



3. Public Input



Overview and Planning Process

Public involvement is imperative in parks and recreation planning. In addition to analyzing demographics and comparing trends, there is no better gauge for identifying needs than asking users for their desires, opinions, and ideas. For the 2016 Update to the County Park Master Plans, several avenues of public input were merged to assess the needs for the system as a whole and each individual park. Community needs and desires were extracted from the 2008 *PROS Comprehensive Master Plan*, the 2014 Community Interest and Opinion Survey, Individual Park Customer Satisfaction Surveys, North Carolina's *Comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan*, national trends in parks and recreation, focus groups, steering committee input, and staff interviews. After a solid foundation of needs, opportunities, and current challenges were established, recommendations were vetted via an online public survey, booths at public events, the steering committee, and park staff. During a final Steering Committee Meeting, members representing the public's interest and future vision of the parks determined which recommendations would be presented in the final Master Plans Updates.

The following text describes each method of public input with a brief summary of key discoveries. Detailed outcomes are provided in an Appendix C of this Plan and within other documents as referenced below.

Previous Tactics and Data Analysis

2008 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Key survey findings from the 2008 *Comprehensive Plan* include:

- Lake Crabtree County Park is the most heavily used park.
- The physical condition of the park system is rated high, with 66 percent of respondents rating it as excellent or good.
- Marketing efforts need to be improved. For example, 25 percent of respondents do not know the locations of the County parks, in excess of a national benchmark of 13 percent.
- Support for the acquisition of open space is very high with 90 percent of respondents being in favor of it.

- Walking and hiking trails are the highest rated new facilities that citizens want.
- Citizens want the County to expend its resources on large regional parks and longer trails, in fact, 76 percent expressed their support for this choice for resource allocation.
- Citizens want the County to partner with municipalities to acquire open space for environmental purposes; 84 percent are supportive of this endeavor. Seventy-eight percent of the respondents are supportive of the County's effort to partner with the school district, cities and towns to co-locate parks and facilities adjacent to schools.
- Seventy-eight percent of the respondents are supportive of the County's effort to protect 30 percent of its land area for environmental stewardship, water quality, large parks and trails.
- Personal benefits of the County providing parks, recreation and open space services include health and wellness.
- Citizens expressed a priority for improvements and maintenance to existing County Parks followed by the acquisition of new parkland and open space.
- The 2008 *Comprehensive Plan* identified seven goals for the Division of Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, which are listed in the Introduction section of this plan.

COMMUNITY INTEREST AND OPINION SURVEY 2014

This outreach method collected responses from 852 county residents through telephone and online surveys. Demographically, the cross-section of those surveyed is mostly consistent with the composition of the county. More women than men participated, which is typical and consistent with the slightly higher percentage of residents who are women (61.3 percent). While 71.7 percent of telephone respondents and 91.6 percent of online participants were white, that is similar to the 61.3 percent composition based on the 2013 US Census.

The methodology and sample appear to meet the definition of what is required from Recreation Resource Services for assessing recreational needs of residents. This can be done prior to master planning and not necessarily be park specific.

Highlights from the survey include:

Most Used Parks in Last 12 Months

- Lake Crabtree (70.6 percent)
- Harris Lake (66.5 percent)
- American Tobacco Trail (55.1 percent)
- Historic Yates Mill (53.2 percent)
- Crowder (40.4 percent)
- Blue Jay (35.9 percent)
- Historic Oak View (32.5 percent)
- N. Wake Landfill (24.2 percent)

Why Are They Not Using Parks

- Prefer to use City or State Parks
- Too Far/don't have transportation
- Not convenient
- Hours not convenient
- Time Constraints/Personal issues
- Didn't know

How Are They Using

- Walking/hiking/dog walking
- Cycling/mountain biking
- Viewing nature/wildlife
- Use of Playground
- Attending a program

Sources of Information

- E-mail Newsletter
- Website
- Brochure/Fliers
- Friends
- Conversations with Staff

Most Important Service

- Acquiring Open Space
- Expanding Greenway System
- Developing Large Regional Parks Nature
- Maintaining Improving Services
- Providing environmental Cultural Historic education



PARK SURVEYS

The park surveys were collected in 2014-2015. Results were analyzed in April 2015 to provide insight for the recommendation of this Plan. Key discoveries per park are as follows.

