and interpretation plan to enhance enjoyment, understanding, and appreciation of this outstanding scenic and recreational waterway, in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management; opportunity for Clemens Park to become the core river site; upgrade and expand Salmonberry campground and day-use facilities.

Natural Areas – Implement the 2011 Benton County Stewardship Management Plan for Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, Fort Hoskins Historic Park, and Jackson-Frazier Wetland; promote species diversity, maintain biological richness, and manage for suitable recreation and visual resource management; improve wayfinding, signage, and interpretive and educational programs.

Prairie Conservation Areas – The recently adopted Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) calls for designating rare habitats within Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, Jackson Frazier Wetland, and Fort Hoskins Historic Park as Prairie Conservation Areas with a management emphasis on conservation of rare, threatened and endangered species; also to work with willing landowners to strategically acquire easements and parcels for management as Prairie Conservation Areas.

Adair Regional Park – Upgrade facilities, expand use and capacity, and participate in a community vision for the Adair Village Town Center.

Bellfountain Park – Celebrate historical significance of this site as the first Benton County park, used as a meeting place since 1860; upgrade facilities and expand picnicking.

North Albany Park – Explore mutual management opportunities with the City of Albany; upgrade and renovate facilities.

Campground Opportunities – Explore potential for more developed campground opportunities in the county, including sites that would contribute to economic development and tourism.

Collaborative Opportunities –Opportunities that have potential for addressing recreation needs and meeting goals of the vision diagram through collaboration with others.

Marys Peak Campground – Opportunity for Benton County and the U.S. Forest Service to explore ways to improve recreation use of this outstanding scenic and botanical feature on the Coast Range.

East Thornton Lake Natural Area and Interpretive Center – Opportunity for Benton County and City of Albany to explore common goals to manage this recently acquired natural area and remnant oxbow of the Willamette River.

Yaquina Falls – Opportunity for stakeholders to work with the Oregon Department of Forestry to explore management options for these spectacular waterfalls, recently acquired as western Oregon state forestlands.

Newton Creek Wetlands – Opportunity to collaborate with US Fish & Wildlife Service and local partners to acquire and develop this site for wetland habitat, recreation, natural resource education and economic development.

System-Wide Projects – Prepare a system-wide wayfinding and signage plan to improve public information and access; upgrade entry signs, and expand and improve interpretive and educational opportunities including trailheads and interpretive displays. Upgrade and expand ADA accessible facilities as well as enhance outdoor recreation opportunities for persons with different abilities and from different ethnic groups.

Highlights of the Trail System Plan

The Trail System Plan responds to the new policy goal "Connectivity and Accessibility" with projects designed to develop an interconnected and integrated system of accessible natural areas, parks, and open space. Five programmatic areas provide organization and direction for implementing the Trails Plan. A more complete list of trail projects has been developed by the Benton County Joint Trails Committee for inclusion in the City of Corvallis and other community and county plans.

Fire Protection and Community Access – providing critical connection for community and neighborhood access for emergency egress, fire protection, and connectivity.

- City of Philomath to Fitton Green Natural Area
- Neighborhood Emergency Access and Connectivity (along existing rights-of-way)

Multi-Use Trail Projects – joint projects with Public Works (Transportation) to promote walking and bicycling opportunities

- City of Adair to Adair Park – Adair Park to E.E. Wilson Wildlife Refuge
- City of Corvallis to Albany Multi-use Path
- City of Corvallis to Finley Wildlife Refuge
- City of Monroe to Finley Wildlife Refuge
- City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-use Path
- Roadway Shoulder Widening Improvements for Bike Lanes
- Sheep Farm Trail – Northwest Corvallis to McDonald Forest

Willamette River Access – Improving access to the Willamette River and participating with others to implement the Willamette River Water Trail Concept, including signage and minimal facilities; special consideration and additional study to improve access to the river between Corvallis and Irish Bend Park.

Tourism and Economic Development – Projects with potential for promoting tourism and improving economic health of local communities.

- Alsea River Loop Trail
- City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-use Path
- Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail
- Willamette River Access and Water Trail
- Regional Bike Touring Routes (Special-interest tours e.g. wine tours)

Connections Between Natural Areas – Projects to create a more cohesive and connected system by linking all of the county's natural areas as well as Fort Hoskins Historic Park.

- Bald Hill Park to Fitton Green Natural Area (off roadway)
- Beazell Memorial Forest to Fort Hoskins Historic Park
- Fitton Green Natural Area to Beazell Memorial Forest
- Fitton Green Natural Area to McDonald Forest
- Jackson-Frazier Wetland to Chip Ross Park (Corvallis)

Beazell Memorial Forest Trail

Fitton Green Trail

Cycling

Implementation Plan

A number of strategies are recommended for implementing this plan, in response to the eight policy goals. These strategies provide tactical direction and a general work program for implementing the vision diagram and trails plan. Staff can draw on the strategies to set priorities, prepare action plans, and develop and maintain site management plans.

Fort Hoskins Historic Park - Grand Opening 2002

Financing the Plan

Stable funding in an unstable external environment will be the major challenge for maintaining high quality natural areas, parks and trails, responding to public expectations, and addressing programmatic needs and opportunities identified in this plan.

FCS Group (Portland) evaluated eleven funding methods and a number of potential governance strategies, providing the basis for preparing a strategic framework to implement the Benton County Natural Areas, Parks and Trails System Plan. Both the state of Oregon and Benton County have a long history of strategic planning. This plan continues the strategic approach with emphasis on exploring creative concepts as well as collaborating with other local governments, non-profits, and others to find common ground and mutual solutions to current challenges in public service delivery.

Five funding methods are considered to have the highest potential:

- System development charges for implementing the Habitat Conservation Plan
- System development charges for connectivity and transportation (Trail System Plan)
- Dedications and donations of easements and land
- Partnerships
- Grants

Consistent with a widespread shift within multiple governments toward more creative and regional partnerships, it is recommended that Benton County explore an array of options to deliver high quality parks, natural areas and trails, using a combination of funding resources and alternative governance strategies. These may include:

- Voter-approved specific improvement program
- Voter-approved regional service district with dedicated funding sources
- Joint powers agreement among participating cities, county and/or service districts
- Inter-agency agreement among participating cities, county and/or service districts

To fulfill the vision, mission, policy goals, and strategies of this plan, the following strategic framework is recommended:

- Create a blue-ribbon committee to develop a strategic plan for stable funding.
- Establish a friends group for long-term support of Benton County natural areas, parks & trails.
- Prepare a preliminary financial analysis of funding and governance options.
- Develop a phased implementation plan and refine projects priorities and costs.

Plan Purpose and Process

Why this plan is important

Irish Bend Public Meeting at Monroe

Background

This system plan for Benton County natural areas, parks, and trails is a second-generation comprehensive plan. The first-generation plan was adopted in 1995 to provide strategic direction and a framework for organizing and managing a comprehensive system.

New initiatives were outlined in the 1995 plan, including natural resource management and restoration, historic preservation, and trail system planning. Performance measures and benchmarking identified specific outcomes for meeting current needs and shaping the future.

Clearly, the 1995 plan has a been a living document resulting in achievements that have earned Benton County its reputation as a leader in planning and managing a robust natural areas, parks and trail system.

The 2012 plan has been prepared to continue that legacy, building on past success to solidly position Benton County for a changing and challenging future.

Planning Context

In Oregon, comprehensive planning is structured to provide coordination of effort, with statewide goals providing overall direction for countywide and local planning. The Oregon Statewide Planning Program requires counties to maintain updated comprehensive plans to provide policy direction for growth, land use and resource management.

2007 Benton County Comprehensive Plan

Value Statements

Residents of Benton County value:

The Land -- its beauty and life sustaining qualities
Maintenance of rural character
A healthy environment
Economic security and opportunity
Supportive human systems
Public and private interests
Engagement between citizens and government
Connection to place

Benton County Comprehensive Plan

The 2007 Benton County Comprehensive Plan is the guiding policy document for the county's functional plans (e.g. transportation, parks). Eight value statements provide an overall framework for planning to ensure values and visions of county citizens are acknowledged. These statements have direct implications for the Natural Areas and Park System Comprehensive Plan, including importance of connection to the land, health and well-being, environmental health, and economic stability. The complete Comprehensive Plan can be found at http://www.co.benton.or.us/cd/planning/comp_plan.php.

Goals from the Benton County Comprehensive Plan also provide policy direction and guidance for natural area and park planning. Goal 5 provides the framework for protecting natural resources, and it is noteworthy that Benton County has fulfilled these goals in many ways through its natural and cultural resource management program.

Benton County Comprehensive Plan

Goal 5: Natural Resources, Scenic & Historic Areas, Open Spaces

- To protect and maintain unique scenic, open space and natural areas.
- To promote appreciation & preservation of diverse historic resources.
- To preserve aquatic systems and riparian areas for ecological functions.
- To identify and protect significant wetlands and their natural functions.
- To conserve and protect wildlife habitats and promote habitat management that maintains wildlife diversity.

Of particular significance, Goal 8 links outdoor recreation with community health. A recent national survey ranked Benton County as the healthiest county in Oregon (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2010).

Benton County Comprehensive Plan

Goal 8: Recreational Needs

To maintain a park and open space system that represents the heritage and natural and scenic qualities of Benton County, and provides outdoor recreation opportunities that contribute to healthy individuals, children, and families.

Planning for Stability and Sustainability

This plan addresses needs and opportunities of an innovative and mature system – in a sense at a crossroad in terms of future investment of resources and setting priorities. Planning for stability and sustainability is especially timely, when external dynamics are creating a highly uncertain and unpredictable future. The 2002 Benton County Sustainability Policy provides the definition and goals for the term sustainability in this plan update:

We must use, develop, and protect our resources at a rate and in a manner that enables people to meet their current needs and also preserve resources for future generations.

Purpose of the Benton County System Plan

While the 1995 plan for natural areas and parks has served Benton County residents well, much has changed over the years – the name of the department has changed to include natural areas, several additional outstanding habitats representative of the county's special landscapes have been acquired, and active management and restoration efforts have been successfully implemented with thousands of hours of volunteer labor.

Other major accomplishments include adoption and implementation of Benton County's first Trail System Plan, and being the first county in Oregon to adopt a Habitat Conservation Plan, while continuing to make investments in site and facility infrastructure to enhance public access and stewardship. Partnering with others has been a major and equally important effort, including the Greenbelt Land Trust, other nonprofits, local communities and agencies, and private landowners – working together toward a more sustainable future.

Process Overview

This planning project provides an opportunity to celebrate past achievements, and create a vision of a preferred future with policy direction and strategies to guide decisions over the next twelve years.

This plan was designed to provide strategic direction by developing a solid policy framework with a clear vision, mission, and policy goals. The county's first comprehensive vision diagram organizes the system, targeting special needs and opportunities with a visual map. Implementation strategies provide specific direction to achieve the vision and fulfill policy goals.

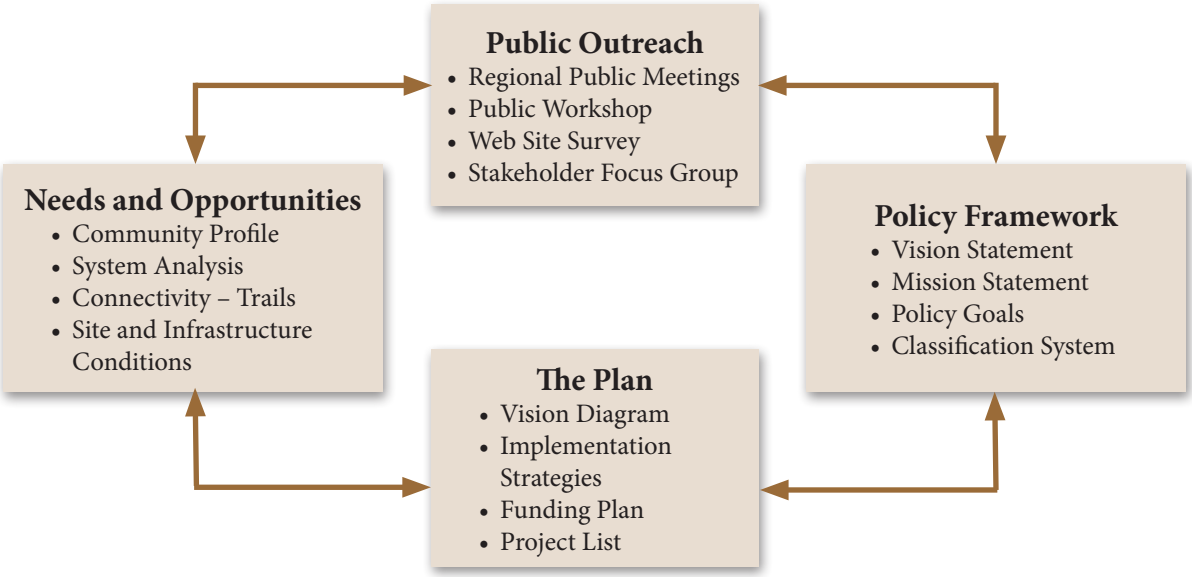
Citizen and stakeholder involvement was a major underpinning of the planning process by identifying problems and concerns, recording personal, family, and community benefits; outlining priorities, and exploring a vision for the future. Methods for public outreach included:

- Five public outreach meetings (Wren/Kings Valley, Adair, Monroe, N. Albany, Alsea)
- Focus group meeting with key stakeholders (Corvallis)
- Community workshop with breakout groups (Corvallis)
- On-line public opinion survey
- Natural Areas and Park Advisory Board – active involvement throughout the process

A systematic assessment was made of individual sites and facilities to determine physical conditions and needs of infrastructure and system investment. Gap analysis and needs and opportunity assessment provided a broad examination of the county's total system of parks, natural areas, and trails.

An updated Trails Plan is integrated into this plan, part of a more comprehensive countywide trail plan prepared by the Benton County Trails Connection Committee.

Planning Process



Maximizing Benefits

A major underpinning of this plan is the goal to maximize multiple benefits of the natural areas, parks, and trails program – especially benefits of community health and well being, economic development, and biodiversity. This is consistent with the benefits-based management approach that is becoming a major trend in planning for livability and sustainability.

Benefits

How natural areas and parks contribute to livability

Willamette River

Parks and recreation have long been considered essential public services. Yet, a tidal wave of research and public interest has been sweeping the country, with conclusive evidence of powerful social, economic, and environmental benefits from connections with nature and the outdoors, and from landscape settings ranging from urban to national parks.

Community Health and Well-Being

There are many reasons for the recent surge of attention to public health and well-being, not the least of which is increasing documented evidence that urbanization and technology are major threats to physical and mental health, and sense of community. Richard Louv's "Last Child in the Woods" has become a flash point with his scholarly assessment that we must "save our children from nature deficit disorder," the premise of which is that a lack of nature in children's lives is linked to trends such as obesity, attention deficit disorders and depression. Louv cites numerous studies documenting how exposure to natural environments enhances children's cognitive development by improving their awareness, attention, reasoning and observational skills.

> *"It is an incalculable added pleasure to any one's sum of happiness if he or she grows to know, even slightly and imperfectly, how to read and enjoy the wonder-book of nature."*
>
> Theodore Roosevelt

As part of its Research Series, the National Recreation and Park Association recently published a monograph by Frances (Ming) Kuyo titled "Parks and Other Green Environments: Essential Components of a Healthy Human Habitat." Kuyo provides an overview of what scientists have discovered about the relationship between nature and human health, focusing on the most remarkable and compelling findings.

> *"When we compare people with more versus less ready access to parks and other green environments, we find that they exhibit differences in well-being and functioning in each of the three trademark domains: social, psychological, and physical health."*
>
> Frances (Ming) Kuyo

Benton County leaders have long recognized the connection between healthy residents, nature, and the outdoors – the 1995 park system plan emphasized the need for "recreation and renewal, solitude, social interaction, and relaxation" and proposed new initiatives for natural, cultural, and historical preservation, restoration, and education. Notably, the first Benton County Trails System Plan was adopted several years ago, with endorsement from the Benton County Health Department.

For the past two years, Benton County has been ranked the healthiest county in the state (University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, 2010). For a second time, the county received a No. 1 ranking for child well-being by the Oregon Progress Board, which monitors the progress of each county in meeting state benchmarks.

> *"The community-based Benton County Trail System Plan increases opportunities to engage in physical exercise and will promote and support choices for healthy lifestyles. The Trail Plan is good recreational planning and it is good public health planning, which supports healthy people in a healthy community."*
>
> Mary Anne Deagen
> Benton County Community Health Department Administrator (retired)

One can assume there is a connection between Benton County being regarded as a healthy place and its efforts to manage and provide opportunities for residents to enjoy some of the best representations of Benton County's landscape. Nevertheless, obesity and diabetes are increasing rapidly in Benton and Linn Counties, in large part due to poverty, lack of access to healthy food, and inactivity among the minority population (Benton County Health Department, 2010). The 2008-2012 Oregon Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) identifies minorities as a target population for increasing participation in outdoor recreation. Barriers to participation amongst minority communities in Benton County include a lack of transportation, comprehensive signage and information regarding available services and opportunities. It has been suggested that the development of multi-lingual materials and dissemination of information to children at schools would increase participation by this portion of the population.

Benton County Healthy Kids, Healthy Communites Program

The Benton County Health Department, in collaboration with the city of Corvallis and other partners, was recently selected as one of 41 sites nationwide to participate in the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities program. The foundation's $500 million commitment is to reverse childhood obesity trends in the U.S. by 2015. Currently, 23 million young people in the U.S. are overweight or obese. The presence of parks, open spaces and other recreational facilities is consistently linked with higher physical activity levels among children and adolescents. The opportunity that the Banton County Natural Areas and Parks Department has to partner with the Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities program is tremendous, providing possible solutions to frightening trends. The Safe Routes to Schools program provides children with walking and biking zones free from safety issues with motor vehicle traffic and teaches them good attitudes toward exercise.

Sense of Community, Family Solidarity, Education

Benton County residents believe a sense of community and family togetherness are important social benefits of the county's natural areas, parks and trails. They take pride in well-maintained, high quality places for outdoor recreation and enjoyment, and the county's commitment to protect, restore and interpret natural, historical, and cultural landscapes.

Benton County celebrates, protects, and interprets its natural, historical and cultural resources, providing residents with an appreciation for the land and contributions of past generations. Educational benefits include not only interpretive programs and information, but also opportunities for volunteers and students to become involved in hands-on activities and develop a stewardship ethic.

Residents value opportunities for community and family gatherings, and for people of all ages, abilities, and cultures to access county sites and facilities. They believe these places are safe and make a major contribution to livability, while at the same time reflecting the quality of life in their community.

Jackson-Frazier Boardwalk - Science Education

Economic Health

While research has indicated that parks, trails, and recreation amenities distinguish a city or county as desirable places to live, park and recreation agencies have generally been unsuccessful in documenting how their services contribute to economic health. The reason is because financial reports have usually been the source of information rather than economic impact reports (Crompton, 2011).

> This study has shown local benefits from Mecklenburg County's parks on property values and taxes, increased economic development and tax revenue from tourism, improved quality of life from publicly available amenities, a healthier and more interconnected citizenry, and an enhanced ability to deal with the environmental challenges of stormwater management and air pollution.
>
> Economic Benefits of Mecklenburg County, N.C. Park & Recreation System, Trust for Public Land (2010)

A recent study conducted by the Trust for Public Land for Mecklenburg County, North Carolina is exemplary of pioneering work to quantify how park and recreation investments have major economic value. Seven factors were measured, contributing direct income to the county treasury, providing direct savings, and significantly increasing property values.

Although not included in the Mecklenburg County study, judicious use of revenue generating programs are becoming more widely accepted by the public as a sound method for offsetting operating costs for managing parks, natural areas, and recreation amenities.

Benton County residents value economic benefits of the County's natural areas, parks, and trails, and they believe they contribute significantly to economic stability. They also believe there are future opportunities for tourism and economic benefits.

Biodiversity and Environmental Health

> Almost all native upland, wet prairies, and oak savanna habitats have vanished in the Willamette Valley, with less than 0.5% remaining. Benton County comprises 7% of the eco-region, and is home to 12% of the remaining native prairie and oak savanna habitat.
>
> Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan, Sept. 2009

Environmental sustainability benefits commonly identified by park and recreation agencies include acquiring and protecting natural areas for future generations, and other benefits such as improving air quality, creating wildlife habitat, and providing opportunities for children and families to connect with nature and recreate together outdoors.

While these indeed are benefits of Benton County's natural resource management program, the county has expanded its role and benefits to include much more, notably through proactive efforts to actively manage and restore sites with the most ecological significance.

Preserving, Managing, and Restoring Natural Habitats

As noted in the "Resource Stewardship Plan for Benton County Parks and Natural Areas" (Trout Mountain Forestry, 2011), Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, and Fort Hoskins Historic Park encompass five of the eight "Strategy Habitats" identified by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife for conservation priorities in the Willamette Valley. As the plan notes, the fact that these properties contain five of the state's "Strategy Habitats" is a testament to the ecological significance of the sites.

A policy framework guides managers and ensures a consistent long-term management approach for these sites.

Benton County has also taken the lead to preserve and restore some of the remaining prairie habitat, as well as rare prairie species, through implementation of the Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan. Additionally, the county will designate Prairie Conservation Areas for active conservation, and partner with local land managers to guide where habitat restoration and enhancement will take place. Seven rare native species are targeted.

In addition to ensuring all county activities are in full compliance with endangered species protection laws, the county will provide assistance to county residents and cooperators to simplify the land use permitting process.

The County has also developed a strategy for a non-regulatory framework for interested parties, both public and private, to work together to help conserve and restore rare habitat and recover at-risk species in Benton County.

Benton County Resource Stewardship Management Plan

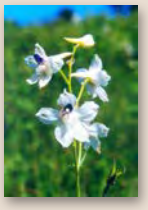
Policy Framework

1. Manage for suitable recreation and visual resource management
2. Make wildlife and fish habitat improvements to promote species diversity
3. Maintain biological richness and native diversity
4. Protect long-term productivity and improve biological integrity of forest ecosystems
5. Conduct regular monitoring and assessment
6. Make park operations self-sustaining wherever possible

Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan

Targeted Species

Common Name	Federal Status
Willamette daisy	Endangered
Fender's blue butterfly	Endangered
Bradshaw lomatium	Endangered
Kincaid's lupine	Threatened
Nelson's checkermallow	Threatened
Taylor's checkerspot butterfly	Candidate
Peacock larkspur	Species of Concern



Peacock larkspur
Photo: TN Kaye

Taylor's checkerspot
Photo: KF Harding

Willamette Daisy
Photo: TN Kaye

Bradshaw's lomatium
Photo: TN Kaye

Nelson's checkermallow
Photo: TN Kaye

Fender's blue butterfly and Kincaid's lupine
Photo: KF Harding

Biodiversity Collaboration

While Benton County is committed to its Habitat Conservation Plan and Prairie Conservation Strategy, there is also the opportunity to collaborate with others to achieve broader biodiversity goals. For example, many of the habitat restoration efforts and strategies will provide new information and a learning curve for replication in other efforts to promote biological diversity.

Connectivity and Alternative Transportation

A major benefit of Benton County's natural areas and parks program is a commitment to a comprehensive trail system, in cooperation with willing landowners and other providers. A cohesive and integrated trail system not only provides health benefits including exercise, connection with nature, and stress relief, but in many cases can serve dual purposes for transportation including bicycling and walking.

Additional benefits from a trails system include opportunities for strengthening a sense of community, creating social interactions with friends and neighbors, and providing educational opportunities.

Benefits of Natural Areas, Parks and Trails

Be happier – feel great	Promote sensitivity to cultural diversity
Build family unity	Increase community pride
Educate children and adults	Strengthen community involvement
Control weight	Reduce crime
Look better	Diminish gang violence
Build strong bodies	Provide safe places to meet friends
Diminish chance of disease	Create memories
Decrease insurance premiums	Curb employee absenteeism
Live longer	Boost employee productivity
Build self-esteem	Enhance property values
Relax	Generate revenue
Reduce stress	Increase tourism
Place for social interaction	Attract and sustain business
Enhance relationship skills	Enjoy and connect with nature
Eliminate loneliness	Clean air and water
Conquer boredom	Protect the environment
Preserve and celebrate history	Restore natural habitats

Adapted from "Benefits are Endless," Massachusetts Recreation and Park Association

Conclusions

Social, economic, and environmental benefits of natural areas, parks and trails will become essential for maintaining a sustainable and livable future. Benton County has positioned itself well to meet the challenge.

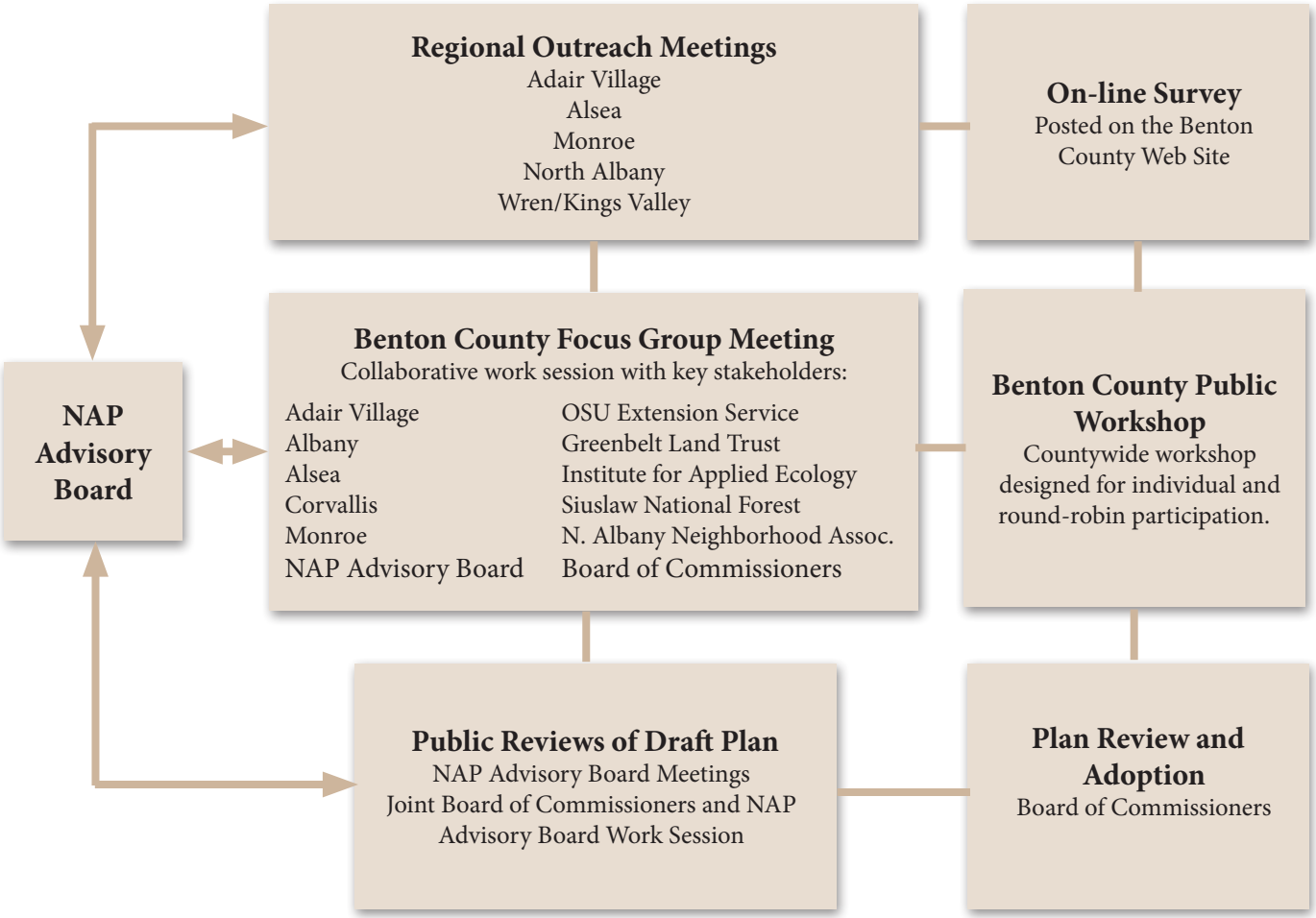
Public Involvement

What we learned from Benton County residents

Public involvement was an integral part of the process for this benchmark planning effort, led by the Natural Areas and Parks (NAP) Advisory Board. A variety of methods provided opportunities for the general public and key stakeholders to participate. Outreach meetings were well attended and participants were supportive of the planning program.

Public Involvement Process

Benton County Natural Areas and Park System Plan



Outreach Results

Residents and stakeholders generated an extraordinary depth and quality of information to provide a community-based framework for the plan update. With multiple venues and participants, themes ranged from frequency, type, and benefits of outdoor recreation participation to more strategic and policy-focused outcomes including needs, opportunities and priorities. See Appendix B and C for a detailed summary of public input.

Values, Benefits and Activities

Residents highly value the county's scenic beauty, parks and natural areas.

Most common activities are enjoying nature, walking and hiking, being with friends and family outdoors, exercising, and walking a dog.

Benefits include physical exercise, health and wellness, family togetherness, and overall livability.

Most residents believe natural areas and parks managed by the county are safe.

Needs, Opportunities and Priorities

Education, community health, and habitat conservation are high priorities.

Improving the trail system, better signage, and connectivity are major needs.

Enhancements to parks, natural areas, and trails can strengthen the economy.

Threats and concerns include unstable funding, aging infrastructure, attrition of staff, and exceeding capacity to maintain management standards.

Other concerns include maintaining safety and security, and meeting needs of all ages, cultures, incomes, and abilities.

Maintaining a high quality system is more important than expanding the system with new acquisitions.

Additional facilities are desired including campgrounds, trails, and improved access to the Willamette River.

Outreach Conclusions

Conclusions drawn from results of the public involvement program indicate the need for a highly strategic and focused planning effort. While residents take pride in the high quality system of Benton County parks and natural areas, they see this as an opportunity for the program to reach another level of excellence. Strong support exists for continuing bold vision while maintaining a sustainable future.

Public Involvement Themes and Conclusions

Residents take great pride in the stewardship legacy and social and economic benefits of parks and natural areas managed by Benton County.

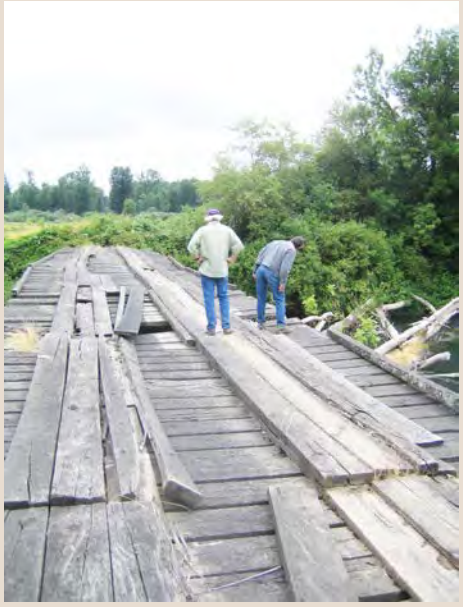
Residents envision a vibrant, sustainable, and well-integrated network of natural areas, parks, and trails.

More collaboration and partnering will be required to achieve the vision.

Improved public awareness and information should be part of a broad effort to expand educational opportunities, especially for youth.

Residents support new initiatives such as the Habitat Conservation Plan, but implementation will require efforts to invigorate and re-energize the community.

Benton County is moving more toward a leadership role that fosters collaborative ventures and facilitates quality services.



