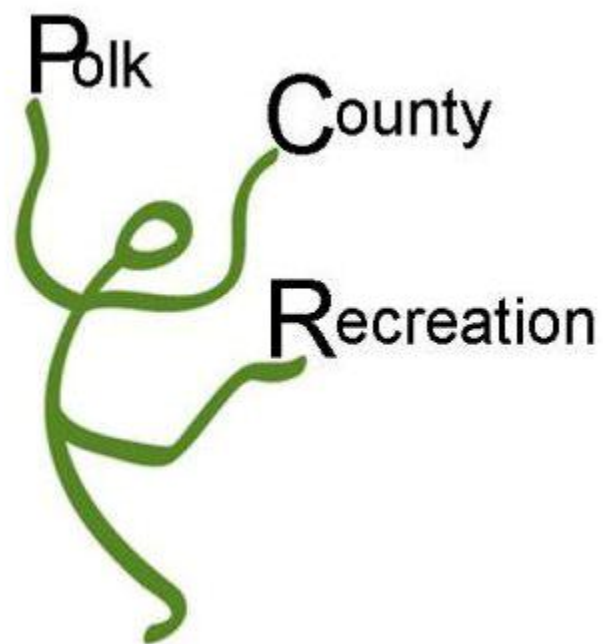


# POLK COUNTY RECREATION PLAN

JUNE 2013



**Presented to...**

Polk County Board of Commissioners

Michael Gage - Chair  
Ted Owens  
Ray Gasperson  
Keith Holbert  
Tom Pack

Polk County Recreation Advisory Board

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Chris Zellner - Assistant Director

Prepared by...

Isothermal Planning and Development Commission

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Jessica Trotman  
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Polk County Recreation Department has been a primary provider of recreation programs and facilities for county residents for decades. The Department, under the leadership of director Patty Aldred and the Recreation Board, has slowly expanded and upgraded its programs and facilities to meet the needs of the citizens.

The purpose of this plan is identify the current needs of the citizens, assess the ability of the department or other entities to meet those needs and determine the actions the Department needs to take in the future.

Through a survey, multiple public meetings, meetings with the Recreation Board and staff and other stakeholders we feel confident that this plan represents the wishes of the citizens.

The report documents the current county programs and facilities as well as identifies primary non-county programs and facilities that serve the local population. A current demographic profile of the county is included as well as a map of recreation assets.

The focus of the plan is on the recommendations and timeline provided. Those recommendations are geared towards the actions the county government and the Polk County Recreation Department may take. It is a general assumption of this plan that municipalities and local organizations will continue to provide services and facilities similar to what they currently offer. Thus the focus is on actions the county government can take itself. That said, they key to success of this plan will be strong partnerships with the community and strong relationships with the municipalities and with organizations providing recreation options.

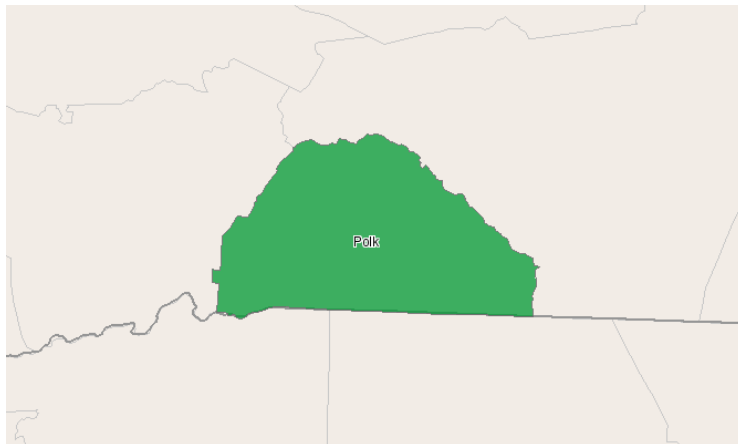
This plan is intended to serve as a guide only and does not obligate the county expend money or other resources. The lifespan of this plan is five years from 2013-2018.