American Tobacco Trail

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Jogging/Running (47 percent)
- Bicycling (47 percent)
- Hiking/Walking/Trail Use (23 percent)

Respondents requested the addition of water fountains and noted a need for dog waste receptacles. Requests for 1/4 mile intervals for mile markers. Most visitors found out about the park via word of mouth (62 percent).

Blue Jay Point County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Educational Program (54 percent)
- Hiking/Walking/Trail Use (49 percent)
- Nature Observation (36 percent)
- Playground (26 percent)

Survey respondents also had many positive comments about the staff. There was a request for another picnic shelter. Most visitors found out about the park via a field trip (32 percent).

Crowder District Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Hiking/Walking/Fitness (65 percent)
- Nature Observation (39 percent)
- Other/Self Guided Activity (22 percent)
- Playground (10 percent)

There was a request for sidewalks along Ten-Ten Road. One person noted the playground equipment can be hot and requested shade. Most visitors found out about the park from driving by (47 percent).

Harris Lake County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Picnicking/Shelter Use (39 percent)
- Playground (36 percent)
- Other/Self Guided Activity (35 percent)
- Trail Use - Hiking/Running/Walking (26 percent)

Respondents requested camping, safe crossings of trails and vehicular paths, and additional trail connections. Most visitors found out about the park via word of mouth (53 percent).

Historic Oakview County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Exhibits/Displays (41 percent)
- Educational Program (40 percent)
- Visiting Goats (35 percent)
- Farmer's Corner (25 percent)
- Other (25 percent) which included field trips, pecan picking, boy scouts, and family outings

Most visitors found out about the park via word of mouth (37 percent) followed by field trips (22 percent).

Historic Yates Mill County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Hiking/Walking/Trail Use (69 percent)
- Nature Observation (49 percent)
- Exhibits/Displays (39 percent)
- Visiting with Family/Friends (31 percent)

There were many comments about the friendliness of the staff and the beauty of the park.

Most visitors found out about the park via word of mouth (30 percent), followed by driving by (29 percent), and other (27 percent), which included knowing the park was there due to living close by or being in the area for years.

Lake Crabtree County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Hiking/Walking/Trail Use (37 percent)
- Boating (36 percent)
- Bicycling/Biking (25 percent)
- Other/Self Guided Activities (22 percent) with some of the most popular activities listed as photography, sailing, kayaking, and paddleboarding

Most visitors found out about the park from other sources (35 percent) which ranged from living in the area and just knowing about the park to word of mouth and other groups. This was followed by word of mouth (27 percent) and driving by (24 percent).

North Wake Landfill County Park

Top activities identified by respondents included:

- Playground Use (95 percent)
- Picnicking/Shelter Use (26 percent)
- Bicycling/Biking (21 percent)
- Hiking/Walking/Trail Use (16 percent)

Several requests were made for shade. A request was made for swings for older kids, and a request was made for a dog park or dog run area. Most visitors found out about the park via word of mouth (68 percent).

NORTH CAROLINA'S COMPREHENSIVE OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

North Carolina State Parks Division of Parks and Recreation revises The *North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan* every five years and submits findings to the National Park Service to remain eligible for LWCF (Land and Water Conservation Fund) assistance. It is important to review and understand these findings to determine how Wake County Parks and Open Space is serving residents to help meet demand identified for Outdoor Recreation within the state.

In many cases, the desired activities are similar to activities identified by Wake County Residents in the 2013 survey findings. Below are the most popular outdoor recreation activities identified by residents in the 2015 plan.