Norwood Island Access

Needs Assessment

Our opportunities and needs

In addition to the needs identified in the public involvement process, opportunities and needs were assessed by examining Benton County's social and physical characteristics – the people, land and facilities, and the system – including:

- Community population characteristics and trends
- Conditions of existing Benton County parks, natural areas, and recreation facilities
- System opportunities and needs

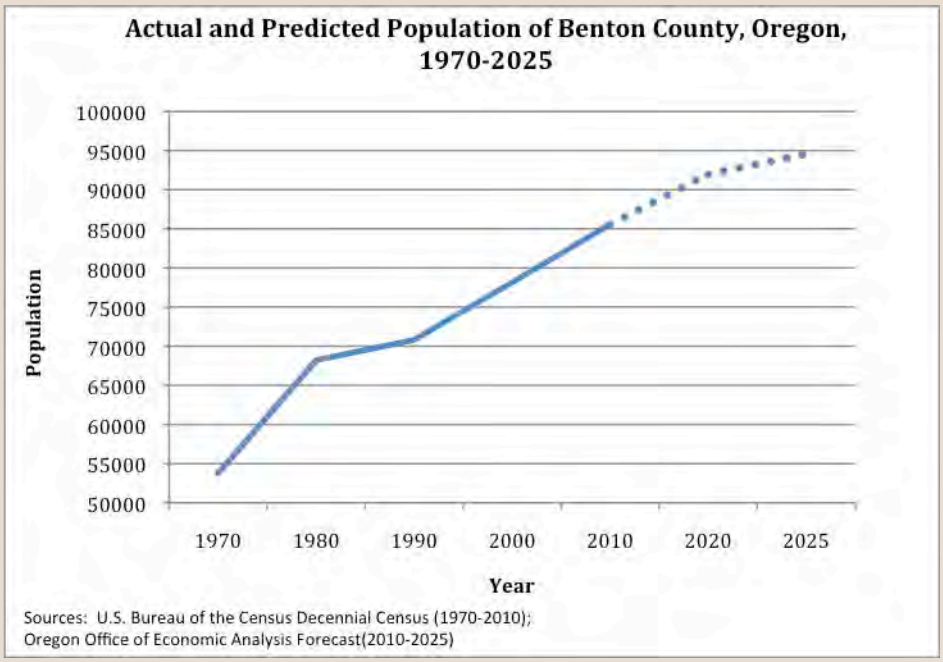
The needs assessment provides a framework for the plan, from which strategic issues can emerge and guide the policy framework including a vision of the future.

Population Profile and Trends

Over the last ten years, Benton County's population has increased by 9.5%, with 85,579 persons recorded in the 2010 census. This increase was less than the 12% growth for the state. For the previous decade, the county population grew by 10%; from 1980-1990 the growth was 4%, and from 1970-1980 the county had a large increase of 27%.

Population forecasts for Benton County for the next decade (2010-2020) suggest a continued moderate increase of approximately 3%, and an increase of 6.7% over the next fifteen years (2010-2025). Unknown factors include effects of future events such as possible climate change – June 2010 was declared to be the hottest June based on world-wide records, and scientists believe this could be the hottest year on record (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2010). Benton County also has a reputation as a desirable and healthy place to live.

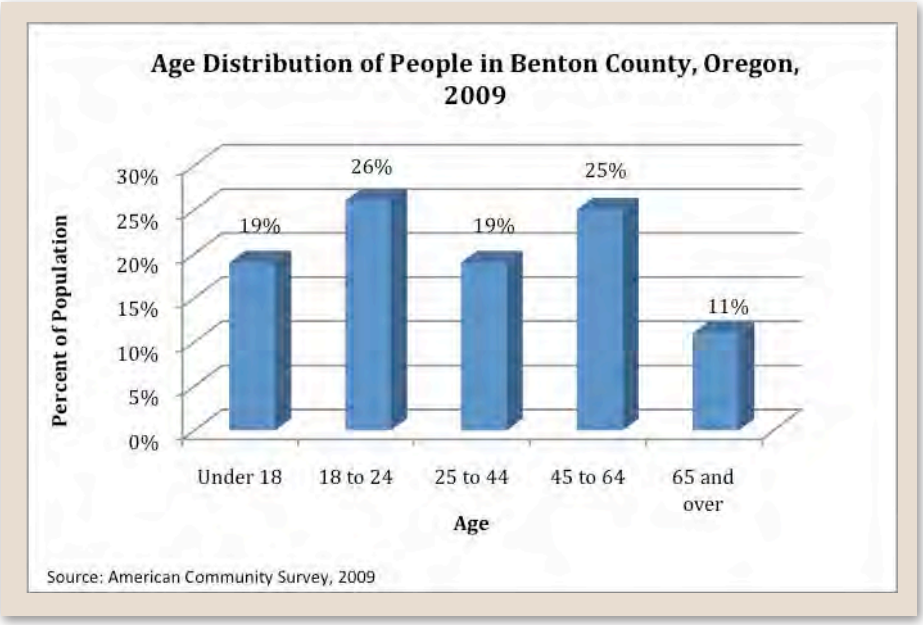
Note: In 2009 the Benton County Health Department prepared a comprehensive Health Status Report, including 2007 demographic and socioeconomic characteristics for the county based on data from the Portland State University Population Research Center. The U.S. Census Bureau has since published a 2009 database considered to be more current for this plan update. Only total population data was available from the 2010 census.



Age

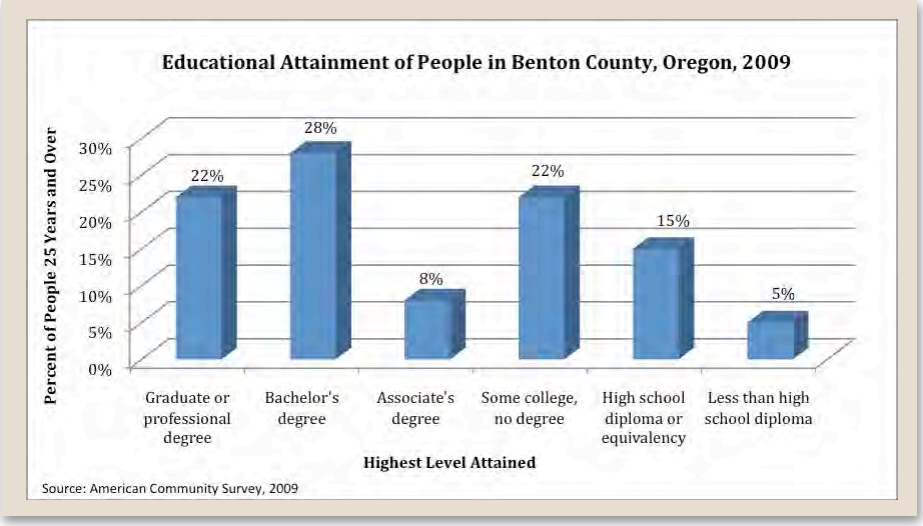
In 2009, almost two-thirds of Benton County residents were under the age of 45 with almost 50% of the population under the age of 24 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Oregon State University and Linn-Benton Community College contribute to the unusually large 18-24 age group comprising 26% of the population. The median age was 29.8 years. Combined with over 50% of the remainder of the population that is either aging or considered senior adults, a high level of participation in outdoor recreation and family-oriented activities can be expected throughout the planning horizon for this plan.

According to the Portland State University Population Research Center, the highest growth will be seen in the age group of adults 60 years and older. A significant increase is expected among the 85 years and older age group. Conversely, minimal population growth is expected among the younger age groups.



Education

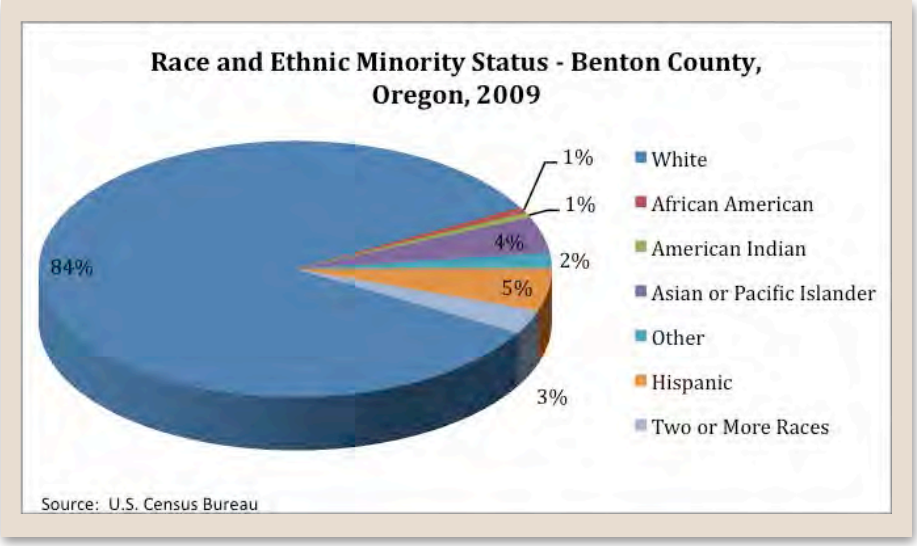
In 2009, fifty percent of Benton County residents 25 years of age and older earned graduate, professional or bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Educational attainment in the county is well above the national percentage of adults with 4-year degrees (28%). Yet, there is a large number of adults in Benton County who do not have degrees, which may at least partially be related to an increase in the racial and ethnic minority population that tends to have lower educational attainment levels than the population at large.



Racial and Ethnic Minority Population

According to Census Bureau updates, more than one third of Americans are racial and ethnic minorities. Hispanics continue to grow faster than any other group, exceeding 15 percent of the overall population for the first time last year. At the same time, children of racial and ethnic minorities continue to exhibit significant growth.

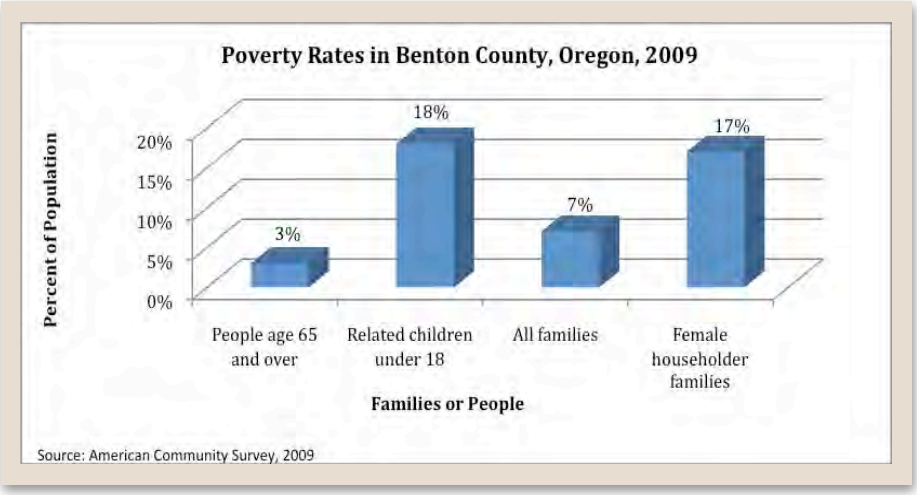
In 2009, the non-white minority population in Benton County was 16%, including 6% Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Benton County Health Department has identified access to healthy foods, transportation, exercise, and safe and affordable recreation as areas of need for the county's increasing Hispanic community, including large families with children and youth.



Poverty

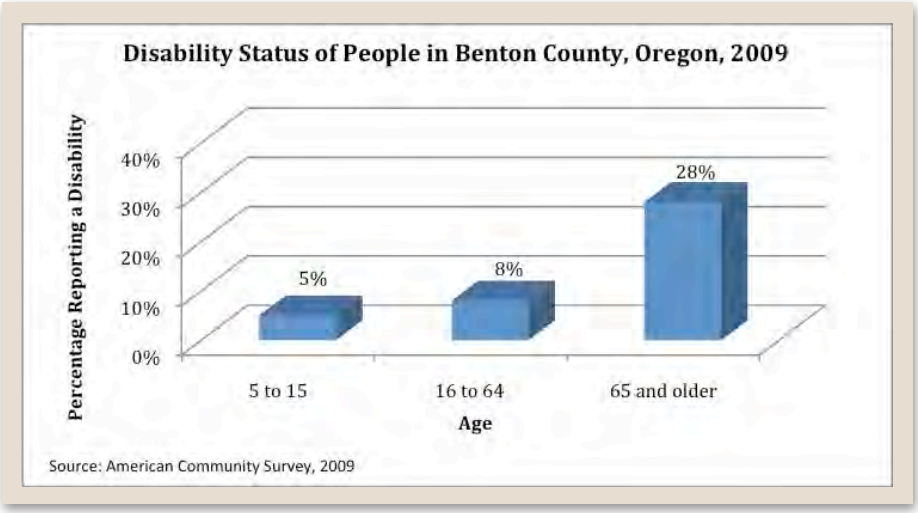
In 2009, 20% of Benton County's population was below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009), exacerbated by the downturn in the economy over the last several years. Eighteen percent of related children under 18 were below the poverty level in 2009, compared with 3 percent of persons 65 years old and over. Seven percent of all families and 17 percent of families with a female householder and no husband present had incomes below the poverty level.

Benton County's Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities program is focused on improving opportunities for physical activity and access to affordable foods for children and families living in southern Benton County, including part of Corvallis. Reducing childhood obesity through active living and healthy eating is a major goal.



Disability

In Benton County, almost a third of older adults age 65 and older reported a disability in 2009, while ten percent of Benton County children at least five years of age reported disabilities. In 2006, an estimated 12% of Benton County residents were disabled, compared to 16% of Oregon residents.

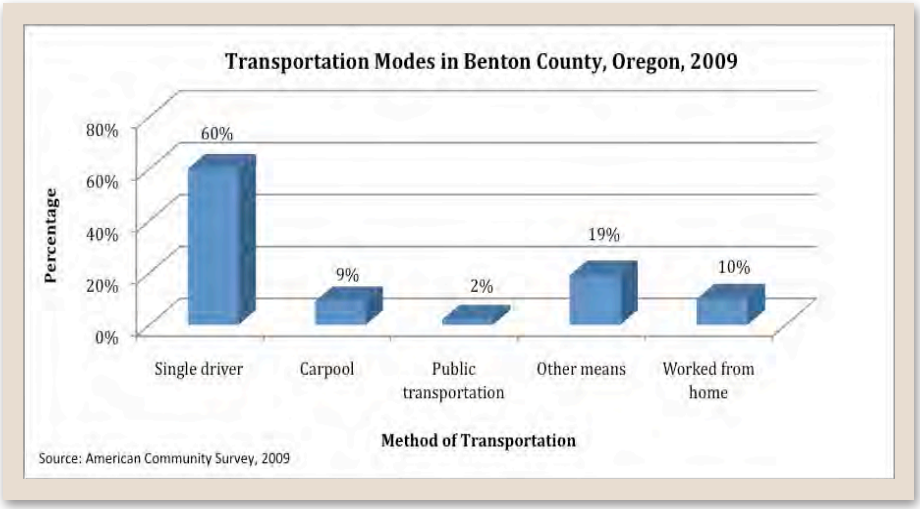


Unemployment

In April 2010, Benton County's unemployment rate of 6.3% was the second-lowest rate among Oregon's 36 counties, according to the Oregon Employment Department. The statewide rate was 9.6%. Sectors showing growth in the last year include leisure and hospitality, up 190 jobs, and professional and business services, up 80 jobs.

Transportation

Sixty percent of Benton County workers drove to work alone in 2009, while 9% carpooled and 2% used public transportation. Nineteen percent used other means, indicating a large number who walk or bicycle to work.



Population Conclusions

Benton County's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics are unique in many respects, with many implications for meeting needs for natural areas, parks and open space, and recreation.

Total Population

Benton County's population will likely increase in the future at a modest growth rate; however there are many unknowns that are difficult for population forecasting, including the possibility of in-migration due to climate change.

Age

Benton County's age pyramid is uncharacteristic for Oregon due to its average age (29.8) with a large number of families and children. An extraordinary increase in older adults, especially over age 85 will require special attention to mobility and transportation needs.

Education

While Benton County's population tends to be highly educated, a large number of adults have little or no education. Education, public information on outdoor opportunities and consequent health benefits, and stewardship awareness will be important in the future.

Race and Ethnicity

Benton County's race and ethnic composition creates special needs for recreation and the outdoors, such as multi-family gatherings and opportunities for children and youth. Benton County Health Department is focusing on the health, recreation and transportation needs of Hispanic families and children.

Poverty

A large number of Benton County residents are below the poverty level. Benton County's Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities program is an opportunity for inter-departmental collaboration to meet recreation and health needs of residents below the poverty level.

Disability

A significant number of Benton County residents report a disability (12%). A growing aging population will have special transportation and facility needs.

Transportation

With 19% of the county population using non-auto transportation, multi-modal opportunities such as trails and pathways will be important in the future.

Recreation Participation, Trends, and Issues

The Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation has been conducting outdoor recreation research for the last several years as the basis for updating the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The 2003-2007 SCORP provides information on outdoor recreation participation and trends at both the regional and state level.

Statewide, the top six Oregon outdoor recreation activities indicate large numbers of Oregonians participate in running and walking for exercise as well as nature recreation (birdwatching, nature/wildlife observation), sightseeing, and camping.

The 2003-2007 SCORP identified a need for increasing water-based recreation resources and facilities for both motorized and non-motorized boating to support the growing demand for boating, fishing, and water-based camping.

Recreation Trends and Needs

Based on data from the Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan, for the Benton-Lane-Linn County region, outdoor recreation activities with the highest growth rate are nature and wildlife observation (254%), fishing from a boat (97%), sightseeing/driving for pleasure (69%), R/V trailer camping (49%), day hiking (21%).

These growth trends are similar at the state level, except for a 138% increase in non-motorized boating (0.2% for Benton County region).

Top Six Oregon Recreation Activities (2003-2007)

Activity	Annual User Days (millions)
Running/Walking for Exercise	49.2
Walking for Pleasure	47.4
Birdwatching	18.7
Nature/Wildlife Observation	17.6
Sightseeing/Driving for Pleasure	12.3
R/V Trailer Camping	11.0

Recreation Issues

The 2008-2012 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan identified four demographic and social changes as critical areas affecting recreation, with specific recommendations for meeting recreation needs as well as setting priorities for the state grant program.

What is apparent is how well positioned Benton County is to respond to these changing demographics in ways that can meet emerging outdoor recreation needs.

Key Demographic and Social Issues and Needs in Oregon (2008-2012)

Rapidly Aging Population
Walking/hiking trails close to home; accessibility, volunteerism.

Declining Youth Outdoor Participation
Walking/hiking trails close to home; connections with nature.

Increasingly Diverse Population
Adapting to cultural needs e.g. group picnic and camping facilities.

Oregon's Physical Activity Crisis
Promoting physical activity to reduce chronic diseases and increase overall health.

These trends also provide direction for updating the Benton County plan:

- Close-to-home recreation travel is increasing; agencies will be challenged to meet this demand.
- As the baby boomer generation retires, demand for more amenities and accessibility will increase.
- Rural communities want to collaborate with providers to diversify economies, while maintaining values.
- Nature study activities are rising in popularity – above all other recreation activities.
- In some areas in the future, water may be more valuable for recreation than for agriculture.
- Managing conflicts between recreational users is becoming more important.
- Expanding public-private partnerships is needed to be more efficient and effective.

Benton County System Inventory

Benton County manages a 1,475-acre system of three large natural areas, a large historic park, a large regional park, seven other smaller park sites including four on the Willamette River, and three boat landings, a campground, and a park on the Alsea River. The county courthouse grounds and Crystal Lake Cemetery are also maintained by the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department.

The Beazell, Fitton Green, Jackson-Frazier, and Fort Hoskins sites have been designated strategic Prairie Conservation Areas for habitat restoration and enhancement. The Cardwell Hill area in Wren has been designated as an area of interest for possible acquisition from willing sellers of additional lands for prairie conservation.

Benton County Natural Areas and Park System

Site	Size	Location	Purpose and Function
Natural Areas			
Beazell Memorial Forest*	586 acres	Kings Valley	Demonstration working forest & natural area
Fitton Green Natural Area*	308 acres	Near Philomath	Ridge-top natural area; views of Marys Peak, Marys River
Jackson-Frazier Wetland*	144 acres	North Corvallis	Second largest native prairie wetland in Oregon
Cardwell Hill Prairie Conservation Area (pending)*	56 acres	Wren	Conservation measure within Habitat Conservation Plan
Historic Park			
Fort Hoskins Historic Park*	130 acres	Kings Valley	1856 Civil War-era fort; historic and natural area restoration
Parks			
Adair Park	123 acres	City of Adair	Large regional park and Adair Village open space
Anderson Park	26 acres	Willamette River	Premier river oxbow restoration project; river access
Bellfountain Park	10 acres	Near Monroe	Historic community park est. in 1860; popular group site
Clemens Park	38 acres	Alsea River	Core Alsea River Recreation Corridor site; river trail
Hyak Park	5 acres	Willamette River	Strategic river access site on Highway 20 near Albany
Irish Bend Park	8 acres	Willamette River	Water Trail access; non-motorized boat access
Norwood Island	60 acres	Willamette River	Island at Long Tom River confluence; Water Trail access
North Albany Park	22 acres	North Albany	Community park in urbanizing part of North Albany
Boat Landing/Campground			
Campbell Boat Landing	1 acre	Alsea River	Small boat landing, access to Alsea River
Mill Creek Boat Landing	4 acres	Alsea River	Memorial picnic grove and boat access to Alsea River
Salmonberry Landing/Cmpgrnd	10 acres	Alsea River	Boat landing, campground, river trail on Alsea River

*Includes lands designated as Prairie Conservation Areas, identified in the Benton County Prairie Conservation Habitat Plan.

Site and Infrastructure Conditions

The 15 natural areas, parks, and recreation sites were systematically surveyed, using a scoring system to assess 14 site and infrastructure conditions. Results provided an assessment of six performance criteria.

Site and Facility Criteria

General Appearance
Infrastructure Age and Serviceability
Visitor Services and Information
Resource Protection
Suitability of Recreation Use
Safety and Security

Site Condition Results

Site and infrastructure conditions are good to excellent for most of Benton County's natural areas, parks, and boat landings. There is little evidence of vandalism, incompatible use or misuse, and almost no graffiti. Only minor potential safety hazards exist. Some infrastructure and recreation facilities (restrooms, playgrounds) are near the end of their useful life.

Overall, natural systems are protected and managed for ecological benefits. Exceptions include traditional landscape management practices at some sites (mowing, use of non-native landscaping), and parking lots near waterways that lack stormwater treatment. For most of the sites, design elements are well chosen, and complement and enhance resource values.

Visitor information and signage are the weakest elements of the system, particularly directional signs to remote sites, trailhead signs, and site information. The Benton County logo seldom appears on directional signs. At the larger sites, interpretive information is excellent; some of the smaller sites need updated interpretive displays and signs, with sensitivity toward providing interpretive materials in other languages when appropriate and feasible.

Site Condition Conclusions

Results of the conditions assessment are consistent with results and themes from the public involvement efforts. Notably, Benton County has placed a high priority on maintaining its infrastructure, and because of its stewardship can continue to invest in improvements that enhance the visitor experience and support resource management. Other themes and conclusions include the following.

Site Condition Assessment Themes and Conclusions

- Benton County is an excellent steward of its natural area and park assets.
- Sites and facilities are a testament to high quality maintenance and repair.
- Some older park and boat landing facilities will require replacement or upgrading.
- Resource protection such as stormwater treatment is needed at some sites.
- Benton County parks and natural areas are safe and secure, but vigilance and special management efforts will be necessary to maintain safe and inviting places.
- A signage/interpretive plan is needed to improve way-finding (directions), site information and education; improve "brand" recognition and county stewardship.
- Willamette River sites (Hyak, Irish Bend) have a history of misuse, and could provide a springboard for a river recreation initiative.

System Analysis

Assets, opportunities and weaknesses were assessed for the current system of federal, state, and local parks, recreation areas, natural areas, and trails in Benton County. Lands managed by conservation organizations were also included. The assessment used five criteria to help provide a framework for defining the preferred role of Benton County and its future priorities.

System Assessment Criteria

- Landscape Character, Qualities
- Habitat Conservation
- Accessibility and Connectivity
- Outdoor Recreation Opportunities and Gaps
- Geographic Distribution

System Analysis Results

Benton County has remarkable assets and opportunities, and the total countywide recreation system has several weaknesses and deficiencies that should be considered in this planning effort.

Landscape Character, Qualities, Scale

- Variety of landforms and habitats create a distinct landscape personality for Benton County, with exceptional scenic, recreational, and ecological qualities.
- Benton County's small size (20x30 mi.) creates a dramatic contrast, rising from the Willamette River in the valley floodplain to Marys Peak and the Coast Range Mountains .
- Benton County has a rich Native American and pioneer settlement history.
- 12% of the remaining native prairie and oak savanna habitats in the Willamette Valley are located in Benton County.

System Assets and Opportunities

- Federal, state, and local agencies, the Greenbelt Land Trust, and Oregon State University manage a robust system of recreation settings and landscapes.
- Recreation opportunities are generally well distributed geographically.
- The Willamette River corridor with state greenway lands and several Benton County sites provide outstanding opportunities for recreation and restoration.
- Several collaborative Willamette River restoration and management planning projects are underway; opportunities exist for the county to actively participate and provide leadership to restore river habitat and provide recreation access.
- The Alsea River corridor and Benton County sites and boat landings provide recreation opportunities and access to an exceptional county asset.
- Benton County manages some of the best representations of native landscapes, and a prominent historic park (Fort Hoskins)
- Greenbelt Land Trust manages a large number of native habitats, and the City of Corvallis manages sizable natural areas on the urban fringe.
- Marys Peak is the highest point on the Coast Range and offers outstanding scenic and recreational opportunities
- Oregon Department of Forestry acquired Yaquina Falls through a land exchange; the falls are also one of Benton County's most outstanding scenic assets.
- The Benton County Joint Trails Committee has prepared a countywide Trails Plan, recognizing excellent potential and need for an integrated and connected system.

System Weaknesses and Deficiencies

- Benton County's countywide system of natural areas, parks, and recreation areas are not integrated well, and lack connectivity and cohesiveness.
- Benton County and its partners have not capitalized on the large number of low-traffic roadways, existing trails, and railroad corridors to connect communities, natural areas, parks and recreation areas, and other destinations.
- The Willamette River corridor has untapped potential – Benton County sites, state greenway lands and other public lands do not represent a cohesive and organized system for optimum public access and river recreation, and to minimize potential impacts on private lands. River restoration efforts are not well coordinated.
- The North Albany area is an underserved part of the county. The proposed East Thornton Lake Natural Area and Interpretive Center would help correct this deficiency.
- Camping opportunities are lacking in Benton County.
- Emergency wildfire access and trail connection is needed between Fitton Green Natural Area and Philomath.
- The role of recreation on state forestlands managed by the Oregon Department of Forestry is unclear. Yaquina Falls, recently acquired, needs a management plan.

System Analysis Conclusions

With its relatively small size and exceptional resource assets, Benton County has a very favorable economy of scale and outstanding opportunities for land managers and conservation organizations to organize and manage an efficient and sustainable system of parks and natural areas.

Benton County manages an outstanding natural areas and park system, with some of the best representations of the regional landscape and native habitats that are managed for conservation biology, habitat restoration, nature recreation and education, and a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities. Lands managed by local, state and federal agencies and non-profit organizations also contribute to the exceptional comprehensive open space system in Benton County.

The existing system is not interconnected. More organized and collaborative effort is needed to capitalize on major assets such as the Willamette River corridor and trail and connectivity opportunities. The future is very promising with emerging initiatives of a number of managing agencies and non-profit organizations creating opportunities for collaboration and partnering.

Oak Restoration

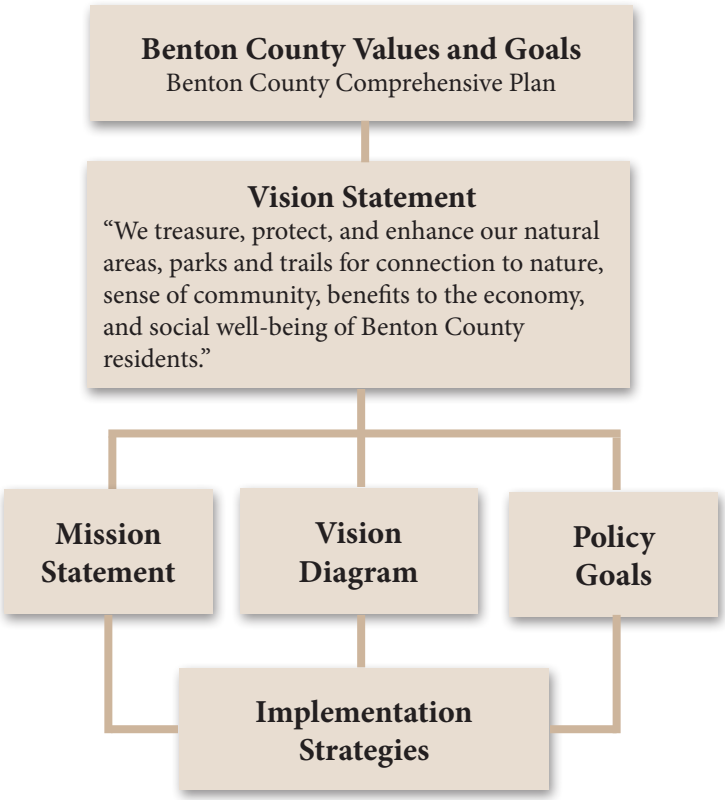
The Plan

A vision for the future and our priorities

The Benton County Natural Areas and Park System Plan is a response to the value statements and goals of the Benton County Comprehensive Plan (see pp. 7-8), with a policy framework including vision and mission statements, eight policy goals, and a vision diagram. Strategies provide specific guidance for implementing the policy framework.

Plan Framework

Benton County System Plan Update



Vision Statement

The Vision Statement reflects shared core values and aspirations of Benton County residents and imagines a preferred future, consistent with value statements and goals of the Benton County Comprehensive Plan.

Benton County Vision Statement

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan

Benton County celebrates its steadfast commitment to natural beauty, diverse habitats, and rich history.

Our community benefits significantly from outstanding natural areas and parks, connected by a well-established network of greenbelts and trails that provide public access, recreation, renewal and education for all.

We treasure, protect, and enhance these public places for connection to nature, sense of community, and sustained benefits to the economy, health and social well-being of Benton County.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement outlines the core purpose of Benton County Natural Areas and Parks. Guiding principles, values, and requirements are outlined to fulfill the vision. Engaging behaviors, habits, and qualities are described.

Benton County Mission Statement

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan

Benton County's long-term vision is to treasure, protect, and enhance natural areas and parks, connected by a network of greenbelts and trails, providing public access, recreation, renewal and education for all.

To accomplish this vision, our mission is to maintain a commitment to excellence with teamwork and open communication, working toward harmony in everything we do. We are responsive to community needs and aspirations, actively engage the community in planning and decision-making, foster volunteers to the maximum degree possible, and create collaborative partnerships with others.

We provide opportunities for everyone to connect with the natural environment and engage in outdoor recreation, which we value as essential for physical health and wellbeing. We strive for a balanced system of natural areas and parks by providing a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Habitat conservation, restoration and educational programs help residents understand and appreciate the value of nature and stewardship responsibilities, and to appreciate the important role of biodiversity as it contributes to a healthy community.

Accessibility is a hallmark of our system. We value cultural diversity and strive to adapt facilities and recreation opportunities to needs of all residents, including those with different abilities and incomes. We place special emphasis on achieving connectivity between major parks, natural areas, and communities in the county.

We maintain safe, welcoming places for social interaction, education, and recreation, and for solitude, reflection, and renewal. We treasure our cultural and historic resources, and develop educational and preservation programs for the community to understand, appreciate, and honor our legacy of the past.

Leadership excellence, creative thinking, and strong community support will provide inspiration and resources to achieve our vision.

Policy Goals

Eight goals provide policy direction for fulfilling the vision and mission, and lay a foundation for preparing a visual diagram of the desired future system. While policy goals provide a framework for decision-making, they are general in nature to allow policy makers to provide overall guidance.

Policy Goals

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan

Exemplary System

To maintain an exemplary system of natural areas and parks with the best representations of habitat types and historic and cultural assets. To manage in a strategic manner to protect and restore resource values, and to plan for an integrated network of landscape settings providing a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities.

Quality of Services

To strive for the highest quality of planning, managing, and service delivery, using best management practices guided by stewardship plans.

Education and Community Awareness

To take a leadership role in providing learning opportunities for everyone – to connect with the natural environment, and to increase community awareness, understanding, and support for life-sustaining benefits of Benton County's natural areas and parks.

Safety and Security

To assure highest level of safety and security in all natural areas and parks. To work creatively with the community to maintain vigilance and oversight, assure appropriate and suitable activities, and instill a sense of stewardship responsibility.

Healthy Community - Healthy Habitats

To promote the relationship between healthy natural habitats and health and well being of residents, both essential for community livability. To enhance biological diversity and ecological health by preserving and restoring natural habitats and maintaining integrity, stability, and natural beauty of the county.

Connectivity and Accessibility

To develop an interconnected and integrated system of accessible natural areas, parks and open space, working with landowners and other agencies to fill gaps, acquire easements, create alternative transportation opportunities, and promote green infrastructure. Promote healthy transportation choices through connectivity and public safety. To meet needs of persons with all abilities and demographics.

Leadership

To maintain progressive, consistent, and supportive leadership including policy direction and highly professional service-based management responsive to community values. Through collaboration and partnering – including other counties and communities – capitalize on the vast knowledge and exceptional creativity of the community.

Sustainability

To strive for a sustainable future with strategic, adaptive, and entrepreneurial management, providing operational stability and long-term success measured by ecological, social and economic benefits. Assist Benton County in adapting to climate change and energy independence, using green standards for facility management and development.