# DEMOGRAPHICS

111 West Court St.  
Rutherfordton, North Carolina 28139  
828.287.2281

## Demographics Report

Polk County



## Region Info - Polk County

---

County Areas	Polk, NC (37149)

## Selected Demographics

---

Selected Demographics	Selected Cohorts
Age	Under 5 years
	5 to 9 years
	10 to 14 years
	15 to 19 years
	20 to 24 years
	25 to 29 years
	30 to 34 years
	35 to 39 years
	40 to 44 years
	45 to 49 years
	50 to 54 years
	55 to 59 years
	60 to 64 years
	65 to 69 years
	70 to 74 years
	75 to 79 years
	80 to 84 years
	85 years and over
Race/Ethnicity	White, Non-Hispanic
	Black, Non-Hispanic
	American Indian or Alaskan Native, Non-Hispanic



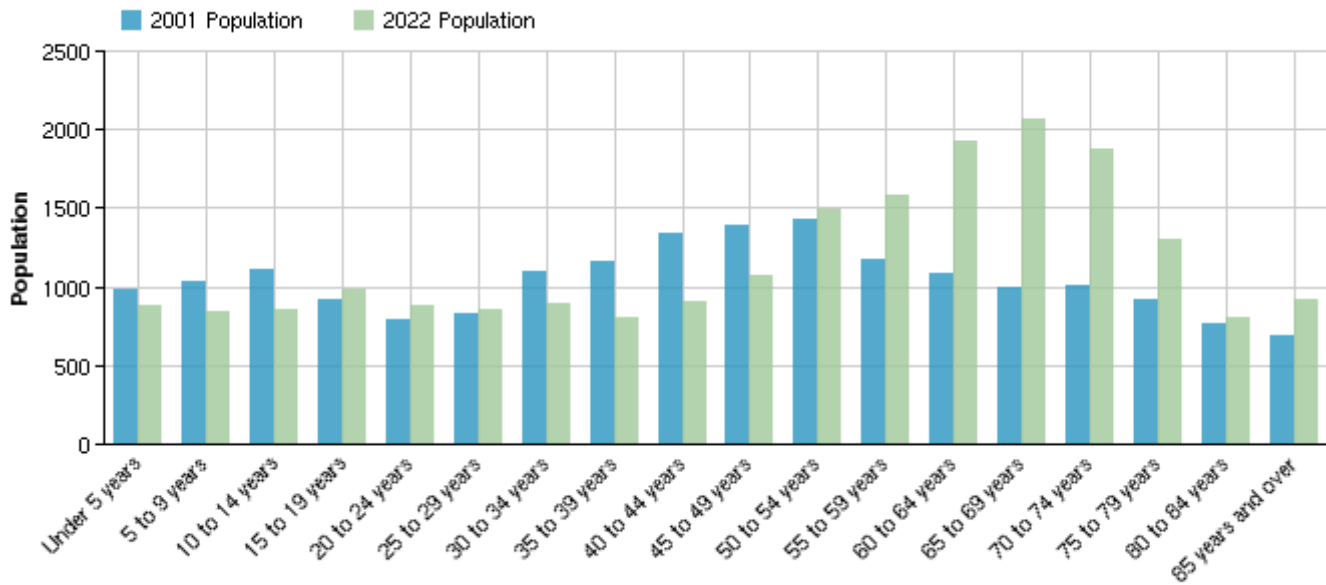
Selected Demographics	Selected Cohorts
	Asian, Non-Hispanic
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic
	Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic
	White, Hispanic
	Black, Hispanic
	American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic
	Asian, Hispanic
	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic
	Two or More Races, Hispanic
Gender	Males
	Females

## Cohort Totals

---

Area	2001 Population	2022 Population	Change	% Change
Region	18,696	20,927	2,231	12%
State	8,213,309	10,531,500	2,318,191	28%
Nation	284,968,955	330,617,272	45,648,317	16%

