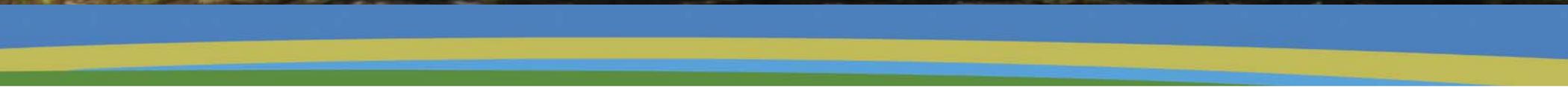




# 1. Introduction



## Overview

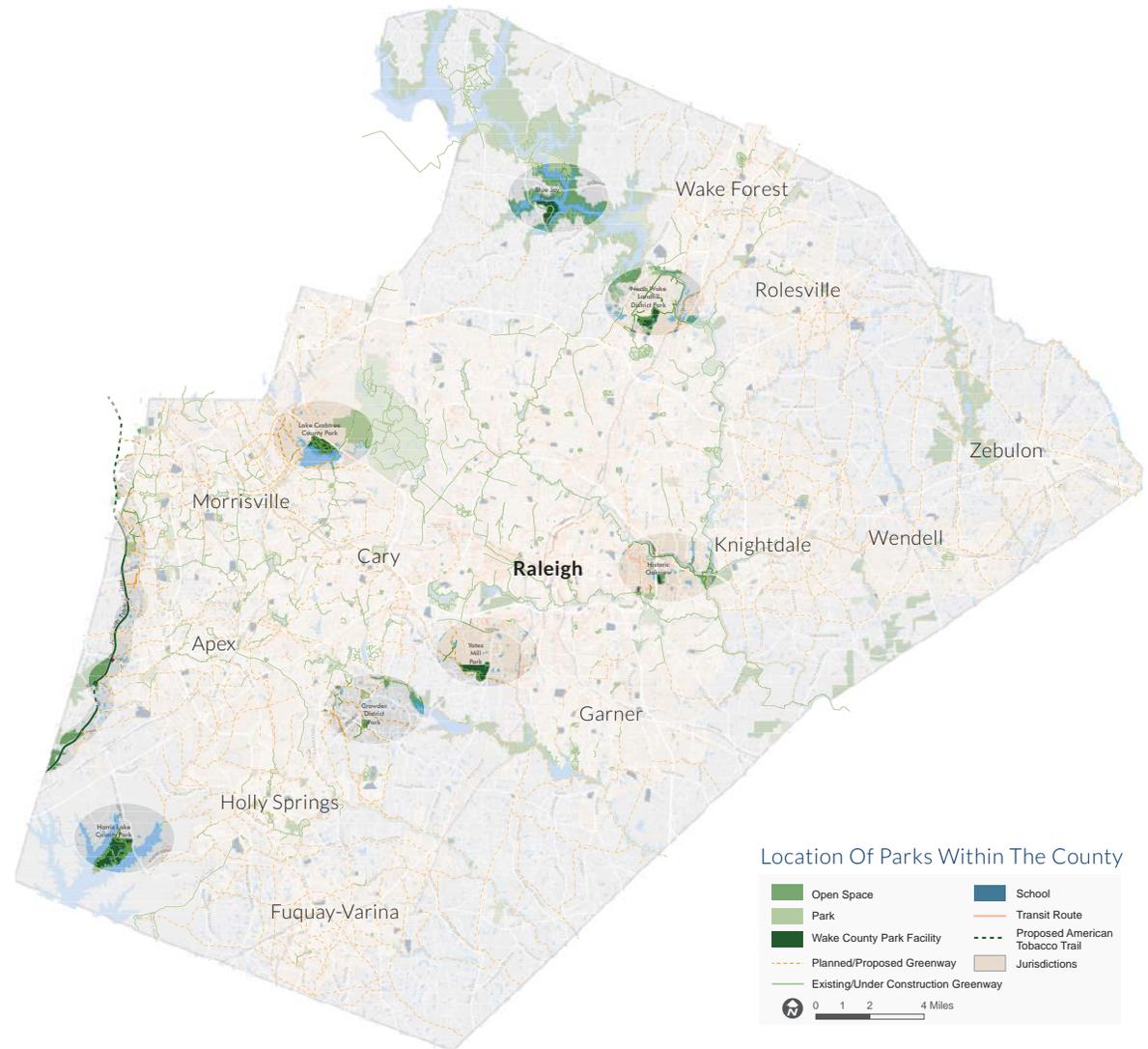
Wake County is located in northeast North Carolina featuring 548,480 acres of rolling hills, sloped towards the state's flat coastal plain. Founded in 1771, it is home to the state capital Raleigh and named for Margaret Wake, wife of the Governor of the Province of North Carolina. Though originally inhabited by the Sissipahaw and Occaneechi Tribe, it was quickly colonized and become primarily an agriculture-based county until the Civil War changed the economy. With the development of the railroad came new people and businesses. It was at the end of the Second World War that the county changed into an urban and industrial center that shaped the areas present outlook. Today, Wake County is the fifth fastest growing county over 500,000 people in the United States. It houses the North Carolina State Fair and is home to such higher education institutions as North Carolina State University, Meredith, Peace, St. Augustine's, and Shaw University.