Vision Diagram

The Vision Diagram is a graphic image of the existing and recommended natural areas, parks, and trails system. (See map on facing page.) The Vision Diagram provides direction and specific opportunities for a preferred future.

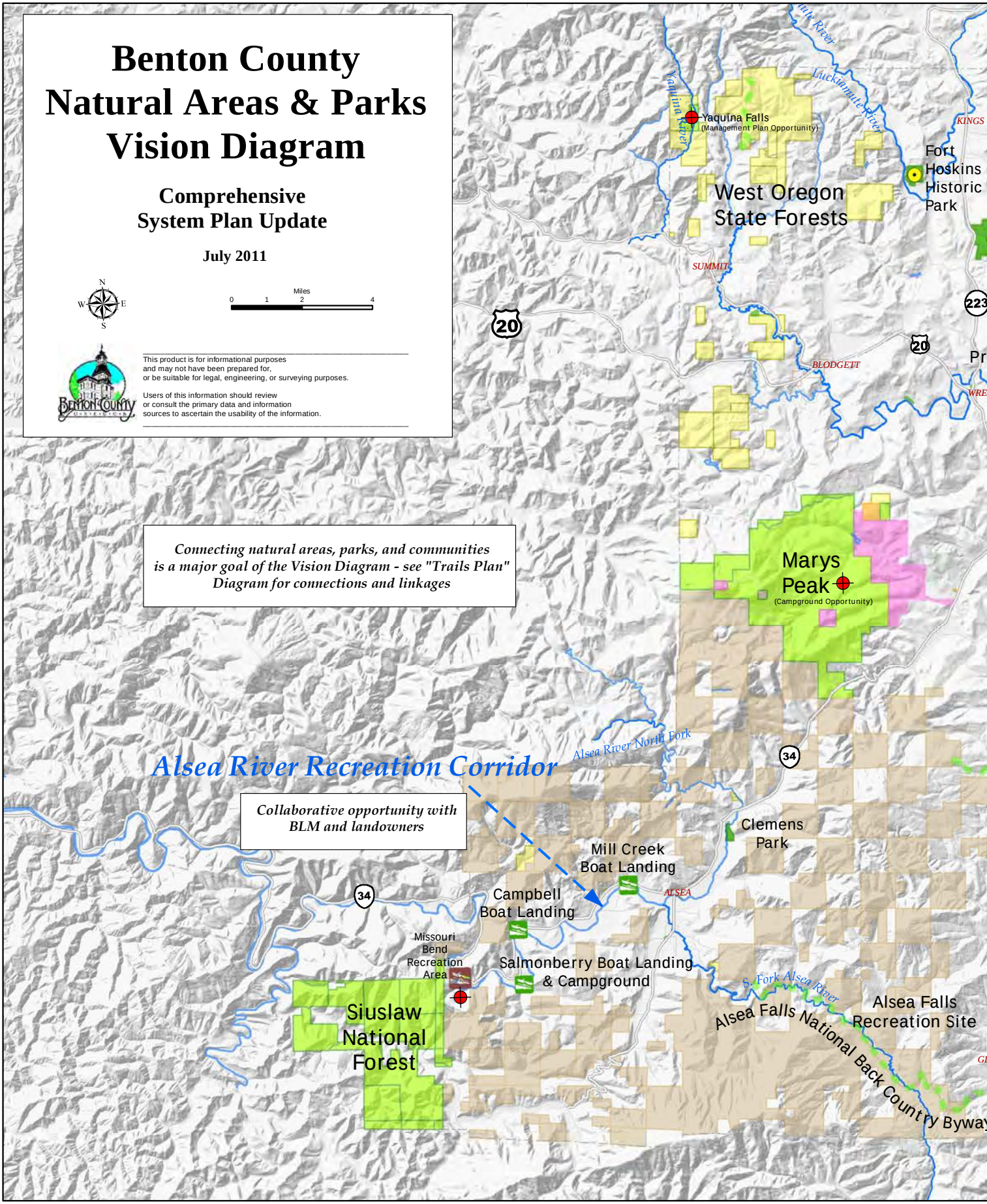
Key Themes and Structuring Elements

Four themes emerged from the needs assessment, providing an underpinning for the vision diagram:

- **Education** – emphasis on connecting the community with nature, especially youth; developing community awareness of health and well-being benefits, including healthy eating and active living involving park and recreational facilities.
- **Biodiversity** – importance of conservation biology in community health; implications of biodiversity loss.
- **Collaborative Management** – implementing the vision through combined efforts with partners and the community; synergy.
- **Best Management Practices** – stewardship of Benton County natural areas, parks, and trails; providing high quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

These structuring elements provide additional rationale for the plan recommendations.

1. Create an interconnected and integrated system of accessible natural areas, parks, and trails.
2. Improve access to the Willamette River and help implement the "Water Trail" concept.
3. Manage Prairie Conservation Areas identified in the "Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan".
4. Apply new classification system concepts, e.g. river corridors.
5. Explore new opportunities, e.g. campground partnership with the U.S. Forest Service on Marys Peak; prototype projects on the Marys River.


Benton County
Natural Areas & Parks
Vision Diagram
Comprehensive
System Plan Update
July 2011
Miles
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and may not have been prepared for,
or be suitable for legal, engineering, or surveying purposes.
Users of this information should review
or consult the primary data and information
sources to ascertain the usability of the information.
Connecting natural areas, parks, and communities
is a major goal of the Vision Diagram - see "Trails Plan"
Diagram for connections and linkages
Yaquina Falls
(Management Plan Opportunity)
Yaquina River
Luckiamute River
West Oregon
State Forests
Fort
Hoskins
Historic
Park
KINGS
SUMMIT
BLODGETT
20
223
Marys
Peak
(Campground Opportunity)
Alsea River Recreation Corridor
Collaborative opportunity with
BLM and landowners
Alsea River North Fork
34
Clemens
Park
Mill Creek
Boat Landing
ALSEA
Campbell
Boat Landing
Missouri
Bend
Recreation
Area
Salmonberry Boat Landing
& Campground
S. Fork Alsea River
Alsea Falls
Recreation Site
Alsea Falls National Back Country Byway
Siuslaw
National
Forest

Plan Concepts and Project Descriptions

Outlined here are major concepts and opportunities of the Vision Diagram, and project descriptions including attributes of each site, with specific recommendations for a desired future.

Willamette River Trail and Restoration Corridor **River Mile 111-160**

Willamette River Trail

Benton County has the opportunity to become one of the lead agencies for implementing Oregon's "Concept Plan for the Willamette River Water Trail," including pilot projects for river access and infrastructure, public information and education, and protection of private lands. There is also the opportunity for involvement in experimental and adaptive projects in collaboration with public agencies, non-profit organizations, and private landowners to implement river restoration goals outlined in the "Willamette River Basin Planning Atlas."

Collaboration Opportunity

Over 20 land parcels are managed by federal, state, and local government in the river corridor in Benton and Linn County comprising about 2500 acres. These include Snag Boat Bend, a 340-acre wildlife refuge that is part of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, Bowers Rock State Natural Area (undeveloped), the southern part of the Luckiamute State Natural Area, State Greenway lands and boat landings (8), islands managed by the Division of State Lands (4), Benton and Linn County parks and boat landings (6), riverfront parks managed by the City of Corvallis (4) and the City of Albany (5). Several non-profit organizations such as the Willamette Riverkeeper, Greenbelt Land Trust, and Cascade Pacific Resource Conservation and Development are also dedicated to promoting stewardship and restoration, responsible public access, and appreciation of the Willamette River.

Anderson Park - Harkens Lake Oxbow **River Mile 151.0-153.5**

Anderson Park

Site Attributes A 26-acre oxbow featured in the "Willamette River Basin Planning Atlas" as a river restoration prototype. Premier river restoration project and public access recreation site.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Continue efforts to consolidate public ownerships including State Greenway lands, acquire additional land, and partner with the Greenbelt Land Trust, State of Oregon, and landowners to conserve riparian forests on private lands, while restoring floodplain forest on publicly owned land. Also opportunity for a prototype site to demonstrate best practices for public access to the river, including a potential boat landing in the general area coordinated with landowners, and supporting infrastructure and interpretation-education. No overnight camping due to sensitivity of the site.

Irish Bend Park River Mile 151.0

Site Attributes Large gravel bar and riparian habitat (8-acre site) with primitive water trail camping opportunities downriver; opportunity for day use (upland access) and limited non-motorized boat access due to flood-prone and shallow conditions of the site.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Primitive sanitary facilities, limited parking, and interpretive potential to celebrate original location of the Irish Bend Covered Bridge at entry to the park. Opportunity in the future to negotiate an easement or land purchase from adjacent landowner to provide peripheral parking outside the riparian zone and minimize impacts. Opportunity to interpret importance of farming in the Willamette Valley.

Irish Bend

Norwood Island River Mile 148.5

Site Attributes A 60-acre island at the confluence of the Long Tom River, privately owned with a conservation easement for restoration of this biologically rich site and accommodating public access from the river for Water Trail use including camping.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Outstanding opportunity to continue acquisition and restoration activities in collaboration with the Willamette Riverkeeper, Institute for Applied Ecology, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board and others to promote the site as an integral part of the Willamette River Water Trail Concept Plan with primitive boat-in facilities (pack-in, pack-out), and interpretation and education. Access by land only for site administrative purposes.

Norwood Island

Hyak Park - Boat Ramp

Hyak Park River Mile 122

Site Attributes Opportunity for this 5-acre site to function as a major public access, river viewing, and picnicking site, both from land and the river. Strategic location for an interpretive facility for the Water Trail system, in conjunction with the large Bowers Rock State Natural Area on the Linn County side of the river. While currently limited in size, the site has exceptional potential with its strategic location providing direct access from Highway 20 in the Corvallis-Albany corridor, full-service boat access and other substantial infrastructure, and outstanding views from the river bend. Increasing the size of the site could provide opportunities for expanding river-oriented recreation at this strategic location.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Additional land is needed for adequate parking and day use amenities to meet recreation needs and opportunities (adjacent property to the north). Opportunity to collaborate with the State Greenway program and Linn County at Bowers Rock across the river.

Natural Areas - Prairie Conservation Areas

The Benton County Resource Stewardship Management Plan (2011) provides a policy framework for managing the county's three natural areas and Fort Hoskins Historic Park. These sites are managed for species diversity, maintaining biological richness, and to provide suitable recreation and visual resource management. The County is also designating Prairie Conservation Areas to preserve and restore some of the remaining prairie habitat, as well as rare prairie species.

Beazell Forest Education Center

Beazell Memorial Forest

Site Attributes A 586-acre demonstration working forest and natural area, including the historic Plunkett barn built in the 1930s from timber on the site, and reconstructed and transformed to function as the Beazell Forest Education Center. Built in the 1870s, the Plunkett farmhouse is one of the oldest surviving structures in Kings Valley. The Beazell site has one of the largest and most productive populations of the rare and endangered Taylor's checkerspot butterfly in the state. Beazell is designated as a Prairie Species Conservation Area in the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan. Excellent educational opportunities including the innovative stewardship plan for sustainable forest management.

Proposed Classification Natural Area

Recommendations Expand site interpretive program and infrastructure (picnic tables).

Fitton Green Natural Area

Fitton Green Natural Area

Site Attributes A 308-acre natural area with exceptional views from ridge-top meadows of Marys Peak and the Marys River; excellent educational opportunities for demonstrating progressive stewardship management practices including Douglas-fir/oak forest and oak savanna ecosystem restoration. Historic Cardwell Hill Road accesses the site and provides opportunity for interpretation of its function during the Civil War as a travel route between Fort Hoskins and the Willamette River at Corvallis. Designated as a Prairie Species Conservation Area in the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan.

Proposed Classification Natural Area

Recommendations High priority to connect the site with Philomath, acquire additional land to enhance management, and improve signage and wayfinding at trailheads. Prepare an interpretive plan for the site including historic Cardwell Hill Road.

Maintain primitive character.

Fort Hoskins Historic Park

Fort Hoskins Historic Park

Site Attributes A 130-acre historic site overlooking the Luckiamute River, Fort Hoskins was a small military garrison built in 1856, with troops protecting nearby Siletz Indian Reservation, and during the Civil War to keep the secessionist movement from erupting into armed conflict. The site became a private farm in 1866, and the Franz-Dunn House is one of the best remaining examples of Gothic Revival architecture in Benton County. Opportunity to relocate the historic Sheridan House, with assistance of a Friends group. Long-term habitat restoration efforts including fire management are nudging the site on a trajectory familiar to the Kalapuya Indians, Fort Hoskins soldiers, and Kings Valley pioneers. This is an active archeological research site for Oregon State University. Excellent educational, interpretation, and demonstration opportunities with rich cultural, historical, and natural resource values all at one site. Designated as a Prairie Species Conservation Area in the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan. A management plan for interpretation and education is proposed for this site, with substantial historical information prepared by Oregon State.

Proposed Classification Historic Park

Recommendations Opportunity to consolidate land ownership at the park entry. Pursue Sheridan House relocation; expand interpretive program.

Jackson-Frazier Wetland

Jackson-Frazier Wetland

Site Attributes This 144-acre site is the second largest native prairie wetland in the state, and is registered as an Oregon Natural Heritage Resource. Excellent opportunity for securing easements and stewardship partnering with the City of Corvallis and Greenbelt Land Trust to achieve watershed protection by using the Jackson-Frazier Wetland as the benchmark to maintain natural stream flows and maintain wetland hydrology. This site has naturally occurring populations of Kincaid's lupine, Nelson's checkermallow and Bradshaw's lomatium, and is designated as a Prairie Species Conservation Area in the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan.

Proposed Classification Natural Area

Recommendations A demonstration project for habitat restoration, management, education, and research. Pursue opportunity for acquiring a conservation easement on the northern edge of the site. Popular fully accessible boardwalk may require widening when replaced at end of its useful life. Maintain primitive character (no restrooms).

Fitton Green Prairie Conservation Area

Prairie Conservation Areas

The recently adopted Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) calls for designating lands within the three natural areas as Prairie Conservation Areas – Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, Jackson-Frazier Wetland – and also lands within Fort Hoskins Historic Park. These areas are to be managed for prairie habitat and the conservation of threatened and endangered species including Kincaid's lupine, host plant for the endangered Fender's blue butterfly (Beazell, Fitton Green, and Jackson-Frazier); rare and endangered Taylor's checkerspot butterfly (Beazell, Fitton Green, Fort Hoskins); endangered Bradshaw's lomatium (Jackson-Frazier); and threatened Nelson's checkermallow (Jackson-Frazier).

The HCP also calls for Benton County to designate and manage the Cardwell Hill Prairie Conservation Area, working with willing sellers to strategically acquire easements and parcels where existing populations of Fender's blue butterfly and high priority prairie habitat have been identified. This Prairie Conservation Area will provide both habitat enhancement and connectivity within the vicinity of Fitton Green Natural Area, Beazell Memorial Forest, and Fort Hoskins Historic Park.

The Prairie Conservation Areas provide opportunities not only for habitat conservation, but also for education and interpretation.

Alsea River Recreation Corridor

Benton County has the opportunity to develop an information and interpretation plan to enhance enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the outstanding scenic and recreation values of the Alsea River Recreation Corridor, in collaboration with the Bureau of Land Management, while actively engaging private landowners as major stakeholders to minimize impacts and meet common goals.

Campbell Boat Landing

Site Attributes Primarily providing drift boat access to the Alsea River, this one acre site is heavily used during the fishing season.

Proposed Classification Boat Landing

Recommendations Improve signage program to celebrate the river.

Campbell Boat Landing

Clemens Park

Site Attributes There is opportunity for this 38 acre park to become the core site for the Alsea River Recreation Corridor, one of the most scenic free-flowing rivers in Benton County. A loop river trail has outstanding potential for education and interpretation.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Expand interpretation and education by enhancing the river trail and improve capacity of the site to support river recreation and use. Entry and trailhead improvements would provide opportunity to celebrate special features of this site; consider a picnic shelter.

Clemens Park - Salmon Deck

Mill Creek Park

Mill Creek Park - Robinson Memorial Grove

Site Attributes This four acre site is a popular drift boat access to the Alsea River that is heavily used during fishing season; bank fishing, swimming, and picnicking are accommodated in the Robinson Oak Grove.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Opportunity to improve parking and pedestrian access to the Robinson Oak Grove and eliminate potentially hazardous parking along the highway; enhance interpretive and signage program.

Salmonberry Campground

Salmonberry Boat Landing and Campground

Site Attributes This ten acre park is the most developed county site on the Alsea River, including a boat landing, river trail, and small full-service campground. Given extensive infrastructure, the campground has potential for more investment and revenue generation. There is opportunity for the short river trail to be upgraded and interpreted as a prime Alsea River feature.

Proposed Classification River Site

Recommendations Opportunity to upgrade and expand both the boat landing and campground including improved entryway facilities, surfaced parking at the main gateway, trailhead and river interpretation, and a fishing/viewing platform along the River Walk. Consider feasibility of cabins or yurts to provide variety of overnight opportunities and year-round use.

General Parks

Adair Park

Site Attributes A 123-acre regional park that also functions as town greenspace and outdoor recreation for Adair Village. Formal sports fields, playground, full-service picnic shelters, and a hiking trail provide for a wide variety of recreation activities and large group events. Disc golf is a popular and growing use of the park. A full-service campground is proposed in the current master plan, and should be addressed in an updated site plan.

Proposed Classification Regional Park

Recommendations Opportunity for upgrading facilities (playground, picnic shelter) and expanding use and capacity including a campground, and to actively participate in a community vision for the Adair Village town center with recreation and open space opportunities. Consider changing the name to "Adair Regional Park" to reflect its purpose and function.

Adair Park Disc Golf

Bellfountain Park

Site Attributes Benton County's first county park, this ten acre site has been used as a community meeting place since 1860. The freshwater spring and 85-foot single-board picnic table provide outstanding opportunities for interpretation. A group picnic shelter and playground have accommodated large special events and gatherings.

Proposed Classification Historic and Cultural Park

Recommendations Opportunity to celebrate historical significance of this site, and resource values including the spring. Potential to expand use with picnicking facilities in the lower part of the site near the spring. Size limits suitability of use for large events and groups.

Bellfountain Park

North Albany Park

Site Attributes Large 22-acre community park and greenspace located in a rapidly growing North Albany urban area; full-service picnic shelter for large groups and barbecues; playground and open fields for sports, games, and special events.

Proposed Classification Community Park

Recommendations Opportunity to explore mutual management opportunities with the City of Albany, along with an updated master plan. The park needs upgrading and renovation. Consider changing the name to "North Albany Community Park" to reflect its purpose and function.

North Albany Park

Other Collaborative Opportunities

Marys Peak Campground (U. S. Forest Service)

Site Attributes Marys Peak is a Benton County landmark in the Siuslaw National Forest. The peak is designated as a Scenic and Botanical Special Interest Area, and is the highest point on the Coast Range with spectacular panoramic views of the Willamette Valley and Coast Range, as well as hiking opportunities through forest, summit meadow, and rock garden settings. A small primitive campground is located at mid-elevation. Access for winter snow activities is provided when road conditions permit.

Opportunity Opportunity for Benton County to open conversations with the U.S. Forest Service and explore a potential cooperative project to improve and explore opportunities for expanding public use at this popular recreation destination. Located on a major travel route, a developed campground and winter recreation could provide an outstanding year-round destination attraction. Benton County residents desire more camping opportunities.

East Thornton Lake Natural Area and Interpretive Center (City of Albany)

Site Attributes A 24-acre site on the south shore of East Thornton Lake has been acquired by the City of Albany, assisted by a grant from the Trust for Public Lands. The lake is a remnant oxbow of the Willamette River, and lies in the heart of a site identified by the City of Albany as its most significant natural area. Plans are to restore the site to an oak savanna, lay the foundation for reconnecting the lake to the Willamette River, and develop an interpretive program including the story of the Kalapuya Indians who visited the site.

Opportunity Opportunity for Benton County and the City of Albany to explore common goals for managing both North Albany Park and East Thornton Lake Natural Area.

Yaquina Falls (West Oregon State Forests)

Site Attributes A string of spectacular waterfalls located 10 miles north of Blodgett, recently acquired by the Oregon Department of Forestry as part of the West Oregon District.

Opportunity Opportunity for stakeholders to work with ODF and others to develop a management plan, exploring options for future management responsibility, with potential for a trail system to access the site, and strategies to protect adjacent private lands and avoid impacts.

Long Tom River

Site Attributes The Corps of Engineers manages lands along the Lower Long Tom River, providing an opportunity to explore potential for creating a multi-use trail connection along the Long Tom River between the Monroe community and the Willamette River at Norwood Island. This project has potential for enhancing economic development and tourism in this part of the county.

Recommendations Work with the Corps of Engineers to investigate feasibility of a multi-use trail connecting Monroe with the Willamette River.

Newton Creek Wetlands - Marys Peak Natural Resources Interpretive Center

Site Attributes Acquisition of the 120-acre Newton Creek Wetland site and development of the proposed Marys Peak Natural Resources Interpretive Center will provide community-wide economic benefits through education and interpretation of natural resource issues with school children and the general public.

The Wetland and Interpretive Center will provide science-based programs and will be:

- A recreational hub with a trail network connecting to the Benton County Trail System.
- A natural habitat for wildlife and an environment for viewing wildlife.
- Developed using sustainable site and building techniques compatible with the environment.
- An economic hub attracting visitors to Philomath.

Recommendations This project is a good fit with the America's Great Outdoors program of the US Fish and Wildlife Service and has the support of many partners and collaborators, including:

Benton County	Strengthening Rural Families
Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife	Marys River Watershed Council
Greenbelt Land Trust	Oregon State University
Philomath School District 17J	Philomath Area Chamber of Commerce
City of Philomath	Chintimini Wildlife Rehabilitation Center
Corvallis Tourism	Institute for Applied Ecology

Classification System

Classifying and naming parks, natural areas, and recreation sites is critical not only for planning and management, but also for visitor understanding of the most suitable and appropriate recreational uses of each site. A new classification system (p. 38) responds to the vision diagram, policy goals, and characteristics of each site, and provides an organizing tool for the most effective stewardship and public use.

Some sites may have characteristics that apply to more than one classification type. The value of the new system is to identify the primary purpose and function of each site as a framework for management direction, regimes, and prescriptions. The framework is not intended to be prescriptive, but to provide flexibility, staff interpretation, and board policy direction. In particular, management plans provide the best opportunity to interpret and apply classification and typology guidelines. Some guidelines are targets only, such as preferred use.

Applying the Classification System

By adopting the proposed classification system for Benton County natural areas and parks, realignment of some current site names could facilitate more public awareness and assist in management direction for each component of the system. In particular, concepts of "Limits of Acceptable Change" and "Desired Future Condition" could become the broader guideposts for not only naming individual sites, but also assist in determining the most sustainable trajectory for management decisions.

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Classification System

Classification Type	Purpose and Function	Location and Size
General Parks	Unique sites providing complementary, diverse, and specialized recreation opportunities, meeting needs that otherwise could not be met by local government. For example, Bellfountain is the first Benton County Park, used as a meeting place since 1860 - a part of the county's heritage.	Variable in size. Adair Park functions as a large regional park serving the broader county; North Albany functions as a community park and is situated in a rapidly urbanizing part of the county with an opportunity to explore mutual goals with the City of Albany.
Natural Areas **Prairie Conservation Areas**	Significant habitats and landscapes managed for biodiversity, restoration, education, and nature recreation to increase community appreciation and respect for disappearing habitats; actively engage the community in conservation and restoration projects.	Representative of major habitats throughout the county. Variable in size; large enough to protect integrity of the resource. The Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan designates lands within Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, and Fort Hoskins Historic Park as Prairie Conservation Areas (PCAs); also lands to be acquired by the county in the Cardwell Hill area; the PCAs are identified for high priority conservation actions to benefit key species.
Historic and Cultural Parks and Sites	Lands and structures managed primarily to preserve, restore, interpret, & commemorate history, landscape settings, cultural resources and activities. Emphasis on education, community engagement.	Locations with historical or cultural significance. Variable in size, but large enough to accommodate visitors and protect integrity of resource values. Active conservation, restoration, and enhancement of natural habitats in conjunction with historic conservation goals.
River Recreation Corridors	River recreation corridors with boat landings and opportunities for picnicking, swimming, fishing, and camping where suitable; often include trails and paths with interpretation; water trails such as the Willamette River promote river recreation with staging areas at key mileposts. "Anchor habitat areas" preserve and restore Willamette River riparian zones, gallery forests, and historic river systems.	Located geographically throughout the county, often including and linked by bikepaths and trails. Variable in size and frequently several miles in length where easements are obtained from willing sellers to cross private land.
Trails, Water Trails, Multi-use Pathways	Pathways dedicated to walking, hiking, bicycling for connectivity to natural areas, parks and open spaces, and local communities; also provide access within parks and natural areas, often with interpretive information; water trails along navigable waterways for river/riverbank recreation.	Located geographically throughout the county, often part of a navigable waterway. Variable in length with trail surfacing geared to type of use. May have dual role to promote non-motorized mobility, connectivity, circulation, and safety including pathways on abandoned rail lines or along active railroads. Willing landowners only.
Conservation and Trail Easements	Landowners voluntarily grant or sell conservation easements to protect and often restore high quality habitats, with public access allowed only by landowner consent; trail easements historically negotiated as gifts, usually for trail connections.	The Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan identifies areas for high priority conservation actions to benefit key species. Size is dependent on landowner goals and habitat needs. Trail easements are obtained in strategic areas for connectivity.

Salmonberry Campground

Trail System Plan

How the system can be connected and accessible

Background

Benton County adopted its first comprehensive Trail System Plan in 2003. Working with a 25-member Trails Focus Group, the plan outlined economic, social, and health and wellness benefits of trails, developed twelve plan guidelines, and identified ten priority projects for trails and connectivity. A goal of the 2003 plan was to become integrated into the Oregon Statewide Trails Plan, which was under revision at the time.

The 2003 Trail Plan outlined four themes for establishing trail priorities and recommendations:

1. Linkage to Willamette/Marys River Access Points – for boating, bank fishing, and day use
2. Rails-to-Trails – use of abandoned railway corridors, with opportunities for multi-use
3. Landowner Participation – trail routes acquired only from willing landowners
4. Outreach and Partnership – collaboration with providers and organizations to implement the plan

The plan recognized the existing Bald Hill Trail System and Midge Cramer Path/Campus Way connectors as a successful case study, and even today the project is considered an excellent trail prototype because of its connectivity between Bald Hill, downtown Corvallis and the Willamette River.

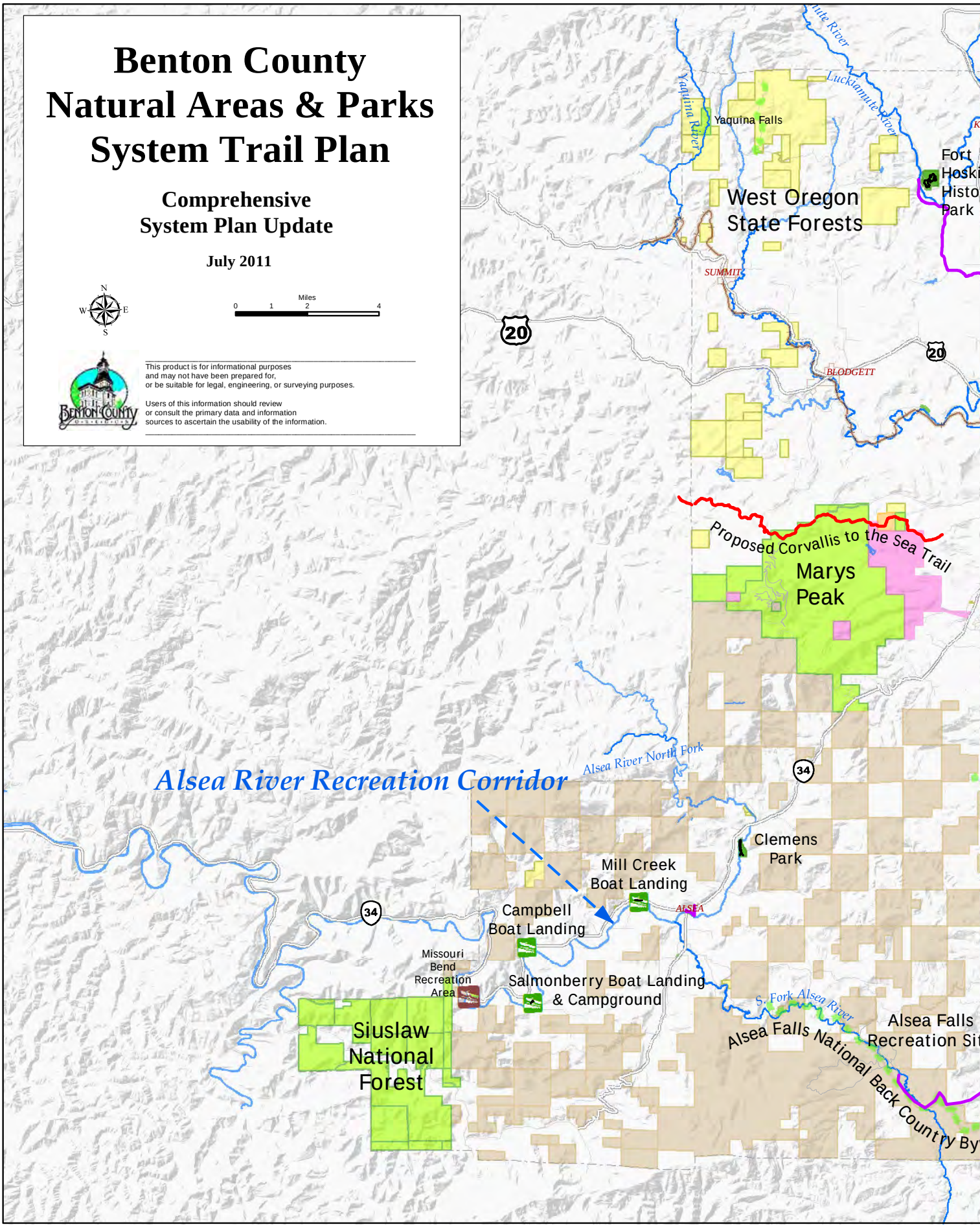
The trail plan noted existing Benton County natural areas and parks with existing trails including interpretive trails at Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Beazell Memorial Forest, Fort Hoskins Historic Park, Clemens Park, and Salmonberry Campground.

Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail

The county trail plan noted the proposed Corvallis-to-the-Sea trail with its long history of planning by Benton County advocates. The proposed trail alignment has since been refined and approved by partners, and an environmental assessment is underway for routing through federal lands.

Willamette River Water Trail

In 2004, the governor announced plans to clean up and restore the Willamette River and, in 2007, endorsed a "Concept Plan for the Willamette River Water Trail." The plan invited local, private, and non-profit organizations to improve access to the river, provide support facilities, and better protect adjoining private lands.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BENTON COUNTY
Yaquina River
Yaquina Falls
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Proposed Corvallis to the Sea Trail
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Boat Landing
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& Campground
S. Fork Alsea River
Alsea Falls
Siuslaw
National
Forest

Countywide Trails Committee Planning

In 2010-2011, a comprehensive trail planning effort was undertaken by the Benton County Joint Trails Committee, involving a large number of providers and community leaders including the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Board, City of Corvallis, Oregon State University and the Greenbelt Land Trust. The purpose of the project was to identify trail needs and opportunities throughout the entire county so that planning for trails, bikeways, and multi-modal paths could be coordinated among agencies and would inform and achieve compatibility with the County Transportation System Plan, the County Bicycle Transportation Plan and other agency trail plans as well as local and county comprehensive plans. While this effort is much broader in scope than the trails plan for the Benton County Natural Areas and Park System Plan Update, it assures a well-coordinated and integrated planning framework for future trail development involving multiple agencies and providers.

Trail Vision Concepts and Guidelines

As an integral part of the Natural Areas and Parks System Plan Update, ten visioning concepts and guidelines are the basis for establishing new and updated priorities to improve connectivity and the Benton County trail system. These guidelines are derived from the plan update process including needs and priorities identified throughout the public involvement process, opportunities and weaknesses outlined in the system assessment, and projects identified by the Trails Connection Committee. The guidelines and visioning concepts also respond to the new policy goal for Connectivity and Accessibility: "To develop an interconnected and integrated system of accessible natural areas, parks and open space."

Benton County Trail System Plan
Vision Concepts and Guidelines

Linking Communities, Parks, Natural Areas
To link communities and connect them with public owned natural areas, open space, wildlife refuges, waterways, and parks; to collaborate with others to improve an integrated system, and to provide multi-use transportation.