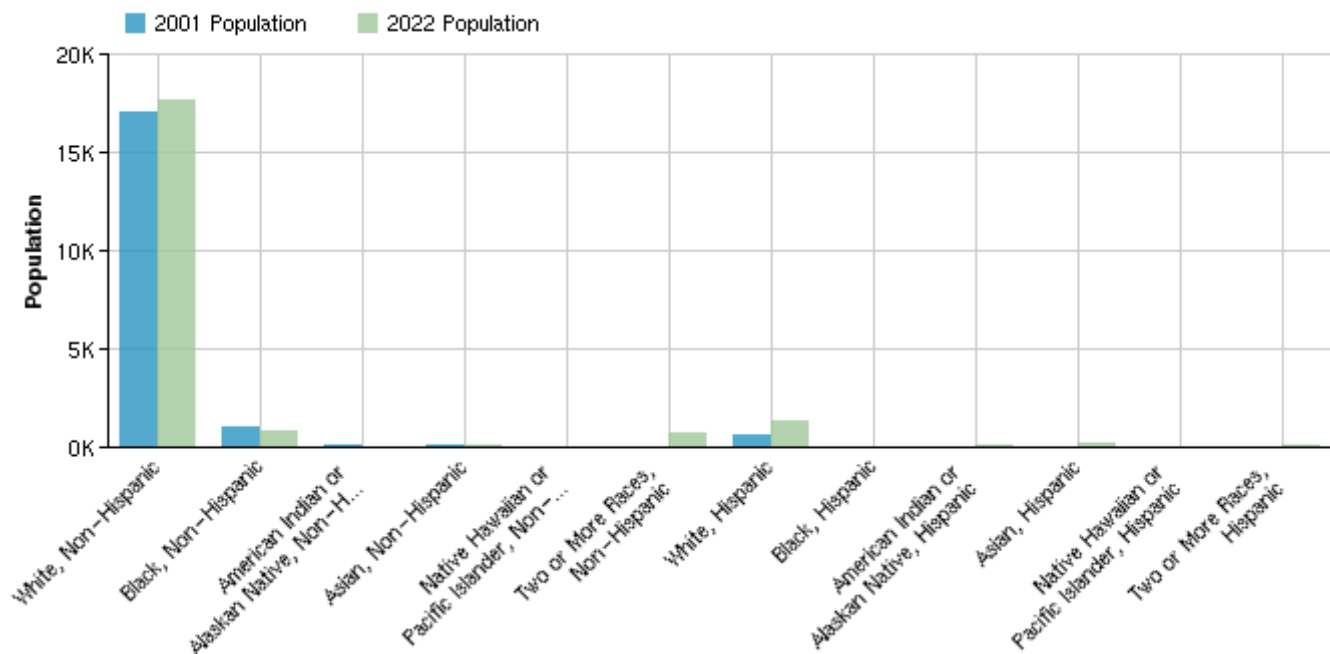
## Age Breakdown



Age	2001 Population	2022 Population	Change	% Change	2001 % of Cohort
Under 5 years	979	874	-105	-11%	5.24%
5 to 9 years	1,035	839	-196	-19%	5.53%
10 to 14 years	1,114	856	-258	-23%	5.96%
15 to 19 years	918	987	69	8%	4.91%
20 to 24 years	787	880	93	12%	4.21%
25 to 29 years	824	860	36	4%	4.41%
30 to 34 years	1,091	888	-203	-19%	5.84%
35 to 39 years	1,165	801	-364	-31%	6.23%
40 to 44 years	1,335	908	-427	-32%	7.14%
45 to 49 years	1,388	1,077	-311	-22%	7.42%
50 to 54 years	1,433	1,496	63	4%	7.66%
55 to 59 years	1,168	1,583	415	36%	6.25%
60 to 64 years	1,086	1,928	842	78%	5.81%
65 to 69 years	1,000	2,067	1,067	107%	5.35%
70 to 74 years	1,008	1,871	863	86%	5.39%
75 to 79 years	918	1,295	377	41%	4.91%
80 to 84 years	762	799	37	5%	4.08%
85 years and over	685	918	233	34%	3.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>18,696</b>	<b>20,927</b>	<b>2,231</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2013.1

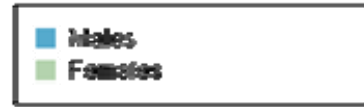
## Race/Ethnicity Breakdown



Race/Ethnicity	2001 Population	2022 Population	Change	% Change	2001 % of Cohort
White, Non-Hispanic	17,008	17,681	673	4%	90.97%
Black, Non-Hispanic	995	864	-131	-13%	5.32%
American Indian or Alaskan Native, Non-Hispanic	62	15	-47	-76%	0.33%
Asian, Non-Hispanic	58	56	-2	-3%	0.31%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Non-Hispanic	0	2	2	0%	0.00%
Two or More Races, Non-Hispanic	0	681	681	0%	0.00%
White, Hispanic	572	1,310	738	129%	3.06%
Black, Hispanic	0	12	12	0%	0.00%
American Indian or Alaskan Native, Hispanic	2	60	58	2,900%	0.01%
Asian, Hispanic	0	171	171	0%	0.00%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic	0	4	4	0%	0.00%
Two or More Races, Hispanic	0	71	71	0%	0.00%
Total	18,696	20,927	2,231	12%	100.00%

