



**OPEN SPACE,
AGRICULTURE,
PARKS & RECREATION**

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Open space, parks, recreation, and agriculture provide Bergen County's residents, visitors and businesses with numerous quality of life amenities and benefits. Protected open space and parks provide opportunities for passive and active recreation. The ecosystem services provided by protected open space reduce the costs associated with flood mitigation and water treatment. Natural lands promote community health and social equity in urban areas where trees and other plantings can help to manage stormwater, regulate temperature, improve air quality, generate oxygen, and also offset carbon emissions. Access to recreation can help residents to stay healthy and active, both physically and psychologically, and the aesthetics of passive parks and open spaces – including scenic views and landscapes – carry both social and economic benefits. As also referenced in the Economic Vitality element, parks and open space can be a major revenue generator for the county through tourism and its related sales (lodging, food and beverage, retail, recreation, transportation, and second homes), which, in 2017 totaled \$2.9 billion dollars.

WHAT DO PARKS MEAN TO BERGEN COUNTY?

Parks contribute to the high quality of life in Bergen County. Parks also serve as the public face of the County. For most residents and visitors, the first interaction they will have with Bergen County is through its diverse Parks, Open Spaces, Historic Sites, and other recreational amenities.

Why do parks matter? Parks offer health and wellness benefits to residents and visitors, economic benefits to businesses and property owners, and ecological benefits to the greater built and natural landscapes. They do this by:

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

ACTIVE RECREATION VS. PASSIVE RECREATION

Active Recreation refers to activities conducted within defined recreational spaces such as playgrounds, athletic fields, outdoor basketball and tennis courts, outdoor swimming pools, and outdoor skate parks and ice rinks.

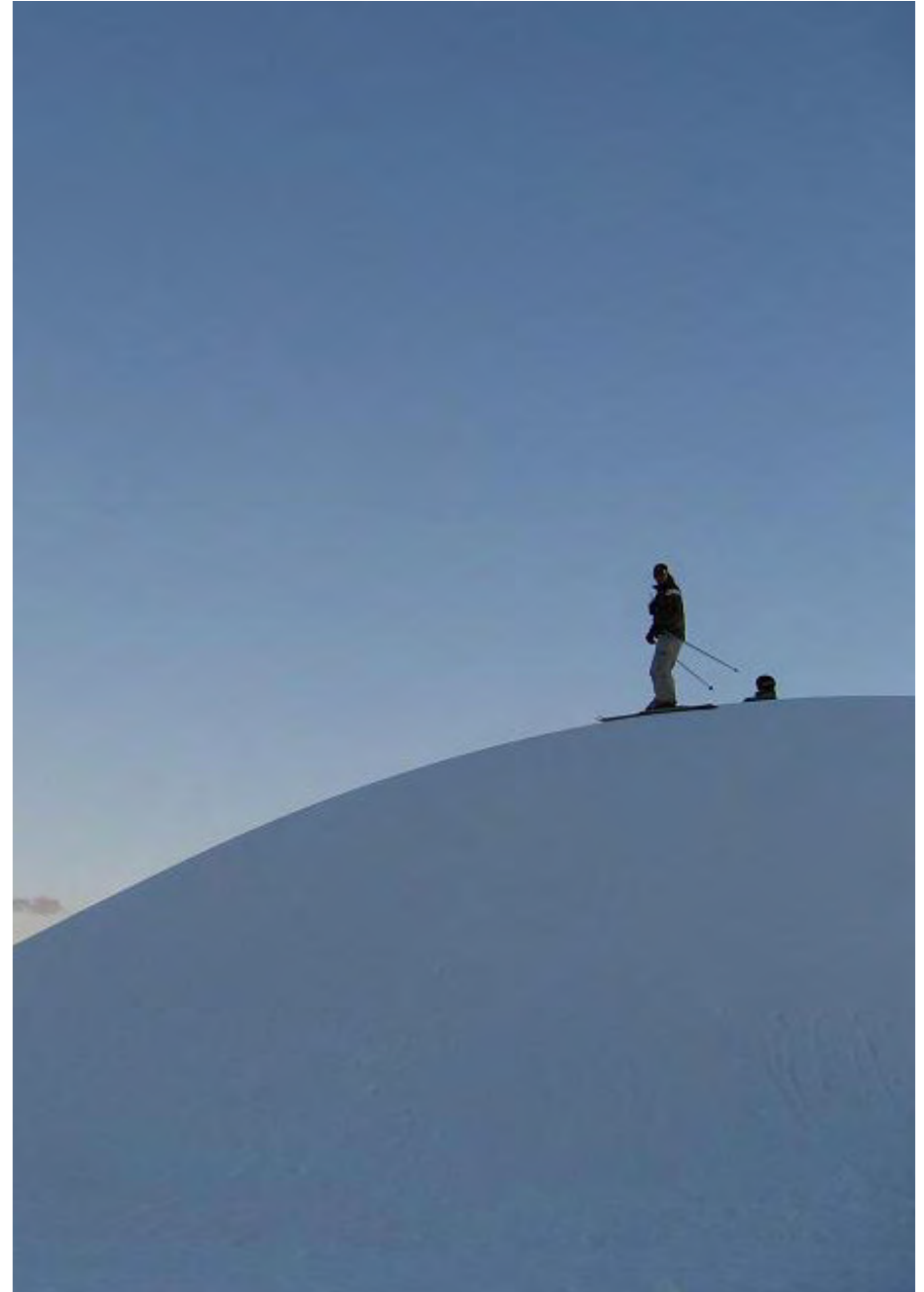
Passive Recreation refers to activities of least impact and non-consumptive uses, such as nature observation, picnicking, boating, walking, and biking. In Bergen County, preserved lands kept in their natural state provide residents and visitors with access to passive recreation.



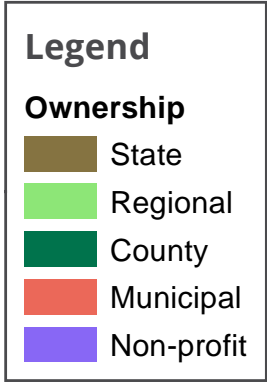
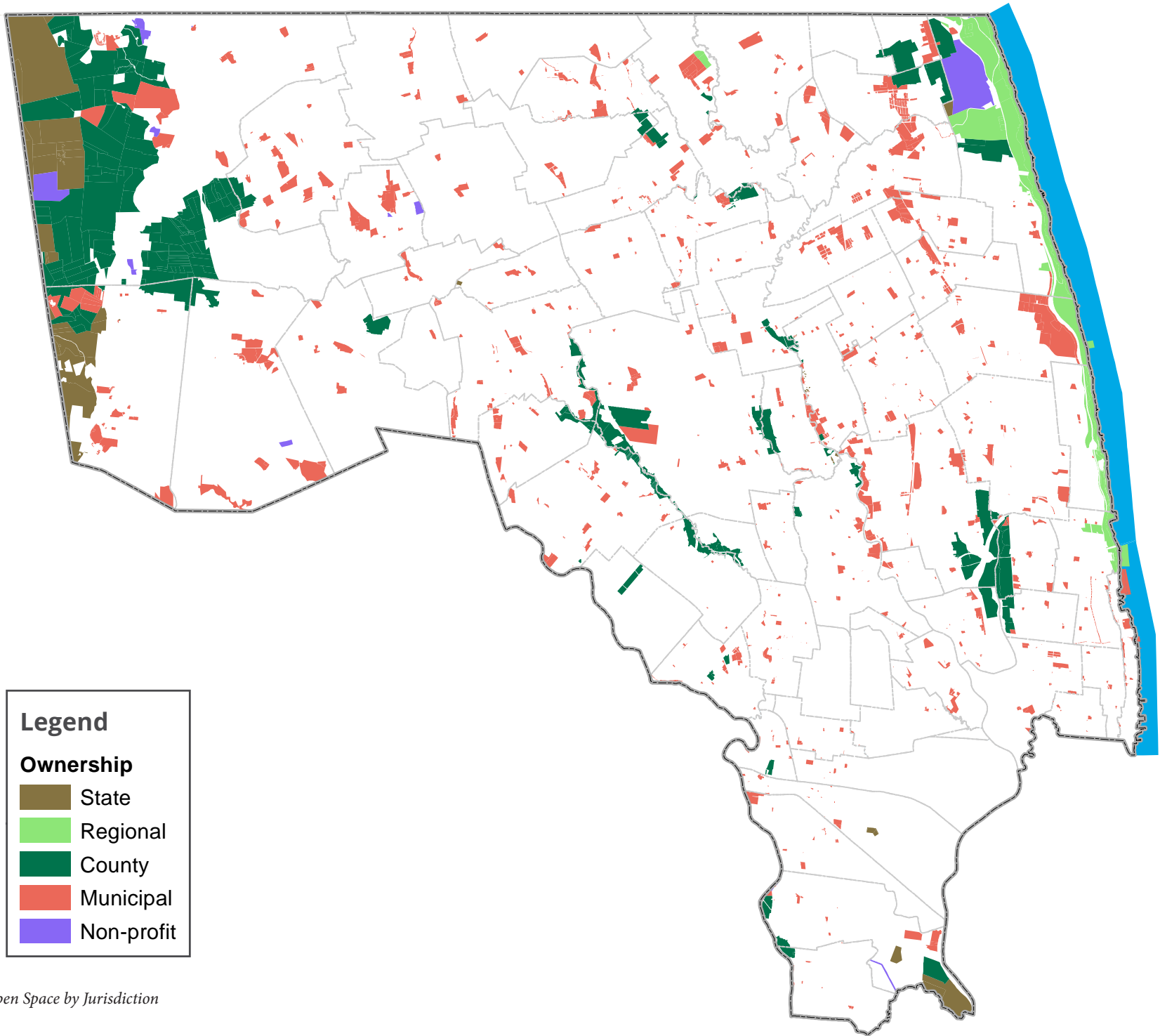
Edgewater Recreational Complex. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development.

Bergen County is proud to offer an attractive and healthy environment by providing residents and visitors with an abundance of open space and recreational amenities. County park and recreation land, currently 9,335 acres, accounts for over 5 percent of the total land area in Bergen County, and roughly half of the public open space in Bergen County.¹ The other half falls under the jurisdiction of municipalities (5,878 acres), the Palisades Interstate Parks Commission (2,452 acres), non-profit entities (862 acres), and the State of New Jersey (3,550 acres).² Collectively, these parks and recreation facilities compose over 22,000 acres, or nearly 14 percent of Bergen County. Additionally, there are numerous private recreation facilities, undeveloped (but unprotected) open space, and minimally developed lands still dedicated to agricultural production, some of which have been protected from future development through various farmland preservation and agricultural support programs. Future opportunities include expanding these programs to encompass a wider spectrum of open space preservation and reclamation efforts, akin to the 2013 creation of the Floodplain Protection component of the Open Space Trust Fund to acquire of flood-prone properties and riparian lands.

This section provides an overview of the county's parks, open space preservation, recreation, and agriculture preservation programs, outlining goals, objectives, and implementable action items. It should be noted, however, that the county has recently prepared several detailed plans, studies, and reports related to these individual programs, including the Bergen County Parks Master Plan (2019), the Ramapo Valley County Reservation Management Plan (currently under development), and a Farmland Preservation Plan (Adopted June 2014).³ Where applicable, these plans are incorporated into this Master Plan Element by reference.



Skiing at Campgaw Mountain. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development.



Map: Parks and Open Space by Jurisdiction

EXISTING PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS

COUNTY ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

There are multiple county entities involved in the preservation and maintenance of the county's open space, agriculture, parks and recreation resources. The Department of Parks is responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and operations of all the county-owned parks. The Division of Land Management within the Department of Parks protects, maintains and enhances the quality and degree of open space throughout the county. Open space, in this sense, refers to land that is not developed with buildings, and includes parks, forests, greenways, wetlands, and farms. The Division of Land Management and the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs within the Department of Parks collaborate to create park management plans to help define the future of the Bergen County park system. Park plans involve additions and renovations to the park system to provide recreation opportunities, protect significant environmental resources, preserve key cultural resources and promote the countywide park system. This organizational structure serves to provide a policy direction for the future strength and viability of the Bergen County Parks System, which in turn informed this Master Plan element.



Darlington Golf Course. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development

FUNDING

The primary source of funding for parks is through capital appropriations and annual operating budgets from the county. While the parks generate revenues from different park facilities – including its golf courses, the Van Saun Zoo, permits and rentals (such as park pavilions used for picnicking), the county’s equestrian centers, tennis facilities, and food – these are placed into the county’s General Fund and not directly dedicated for parks use.

Additional funding for parks includes the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland & Historic Preservation Trust Fund (“Trust Fund”), a dedicated program supporting open space acquisition and recreation development, as well as historical preservation and farmland protection throughout Bergen County. The Trust Fund has two programs: a County Program, and a Municipal Park Improvement Program, which are funded through a property tax assessment, the rate of which is determined annually by the county, with a maximum cap of one cent (\$0.01) per \$100 of total county equalized real property valuation. The funding comes from county operating and capital appropriations, and it may be supplemented by the Trust Fund, which is primarily used for acquisition and capital improvements; 30 percent of the fund is dedicated to municipal efforts, and the remaining 70 percent of the fund is divided and shared for land acquisition, flood prone properties, historic properties, farmland preservation and county park improvements. The Trust Fund was established by Freeholder (known as Commissioners as of 2021) resolution in 1998, and subsequently reauthorized by a public ballot vote in 2003. In 2013, residents approved a public ballot initiative that amended the program to include the acquisition of flood-prone properties. The County Program uses Trust Fund dollars on a county-wide basis to preserve land, maximize recreational opportunities, acquire flood-prone properties, and preserve historic areas and farmland.