Including Water Routes
To include water routes such as the Willamette River, working with others to implement the Willamette River Water Trail Concept Plan.

Utilizing Rails-with-Trails
To utilize the Rails-with-Trails concept for providing trails along active railroad rights-of-way, actively pursuing agreements with railroad companies. Acquire abandoned rights-of-way.

Working with Willing Landowners
Work strategically with willing private landowners to pursue common goals; maintain sensitivity to landowners concerns and perceptions; identify mitigating strategies.

Respecting Private Lands
Maintain consideration and respect for private landowners and their management goals and operations, and promote "good-neighbor" principles for trail users.

Working with Volunteers
Continue a strong volunteer program to create community ownership and stewardship of the trails program.

County Adoption and Coordination
Pursue adoption of the Trail System Plan, and coordinate plans with the Community Development and Public Works Departments to meet trail objectives.

Interpretive Trails
Continue to develop educational and interpretive trails within natural area and park sites.

Providing Accessibility for All Abilities
Develop ADA accessible trails in appropriate locations.

Collaboration with Others
Coordinate and collaborate trail planning with all levels of government and with non-government organizations, especially the Benton County Public Works Department, with the intent of integrating trails, open space and natural areas into the fabric of communities.

Priority Trail Projects

These trail projects are considered to be top priorities and a major component of the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan (see Map 2). The priorities respond to the Trails Plan vision concepts and guidelines (outlined above), priorities of the public outreach process, and the comprehensive list of projects prepared by the Benton County Trails Committee. Uncompleted projects from the 2003 Trails Plan were also incorporated into the project list. Five programmatic areas provide organization and direction for implementing the 2011 Trails Plan.

Although these are considered priority projects, it should be recognized that trail planning and implementation is an opportunity-based, complex and multi-faceted process requiring a high degree of flexibility, as well as relationship-building with others. Priorities will likely shift and should be continuously revised to respond to public needs, resources, long-term maintenance impacts, and accomplishments.

Benton County Trail System Plan Priority Projects

Fire Protection and Community Access

City of Philomath to Fitton Green Natural Area
Critical connection for community access and fire protection; alignment opportunities are part of Fitton Green Management Plan.

Neighborhood Emergency Access and Connectivity
Connections between neighborhoods along existing rights-of-way for both emergency access and connectivity to parks, open space, and natural areas. Projects not identified.

Multi-Use Trail Projects

City of Adair to Adair Park – Adair Park to E.E. Wilson Wildlife Refuge
Explore existing rights-of-way for connecting City of Adair with Adair Park and the wildlife refuge.

City of Corvallis to Albany Multi-use Path
Connect Corvallis with North Albany, increase bike commuting, improve safety, and reduce vehicle use. Benton County Public Works Department has prepared feasibility study.

City of Corvallis to Finley Wildlife Refuge to City of Monroe
Important multi-use path will increase bicycle use and reduce vehicle use between Corvallis and Monroe; alignment along Highway 99 right-of-way is preferred.

City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-use Path
Explore connection between Monroe and the Willamette River with a trail along a Corps of Engineers easement on the Long Tom River; tourism and economic development potential.

Roadway Shoulder Widening Improvements for Bike Lanes
Albany to Adair Park; Monroe to Alsea Falls; Fitton Green Natural Area to Beazell Memorial Forest; Philomath to Evergreen Mountain (Greenbelt Land Trust property).

Sheep Farm Trail – Northwest Corvallis to McDonald Forest
Excellent partnering opportunity with City of Corvallis and the OSU sheep farm; alignment has been studied.

Willamette River Access

Willamette River Access and Water Trail
Improving public access to the Willamette River with supporting infrastructure, focusing on existing county-owned sites and working with landowners to meet common goals and avoid impacts. Active participation with others to implement the Water Trail Concept, including signage and minimal facilities to assist users' knowledge of the river ecosystem.

Benton County Trail System Plan Priority Projects

(continued)

Willamette River Access Between Corvallis and Irish Bend Park
River access is limited in southern Benton County, and needs additional study to determine how to meet common goals with landowners, minimize impacts, provide access toward the river with appropriate and minimal facilities, and promote the Willamette River Water Trail Concept for river activities.

Tourism and Economic Development (key projects)

Alsea River Loop Trail
Priority in the Alsea Community Strategic Plan. Utilize existing right-of-way along the Alsea River. Excellent tourism and economic development potential.

City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-use Path
Explore connection between Monroe and the Willamette River with a trail along a Corps of Engineers easement on the Long Tom River; tourism and economic development potential.

Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail
Planning effort since the 1970's to connect Corvallis and the Willamette River with the Oregon Coast; current non-profit has identified the preferred trail location and is preparing an environmental assessment.

Willamette River Access and Water Trail
Access to the Willamette River is limited in Benton County; private landowners must be engaged to avoid impacts. The State Water Trail promotes the Willamette River for recreational canoeists and kayakers; signage and minimal facilities on County owned lands will assist visitor's knowledge of the river ecosystem.

Regional Bike Touring Routes (Special-interest tours e.g. wine tours)
Special-interest bike routes that provide bicycle access to areas and sites of interest throughout Benton County, such as the Monroe area and the wine industry.

Connections Between Natural Areas

Bald Hill Park to Fitton Green Natural Area (off roadway)
Essential off-roadway connection; alignment through private property has been studied.

Beazell Memorial Forest to Fort Hoskins Historic Park
See "Roadway Shoulder Widening" projects above.

Fitton Green Natural Area to Beazell Memorial Forest

See "Roadway Shoulder Widening" projects above.

Fitton Green Natural Area to McDonald Forest
Alignment would pass through private property; needs study.

Jackson-Frazier Wetland to Chip Ross Park (Corvallis)
Alignment utilizing public lands such as Owens Farm and Crescent Valley High School will decrease need for crossing private lands; needs study.

Implementation Plan

How we will achieve the vision

Implementation Strategies

To facilitate implementation of the plan, strategies provide tactical direction and a general work program for each of the policy goals. The list is not intended to be prescriptive and defers to staff to determine what is useful for preparing specific action plans and management plans.

Quality of Services

1. **Management Plans** – Prepare and/or update management plans for all land holdings, with scale of the plans determined by their function and significance. For some sites, the plan may be very simple with a list of management issues, goals and objectives, and strategies as well as conducting periodic reviews.
2. **Resident and User Feedback** – Conduct periodic reviews of resident and user satisfaction, such as on-line and on-site surveys. Routinely gauge community support.
3. **Benefit Assessments** – Work with researchers (OSU and others) to conduct benchmark assessments of economic, social, environmental and health benefits of parks, natural areas and trails to the Benton County community.

Exemplary System

1. **Action Plan for an Integrated System** – Prepare an action plan to implement the Vision Diagram, creating a cohesive and integrated network of landscape settings, linkages, and trails.
2. **Strategic and Benefits-Based Management** – With strategic and tactical management, place highest priority on education, connectivity, infrastructure investment, and implementation of the Habitat Conservation Plan. Set priorities and target points of leverage for benefits-based management to promote healthy life styles and well-being, economic development, and ecological health.
3. **Classification System** – Review purpose and preferred functions of all managed sites, and test against existing nomenclature; consider renaming sites where appropriate. For example, Irish Bend Park might be examined to determine how to best represent location on the Willamette River and its primary function as a Water Trail access point.
4. **Collaborative Management with Others** –Work as a facilitator with other providers and non-profits to create a more organized and connected system of parks, natural areas, and trails, recognizing complementary strengths and capabilities to enhance public benefits and improve management efficiencies.
5. **Innovation and Demonstration** – Capture talent and imagination of the scientific community and other key knowledgeables to establish demonstration and pilot sites, with experimentation, creativity, and adaptive management.

6. **Monitoring Outcomes** –Assure monitoring commitments are included in site management plans; establish periodic and routine system reviews to monitor progress toward an integrated system; identify obstacles and constraints and assess benefits and costs.

Education and Community Awareness

1. **Education** – Consider hiring a contractor to develop a plan for managing a comprehensive and strategic program for education and community awareness. Emphasis on working with the community, coordinating volunteers, and working with others in leadership positions to develop a program for communicating the value of nature and the rich natural, cultural, and historic heritage of Benton County. Potential for assisting with the Habitat Conservation Plan, partnering with the Benton County Health Department and the Healthy Kids, Healthy Community program, and implementing Strategies 2-7 below.
2. **Working With Educational Institutions** – Involve students, faculty and others such as 4-H and Extension Service in projects to become directly involved in an environmental interpretation program at selected county sites such as preparing informational brochures, leading guided tours walks, continuing research efforts such as Fort Hoskins archeological work.
3. **Historical and Cultural Program** – Continue to work with groups such as the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde, historical organizations, and researchers (e.g. OSU – oral histories), to collaborate on projects to foster a greater awareness and appreciation for the cultural and historical heritage of Benton County.
4. **Respond to Changing Demographics** – Adapt facilities and programs to respond to cultural shifts in the community; e.g. group picnic and camping facilities for Hispanic, multi-family gatherings and opportunities targeting children and youth.

Ft Hoskins Interpretive Site Staking

5. **System Way-Finding and Sign Plan** – Collaborate with others such as Benton County Public Works Department and other providers to prepare a system-wide way-finding and signage plan, with emphasis on design and choice of materials, legibility, and consistency throughout the system, including trailheads and interpretive information. Work with others to improve signage and educational information for the Willamette River Water Trail and the Alsea River Corridor. [Example: Swiss "Wanderweg" signpost system and website]
6. **Engaging Youth** – Work with others (e.g. Benton County Health Department, OSU, local school districts) to prepare a comprehensive and strategic plan for engaging youth in the outdoors, including educational and recreational opportunities, and habitat restoration projects to instill a deeper appreciation of the outdoors and to improve youth fitness and reverse the effects of the "nature-deficit disorder".

Kings Valley Charter School at Beazell Education Ctr

7. **Demonstration Projects** – Consider designation of Beazell Education Center, Fort Hoskins Interpretive Center, and Jackson-Frazier Wetland as demonstration projects for engaging youth and the community through the most advanced educational and interpretive methods; promote understanding and appreciation for heritage resources and progressive stewardship management programs.
8. **Public Information and Marketing** – Expand public information and marketing for Benton County sites and services including brand recognition, more awareness of the county's stewardship efforts, and social, economic, environmental and health benefits.

Safety and Security

1. **Community Involvement** – Explore opportunities to engage citizens in a day use "Park Host" program to enhance stewardship responsibility and maintain vigilance and oversight at sites with either a history or potential for adverse or inappropriate use; re-energize the "Adopt-a-Park" program where appropriate. To the degree possible, maintain a "light touch" community-based approach to problems as they occur.
2. **Working with Peace Officers** – Develop a close working relationship with the Sheriff's Office and others to assure county sites are safe and secure, develop strategic remedial plans where problems occur and include public involvement where feasible. Monitor citations and criminal activity.
3. **Public Awareness** – continue to create public awareness of inappropriate and/or adverse behavior in county parks and natural areas (e.g. flyers at trailheads); encourage users to monitor and report unsuitable conduct or actions.
4. **Public Information and Education** – Through the interpretive and informational program, promote understanding of the role and purpose of each managed site, including the preferred and most suitable public uses.

Healthy Community, Healthy Habitats

1. **Endangered Species and Habitat Conservation** - Establish and expand rare plant and animal populations and conserve sensitive prairie and oak savanna habitats within a network of designated Prairie Conservation Areas. Continue to collaborate with local organizations and partners to promote rare species enhancement and habitat protection. Eradicate or contain invasive species that threaten these systems.
2. **Serving Rural Community and Partners** - Provide simplified endangered species permitting; alleviate need for county residents and cooperators such as the City of Corvallis and OSU to independently navigate the permitting process using permits associated with the Habitat Conservation Plan; ensure mitigation is completed where it will contribute most to species conservation.

Controlled Burn at Beazell

3. **Community Engagement and Voluntary Habitat Conservation** - Using the Prairie Conservation Strategy, engage the community and encourage public and private landowners to use this Benton County guide to identify birds, plants and other wildlife that can benefit from local conservation. Cooperate with partners to use the Prairie Conservation Strategy maps and work where conservation efforts are most needed. Publicize conservation success stories and encourage information sharing.
4. **Community Benefits** – Collaborate with the Benton County Health Department and others to promote and provide public information and education on multiple benefits of trails, parks, natural areas, outdoor recreation, and the relationship between healthy residents, healthy habitats, and connecting with nature.
5. **Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities** – As part of the Natural Areas and Parks Department (NAPD) educational program, continue to partner with the Benton County Healthy Kids, Healthy Communities program, including a feasibility study of community gardens at county park sites to educate community members on sustainability, provide opportunity to exercise through gardening and increase access to healthy foods. Continue participation in the mini-grant program to provide infrastructure and transportation for healthy kids programs, such as day camps at Beazell and Fort Hoskins. (See page 51, Education and Community Awareness – #1.)
6. **Biodiversity and Human Health** – Collaborate with local conservation agencies, educators, and partners to create public awareness of the health implications of biodiversity loss and the role of conservation biology in community health.

7. **Habitat Restoration** – Work with nonprofits such as the Institute for Applied Ecology and the OSU Institute of Natural Resources to develop an annual progress report on the state of the condition of Benton County's biodiversity and ecological health, including significant achievements and priority concerns for the future. Celebrate and publicize positive outcomes. Promote services of the Oregon Explorer natural resources digital library.
8. **Habitat Restoration Volunteer Program** – As part of the NAPD educational program, develop a comprehensive and strategic plan for active engagement of volunteers in habitat restoration projects, including students; celebrate achievements, project leaders, and outstanding participant contributions with annual awards.
9. **Invasive Species Management** – Work with the Oregon Invasive Species Council and local partners to create a funded, countywide comprehensive invasive species management program for priority listing and assessment, coordinated management and control, and use of best practices.

Connectivity and Accessibility

1. **Pathways, Trails, and Multimodal Linkages** – Work with Benton County Public Works Department, Community Development Department, and the Sheriff's Office to conduct gap analysis and identify priority multimodal path linkages for connecting communities with natural areas, parks, and public open space. Focus on public lands and rights-of-way (developed or undeveloped) to avoid impacts on private property.
2. **Collaboration with Others** – Collaborate with a broad spectrum of partners to develop an integrated and cohesive trail and linkage system including Linn County, local communities, state and federal agencies, and nonprofit organizations. Continue to explore opportunities for pathways along abandoned or active railroad lines.
3. **Connectivity Design** – Linkages should consider multiple benefits through design such as fire access, alternative transportation, interpretive and educational opportunities, and promoting healthy life styles for youth and families.
4. **Prototype Project** – Develop a prototype project (e.g. Long Tom River Trail connecting Monroe with the Willamette River) to demonstrate social and economic benefits of multimodal trails that could be replicated in other parts of the county.
5. **Willamette River Connection** – Prepare a work plan to improve public access and connection to the Willamette River. Identify pilot projects for river access and infrastructure, public information and education, and protection of private lands.
6. **Willamette River Habitat Restoration** – Work as one of the lead agencies to achieve a more collaborative approach to habitat restoration in the Willamette River Corridor, including a strategic funding plan for implementing restoration goals outlined in the "Willamette River Basin Atlas."
7. **Accessibility for All** – Adapt recreation facilities and provide opportunities to meet cultural diversity and special needs of low income and minority families; work with partners to identify barriers to participation such as proximity to residences, transportation and signage (e.g. multi-lingual signs).

Trail Volunteers

Leadership

1. **Strategic Vision and Tactical Direction** – Focus on major priorities and key strategies to implement the vision and adapt to a changing environment.
2. **Collaboration, Partnering, Facilitator Role** – Capitalize on the vast knowledge and exceptional capacity and creativity of the community; marshal and harness resources to implement the vision; thrive on active partnerships.
3. **Next Generation of Champions** – Cultivating community champions and volunteers to continue the legacy of bold leadership and involvement.

The Rosses at Beazell Grand Opening

Sustainability

1. **Entrepreneurial Management Model** – Maintain bold entrepreneurial management to respond to change and unpredictability, balancing to the highest degree revenue programs (fees and charges) with affordable outdoor recreation and access to nature (free or low cost).
2. **"Green" Design and Management Standards** – Commit to sustainable design and management standards wherever feasible for energy conservation, water efficiency, carbon emissions reduction, and stewardship of natural, human, and fiscal resources.
3. **Regional Organization Options** – Explore options with local government partners for managing natural areas and parks on a regional basis; determine if there are alternative organizational structures for improving efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.
4. **Navigating an Uncertain Future** – Actively participate with others to anticipate and respond to possible future threats to sustainability such as climate change, wildfire risk, and increased growth and development; provide education and information throughout the natural areas and parks system to assist residents in adapting to change.

Financing the Plan – A Strategic Framework

Benton County has provided outstanding stewardship of its natural areas, parks, and trail system through sound planning and adaptive management. Sites and facilities have been well maintained, management plans have provided strategic direction and priority setting, and most importantly, consistent leadership and public support have provided financial stability.

Benton County has been managed with a strategic business approach, navigating through challenging times in resourceful ways by seeking opportunities to partner and collaborate with others, generate revenue, obtain grant funding, and work with volunteers. Recent adoption of the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan exemplifies a commitment to look to the future as well, protecting and restoring some of Benton County's remaining landscape and maintaining biologic diversity.

The legacy of Benton County's natural areas and parks system is clearly evident by its excellent public image, and by social, environmental, and economic benefits of the program that have been identified by stakeholders throughout this planning effort. However, it is also apparent that the county is at a crossroads: the notion of "do more with less" could pass the threshold of reasonable limits unless additional funding and non-funding options are in place.

County residents have clearly weighed in on this issue — maintaining current investment in lands and facilities is a high priority, and the quality of the system and services should not be jeopardized by taking on new programs and obligations.

In particular, it has become apparent that stable funding in an unstable external environment will be the major challenge for maintaining high quality services, responding to public expectations, and addressing programmatic needs and opportunities identified in this plan. And importantly, while financing must be a critical consideration, an array of non-funding strategies must augment the fiscal program, including collaboration and partnering with others.

> To assist in developing a strategic framework for implementing the 2011 Benton County Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Plan, FCS GROUP (Portland) prepared a report outlining potential governance strategies and funding options (Funding/Implementation Strategy Memorandum, FCS GROUP, 2011). See Appendix A.

Drawing from the FCS report, financing considerations for implementing this plan are organized in three parts:

- Part 1 summarizes Benton County's current organization and authority for governance, and includes the budget and funding methods for the Natural Areas and Parks Department.
- Part 2 describes potential funding sources and evaluates strategies for governance
- Part 3 provides a strategic framework for financing the natural areas and parks program

Benton County Governance and Funding

A separate governmental department currently manages Benton County's natural areas and parks. Other departments are responsible for general government, public safety, public works and transportation, health and other community services, and justice services.

The biennium budget for natural areas and parks ending June 2011 was $1,891,432, or 3% of the general fund expenditures for Benton County. Approximately 65% of the current budget was for personal services (primarily county staff payroll), 34% for materials and services, and 1% for capital outlays.

Current funding for the Benton County general fund is derived from two primary sources – local property taxes (46%) and state shared tax revenues (37%) such as taxes from sales on motor vehicle fuel, alcoholic beverages and cigarettes. The other 17% of general fund revenues are derived from a mix of sources including charges for services, interest/investment earning, and state and federal grants.

For the Natural Areas and Parks Department, funding comes primarily from a mix of general fund revenues. Parks and camping reservation fees and other revenue generating programs make up a small portion of the actual parks and natural areas expenditures.

The recent economic downturn combined with increases in public employee health care and retirement costs have negatively impacted local and state fiscal conditions. The current adopted 2011-2013 budget for Benton County calls for a slight 1.65% increase in spending over the next two-year budget cycle, along with a reduction of county staff by approximately 30 jobs.[1]

According to the League of Oregon Cities, slower statewide growth in population and employment is expected to curtail state shared-tax revenue disbursements to local cities and counties over the next several years for the non-highway governmental taxing sources, such as taxes from sales on alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and 911 phone calls.

Also in light of voter passage of Measures 5 and 50, cities and counties in Oregon are limited in how much local property taxes they can levy. The current tax system in Oregon limits increases in local assessed value and permanent property tax rates to a maximum of 3% annually, does not allow "minor construction" to be added to assessed value, and limits the overall property tax to no more than $10 per $1,000 in assessed value for general government, and $5 per $1,000 for education.

For jurisdictions in Oregon such as Corvallis and Benton County that have a very large share of public and non-profit property owners including state universities – these cities and counties are hard pressed to maintain a positive fiscal position as the cost of governmental services and outlays rises faster than public revenues.

For these reasons, a new funding approach will likely be required to maintain and enhance Benton County's high standard for providing natural areas and parks, and regional partnerships and governance strategies must also be considered.

Review of Potential Funding Sources

Outlined here is a suite of methods for Benton County to consider for generating adequate and sustainable revenues required to fund acquisition, construction, maintenance and operations of the regional natural areas, parks, and trail system, as updated in this comprehensive plan. Eleven potential funding options have been evaluated.

Funding sources for capital facilities and operations typically used by Oregon cities and counties for parks and natural areas include property taxes, user fees, system development charges, and state and federal appropriations, grants, and loans.

Private and non-profit donations and contributions have also been instrumental in funding public parks, trails, and open spaces. One of Benton County's best examples is the donation of Beazell Memorial Forest by Fred Beazell – the large site is not only certified for innovative and sustainable forest management, but also generates revenue using sensitive management and harvesting methods to support operations and maintenance. Many other examples of privately donated lands and easements have contributed to the Benton County's present system of natural areas, parks and open space, and trails.

Potential Funding Options

General Fund
User Fees
System Development Charges (SDCs)
Utility Fees
Local Improvement Districts (LID)
Reimbursement District
Voter-Approved Tax Levy
Dedications and Donations
Partnerships
Franchise Fees
Loans and Grants

Regional governance efforts in Oregon have successfully resulted in construction and management of parks, trails and open space areas through regional property tax measures. After two successful bond levies, Portland Metro's Natural Areas Program has invested $360 million of voter-approved bonding to acquire and preserve over 11,000 acres and 90 miles of river and stream banks, and has supported hundreds of local community projects. The Metro district includes portions of Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties.

1 Hall, Bennet, Benton County Adds Spending, Still Must Cut Jobs, Corvallis Gazette-Times, June 22, 2011.

With voter approval, special park districts have been created within several of Oregon's counties to develop and manage parks, trails and open space areas. In addition to Portland Metro, examples include the Willamalane Park and Recreation District (Springfield/Lane County area), North Clackamas Parks District (Clackamas County/Happy Valley/Oregon City area), and the Tualatin Hills Parks and Recreation District (Washington County/Beaverton/Hillsboro area). Local funding for these districts is usually derived from a mix of property tax revenues, impact fees, user fees and grants.

In other states, such as Nevada, Washington and California, regional flood control and transportation districts have been created to fund and manage a variety of pubic trails, greenways and conservation areas. These districts are usually created though a joint powers agreement or voter-approved special district authority, and derive local funding from a variety of fees, taxes and service charges (see next section for regional governance funding techniques).

Each of these funding sources can be constrained by a variety of factors including willingness of local leadership and the electorate to assess residents and businesses; availability of local funds to be dedicated or reallocated from competing county programs to the parks program; and availability and competitiveness of state and federal funds.

General Fund

Sources for Benton County's general fund include property and use taxes, and other miscellaneous taxes and fees imposed by the County. To supplement its general fund allocation, the Natural Areas and Parks Department obtains additional funding from timber management revenues, vendor concession leases, and user fees including campground reservation and facility rental fees. General fund resources can fund any aspect of the program including capital improvements, operations and maintenance, and administration. At the discretion of the Board of Commissioners, general fund allocations are made to each county department as part of the annual budget process.

> The current funding approach for Benton County's natural areas and parks is constrained by competing community priorities for various public services. Funds for new or additional projects are only available to the extent that either general fund revenues are increased, the County Board of Commissioners redirects funding from other county programs, or user fees are assessed for supplemental funding.

User Fees

Benton County currently obtains revenue for its general fund from timber management revenues (Beazell Memorial Forest), vendor concession leases, and user fees associated with parks facilities (i.e., picnic shelters and camp site reservations).

Theoretically, establishing user fees to fund applicable natural area, parks and recreation activities and/or capital construction ensures that those who create the demand for service pay for it proportionally with their use. However, for Benton County residents, providing affordable outdoor recreation opportunities has historically been a policy goal, and establishing user fees has been undertaken with much consideration of pros and cons.

> In considering funding options, it will be important to maintain Benton County's policy goal to balance fee-based outdoor recreation opportunities with those opportunities that are offered with no user fees and charges.

User fees and other types of miscellaneous revenues (such as advertising and concession revenues) require higher levels of administrative costs to offset user fee collection requirements. Additionally, user fees (such as parking fees) can help assist operations and maintenance funding, but are not very reliable and insignificant for financing capital projects.

System Development Charges

As defined by state statute, System Development Charges (SDCs) are one-time "impact" fees imposed on new development or certain types of major redevelopment. SDCs recover a fair share of the construction and improvement costs of public infrastructure such as parks and transportation that provides capacity to serve growth. SDCs help ensure that growth pays for the need it creates, and is a key part of a balanced funding strategy. SDC revenues can only be used as a funding source for capital improvement projects that add capacity to the system – they cannot be used for operations or routine maintenance. Capital improvements are defined by state statute as facilities or assets used for the following purposes:

- Parks and recreation including land acquisition, easements, trails, open space, and habitat restoration
- Transportation including pathway, bicycle and transit facilities
- Drainage and flood control
- Water and wastewater

Currently Benton County does not charge SDCs for transportation or parks and recreation. Albany, Corvallis, Philomath, and Adair Village have adopted SDC programs for both transportation and parks. These SDCs range from $270 (Adair Village) to almost $5,000 for a single-family dwelling unit (Corvallis).

Several Oregon counties have adopted development impact fee programs for parks and recreation including Lane and Marion County. For counties outside the Portland metropolitan region, fees range from $236 to $378 per single-family residential unit.

Parks SDCs assessed in unincorporated parts of Clackamas County are much higher than other counties, ranging from $4,425 to $6,760 for areas within the North Clackamas Park District. No impact fees are assessed in the more rural portions of Clackamas County.

Voters have approved transportation impact fees in Washington County as a Transportation Development Tax, with one set of fees for cities and unincorporated parts of the county in a designated area. Revenues generated by this impact fee may be used for designated roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, transit and trail improvements.

Applicability of SDCs to Fund Benton County Park Acquisition and Development

Benton County previously considered implementing a parks systems development charge over 15 years ago after conducting an SDC feasibility study (see Benton County Methodology for Parks System Development Charges, prepared by Raymond Bartlett et. al.) The study examined methods for implementing a countywide SDC for parks; however a long-range list of planned capital projects and land acquisition was not in place at the time, and no action was taken.

The 2011 Benton County Natural Areas, Parks, and Trails Plan includes a long-range list of planned capital facilities and land acquisition projects that could be used as a basis for developing a county-wide Parks SDC program. The plan identifies approximately $4 million in park projects and land acquisition, and approximately $19 million in trail projects that help enhance mobility and provide recreational functions.

The technical memorandum prepared by the FCS GROUP identifies methodologies that have been legally tested under Oregon law. In a preliminary analysis, FCS applied one of the methods for Benton County using an improvements-based parks SDC. Based on $4 million in county expenditures over 20 years, an average parks SDC would consist of approximately $880 per dwelling unit. This assumes all costs are borne by Benton County (no funding participation by cities, state or federal agencies), and county population increases by 11,000 between 2011 and 2031, and an average of 2.45 persons per dwelling unit.

The SDC charge could vary (higher or lower depending upon development type or county subarea/zone). If a portion of the cost of providing new trail facilities is added to the county natural areas and parks SDC methodology, the potential park SDCs could increase significantly higher than $880 per dwelling unit. An alternative approach to funding trail facilities is the creation of a separate Benton County Transportation SDC, to help fund eligible street, pedestrian, bicycle and trail facilities.

Over the last several years, development impact fees (SDCs) have been a major source of funding for local parks and recreation services, with the assumption that growth creates new demands on public infrastructure and services and

should therefore help offset additional costs. However, for counties in Oregon with large rural areas such as Benton County, system development charges tend to be more applicable to incorporated cities than counties as a funding source.

> Due to Oregon's stringent land use laws and local growth management practices, and the need for additional funds required to implement the Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan, SDCs likely have more applicability for habitat acquisition and restoration than for parkland and park facility improvements.

Applicability of SDCs to fund Benton County Transportation (Connectivity)

Achieving connectivity is a major goal for fulfilling a vision for the Benton County natural areas, parks and trail system, with numerous trail connections identified in the plan. A county transportation impact fee (SDC) may be a viable method to help fund trail improvements and land/easement acquisition activities, especially since many of the trail projects will enhance mobility for bicycles and pedestrians.

> Since connectivity and multi-use transportation are key elements of the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan, the county might consider transportation impact fees as a potential source of funding to assist in implementing the 2011 Trail System Plan.

Utility Fees

A number of Oregon cities supplement their parks programs with utility fees designated for park improvements. Cities also collect utility fees for street and stormwater management, including bicycle and pedestrian facilities as part of green streets programs.

Establishing utility fees to fund natural area, parks and recreation projects ensures that those who create demand for service pay proportionally to their use. From a system-wide perspective, creating a utility fee also helps support ongoing viability of the program by establishing a source of stable, dedicated funding for a specific public service.

Additionally, fee revenues can be used to secure revenue bond debt used to finance capital construction. A parks or surface water utility fee can be formed by a county commission or city council action and does not require a public vote. Nevertheless, an initiative petition could bring the issue to a vote. The City of Medford uses parks utility fees as a funding source, adopting an ordinance in 2005 for maintenance of beautification areas and rights-of-way. In 2006, the City expanded its use of parks utility fees to secure revenue bonds to fund capital facilities including a community park and community center gymnasium. A fee of $2.95 per dwelling unit per month is collected monthly through utility bills, and generates approximately $1.26 million per year.

Counties do not typically employ utility fees, since they usually do not have administration and billing mechanisms in place to charge residents and customers for accounting, invoicing, and collection. However, in Washoe County, Nevada, as part of a flood mitigation effort the county assessor database will be used to assess property owners an annual flood and drainage utility fee used for designated land acquisition, open space, flood protection, and transportation/trail improvements.

Local Improvement District

Jurisdictions in Oregon have the statutory authority to establish local improvement districts (LID) and levy special assessments on the benefited property to pay for improvements. LIDs result in upfront or annual payments from affected property owners within a district. LIDs are payable in annual installments for up to 30 years. LIDs are generally used for capital improvement projects that benefit numerous large tenants and/or private property owners. The future revenue stream generated by LIDs can be used by local governments to obtain financing through the use of loans (e.g., Oregon Public Works Trust Fund) or bonds (e.g., issuance of revenue bonds).

Reimbursement District

Similar to LIDs, jurisdictions can negotiate public/private advance financing arrangements with developers, where a developer agrees to front capital improvements/investment (such as a new local park or traffic signal) within a designated zone of benefit district (ZBD). The local jurisdiction that adopts a zone of benefit applies a special development impact fee that is charged based on a proportional benefit to properties for the capital infrastructure. The developer is then partially reimbursed as new land use development approvals are granted within the ZBD over a period that usually extends 10-15 years. However, there is no guarantee that future revenues will be as steady and reliable as with the LID or property tax assessments.

Voter-approved Property Tax Levy

Subject to voter approval, the county can issue General Obligation (G.O.) bonds to finance capital improvement projects using voter-approved property tax levies that are outside the limits of Ballot Measures 5 and 50. Depending on the critical nature of any planned projects and willingness of the electorate to accept increased taxation for parks and recreation improvements, voter-approved G.O bonds may be a feasible funding option for specific projects. Proceeds may not be used for ongoing maintenance.

Dedications and Donations

Jurisdictions can require developers to dedicate right-of-way or public improvements such as trail easements or parks improvements as a condition of future development approval if those public facilities are identified in an adopted local plan. The value of the real estate and improvements must be commensurate with the level of impact generated by a proposed development. SDC credits can be granted to developers who dedicate eligible public facilities, based on amount of the SDC impact fee and value of the land, trail easements, or capital facilities.

Benton County has significantly benefitted over the years from donations of land and easements for parks, open space, and trails. Engaging the community and continuing to build relationships will continue to be one of the most important methods for implementing the Benton County plan.

Partnerships

Ongoing partnerships with federal, state, and local governments have been a hallmark of the Benton County natural areas and parks program, including collaborative efforts with the City of Corvallis, City of Philomath, City of Monroe, Adair Village, and other local jurisdictions.