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2013.1

## Gender Breakdown



Gender	2001 Population	2022 Population	Change	% Change	2001 % of Cohort
Males	8,912	10,055	1,143	13%	47.66%
Females	9,785	10,872	1,087	11%	52.34%
Total	18,696	20,927	2,231	12%	100.00%

Source: EMSI Complete Employment - 2013.1

## Data Sources and Calculations

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### Demographic Data

The demographic data in this report is compiled from several sources using a specialized process. Sources include US Census Bureau annual estimates, birth and mortality rates from the US Health Department, and projected regional job growth.

### State Data Sources

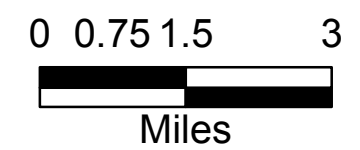
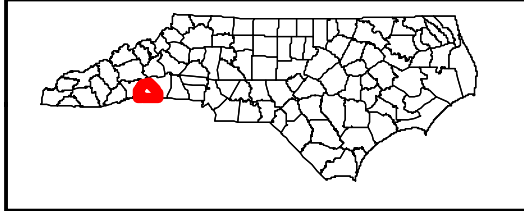
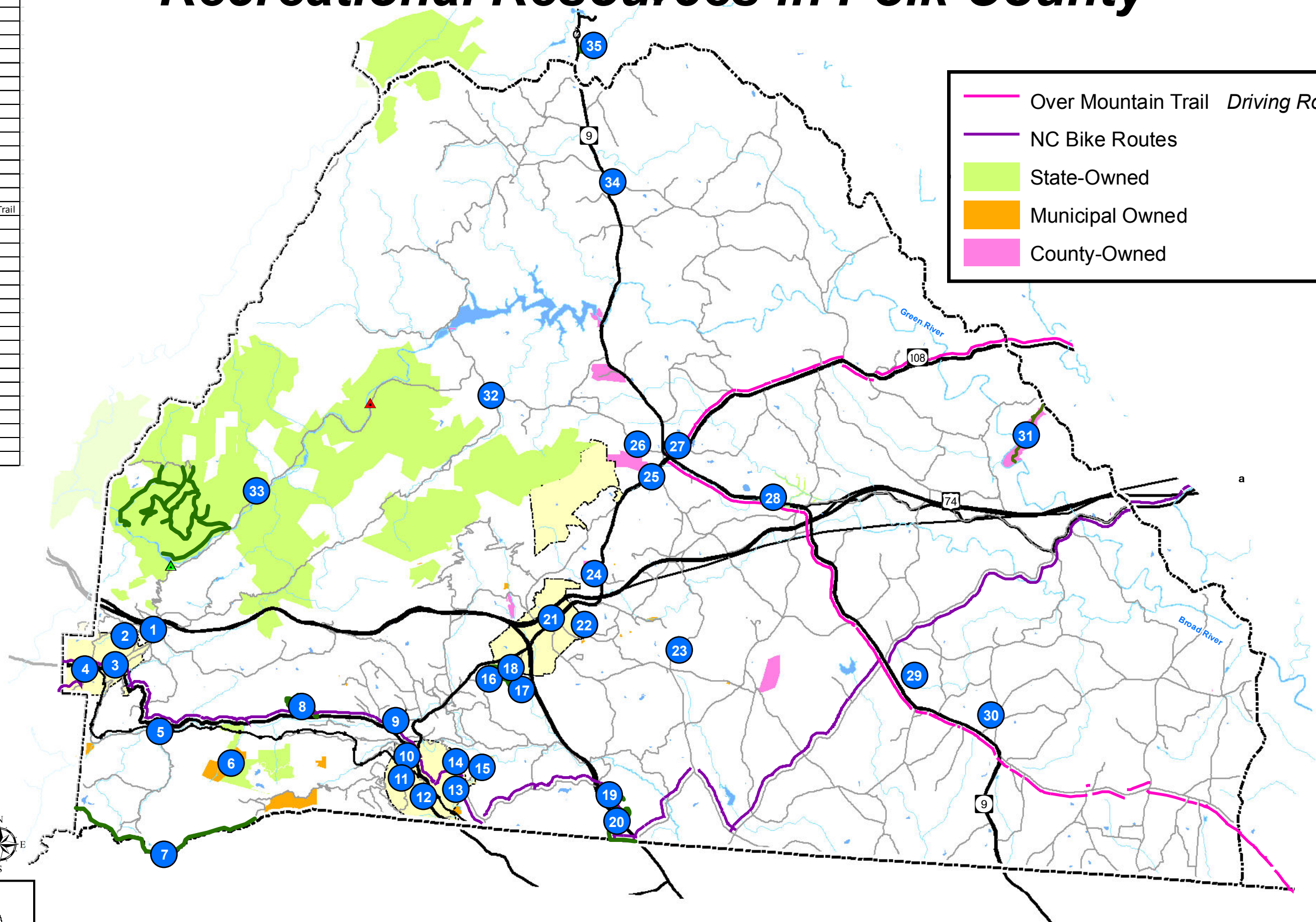
This report uses state data from the following agencies: North Carolina Employment Security Commission, Labor Market Information Division.