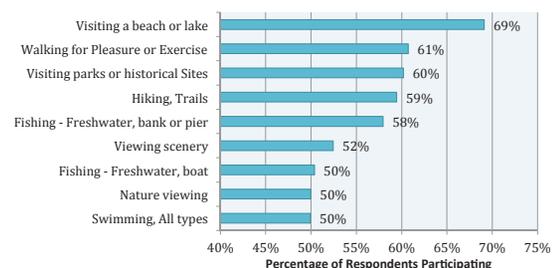


Figure showing most popular outdoor recreation activities reproduced from the 2015-2020 North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan

Another important finding in this state-wide study that may have influence on outdoor recreation in Wake County are the barriers for participation in outdoor recreation. The number one barrier to participation in the state is lack of time, or perceived lack of time. This may indicate a need to not only communicate offerings in a different way, but also provide recreation opportunities that allow for shorter amounts of participation time or scheduled at a variety of times.

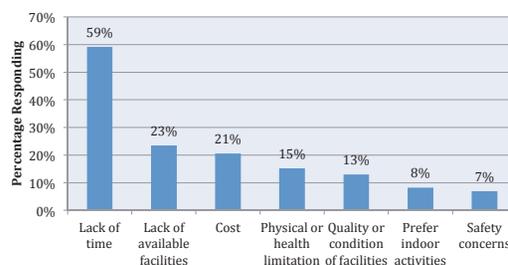


Figure showing barriers to outdoor recreation reproduced from the 2015-2020 North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Plan

In addition, there is a need to provide access to water and to facilities such as greenways and trails. It is noted that by providing greenways and trails within park facilities and linking local, state, and federal trails the state can meet 8 of the top 35 identified outdoor recreation activities.

The above statewide findings are consistent with findings from the Wake County 2013 survey and the individual park surveys conducted with this study.

National Trends in Parks and Recreation

The National Recreation and Park Association *2015 Field Report* outlines national trends in recreation affecting Parks and Recreation Service Providers.

- **Trend 1. Parks and recreation programs are key to great park attendance.**
- **Trend 2. The perceived value of distributed services results in agency functions assigned to various departments.**
- **Trend 3. Agencies are pioneering new funding methods**
- **Trend 4. The infrastructure deficit means parks will have to fight harder for public dollars.**
- **Trend 5. Walkable cities draw millennials, fueling a suburban exodus.**

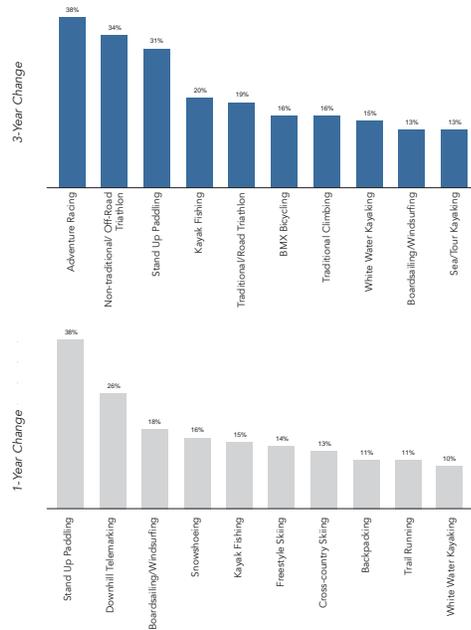
The 2015 *Outdoor Recreation Participation Topline Report* provided by the Outdoor Foundation is a national look at the activity trends in recreation participation. While there are numerous reports by Fish and Wildlife, National Park Services, and NRPA, the Outdoor Foundation is the most recent look at activity trends and changes in outdoor recreation.

<http://www.outdoorfoundation.org/research.participation.2015.topline.html>

The survey outlines top activities and activity trends for youth and adult participants, with many of these trends aligning with findings within the Wake County 2014 citizen survey. Access to water, water-based activities, hiking and walking, and access to adventure sports ranked high among national recreation trends. One significant change since the study began in 2006, 2014 participation in outdoor recreation had a slight decrease for the first time.

While participation in activities such as running/jogging, bicycling (road/paved surface), fishing, hiking, camping and wildlife viewing ranked the highest from survey participants, several more non-traditional activities had significant participation increase of 20-30 percent over a three year period. Non-traditional activities such as adventure racing, triathlons (traditional and nontraditional/off-road), stand-up paddle boarding, and kayak fishing saw the greatest increase in participation numbers.