Benton County also has a long history of partnering with other environmental non-profits and public land trusts – organizations such as the Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Corvallis Environmental Center, Corvallis NW Earth Institute, Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, and the Benton County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Benton County also has a long history of active collaboration with non-profit agencies and public land trusts to create natural areas and other public recreation improvements. For example, in partnership with the Greenbelt Land Trust over $7m in real estate property has been bequeathed to Benton County.

Franchise Fees

Local cities and county jurisdictions in Oregon may also utilize franchise fee increases within allowed limits as a supplemental source of general fund revenues that can be dedicated to strategic reserve funds. For example, the Lake Oswego City Council voted in 2011 to increase its local franchise tax assessment levels for Northwest Natural Gas, Allied Waste Services, and Portland General Electric by about $5 per month for the average homeowner. The increased revenue is expected to generate almost $775,000 of a $2m financial aid package for the local school district.

Loans and Grants

At one time readily available for financial assistance, federal and state grant programs are generally limited in size (usually less than $500,000), and often require a sizable local match. By targeting its efforts and placing a high priority on preparing applications, Benton County continues to benefit from state grant programs including the Local Government Grant Program, RV Campground Funds, and the Oregon Marine Board.

Common special programs identified as potential funding sources include:

- Bank and State Loans – Benton County may use private bank loans or state loans to make strategic capital upgrades. Given the county's limited operating revenues, state loan programs such as the Public Works funds would only be viable for smaller improvements that promise rapid return on the investment.
- Federal and State Grants – Benton County has been successful in obtaining state grants administered by the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation (Local Government Grant Program, RV Campground Funds), and the Oregon Marine Board (boating facility improvements). The recently completed Habitat Conservation Plan was funded through issuance of two sizable U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grants. Grants offer potential for leveraging non-local dollars using dedicated local funding.

Potential Funding Conclusions

Given the need for exploring all possible options for implementing the Benton County Natural Areas, Parks, and Trails Plan, a number of funding options have been evaluated. Five of these methods are considered to have the highest potential.

Funding Options with Highest Potential

- System Development Charges for Habitat Restoration (Implementing the Habitat Conservation Plan)
- System Development Charges for Connectivity and Transportation (Implementing the Trail System Plan)
- Increased utilization of County Departments and resources through internal partnerships
- External partnerships
- Dedications and Donations
- Grants

Governance

The current economic environment is requiring local jurisdictions to consider new options to deliver public services using a combination of funding resources and regional partnerships. The traditional approach of multiple agencies within the same watershed or basin that are funding and managing local, regional, and state park facilities and natural areas is shifting toward new creative and regional partnerships, with a mix of local and regional funding sources.

There are many examples of regional approaches for providing parks and recreation services in Oregon (Portland Metro, numerous park districts), and regional flood control and transportation districts are emerging in nearby states that provide trails, greenways, and conservation areas. Table 1 provides a comparison of governance strategies currently in place.

Table 1. Potential Governance Strategies for Delivering and Managing County Natural Areas and Facilities

Governance Strategy	Examples
Status Quo	Funding provided by County General Fund, uses a pay-as-you go funding (timber revenues and user fees) and volunteer help
Voter Approved Specific Improvement Program for Benton County	Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, 2004 tax levy of $0.05/$1,000 of assessed property value
Voter-Approved Regional Service District with Dedicated Funding Sources	Willamalane Park and Recreation District (Springfield/Lane County); Clackamas Parks District (Clackamas County); Tualatin Hills Parks & Recreation District (Washington County, Oregon)
Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Truckee River Flood Management Authority (includes funding for flood mitigation, natural areas and trails; involves Washoe County, Reno and Sparks); and Chehalis River Flood Authority (Lewis, Thurston & Grays Harbor counties, WA)
Inter-local Agreement Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	West Eugene Wetland Mitigation Bank; agreements among Eugene, Lane County, Oregon Division of State Lands et. al.

These governance strategies have a number of advantages and disadvantages for maintaining local control, retaining grass roots community support, minimizing county liability, and leveraging funds for capital improvements and operations and maintenance functions.

A comparative evaluation of governance strategies is outlined in Table 2 including strengths and weaknesses, responsible managing entity, and typical funding methods.

It could be advantageous for Benton County to explore a variety of governance strategies to maintain local and regional parks, natural areas and trails. Of particular benefit could be the opportunity to examine the feasibility of an approach to fulfill the vision of connectivity with an integrated system of multi-modal trail opportunities.

Governance Conclusions

Current challenges to provide stable funding – not only to maintain high quality of the existing Benton County natural areas, parks, and trail system, but also to achieve the vision of this system plan – provide an opportunity to explore with other jurisdictions how to achieve common goals and continue service excellence.

What is most apparent is not only the range of governance options, but also the complexity that will require extensive conversations with potential partners, and due diligence. Other conclusions are offered as well.

Exploring Governance Options

- Benton County is small in size and scale, providing an opportunity to efficiently and effectively engage potential partners in pursuing governance options
- Residents must support a proposed change in existing governance, and will want to be engaged in the exploration process
- Both political and fiscal realms must be successfully addressed, with extensive due diligence

Strategic Financing and Governance Recommendations

With completion of the Benton County Natural Areas, Parks and Trails Plan, the county is positioned to consider the timing and prioritization of future parks, open space and trail investments, along with potential funding mechanisms that are most appropriate for each project. Implementation and funding of the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan should be conducted as part of a strategic planning effort.

The State of Oregon and local communities and counties have a long history of strategic planning, using benchmarks to develop short term and long-range budget priorities. Benton County adopted its countywide Strategic Plan in 1995, the same year as the first Benton County Comprehensive Park System Plan was adopted, using statewide benchmarks and developing a strategic framework for planning and funding decision making.

Benton County's history of strategic and tactical planning has served it well with measurable results – Benton County is recognized as not only the healthiest county in Oregon, but also a livable county valued for its high quality of life. Maintaining this legacy will require a strategic, progressive, and innovative approach for funding given the uncertain external environment, relatively small population, and limited local resources.

Table 2. Comparison of Potential Governance Strategies

Governance Strategy	Strengths	Weaknesses	Who Governs?	Who Owns?	Typical Local Funding Methods
Status Quo	May not require voter approval	Insufficient funds to meet all needs; better for local parks than for regional facilities	Local jurisdiction each manages their own facilities	Local jurisdiction each owns their own facilities	SDCs, Utility Fees, Urban Renewal, Community Facility Districts
Voter Approved Specific Improvement Program for Benton County	Grass roots support	Limited to established projects within the county jurisdiction	Benton County	Benton County	Property Taxes or Development Taxes (SDCs)
Voter Approved Regional Parks District	Grass roots support; Flexible boundaries; governed by County Commissioners or separate elected board	New separate entity created; un-established weak credit history; O&M costs may tend to be under funded	Flexible, usually county or participating jurisdictions	Special District or Participating Jurisdictions (jointly)	User Fees, Utility Rates, or Property Taxes
Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Board can be made up of current elected body or new designated entity	New governance; un-established; weak credit history; O&M costs tend to be under funded; can issue revenue bonds only	Determined by agreement	Determined by agreement	Local or Regional User Fees, Utility Rates, or Locally Dedicated Reserve Funds
Inter-local Agreement Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Participating jurisdictions have more control	Hard to identify "lead agency"; possible inequities, redundant efforts & costs	Determined by agreement	Determined by agreement	Separate Local User Fees, Utility Rates, or Locally Dedicated Reserve Funds

It is recommended that Benton County continue this strategic approach for implementing and funding the 2011 Natural Areas, Parks, and Trails Plan, in particular responding to the following relevant implementation strategies (from p. 54):

- Use **Strategic and Tactical Direction** to identify major priorities and key strategies, maintaining an agile decision making process for adapting to a rapidly changing environment.
- Maintain a **Collaborative-Partnering-Facilitator Role** to capitalize on vast knowledge, capacity, and creativity of the community.
- Maintain **Entrepreneurial Management** to respond to change and unpredictability, balancing revenue programs with affordable outdoor recreation at low or free cost.
- Explore **Regional Organization** options with local government partners to improve efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.
- **Navigate an Uncertain Future** by proactively participating with others to anticipate and respond to future threats to sustainability.

Outlined here is a recommended strategic framework for funding and governance to fulfill the vision, mission, policy goals, and strategies that are the underpinning of the 2011 Benton County Natural Areas, Parks, and Trails Comprehensive Plan.

A Strategic Framework for Funding and Governance: Benton County Natural Areas, Parks and Trails

Create a "Blue Ribbon Committee" to Develop a Strategic Plan for Stable Funding
Create a Blue Ribbon Committee consisting of a mix of community residents and resource management representatives from other agencies, non-profits, and Benton County, using a collaborative approach to establish an appropriate funding stream and creative management concepts, and explore potential sources of funds and governance options. Prepare a preliminary strategic plan for stable funding to achieve more efficient and effective use of staff and capital resources for managing natural areas, parks and open space, and a connected system of trails, pathways, and bike lanes.

Establish a "Friends Non-profit Group" for Long-term Support
Build a broad constituency and stakeholder base of support by establishing a Friends Group, recommended by the Blue Ribbon Committee.

Identify Non-funding Strategies to Assist Plan Implementation
Non-funding strategies include developing common goals and objectives with other providers and non-profit organizations, identifying collaborative and partnering opportunities, and brainstorming programs and projects that can indirectly create more financial and economic stability. For example, explore opportunities for Benton County to partner with the U.S. Forest Service to provide high quality recreation opportunities on Marys Peak.

Prepare a Preliminary Financial Analysis of Funding and Governance Options

Conduct a benefit-cost analysis of the most feasible funding and governance options; conduct a public opinion poll or focus group research to determine level of support for options among geographic sub-areas of the county.

Develop a Phased Implementation Plan and Refine Project Priorities and Costs
Based on information from the strategies generated above, aim at funding a modest array of projects through existing and potential funding and governance options; reconcile and update high priority natural area, parks, and trail projects and costs.

Project Lists

Project lists, included in Appendix A, have been prepared for implementing both the Vision Diagram and Trails Plan including project descriptions, cost estimates, funding sources, priorities, and other information such as trail lengths. Upon adoption of the plan update, these lists become official documents to qualify for funding such as system development charges.

The Trails Plan project list was developed in collaboration with the Public Works Department in order to integrate transportation projects and achieve a connectivity vision for the plan update, and thereby provide an opportunity for a mix of funding sources for trail construction and acquisition.

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Additional Support Documents

Benton County Comprehensive Plan, 2008

Benton County Parks System Comprehensive Plan, 1995

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Trail System Plan, 2003

Benton County Prairie Species Habitat Conservation Plan, 2010

Benton County Prairie Species Conservation Strategy, 2010

Resource Stewardship Plan for Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department, 2011 (Update of previously adopted Resource Stewardship Plans for Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area and Fort Hoskins Historic Park)

Jackson Frazier Wetland Mangement Plan, 2005

Appendix A

Funding Implementation Strategy

FCS GROUP
Solutions-Oriented Consulting

Memorandum

To: David Reed, David Reed & Associates **Date:** Aug. 31, 2011

From: Todd Chase, AICP, LEED FCS GROUP

CC: Jerry Davis and Jeff Powers

RE Benton County Natural Areas & Parks System Comprehensive Plan, Funding/Implementation Framework

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1. INTRODUCTION

This memorandum provides strategic input for Benton County to consider as it prepares and finalizes its Natural Areas and Parks System Comprehensive Plan. The purpose of this memorandum is to highlight potential governance strategies and funding options for Benton County to consider when constructing and managing future natural areas, parks and trail facilities.

As mentioned in the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Master Plan, Benton County currently owns, manages and maintains an array of parks, natural areas and trails, including but not limited to:

- 14 parks with over 1,413 acres
- The Fitton Green Natural Area (and trail system)
- Beazell Memorial Forest
- Jackson-Frazier Wetland
- Fort Hoskins Historic Park

This memorandum is organized into five sections, following this introduction:

- **Section 2 summarizes current Benton County governance and funding methods**;
- **Section 3 describes potential funding sources**;
- **Section 4 evaluates potential governance strategies**, and
- **Section 5 provides an implementation framework** for developing and managing the improvements listed in the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Master Plan.

2. CURRENT GOVERNANCE AND FUNDING METHODS

Benton County's natural areas and parks are currently managed by the county as a separate governmental department, along with other departments such as: general government, public safety, health services, justice services, community services, and cultural and education services. The current biennium budget for the parks and natural resources department per the final adopted budget for period 2-year fiscal year ending June 30, 2011 was $1,891,432. This amounted to approximately 3% of the general fund expenditures for Benton County.

The final adopted parks and natural areas budget for FY ending June 30, 2011 included: $1,218,406 for personal services (primarily county staff payroll), $648,045 in materials and services, and $24,981 in capital outlays.

Funding for Benton County's parks and natural areas is currently derived from a mix of general fund revenues, including Beazell Memorial Forest Timber Management Funds, concession/vendor contracts, and parks and camping reservation fees.

The majority of funding for the Benton County's general fund is derived from two primary sources local property taxes (46% of general fund revenues); and state shared tax revenues such as taxes from sales on motor vehicle fuel, alcoholic beverages and cigarettes (accounted for 37% of general fund revenues) for the biennium ending June 30, 2011. The other 17% of the Benton County's general fund revenues are derived from a mix of sources including charges for services, interest/investment earnings, and grants from state or federal agencies.

The recent national and state economic downturn combined with increases in public employee health care and retirement costs have negatively impacted local and state fiscal conditions. The current adopted 2011-2013 budget for Benton County calls for a slight 1.65% increase in spending over the next two-year budget cycle, along with a decline in local county staff by approximately 30 jobs.[1]

According the League of Oregon Cities, slower statewide growth in population and employment is expected to curtail state shared-tax revenue disbursements to local cities and counties over the next several years for the non-highway governmental taxing sources, such as taxes from sales on alcoholic beverages, cigarettes and 911 phone calls.

Also in light of voter passage of Measures 5 and 50, cities and counties in Oregon are limited in how much local property taxes they can levy. The current tax system in Oregon generally limits increases in local assessed value and permanent property tax rates to a maximum of 3% annually, and does not allow "minor construction" to be added to assessed value, and limits the overall property tax to no more than $10 per $1,000 in assessed value for general government, and $5 per $1,000 for education.

Jurisdictions in Oregon (such as Corvallis and Benton County) that have very large share of public and non-profit property owners, such as state universities are hard pressed to maintain a positive fiscal position as the cost of governmental services and outlays rises faster than

[1] Hall, Bennet, *Benton County Adds Spending, Still Must Cut Jobs*, Corvallis Gazette-Times, June 22, 2011.

public revenues. Hence, ***the ability to maintain and enhance Benton County's high standard for providing natural areas and parks will likely require a new approach to funding and the formation of regional partnerships and governance strategies.***

3. POTENTIAL FUNDING & FINANCING SOURCES

The primary purpose of this section is to consider ways Benton County can generate adequate and sustainable revenues required to fund the acquisition, construction and maintenance of local and regional natural areas and parks within the county. Potential funding and financing options that have been evaluated include:

- General Fund
- User Fees
- System Development Charges (SDC)
- Utility Charges
- Local Improvement Districts (LID)
- Reimbursement District
- Voter-Approved Tax Levy (supports General Obligation and/or Revenue Bonds)
- Dedications and Donations
- Partnerships
- Franchise Fees
- Loans and Grants

Local cities and counties in Oregon include a range of funding sources to pay for parks and natural areas capital facilities and operations. The most typical funding sources include user fees, property taxes, system development charges, and state and federal appropriations, grants, and loans.

Private and non-profit donations and contributions have also played a major role in providing and operating public parks, trails and open spaces. An important local example is the Beazell Memorial Forest, which was generously donated to Benton County in July 2000. Located in Kings Valley, the 586 acre Beazell Memorial Forest is the largest of all parks in Benton County. Benton County and the Parks Department maintain public access and environmental and cultural resources through innovative forest management under the Smart Wood Program which generates revenue to make this park ecologically and fiscally sustainable. There are countless examples of other privately donated land areas that are actively utilized by the public and managed by public and non-profit entities throughout Benton County and Oregon.

Regional governance efforts in Oregon have successfully resulted in construction and management of parks, trails and open space areas through regional property tax measures. After two successful region bond levies, Metro's (Portland region) Natural Areas Program has invested $360 million of approved bonding to acquire and preserve over 11,000 acres and

90 miles of river and stream banks, and has supported hundreds of local community projects. The Metro area (includes portions of Clackamas, Multnomah and Washington counties).

Special parks districts have been created (with voter approval) within several of Oregon's counties to develop and manage parks, trails and open space areas. Oregon examples include Metro (see above paragraph), Willamalane Park and Recreation District (Springfield/Lane County area), North Clackamas Parks District (Clackamas County/Happy Valley/Oregon City area), Tualatin Valley Parks and Recreation District (Washington County/Beaverton/Hillsboro area), and others. Local funding for these districts is usually derived from a mix of property tax revenues, impact fees, user fees and grants.

In other states, such as Nevada, Washington and California, regional flood control districts and regional transportation districts have been created to pay for and manage a variety of pubic trails, greenways and conservation areas. These districts are usually created though a joint powers agreement or voter-approved special district authority, and derive local funding from a variety of fees, taxes and service charges. Please refer to the next section for more details on regional governance funding techniques.

Each of the aforementioned funding resources can be constrained by a variety of factors, including the willingness of local leadership and the electorate to burden residents and businesses; the availability of local funds to be dedicated or diverted to parks from other competing County programs; and the availability and competitiveness of state and federal funds

A. GENERAL FUND

Benton County currently obtains revenue for its general fund from timber management revenues, vendor concession leases, and user fees associated with parks facilities (i.e., picnic shelters and camp site reservations). General fund resources can fund any aspect of the program, from capital improvements to operations, maintenance, and administration.

At the discretion of the county commission, the County can allocate general fund revenues to pay for parks and recreation needs. General fund revenues primarily include property, use taxes, and any other miscellaneous taxes and fees imposed by the County. This allocation of the general fund to the parks department is completed as a part of the County's annual budget process. Hence, ***the funding potential of Benton County's current natural areas and parks funding approach is constrained by competing community priorities for various public services***. Additional revenues to fund new aspects of the parks program are only available to the extent that either general fund revenues are increased or the County Board of Commissioners redirects funding from other programs.

B. USER FEES

Benton County currently charges user fees for public use of parks facilities (i.e., picnic shelters and camp site reservations) but such fees tend to cover only a small portion of parks operations and maintenance activities. Increasing user fees or applying new types of user

fees (e.g., day-use parking fees) could be considered as means to enhance parks operating revenues, but would not likely result in adequate revenues for major parks and natural areas land acquisition or facilities expansion. Hence, other types of funding techniques (described below) may be more appropriate for parks, trails and natural areas facilities and capital improvements.

C. SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT CHARGES

ORS 223.297 – 223.314 provides "a uniform framework for the imposition of system development charges by governmental units" and establishes "that the charges may be used only for capital improvements." An SDC can be formulated to include one or both of the following components: (1) a reimbursement fee, intended to recover an equitable share of the cost of facilities already constructed or under construction and (2) an improvement fee, intended to recover a fair share of future, planned, capital improvements needed to increase the capacity of the system. ORS 222.299 defines "capital improvements" as facilities or assets used for:

- Water supply, treatment and distribution;
- Waste water collection, transmission, treatment and disposal;
- Drainage and flood control;
- Transportation (includes roadway, **pathway,** bicycle and transit facilities); and
- **Parks and recreation (includes land acquisition, easements, trails, open space, and habitat restoration).**

SDCs, defined by ORS 223.297 - 223.314, are one-time fees imposed on new development or certain types of "major redevelopment." They are intended to recover a fair share of the costs of existing and planned facilities that provide capacity to serve growth. Consequently, SDC revenues may only be used as a funding source for projects that add capacity to the system. SDCs cannot be used for operation or routine maintenance.

Benton County does not currently charge SDCs for transportation or parks and recreation. Most local cities within Benton County have adopted SDCS for transportation and parks, as indicated in **Tables 1 and 2.** A detailed discussion of SDCs, calculation methodologies, and other issues related to implementation of parks SDCs is provided in **Appendix A**.

Benton County previously considered implementing a parks systems development charge over 10 years ago after conducting a parks system development charge feasibility study.[2] That study concluded that there were two primary methods for implementing a county-wide parks SDC, including: (1) basing an impact fee on the capital cost of planned parks and recreation facilities and projected population/dwelling unit growth levels; and (2) applying a methodology based on a "buy

[2] See separate report titled: *Benton County Methodology for Parks System Development Charge*, June 2006, by Raymond Bartlett et. al.

voters as a Transportation Development Tax using a methodology generated by FCS GROUP that is consistent with Oregon statutes). The revenues generated by this impact fee are used for designated roadway, bicycle, pedestrian, transit and trail improvements. Local governments also have the option of adopting a supplemental fee to pay a portion of eligible capital projects that are not on the county project list.

Table 3. Parks Impact Fees for Selected Counties

County	SDC Fee	Unit	Fee Varies by Zone or Development Type*	Fee for Non-Res. Development
Lane County	$378	Single family dwelling	No	No
Marion County	$236	Single family dwelling	Yes	No
Clackamas County	$4,425 to $6,760	Single family dwelling	Yes	Yes
Pierce County (WA)	$355	Single family dwelling	Yes	No
‘ note: separate fees are usually assessed for local jurisdictions within the county.				

Source: Compiled by FCS GROUP.

Washington County and its member jurisdictions may be the only county in Oregon that has opted to have one set of county-wide transportation SDCs. In Clackamas County, the county and city of Happy Valley have agreed to adopt a city/county joint transportation SDC for the city as well as a designated portion of urbanizing Clackamas County; and the county applies a lower SDC to other unincorporated portions of the county. These cases are relatively unique in Oregon, since most jurisdictions charge separate SDCs and maintain separated SDC accounts.

D. UTILITY CHARGES

A number of Oregon cities supplement their parks programs with parks utility fees and collect surface water utility fees for a variety of public services related to streets and stormwater management (including providing bicycle or pedestrian facilities as part of green streets). Establishing utility fees to fund natural area, parks and recreation activities and/or capital improvements ensures that those who create the demand for service help to pay for it. From a system-wide perspective, creating a utility fee also helps to support the ongoing viability of the program by establishing a source of reliable, dedicated funding for that specific function. Additionally, fee revenues can be used to secure revenue bond debt used to finance capital construction. A parks or surface water utility fee can usually be created by county commission or city council action and does not require a public vote.

The city of Medford, for example, uses parks utility fees as a funding source. The City adopted parks utility fee by ordinance in 2005 for maintenance of beautification areas and rights-of-way. In 2006, the City expanded its use of parks utility fees to secure revenue bonds to fund capital facilities (a community park and community center gymnasium). $2.95

per dwelling unit per month fee is collected monthly through utility bills, and generates approximately $1.26 million per year. $0.39 of the fee is used for maintenance and beautification, and the remaining $2.56 for debt service associated with U.S. Cellular Community Park and Santo Community Center.

Utility fees are difficult for counties, since they do not typically have the administration/billing mechanisms in place to charge residents/customers nor the accounting systems for accounting, invoicing and collection. However, outside Oregon, in Washoe County, Nevada, the county assessor database is to be utilized to assess property owners an annual flood and drainage utility fee to be used for designated land acquisition, open space, flood protection, and transportation/trail improvements, as part of an overall flood mitigation effort.

E. LOCAL IMPROVEMENT DISTRICT

Jurisdictions in Oregon have the statutory authority to establish local improvement districts (LID) and levy special assessments on the benefited property to pay for improvements. LIDs result in upfront or annual payments from affected property owners within a district. LIDs are payable in annual installments for up to 30 years. LIDs are generally used for capital improvement projects that benefit numerous large tenants and/or private property owners. The future revenue stream generated by LIDs can be used by local governments to obtain financing through the use of loans (e.g., Oregon Public Works Trust Fund) or bonds (e.g., issuance of revenue bonds).

The formation of LID districts could be a potential source of funding for *local* parks improvements because there will be direct benefits to multiple property owners. New LIDs require approval by at least 51% of the affected properties within the district. LIDs tend to apply mostly to capital facilities that have local benefits, such as local streets. However, they may be an appropriate source of “gap funding” when other funding sources are inadequate.

The primary advantage of LIDs from the jurisdiction’s perspective is the ability to obtain a consistent level of revenue generation early in the development process. Financial intermediaries, such as banks, now view LIDs as a more reliable funding source than some funding sources (such as SDCs) and therefore are more apt to provide loans based on future LID revenue streams. However, the financing terms for “raw land” LIDs have become far more stringent since the 2007 “financial crisis,” and are now far less favorable than the financing terms given to municipal bond issues or state infrastructure loans.

F. REIMBURSEMENT DISTRICT

Similar to LIDs, jurisdictions can negotiate public/private advance financing arrangements with developers, where a developer agrees to front capital improvements/investment (such as a new local park or traffic signal) within a designated zone of benefit district (ZBD). The local jurisdiction that adopts a zone of benefit applies a special development impact fee that is charged based on a proportional benefit to properties for the capital infrastructure. The developer is then partially reimbursed as new land use development approvals are granted

in" method that takes into account historic county capital expenditures for parks and recreational facility investments. Since Benton County had not yet established a long-range parks facilities plan in 1996, the first method was found to generate a relatively small fee (approximately $14 per dwelling unit in 1996 dollars or about $20 per dwelling unit in 2011 dollar amounts). The second method was found to generate an impact fee of approximately $345 per dwelling unit (adjusted to 2011 dollars).

The Benton County Parks and Recreation Master Plan (2011) includes a long-range listing of planned capital facilities and land acquisition activities (including trail connections) that may be used as a basis for developing a county Parks SDC and Transportation SDC program. The current plan identifies approximately $4 million in parks and recreational facility and land investments, and approximately $19 million in trail investments (note this assumes that identified annual restoration activity costs are capitalized by 10% or spread out over 10 years). A preliminary list of planned parks, recreational and trail facilities is provided in the Benton County Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

While the two methods for implementing a county-wide parks SDC in Benton County that were identified in 1996 are still valid, FCS GROUP recommends methodologies that have been legally tested under Oregon law, which includes either: (1) a level-of-service approach (with local level-of-service policies that establish standards for general types of parks facilities usually expressed in acres of parks or miles of trails per capita; (2) a improvements-based approach (which is a variation/refinement of the first SDC option described in the 1996 Benton County parks methodology report; or (3) a hybrid approach, which is a combination of the first two methods, with a variation in parks SDCs based on geography, level of service, and/or facility characteristics. Please refer to **Appendix A** for a more detailed discussion of these three methods.

A preliminary analysis by FCS GROUP of the improvements-based parks SDC methodology for Benton County, based on $4 million in county expenditures over 20 years, results in an average parks SDC of approximately $880 per dwelling unit. This assumes all costs are borne by Benton County (no funding participation by cities, state or federal agencies), and county population increases by 11,000 between 2011 and 2031, and an average of 2.45 persons per dwelling unit. The SDC charge could vary (higher or lower depending upon development type or county subarea/zone). If a portion of the cost of providing new trail facilities is added to the county SDC methodology, the potential park SDCs could increase significantly higher than $880 per dwelling unit.

Also, since there are numerous planned trail connections identified within the Benton County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, a county transportation impact fee (SDC) may also be a viable means to help fund future trail improvements and land/easement acquisition activities, along with other transportation improvements that enhance mobility, such as roads and transit facilities. In light of the significant level of connectivity improvements included in Benton County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, a transportation impact fee (SDC) may be a more appropriate means of funding the majority of the Plan's trail-related capital improvement and land/easement acquisition recommendations.

Table 1. Park SDCs for Cities in Benton County, Oregon

City	SDC Fee	Unit	No. of Bedrooms	SDC for a 3 bdrm 2,000 SF single-family dwelling
Albany	$255.00 $0.49	/bedroom plus /square foot	3	$1,745.00
Corvallis*	$4,993.31	single-family dwelling	3	$4,993.31
Philomath	$770.00	single-family dwellings	3	$770.00
Adair Village	$270.00	single-family dwelling	3	$270.00
*Note: Corvallis charges a lesser fee for multiple-family dwellings of $3,701.36/unit				

Source: City contacts and websites; compiled by FCS GROUP.

Table 2. Transportation SDCs for Cities in Benton County, Oregon

City	SDC Fee	Unit	ADT (average daily traffic trips) per single family dwelling	SDC for a single-family dwelling
Albany	$1,734.00	single family dwelling	N/A	$1,734.00
Corvallis	$238.67	ADT (traffic trips)	9.57 ADT per dwelling	$2,284.07
Philomath*	$3,928.00	single family dwelling	N/A	$3,928.00
Adair Village	$934.00	single family dwelling	N/A	$934.00
*Note: Philomath's SDC includes reimbursement ($1,304) and improvements ($2,624)				

Source: City contacts and websites; compiled by FCS GROUP.

Several counties in Oregon and Washington have adopted development impact fees for parks and recreational facilities. As shown in **Table 3,** the counties located outside the Portland metropolitan region, were found to have impact fees ranging from $236 to $378 per single family dwelling unit. Impact fees usually vary by development type, with single family detached units being assessed about 30% to 40% higher than multifamily and attached dwelling units. The parks SDC that is assessed in unincorporated portions of Clackamas County is much higher than the other counties, ranging from $4,425 to $6,760 for areas within the North Clackamas Parks District, but no parks impact fees assessed in more rural portions of Clackamas County. Parks impact fees may be used for a variety of land acquisition and capital improvements, including purchase of land and/or easements for parks, trails, and open spaces.

In Washington County, the transportation impact fee is based on one set of fees that is applied to cities and unincorporated portions of Washington County inside a designated area (approved by

within the ZBD over a period that usually extends 10-15 years. However, there is no guarantee that future revenues will be as steady and reliable as with the LID or property tax assessments.

G. VOTER-APPROVED PROPERTY TAX LEVY

Subject to voter approval, the County can issue General Obligation (G.O.) bonds to finance capital improvement projects using voter-approved property tax levies that are outside the limits of Ballot Measures 5 and 50. Depending on the critical nature of any planned projects and the willingness of the electorate to accept increased taxation for parks and recreation improvements, voter-approved G.O. bonds may be a feasible funding option for specific projects. Proceeds may not be used for ongoing maintenance.

H. DEDICATIONS AND DONATIONS

Jurisdictions can require developers to dedicate right-of-way or public improvements (such as trail easements or parks improvements) as a condition of future development approval if those public facilities are identified in an adopted local plan, and the value of the real estate and improvements is commensurate with the level of impact generated by the proposed development. In cases where dedicated public facilities are eligible for System Development Charge credits, the developer may be entitled to an amount of SDC credit based on the amount of the SDC improvement charge and the value of the land, trail easements and capital facility provided.

Benton County has also benefited from donations of land for parks and open space. As mentioned previously, the 586-acre Beazell Memorial Forest was donated to Benton County and is the largest of all parks in Benton County. Please refer to the following section on Partnerships for discussion on working with non-profits.

I. PARTNERSHIPS

Benton County has a long history of working with non-profit agencies and public land trusts to help create natural areas and other public recreational improvements. Local examples include partnerships with the Greenbelt Land Trust, where over $7 million in real estate property has been bequeathed to Benton County. Ongoing partnerships with federal, state and local agencies and non-profits, such as the Audubon Society, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club, Corvallis Environmental Center, Corvallis NW Earth Institute, Corvallis Sustainability Coalition, and the Benton Soil & Water Conservation District could continue to provide opportunities to assemble and dedicate future natural areas and parks resources to Benton County.

J. FRANCHISE FEES

Local cities and county jurisdictions in Oregon may also utilize franchise fee increases (within allowed limits) as a supplemental source of general fund revenues that can be

dedicated to strategic reserve funds. For example, the Lake Oswego City Council voted in May 2011 to increase its local franchise tax assessment levels by about $5 a month for the average homeowner. The fee increase is scheduled to take effect July 1 for NW Natural Gas and Allied Waste and August 1 for Portland General Electric. The increased revenue is expected to generate almost $775,000 of a $2 million financial aid package the city plans to divert to the local school district.

K. LOANS AND GRANTS

Federal and state grant programs, once readily available for financial assistance, are generally limited in size (usually less than $500,000), often require a sizable local match (at least 50% local match is recommended). Nonetheless, the economic benefit of grants and low-interest loans can make the effort of applying worthwhile. Specifically, Benton County Natural Areas and Parks relies heavily upon State Grants that are administered by Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation (Local Government Grant Program, RV Campground Funds, etc.) and the Oregon Marine Board.

Common special programs identified as potential funding sources are summarized below:

- **Bank and State Loans:** Benton County may utilize private bank loans or state loans to make strategic capital facility upgrades. Given the county's limited operating revenues, bank loans would only be viable for smaller budget improvements that promise rapid return on the investment. State loan funds available from Business Oregon currently include the Special Public Works funds . These funds are available on a competitive basis and can fund projects up to $3.0 million in size. Oregon Bond Bank or Oregon Infrastructure Finance Authority loan funds may be available if the project is well secured and other funding alternatives are not available.