The Wake County Parks and Recreation and Open Space Division currently operates eight county parks focused on the core service areas of **open space, recreation and leisure, and environmental and cultural education**. The Division's mission is:

*To provide outdoor recreation and educational opportunities while promoting environmental and cultural stewardship through a managed system of parks and open spaces.*

In 2014, these facilities had a combined visitation of 1,187,986 people—experiencing exhilarating mountain biking, sailing across Lake Crabtree, picnicking with family, and horseback riding along the American Tobacco Trail. The Division has recently received numerous environmental preservation awards at both the local and national level.





## Purpose of This Plan

The purpose of this plan is to update the Master Plans for each of the County's parks: The American Tobacco Trail, Blue Jay Point County Park, North Wake Landfill District Park, Lake Crabtree County Park, Historic Oak View County Park, Historic Yates Mill County Park, Crowder District Park, and Harris Lake County Park. Each Master Plan Update will provide analysis and recommendations that will elevate the park's ability to serve citizens and visitors who travel to the area to enjoy the natural and cultural resources of Wake County. To achieve this, the consultants, staff, steering committee, stakeholders, and public examined the layers of information identified in the discovery process to provide guidance for implementation.

## STUDY AREA

Each of the eight County Parks is comprised of unique features, programs, facilities, challenges, and opportunities. Existing conditions profile sheets for each park are located in Chapter Two: Existing Conditions. Profile sheets illustrate the size of the park, facilities within the park, and activities offered. While each park is the subject of the study, the overall county was analyzed to understand demographic composition, demand, adjacent facilities, connectivity, and community characteristics.

## CONTINUING THE VISION

The Parks and Recreation Division's vision from the 2008 *Comprehensive Parks & Recreation Master Plan* continues today. Each activity, improvement, facility, and park is developed with this vision as a guiding principle:

*Wake County will be a great place to live, work, learn and play. It will be a place where people are self-sufficient, enrich their lives, respect the environment, appreciate their heritage, participate in government, and plan for a better tomorrow.*

Seven goals were identified to target the efforts needed by the Parks and Recreation Division to achieve this vision. The following goals acted as the pillars of the 2008 plan and guide this process to update each Master Plan.

**Goal 1** – To position the Division of Parks, Recreation and Open Space (the Division) as a valued partner in the vision of Wake County.

**Goal 2** – To maintain and enhance the core services of Wake County Parks, Recreation, and Open Space.

**Goal 3** – To be proactive with initiatives, that result in long-term sustainability of the Division and the environment.

**Goal 4** – To market the benefits and services of the Division of Parks, Recreation and Open Space.

**Goal 5** – To continue to serve the citizens of Wake County in our three core service areas and develop performance measures to track and report our success.

**Goal 6** – To create a regional park land acquisition and development plan.

**Goal 7** – To participate in the planning and collaboration of municipal and regional trail and greenway plans.

These goals will guide this planning process to update the eight master plans.

## National Standards and Trends

All parks and recreation divisions (or departments) observe the standards and guiding principles of the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA). This group provides countless resources for divisions to plan, implement, and document progress. Understanding history, learning from other communities, and identifying future focus areas are critical to serving diverse populations.

Originally preserved for their aesthetic beauty, parks have evolved into critical public spaces that enable communities to become healthier, more prosperous, and socially connected. Careful management and planned activities have positioned local parks and recreation departments as essential components of modern life by helping mitigate the growing trend of obesity, improving the economy, and providing environmental benefits through conservation. By following the NRPA's three pillars of

Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity, Wake County can continue to provide resources and services that create quality of life improvements for its residents.

## CONSERVATION

Parks and public lands serve an essential role in the preservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat, the protection of clean water and air, and the provision of green spaces for current and future generations to enjoy. The ability to preserve these essential connections is critical to the quality of life for Americans, and as such, the mission of parks and recreation departments at all levels should support the conservation of our natural resources. Clean, green, and accessible parks and open spaces benefit everyone in the community.