The county currently provides several opportunities to advance parks, recreation, and open space goals:

- Within the County Program:
 - The Land Preservation Grant Program assists municipalities, qualified nonprofits and the county itself to purchase land for new parks, or purchase land adjacent to existing parks to increase their size.
 - The Farmland Preservation Easement Purchase program provides grants for the county’s acquisition of farmland development rights from landowners who want to keep their land in agricultural production permanently.
 - The Historic Preservation Trust Fund Program provides grants for the acquisition, stabilization, rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation of historic sites as well as the preparation of plans and reports associated with the preservation.
 - The Floodplain Protection Program funds the acquisition of flood-prone properties in order to restore the land to a natural state useful for recreation and conservation purposes by county, municipalities, and qualified non-profit organizations.
- The second program, the Municipal Park Improvement Program, supplements municipal efforts to improve municipal open space and recreation facilities.

Over the course of its history, the Trust Fund has generated and allocated \$269 million dollars for 1,488 projects (through 2022), while eliminating long-term capital bonding.

COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE

The Bergen County Parks System encompasses a diverse set of holdings, including historic sites, parks, recreation centers, preserved lands and open spaces, and offers a wide range of passive and active recreation opportunities. Passive recreation refers to activities that do not require prepared facilities and have limited impact on a site, such as hiking, camping, and bird watching, while active recreation includes activities where more developed infrastructure is required, such as fields, equipment, and indoor facilities to support activities such as team sports, skateboarding, and playgrounds. The county's parks include Overpeck, Saddle River, Van Saun, Riverside and Darlington County Parks and the Ramapo Valley and Campgaw Mountain County Reservations, in addition to numerous other smaller parks, county-owned golf courses, historic sites,⁴ and other facilities. Overpeck County Park is the county's largest urban park and newest recreational venue, covering over 805 acres and home to the Bergen County World Trade Center Memorial as well as an amphitheater, which hosts concerts, social, and cultural events.⁵

ACTIVE PARKS

The county parks system offers ample opportunity for active recreation. Active parks offer 26 baseball fields, 9 basketball courts, 2 football fields, 16 playgrounds, 2 volleyball courts, 8 soccer fields, 35 tennis courts, 2 bocce ball courts, 2 hockey rinks, 6 track and field areas, 1 shuffleboard court and 3 fitness stations, including:

- The Palisades Park Sportsplex at Overpeck County Park boasts a football/soccer stadium, all-weather running track and field events area, in addition to softball and baseball fields.
- The Bergen Equestrian Center at Overpeck County Park in **Leonia** and Saddle Ridge Riding Center in **Franklin Lakes** offer horseback riding, while pony rides for young children can be found at Van Saun County Park.
- The County Parks System provides six dog runs, one at each of the following parks: Samuel Nelkin County Park in **Wallington**; Riverside County Park (North) in **Lyndhurst**; Wooddale County Park in **Hillsdale**; the Henry Hoebel Area of Overpeck County Park in **Leonia**; the Wild Duck Pond Area of Saddle River County Park in **Ridgewood**; and, Van Saun County Park (South) in **Paramus**.
- Campgaw Mountain County Reservation offers recreational opportunities unique to county parks: a disc golf course, an archery range, camping, and a ski area for skiing, snowboarding, and tubing in the winter.
- Saddle River County Park is a 577-acre linear park that meanders along the Saddle River and its tributary brooks and consists of five park areas that are linked by a multi-use path available for pedestrians and bicyclists.



Overpeck Golf Course. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development

PASSIVE PARKS

Bergen County Parks offer passive recreational amenities, including picnicking, hiking, walking, and camping overnight at select parks. Parks display the local flora and fauna of the county, and there are opportunities to bird-watch and fish. Passive recreation includes access to over 6,000 acres of forest, 35 miles of pathways, over 1,000 acres of water and wetlands, 16 hiking areas, 12 fishing areas, and 3 camping areas.

OTHER FACILITIES

Bergen County Zoo

The 13-acre Bergen County Zoo, located in Van Saun County Park in **Paramus**, is nationally accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Accreditation requires inspections every 5 years to ensure that the facility has the proper support, knowledge, staffing, veterinarian care and financial backing to operate.

The Bergen County Zoo collection is made up of about 200 North and South American animals, housed largely in outdoor facilities. An indoor education center provides programs and interactive displays to Bergen County school groups and zoo visitors; an outdoor amphitheater provides visitors with a closer look. The zoo is open year-round and charges admission from May through October.

The zoo pursues efforts to conserve wildlife and habitat and strives to educate visitors with a strong sense of appreciation and understanding of both. To create an enjoyable recreational experience, the zoo seeks to provide a clean, aesthetically pleasing facility which meets or exceeds the physical, environmental and behavioral needs of the animals in its care. It develops and maintains exhibits which promote healthy animals, and actively participates in wildlife conservation through local and worldwide efforts. The zoo also carries out captive breeding and conducts research projects.

James A. McFaul Environmental Center

The mission of the James A. McFaul Environmental Center is to educate the public about local flora and fauna. The 81-acre plant and wildlife sanctuary located in Wyckoff is open all year to the public and is free of charge, providing access to a large selection of nature education programs and workshops for school groups on weekdays. The indoor and outdoor exhibit areas contain live animals, aquariums, natural history displays, and nature art exhibits. The center also supports a wide variety of plant species and has several small gardens.

Golf Courses

Bergen County's park system includes 6 public golf courses:

- Darlington Golf Course, Mahwah;
- Orchard Hills Golf Course, Paramus;
- Overpeck Golf Course, Teaneck;
- Rockleigh Golf Course, Rockleigh;
- Soldier Hill Golf Course, Emerson; and,
- Valley Brook Golf Course, River Vale.

The County's Golf Courses provide convenient public access to the sport for the region's golfers, both for beginners and those of more advanced skill. The county's courses are a high-visibility element of the park system that generate a significant portion of park revenue. The Parks Department sponsors a variety of golfing tournaments and events for all ages and skills. The County recently developed a one-stop information center dedicated to its golf courses,⁶ providing information on costs, online scheduling of tee times, details on upcoming events, and tournaments. The courses offer golfing in varied settings and are open from mid-March through mid-December.



Overpeck Park Bridge. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development

PARK SYSTEM EVENTS

In addition to their unstructured recreation and use, county parks provide a venue for different events throughout the year that draw visitors to the parks. These events include a variety of different athletic and cultural offerings, such as movie nights, concerts, fundraising walks and runs, festivals, fitness activities, dance events, and storytelling. County departments contribute to the events schedule, including events being run as part of the County's Health and Wellness Program. External entities may hold events in the Parks System by permit, including events at the county's golf courses and the Van Saun Zoo.

FACILITIES NOT OWNED BY THE COUNTY

In addition to the county-owned facilities, Bergen County is home to many other open space areas. The Palisades Interstate Park system includes 24 parks and 8 historic sites, covering over 100,000 acres along with more than twenty miles of Hudson River shoreline in both New Jersey and New York. Flat Rock Brook Nature Center is a 150-acre preserve and education center situated on the western slope of the Palisades in **Englewood**, and one of the last remnants of the Palisades Forest. Tenafly Nature Center is a 65-acre nature preserve adjoining the 316-acre Lost Brook Preserve and sits atop the Palisades overlooking the Hudson River. On the state level, the 4,200-acre Ramapo Mountain State Forest is located in Bergen and Passaic Counties, containing the 1,417-acre Ramapo Lake Natural Area, which includes Ramapo Lake, a 120-acre mountain lake. The State Forest adjoins the Ramapo Valley County Reservation, part of the Bergen County park system, thereby contributing to a large swath of preserved green space at the northwest extent of the County, with a trail system which runs along the ridge of the Ramapo Mountains north to **Mahwah**. In addition, 5,878 acres of individual parks and open spaces owned by municipalities and another 862 acres by nonprofit entities are located in Bergen County.

AGRICULTURE

Bergen County contains approximately 1,000 acres of farmland, less than 1 percent of the county's land area.⁷ Despite the limited amount of land dedicated to agriculture, these farms contribute to the local economy and the health and well-being of the county. They provide locally grown fruits and vegetables; they provide open space buffers against suburban sprawl; they inject economic benefits into the economy with local jobs; and they preserve the last vestiges of the county's once-prominent farming heritage. Farming activities in Bergen County have been on the decline for quite some time due to the high value of land for real estate development. Between 1982 and 2017, the number of farms in Bergen County decreased from 126 to 74.⁸ During the same period, the average size of existing farms decreased from 21 acres to 14 acres.⁹ The approximate land area dedicated to farming in 1982 was 2,728 acres. By 2017, the acreage decreased to 1,051 acres. Agriculture is part of the local scenic landscape with farms serving as popular destinations for both residents and visitors to experience real, living, and local farm operations and products.

Despite the county's urbanized development patterns, agriculture continues to exist because farms meet the needs of local consumers, though this presents a challenge when land becomes more valuable for development. Bergen County growers produce a wide array of nursery plants, vegetables and orchard fruits.¹⁰ The nursery plant industry composes the largest segment of agricultural production and consists of landscaping crops (bedding plants, trees/shrubs, cultivated sod, and other ornamental plants), limited production of Christmas trees and cut flowers. Besides the nursery plant industry, Bergen County's agricultural landscape and its products can be experienced at roadside markets, farmers markets, pick-your-own operations, hayrides, renting agricultural space for events, and highlighted in local restaurants with locally sourced "farm-to-table" menu items. Another major component of agriculture in Bergen County are equine and equestrian activities, including boarding and training facilities.

The County of Bergen has adopted a multifaceted approach to protecting its remaining farmland and supporting the farming industry. The county, through the Division of Land Management and the County Agriculture Development Board (CADB), strives to maintain and encourage diverse agricultural operations. Since 1999, the CADB has worked with landowners in administering the Bergen County Farmland Easement Purchase Program. This program is available to qualified farm owners who retain ownership of the land and agree to sell the development rights to the county. A permanent deed restriction is placed on the property that prohibits nonagricultural

development. The cost of the easement is shared between the county (Open Space Trust Fund) and the State Agriculture Development Committee (Garden State Preservation Trust). The Bergen County Farmland Easement Purchase Program purchased its first easement in 2002 with the purchase of development rights to a 216-acre farm in **Mahwah**. The outcome of the effort to date has protected eight farms, totaling 335 acres and has been funded by over \$19 million in grants from the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund and State Agriculture Development Committee.¹¹ An additional component of preservation is the long-term process of ensuring that these properties remain under agricultural use. In this role, the CADB monitors preserved farms for compliance with the easement and assists landowners and farmers with stewardship and post-closing issues.

In addition to land preservation, Bergen County has taken necessary steps to protect farmers and their land from encroaching development and other potential threats to their land and lifestyle. Enforcement of the New Jersey Right to Farm Act provides commercial farm owners or operators with certain protections from restrictive municipal ordinances and public and private nuisance actions. For some farm operators, nuisance complaints can reduce profitability to the extent that they must leave the industry. There is a conflict resolution process to improve communication between farmers, municipalities and private citizens and reduce litigation time and expense incurred by the agriculture community.

Bergen County is also dedicated to promoting agriculture through interactive and educational programs for residents. Accordingly, Bergen County formed a partnership with Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, to provide a program that would increase horticultural skills, environmental awareness and stewardship utilizing research-based education. Initiated in 1984 in Bergen County, the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Master Gardener program has since expanded to many more New Jersey counties, with Bergen County's successful Master Gardener program serving as a model. Educational outreach includes "Garden Helpline" inquiries, horticultural therapy projects, garden clinics, and speaker bureaus. Youth programming includes schoolyard habitats, water conservation, urban gardening, 4-H programs and county fairs. RCE Master Gardener volunteers have addressed public health and safety through presentations on controlling mosquito and tick populations and habitats. Other volunteer efforts include composting, natural resource assessment, assistance at various RCE research facilities, and gleaned fields for food banks.¹²

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 1: Preserve and Balance Open Space

What is it?

The County of Bergen strives to provide a high quality, diversified open space system that preserves and enhances significant environmental resources, including public water supplies, protects threatened species and their habitats, and provides open space and recreational resources for all of its residents. Open space is land that is predominantly undeveloped and may be either publicly or privately owned. Open space preservation protects significant environmental resources, limiting the scale of development that can take place in perpetuity, in order to provide scenic enjoyment, recreation, community space, plant and animal habitat, and resource protection for the community.

What will it do?

This goal will increase, protect, and enhance the county's existing and future open spaces that can provide an appropriate balance of active and passive recreational opportunities. Diverse and balanced facilities ensure that parks and open space benefit residents, visitors, and businesses.

Why should the county pursue it?