# Recreational Resources in Polk County

Key	Name
1	Bradley Nature Preserve
2	Lazy Girl Loop Trail
3	Saluda Elementary School
4	McCreery Park
5	Missing Trace 40
6	Pearson's Falls
7	Palmeto Trail
8	Norman Wilder Forest
9	Harmon Field
10	Tryon Elementary School
11	Forbes School
12	Woodland Park
13	Vaughn Creek Greenway
14	Roseland Community Center
15	Zigler Field
16	Tom Raymond Fitness Trail
17	Weaverton Shuford Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary Trail
18	ICC Trail
19	FENCE
20	Blue Wall Passage
21	Stearns Park/Gym
22	Gibson Park
23	Adawehi Institute
24	Polk County HS Track
25	Polk County Recreation Complex
26	Polk County Middle School Track
27	Searcy Field
28	Polk County Central School
29	TRH Horse Park
30	Green Creek Family Life Center
31	Alexander Ford's Park
32	Little Bradley Trail
33	Green River Game Lands Trails
34	Sunny View Elementary school
35	Donald Ross Nature Trail

▲ Indicates River Access Points.  
 Green is Put-In. Red is Pull-out.  
 Caution is advised.

- Over Mountain Trail *Driving Route*
- NC Bike Routes
- State-Owned
- Municipal Owned
- County-Owned



Source:  
 Recreation data: IPDC, 2013.  
 Other data: NCOne map, 2000-2010.  
 Map produced by the Isothermal Planning & Development Commission.  
 For planning purposes only.  
 kmf/jk 6/12/2013

# **SURVEY**

The Polk County Recreation Department conducted a survey in 2011 to gauge the recreational needs and wishes of the public. To help understand how to develop proper survey questions, the Recreation Director and Recreation Board Chair attended a seminar conducted by Dr. Ananda Mitra, professor in the Department of Communication at Wake Forest University. The entire Recreation Board helped in developing the survey. See Appendix A for a copy of the survey questions.

The Board used multiple methods of distributing the survey and soliciting responses. Those means included:

- Holding public meetings around the county
- Posting the survey on the county website
- Published announcements of survey in the Tryon Daily Bulletin and Polk County News and Journal
- Distributed survey through multiple local civic groups including Rotary, Lions and Kiwanis
- Distributed survey at the Tryon Estates retirement village
- E-mail solicitations of community leaders including the Polk County Board of Commissioners, Tryon Town Council, Columbus Town Council and Saluda Town Council.
- Direct contact with local youth sport organizations and the chair of the Harmon Field Board of Supervisors.

Public meetings were held in July and August of 2011 at the Green Creek Community Center, Isothermal Community College, Polk County Middle School and Saluda Elementary School. The meetings were advertised in the newspaper and other venues. Attendance was relatively light at each meeting but a total of about 50 people attended, giving valuable additional input. Attendees were encouraged to fill out the written survey. Luann Bryan, Western Region Consultant for Recreation Resource Services, a service of N.C. State University and the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation, assisted in organizing the meeting format and helped facilitate the first meeting.

The efforts were successful in generating a total of 434 survey responses.

Summary of the survey results as compiled by Dr Mitra...