- **Grants and Low-Interest Financing:** Grants offer some potential for the capital improvement projects and initiatives that Benton County has relied upon in the past. Benton County may be able to leverage non-local dollars using dedicated local funding. There are several regional, state and federal grant and loan programs that may be available for parks, natural areas and trail improvements. As mentioned above, Benton County has been successful in obtaining State Grants that are administered by Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation (Local Government Grant Program, RV Campground Funds, etc.) and the Oregon Marine Board. Please refer to Business Oregon contacts for current grant and loan funding opportunities.

4. GOVERNANCE

In this current challenging economic environment local jurisdictions are being challenged to find new ways to deliver public services using a combination of funding resources and regional partnerships. The traditional approach of having multiple government agencies funding and managing local, regional and state park facilities and natural areas within the

same watershed or basin is being supplanted by new creative regional partnerships using a mix of local and regional funding sources.

To implement the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Master Plan project list, Benton County may explore a variety of governance strategies to provide and maintain local and regional parks, natural areas and trails. Emerging examples of regional partnerships are underway in that states of California, Nevada and Washington. A comparison of governance strategies is provided in **Table 4**.

Table 4. Potential Governance Strategies for Delivering and Managing County Natural Areas and Parks Facilities

Governance Strategy	Examples
Status Quo	Funding provided by County General Fund, uses a pay-as-you go funding (timber revenues and user fees) and volunteer help
Voter Approved Specific Improvement Program for Benton County	Benton Soil and Water Conservation District, 2004 tax levy of $0.05/$1,000 of assessed property value
Voter-Approved Regional Service District with Dedicated Funding Sources	North Clackamas Parks District (Clackamas County); Tualatin Hills Parks & Recreation District (Washington County, Oregon)
Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Truckee River Flood Management Authority (includes funding for flood mitigation, natural areas and trails; involves Washoe County, Reno and Sparks); and Chehalis River Flood Authority (Lewis, Thurston and Grays Harbor counties, WA)
Inter-local Agreement Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	West Eugene Wetland Mitigation Bank; agreements among Eugene, Lane County, Oregon Division of State Lands et. al.

Each of the governance strategies strategy options has a number of advantages and disadvantages when it comes to maintaining local control, retaining grass roots community support, county liability, and leveraging funding or financing for capital improvements and operations/maintenance activities. A comparative evaluation of the governance strategies is provided in **Table 5.**

Table 5. Comparison of Potential Governance Strategies

Governance Strategy	Strengths	Weaknesses	Who Governs?	Who Owns?	Typical Local Funding Methods
Status Quo	May not require voter approval	Better for local parks than for regional facilities	Local jurisdiction each manages their own facilities	Local jurisdiction each owns their own facilities	SDCs, Utility Fees, Urban Renewal, Community Facility Districts
Voter Approved Specific Improvement Program for Benton County	Grass roots support	Limited to established projects within the county jurisdiction	Benton County	Benton County	Property Taxes or Development Taxes (SDCs)
Voter Approved Regional Parks District	Grass roots support; Flexible boundaries; governed by County Commissioners or separate elected board	New separate entity created; un-established weak credit history; O&M costs may tend to be under funded	Flexible, usually county or participating jurisdictions	Special District or Participating Jurisdictions (jointly)	User Fees, Utility Rates, or Property Taxes
Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Board can be made up of current elected body or new designated entity	New governance; un-established; weak credit history; O&M costs tend to be under funded; can issue revenue bonds only	Determined by agreement	Determined by agreement	Local or Regional User Fees, Utility Rates, or Locally Dedicated Reserve Funds
Inter-local Agreement Among Participating Cities, County and/or Service Districts	Participating jurisdictions have more control	Hard to identify "lead agency"; possible inequities, redundant efforts & costs	Determined by agreement	Determined by agreement	Separate Local User Fees, Utility Rates, or Locally Dedicated Reserve Funds

4. PRELIMINARY STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

With completion of the Benton County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the county is now positioned to consider the timing/prioritization of future parks, open space and trail investments, along with potential funding mechanisms that are most appropriate for each facility type. The implementation and funding of the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan should be conducted as part of a follow-on strategic planning effort.

PRELIMINARY APPROACH

No matter what governance strategy is selected, local citizens general favor a structure that: provides maximum accountability to them as residents or taxpayers within the district; and provides a structure that includes geographic representation of localized needs and issues. The ability to streamline government resources through more creative and effective use of staff and capital resources is also generally viewed favorably.

A possible framework approach for proceeding with the implementation of the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks project list (identified in the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan), includes the following:

1. **Establish a "Blue Ribbon" committee or "Friends Group"** with a cross section of city and county parks and natural area stakeholders to work with county staff to conduct community outreach and to ascertain the most likely sources of funding for parks facilities and operations. Determine interest in local cities (e.g, Corvallis, Albany and Adair Village) to participate in utilizing and funding any of the parks, trails and natural area improvement projects listed in the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Plan. This effort should include a current survey of county and city park user demographic characteristics to better understand who uses the county and local parks facilities.
2. **Consider phased-approach for implementing the parks, trails and natural area improvement projects**. Consider the input received from Step 1 to refine improvement program priorities. Near-term focus should take aim at funding modest parks and recreational improvements and activities though the use of existing and potential new funding sources, which have been identified in this memorandum. The results of Step 2 should be carried forward into Step 3 for additional analysis.
3. **Conduct preliminary financial analysis of selected funding options**, such as a new parks & natural areas SDC, transportation SDC, and utility charges. This effort should consider the feasibility of a county-wide SDC (one fee for all urban and rural areas of the county), a county SDC (separate from city SDCs), and creation of a city/county parks district. Conduct public opinion poll or focus group research to ascertain the level of support for various funding levels among geographic sub-areas of the county.

4. **Seek additional public input** regarding the potential establishment of a new regional parks district, or other inter-agency authority with a dedicated source of revenue from property taxes, user fees, utility rates, SDCs, and other revenue streams. Public support for a county transportation SDC or Parks SDC should also be ascertained.
5. **Reconcile/update the list of high priority natural area, parks, and trail projects** and costs, and determine where projects fall with respect to county versus regional funding and operating responsibility.
6. **Leverage local, regional, state and federal partnerships with public agencies and non-profit organizations** to optimize non-local grants, donations and sponsorship opportunities.

In light of Oregon's stringent land use laws and local growth management practices, Benton County will need to explore new sources of funding and governance partnership strategies to fully implement the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Master Plan. Deliberate and concerted effort is required to explore the creation of ***new local funding sources*** (e.g., parks and transportation SDCs) for strategic parks and trail improvements in a manner that is acceptable to the general public and consistent with Oregon legal requirements.

Benton County is recognized as a progressive and innovative county that has an excellent reputation and wonderful quality of life. New regional partnerships and related funding sources (e.g., parks utility or franchise fees) will be needed to help acquire, construct and operate natural areas, parks and trail improvements that benefit multiple jurisdictions and agencies. Maintaining and enhancing high quality parks, trails and natural areas will be a challenge in the years to come, but will benefit Benton County's existing and future residents, businesses and visitors.

APPENDIX A

IMPLEMENTING SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT CHARGES[3]

System development charges (SDCs) are fees charged to new development to pay a portion of the costs of facilities needed for growth. In Oregon, SDCs (which are called "impact fees" in most other states) can be charged only for transportation, water, wastewater (sewer), stormwater, and parks and recreation facilities.

Parks and recreation SDCs may be adopted by cities, counties, and special service districts (parks providers) to 1) acquire land and construct parks and recreation facilities needed for future growth, and 2) reimburse parks providers for the costs of facilities that have already been acquired and/or constructed and have excess capacity available for growth.

2.A. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.A.i. Oregon Systems Development Act (ORS 223.297 - 223.314)

The source of authority for the adoption of SDCs by local governments and special districts is found both in state statute and in each local government or special district's own plenary authority to adopt this type of fee. While SDCs have been in use in Oregon since the mid-1970's, State legislation regarding SDCs was not adopted until 1989, when the Oregon Systems Development Act (SDC Act) was passed. The purpose of this Act was to "…provide a uniform framework for the imposition of system development charges..., to provide equitable funding for orderly growth and development…, and to establish that the charges may be used only for capital improvements." [ORS 223.297]. Legislative additions and modifications to the Act have been made in 1993, 1999, 2001, and 2003. A copy of the Oregon Systems Development Act is included as Appendix A to this document.

2.A.i.a. General Requirements

A "system development charge" (SDC) is a fee "assessed or collected at the time of increase usage of a capital improvement or issuance of a development permit, building permit or connection to the capital improvement." [ORS 223.299(4)(a)]

SDCs do not include any fees assessed or collected as part of a local improvement district (LID) or a charge in lieu of an LID assessment, or the cost of complying with requirements

[3] This appendix was modified for Benton County based on an analysis by Don Ganer, Senior Project Manager, FCS GROUP for the Oregon Parks Association. The intent of this appendix is to provide direction regarding the potential methods and level of work scope required to create and implement a new natural area and parks SDC ordinance.

or conditions imposed upon a land use decision, expedited land division, or limited land use decision; and the establishment, modification or implementation of an SDC is not a land use decision pursuant to ORS chapters 195 and 197. [ORS 223.299(4)(b) and ORS 223.314]

Local governments and special districts that adopt SDCs **must**:

- establish or modify the SDCs by ordinance or resolution [ORS 223.304(1)(a) and ORS 223.304(2)(a)];
- develop a methodology outlining how each SDC was developed [ORS 223.304(1)(a) and ORS 223.304(2)(a)];
- maintain a list of people who have made a written request for notification of adoption or amendment of an SDC methodology, and mail a written notice to these people at least 90 days prior to the first hearing to establish or modify an SDC [ORS 223.304(6) and ORS 223.304(7)(a)];
- have the SDC methodology available for public inspection not later than 60 days prior to the first hearing to establish or modify an SDC [ORS 223.304(1)(b(B), (ORS 223.304(2)(a) and ORS 223.304(7)(a)];
- prepare a capital improvement plan, master plan (or similar plan) that includes a list of capital improvements to be funded from SDC revenues [ORS 223.307(4) and ORS 223.309(1]);
- include for each project in the list of capital improvements the estimated cost, timing, and percentage of costs eligible to be funded from improvement fee SDC revenues (eligible SDC improvements generally include designated capacity inducing elements, such as land/easement purchase, capital facilities, parks and trail facilities and related open space investments that are consistent with an adopted facilities plan);
- use SDC revenues only for capital improvements included in the required list, and for the costs of complying with the provisions of the SDC Act [ORS 223.307(4) and ORS 223.307(5)];
- separately account for and report receipt and expenditure of SDC revenues [ORS 223.311];
- adopt administrative review procedures by which an expenditure of SDC revenues may be challenged [ORS 223.302(2)]; and
- advise a person who makes a written objection to the calculation of an SDC of the right to petition for review pursuant to ORS 34.010 to 34.100 [ORS 223.302(3)(a).

Local governments and special districts that adopt SDCs **may**:

- change SDC rates based on a change in the costs of materials, labor, or real property applied to the projects included in the required list [ORS 223.304(8)(a)];
- change SDC rates based on the periodic application of one or more identified and adopted cost indices or periodic data sources [ORS 223.304(8)(b)]; and

- modify the required plan and list of capital improvements to be funded from SDC revenues at any time [ORS 223.309(2)].

Local governments and special districts that adopt SDCs **may not**:

- use SDC revenues for the construction of administrative office facilities that are more than an incidental part of other capital improvements, or for costs of operations or maintenance of capital improvements [ORS 223.299(1)(b) and ORS 223.307(3)]; or
- establish or impose an SDC that requires an employer to pay an SDC based on either the number of employees hired after a specific date, or a methodology that assumes that costs are incurred for capital improvements when an employer hires an additional employee [ORS 223.301(2)].

2.A.i.b. The Two Authorized Types of SDCs

The Oregon Systems Development Act provides for the imposition of two types of SDCs: (1) "improvement fee" SDCs, and (2) "reimbursement fee" SDCs.

"Reimbursement fee" SDCs may be charged for the costs of existing capital facilities if "excess capacity" is available to accommodate growth. The methodology for a reimbursement fee SDC must promote the objective of future users contributing no more than an equitable share of the costs of existing facilities, and must be based on ratemaking principles that consider prior contributions by existing users, gifts or grants from federal or state government or private persons, the value of unused capacity available to future system users or the cost of the existing facilities, and any other factors considered relevant by the local government or special district imposing the fee. Revenues from "reimbursement fees" may be used for any capital improvement project, including major repairs, upgrades, or renovations.

2.A.ii. Authorized uses of Improvement Fee SDC Revenues

"Improvement fee" SDCs may be used to pay for all or a portion of new capital improvements that will increase capacity. Oregon law requires that an "improvement fee" SDC methodology must be based on consideration of 1) the projected cost of capital improvements identified in a required "capital improvement plan, public facilities plan, master plan or comparable plan that includes a list of the capital improvements" [ORS 223.309(1)] needed to increase the capacity of the parks and recreation system; and 2) the portion of the increased capacity required to serve the demands placed on the system by future users. Revenues from "improvement fee" SDCs may be used only for capacity-increasing capital improvements included in the required plan and list of projects.

2.B. DEVELOPING THE SDC METHODOLOGY

2.B.i. SDC Methodology Approaches

There are two basic approaches used to develop SDCs for parks and recreation facilities: "Level-of-Service (LOS)-based" and "improvements-based". **Figure 1** is a flowchart designed to provide a general outline of these two approaches.

2.B.i.a. LOS-Based Approach

The LOS-based approach requires a review of the existing and planned LOS, either for all facilities (e.g., total acres in the park system), or for each major type of facility (i.e., acres of community parks, miles of trails, etc.). The LOS is expressed as units of facility per population measure (i.e., acres of community parks per 1,000 residents, etc.). The LOS-based approach may be used for both "improvement fee" and "reimbursement fee" SDCs.

Once the required capital improvements plan (or similar plan) and list of projects for the planning period has been developed (as required by ORS 229.309), the LOS expected upon completion of the plan can be determined and compared with the existing LOS. The growth-required percentage of costs for each project can be calculated based on the difference, if any, between the existing and planned LOS.

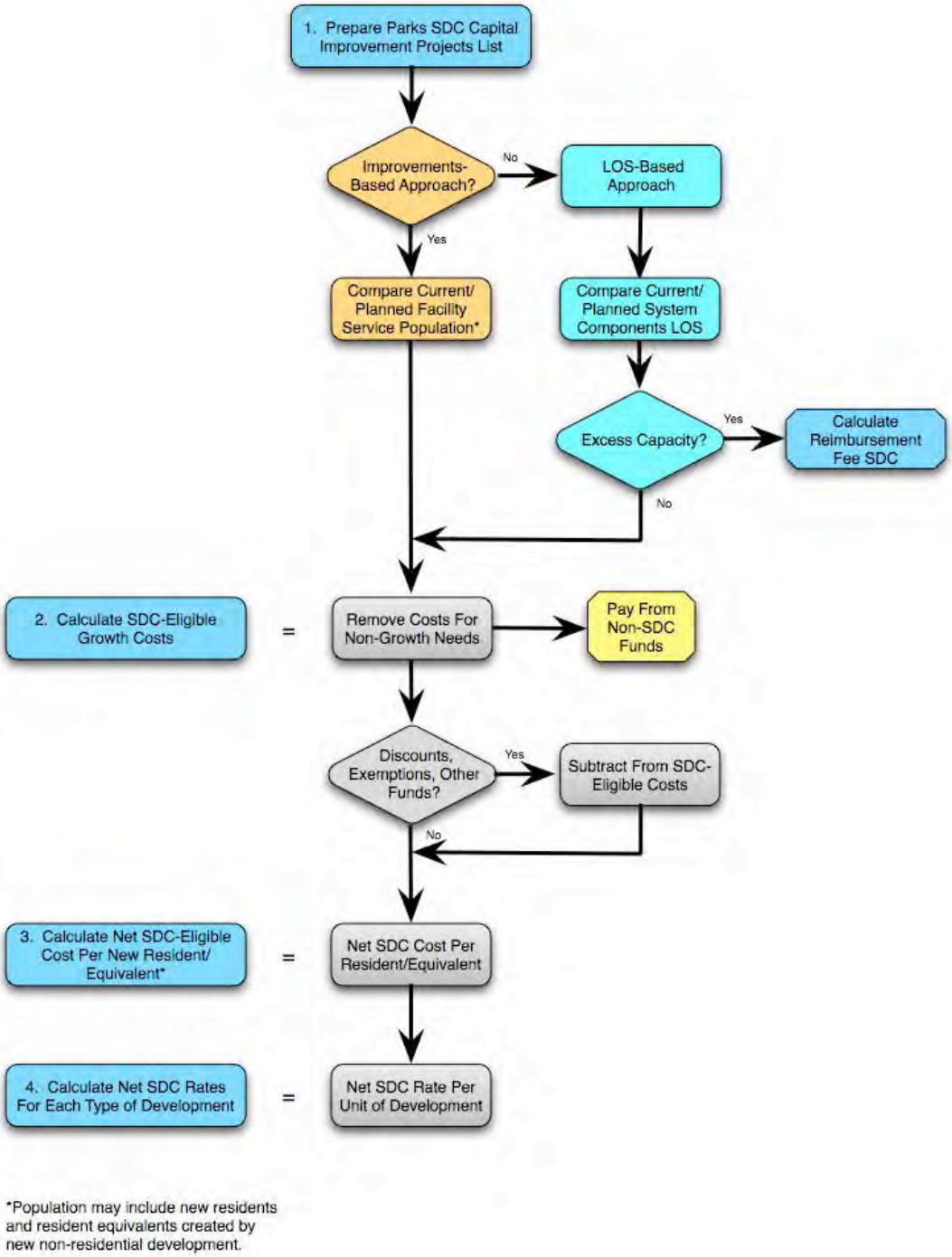
2.B.i.b. Improvements-Based Approach

The improvements-based approach requires a review of the existing and planned population within the service area for each planned facility. The growth-required percentage of costs for each planned facility is calculated individually. The improvements-based approach may be used only for "improvement fee" SDCs.

2.B.i.c. Combination/Hybrid Approach

A combination or hybrid of the LOS-based and improvements-based approaches may also be used for developing a parks and recreation SDC methodology. For example, the LOS-based approach may be used to determine the growth-required portion of needs for some types of facilities (such as community parks, open space, etc.), while the improvements-based approach is used for other facilities (such as neighborhood parks).

FIGURE 1
FLOWCHART DEPICTING IMPROVEMENTS-BASED & LOS-BASED SDC APPROACHES



2.C. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

In addition to determining which methodology approach (or approaches) will best serve the community, local governments and special district also consider other factors when designing parks and recreation SDC methodologies. Following are some examples:

2.C.i. Non-Residential Parks SDCs

Non-residential parks SDCs have plausible application in employment centers that draw non-resident employees into the community.

Under the assumption that parks and recreation facilities did not benefit non-residential development, many local governments have charged parks SDCs only for residential development. During recent years, a growing number of local governments and special districts in Oregon including Canby, Eugene, Gresham, Hillsboro, Lake Oswego, Lebanon, North Clackamas PRD, Oregon City, Sherwood, Tigard, Tualatin Hills PRD, Wilsonville, and Woodburn have concluded that certain types of parks and recreation facilities benefit both residential and non-residential development, and they have established parks SDCs for non-residential, as well as residential development.

Most non-residential parks SDCs in Oregon are based either on the number of new employees or the density (persons per 1,000 square feet) that will be created by new non-residential development and expansion. The methodologies determine the impact that new non-residential development and expansion will have on parks and recreation facilities, and the parks SDC rates are calculated based on those impacts. Most of the communities do not charge non-residential SDCs for neighborhood parks, because these types of facilities are not usually accessible or designed for use by non-residents. Facilities like trails, community parks, and sports facilities are usually available to both residents and non-residents, so these and other similar facilities are usually included in the non-residential parks SDC calculations.

An employee-based, non-residential parks SDC methodology was reviewed by the Oregon Court of Appeals and was found to meet both constitutional and statutory requirements. (Home Builders Association v. Tualatin Hills PRD).

2.C.ii. Multiple SDC Rate Zones

Multiple SDC rates have plausible application in communities where much of the new infrastructure (parks) and development are planned for specific areas or zones within the community, or where land acquisition and/or development costs are significantly higher or lower in one or more areas. Oregon communities that have adopted multiple parks SDC rate zones have higher SDC rates for areas with significant planned new development where parks infrastructure is needed to serve growth. The SDC rates for areas where less development is planned are lower because fewer growth-related parks infrastructure improvements are needed.

The North Clackamas Parks and Recreation District (approx. population: 110,000) has adopted different SDC rate structures in each of three development zones. The City of Gresham (approx. population: 95,000) has also adopted a similar, three-zone parks SDC rate approach. The methodologies used by these communities include "zone" cost components for facilities that primarily benefit the development zone (i.e., neighborhood parks, etc.), and "community-wide" cost components for facilities that are considered to benefit a larger portion of the community (i.e., community parks, sports parks, trails, etc.).

Homebuilder groups have advocated for multiple SDC-rate zones because intense growth is focused in specific areas and the SDCs provide a mechanism for funding facilities needed for the newly developing areas. SDC rates for the more established areas of the community are lower than for newly developing areas. In order to develop multiple parks SDC rate zones, it is necessary to select rate zones and determine which facilities primarily benefit the rate zone versus the larger community.

2.C.iii. Considering Public School Facilities

Parks and recreation providers often partner with public schools to construct and maintain facilities such as playgrounds and ballfields that may be used for both school and parks and recreation purposes. Several Oregon parks providers including the Hood River PRD, North Clackamas PRD, Tualatin Hills PRD, and the cities of North Plains, Scappoose, and Sherwood include selected parks and recreation facilities at public schools as part of the inventory used in calculating their parks and recreation SDCs.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) included "School-Park" as a classification in the 1996 update of Parks, Open Space and Greenways Guidelines (Guidelines). These Guidelines suggest that "by combining the resources of two public agencies, the School-Park classification allows for expanding the recreation, social, and educational opportunities available to the community in an efficient and cost effective manner." The Guidelines caution that school-only uses should not be included when determining parks and recreation LOS. This caution is also important to avoid violating Oregon Law, which does not currently allow SDCs for schools. As a rule of thumb, parks and recreation facilities located at public schools are considered to be available for non-school parks and recreation use about 2/3 of available time. This calculation is based on an estimate that public school facilities are available for use a total of approximately 4,410 hours per year (315 days X 14 hours per day), with exclusive school use for 1,520 hours (20 days X 14 hours, plus 155 days X 8 hours), and non-school use for 2,890 hours (140 days X 14 hours, plus 155 days X 6 hours).

Including parks and recreation facilities located at public schools in the inventory of facilities used for calculating SDCs increases the parks and recreation LOS, and may result in higher SDC rates than would otherwise be possible. The use of parks SDCs for facilities located on public school property has not been tested in court. At a minimum, an interagency agreement between the public schools and the parks provider authorizing the use of facilities for parks and recreation purposes is needed.

2.D. SDC ADOPTION, IMPLEMENTATION, & ADMINISTRATION

2.D.i. SDC Ordinance or Resolution Provisions

2.D.i.a. Rate Reductions/Exemptions

SDCs are one-time fees designed to pay all or a portion of the costs of parks facilities needed to serve new development. SDCs are usually paid along with permit fees at the time of application for a building or development permit. Like permit fees, SDCs are considered to be a cost of construction and have an impact on the total costs of housing, commercial, office, and industrial construction projects.

Oregon law does not specifically require any exemptions from SDCs. Local governments and special districts typically exempt development that does not place increased demands on the parks and recreation system from the requirement to pay parks SDCs. For example, if a single-family house is demolished and is replaced with another single-family house, no increased demand is placed on the parks and recreation system, so no SDC payment is required. Examples of other typical exemptions include:

- temporary uses or structures that will be used for no more than 90 to 180 days in a single calendar year,
- alteration permits for remodeling or tenant improvements that do not add additional units or increase the occupant density of the development,
- non-residential (i.e., commercial, office, etc.) development in communities that do not have significant numbers of non-resident employees

In addition to these exemptions, some communities exempt specific types of development designed to meet adopted policies or goals. Examples include exemptions for affordable housing and non-residential development that provides “family-wage” jobs. Exemptions and rate reductions reduce SDC revenues and increase the amount of capital facilities funding that must come from other sources, such as property taxes.

2.D.i.b. Time of Payment

Oregon law (ORS 223.208) requires that certain types of development be allowed to pay SDCs in installments. Oregon law has no requirements regarding the time at which payment of SDCs is due. The most common time at which either payment of parks SDCs or submission of an application for payment in installments is required is at the time of issuance of a building permit.

2.D.i.c. Credits

A credit is a reduction in the amount of the SDC for a specific development. The Oregon SDC Act requires that credit be allowed for the construction of any "qualified public improvement" that (1) is required as a condition of development approval, (2) is identified in

the plan and list of projects on which improvement fee SDC revenues may be used, and (3) either is not located on or contiguous to property that is the subject of development approval, or is located on or contiguous to such property and is required to be built larger or with greater capacity than is necessary to meet the needs of the particular development project.

The credit for a qualified public improvement may only be applied against an SDC for the same type of improvement (e.g., a parks improvement can only be used for a credit for a parks SDC), and may be granted only for the cost of that portion of an improvement which exceeds the minimum standard facility size or capacity needed to serve the particular project. For multi-phase projects, any excess credit may be applied against SDCs that accrue in subsequent phases of the original development project.

In addition to these required credits, a local government or special district may provide a greater credit, establish a system providing for the transferability of credits, provide a credit for a capital improvement not identified in the required plan and list of projects, or provide a share of the cost of an improvement by other means (i.e., partnerships, other revenues, etc.).

Unlike for transportation, water, and wastewater facilities, the donation or construction of a parks and recreation facility is seldom required as a condition of development approval. As a result, SDC credits are not often "required" for parks and recreation facilities, but many communities allow SDC credits for facilities that are voluntarily donated or constructed by developers.

2.D.i.d. Adjusting Costs and SDC Rates

Oregon Law (ORS 223.304(8) provides for adjustments in costs and SDC rates based either on changes in the project costs, or the periodic application of one or more specific cost indices or other periodic data sources. Many communities annually adjust parks SDC rates using a cost index or a combination of cost indices designed to reflect changes in the costs of land acquisition and construction.

One of the most commonly used indices is the Engineering News Record (ENR) Construction Cost Index (CCI). This index is published monthly by ENR and is available either as a composite for 20 cities, or as an individual index for any one of 20 cities. Seattle is the closest city to Oregon for which an individual city index is available.

A commonly used periodic data source for changes in land costs is the county assessors' ratio study. Each county assessor prepares a ratio study each year. Ratio studies are developed and used by county assessors to keep real market values current with changes in the real estate market place.

Some communities have adopted "combination" indices to reflect both changes in construction costs (from the CCI) and land costs (from the ratio study).

2.D.i.e. Updating the SDC Methodology

Oregon Law does not require that SDC methodologies be updated once they are adopted. Some communities require review of their SDC methodologies on a periodic basis (such as

every two, four, or five years). Communities should review and update the SDC methodology following development or updating a parks master plan or capital facilities plan that results in significant changes to the adopted list of capital improvements on which SDC revenues may be spent.

2.D.ii. Administrative Review Procedures and Appeals

2.D.ii.a. Administrative Review Procedures

ORS 223.302(2) requires local governments and special districts that have SDCs to "adopt administrative review procedures by which any citizen or other interested person may challenge an expenditure of system development charge revenues." The statute requires that the procedures provide that "a challenge must be filed within two years of the [SDC] expenditure" If the citizen or other interested person who challenges an expenditure is not satisfied with the decision regarding the propriety of the expenditure, the decision "may be judicially reviewed only as provided in ORS 34.010 to 34.100."

Oregon law does not require any other administrative review procedures, but many local governments and special districts have adopted such procedures for items such as objections to rate calculations, requests for exemptions, and the calculation of credits. If administrative review procedures are adopted for objections to rate calculations, ORS 223.302(3)(b) requires that "adequate notice regarding the procedure for review [must be provided] to a person who makes a written objection to the [SDC] calculation." ORS 223.302(3)(a) also requires local governments and special districts to "advise a person who makes a written objection to the calculation of a system development charge of the right to petition for review pursuant to ORS 34.010 to 34.100."

2.D.ii.b. Appeals

Oregon law does not require local governments or special districts that adopt SDCs to provide for appeals of discretionary administrative or other decisions. While not required, many have adopted processes for appeals to the governing body (i.e., city council, board of directors, etc.) or other decision maker (e.g. hearings officer) for discretionary administrative decisions regarding items such as rate calculations, exemption requests, and credit calculations.

2.D.ii.c. Accounting Requirements

ORS 223.311 requires that SDC revenues be deposited "in accounts designated for such moneys." The statute also requires that each local government and special district "provide an annual accounting, to be completed by January 1 of each year…showing the total amount of [SDC] revenues collected for each system and the projects that were funded in the previous fiscal year." The annual accounting must include "a list of the amount spent on each project funded, in whole or in part, with [SDC] revenues" The accounting must also include "the amount of [SDC] revenue…attributed to the costs of complying with the provisions of ORS 223.297 to 223.314."