Open space provides residents with the aesthetic value of nature and a sense of place for the community; maintaining open space lands today ensures that these resources are enjoyed by future generations. Whether in rural, suburban, or urban communities, using open space as a form of green infrastructure can reduce the cost of stormwater management while beautifying communities, providing recreation amenities, and raising property values. The financial and quality of life benefits are broad: open space preservation may prevent tax increases otherwise necessary to support the extension of services and traditional infrastructure into undeveloped areas; provides opportunities for wellness and healthy living through for fitness, recreation, and access to nature; electrical costs and grid demand may decline from an improved microclimate where trees and other plantings help lower temperatures; and, trees provide a natural air filter which can lower healthcare costs and serve as an environmental justice remedy for those prone to asthma and other heat- and air quality-triggered illnesses. There are also more basic environmental benefits: preservation of land provides wildlife habitat, sequesters carbon, and protects water quality. By proactively setting aside open space first, lands are protected at a lower cost than in the future when they may be faced with an immediate threat of development.





Hackensack Meadowlands. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 1.1: Underserved Areas

Adding lands through fee-simple purchase is the primary way to accomplish the goal of increasing open space. Increasing the amount of preserved open space provides many benefits as listed previously, including improving air quality, water quality, habitat, recreation, and property values. Ensure that there is equitable access to parks and open space by identifying and prioritizing the creation of new, or the enhancement of existing, parks and open spaces in areas currently underserved. The County's Parks Master Plan has found that 20 Bergen County municipalities have an adequate amount of publicly available open space, while 50 are considered to be underserved, including the southern portion of the county as well as the northern municipalities along the border with New York. Identify opportunities to balance the amount of open space in the County through the development of new parkland and open space resources in these underserved portions of the county.

Public and private initiatives to acquire open space can happen at the municipal, state, and federal level, along with private and non-profit efforts. Leveraging multiple sources of funding is often needed to acquire land because of its high costs in Bergen County. Diversifying the funding sources for open space will lessen the financial burden of preservation or acquisition for recreational use, such as coordinating with key non-county funding sources such as the New Jersey Green Acres Program or the New Jersey Infrastructure Bank with the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund program. It can mean promoting, coordinating with, and encouraging other efforts, such as private and non-profit projects that preserve land, or incentivizing the private donation of land for public open space.

Supporting these alternative efforts to acquire open space will help increase the overall amount of preserved land beyond what the county itself can do alone. Explore other public funding sources or partnerships with other public agencies to achieve mutual goals. Consider outreach programs to private landowners, or private foundations to both maximize funding for conservation acquisitions and promote responsible land stewardship practices.

Additionally, municipalities can utilize development regulations that help to incentivize preservation, including transfer of development rights (TDR) programs, cluster and non-contiguous cluster subdivision regulations, and stormwater utilities. Making these tools readily accessible and user-friendly allows municipalities to achieve open space and recreation goals at a reduced cost compared to outright acquisition, while also addressing other issues, such as land use or stormwater management. In some cases, outdated development regulations that were adopted at the height of the suburban sprawl boom may discourage "smart growth" development. Working with municipalities to identify and amend regulations that deter smart growth and traditional neighborhood development may help to curb sprawl development that consumes open space.





Bald Eagle. Source: Bergen County Division of Planning.

Objective 1.2: Explore Connectors

Greenways are linear corridors of open space that are typically either natural, such as rivers and streams, or man-made, such as abandoned rail lines or utility corridors. Many greenways do or could contain trails, which can be a resource for both recreation and transportation. Connecting open space throughout the county with greenways and trails could form a comprehensive network of open space and parklands that enhance preservation, recreation, and transportation. As open spaces themselves, greenways and trails can also offer many traditional open space benefits such as buffering, connecting natural habitats, improving water quality, and reducing the impacts of flooding.

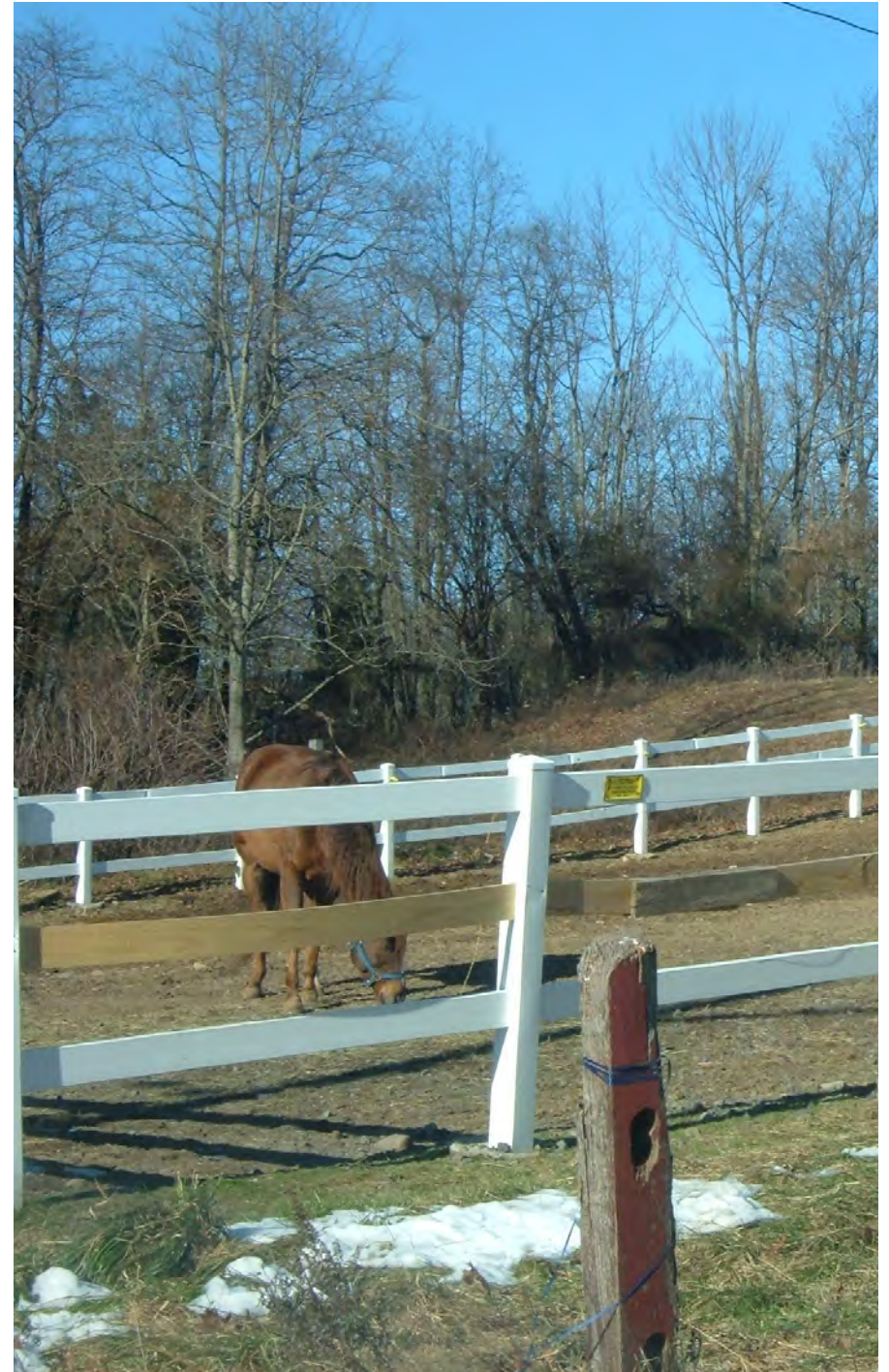
Linear connectors could be explored to determine their potential to link parcels along waterways, pathways, and other rights-of-way, and thereby expand existing and create new linear parks. When connecting open space and parks, greenways provide natural connections —such as waterways and pathways—between parks, allowing users to readily enjoy features in more than one park in the same visit. This can provide the dual benefits of more recreational opportunities that could improve health, as well as increased alternative, non-motorized transportation options for all ages and abilities. A model for this approach is the highly successful Saddle River Park. Parcels adjacent to it and to other potential linear connectors could be explored to determine their potential to link parcels along waterways, pathways, and other rights-of-way, to expand existing and create new linear parks. New parklands adjacent to the rivers, such as the recently-acquired Carlton Hill Greenway in **Rutherford** and **East Rutherford**, would address the currently significant parkland deficits in the southern portion of the County.

Using greenways to connect open space and parks requires proactive planning, by identifying opportunities for linear facilities that link existing and proposed recreation and open space sites in an integrated system and encouraging their formation by setting aside easements or rights-of-way and funding for their creation.

Objective 1.3: Brownfield Opportunities

Brownfield land is any previously developed commercial or industrial land that is currently vacant or underutilized. The term often implies past or present environmental contamination. As a densely developed county, opportunities to create new open space are limited. Bergen County has many vacant or underused commercial and industrial sites, where redevelopment may not be viable on all or part of a site, creating the potential to reestablish open space, particularly in urbanized areas with limited green space and park access. Opportunities to create new parks or include public parks in brownfield redevelopment projects, particularly in the underserved southern municipalities, could be explored. While smaller, local parks might be more appropriately managed as municipal parks, the County could play a helpful role as an advisor or source of funding for property acquisition.

In other instances, previously developed sites with historic significance offer potentially unique public event venues. For example, the Hackensack Waterworks facility offers a great untapped opportunity in the County park system that could be converted to modern productive use.



Saddle Ridge Stables. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design



GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 2: Improve Access and Connectivity

What is it?

Access can be defined as the physical means of entering a park, either by foot, wheelchair, scooter, bicycle, motorcycle, car or bus, while connectivity refers to the routes for approaching and entering a park, including roads, pathways, and sidewalks. Connections between parks can effectively increase the amount of recreational opportunities beyond the addition of land area.

What will it do?

Improved access to parks will make it safer, easier, more affordable, and more convenient for people of all ages and abilities to get to and into parks. Improvements could include better sidewalks, roads, parking, transit routes and stops, interconnections between recreation facilities, and other strategies. Greenways, trails, and other non-motorized connections between parks can provide the dual benefits of more recreational opportunities and alternative means of transportation. It means users can readily enjoy the features of more than one park in the same visit. Improving park access will make it easier, more affordable, and more convenient for people to get to parks and enjoy their benefits. Improving non-motorized access to parks will also help address traffic and parking issues, ensuring that adequate parking exists.

Why should the county pursue it?

Parks that can be accessed exclusively by motor vehicle can discourage use by those who cannot drive and those who prefer not to drive. Great parks are of little benefit if they are inaccessible. Increasing walking and bicycling access can give more people the opportunity to appreciate these parks and open spaces. It can give those who would normally drive to parks the opportunity to walk or bike there, reducing vehicle use while encouraging active and healthy lifestyles. Establishing and maintaining American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance can ensure County parks are safely and efficiently inclusionary and accessible for users with disabilities. Improving access to parks will help realize other goals, such as increasing the use of parks and improving and maintaining parks to optimize the visitor experience.

Edgewater Recreation Complex. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development

Objective 2.1: Identify Greenways

A greenway is a trail found in both urban and rural settings that is on undeveloped land, frequently created from a disused right-of-way such as an abandoned railway or utility easement lands and set aside for recreational use. Establishing a greenway system could create physical linkages between County parks. The County's Parks Master Plan proposes a county-wide greenway system that would connect open spaces across the County. This conceptual regional network would utilize a combination of existing utility rights-of-ways, parks, trails, and roads that could be used by bicyclists and pedestrians. Five main routes are proposed in this greenway system, three of which connect the County from north to south and two which span it from east to west. The acquisition of Carlton Hill Greenway in **Rutherford** and **East Rutherford** is an important first step in this process.

Development of the County's greenway plan examined best practices throughout the country. The Atlanta Belt Line in Georgia is one of the largest greenway systems in the United States, with about thirty-three miles of multi-use trails and twenty-two miles of pedestrian-friendly rail transit. The program has created jobs, transformed neighborhoods, and served as an economic generator for surrounding areas.

Similarly, a Bergen County greenway network could be phased in over time and eventually include connections to the partially realized East Coast Greenway (ECG), a planned network of trails that will stretch 3,000 miles from Maine to Florida. The ECG passes through Bergen County via Edgewater and Fort Lee along the Hudson River before crossing into New York via the George Washington Bridge.

Objective 2.2: Improve Signage

A unified identity and brand can be supported by adopting sign guidelines that ensure visibility for all users, promoting uniformity throughout the parks system and providing necessary, relevant, and interesting information. Signs should follow the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) standards.

Objective 2.3: Improve Lighting

Feedback received in the preparation of the County's Parks Master Plan included perceived safety concerns related to park lighting. Lack of lighting limits the time available for park use. Strategic installation of lighting could help direct users to areas that are safe for use after daylight hours, as well as to help increase the visibility of pedestrians and bicyclists at intersections. To avoid light pollution into natural areas and neighboring properties, overhead lighting fixtures could utilize full cutoff fixtures or be fully shielded, ensuring that the light is directed only where it is needed – such as on the trail or parking area.

To reduce energy usage and further limit light pollution, adaptive lighting can help ensure the parks are not over lit when not in use. Modern Light Emitting Diode (LED) fixtures allow the operator to set the brightness amount based on the time of day or the expected use of the park.