Top Outdoor Activities for Growth



Trends for outdoor recreation activities reproduced from the 2015-2020 North Carolina State Outdoor Recreation Plan

Public Input Phase One-Needs Assessment

STEERING COMMITTEE

During the kick-off meeting, held on March 4, 2015, members of the Steering Committee shared why they think this planning process is important and why they are interested in being involved. Common themes throughout the group include conservation and protection of the county's resources as well as a desire to understand how people are currently using the parks and how the County can match trends in recreation while maintaining the components of Wake County's parks that residents love. Critical outcomes of the plan were discussed with ADA accessibility, access via greenways and transit, and balancing offerings with local municipal parks surfacing as top priorities. Methods for reaching the public and what the Committee wanted to learn from the public fueled the beginnings of the public outreach plan later crafted by the project team.

It was agreed that the County Parks Recreation and Open Space mission and goals should drive the planning process, but that the mission statements for each of the parks should be vetted to determine if that statement was fitting for the current use and future vision for each park. The Committee also reviewed a draft site analysis matrix to provide direction for which items to explore during field visits. Demand for parks was illustrated by a series of maps depicting where citizens, live, work, play, learn, and access transit throughout the county. Equity was also mapped to learn which types of special populations may live close to certain parks. These populations include youth, over 65, English as a second language, no access to personal vehicles, and groups of racial or ethnic diversity as recorded in the US Census and ACS Community Survey.

The meeting closed with the group's first exposure to reviewing past planning efforts, previous master plans, and existing conditions in each park. Groups of four were asked to review materials and suggest opportunities and challenges for each park. These group discussions and feedback provided a foundation for the project team to formulate public input questions, understand important items to explore in the field, and begin to understand the future vision for each park.

The Steering Committee met with the project team to review the progress of analysis and discuss opportunities and constraints for each park. Working in groups, the Steering Committee reviewed information collected during Park Manager Interviews, Customer Satisfaction Surveys, and results of the 2008 Public Survey. Each group covered two of the eight parks and were responsible for presenting the three top opportunities/recommendations and top three concerns/constraints per park.

One key discovery of the group was the need to adjust the mission of each park to fit the growing need of Wake County citizens as well as how the park has evolved to date, and will continue to evolve as a result of this process.



The Steering Committee works in small groups during the project kick-off meeting.

PARK-SPECIFIC FOCUS GROUPS AND STAFF INTERVIEWS

The County Project Management Staff and Steering Committee developed a list of key stakeholders, users, and partners associated with each park. Invitations were distributed to each list to request participation in a focus group to determine existing challenges and future opportunities. Participants were provided with the County Parks Recreation and Open Space mission and core values, as well as the mission of the park (if the park had a separate mission).

The focus groups attendees were asked their opinions of the role of the county parks, each park's mission statement, and their experience of the parks. Results of the focus groups were evaluated by the Steering Committee and project team to contribute to recommendations and key action steps.

Staff at each park were interviewed to gain their insight on the current usage and operations at their site. The discussion gave the consultant team an understanding of current operational challenges, typical usage at the park, and potential improvements.

Detailed notes from these meetings can be found in Appendix A. Key discoveries revealed per park were:

American Tobacco Trail

- More site furnishings, such as garbage cans, hitching posts, and access to water is desired.
- Parking access along the trail can be difficult, especially for horse trailers.

Blue Jay Point County Park

- Additional buildings to support events and operations were requested, especially a large picnic shelter and classroom space.
- Users wanted ways to use the site better with less impact on the environment. Suggestions to improve this included additional fishing piers, natural play areas, and maintenance of the short-leaf pine stand.

Crowder District Park

- Most concerns were about an already dense site; expansion was desired.
- Users want to maintain a mix of biking and walking trails and increase accessibility of trails.