Final Project List

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks System Plan

Willamette River Recreation Corridor			
1-10 years	**Anderson Park – Harkens Lake Oxbow** Acquisition - M Restoration - H Public Access - M	Continue to collaborate with partners to acquire lands and easements, and to restore floodplain forests as featured in the Willamette Basin Planning Atlas as a prototype for river restoration. Provide public access (boat landing), supporting infrastructure, and interpretation as a Willamette River Water Trail restoration and demonstration project. *Notes: Collaborative project with Greenbelt Land Trust, public agencies, and private landowners.*	$ 500K Day-use Boat Ramp $10K/yr Restoration
1-6 years	**Hyak Park** Acquisition - M Facility Renovation - M Facility Improvements - M	Acquire additional land, expand and upgrade to function as a major public access, river viewing, and group picnicking site both from land and the river. Replace restroom. Opportunity to collaborate with Bowers Rock Natural Area across the river. *Notes: Work with Marine Board and 6-year Facility Plan*	$125k New Restroom $100k Property purchase $25K Improvements
10-12 years	**Irish Bend Park** Acquisition - L Facility Improvements - L	Continue river restoration activities in collaboration with partners; promote the site as an integral part of the WR Water Trail Concept Plan with primitive boat-in facilities, interpretation and education. Bridge construction (administrative access only). *Notes: Establish partnership with Sheriff's Office to use boat to monitor current restoration and enhance. Establish signage and primitive river campsites (only). New access bridge – low priority.*	$5k/acre for Land Acquisition
2-8 years	**Norwood Island** Restoration - L Boat-in Facility - M Improvements- L	Continue river restoration activities in collaboration with partners; promote the site as an integral part of the WR Water Trail Concept Plan with primitive boat-in facilities, interpretation and education. Bridge construction (administrative access only). *Notes: Establish partnership with Sheriff's Office to use boat to monitor current restoration and enhance. Establish signage and primitive river campsites (only). New access bridge – low priority.*	$5k Biannually for Restoration and establishing seasonal signage
2-8 years	**Long Tom River** Trail Access - M	Opportunity to explore potential for negotiating with the Corps of Engineers to create a trail connection along the Long Tom River between the Monroe community and the Willamette River. *Notes: Partner with community and volunteers, Benton County Public Works Dept.*	To be determined
Alsea River Recreation Corridor			
	Campbell Boat Landing Facility Maintenance - L	Routine facility maintenance and repair. *Notes: Ramp, stairs, fence, and retaining wall replaced in 2008.*	No capital cost

H = High Priority M = Medium Priority L = Low Priority

Alsea River Recreation Corridor			
4-6 years	**Clemens Park** Facility Renovation - M Parking Improvements - H	Upgrade and enhance Alsea River site for river activities, interpretation and education, and picnicking; restoration of entry parking including stormwater drainage; trailhead improvements, covered picnic shelter, Sealey Creek bridge restoration. *Notes: Ask Public Works to assess Sealey Creek bridge to determine: repair or replace.*	$15k for parking lot overlay, drainage, and bio-swale
4-6 years	**Mill Creek Park – Robinson Memorial Grove** Facility Improvements - M	Improve parking and access to the Robinson Oak Grove. Enhance interpretive information and signage. *Notes: Work with ODOT to determine need and solution to Robinson Grove parking/access.*	To be determined
2-12 years	**Salmonberry Boat Landing and Campground** Cabins - H C.G. Improvements – H Fishing Platform – M	Upgrade boat landing entryway with improved information and education, surface parking lot. Upgrade campground entryway with improved information; add cabins or yurts for year-round overnight use; construct ADA fishing/viewing platform; provide trailhead and interpretation along the River Walk. *Notes: Use cabin location to develop master plan for acquiring grant funds for full build out.*	$50k for Cabins $350k for CG expansion, ADA platform and paving
Natural Areas - Prairie Conservation Areas			
4-6 years	**Beazell Memorial Forest** Facility Improvements – H N. Trail Loop Addition - L	Enhance interpretive displays and educational information on the demonstration forest (adaptive working forest trail), unique barn renovation, and habitat restoration activities; expand picnic facilities to accommodate groups and families. *Notes: Work with north landowner to secure permanent easement for access.*	$ 35k North Trail Loop $ 3k Picnic Tables
1-4 years	**Fitton Green Natural Area** South Access Acq. - H Restoration - H Facility Improvements - M	High priority for acquisition to connect the site with the Philomath community; potential for acquisition on the western boundary; improve signage, interpretation, and way finding at the trailheads. *Notes: Partner with GLT to secure south access.*	$200k South acquisition $75k S. Entry road improvement $5k/yr Restoration of 15k trail, facilities
1-15 years	**Jackson-Frazier Wetland** Acquisition - M Restoration - H Facility Replacement - L	Opportunity to work with partners to acquire and consolidate lands and management plans in the watershed to help maintain natural stream flows and protect the wetland system hydrology. Replacement of the boardwalk will be required in the long term. *Notes: Boardwalk is currently one half through its estimated 30-40 yr design life.*	$ 5k/acre Acquisition $5k/yr Restoration $250k Boardwalk replacement
1-4 years	**Cardwell Hill Prairie Restoration** Habitat Acquisition - H Interpretation - M	Acquire lands from willing sellers for prairie habitat restoration and designate as Benton County Fender's Blue Butterfly Conservation Areas; provide signage and interpretive facilities for educational and demonstration purposes. *Notes: Acquisition in process, restoration enhancements required for HCP mitigation.*	$ 330k Acquisition $10k/year Restoration
Historic Parks and Cultural Sites			
4-15 years	**Fort Hoskins Historic Park** Historic Restoration - M Acquisition - H	Restore historic foundations as "Shadow-Ghost" structures and develop interpretive facilities; move Sheridan House onto the site with assistance of a Friends group; interpret both Sheridan and Frantz-Dunn House (one of the best remaining examples of Gothic Revival architecture in Benton County. Consolidate land ownership at the park entry. *Notes: Research electronic ways (cell phones) to deliver interpretation, rather than fixed signs.*	$125k Sheridan house relocation & stabilization $35k Ghost structures

General Parks			
2-8 years	**Adair Regional Park** Facility Improvements - H Renovation - H Trail Acquisition - H	Based on new master plan, upgrade and renovate park facilities including new restroom and playground for all ages; consider full-service campground; formal picnicking area, enhance parking lots (curbs replacing bollards), trail development, exercise stations, disc golf improvements; storm water controls; trail connection to E.E. Wilson Wildlife Refuge; improve connectivity with park and neighborhoods. *Notes: Master Plan to determine phasing/build out.*	$ 635k Full build out
2 years	**Bellfountain Park** Facility Improvements - H Renovations - H	Replace playground; build new picnic shelter; provide additional dispersed picnic area to accommodate public use. *Notes: Master Plan will determine phasing of renovation and upgrades.*	$100k Replace shelter $65k New playground
2-4 years	**North Albany Park** Facility Improvements - H Renovation - H Trail Acquisition - H	Based on new master plan, upgrade and renovate park facilities including new restroom, playground, parking improvements and storm water controls, dispersed picnicking, disc golf play area. *Notes: Site planning and financing to be coordinated with City of Albany due to location within the city.*	$300k
System-Wide Projects			
2-12 years	**Signs and Interpretive and Educational Program** Master Plan - L	Prepare a system-wide wayfinding and signage plan; replace old park entry signs; upgrade and expansion of the system interpretive and educational program including trailheads, interpretive trail displays. *Notes: Research electronic delivery of interpretation and educational components.*	$15k for plan
1-4 years	**ADA Accessibility** Facility Assessment - H Facility Improvements - H	Upgrade and enhance ADA accessible facilities to not only meet ADA requirements but also enhance recreational opportunities for persons with different abilities. *Notes: Resource-sensitive and fiscally responsible projects*	$10k for assessment
Collaborative Opportunities with Others			
6-15 years	**Marys Peak Campground Opportunity** Partnership - M	Explore opportunity with the Siuslaw National Forest for Benton County to provide overnight camping, yurts, or cabins at Marys Peak; possible management options *Notes: Pursue conversations with the U.S. Forest Service and others to determine parameters, scope, and planning required; Siuslaw Forest Office is supportive of the project*	Collaboration with: • City of Corvallis • Benton County P.W. Dept. • Benton County NAPD
2-6 years	**Yaquina Falls Mgt Plan Opportunity** Partnership - M	Work with the Oregon Department of Forestry and others to develop a management and public use plan for the falls recently acquired by ODF. *Notes: ODF is supportive of the project; no funding available for planning or management*	Collaboration with: • ODF • BC NAPD • Private landowners
2-5 years	**Newton Creek Wetlands & Marys Peak Natural Resources Interpretive Center**	Work with USFWS "America's Great Outdoors Initiative," community partners and willing seller to acquire wetland site. Create restoration and development plan and promote educational programming.	Collaboration with: • America's Great Outdoors • Community partners

H = High Priority M = Medium Priority L = Low Priority

Trails Plan Project List

Benton County Natural Areas and Parks System Plan

Fire Protection & Community Access			
City of Philomath to Fitton Green Natural Area	0.23 mi.	Critical connection for community access, and for emergency access and fire protection; alignment opportunities are part of Fitton Green Management Plan.	Undetermined
* **Neighborhood Emergency Access and Connectivity**	Ongoing Planning	Connections between neighborhoods along existing rights-of-way for both emergency access and connectivity to parks, open space, and natural areas. Projects not identified.	Ongoing Public Works project
Multi-Use Paths and Bike Lanes			
City of Adair to Adair Park * **Adair Park to E.E. Wilson State Wildlife Refuge**	222 ft. 0.3 mi.	Explore existing rights-of-way (Cherry Drive) to connect City of Adair with Adair Park Easement opportunities; additional study needed to connect Adair Village with the nearby state wildlife refuge.	$14,700 $110,500
* **City of Corvallis to Albany Multi-Use Path**	9.25 mi.	Connect Corvallis with Albany; increase bike commuting, improve safety; reduce vehicle use. Benton County Public Works has prepared feasibility study. *In Public Works CIP*	$10m
* **City of Corvallis to Finley National Wildlife Refuge** * **City of Monroe to Finley National Wildlife Refuge**	8.1 mi. 8.5 mi.	Important multi-use path to increase bicycle use and reduce vehicle use between Corvallis and Finley Wildlife Refuge; alignment along Highway 99 right-of-way is preferred. Important multi-use path to increase bicycle use and reduce vehicle use between Monroe and Finley Wildlife Refuge	$2.8m $3m
* **City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-use Path**	6.5 mi.	Explore trail connection between Monroe City Park and Willamette River along a Corps of Engineers easement on the Long Tom River, tourism and economic development potential.	$2.26m
* **Roadway Shoulder Widening Improvements for Bike Lanes** Albany City Limits to Adair Park City of Monroe to Alsea Falls	4 mi. 11 mi.	Along NW Metge and NW Ryals to Adair Park Alignment has been studied along the South Fork Alsea Rd.	$1.5m $4m
* **Sheep Farm Trail – Northwest Corvallis to McDonald Forest**	1.3 mi.	Excellent partnering opportunity with City of Corvallis and the OSU sheep arm; alignment has been studied – NW Ponderosa Ave. to Oak Creek Dr. *In Public Works CIP*	$550,000

** Benton County Public Works Department is managing these projects to promote multi-modal paths. Transportation Enhancement grants have been a primary source of funds in the past. Most of these projects will be implemented in collaboration with the Benton County Natural Areas and Parks Department.*

Willamette River Access			
* **Willamette River Access and Water Trail**	Ongoing planning	Improving public access to the Willamette River with supporting infrastructure, focusing on existing county-owned sites and working with landowners to meet common goals and avoid impacts. Active participation with others to implement the Water Trail Concept, including signage and minimal facilities to assist users' knowledge of the river ecosystem.	Additional study required
* **Willamette River Access Between Corvallis and Irish Bend Park**	Study required	River access is limited in southern Benton County, and needs additional study to determine how to meet common goals with landowners, minimize impacts, provide access to the river with appropriate and minimal facilities, and promote the Willamette River Water Trail Concept for river activities.	Undetermined
Tourism and Economic Development (key projects)			
* **Alsea River Loop Multi-use Path**	.6 mi.	Priority in the Alsea Community Strategic Plan. Utilize existing right-of-way along the Alsea River. Excellent tourism and economic development potential. The Natural Areas and Parks Department will consider funding a gravel surface option.	$ 208,000 $22,100 (gravel only)
City of Monroe – Long Tom River Multi-Use Path		See above.	$3m
Corvallis to the Sea Trail	60 mi. (total length)	Planning effort since the 1970s for a non-motorized trail to connect Corvallis and the Willamette River with the Oregon Coast; current non-profit has identified the preferred trail location and is preparing an environmental assessment.	Unknown
Willamette River Access and Water Trail		See above.	
Connections Between Natural Areas			
Bald Hill Park to Fitton Green Natural Area	.7 mi.	Essential off-roadway connection. Alignment through private property has been studied.	$26,200
* **Beazell Memorial Forest to Fort Hoskins Historic Park**	4.5 mi.	Also a "Roadway Shoulder Widening" project; alignment has been proposed – Alexander Rd to Fort Hoskins (not including Hwy 223)	$1.7m
* **Fitton Green Natural Area to Beazell Memorial Forest**	Study required	Also a "Roadway Shoulder Widening" project and trail connection	Undetermined
* **Fitton Green Natural Area to McDonald Forest**	Study required	Preferred alignment must be analyzed	Undetermined
Jackson-Frazier Wetland to Chip Ross Park (Corvallis)	Study required	Alignment utilizing public lands such as Owens Farm and Crescent Valley High School will decrease need for crossing private lands; additional analysis is needed.	Undetermined

Note: These projects are considered conceptual in scope and execution, and cost estimates are based on the best available information from both Benton County public works and parks staff. This list includes a suite of trails that could improve connectivity for Benton County's natural areas and parks, communities, and trails (including across jurisdictions), and create a more cohesive, organized, and accessible system. Trail implementation is a complex process involving active negotiation with multiple agencies and private landowners, funding availability, and creative planning. The project list must be viewed as a flexible and adaptive in nature.

The overall goal for identifying these trail projects is a sustainable future for Benton County residents, including opportunities for health and fitness, outdoor recreation, alternative transportation, and maintaining a livable community.

Appendix B

Public Outreach Process

Benton County Natural Areas & Parks System Comprehensive Plan

Public Outreach & Parks Advisory Board Meetings

Day/Date/Time	Type of Meeting	Meeting Location
Wed., April 14, 7:00 p.m.	NA&Parks Advisory Board Meeting #1 (Wren/Kings Valley/Philomath)	Beazell Forest Ed. Center [Wren/KV] [37283 Kings Valley Hwy 223]
Wed., April 28, 7:00 p.m.	Public Outreach Meeting	Adair/Clubhouse [6097 NE Ebony Lane, Adair]
Thurs., May 6, 9 am - Noon	Focus Group Meeting	Corvallis-B.C. Library Meeting Room [645 NW Monroe Ave., Corvallis]
Wed., May 12, 7:00 p.m.	NA&Parks Advisory Board Meeting #2	Monroe H.S. Cafeteria [365 North 5th Street, Monroe]
Thursday, May 27, 7:00 p.m.	Public Outreach Meeting	North Albany (Ray's Food Place) [621 NW Hickory Street, North Albany]
Wed., June 9, 7:00 p.m.	Benton County Public Workshop	Corvallis-B.C. Library Meeting Room [645 NW Monroe Ave., Corvallis]
Wed., July 14, 7:00 p.m.	NA&Parks Advisory Board Meeting #3	Alsea (Library/Community Center) [19192 Alsea Hwy, Alsea]
Wed., Sept. 8, 7:00 p.m.	NA&Parks Advisory Board Meeting #4	Avery Large Conference Room
Wed., October 13, 7:00 p.m.	NA& Parks Advisory Board Meeting #5	Avery Large Conference Room
Wed., December 8, 7:00 p.m.	NA& Parks Advisory Board Meeting #6	Avery Large Conference Room

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Final Draft

Public Outreach Draft Summary Report

Public Involvement Methodology

Multiple opportunities have been designed to actively engage residents in the planning process for the plan update, including:

- Outreach meetings in geographic regions of the county: Adair Village, Monroe, North Albany, Wren/Kings Valley, and Alsea
- Public workshop in Corvallis (designed to augment the regional meetings)
- Focus group meeting (by invitation)
- On-line survey to provide additional opportunity for public input
- All park board meetings open to the public

The regional meetings and public workshop were structured so that participants could silently record individual comments on a worksheet, followed by the "snowball" method to provide opportunity for the group to round-robin collective opinions.

The focus group meeting was designed to engage key stakeholders and county leadership in a collaborative work session, with a strategic planning approach focused on strengths and weaknesses, and opportunities and constraints.

Meetings in Adair Village and North Albany also provided a forum to explore specific opportunities and needs for Adair Regional Park and North Albany Park. This information will be useful for future updates of the master plans for both parks.

Approximately 75 residents participated in the outreach program, including several county park board members and county commissioners. Largest attendance was in North Albany (19) and Adair Village (13), while six residents attended the Alsea meeting and six attended the public workshop in Corvallis. Twelve stakeholders participated in the focus group meeting, including representatives from these organizations and agencies:

City of Albany
City of Corvallis
N. Albany Neighborhood Association
Oregon State University Extension Service
Greenbelt Land Trust
Institute for Applied Ecology
Siuslaw National Forest
Benton County Park Advisory Board
Benton County Board of Commissioners

Public Outreach Results

Overall, themes from the public meetings, workshop, and focus group meeting were similar in content. The public workshop generated themes that tended to be more strategic and focused. As expected, brainstorming from focus group participants resulted in more targeted outcomes including policy direction and specific management strategies.

Preliminary Conclusions

Clearly, the public outreach participants place a very high value on Benton County natural areas, parks, and trails; appreciate the health, social, and economic benefits; and have a very positive opinion of the current management approach and direction.

Issues and concerns tend to center on aspects of public safety and security, social conflicts such as dogs on or off leash, improving trails and connectivity, and maintaining a high quality program that is threatened by lack of funding support.

Priorities include an expanded educational program, especially for children and youth, and creating more public awareness of the County's natural areas and parks and opportunities available to residents. Maintaining high quality and improving capabilities of the existing system (including habitat restoration and trail connections) appear to be higher priorities than acquiring new sites or expanding programs.

These specific conclusions are drawn from the meeting results to date.

1. **Residents take great pride in the stewardship legacy and social and economic benefits of Benton County parks and natural areas.** Physical exercise, health and wellness, family togetherness, and overall livability are associated with the county's efforts to provide well-maintained, high quality places for outdoor recreation and enjoyment, and to protect, restore and interpret natural landscapes with trails and basic infrastructure. Economic benefits contribute to the county's stability.

2. **Progressive, resourceful, consistent, and supportive leadership has been evident over many years.** Benton County is recognized as a model for its policy direction and highly professional service-based management responsive to community values.

3. **Benton County residents envision for the future a vital, sustainable, and well-integrated network of natural areas, parks, and trails.** Education, community health, and habitat conservation are supported with a highly vested and supportive user base committed to parks and open space preservation and restoration. While there is support for maintaining a high quality existing system, some additional facilities are desired including campgrounds, hiking and biking trails, and improved accessibility to highly valued resources such as the Willamette River.

4. **Benton County is recognized as a leader in habitat conservation.** Residents place a high value on habitat restoration and interpretation; efforts to maintain and restore natural landscapes and settings create a sense of place, pride, and ownership. A growing number of landowners appreciate natural landscapes and want to be a part of the stewardship process.

5. **Improving and expanding trails and connectivity are high priorities.** Benton County's size, scale, and land ownership patterns create excellent opportunities for improving the countywide trail system, and enhancing accessibility to parks and natural areas with better connections between towns, public forests, parks, natural areas, and the Willamette River. Residents desire more alternative transportation opportunities through partnerships with public agencies and landowners.

6. **An expanded educational program is a high priority. Public awareness, recognition and appreciation, and active engagement are critical for continued public support and stewardship.** Research indicates children and youth are not experiencing nature and the outdoors as much as in the past, referred to as "nature deficit disorder." While Benton County natural areas and parks have outstanding outdoor education values, more leadership is needed to increase learning opportunities. There is concern that the next generation of champions, activists, and advocates may not be emerging as in the past.

7. **Many residents are not aware of the natural areas, parks, and trails managed by Benton County including benefits and opportunities,** Improved public awareness and information should be part of a broader effort to expand educational opportunities and increase public understanding, appreciation, stewardship, and support.

8. **Major threats include unstable funding, aging infrastructure, attrition of long-term staff, and exceeding capacity to maintain high management standards.** These threats create a concern for expanding the system without resources for additional responsibilities while maintaining a high quality existing program. For example, current department offices are marginal to accommodate staff, interns, and volunteers. Creative funding alternatives and revenue opportunities must be explored.

9. **Unsuitable use, perceived criminal activity, and public safety are emerging as a concern for users of parks and natural areas; some social conflicts are also occurring.** While residents generally feel safe and secure in Benton County parks and natural areas, incidents of inappropriate use and possible unlawful activities are occurring. Creative management strategies, more public education, and greater public responsibility for stewardship and oversight will be needed to avoid national, state and local trends. Some conflicts are emerging such as dogs on and off-leash that will require efforts to meet common ground. All of these trends and concerns will require increasing involvement of stakeholders, staff, and law enforcement to be more vigilant and explore creative solutions.

10. **A strategic focus is essential to achieve a cohesive, organized system of natural areas and parks, with a sustainable future.** While the basic framework for a well-integrated system is in place, improved connections/trails are needed with other opportunities and landscape settings through more collaboration and partnering with others. Clear criteria for system priorities and initiatives will be necessary, and an implementation plan with immediate, intermediate and long-term strategies and benchmarks. For example, the preferred role of Benton County in providing public access and restoring the Willamette River is a major opportunity in the plan update.

11. **New initiatives such as the Habitat Conservation Plan will require efforts to invigorate and re-energize the community.** Opportunities include creating more community engagement and education to harness energy focusing on sustainability with creative strategies for a healthy and livable place as well as maintaining community health and well-being, developing state of the art demonstration projects; forming community technical groups to help guide planning and management projects; and increased involvement of OSU, schools, volunteers, landowners, and partners.

Summary Themes

Outlined here are combined summaries of the themes that were generated from the five regional meetings, the public workshop, and the focus group meeting.

Assets and Characteristics

General

Stewardship ethic – a strong legacy passed on to future generations, being a leader; engagement of landowners and other parties

Positive community support, active involvement of citizens, volunteers and staff including hands-on site work; strong political leadership

Ambitious and progressive growth over time with innovative funding and implementation models

Well-maintained, high quality, safe, and well cared for park settings and habitats valued by the public and offering a variety of recreational uses for families and children; no trash or overuse

Active management guided by stewardship plans that are science-based and fit community interests

Willingness to collaborate and develop partnerships with others including landowners

Strong history of dedicated, resourceful leadership: Board of Commissioners, Park Board, staff, volunteers, and community advocates

Oregon State University is a huge educational and informational resource

Natural Areas, Open Space, Historic Preservation

A legacy and history of preserving, managing, restoring, and interpreting natural, historic, and cultural landscapes, while providing opportunities for nature enjoyment and outdoor education

Natural area settings that are the best representations of Benton County's heritage landscapes; providing infrastructure and access to undeveloped natural areas and open space

Preserving and restoring remnant natural habitats and communities to their historical state, including species preservation and habitat diversity

Preparation of a draft Habitat Conservation Plan involving landowners and citizens in developing new strategies for habitat management and protection

Preserving historic values and character, restoring buildings and grounds for public use and education; removal of non-native species

Places where individuals and families can experience, appreciate, and learn about nature and historic sites, and to be active

Natural scenic beauty that is both close-by and distant

Trails and Connectivity

High quality trails (foot and bike) with easy access to and within natural areas and parks, connecting urban and rural areas and providing alternatives to cars

Trails and connections to the best representations of Benton County's heritage landscape

Variety of hiking and biking trails that are well maintained; trail opportunities for persons with disabilities

Variety, Diversity and Balance of Outdoor Recreation

An emerging sense of balancing recreation and ecological goals with a blend of historical, natural, rural and urban parks

Balance between groomed sites and native habitat; simplicity with eye to education; a variety of opportunities for a diverse population

A variety of recreational and open space lands and facilities for a diverse population

Benefits and Satisfactions

Health and Well-being

Physical exercise, mental and physical health, fresh air

Healthy activities in natural settings

Peaceful and quiet places, minimal human contact areas creating social and economic value and enhancing creativity

Solitude, serenity, reflection, relaxation, calmness, in a peaceful and safe environment

Place for dogs – freedom and exercise

Family and Social Values

To be with friends, family, neighbors, in a safe and secure environment

Recreational activities for families and children

Family and group outings; community gatherings, social benefits

Nature Recreation and Appreciation, Outdoor Activities

Enjoying outdoor experiences – picnicking, hiking, biking, fishing, outdoor education

Opportunities for enjoying, appreciating, and connecting with nature, natural areas, open space, unique habitats

Appreciating scenery, wildlife, wetlands, parks, and special places; preserving natural areas

Learning from nature and history; learning experiences and adventures

Youth exposed to nature; children and group outings; day hikes

Awareness of the need for maintenance, management, and upkeep

Conservation

Cleansing role of natural systems – reservoir for natural filtering and wildlife

Preservation and conservation including preserving scenic beauty, viewsheds, and history

Benton County's leadership in habitat conservation; providing and protecting wildlife habitat

Keeping the county green and livable; creating a positive environment

Economic Values

Attracting families to live in the community; retaining families

Economic benefits to the county from attracting visitors, increasing home values, reducing health care costs

Issues and Concerns

Sustainability Issues

Unstable funding and long-term maintenance of a high quality system and free public access

Need to explore innovative funding models to assure sustainability of the program

Economic downtown; insufficient resources to respond to opportunities; lack of funding if natural areas and parks are not perceived by residents as having clear values and benefits for livability

Balancing use, stewardship, maintenance, and expansion

Changes in leadership and competition for resources are threats

Overextending and exceeding capacity at the expense of maintaining investment already in place, given the large system, infrastructure, and current resources and staffing levels

Staff attrition with potential for inadequately trained and mentored staff in the future; maintaining institutional knowledge, skills, culture, and memory; maintaining active volunteer base

Patchwork approach rather than an organized, cohesive, and connected system

Lack of criteria for system-wide priorities – e.g. improving connectivity and managing for funding opportunities along with other agencies, partners, and landowners

Need for more engagement of landowners to achieve connectivity and sustainability

Population pressures and inability to respond to increasing system needs and growth

Overuse of sites, facilities, and trails creating resource impacts and social conflicts; managing public use while protecting resources; maintaining balanced use (overuse vs. underuse)

Development and growth not integrated with sustainability goals and county initiatives such as connectivity corridors, stewardship and restoration plans

Trying to take on too much; maintenance of existing program and facilities

Tendency to forecast and focus on short-term goals, e.g. threatened and endangered species rather than long-term sustainability

Cumulative impacts of climate change and energy needs, with implications for planning, management, transportation, in-migration from stressed regions

Safety, Security, Health and Well-being Concerns

Maintaining safe, secure, and accessible areas for families and children; concern for vandalism, graffiti, and transients

Trend of non-park, adverse, and inappropriate behavior in public parks and natural areas including guns, littering, ATVs, 4-wheelers

Need for management plans to clearly distinguish between recreation capability and suitability, prescribing appropriate and suitable uses for varying landscape settings as a proactive management tool rather than reactionary responses

Concern for health and well-being of county residents, especially in rural communities

Social Conflicts

Emerging uses that conflict with stewardship goals; increasing social conflicts among users

User conflicts including dogs on or off leash, dogs and horses, dog owners not removing dog waster; conflicts between bicyclists and walkers/hikers

Dog restrictions and lack of dog off-leash areas; desire to involve users and user groups more in regulating conflicting uses and accepting responsibilities

Horse impacts on trails; for some dog owners the horse community seems to be more organized with more leverage

System Concerns

Loss of critical habitats, natural areas, and open space

Lack of capacity to implement stewardship and management plans with loss of habitat and inability to achieve desired future conditions

Pace of implementing the Habitat Conservation Plan; lack of alignment with participating agencies; needs exceeding staff capacity

Impacts of invasive species affecting ability to restore habitats; edge effects such as disease, insects, blowdown, incompatible uses and abuses of adjacent lands; new techniques needed

County natural areas, parks, and trail system are not integrated and not connected well with other opportunities and settings

Need for better geographic distribution; e.g. south Benton County in lower income areas; river opportunities near Monroe and North Albany

Need for all parks to be accessible to the disabled and seniors

Lack of multi-use trails; need pedestrian and bicycle access to Jackson-Frazier Wetland

Decrease in children participating in outdoor activities; need for outdoor education

Balancing regulatory/management by enforcement vs. voluntary accountability; maintaining peaceful non-regulatory environments and experiences

Perceived lack of collaboration and cooperation between other counties, cities, public agencies, nonprofits, and private landowners at all levels – accessibility, trails, planning, initiatives

The system is remote and difficult for some to access; transportation and public access is a constraint

Fire planning

Facility Concerns

Lack of campgrounds as an opportunity to engage families in the outdoors and instill nature appreciation and connections; revenue opportunity foregone

Adair disc golf is becoming crowded; need for a second disc golf course

Public Awareness, Information, Marketing Issues

Lack of public knowledge and information to citizens; general public tends to be uninformed of the opportunities, values, and locations of Benton County parks and natural areas

Vandalism, misuse, and inappropriate use when public is not engaged and is unappreciative of values and benefits

Littering and garbage dumping in parks, natural areas, roadsides, and other public places; need for educating public on importance of being good stewards of the land

Habitat purposes and issues are not well understood by the general public; more outreach and education is needed

Need to identify county parks and natural areas as managed by the county to create more public awareness and support

Need more marketing for Benton County parks and natural areas with a focused effort to encourage outdoor recreation with more of a system orientation

Other Concerns

Loss of private land; trespass on private property; loss of privacy

Fair market value if private land is acquired; concerns for use of eminent domain

Maintaining economic value of farm and forestland

Trends and Opportunities

Education

Outstanding opportunities for public education, tours, learning laboratories, interpretation and signage, especially for elementary and high school students

Create more community engagement and education to harness energy focusing on sustainability with creative strategies for a healthy and livable place; provide on-line tools

Capitalize on learning from others, e.g. Wren Community Stewardship work

Expand and increase outdoor education opportunities and outdoor experiences for county residents, especially children and youth; work more with schools

Increase involvement of OSU, schools, landowners, and partners to energize the community and celebrate successful venues; connect with new and emerging OSU Master Naturalist program

Public Awareness, Marketing, Volunteers

Improve marketing, publicity, community awareness, and support of Benton County opportunities, values, and benefits, including ways to become more actively involved

Need for maintaining more ownership, pride, and respect for natural resources; reduce vandalism and inappropriate behavior

Community recognition of the importance of parks and natural areas providing physical and outdoor activities for youth; mental and physical health benefits to county residents

Celebrate the system in creative ways such as passports, raffles, food festivals; contests to identify BC parks and natural areas

Invigorate and re-energize the community, cultivate champions, outreach and collaborate more with others, and vision the future with the plan update project

Opportunity to increase and renew the volunteer base, new generation of champions and advocates

Growth Trends

Expanding population, pressures on all county lands and need for increased leisure opportunities and access to nature

Possible levy to support natural areas and parks; acquire more land for conservation

Timely opportunity to resume conversations and explore alternatives for regional service delivery in Benton County, e.g. a special purpose parks and open space district.

Trails

Improve connectivity between communities, natural areas, parks and recreation sites, forest recreation areas, and heritage resources, with more cooperation and involvement of stakeholders including private landowners

Expand trail system for foot and bike rails including connections between parks, other attractions (e.g. McDonald Forest, Bald Hill, Fitton Green, BLM and Forest Service lands, Linn County Parks)

Bikepaths are needed for alternative transportation and recreation; safe walking and bicycling corridors

Develop connectivity and trails along rail lines from Monroe to Corvallis/Philomath, Monroe to Alsea; a trail from the Long Tom River to the Willamette River; multi-use trail along the railroad tracks in North Albany

Multi-modal trail between Corvallis and Albany (involvement of Benton County)

Trail connection between North Albany and Adair Regional Park

A trail system in the Alsea area, including a "Salmon Walk Loop Trail" connecting the downtown

Possibility of keeping Salmonberry Campground open during hunting season

Completion of Cascades-to-the-Coast Trail

Extend intra-park trails and provide guided interpretation

Habitat Restoration and Stewardship

Opportunity for Benton County Habitat Conservation Plan to become a model for Oregon to restore and protect native habitats and species

Growing number of private landowners who appreciate natural landscapes and want to be part of the stewardship process

Importance of habitat restoration and rare species introduction -- success in removing species from listings

Develop state of the art demonstration projects to target energy, resources, and grants; encourage experimentation and testing of emerging concepts

Partnerships and Collaboration

Foster improved collaboration, cooperation, and coordination with other communities, agencies, NGOs, developers, and private landowners to explore creative solutions, achieve common goals, and target resources

Form community technical groups to help guide planning and management projects, use Jackson-Frazier Wetland Technical Advisory Committee, and Fort Hoskins Advisory Committee as models

Emergence of partnerships with other public and non-public entities to pool resources and develop more critical mass; it will likely be more difficult to enlist landowner participation in the future

Safety, Security, Appropriate Use

Possibility of rotating community-based "volunteer marshals" who are trained and educated to provide oversight for maintaining appropriate use of sites

Be more proactive to designate suitable and allowed recreation uses in each park or natural area management unit; avoid emerging incompatible uses (e.g. ATV riding, orbing, paintball games, etc.)

Site and Facility Opportunities

Disc golf is exploding; Adair facility needs expansion to relieve pressure; one of the best courses in Oregon; need more disc golf courses

Develop public access, day-use, and camping with restrooms and parking at Anderson Park.

An additional campground

Dog off-leash areas

Acquisition of Thornton lake natural area with endangered wildlife species

Historic booklet "Revitalizing Monroe" may have potential for historic interpretation

Other

Work with others to create Willamette River shoreline opportunities; promote the Water Trail

Vision

Maintain Current Vision

A vital, sustainable network of natural areas and parks that support recreation, health, and habitat conservation

Continued emphasis on protecting and restoring habitats, natural areas and systems, and heritage resources, and providing a diversity of natural settings including forests, wetlands, and riverfronts; restoring for future generations

Maintain a sustainable, balanced system with diverse recreation opportunities and natural areas; provide a balance of natural areas and maintained recreation areas; a balance of recreation and conservation

Maintain high quality of the existing system, in an affordable way

Maintain and upgrade present parks and natural areas

Maintain quiet, scenic, livable family atmosphere in the midst of growth

Provide use that is at high capacity without degrading resources

Other Visions

Dare to be a model

A system that is mature – better than today

Strive to be beyond our reach – imaginative, ambitious, creative

Users of all ages experience a sense of renewal, safety and security, value a healthy community

Equal access and recognizing needs of all citizens – young, old, lower socio-economic groups, and changing demographics

A community and staff that are passionate and excited; proud of their natural areas and park system and place a very high value on the program; robust volunteers

Vision that is strategic, with community involvement and engagement

Every county resident can name four county sites and has visited at least five

"Salmon Walk Loop Trail" connecting downtown Alsea with the Alsea River, including interpretive information

Integrate value statements from the Benton County Comprehensive Plan in the plan update

Growth and Expansion

Slow, planned growth that increases opportunities for county residents, including more camping and expanded opportunities near cities and towns

As population increases and county grows, maintain natural areas and parks that are open and accessible

Strategic collaboration and planning; leadership for smart growth providing natural areas, parks, and rails – Willamette Greenway trails between Albany and Salem

Increase natural areas; make few "built improvements" as possible; provide trails

Increased local opportunities and uses, e.g. Willamette River access

More regional parks

System Vision

A well-integrated system linked with other open space areas and across resource areas and habitats.