LED technology also enables the color of lighting to be modified. The color selected affects how visitors perceive their safety and how animals regulate their daily cycle. Higher Kelvin ratings mimic daylight and can confuse and disrupt wildlife. Lower ratings do not disrupt wildlife but can appear discomforting to visitors due to their red hue. An adaptable system allows the color of the lighting to change as the evening progresses.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 2.4: Pedestrian Improvements

Ensure access points and facilities are safe and accessible to all ages and abilities. Increased access can give even more people, and especially those who do not drive, the opportunity to visit parks. In addition, it can give people who would normally drive the opportunity to walk to a park, reducing vehicle use to free up additional road and parking capacity, while encouraging active and healthy lifestyles.

Prioritize pedestrian amenities, including the improvement of American Disability Act (ADA) compliance, so that all park users, including those with strollers and in wheelchairs and other mobility devices, can easily enter and move about the parks. This would require utilizing ADA compliant ramps at park and trail entrances.

Install crosswalks regardless of whether or not a park entrance is located at an intersection. Crosswalks should be designed according to the characteristics of the road network surrounding each park entrance and could include simple striping, raised crosswalks, or High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) beacons. HAWK beacons, also called Pedestrian Hybrid Beacons, are designed to allow safe pedestrian crossing while pausing vehicular flow only as needed, particularly at mid-block crossings where traffic speeds are high or gaps in traffic are few.

As discussed, access points are the spaces used to approach and enter parks, including roads, driveways, parking lots, bus stops, sidewalks, pathways, and bikeways. In addition, many County parks include internal pathway systems that provide internal access and circulation within the parks themselves. Safety may be addressed through adding amenities such as adequate lighting along paths and intersections, as well as ensuring paths meet the size requirements per the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) standards. Further, Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits disability discrimination by all public entities at the local level. The County of Bergen is working to establish full compliance through this objective and many other initiatives. Establishing and maintaining full ADA compliance can ensure the county park system is safely and efficiently accessible for users with disabilities.

Objective 2.5: Bicycle Improvements

Similar to pedestrian improvements, increasing bicycling access gives more people, and especially those who do not drive, the opportunity to visit parks. In addition, it gives people who would normally drive the opportunity to bike to parks, reducing vehicle use to free up additional road and parking capacity, while encouraging active and healthy lifestyles.

Work with municipalities to improve conditions for bicyclists wishing to access the County park system. This could include designating a network of dedicated bicycle paths and bicycle lanes, where appropriate, in communities surrounding the parks.

Providing secure bicycle parking facilities is essential in encouraging park users to arrive at the parks by bicycling. Locating bicycle parking near park features that attract visitors and visible from the road or trail will help ensure usage. This includes playgrounds, sports fields, and trail access points. Appropriate signage could also direct bicyclists to parking areas. In an area where a large amount of bicycle racks are installed, an attractive amenity for bicycle riders is a bicycle maintenance station. These installations allow bicycle riders to add air, adjust their brakes, and make other quick fixes to their bicycle using tools that are chained to the support post.



Objective 2.6: Transit Connections

Not everyone can drive to parks. For those who cannot drive, or for those who choose not to own a vehicle, park access becomes limited to places within walking distance, where there is transit access, or where pedestrians feel safe reaching the park from a transit connection. Increasing transit service and access to parks will give more people the ability to reach parks by other means, therefore expanding the number of people who can visit parks.

Work with municipalities and public transit providers to ensure safe pedestrian access to parks from nearby bus stops and rail stations. Providing sidewalks and crosswalks along these routes will help to ensure the safe arrival of visitors utilizing public transit. Bicycle share programs at local train stations could provide an opportunity for transit users to access parks more easily, especially if marked bicycle trails are provided along the route. Including transit directions, in addition to the driving directions provided on the County's Department of Parks and Recreation website, could help encourage more park visitors to utilize public transportation.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 2.7: Vehicular Improvements

Vehicular access is how and where people enter parks by car, and includes such infrastructure as the intersections, traffic signals, driveways, and parking lots. Making it safer, more intuitive, and easier to travel through intersections, signals, and driveways, and to park, will improve access to parks for visitors who drive there. In other instances, several County parks experience problems with cut-through traffic. Improving and expanding this infrastructure could make the parks more efficient, safe, convenient, and attractive to visitors. Many factors affect park access, such as the various events that take place throughout the County's parks, where events can strain parking capacity. Understanding parking demands for different types of events is critical to managing the long-term safety and enjoyment of these facilities. Requiring access and traffic management plans for certain events may help to alleviate parking demand. Consideration could also be given to coordinating with neighboring businesses to create satellite parking.

The installation of traffic calming devices such as fifteen mile-per-hour speed limits, roundabouts, speed humps, and other strategies could be explored to improve traffic safety in and around parks for both cars and non-motorized traffic. Raised crosswalks could serve a dual purpose of slowing down vehicular traffic, while also helping improve pedestrian visibility and safety.

Objective 2.8: Improve Pathways

Assess internal pathways throughout parks to ensure they are adequately sized to meet user demand and minimize congestion. The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) recommends that heavily used shared-use pathways be a minimum of ten feet wide, with two feet of grading on either side. However, if more than thirty percent of the pathway's total traffic is pedestrian, a wider path of eleven to fourteen feet is suggested. Path design should also keep in mind the importance of smooth surfaces for longevity as well as ease of use for bicycle riders and those utilizing mobility assistance devices. In areas where paving is not possible, dirt or gravel pedestrian paths could be installed alongside paved pathways for added width.



Concerts in the Park. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 2.9: Future Trends

As referenced in the Transportation and Mobility Element, technological advancements are having profound impacts on transportation and the built landscape. Improving vehicular access should also consider how to plan for a changing transportation future, including the growth in popularity of electric vehicles, ride-hailing services, and car-sharing. Designating “Drop-Off Zones” eliminates the challenge of riders having to communicate their location, which can be particularly daunting in some of the larger parks that span multiple municipalities. These zones could be especially helpful during large events.

The strategic installation of electric vehicle charging stations, a goal of the County’s Recycling and Sustainability division, could also be considered throughout parks and other recreational facilities, particularly those parks with significant daily attendance, the ability to host large events, and where parking is plentiful would be likely candidates.

Objective 2.10: Event Parking

Consider the feasibility of parking associated with park events and activities such as movie nights, cultural festivals, and multi-day events at various park locations.

Each event and each park have unique characteristics. Consideration of how different events could impact traffic volume is critical to planning the necessary accommodations. In instances where access and parking demand is likely to exceed capacity, require event planners to provide access and traffic management plans.

For parks without the parking capacity to support large events, establish shared-use agreements with nearby organizations to address parking shortfalls. Coordinate with nearby businesses or community organizations with parking garages and lots with excess parking to create satellite parking. Satellite parking could require the use of shuttle bus services, which would necessitate cooperation with other County departments and potentially public and private transit providers.



Bergen County Zoo. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development



Ramapo Valley County Reservation.
Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 3: Steward Our Environmental Resources

What is it?

Environmental resources include all living and nonliving contributors to the woodlands, wetlands, and stream valleys that make up the ecosystem. Stewardship is defined as taking an active role in the care and maintenance of something, in this case the biological diversity, natural resources, and overall quality of natural lands.

What will it do?

Environmental stewardship will protect the wildlife, forests, wetlands, and waterways in the county parks using strategies like floodplain and stormwater management, considering best practices such as low impact development and green infrastructure. Protecting natural areas brings multiple benefits. In managing stormwater, natural areas slow rain and flood waters, filter pollutants, and reduce the need for hard infrastructure systems and their associated capital and operating costs. Natural areas are themselves a system for absorbing stormwater and preventing flooding.

Why is it important?

Although most of the County is developed, the Highlands region is a significant source of drinking water. The surrounding forested landscape helps ensure the high quality of these waterways, which provides habitat for fish, making places such as the Ramapo River a popular destination for fishing. The Hackensack Meadowlands, which form the estuarine boundary where the freshwaters of the Passaic and Hackensack Rivers drain to the saline waters of the Atlantic Ocean, provide important habitat and breeding grounds for many species. Both areas are under constant development pressure, and there have been repeated efforts to relax the environmental protections established for these areas. In addition, places such as the Hackensack Meadowlands are threatened by invasive plants, animals, and pests, and have been impacted by dumping and pollution, including contamination from organic compounds and heavy metals. Environmental stewardship protects endangered and threatened species in our parks and ensures a stable ecosystem by maintaining a diverse array of species. Further, effective stewardship can help ensure that environmental resources are managed responsibly to promote functioning ecosystems and maximize the natural benefits of open space. For example, ensuring that appropriate plantings are located along waterways can reduce erosion and provide shade that regulates water temperatures, which is critical for some aquatic species. Replanting some turf grasses, where appropriate, with native grasses can reduce the need for chemical fertilizers, while also providing habitat space for other plants and animals. Environmental stewardship also provides economic and infrastructure benefits, such as how natural areas can absorb stormwater, mitigate flooding, and filter pollutants from waterways.

Objective 3.1: Permeable Surfaces

Reducing impervious surfaces and managing stormwater on-site is a key part of stormwater management. Existing parking lots, playing fields, courts, and underutilized sidewalks and pathways could be converted to permeable surfaces. Where appropriate, converting these surfaces to permeable may help mitigate flooding.

Objective 3.2: Implement Bioretention

Retrofit existing curb cuts or drainage inlets to incorporate green infrastructure techniques, such as bioretention to reduce the impact of stormwater on adjacent water bodies. Bioretention treats stormwater runoff close to the source and reduces the need for structural systems and their elements such as curb cuts, drains, inlets, and piping. While the primary intention of these bioretention features and bioswales is to treat stormwater, they can also provide secondary benefits, including habitat and aesthetics, through the installation of planted spaces.

Objective 3.3: Restore Gullies

Slow and retain stormwater through the restoration of existing erosion gullies using regenerative stormwater conveyance techniques. Protecting areas that are susceptible to erosion and sediment loss is a green infrastructure practice, applicable to parks, that is recognized by the state as a best management practice for managing stormwater.



Ramapo Valley County Reservation. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 3.4: Restore Shorelines

Restore shorelines with robust vegetation and appropriate grading to create more resilient edge conditions. Protection of waterfront areas from flooding and storm surges is receiving increasing attention as extreme weather events become more intense and more frequent. Communities worldwide are identifying ways to improve resilience to these weather events, meaning mitigation of both the immediate impacts, but also the speed at which post-storm recovery and return to normalcy can occur. Limiting development in vulnerable areas can help reduce damages and limit the loss of life, but this does not mean that communities need to abandon the waterfront. Preservation of land in floodplains and vegetating shorelines are just a few of the different approaches to improve resilience. Neighboring New York City has developed a hybrid approach in some areas, utilizing natural features that are combined with engineered flood protection (such as rip rap and other stone stabilization), while also including public pathways and park infrastructure that are resilient to periodic flooding. As stated in the Environmental and Natural Resources and Land Use and Housing elements, the municipalities along the Hudson River and in the Meadowlands have been designated as high risk for flooding by FEMA. Sea level rise will cause more frequent flooding in the future, especially as the low-lying natural lands that buffer storms, such as the Meadowlands, sink below rising waters. Preserving open space in these municipalities along the Hudson River or within the Meadowlands will prevent or decrease run-off and flooding that would occur due to impervious surface coverage. Preserving and restoring wetland areas in this region would create a natural barrier to flooding and allow wetlands to migrate inland with changing water levels. Providing vegetated open-channel conveyance systems discharging into and through stable vegetated areas is another green infrastructure practice recognized by the state to be a stormwater best management practice.



Objective 3.5: Stormwater Management Plan

Preparing stormwater management plans, either for the entire park system, or for individual parks, will help the parks transition from practices that degrade the environment to creating working landscapes that perform important ecological functions.



Objective 3.6: Protect Forested Habitats

Without prohibiting the achievement of larger goals, natural areas such as forests and watersheds should remain unspoiled even when used as parkland, and degraded ecosystems should be restored using native plants of varying heights and types, particularly those related to watersheds and reservoirs. Existing forest habitat should be conserved, particularly large areas of interior forest and contiguous riparian forest that contains mature forest buffers. Forest regeneration can be supported through restoration, enhancement, support of native species, avoiding deforestation and protection of mature tree canopies. Forests should be restored with native trees, with a focus on reconnecting habitat corridors. Fragmentation of existing forest patches should be avoided and where forests have been fragmented, they should be restored. Biodiversity should be enhanced using appropriate native plants and the use of non-native species should be avoided. As more specific management practices are beyond the scope of this Master Plan, a Forest Stewardship Plan should be developed for all County-owned forests.

Objective 3.7: Soften the Edges

Utilize low maintenance landscaping that encourages soil and water retention, particularly native vegetation that minimizes the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Soften the edges around pathways, roadways, and waterbodies through planted buffers of native vegetation. Replacing turf grass with native meadow vegetation can help improve water infiltration and create habitat that is not conducive to supporting Canada geese. Identify and limit mowing in some areas to re-establish grasslands and meadowlands, particularly during breeding seasons.

Objective 3.8: Invasive Species Management

Conservation of natural resources in existing parks and open spaces protects and improves the critical environments of the already-preserved open space along with preserving habitats of local fauna such as nesting sites for birds. This also extends to controlling invasive species such as Japanese stilt grass, Japanese knotweed, mile-a-minute vine, barberry, multiflora rose, the common reed, and porcelain berries as well as destructive animal population like Canadian geese and white tail deer, which both degrade natural resources. In effect, this strengthens protections on these lands, and further helps preserve them for future generations. Conservation of natural resources can offer many benefits: protecting biological diversity, fostering environmental stewardship, slowing rain and flood waters, filtering pollutants, and providing a continuous supply of clean water. Invasive species need to be removed or managed and control measures enacted. The common reed is particularly problematic in areas of Overpeck Park, along the shorelines of the Hackensack River, and on golf courses.