## Demographics

- 46% of the respondents were men
- 48.8% of the respondents were in under 18 years old
- 5.8% of the respondents were between 18 and 24 years old
- 10.8% of the respondents were between 25 and 34 years old
- 19.7% of the respondents were between 35 and 44 years old
- 9.9% of the respondents were between 45 and 54 years old
- 2.7% of the respondents were between 55 and 64 years old
- 2.3% of the respondents were over 65 years old
- Average number of years in Polk County – 19
- A third of the respondents made under \$25K, a third made between \$25K and \$50K and a rest made more than \$50K

## Townships

- Columbus 25%
- Tryon 19%
- Green Creek 16%
- Sunnyview 15%
- Millspring 14%
- Saluda 12%

## Visitations

- Harmon Field 83%
- Recreation Complex 45%
- Gibson Pool 38%
- Stearns Park 31%
- Stearns Gym 25%

### **Programs popular to 50% or more**

- Open swimming
- Walking
- Youth basketball league
- Recreational play

### **Programs popular to 20% to 49%**

- Swim lessons
- Little League baseball/Softball
- Volleyball
- Soccer
- Spectator at sporting events
- Summer Camp for kids
- Summer day camp
- Basketball league
- Tennis
- Basketball
- PCMS ball games

### **Programs popular to less than 19%**

- Free basketball play
- Fishing
- Babe Ruth baseball/softball
- Horse shows
- After School
- Yoga
- Dance lessons
- Lifeguard training classes

### **Facilities popular to 50% or more**

- Playground
- Picnic area
- Walking trails

### **Facilities popular to 20% to 49%**

- Picnic shelter
- Ball fields
- Fishing pond



- Picnic tables
- Cabin rental

### **Facilities popular to less than 19%**

- Tennis courts
- Recreational play softball fields
- Pool rental

### **What is needed?**

1. Indoor pool
2. Bike trails
3. Additional walking trails
4. Picnic facilities
5. Public canoe access
6. Soccer fields
7. Frisbee golf course
8. More softball/baseball fields
9. Horse trails

### **Summary**

1. A majority (83%) of the community is satisfied with the recreation opportunities available
2. Interested in active recreation – walking, biking, swimming, etc.
3. Interested in family recreation – picnic opportunities, playgrounds for children
4. Interested in league-based athletics with particular emphasis on basketball

# RECREATION DEPARTMENT INFORMATION

## Information

Website: <http://www.polknc.org/departments/recreation/index.php>

Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/PoCoRec?fref=ts>

E-Mail: [recreationdept@windstream.net](mailto:recreationdept@windstream.net)

Phone: (828) 894-8199

Address: 105 N Peak St  
PO Box 308  
Columbus NC 28722

Office Hours: 8:30-5:00 Mon-Fri

## Staffing & Budget

The Recreation Department currently has two full-time employees, three part-time staff for the after school program and about 35 summer seasonal staff for Gibson Pool and summer camp.

The department has a budget of about \$300,000 and brings in about \$100,000 in revenues.

The department operates a transport van used mainly to transport children to summer camp outings.

# **PROGRAMS SUMMARY**

## **County Programs**

### **Soccer**

A youth soccer program for youth in first through 12th grade. Four divisions [1st/2nd Grade; 3rd/4th Grade; 5th/6th Grade; 7-12 Grade].

There is a spring and a fall season. Approximately 200 youth play in each season, with the spring season being a little larger. Participation levels have been stable in recent years.

The program utilizes the two soccer fields at Harmon Field through a paid use agreement.

### **Youth Basketball**

Youth basketball is offered for ages between 1st and 12th grade. There are five divisions [1st/2nd Grade; 3rd/4th Grade; 5th/6th Grade; 7th/8th Grade; 9-12 Grade].

The county uses a range of facilities including Stearns Gym, Polk Middle School and Saluda Elementary for both practice and games. Tryon Elementary, Polk Central Elementary and Sunny View Elementary are used for practices. The school usage is done through non-written arrangements with school personnel.

The number of participants has fallen a little in recent years. Approximately 30 teams and 230 kids played in 2012-13.

### **Volleyball**

Youth volleyball is offered for ages 7 and up in two divisions [Girls Ages 7-9; Girls Ages 10-14].

The 2012-13 season was the third year of it. There are usually 4-6 teams in each age group and participation rates are steady.

### **Swim Lessons**

Each summer the department offers swimming lessons at Gibson Pool. They offer a morning and an afternoon class four times a summer. Classes are limited to 15. Usually about 150-160 youth take part each summer.