Harris Lake County Park

- Active programming, such as a trail accommodations for hikers and bicyclists, horseback riding, boat rental, and camping, was desired.
- Additional facilities, such as an expansion of the maintenance yard and education center, were also requested.
- Parking was identified as a problem on weekends.

Historic Oakview County Park

- Adding more opportunities for interaction with animals by adding chickens, mules, and more goats was discussed.
- Users requested more farm exhibits, including finishing the permanent exhibits and adding more out buildings to the farm.
- Better wayfinding to and within the park was requested.

Historic Yates Mill County Park

- Accessibility on the site was difficult.
- A more dynamic trail system at the site, including better connection to the Park Center, was requested.
- Adding additional shelters to supplement the Mill was desired.

Lake Crabtree County Park

- Improving ways to access the water was requested. A planned accessible dock, in addition to dredging to improve rowing and maintaining a no motorboat policy, were identified.
- Users wanted trails of varying challenge.

North Wake Landfill County Park

- Users commented on the lack of entrance signage.
- Public art was identified as a way to improve the space and delineate secured areas.
- Additional connectivity to the neighborhood, including schools and existing trails, was desired.



The Lake Crabtree County Park focus group discusses existing conditions at the park and desired features.

Public Input Phase Two- Recommendations Review

STEERING COMMITTEE REVIEW

After developing recommendations based on the needs assessment and existing conditions phase, the consultant team met with County Project Management Staff and Steering Committee on January 14, 2016, to workshop the detailed recommendations for each park.

As during the kick-off meeting, the Steering Committee worked in small groups to evaluate the recommendations, identify any missing elements, and determine to what degree the recommendations were supported by the public. The consultant team then refined the recommendations for each park using this input.

PUBLIC SURVEY EVENTS AND DIGITAL SURVEY

The County Project Management Staff and consultant team presented the proposed recommendations, refined with the Steering Committee and to the public through an online survey and through on-site surveys at the parks.

On-site meetings at the park were held on the following dates:

- September 19, 2015 – Historic Yates Mill, Harvest Celebration
- September 26, 2015 – Historic Oak View, Storytelling Festival
- October 17, 2015 – Harris Lake, Haunting at Harris
- October 17, 2015 – American Tobacco Trail
- October 24, 2015 – Lake Crabtree, Creepy Crabtree

The boards from the on-site meetings can be found in Appendix B. Key discoveries revealed per park were:

American Tobacco Trail

- Ninety-four percent of survey respondents support the idea of having water stations for people and animals along the trail and specifically at the trailheads.
- Seventy-nine percent of survey respondents stated that user orientation, signage, and wayfinding improvements and consistency were needed.

- Respondents (86 percent) support the idea of additional lighting at the trailheads.
- Survey respondents stated several times that it would be beneficial for early morning exercise and commuting to open the trail access locations earlier.

Blue Jay Point County Park

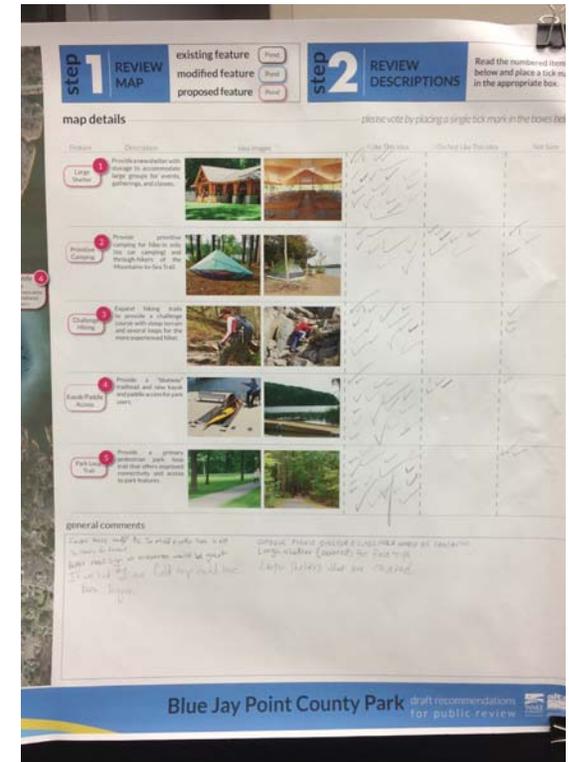
- Ninety-seven percent of survey respondents agreed with the addition of a large shelter and also stated the need for several additional shelters throughout the park.
- Eighty-one percent of respondents support the idea of introducing primitive camping. It was highlighted for through hikers and for people kayaking and using the blueway system.
- Respondents positively reacted to adding/expanding trails throughout the park with interpretive signage, adding an adventure hiking course, as well as connecting trails and park features to a primary loop trail system with improved wayfinding.