Although a controversial issue, predatory animal populations need to be reduced and controlled to diminish threats to birds and allow forest understories to regenerate. Particularly destructive populations include white tailed deer, the largest wild herbivore in New Jersey. Deer are an edge species and thrive in habitats that are found within parks. Without any natural predators to control the deer population, over-consumption of plant life by deer destroys the forest understory, a critical component necessary for providing habitats for birds and small mammals, and to provide seedlings that replace maturing trees. Regenerating forest tree species and the understory can be addressed in a Forest Stewardship Plan.

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

Objective 3.9: Encourage Park Stewardship

Integrating natural resource conservation into the County's parks and open spaces ensures that it is not secondary to other activities located in county parks, and conserving natural resources, through natural buffers and low-maintenance landscaping, can enhance these spaces and the surrounding community. Picnic areas, ball fields, trails, and other recreational facilities should complement and not interfere with natural resources. For example, out-of-play areas may be left in their natural state, or vegetation removal may be confined to existing road or trails. Interpretive signs could be installed along park pathways that describe habitats and native vegetation, and aid in educating park users in the best practices for management of parks and the treatment of certain areas, including green infrastructure.

A long-term Sustainability Plan could be developed to set standards for environmentally sound practices for concessions, building upon the existing goals of the County's Recycling and Sustainability Division. This includes measures such as recycling of glass, plastic, and metal, provision of water refill stations, using compostable utensils, and composting where feasible. Encourage and inform park visitors to reduce and properly dispose of waste through signage and placards. Discourage the use of single-use plastics and other non-biodegradable products and install recycling bins wherever they are lacking throughout the county. All efforts should be made to first reduce, and then recycle, waste streams.

Objective 3.10: Forest Stewardship Plan

Develop forest stewardship plans for parks and public open spaces that include adaptive management approaches to ensure Bergen County's remaining forests can be sustainable considering current threats from development, herbivory, pathogens, and a changing climate.

Objective 3.11: Habitat Management Plan

Through partnerships with municipalities and park stakeholders, develop habitat management plans for parks and public open spaces that are supported by the McFaul Environmental Center. These collaborations could form the basis for citizen science monitoring programs in partnership with local colleges and non-profit groups.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 4: Provide Diverse Golf and Recreation

What is it?

Created in 1947, the County Park System now encompasses a highly developed recreational network that provides a wide range of recreational, scenic, and natural areas. The park system includes a nationally accredited zoo, 6 golf courses, 2 horseback riding areas, an environmental center and nine historic sites. In the 39 separate county park areas, residents can walk, bike, ski, skate, jog, golf, picnic, camp, visit Revolutionary War sites, take guided nature hikes, swim, and ice skate, as well as engage in organized sports (including softball, tennis, basketball, and soccer), and lawn sports, such as bocce. In prior decades, Bergen County ran recreational programs such as tennis tournaments, and continues to provide recreation through its public golf course system. The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation is the prime provider of public golf in the County and surrounding areas of northern New Jersey. The 6 golf courses and their associated programs provide affordable, challenging, and accessible golf to residents and visitors. For other activities, the county primarily works with municipal, non-profit, and private entities to provide spaces for active recreation such as sports leagues and fitness classes.

What will it do?

Diversifying recreational opportunities in county parks will increase the number of park visitors, increase participation in park programming, and encourage park visitors to become stewards of the park system through participation in park planning and management. Park diversity allows residents to engage in physical fitness, rest and relaxation, and socialization; providing a wide array of facilities, such as tracks, hockey rinks, lawn bowling, and swimming pools, provides the community with recreational options that meet different interests.

Why should the county pursue it?

The County has invested many resources to provide the public with an array of recreational facilities. The mission of the Bergen County Department of Parks is to plan, promote, and administer comprehensive recreation services that make for safe, high quality, and enjoyable experiences. Increasing the use of parks will help realize a greater return on this investment when more people use and enjoy the park system.

Access to parks and open space, whether it be participation in a team or group activity, a stroll along a walkway, a visit to a zoo, or birdwatching in an undeveloped preserved space, is essential to the quality of life of Bergen County residents. Parks provide essential places for community activity, and recreation programs provide opportunities for people to improve their physical, mental, and emotional health. Increasing the public's engagement with parks can help more people realize the benefits of these activities and thereby support the parks and programs that provide these programs and amenities.

Bergen County golf courses constitute over ten percent of the County's park acreage. These courses contribute over \$7 million out of the \$9 million in annual revenues earned by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation. These properties form a critically important component of the parks system. In view of contemporary and projected development pressures and the closure of private golf courses in Bergen County, these courses constitute large tracks of essential open space with tremendous potential for providing broader service to the community and an opportunity for creative natural resource stewardship. While some open spaces can be left in a natural state, others, such as county golf courses, often require ongoing management to maintain in a specific state and to address interference from outside factors, such as invasive species.

Objective 4.1: Diversify Golf

Evaluate the current portfolio of golf courses to determine the possibility of offering more varied golf experiences. Existing courses could be renovated to create one or more championship-caliber courses, a Scottish links style course, an executive short course, and one or more Par 3 or Pitch and Putt courses. Opportunities to acquire additional golf course properties could be considered if private courses become available. A diversity of golf course types would provide new experiences for area golfers, the possibility of hosting regional or national tournaments, and could provide justification to update the greens fees structure. Creative programming could use the slow times to improve the diversity of programs offered and introduce the sport to new golfers. In other areas, golf courses have found ways to provide additional activities in the off-season months, such as cross-country skiing and disc golf. Introductory programs that reach out to new or marginalized golfers will provide a path for all those interested in the game. Overall, better facilities and a wider range of programs will improve the visitor experience for those using county golf courses.

Objective 4.2: User-Friendly Website

Continuously update the Bergen County golf website to ensure it meets the needs of its users, providing information on events, clinics, instruction, and course calendars, as well as an efficient way to register for courses, reserve spaces, and select tee times.

Objective 4.3: Enhance Amenities

Update facilities and improve amenities at county parks and golf courses to be comparable with the best and highest quality public parks and golf courses. Outdated facilities should be repurposed to meet new demands. Where large locker rooms are no longer utilized to prepare for a round or to store equipment, for example, these spaces could be transformed into social areas for meetings and food service. Facilities that provide well maintained rest rooms, comfortable indoor and outdoor sitting areas, and a welcoming food service area enhance the customer experience. People spend hours at the golf centers, not only on the course to play but also around the clubhouse for meals and refreshments before and afterwards.

County golf courses provide an excellent location for a multitude of events that extend beyond golf including venue spaces for other events, such as weddings and birthday parties, or off-season recreational use, such as cross-country skiing. Higher standards for amenities, including upgraded clubhouses, restrooms, unique food concessions, and modern golf concessions could enhance the year-round use of these facilities.

The clubhouse facilities at these courses are aging, and some have been identified in the Parks Master Plan as in need of repair, maintenance or refurbishment.



Overpeck Golf Course. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development.



Darlington Golf Course. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development.

Objective 4.4: Enhance Aesthetics

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

Objective 4.5: Courses as Resources

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

Objective 4.6: Map Courses

Develop a map of each county park and golf course that highlights existing habitats, such as mature woodlands, wetlands and stream corridors, special habitat concerns such as endangered or threatened species on the properties, and potential threats to existing habitats such as pathogens and invasive species. Such mapping is considered a best practice for golf courses by Audubon International and the United States Golf Association (USGA). The data collected for these maps can then be used for both course guides and reference, but also to inform development of different management and stewardship plans recommended throughout this Element, including those for habitat, forest, and stormwater. Installation of interpretive signs along course and park pathways could describe various habitats and native vegetation, and aid in educating park users in the best practices for management of parks and the treatment of certain areas. Interpretive signage for Green Infrastructure could also help to educate and explain the measures being taken to support sustainable practices.

Objective 4.7: Maintain Plants

Establish and maintain a variety of native plants, from ground cover to shrub and tree layers in habitat areas such as woods. While some vegetation related to active recreation necessitates the use of turf grass, identify areas where native plants, trees, shrubs, and flowers that are well-suited to the existing soils can be utilized. This includes maintaining the understory in forested woodlands, grasses and herbaceous plants in tall grass areas, aquatic plants in water bodies, and shrubbery and native plants along shorelines.

Objective 4.8: Naturalize Areas

For golf courses and other active recreation uses, most out-of-play areas could be left in a natural state. In the case of golf courses, leave certain out-of-play areas off-limits, using buffers, mounted signs, fencing, or designated environmentally sensitive zones per USGA rules. Confine vegetation removal to existing roads, trails, cart and walking paths, and other necessary areas to protect wildlife habitats, endangered or threatened wildlife or plant species, and shorelines from disturbance by golfers and maintenance activities.

Objective 4.9: Enhance Nesting

Where appropriate in out-of-play areas, nesting boxes or other structures could enhance nesting sites for birds. Known bird or den sites could be staked or flagged to notify golfers and maintenance personnel to avoid disturbance. During bird nesting season, avoid the removal of shrubs and trees when nests are present, and limit mowing of fields to protect these habitats, consistent with best practices developed by Audubon International and the United States Golf Association (USGA) for golf courses.

Objective 4.10: Improve Water Quality

Improve the water quality of waterbodies in and around county parks and golf courses through changes in water management strategies. Reduce nutrient loading to water bodies using slow-release fertilizers, spoon-feeding, and filtering drainage through vegetative or mechanical filters. To minimize nutrient and chemical input, implement environmentally sensitive plant management techniques within 25 feet of all water bodies. For example, raising mowing heights to 3-inch turf 25 feet along shorelines can significantly slow and filter runoff. Further protection of waterways could include limiting chemical treatments near waterbodies through the designation of “no spray” zones, using spot treatments, increasing thresholds for pest problems, using covered booms, and taking the weather into account prior to application.

Visual monitoring of water bodies can identify some water quality problems, such as erosion, algae, aquatic weed growth, fish kills, and sediment buildup. When water quality problems are identified, prioritize low impact corrective measures. Proper aeration, bio-filters, vegetation management, and bio-controls can reduce or eliminate the need for chemical algae control. When aquatic weed management is required, a physical solution such as hand removal of plants could be sought first, and the least toxic method of weed control second.

Objective 4.12: Reduce Water Use

Irrigation is a necessity to maintain certain active recreation fields and golf courses, however, opportunities may exist to curb water usage, such as on unused or minimally used areas. Watering of “hot spots” could target area of need only, rather than running the entire irrigation system. Additionally, setting sprinklers to run during dew periods will maximize efficient use, in contrast to peak evapotranspiration times. Maintaining soils and turfgrass to maximize water absorption and reduce runoff and evaporation through maintaining soil cover, improving soil structure, improving soil drainage, and adding or maintaining natural organic matter in the soil. Monitor and record daily water use in order to set targets for yearly improvement.

Objective 4.12: Minimize Chemicals

Ensure safe storage, application, and handling of chemicals, and reduce actual and potential environmental contamination through the adoption of best management practices adopted by Audubon International and the United States Golf Association for golf courses. This includes minimizing the use of fertilizers and herbicides through site-specific assessments of soil type and properties, to determine the most suitable plant species and/or the dominant native plant community for each course. Soil types could then be inventoried for all playing surfaces and conditions such as soil structure, nutrient levels, organic content, compaction, and water infiltration assessed regularly. Soil test information can then inform subsequent fertilize application. Regular amendments of organic content can help improve soil health, as well as aerating, and improving water infiltration to cultivate a diverse, living biotic soil community. Records of treatments employed, and their effectiveness could be maintained and used to guide future pest control decisions. Green, tee, and fairway mowing heights should be at levels that can be reasonably maintained on a day-to-day basis without continually stressing turf or maximizing chemical inputs.

Pest-resistant or stress-tolerant cultivars could be planted on playing surfaces and in landscaping, particularly plant species best suited for local climate, soils, and growing conditions. Identify and record the locations where turf “hot spots” where disease or insect outbreaks first occur, along with other areas where poor growing conditions often lead to problems. Aesthetic and functional thresholds for insects, fungal disease, and weeds could be established for all managed areas.

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



New Jersey Palisades. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Donna Brenman, Bergen County

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 5: Improve Amenities and Infrastructure

What is it?

Protecting open spaces and establishing parks are only the initial steps in a long-term process. Aging park facilities, particularly restroom facilities, eventually need maintenance, repairs, and modernization to remain attractive and relevant to visitors.

What will it do?

Better infrastructure and ongoing maintenance will improve visitor experiences and create better recreation opportunities, as well as access to these recreation opportunities.

Why should the county pursue it?