"Benton County is widely known for its parks and natural areas connected by continuous greenbelts for future preservation to insure survival of animals and habitat, public access and enjoyment, and education"

"Willamette River becomes a major focus with good fish habitat and riparian repair, providing ample public access such as Irish Bend and Anderson Park"

Connectivity

Connectivity of parks and trails; expanding the trail system to link major features of Benton County including the Corvallis to the Sea Trail

Better connectivity and access to the Willamette River on the Benton County side

Hiking and biking trails along the Alsea River, with bank access

Education, Public Awareness and Appreciation, Involvement

A commitment to outdoor education (staff person) working with schools to focus on education values of trails, natural areas and habitat restoration; help implement the Habitat Conservation Plan through education

A highly vested and supportive user base committed to parks and open space preservation and restoration; increased awareness of available opportunities and health benefits

Public awareness, appreciation, and support of the natural areas and park system

Improve residents' knowledge of the county's parks and natural areas

Users taking more responsibility and pride in their parks and natural areas

On-going community involvement; responsive to citizens

Collaboration and Partnering

Collaborative, excited partnership between providers and residents; high desire by the public o contribute time and talent and support the program

A strong cross-jurisdictional system; coordinate and collaborate with other agencies, jurisdictions

Priorities

Maintain Existing System

Maintain high quality and legacy of the existing system; discipline to make good decisions for updating and using the Plan, with sound criteria for sustainability

Sustainability – ability to maintain a safe, high quality natural areas and park system, adequate funding decisions for updating and using the plan, with sound criteria for sustainability

Stable funding

Maintain a balance of recreation, conservation, and education

Maintain and implement vision and goals of existing management plans as a way to capture staff knowledge and skills and reduce impact of staff attrition

Continue to provide recreational opportunities while maintaining nature preservation and restoration

Natural Area Protection and Restoration

Emphasis on preservation and restoration, keep it natural

Natural beauty, natural flora and fauna

Maintain emphasis on preserving and restoring natural areas and habitats

Acquisition of natural areas with priority habitats more rare or at risk of being lost or irrevocably altered; work with other counties to link areas of concern for species migration (e.g. Willamette Greenway)

Ecological restoration for imperiled species; invasive species control

Trails and Connectivity

Connectivity and accessibility – connecting all major natural areas and parks including those on federal and state lands; with paved bike trails

Link open spaces, parks, trails, bike routes through coordinated efforts and partnerships with others

Bikepaths from Monroe to Corvallis and Alpine; to Alsea Falls and Alsea; Decker Rd.

Walking and bicycling opportunities; trail corridors; need trails north of the river; trail connection to Adair Park

Public access to parks, natural areas, and public resource values, as well as improving connectivity

Trails for all abilities

Marketing, Information, Public Participation

Building constituencies for broader public awareness and support; commitment to public outreach and education; utilize OSU students, interns, class projects, scientists

Promoting and branding Benton natural areas and parks as county owned and managed, including improved outreach information for better public awareness and support; better use of publications and news media distributions

Information and awareness – "how to get people to the parks": provide a county-wide calendar of events for picnic availability, parks, trails; use easy domain name for folks to remember (Bentoncountyparks.com); bulk mailing for outreach to residents

Strong "action-based" emphasis to promote use, appreciation, and recognition of the system – a Benton County "brand"

Look for new opportunities and increase public participation; create Friends Groups, Annual Focus Days, and cultivate loyal constituents

Establish a non-profit support group

Increase the volunteer base

Leadership

Benton County should provide strategic leadership, foster partnerships including cooperation and collaboration among jurisdictions; seek buy-in from others

Monroe and Alpine leadership can help "make things happen"

Maintain supportive and high quality leadership for future of the system

Safety and Security

Maintain places that are safe, secure, used appropriately

Assure safety and security with proactive management such as reducing conflicts and adverse behavior

Other Priorities

Develop a new county interface with the Willamette River and its importance, including shoreline recreation opportunities, river access, interpretation and awareness

Parks and natural areas are close to all county residential concentrations so that all residents have a favorite county site; acquisition of parks with priority near urban areas

Equitable access to natural areas and parks with focus on lower income areas (South Benton, Monroe, Alpine)

More attention to historical and cultural resources (e.g. Bellfountain Park)

More educational opportunities; more children and youth participation

Keep pace with population; space parks throughout the county

Respond to climate change through green concepts and management

Peace and quiet

Proper tree pruning

Need for a sanitary dump station in the Alsea area

Site Specific Priorities

Acquire additional parkland for North Albany Park; provide more parking

Preserve Thornton Lake natural area

Continue to improve Irish Bend Park and take corrective actions

"Salmon Walk Loop Trail" connecting Alsea and the Alsea River

Clemens Park not as clean as in previous years; need for tree thinning and trail work

Appendix C

Survey Results

Benton County Natural Areas & Parks Department System Survey

Have you visited a Natural Area or Park managed by Benton County within the last year?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	**88.3%**	**121**
No	3.6%	5
I'm not sure if it is managed by Benton County	8.0%	11
Sites you have visited: (please specify)		106
answered question		**137**
skipped question		**2**

Sites you have visited: (please specify)		
1	Fitton Green, Beazell Memorial Forest	Jul 19, 2010 9:24 PM
2	Beazell Memorial Forest, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 20, 2010 1:48 AM
3	Fitton Green, Beazell, Fort Hoskins, Jackson Frazier, Irish Bend, Bellfountain, Clemens, Salmonberry, Anderson, Hyak, North Albany, Adair, Mill Creek	Jul 21, 2010 3:08 PM
4	Fitton Green, Beazell	Jul 22, 2010 4:07 AM
5	Clemens Park Beazell Fort Hoskins Jackson Frazier Wetland Fitton Green Salmonberry	Jul 22, 2010 2:04 PM
6	Adair, Jackson-Frazier, Fitton Green	Jul 22, 2010 2:42 PM
7	Jackson-Frazier; Fitton Green	Jul 22, 2010 3:33 PM
8	Avery Park	Jul 22, 2010 3:38 PM
9	J/F Wetlands	Jul 22, 2010 4:03 PM
10	Fitton Green, Beazell Memorial Forest, Jackson Frazier Wetlands	Jul 22, 2010 4:06 PM
11	Beazell, Bellfountain, Fort Hoskins, Fitton.	Jul 22, 2010 4:27 PM
12	Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green	Jul 22, 2010 4:31 PM
13	North Albany Park, Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 22, 2010 4:33 PM
14	Alsea Falls, Bald Hill, Jackson Frazer	Jul 22, 2010 4:41 PM
15	Bald Hill, MLK Jr. Park, Avery Park	Jul 22, 2010 4:55 PM
16	Beazell, Jackson-Frazier, Fitton Green, Bald Hill	Jul 22, 2010 5:18 PM
17	Fitton Green, Bald Hill Park, Mary's Peak	Jul 22, 2010 5:31 PM
18	Fitton Green Natural Area Jackson-Frazier Wetland Beazell Memorial Forest Fort Hoskins Historic Park	Jul 22, 2010 6:06 PM

Sites you have visited: (please specify)		
19	Irish bend, Bald hill, Avery, Peoria park,, walnut park, Fairgounds-to-Blakesly-creek trail,	Jul 22, 2010 6:07 PM
20	Beazell Memorial Forest, Fitton Green Natural Area, Hyak Park	Jul 22, 2010 6:09 PM
21	Willamette Park, bike path south of Willamette Park, bike paths to fairgrounds, Bald Hill Park, to Philomath, along Hwy 99 north of Buchanan, and along riverfront; Mary's River park in Philomath; Mary's Peak; Jackson Frazier Wetland; Avery Park; Finley Wildlife Refuge	Jul 22, 2010 6:36 PM
22	Jackson Frazier Wetland	Jul 22, 2010 6:46 PM
23	Beazell, Fitton Green, Fort Hoskins, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 22, 2010 6:48 PM
24	For softball: Chintimini, Porter, Sunset, Pioneer. I work 6 days/week or I'd get outside more often! (I have in past years...)	Jul 22, 2010 6:57 PM
25	Beazell Memorial Forest, Clemens Park, Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 22, 2010 7:05 PM
26	Bald hill Willamette park Witham hill	Jul 22, 2010 7:16 PM
27	Fort Hoskins Beazell Memorial Forest Jackson-Frazier Wetland Fitton Green	Jul 22, 2010 8:35 PM
28	Bald Hill, Mary's River, Starker Arts, Fitton Green Natural Area, Mary's Peak, Martin Luther King Jr Park, 1st St Riverfront Park,	Jul 22, 2010 9:04 PM
29	Fitton Green, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 22, 2010 9:12 PM
30	Beazell, Fitton, Salmonberry, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 22, 2010 9:38 PM
31	Fort Hoskins, Beazell, Clemens Park	Jul 22, 2010 9:45 PM
32	Fitton Green Bald Hill Does Alsea Falls count?	Jul 22, 2010 11:48 PM
33	Bald Hill Fitton Green Jackson-Frazier	Jul 23, 2010 3:12 AM
34	Adair Park, Bellfountain Park, Fort Hoskins Historic Park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Jul 23, 2010 3:51 AM
35	Chip Ross, Willamette, Fitton Green, Mary's Peak, OSU Forests, Bald Hill, Luckiamute Landing,	Jul 23, 2010 4:35 AM
36	Crystal Lake Cemetery; Beazell Forest; Adair; Willamette Park	Jul 23, 2010 5:59 AM
37	Fitton Green Bald Hill Hoskins	Jul 23, 2010 7:42 AM
38	Adair Park, Beazell Forest, probablly some others	Jul 23, 2010 4:45 PM
39	Finley, Bald Hill,	Jul 23, 2010 4:58 PM
40	Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Jul 23, 2010 5:12 PM
41	Beazell, Fort Hoskins, Fitton Green, Salmonberry, Clemens, Adair	Jul 23, 2010 5:37 PM
42	Mill Creek Boat Landing and North Albany Park	Jul 23, 2010 5:51 PM
43	Fitton Green	Jul 23, 2010 6:24 PM
44	Mill Creek, Campbell, Salmonberry	Jul 23, 2010 6:33 PM
45	Beazell, Jackson-Frazier,Fitton Green.	Jul 23, 2010 7:20 PM
46	Fitton, Beazell, Anderson	Jul 23, 2010 10:53 PM
47	adair, beazell, jackson-frazier, fitton green, campbell boat	Jul 23, 2010 10:55 PM
48	CRYSTAL Lake Cemetery, Willamette park and the park south of Willamette	Jul 24, 2010 4:44 AM

Sites you have visited: (please specify)		
49	Hyak Park, Jackson-Frzier Wetland, Fitton Green.	Jul 24, 2010 3:13 PM
50	Jackson-Frazier Wetland and Fitton Green	Jul 24, 2010 6:35 PM
51	Hyak Park, Jackson Frazier Wetland,	Jul 25, 2010 4:54 AM
52	Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 25, 2010 9:22 PM
53	Bald Hill Fitton Green Mary's Peak Bezell	Jul 26, 2010 2:29 AM
54	Beazell Forest	Jul 26, 2010 4:09 PM
55	Fort Hoskins	Jul 26, 2010 4:24 PM
56	Fitton Green, Jackson-Frazier, Beazell Memorial Forest	Jul 26, 2010 5:55 PM
57	Jackson-Frazier, Beazell Memorial, Fitton Green, Willamette park (if it counts)	Jul 27, 2010 2:31 AM
58	Beazell, Fitton Green, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 27, 2010 3:57 PM
59	Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Jul 27, 2010 4:10 PM
60	Clemens, Jackson Frazier, Mill Creek Boat Landing, Salmonberry	Jul 27, 2010 8:21 PM
61	Bellfountain, Hyak, Clemens, Irish Bend	Jul 27, 2010 8:36 PM
62	Fitton Green	Jul 27, 2010 8:47 PM
63	Bald Hill, Avery Park, Alsea River parks, Willamette River, Wilamette Park	Jul 27, 2010 8:52 PM
64	Adair Park, Beazell Memorial Forest, Fort Hoskins Historic Park, Hyak Park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 27, 2010 9:03 PM
65	Starker, Avery, Fort Hoskins, Beazell	Jul 27, 2010 9:03 PM
66	Adair Park, Beazell MF, Fort Hoskins HP, Hyak Prk, Jacckson-Frazier W, N. Albany Park	Jul 27, 2010 9:04 PM
67	Adair Park Clemens park Jackson Frazier Wetland	Jul 27, 2010 11:39 PM
68	Willamette Park, Starker Arts Park, Avery Park, Central Park, Mary's Peak...	Jul 27, 2010 11:42 PM
69	Beazell Memorial Forest	Jul 28, 2010 12:24 AM
70	Fort Hoskins Beazell Memorial Forest Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 28, 2010 12:47 AM
71	Beazel Park, Fort Hoskins Park, Willamette Park, Avery Park, Walnut Park, Bald Hill. Also Finley Wildlife Refuge (Federal). Also MacDonald Forest & Arboretum although they are run by OSU. Allen Throop Loup and Fitton Green. And all the others at times over the last years.	Jul 28, 2010 2:00 AM
72	Hyak, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 28, 2010 3:24 AM
73	Adair park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Fitton Green Natural ARea	Jul 28, 2010 3:55 AM
74	Fitton Green	Jul 28, 2010 4:31 AM
75	Beazell Memorial Forest	Jul 28, 2010 4:59 AM
76	Adair Park; Beazell Memorial Forest; Bellfountain Park; Jackson-Frazier Wetland; Fitton Green Natural Area	Jul 28, 2010 7:37 AM
77	beazell, fitton green, jackson frazier, adair park	Jul 28, 2010 5:26 PM
78	Fitton Green	Jul 28, 2010 6:14 PM
79	Clemens Park; Fort Hoskins Historic Park; Hyak Park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Jul 28, 2010 9:55 PM
80	Fitton Green, Mill Creek Park, Beazell Memorial Forest, Irish Bend	Jul 28, 2010 10:12 PM
81	Bald Hill	Jul 29, 2010 1:51 AM
82	Beazell, Jackson Frazier, Marys River Natural Area	Jul 29, 2010 1:51 AM
83	Adair park, Fort Hoskins, Jackson-Frazier	Jul 29, 2010 4:24 AM

Sites you have visited: (please specify)		
84	Fitton Green; Jackson Frazier; Beazell forest; Ft. Hoskins	Jul 29, 2010 5:16 AM
85	clemens park, mill cr. park, campbell boat landing	Jul 29, 2010 12:10 PM
86	Fitton Green, Beazell,	Jul 29, 2010 6:17 PM
87	Adair, Fitton Green, Beazell Forest	Jul 29, 2010 8:51 PM
88	Willamette Park Avery Park Fitten Green Mary's Peak Hyatt Park	Aug 1, 2010 1:27 AM
89	Beazell, Hoskins, Bellfountain,	Aug 1, 2010 2:06 AM
90	beazell, fitton green, marys river natural area	Aug 1, 2010 6:04 PM
91	Adair Park, Hyak Park	Aug 2, 2010 4:43 PM
92	Beazell; Ft Hoskins	Aug 3, 2010 3:38 PM
93	Adair Park, Beazell memorial Forest, Bellfountain Park, Fort Hoskins, Jackson-Frazier, Fitton Green	Aug 4, 2010 2:54 AM
94	All the parks in corvallis	Aug 4, 2010 3:41 AM
95	Bald Hill CIty Park Oak Creek Mary's Peak (probably not BC) McDonald Peavy	Aug 4, 2010 3:46 AM
96	Bald Hill, Jackson-Fraizer Wetlands, Chip Ross Park, McDonald Forest/Peavym Hyak Park, Mary's Peak	Aug 4, 2010 9:08 PM
97	Salmonberry, Clemens, Campbell, Mill Creek, and Beazell	Aug 5, 2010 3:07 AM
98	North Albany park Salmonberry Jackson -Frazier	Aug 5, 2010 4:08 PM
99	Adair Park, Beazell Memorial Forest, North Albany Park	Aug 7, 2010 6:08 AM
100	Fitton Green Natural Area	Aug 8, 2010 6:25 AM
101	Adair Park, Beazell Memorial Forest, Hyak Park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland, Fitton Green Natural Area	Aug 10, 2010 11:44 PM
102	Crystal Lake Sports Park and natural area	Aug 21, 2010 10:16 PM
103	Adair, Beazel, Jackson Frazie, Fitton Green	Aug 23, 2010 4:41 AM
104	mary's peak clemens park (love it) beazell memorial forest	Aug 24, 2010 5:05 AM
105	Beazell Memorial Forest, Ft Hoskins Historic Park, Hyak Park, Jackson-Frazier Wetland	Aug 28, 2010 4:12 PM
106	Jackson Frazier Wetland	Aug 31, 2010 6:43 AM

If yes, how often do you visit Benton County Natural Areas & Parks System sites?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Often (Three times a month)	25.7%	35
Sometimes (Once a month)	**50.0%**	**68**
Not very often	24.3%	33
answered question		**136**
skipped question		**3**

What outdoor recreation activities do you enjoy the most? (Check all that apply)

	Low	Medium	High	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Exercising, walking my dog	5.6% (7)	26.2% (33)	**54.0% (68)**	14.3% (18)	2.56	126
Bicycling	23.1% (28)	27.3% (33)	**36.4% (44)**	13.2% (16)	2.15	121
Fishing	36.6% (41)	11.6% (13)	9.8% (11)	**42.0% (47)**	1.54	112
Enjoying nature and the natural environment	0.0% (0)	5.3% (7)	**93.9% (124)**	0.8% (1)	2.95	132
Playing games, sports (e.g. Disc Golf, Frisbee, etc.)	**46.0% (52)**	23.0% (26)	9.7% (11)	21.2% (24)	1.54	113
Being outdoors with my family and friends	2.3% (3)	19.5% (25)	**78.1% (100)**	0.0% (0)	2.76	128
Picnicking	19.8% (24)	**53.7% (65)**	24.8% (30)	1.7% (2)	2.05	121
Camping	26.1% (31)	29.4% (35)	**39.5% (47)**	5.0% (6)	2.14	119
Volunteering to help with habitat restoration and trail work	28.8% (34)	**35.6% (42)**	22.0% (26)	13.6% (16)	1.92	118
Walking, hiking	2.2% (3)	10.4% (14)	**85.1% (114)**	2.2% (3)	2.85	134
Photography	30.4% (35)	**38.3% (44)**	25.2% (29)	6.1% (7)	1.94	115
				Other (please specify)		23
				answered question		**138**
				skipped question		**1**

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How safe do you feel in Natural Areas and Parks managed by Benton County?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Very safe	**66.9%**	**91**
Reasonably safe	32.4%	44
Not very safe	0.7%	1
Please list any safety comments or concerns:		18
answered question		**136**
skipped question		**3**

How do you rate maintenance and upkeep of the Benton County Natural Areas & Parks System?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Excellent	40.4%	55
Good	**52.9%**	**72**
Fair	6.6%	9
Poor	0.0%	0
answered question		**136**
skipped question		**3**

Benton County Natural Areas & Parks Department System Survey

How important are Benton County Natural Areas & Parks sites for you (and your family)?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Essential	**64.5%**	**89**
Important	27.5%	38
Somewhat Important	7.2%	10
Not Very Important	0.7%	1
Please provide your comments:		27
answered question		**138**
skipped question		**1**

Please provide your comments:		
1	I go to Jackson-Frazier on my lunch everyday; I would go crazy if I did not have that calm, peaceful, serene paradise to go to whenever I need it..	Jul 22, 2010 3:33 PM
2	Even though I don't use them regularly, I believe that the many natural areas and parks in Benton County are an important part of the high quality of life in this county.	Jul 22, 2010 3:39 PM
3	Good to know they are there as a recreation option.	Jul 22, 2010 6:04 PM
4	Benton County's natural areas and parks not only are essential amenities for myself, my family, and virtually all of my friends, but they also define the character of the community as one that values nature and its processes. We are a community that lives and recreates in nature.	Jul 22, 2010 6:06 PM
5	WIth budget cuts, P&R does as good a job as is humanly possible to maintain our open spaces. Thank god for Steve and his volunteers! We are SO LUCKY to live in a place that has set aside as much space as we have!	Jul 22, 2010 6:57 PM
6	They're not just important to me because I use them for recreation, but because they're green spaces, wildlife habitat, etc. that benefit us all.	Jul 22, 2010 9:12 PM
7	the parks are the reason we moved here in 1985 and the reason we returned from WI to retire here. If the parks go, we go.	Jul 22, 2010 9:38 PM
8	It's not only important for me as a place to visit, but for the ecological value that these sites possess. Habitat for wildlife, native plants, ecological services, etc...	Jul 22, 2010 11:48 PM
9	Green Space is what provides me Sanity!!	Jul 23, 2010 4:45 PM
10	Accessible greenways and parks are what make this city so livable.	Jul 23, 2010 4:58 PM
11	As an Alsea steelhead fisherman I use your boat ramps very often	Jul 23, 2010 6:33 PM
12	The natural areas are so important to my health, mental and physical.	Jul 23, 2010 10:55 PM
13	It's why I live here.	Jul 26, 2010 2:29 AM
14	A sign of a healthy community are the number of high quality sites that offer outdoor experiences close to natural settings with some amenities.	Jul 26, 2010 4:09 PM

Please provide your comments:		
15	I have no basis for a comment on maintenance and upkeep. Greenspaces are important to me whether I use them or not.	Jul 27, 2010 8:42 PM
16	They are part of our community and what makes Corvallis so livable.	Jul 27, 2010 8:52 PM
17	They are a major reason we decided to retire in Benton County	Jul 27, 2010 11:39 PM
18	The parks are a prime reason why we moved to Corvallis and why we stay.	Jul 28, 2010 2:00 AM
19	We spend a lot of time outdoors but it turns out Benton County parks are not what we frequent the most. We visit Jackson-Frazier more than any of the others	Jul 28, 2010 3:24 AM
20	Although I don't have time to visit them often, knowing they are there, seeing them even in passing is a balm.	Jul 29, 2010 1:51 AM
21	Public natural areas are very important for their beauty, wildlife habitat, spiritual renewal, and physical health. Some are a bit far away, so I visit them less often than the ones close by.	Jul 29, 2010 1:51 AM
22	They, and other natural areas are an important part of my life here in Oregon. I wouldn't be here if we did not have such areas.	Aug 4, 2010 2:54 AM
23	I love Benton County because of our parks! Its very important to us.	Aug 4, 2010 3:46 AM
24	My family has suffered a job loss this year, so we rely on local city/county parks and green spaces to continue our outdoor activities (hiking, biking, etc)	Aug 4, 2010 9:08 PM
25	It is very important to my family and me to live in a place where we have easy access to parks and natural areas. It is one of the things we love most about Corvallis.	Aug 10, 2010 11:44 PM
26	Rarely visit, but nice to have when we got there.	Aug 23, 2010 4:41 AM
27	love clemens park!	Aug 24, 2010 5:05 AM

What priorities do you believe Benton County should consider in planning and managing the Natural Areas & Parks Department in the future? (Check all that apply)

	Low	Medium	High	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Provide more education and interpretive programs	27.8% (35)	**42.1% (53)**	28.6% (36)	1.6% (2)	2.01	126
Improve the county's trail system for bicycling, walking, and hiking	5.4% (7)	29.2% (38)	**65.4% (85)**	0.0% (0)	2.60	130
Provide more outdoor recreation facilities (picnicking, camping, disc golf, etc.)	40.2% (51)	**45.7% (58)**	14.2% (18)	0.0% (0)	1.74	127
Acquire more natural areas to protect and restore diminishing habitats	4.5% (6)	15.2% (20)	**80.3% (106)**	0.0% (0)	2.76	132
Increase recreation opportunities and habitat restoration on the Willamette River	3.9% (5)	41.1% (53)	**54.3% (70)**	0.8% (1)	2.51	129
Maintain the existing parks and natural area system at a high quality	3.1% (4)	22.1% (29)	**74.8% (98)**	0.0% (0)	2.72	131
Acquire more parkland for outdoor recreation activities	20.3% (26)	**39.8% (51)**	**39.8% (51)**	0.0% (0)	2.20	128
Work more with others (Greenbelt Land Trust, rural communities, Corvallis, etc.)	2.3% (3)	24.2% (31)	**71.1% (91)**	2.3% (3)	2.70	128
Provide more volunteer opportunities (e.g. habitat restoration projects)	12.1% (16)	**58.3% (77)**	28.0% (37)	1.5% (2)	2.16	132
Place more emphasis on enforcement of rules and regulations	**50.0% (64)**	42.2% (54)	6.3% (8)	1.6% (2)	1.56	128
				Other (please specify)		19
				answered question		**137**
				skipped question		**2**

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Other (please specify)		
1	Again, survey has flaw.	Jul 19, 2010 9:24 PM
2	(Survey was not set up to "Check all that apply"... I could only check one category in each column.)	Jul 20, 2010 1:48 AM
3	Not sure how you can increase recreation opportunities AND habitat restoration on the W. River...?	Jul 22, 2010 3:33 PM
4	maintain or increase habitat restoration and participation in habitat conservation activities; protect native communities from invasive species	Jul 22, 2010 5:18 PM
5	I marked improvements to the trail system, and interpretive functions as "low" because these are done so well already. Keep up the good work! By all means, acquire more lands for natural areas and parks!!! Even if they are not fully developed for recreational use, they are habitat that is set aside. The county plays an essential role in the protection of our natural landscapes. I cannot overstate the importance of acquisition of lands by Benton County Parks for the health of our community and the biotic systems we are dependent on.	Jul 22, 2010 6:06 PM
6	recreation and habitat restoration on the Willamette River are not the same, should be seperate questions	Jul 22, 2010 6:17 PM
7	The more open space we can preserve, the better. When I retire in 2 years I'll jump in more often as a volunteer!	Jul 22, 2010 6:57 PM
8	we need to engage people in the out of doors to get them mentally involved in wanting to protect them.	Jul 22, 2010 9:38 PM
9	focus on educating visitors about invasive species and how to keep from contributing to their spread.	Jul 22, 2010 11:48 PM
10	Only rule that needs more enforcemnt is the dogs off/on leash rule. Need to increase the FTE of dog control and give out tickets to offenders--Bald Hill is the worst!	Jul 23, 2010 7:42 AM
11	INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!	Jul 23, 2010 7:20 PM
12	off leash dog walking areas are very important	Jul 23, 2010 10:55 PM
13	I would like more access to the park end of Crystal Lake cemetery for quiet, comtemplative activities. It seems like it is being meticulously maintained for nothing, as it is not slated for use by the public.	Jul 24, 2010 4:44 AM
14	We must do all we can to protect diminishing habitats!	Jul 25, 2010 4:54 AM
15	Please don't compromise horseback riding trails	Jul 26, 2010 2:29 AM
16	Definite rules enforced on dog leash/off leash areas	Jul 27, 2010 8:28 PM
17	Acquire more natural areas that are closer to town so people don't have to drive so far to visit them.	Jul 29, 2010 1:51 AM
18	I feel that 90% of the people who use the parks are self governed. No need for external government	Aug 4, 2010 3:46 AM
19	It would be great to have a program that gets our youth into camping/love of the natural world in the summer months.	Aug 8, 2010 3:36 PM

Benton County Natural Areas & Parks Department System Survey

Are you a resident of Benton County?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	**94.1%**	**127**
No	5.9%	8
answered question		**135**
skipped question		**4**

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What city or community do you live in or near?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Adair Village	0.0%	0
Alsea	0.8%	1
Bellfountain/Alpine	0.8%	1
Corvallis	**84.6%**	**110**
Kings Valley/Summit	0.0%	0
Monroe	0.8%	1
North Albany	3.8%	5
Philomath	7.7%	10
Wren/Blodgett	1.5%	2
Other (please specify)		9
answered question		**130**
skipped question		**9**

Other Comments:

	Response Count
	32
answered question	**32**
skipped question	**107**

Question #10 Survey Comments

1.	We may live in polk county and we love our park system, but we love benton's, as well, and as much!	Mon, Aug 23, 2010 10:05 PM
2.	Thanks for asking for input!	Tue, Aug 10, 2010 4:44 PM
3.	Please bring back the mid-way porta potty on the Bald Hill walkway. Several middle aged and older people need it. Thanks for this opportunity!	Tue, Aug 3, 2010 8:46 PM
4.	What can we do to help increase the funding for your efforts?	Tue, Aug 3, 2010 7:54 PM
5.	Maintain what we have. Don't expand at the expense of other essential County programs -- such as law enforcement (government's most important function)	Sat, Jul 31, 2010 7:06 PM
6.	Please remove all non-native plant species from parks and natural areas, (blackberries, scotch broom, etc.)	Thu, Jul 29, 2010 5:10 AM
7.	Thank you for asking. First priority is to acquire more natural areas near the bike loop around Corvallis, and add appropriate amenities later. Fill in gaps in the "emerald necklace" around Corvallis, in collaboration with the City of Corvallis. What habitat types are not well-represented near town could be acquired as park land?	Wed, Jul 28, 2010 6:51 PM
8.	I applaud you for your parks maintenance, especially probably under trying circumstances. However, it seems that you're managing two types of systems: man-made parks, and natural systems. Most of staff is trained in disciplines other than biology and ecology and, although they understand landscape mgmt (appl. of pesticides, mowing regimes, etc.), they often seem to have little understanding of natural systems. In consequence many silly things have been done: insensitivity to wildlife and native seed cycles, planting over natives with invasive nonnatives, planting horticultural trees in natural areas, cutting down snags, etc. I would like to see people well-trained in ecology hired for natural systems decision-making and management. We need someone with sensitivity to the concerns mentioned above so that irreversible mistakes can be avoided.	Wed, Jul 28, 2010 6:51 PM
9.	I thouroughly enjoy the natural beauty of Fitton Green Natural Area and Beazell Memorial Forest	Wed, Jul 28, 2010 11:14 AM
10.	Acquiring and maintaining parklands/natural areas is very important for quality of life for the present and future generations.	Tue, Jul 27, 2010 9:31 PM
11.	I love our parks. It is perhaps more than anything else, why I choose to live in Benton County. I would love to see more herb walks and Native Plant and bird walks like Finley Wildlife refuge did this spring.	Tue, Jul 27, 2010 7:00 PM
12.	Our parks here are beautiful, especially compared to parks in other areas. Keep up the good work. Thank you very much.	Tue, Jul 27, 2010 3:26 PM
13.	Thank you for the parks we have! I hope you are not planning to cut back.	Tue, Jul

		27, 2010 1:36 PM
14.	Thanks for conserving our natural areas!	Sun, Jul 25, 2010 7:29 PM
15.	Thank you for all your hard work.	Fri, Jul 23, 2010 3:55 PM
16.	Benton Co. Parks and Rec are fantastic...great work!	Fri, Jul 23, 2010 3:53 PM
17.	Maintain what you have at the best level possible before acquiring new parcels.	Fri, Jul 23, 2010 11:32 AM
18.	thank you for a great parks system!	Fri, Jul 23, 2010 10:51 AM
19.	More toilet opportunities at spots where runners typically train.	Fri, Jul 23, 2010 9:58 AM
20.	Am often confused about whether local parks are city, county, OSU Forest, Greenbelt, or State owned and managed. Appreciate linking trails around city. Most of my volunteer work is with local environmental groups.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 9:35 PM
21.	Good job on a tight budget!	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 8:51 PM
22.	It would be REALLY cool if you could mountain bike or hike from the Mac Forest, to Fitton Green, to Mary's Peak... if the land between Fitton and MP ever becomes available for purchase. In general, Fitton has a lot of potential (and has wonderful upland prairie habitat), but the trail system isn't entirely clear for hiking. Having clear trails and paths reduces unwanted tromping through sensitive areas.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 8:12 PM
23.	We could do more to get children involved in education and volunteer work to maintain and improve areas where they can then play - bike, hike, camp, picnic, fish, etc. The future out the environment depends, I think, I getting children invested in their immediate surroundings.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 2:38 PM
24.	help in the purchase of Witham Oaks. Keep it from development.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 2:23 PM
25.	It's a tough job to provide all the things we want when the money isn't there...I love our park spaces--they are critical for our mental health!	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 11:57 AM
26.	It would help if you had a list of the Benton County Parks. I'm not sure which are city or state or federal, and which are county parks.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 11:36 AM
27.	I work here and enjoy the parks very much. You do a great job. I have Lane County Parks as a comparison and you do such a better job hands down	Thu, Jul 22, 2010

		11:14 AM
28.	We have some real jewels, and the Parks people seem to be top notch professionals	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 10:18 AM
29.	I received the survey because I own a small forest acreage in Benton and have little knowledge of the needs of local parks. Highest priority would be additional land purchase for development. Once it is built upon, land cannot be set aside for future generations.	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 8:48 AM
30.	Thank you so much for providing this survey and caring about what your residents want to see in their parks and natural areas. :)	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 8:33 AM
31.	more control of invasive species(false brome, knapweed, etc)	Thu, Jul 22, 2010 7:40 AM
32.	We are prone to going to places closer to town, but it's good to be reminded of the lovely County spots	