### **After School/School's Out Program**

15-20 kids this year participated in 2012-13. The department would like to grow this program. Most area youth are served in school-based programs.

### **Walk to the Beat**

A group of 5-10 people, usually seniors, walk at Stearns Gym.

### **Yoga**

This service is contracted out. The teacher offers one class a week and it lasts six weeks.

### **Summer Day Camp**

The 2013 camp has been the largest ever with 90 youth signed up.

### **The Meeting Place**

Programs for Seniors.

## **Future County Programs**

The county is considering adding Pickleball, which is a senior friendly sport played on a tennis court. They regularly have requests for adult softball, but do not have current plans to add it.

## **Non-County Programs (selected)**

### **Polk Youth Football**

<http://www.leaguelineup.com/welcome.asp?url=polkcounty>

Polk Youth Football is operated by a volunteer board of directors. It utilizes Gibson Park and other facilities for its practices and camps and school football fields for games.

### **Little League**

Polk Little League is operated by a volunteer board of directors. It utilizes the Recreation Complex and Harmon Field for its games and practices and some teams utilize other area facilities for practices. The Little League and Babe Ruth league merged in 2012.

### **Polk Fit, Fresh & Friendly**

<http://www.polkfitfreshandfriendly.org/index.html>

Polk Fit, Fresh & Friendly is a spin-off of the former Polk County Health Council. Its focus is on informing the public about healthy food and physical activity.

### **Harmon Field**

<http://www.harmonfield.com>

Offerings include tennis leagues, summer camps, karate, equestrian and special events. Harmon Field is operated by an independent Board of Supervisors. The Town of Tryon owns the property.

### **Tryon Running Club**

<http://www.tryonrunningclub.com/>

Group runs, training, annual running events.