Better infrastructure will improve visitor experiences, which may result in more numerous and more satisfied park users. For example, an enhanced zoo facility will help ensure that animals continue to receive appropriate physical, environmental and behavioral care, while also providing programming that accommodates the interests of residents and visitors. An improved environmental center can better educate residents and encourage respect for, and conservation of, natural resources. Better golf courses will encourage more use, which will generate additional park revenues to invest back into the county park system. Improving running and biking trails can provide both better recreation and transportation opportunities, as can adding amenities like bike parking and storage.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 5.1: Diversity of Food Concessions and Venues

While not every park is an appropriate venue for adding a food concession, expanded food options at some county parks could enhance the park experience. For example, child-friendly food offerings would complement playground and zoo experiences.

Portable or temporary options, such as spaces for food trucks or pop-up huts, would provide opportunities to test various food offerings without incurring the large investment required for permanent restaurant facilities. Temporary options can range from a complicated gourmet experience to a simple ice cream cart, depending on the specific park. In properties with high numbers of visitors, underutilized facilities, or available space for new amenities, consider the possibility of adding restaurant infrastructure.

In exhibiting a commitment to sustainability, follow environmentally sound practices for concessions, including, minimizing glass, plastic, and metal, provision of water refill stations, using compostable utensils, and composting where feasible. Establishing a long-term Sustainability Plan for park operations could outline standards for concessionaires and to facilitate converting existing park practices and concession requirements into sustainable practices.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 5.2: Athletic Amenities

Adequate and balanced facilities and amenities meet the current and future needs of residents and visitors. They are diverse enough to accommodate the many different groups that use parks and are balanced appropriately between active and passive recreation. Diversifying facilities to include rock climbing, ziplining, rappelling, boat rentals, fitness stations, bicycle/surrey rentals, and bike repairs allow the community to engage in new and interesting activities. The addition of year-round athletic facility to the Bergen County park system could provide additional support for healthy lifestyles and encourage participation in recreation sports and fitness.

As life expectancies continue to increase, it will be important to provide recreational activities and amenities that are accessible and attractive to people of all ages and ability levels. As the population diversifies, interest in previously unfamiliar sports, activities, and cultural events may become apparent. Increased engagement with the parks and park activities will grow support for parks preservation and expansion. To determine what programs or activities may be of interest to the community, surveying the recreational needs and preferences of county residents may be appropriate. In Middlesex County, for example, a growing South Asian population has resulted in the repurposing of existing, or acquisition of new, parks to include spaces to play cricket.

Similarly, establishing convenient and safe non-motorized connections throughout and between parks and other destinations can give people the ability to enjoy parks without having to drive and expand their open space and recreation opportunities by allowing them to enjoy two or more facilities without the additional roadway traffic and parking demands. For those who enjoy walking, running, or biking, a network of trails, bikeways, and pathways can give them both optimal recreation and transportation opportunities. Incrementally establishing new and linking existing trails, bikeways, and pathways, both as part of park improvements and through new development could form a comprehensive network of non-motorized transportation corridors throughout the county. These pathways should not just be limited to inter-park connections, but multipurpose networks that provide safe and convenient access to residential neighborhoods, parks, schools, workplaces, shopping, major open spaces, and other destinations.

In addition, an enhanced zoo and environmental center can contribute to an optimal visitor experience. These two facilities are highly visible assets of the park system, which can and do attract many visitors to our parks. Visitors of all ages are provided with opportunities to learn about local and global animal and plant species, conservation programs, and the need to respect and preserve animal and natural resources.

Increase opportunities for water access. Recreational waters are opportunities for exploration, discovery, and enrichment for a variety of activities both on and off the water. They build a sense of place and strengthen community identity, resource protection, and resource restoration. Having more access points such as boat docks and fishing areas will improve the visitor experience by giving more opportunities to enjoy the water and participate in waterborne recreation.

Objective 5.3: Social Amenities

Having adequate and balanced facilities and amenities will ensure most people will find something to do or enjoy in the park system. Having complete and balanced offerings will contribute to a positive visitor experience and give visitors a reason to return to and participate in their parks. Social amenities such as artisan markets, family movie nights, seasonal events, mazes, and glamping (upscale camping) will attract families and visitors of all ages and interests.

Community gardens offer another public benefit. Often located on publicly-owned properties, community gardens can provide local residents with the opportunity to cultivate a small plot of land to grow fresh fruits and vegetables. The Rutgers New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station's Cooperative Extension of Bergen County, which operates out of the administration building at One Bergen County Plaza, provides trainings on community garden development, in addition to other programming focusing on family well-being, agriculture, the environment, and youth development.



Objective 5.4: Restroom Facilities

The availability of well-maintained, accessible working bathrooms allows visitors to spend more time at the park. Inventory the type, location, and condition of existing facilities throughout the park system to identify opportunities to add new facilities and where to upgrade existing facilities.

Objective 5.5: Inclusive Parks

A common goal in this element and throughout this Master Plan is to ensure that Bergen County's infrastructure and facilities can be enjoyed by residents and visitors of all ages and abilities. ADA standards ensure that more people can access facilities, additional opportunities may exist to ensure that parks offer amenities that serve the needs and interests of those with special needs, such as limited mobility, or visual and hearing impairments. This can include specially designed playgrounds that foster an inclusive atmosphere, providing benches along pathways, and sufficient accessible parking spaces.

The 16 existing playgrounds in County parks do not address children with special needs or limited mobility. Playgrounds located in **Fair Lawn** and **Rutherford** are inclusive. Further exploration is needed to identify playgrounds that are suitable for incorporating universal design principles and adding amenities that can cater to the needs of all. One of those principles is to provide spaces where all residents can play together and enjoy appropriate physical and mental stimulation, and another is to fulfill resident's needs to recreate without any physical obstacles.

Improvements for the elderly with limited mobility include safe and barrier-free access, an appropriate number of designated parking spaces, benches along pathways, and short walking distances with appropriate resting areas. Offerings that provide stimulation for the senses, such as gardens that feature plants with scents, tactile sensations, and color, could provide enjoyment for all residents, but especially for those with special needs.

Objective 5.6: Historic Properties

Historic properties offer potentially unique public event venues. Although there are flooding challenges, the Hackensack Waterworks offers a great potential opportunity in the Bergen County park system. The Hackensack Waterworks is an exceptional asset that could be repurposed for a park-related reuse. The built infrastructure of the Hackensack Waterworks and the outdoor spaces of Van Buskirk Island offer opportunities for a variety of events and uses. Furthermore, the architecture and layout of the Hackensack Waterworks are spectacular and have tremendous re-use potential if used in appropriate ways. Recognizing the flooding issues in the area, the site could incorporate resiliency best practices, serving as a demonstration site for the region as communities continue to learn to adapt to flood events brought on by a changing climate.

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

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



Ramapo Valley County Reservation. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 6: Program Park Spaces and Events

What is it?

The visitor experience is an encapsulation of the perceptions, feelings, reactions, and encounters a person has while visiting a park. An optimal experience is one that visitors find sufficiently rewarding to merit repeat. Events of all sizes and types can enrich the park experience, provide new opportunities for recreation and socialization, and activate underutilized spaces. It is critical for events to occur at venues that have the appropriate size, level of accessibility, infrastructure, and ecology to sustainably and successfully accommodate participants.

Developing a comprehensive public relations program for county parks and open spaces and providing more opportunities for local citizens to engage in the planning and care of open space and parks. Such a program could be enhanced through the development of an annual marketing program, containing goals, and strategies and tactics for accomplishing those goals. It should consider communication approaches that reach audiences in relevant and targeted ways, based on what parks offer during different times of the year.

The county's larger parks, including Campgaw Mountain County Reservation, Overpeck County Park, Van Saun County Park, and Darlington County Park, may be conducive to large events, while many of the smaller parks could host small- to medium-sized local events and programs that could benefit neighboring communities. Limited parking options and proximity to residential neighborhoods are factors determining appropriateness and where events could be accommodated successfully.

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



Senior Picnic. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

What will it do?

This goal will direct efforts and resources to improve the experience of using parks, beyond just offering more programs and activities. Improvements in distinct elements of a park experience, corresponding to the objectives below, can help change the visitor experience for the better.

Many events can be hosted in partnership with local civic and cultural organizations. An expansion of the current fitness and wellness series could partner with local gyms, yoga studios, and other similar organizations. These businesses might be amenable to providing an instructor to lead a class in exchange for the opportunity to get in front of a larger audience and the potential to distribute marketing materials. The offerings by the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation's Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs recognize the value of the arts, history, and civic pride. Their partnerships include local libraries for storytelling, community groups assisting in presenting art, dance, and craft shows, and educational and environmental partners for programs like bird watching, ecological tours, historical tours, and other programming. Offering educational programs, particularly environmental and historic, is a way for people to learn what the natural and historic resources of the County are and why they must be conserved. Educating children ensures that knowledge carries into future generations.

Furthermore, using volunteers for park clean up, weeding, and other activities can provide residents a way to give back to their park. Community volunteers could augment the current activities of the Rutgers Master Gardeners and the Bergen County Environmental Commission. Community volunteerism, in addition to preserving the well-being of the park system, is also an attractive initiative for corporate sponsorship that could offset the cost of the tools and equipment need for stewardship activities.

Why should the county pursue it?

Increasing the seasons, days, and hours of programs offered, an offering them in more locations can help encourage more people to visit parks and enjoy the benefits of them. More people using parks can also raise the visibility of the park system. Better visitor experiences can result in more satisfied park users, who in turn can support and become more involved in their parks. Visitors can be powerful advocates for county parks, and the word-of-mouth or online reviews describing these positive experiences (or negative experiences), can influence return visits and additional visitors. Maintaining a strong interest in parks and open spaces is critical for their long-term viability and protection. Increasing public awareness ultimately supports the goal of increasing open space through public appreciation by having more people appreciate and understand the importance of these resources in order to support their protection and preservation. Understanding the interests and preferences of visitors would help to understand and meet the needs of park users and to coordinate potential programs, events, and amenities with a wide range of users and partners.

The County of Bergen wants to give people many reasons to visit parks by having diverse, exciting, and educational programming for all ages and backgrounds. Educating children is vital to maintaining the environmental and historic character of the County, providing future generations with an understanding of the importance of these places. Several County parks have spaces large enough to hold regional-scale events like food and cultural festivals, outdoor concerts, or fairs. New programs could increase the appeal of smaller parks, making them destinations that provide more social interaction. Existing offerings of movie nights, public art exhibitions, fitness activities, music events, storytelling, fundraising walks and runs, and community celebrations can be expanded or added at several of the smaller parks.

There is also the potential for sponsorships to offset costs and in some cases, produce revenue. For example, a movie night has non-intrusive possibilities for sponsorship that are easy to implement and have the potential to offset event production costs. A smaller-scope music series that provides many locations and performances could also be an attractive sponsorship opportunity, particularly when existing facilities are utilized.



Overpeck Park. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 6.1: Create an Event Guide

Develop an easy to understand Event Guide that provides event planners with the necessary information to understand the parks system as a venue, including photos and data about recent events in the parks and pertinent information that would help event producers identify appropriate spaces.

Objective 6.2: Communicate with Producers

Ensure that potential event producers receive the information they need to make informed decisions, including a general estimate of usage fees and a checklist of deliverables that would be required in order to issue a permit.

Objective 6.3: Sustainable Events

To further the county's commitment to sustainability, require event producers to prepare and submit a formal plan to minimize the environmental footprint of the proposed event. For larger events, water diversion, waste management, and recycling plans may be necessary. Encourage event producers to utilize alternative or renewable energy sources and potentially offset the carbon footprint of event operations, while also implementing initiatives that conserve water and reduce the environmental impact of water runoff, wastewater and litter, and, plastic litter.



Van Saun Senior Picnic. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 6.4: Unify Events Calendar

Although different entities, such as the Van Saun Park Zoo, the golf courses, and the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs, publicize their own events, there is currently no unified marketing plan for all the events that take place in Bergen County parks. The creation of an overall internal events calendar is vital to ensuring all staff is up to date on events and programming throughout the parks system, facilitating inter-agency communication and coordination. An internal events calendar that includes not only top-line event information like date, time, and location, but also be updated throughout the event pre-production process to include all relevant event documents like site plans, operations timelines, vehicle lists, and security plans. For example, the Operations Division could enter information regarding scheduled maintenance to facilities that could impact availability for events.

Objective 6.5: Update Fee Schedule

The current fee schedule is not consistent with current park system operations and industry standards. The fee schedule for events is based on the expected number of participants, which can lead to event producers misstating potential attendance to keep permit fees low. The current system limits accurate forecasts of event operations and leads to the inability to accurately project internal event needs and requirements. Instead, a fee schedule based on the scope or type of event activities could factor in designated area or venue, the type of event activity (such as exclusive private events, recreational or sporting events, charitable fundraising events, non-commercial community events, filming/photography use, picnic/party events, and school/camp events) and the expected event revenue. Protection of the resources and integrity of the park system is a priority for every event. Permits for large events could include a clean-up fee to cover the cost of any post-event repairs or staff clean-up required.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 7: Increase Public Access to Information

What is it?

Increasing the awareness of the facilities, activities, and programs in parks will mean communicating their availability and benefits to a greater number of people. The county currently maintains information on its parks and recreational facilities on the county website, and its social media presence (currently including Twitter and Facebook) is used to advertise events and important updates, such as unplanned closures. A unified marketing plan for all events across the different County entities could build upon the existing outreach programs to inform existing users and attract new visitors for greater awareness and visibility.