Parks and recreation professionals are the champions in protecting and managing open space for the common good. The preservation of our national resources not only improves the quality of life in our communities, but also provides substantial economic benefits such as reducing healthcare costs, cleansing air and water pollution, and improving social equity. Park and recreation facilities and programs also enhance the value of conservation by educating the public about their values, connecting young people to nature and the outdoors, and coordinating environmental stewardship with other public and nonprofit entities. Through careful planning, stewardship, and public engagement, Wake County can continue to be a leader in conservation and build upon the benefits of its parks and open spaces. These benefits include:

- Providing carbon-reducing sustainable landscapes that cleanse air and water, replenish aquifers, reduce stormwater runoff, and protect wildlife habitat;
- Offering the public access to safe, affordable, and healthy ways to experience and appreciate nature; and
- Contributing significantly to the economic wellbeing of communities through energy and resource conservation and providing many economic benefits to communities derived from outdoor recreation.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Due in large part to a growing trend of poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyles, and overall unhealthy habits, America is in the midst of a serious health crisis that is affecting adults and children. Parks and recreation agencies have become leaders in fighting many of these challenges by enhancing the physical environments in which we live and improving the overall health and wellness of our communities. More and more evidence has shown that parks and recreation actively contribute to healthier communities and are a critical solution for our nation's health epidemic. Through facilities, natural amenities, and programs, they encourage and promote healthy habits for people of all ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and ethnicities. Wake County can work toward improving the health and wellness of its community by offering collaborative programs and policies that:

- Help reduce obesity and incidence of chronic disease by providing opportunities to increase rigorous physical activity in a variety of forms
- Provide a connection to nature which studies demonstrate relieves stress levels, tightens interpersonal relationships, and improves mental health
- Aid in reducing hunger in America and increasing access to nutritious food options
- Foster overall wellness and healthful habits, such as becoming tobacco-free and engaging in enrichment opportunities that add balance to life

## SOCIAL EQUITY

The philosophy of social equity and access is a core pillar of every parks and recreation department. Having access to programs, facilities, places, and spaces—regardless of skin color, age, income level or ability—is a right, not a privilege, for people nationwide. Social equity is a critical responsibility of every public park and recreation agency and the professionals who operate them. The inclusive nature of parks and recreation cultivates community ties through programs and services that connect people more deeply to the community. This sense of community connection improves quality of life and makes our communities more livable and desirable for residents and businesses.

Social equality is expressed through more than the physical environment. While ADA access is critical, other equitable attributes should be addressed in public parks. Access via public transportation and greenway trails enables youth, seniors who no longer drive, and those without personal vehicles to partake in programs and park activities. Cost to participate in programs or gain access to certain amenities is also essential to equitable offerings. In addition, language barriers sometimes deter non-English speaking residents and visitors from enjoying facilities and events at programs in their communities.

Physical, sensory, economic, and cultural considerations should be analyzed to provide services and facilities that pair well with the demographic composition of residents and visitors to each park.

Upholding social equity is one of the core means of assuring the value of parks and recreation for future generations. By continuing to improve upon the social equity and universal access to its parks and recreation opportunities, Wake County will enjoy many benefits, including:

- Public enjoyment and engagement. Where parks and open space are plentiful and recreation services strong, residents enjoy the closest attachment and engagement within their communities; and studies indicate higher levels of local gross domestic product and economic well being;
- Quality recreation time with family and friends. Parks and recreation services provide a space and a reason to partake in enjoying quality time, relaxation, and fun among family members and friends, thus strengthening the social and familial bonds that provide balance and satisfaction in life;
- Improvement of mental and physical health. Parks and recreation can reduce the impacts of chronic diseases, especially in such vulnerable populations as children, seniors, and the underserved; and
- Measurable decreases in rates of crime and other detrimental activities. Communities are safer as a result of a wholesome atmosphere created by well managed parks and recreation services in communities through healthy activities and programming for all people.

## Planning Process

The planning process began with a period of Discovery and Data Collection. During this stage, data collection, review of past planning efforts, GIS analysis, a review of leases and memoranda of understanding, on-site evaluation, and inventory set the stage for analysis. Previous citizen surveys, park satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and site visits fueled the Needs Assessment and Analysis Stage where community needs and site improvements begin to surface. All of these items were overlapped to provided the inspiration for recommendations, which were vetted by the public through a series of workshops. The final recommendations and action steps for each park site will provide the staff of Wake County with actions items to achieve the goals and implementation strategies of the final plans.