Crowder District Park

- Eighty percent of survey respondents supported the idea of expanding the parks garden themes and offerings .
- Survey participants would like to see additional trail and sidewalk connections to and from the park (87 percent).
- Ninety-five percent of respondents supported the idea of adding a nature-based play area in the park.
- Sixty-three percent supported the idea of expanding dog features and support facilities within the park.

Harris Lake County Park

- Ninety-five percent of respondents supported rentals of kayaks, canoes, and stand up paddleboards to provide an opportunity for visitors who do not own boats to be able to interact with the water.
- The improved boat launch providing an ADA accessible dock for personal water crafts and rental vessels was supported by 84 percent of respondents.



Example of public review comments on draft recommendations at Blue Jay Point County Park

- Eighty-two percent supported the creation of an elevated treetop trail, while 80 percent liked a central loop trail that would be accessible and provide for family walking and biking.



Children review the recommendations for Harris Lake County Park during a public input meeting. Input from children was integral in the planning process.

Historic Oakview County Park

- Ninety-six percent of survey respondents would like to see a primary loop trail that is ADA accessible and links to each of the site features.
- Ninety percent of survey respondents would like to see an additional play space near the education building and user activities that simulate life on a farm. Ninety percent also supported the idea of adding additional livestock to the site.
- Survey respondents (89 percent) support the idea of expanding this park to the unused area to include walking, fishing, hiking, and outdoor education.

Historic Yates Mill County Park

- Adding additional trails throughout the park with interpretive signage and creating connections to regional greenways was supported by 91 percent of respondents.
- Eighty-three percent liked improved access to water with stepping stones, vegetation, and an ADA accessible trail.
- Seventy-six percent supported adding buildings in the same architectural style as the mill to provide spaces for historic activities (or to house concessions or a gift shop).

Lake Crabtree County Park

- Eighty-six percent support providing a trailhead near the multi-use trails that has a shelter, bike "fix it" station, restrooms, first aid station, and changing area.
- Creation of a new Park Center with an iconic building that provides an educational setting, a place for rest and relaxation, observation of the waterfront, and park support facilities was liked by 71 percent of respondents.
- Improved connectivity with crosswalks, links to existing greenways, coordination with area transit for stop locations and wayfinding, and extension of trails across Aviation Parkway to increase total trail length was supported by 82 percent of respondents.

North Wake Landfill County Park

- Ninety-three percent supported renaming the park.
- Seventy-six percent responded favorably to a new ADA accessible trail that will wrap around the large hill from the existing playground with up-cycled art and bands of colored vegetation marking the mound's growth.
- Respondents liked greenway connections, with 81 percent supporting connection to Abbotts Creek.
- Seventy-six percent supported a ribbon of skate skill areas.
- Large art placed on the northern mound was supported by 69 percent of respondents.

Outcomes of the Public Process

In addition to the Steering Committee and general public, the management staff and park staff were heavily involved in the process of analyzing and vetting recommendations. As they lead programs, help people navigate the parks, and express the brand of Wake County Parks and Recreation, the staff see how people use the parks and understand how modifications will enhance user experience.

This multi-faceted input process drove the recommendations in an implementable direction. Input from all groups was balanced to craft recommendations that would be visionary, yet realistic, for the future populations of Wake County. The evolution of the recommendations, including feedback from each element of the engagement process, is included in the matrix in Appendix C.