This could include improvements to advertising and marketing, such as a comprehensive branding identity, that expand the reach of how many people can see, hear, and read about county parks and open space. Advertising may need to be expanded to additional social media platforms (such as Instagram and YouTube) and other apps, be provided in more languages, or shared with more organizations.

What will it do?

Increasing public access to information can communicate the benefits of parks and programs to a greater number of people, increasing the use of, care for, and involvement in the parks system.

Why should the county pursue it?

Reaching a greater number of people can increase the use of, care for, and involvement in their parks.



Senior Picnic. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 7.1: Brand Positioning

Positioning is a single statement of whom the brand is for, the value the brand delivers, what sets the brand apart from the competition, and why the brand is important. Input received as part of the preparation of the County's Park Master Plan was used to propose the following brand positioning statements:

Bergen County Parks Are For:
Residents and visitors who feel the stressors of modern life;

Bergen County Parks Provide:
An experience that leaves residents feeling more energized;

Because of:
Today's constantly plugged in reality,

We Believe:
A day spent in the park has never been more essential for healthy lives.



Wortendyke Barn Bluegrass Concert. Source: Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs

Objective 7.2: Brand Driver

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

“UNPLUG to RECHARGE”

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

Objective 7.3: Marketing Plan

Create an annual marketing plan with goals, and the strategies and tactics for their implementation. The marketing plan could include the collection of data describing park visitors and their desires to better understand and meet the needs of park users and to coordinate potential programs, events, and amenities with a wide range of users and partners. Annual reevaluation of communication approaches, both those used by the county, and potential new forms of communication, can help maximize outreach to visitors.

Objective 7.4: Public Awareness

Implementing a new brand across the park system, emphasizing signage, digital technologies, public relations, and social media, requires a public awareness campaign that communicates the BCDPR brand position and brand driver.

Objective 7.5: Experience Traits

Experience traits are high-level guides that consistently express the brand across multiple categories and to different markets and in different forms of communication. These factors help create, and help audiences recognize the brand no matter where or how it is encountered. The suggested experience traits for Bergen County parks are: Uncomplicated, Energizing, and Inviting.

Objective 7.6: Create New Logo

The present Department of Parks and Recreation logo, along with the logos of other County departments, are based on the Bergen County Seal. Although the current logo supports the overall Bergen County brand, it does not necessarily speak to the reasons why people would visit parks. Creating a new logo for the Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation would reflect the brand positioning. A strong, easily identifiable logo that represents the park system, similar to the way the green maple leaf sign on all New York City parks identifies them, is a key element that can visually communicate the BCDPR brand – what the Department represents and offers to the community. This logo identity could then complement the design of wayfinding and interpretive signage in each park location.



Ramapo Valley County Reservation. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 7.7: Unify Parks Signage

Adoption of an easily identifiable logo and branding guidelines can help communicate a unified identity. A unified identity and brand can be supported by adopting sign guidelines that ensure visibility for all users, which can also provide relevant information throughout the parks system. The current array of shapes, sizes, colors, typefaces, and materials used for signage is as diverse as the parks themselves. The age and condition of signs across different locations also varies tremendously. Some parks could benefit from more wayfinding signs, while others have an overabundance of signs.

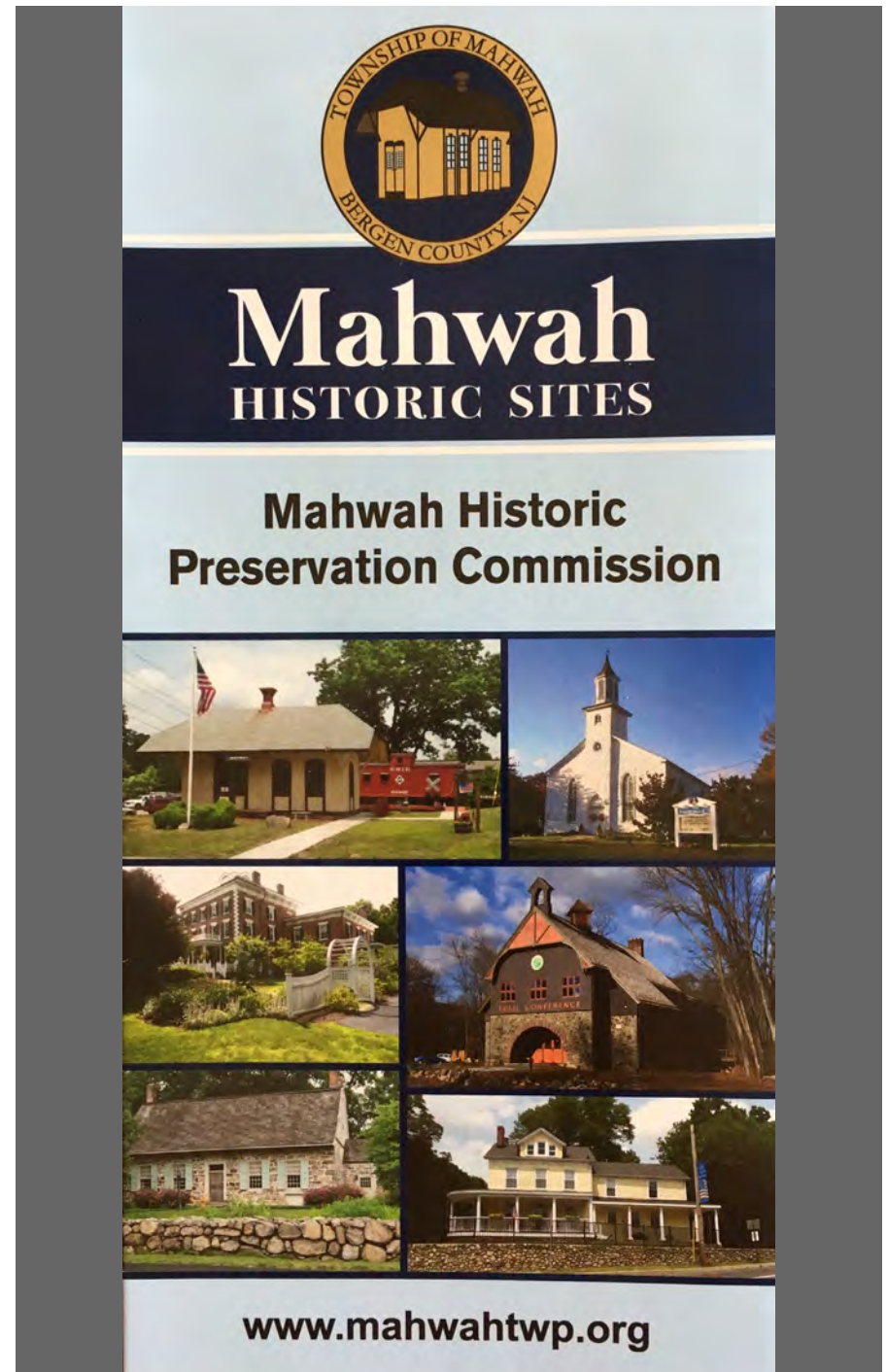
Objective 7.8: Unify Events Calendar

Although different entities, such as the Van Saun Park Zoo, the golf courses, and the Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs, publicize their own events, there is currently no unified marketing plan for all of the events that take place in Bergen County parks. While a previous recommendation recommended an internal operations calendar for coordination between county agencies, the creation of an overall external events calendar is vital to promoting events and programming throughout the parks system. An external events calendar could serve as a “one stop shop” for visitors interested in the different offerings available at each of the county’s parks.

Objective 7.9: Digital Infrastructure

The public outreach process for the County's Parks Master Plan revealed a common theme that a lack of knowledge existed about the Bergen County Parks System and the diversity, amenities, and programs provided, especially among younger families. Improvements to the existing website and a coordinated digital communications strategy could support the needs of both park and golf course visitors, highlight weekly programs and events, and allow ease of filling out permits and applications. In addition, an email newsletter could notify residents about special events and programs. An interactive app that allows park visitors to easily find parks that offer specific amenities and experiences would also help residents plan their visits and explore new opportunities within the parks system.

As recommended in the Arts, History, and Historic Preservation Element, technological innovations and increasing internet access and literacy create opportunities for improved access using interactive applications for virtual tours, as well as enhanced visits. Considering that many of the county's parks and historic assets are often not mutually exclusive, a smartphone-based application could be developed for these sites that provides additional context for visitors, including pictures, descriptions (in place of, or to complement interpretive signage), use policies, and directions. In nearby Paterson, the Mill Mile app provides visitors with a self-guided walking tour of the Paterson Great Falls National Historical Park that is narrated by residents, historians, actors and athletes, allowing them to visit and learn about the area on their own pace and schedule. The County's Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs has developed a Guide by Cell program (cellular phone guidance tool) that allows visitors to use their smartphones to "visit" eight of the county-owned sites. Expansion of this program to include parks and the incorporation of additional features such as virtual/augmented reality (such as pointing a phone at a site pulls up historic imagery of the same place) could help attract more users and foster greater interest and appreciation for county parks.



Mahwah Historic Preservation Commission Brochure.

Source: Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 8: Operate and Maintain Sustainable Parks

What is it?

Operate parks and open space in the most organized, efficient, and sustainable manner to help ensure the long-term financial and environmental health of these spaces. Often, the initial costs of sustainable practices can discourage their use in favor of less expensive alternatives, however, these costs do not always factor in longer term savings of the sustainable practices nor the long-term negative consequences of the non-sustainable alternative. Conserving the natural resources, ecology, and habitats of Bergen County's parks and open space for future generations and mitigating the impacts of operating and maintaining these parks benefit the broader environment. This could mean using alternative, renewable energy sources to power our operations, employing environmentally sound concessions, and using sustainable maintenance practices. While active recreation facilities are minimally developed as compared to other land uses, they are often managed intensively to maintain their usefulness. For sports fields and golf courses, this includes mowing, soil amendment, chemical treatment, and irrigation. Facilities open to night-use require the extension of electrical and other utility services and can benefit from solar-powered lighting or modern LED lighting—the brightness of which can be adjusted based on expected use or time of day. Considering low impact sustainable designs, including recommendations made in the County's Parks Master Plan, could mitigate some of the negative effects of these practices. Utilizing native plantings along with raising mowing heights along stream banks of golf courses to reduce erosion and properly filter runoff. Limiting irrigation to areas most in need of water can limit water usage. Using green infrastructure—such as converting underutilized sidewalks and pathways to permeable surfaces or converting drainage inlets to bioretention swales—can also manage stormwater and limit pollution to surface waters.

What will it do?

Adequately maintaining and operating the park system in the present ensures the current enjoyment of our parks without compromising their ability to meet the needs of future park users.

Why should the county pursue it?

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



Ramapo Valley County Reservation. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 8.1: Sustainable Events

Sustainable management of the physical landscape of county parks, facilities, and open spaces, sustainable practices can be complemented through sustainable practices conducted on-site during large events. Working with event producers to select sites and facilities can help ensure compatibility between the proposed event and the available park infrastructure. As part of the application process for larger events, a water diversion plan, a waste management plan, and a recycling plan could help mitigate the impacts that these events may have on the environment, while also encouraging water conservation, stormwater management, and litter reduction. Consider measures that would encourage event producers to use alternative or renewable energy sources and potentially offset the carbon footprint of event operations, while also implementing initiatives that conserve water and reduce the environmental impact of water runoff, wastewater and litter, particularly plastic litter.

Objective 8.2: Renewable Energy

Bergen County has shown leadership in placing solar panels on public facilities, including the parking deck at One Bergen County Plaza. Similar panels could be installed as appropriate in the parking lots at County parks. This would have the effect of generating energy while providing shade in the summertime, which could help to mitigate the heat island effect related to parking lot blacktop. Further, the energy generated could eventually be made available to parks visitors via charging stations for electric cars, or where appropriate and feasible to power park infrastructure.



Solar Panels. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 8.3: Water Conservation

The sustainable management and conservation of water resources is a common goal throughout this Master Plan. Similar to the Public Facilities and Services Element and Sustainability Element, the County of Bergen can lead by example in promoting water conservation in its parks. Reducing impervious surfaces is a key part of stormwater management. Existing parking lots, playing fields, courts, sidewalks, and pathways could be converted to permeable surfaces, where appropriate, which may help to mitigate flooding. Identify, and where appropriate, remove or replace impervious pavement with pervious surfaces. In some areas, excessive and unnecessary paved surfaces could be removed and re-vegetated, while in other areas, such as parking lots, pervious alternatives could be utilized. Permeable pavements require different maintenance practices, therefore, optimization of these green infrastructure alternatives will require appropriate training of maintenance personnel, such as the development of a Sustainable Operations guide.

Many paved park roadways and parking lots are adjacent to waterbodies. Methods of decreasing the use of road salt during winter storms, such as use of brines or sand, could be explored. Adopt environmentally friendlier options for use in County parks when available and where appropriate.



Objective 8.4: LEED Infrastructure

As recommended in the Sustainability Element, seeking ways to identify small improvements to county operations and facilities may help to manage some of the costs associated with the high costs of living which, at the local level in New Jersey, is particularly associated with property taxes. According to Sustainable Jersey, local governments spend about 10 percent of their budgets on energy. While up-front costs associated with alternative energy systems, sources, and energy-efficient design and equipment are often higher than conventional development, the long-term costs are often mitigated through reduced energy demand. Any new park infrastructure could be built according to the United States Green Building Council (USGBC)'s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. LEED standards are used to design a building that improves energy savings, water efficiency, reduces CO2 emissions, improves indoor environmental quality, and ensures stewardship of resources and sensitivity to their impacts.





Overpeck County Park Entrance. Source: Google StreetView

Objective 8.5: Efficient Lighting

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

Objective 8.6: Waste Stream Reduction

Prioritize the reduction of waste that is generated by parks and park operations, with all remaining waste streams recycled to the greatest extent possible. This could include restricting the sale of non-biodegradable products, particularly plastic, and composting organic waste. It also could mean installing recycling bins where there are none currently. Signage could encourage park visitors to carry out their waste where the placement of recycling bins is not feasible. Bottled water use could be discouraged by offering water bottle refill stations in appropriate locations. Corresponding signage could direct park visitors to these water bottle refill stations, and additional interpretive signage could explain the positive environmental impacts made through the decision to refill a water bottle. Reducing the waste stream from park concessions and at park events is critically important.

Objective 8.7: Sustainable Concessions

Exhibit a commitment to sustainability in food and other park concessions by requiring concessions to follow environmentally sound practices, such as recycling of glass, plastic, and metal, provision of water refill stations, using compostable utensils, and composting where feasible. A long-term Sustainability Plan could be developed to set standards for concessionaires and to facilitate converting existing park practices and concession requirements into sustainable practices.



Grand opening of the Red Wolf exhibit at the Bergen County Zoo. Source: Bergen County

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 9: Develop a Sustainable Business Model

What is it?

To maximize the benefits to residents provided by Bergen County parks, the existing Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation (BCDPR) organizational structure, competencies, and management practices should be reviewed. There are various options that could be considered to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the BCDPR in delivering park services and programming.

The prior parks management entity, the Bergen County Parks Commission (BCPC), was dedicated to meeting the demands for publicly managed open space. To support their mission, the BCPC had access to significant funding from County budget appropriations and Commissioner bonding initiatives. By 1970, funds available to the BCPC approached the equivalent of forty million in 2017 dollars, more than triple the annual expenses of the current BCDPR. The BCDPR now operates at roughly one third of the budget it had fifty years ago, while managing a park system that has more than doubled in acreage.

The Bergen County Parks Master Plan found that the County is currently investing less in park operations than other northern New Jersey counties with similar populations. The Morris County 2017 parks budget totaled \$15,995,721 to support 18,000 parkland acres. The Essex County 2017 parks budget totaled \$26,171,771 in support of 6,000 parkland acres, including the Essex County Zoo. The Essex County parks generated audited revenues in 2014 of \$12,856,984, primarily from their zoo, approximately thirty percent greater than Bergen County park revenues in 2016. The BCDPR spending per resident is approximately thirteen dollars, versus a Trust for Public Land (TPL) survey of cities across the country, where spending per resident ranges from nineteen dollars in Jersey City to \$478 in Saint Louis, Missouri. Total 2017 parks spending per resident in Morris County was \$51.

The Bergen County parks system currently generates significant revenues from a limited number of sources, including \$7,300,000 from golf courses, \$985,000 from the Van Saun Park Zoo, \$880,000 from permits and rentals, and \$200,000 from the Saddle Ridge Riding Center, plus lesser amounts from food and recreation concessions. However, these proceeds are not dedicated for reinvestment in the parks system. Instead, they are placed into the Bergen County General Fund, which supports a wide variety of programs. The BCDPR operates on an annual budget and capital project appropriations approved by the Bergen County Board of Commissioners.



Overpeck County Park. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design



Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial. Source: Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs

What will it do?

A sustainable business model helps to ensure that the county can continue to provide quality services, activities, and recreational amenities to residents and visitors at reasonable cost. Strengthening financial resources for open space and parks will increase the amount, reliability, and equity of available funding. Increasing the amount and quality of financial resources—such as utilizing grants, enlisting volunteer support, and offering unique programming to increase revenue—for open space and parks can help accomplish other goals in this chapter. Increased funding can help preserve more open space, create more parks, expand park programs, improve maintenance, and ensure the longevity of the park system, all while retaining a reasonable cost for visitors.

Why should the county pursue it?

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

Objective 9.1: Collaborative Partnerships

Managing an expansive system of parks and open spaces in one of the most densely populated counties in the United States is challenging and complex. The ability to leverage resources, attract volunteers, supporters, and collaborators is an important tool for the financial sustainability of the Bergen County parks system. A defining characteristic of the original Bergen County Parks Commission was the importance of public outreach and the amount of support and cooperation given by elected officials, civic groups, and private individuals. These collaborations facilitated acquisition of parkland properties, programming within parks, and support for park infrastructure development. Working within the existing funding system, consider be given to identifying partnerships with other county departments and agencies for programming that could achieve mutual goals that are financially efficient.

Many of Bergen County's parks are located within walking distance of residential areas, public schools, and community institutions, yet unfortunately, there are many children that do not have the opportunity to access these facilities. There are numerous reasons that inhibit park usage, from safe access to the park, to unfamiliarity with the park and its potential offerings. Partnering with local schools and other groups offer another way to introduce children and their families to Bergen County's parks, while teachers and volunteers can use these settings to tie in practical applications to classroom instruction.



Raft. Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 9.2: Public-Private Partnerships

Preparation of the County's Parks Master Plan involved input from different athletic, artistic, educational, environmental, historic, and social organizations. An ongoing and institutionalized County program to engage these various groups could help develop new programming, increase volunteer activities within parks, and encourage the public use of and support for the Bergen County park system. Explore opportunities to partner with other organizations on mutually beneficial initiatives.

The BCDPR currently has ad hoc collaborations with many non-profit groups, including the Bergen County Historical Society, the Teaneck Creek Conservancy, Bergen County Audubon Society, and the Friends of the Bergen County Zoo. These collaborations provide amenities and programming that enhances the visitor experience in parks. The County could prioritize the expansion of these types of volunteer opportunities. The establishment of a Bergen County Parks Conservancy could provide support for the entire system.

The expertise and focus of many non-profit groups could be engaged when considering various types of events within the parks, particularly at smaller venues that are targeted to local neighborhoods. The County could partner with and support these groups when they are organizing, marketing, and managing events within the parks. With input from the public and municipal representatives, the County could establish a mechanism to consider new programming and athletic offerings in the parks and to improve existing park programming.

Objective 9.3: Explore Funding Options

In order to acquire parklands for the future, to build, repair, and replace park infrastructure, add new programming, and maintain existing parkland, the BCDPR must secure the required funding on a consistent basis. As illustrated in previous goals and objectives, higher revenues could be obtained from events, golf courses, and opportunities for new or enhanced concessions in certain parks.

The Bergen County Department of Parks and Recreation could explore other funding options. Another option would be to explore outside funding in the form of donations, used by many county park commissions. In this case, a distinct entity legally separate from the County conducts fund raising for the parks programs and then turns the money over to a parks commission or department for specific purposes or purchases. A variation on this option includes donations made directly to the County for specific parks-related projects managed by the County.

Fundraising campaigns could supplement existing parks-specific trust funds the BCDPR already has for the Van Saun Park Zoo, the McFaul Environmental Center, and a golf scholarship. Donors could be solicited for specific programming and amenities at these facilities and to increase the scholarship fund.

The BCDPR may apply, during each annual funding cycle, to the Bergen County Open Space, Recreation, Floodplain Protection, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. In this way, the Open Space Trust Fund supports a number of County park improvements and in some cases may fund the acquisition of land for County park purposes. An increase in funds available in the Open Space Trust Fund would mean more potential support available for County park improvements and expansion of the County park system.

Maximizing the impact of the Trust Fund can leverage funding from other sources, thereby increasing the total funding available for open space preservation. In addition, a strategic preservation plan could identify where preservation could provide the most benefit, such as an urban park that provides an aesthetic benefit, public health benefit (such as improved air quality and access to recreation), and a stormwater management tool. In a suburban area, the factors might be different, and might include the potential to connect to other parks, the ability to protect local and regional water quality, and access to recreation.



Hackensack Water Works. Source: Bergen County Division of Cultural and Historic Affairs

Objective 9.4: Outdoor Advertising

Revenue streams that might contribute funds for Bergen County parks are outdoor advertising and sponsorships. Implementation of these types of programs would need to comply with applicable State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres rules.

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

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

Objective 9.5: Food Sponsorships

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

Objective 9.6: Voluntary Contributions

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

Objective 9.7: Practice Capital Planning

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



Lake Henry Trail, Continental Soldiers Park, Mahwah. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design

Objective 9.8: Business Office

Operations are the activities required to run programs and maintain parks daily. Customer service is the process by which an organization delivers its services or products to a client, and good customer service delivers it efficiently, fairly, cost effectively, and in a satisfying and pleasurable manner. Developing and implementing actions to streamline the delivery of recreational services to customers will enhance the visitor experience through improved maintenance, appearance, staff knowledge, information dissemination, and better communication with park staff and management. A dedicated business office, which would work with outside vendors and event planners, could track spending, income, events, and programs for each park and set permit and concession fees.

Behind every great park and every event in a park, there is a lot of organization and behind the scenes work. A dedicated BCDPR business office could track spending, income, events, and programs for each park and set permit and concession fees. This office would work with outside vendors, concessionaires, and event planners providing amenities to the park system.

Based on other large public park systems, significantly more revenue could be generated and used to cover costs related to maintaining, improving, and increasing park resources, programs, and infrastructure. However, to manage this business office, functions need to be expanded and reorganized into a distinct unit. A new BCDPR business office could provide:

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

Objective 9.9: Personnel Structure

The Director of Parks interfaces indirectly with County purchasing and legal functions, as well as the Board of Commissioners that approves annual budgets and bonding for capital improvements. The Parks Master Plan found that the current staffing level for park operations and maintenance is approximately 1.5 full time equivalent (FTE) per 10,000 residents, lower than what is found in Morris County (3.2 per 10,000 residents).

Establishing a modern organizational structure for the BCDPR and providing the staffing needed to maintain the parks system is a critical element in achieving the goals in this Element. This would include a number of functional staff positions to support public communication, stewardship and sustainability, and business. Dedicated staff would also be needed for providing digital support, such as maintaining a website and social media presence, and a financial analyst to support strategic and financial planning initiatives.



Meadowlands Mobile Lab. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design.



Saddle Ridge Stables. Source: Colliers Engineering & Design.

GOALS & OBJECTIVES

GOAL 10: Protect and Support Agriculture and Agriculture Areas

What is it?

Agriculture is the science and business concerned with cultivating land, raising crops, and feeding, breeding, and raising livestock. A subset of agriculture, silviculture, is the active management of wooded areas for timber resources. Agricultural areas are any lands and structures used for these purposes.

What will it do?

As mentioned in the previous section, Bergen County's Agriculture Development Board strives to maintain and encourage diverse agricultural operations, and the County is currently in the process of updating its Farmland Preservation Plan. Ensure the continued viability and presence of farms in Bergen County. Protecting agricultural areas means ensuring land remains in use for agriculture in perpetuity and is never developed. Supporting agriculture means enacting policies and implementing programs that help sustain the practice of farming in the county.

Why should the county pursue it?

Protecting and supporting agriculture provides many benefits, both tangible and intangible. From an economic perspective, farmland helps keep property taxes down. Studies have shown that local governments expend far more tax dollars to service the needs of residential and other development than for farmland properties. American Farmland Trust's 2010 report, Fact Sheet on Cost of Community Service Studies, found that on average, for every dollar in tax revenue, working/open lands require just 35 cents in government services. Residential property, however, requires \$1.16 in government services. Many studies have found that municipalities in New Jersey spend far less on government services for farm assessed properties than for other properties.¹³ These can help local farms thrive as they provide fresh-grown food and plants to local consumers; help reduce the level of governmental services municipalities would need to provide if the farms were developed; provide farm experiences for visitors to their community; and also provide jobs to the local economy.



Aquatic Activities: Source: Donna Brennan, Bergen County

Objective 10.1: Preserve remaining agricultural land and activities

The Bergen County Division of Economic Development, Workforce Development Board (WDB) and Improvement Authority (BCIA) should work together with other key players to develop a strategic plan for identifying and minimizing obstacles to business development—including property taxes and cost of living—to ensure the economic competitiveness, viability, and strength of Bergen County.

Objective 10.2: Increase opportunities for community agriculture

Community supported agriculture is a food production and distribution system that directly connects farmers and consumers. It is a way for consumers to buy local, seasonal food directly from a farmer.

Increasing community agriculture is an opportunity to support the activity and business of farming. It can capitalize on the trend of people rediscovering the benefits of buying fresh local food. Buying locally grown products helps family farmers stay in business thus supporting the preservation of the remaining farmland in the county.

Objective 10.3: Increase awareness of agriculture and its importance

Increasing the awareness of agriculture means communicating the benefits of agriculture, and the consequences of losing agricultural areas, to as many people as possible. By strengthening appreciation of both the activity of farming and of farmland itself, more people may support local agriculture. They can do this directly, through purchasing locally grown products, and indirectly, by favoring policies and programs that help support agriculture and agricultural land. Increasing the awareness of agriculture and especially the availability of locally grown food also can help individuals to make more informed personal choices about nutrition, diet and health.



New Jersey Palisades. Source: Bergen County Division of Economic Development