### **Pacolet Area Conservancy**

<http://pacolet.org/>

Does fall and spring hike series on Fridays

### **Foothills Equestrian and Nature Center**

<http://www.fence.org/>

Numerous programs

### **Boy Scouts of America - Piedmont Council**

<http://www.piedmontcouncilbsa.org/>

Two local chapters

### **Girl Scouts - Carolina Peaks to Piedmont**

<http://www.girlscoutsp2p.org/>

### **Tryon Arts & Crafts**

<http://www.tryonartsandcrafts.org/>

### **Tryon Youth Center**

# County Facilities

## **Polk County Recreation Complex**

Address: Wolverine Trail & NC Hwy 108, Mill Spring

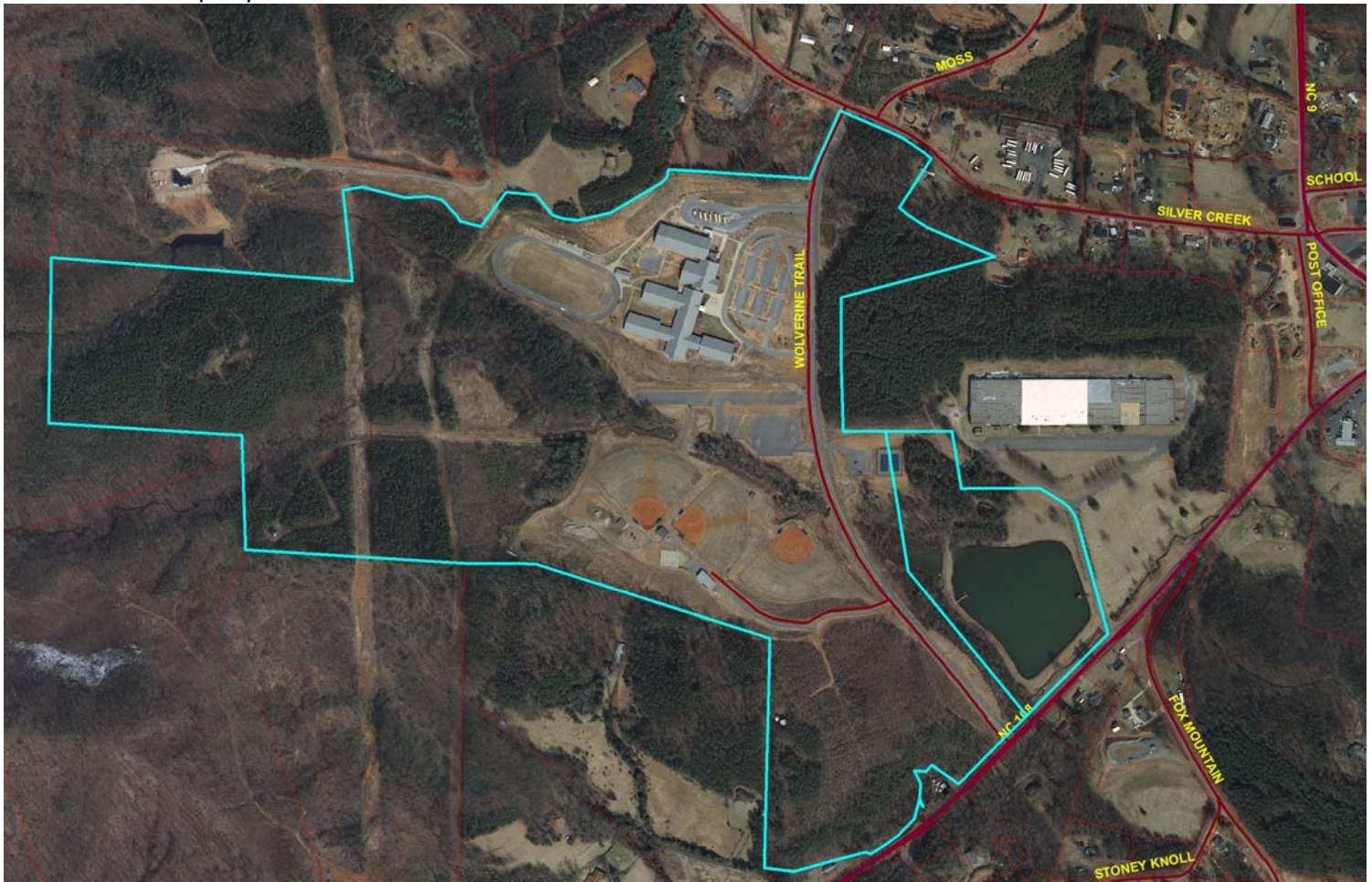
The Recreation Complex is the largest of the county's recreation facilities. The complex shares a nearly 150-acre parcel with the Polk County Middle School campus and the Polk County Department of Social Services building. In addition there is a connected 16.3 acre tract which the county acquired and houses a 6-acre public fishing pond (Laughter Pond) visible from NC Hwy 108.

The recreation facilities include

- 3 Ballfields
- Playground
- 2 Full-court Basketball Courts (6 goals)
- 2 Tennis Courts
- Walking trails
- 6-acre Fishing Pond

Approximately 50 acres of property to the west of the ballfields is undeveloped.

Aerial View of Property





Photos of Polk County Recreation Complex







## **Stearns Gym and Park**

Address: Corner of E. Mills & Peak Streets

The park and gym stand on the grounds of what was originally The Columbus Institute, a unique school opened in the 1890s by Frank M. Stearns who moved to the area from Ohio. The school transitioned to a public high school and served as such until 1947. The main school building now serves as the administration offices for Polk County Schools. The grounds are a public park that includes a walking path, gazebo and playground. The park area is about 2.5 acres.

The gymnasium was built in 1931 and currently serves as the primary public indoor recreation facility of the county. It has one full-size court use primarily for basketball and volleyball with room for spectators and several multi-purpose rooms. It also houses the staff of the recreation department. Programs that use the facility include youth basketball, volleyball, seniors walking group, yoga and after school and summer programs.

The gym floor was recently replaced and additional improvements were made to multi-purpose rooms and office space. The primary need of the facility now is better bathrooms

Aerial View of Property



Images for Stearns Gym and Park





## Searcy Park

Address: NC Hwy 108 & Horsepower Road, Mill Spring

Searcy Park is a lightly developed park on 7.17 acres consisting of two ballfields with backstops, some fencing along the sides and a taller shared outfield fence along NC Hwy. 108. There is a gravel parking lot for about 20 vehicles and a port-a-john.

The park gets limited use as a practice facility by youth sports teams, primarily baseball and softball.

Aerial View of Property



Images for Searcy Park





## **Gibson Park and Pool**

Address: Park Street, Columbus

Gibson Park and Pool are located in Columbus on a 6.8 acre tract. The park includes a ballfield currently used most by youth football, a playground, and a 25-meter pool and associated pool facilities. The pool is heavily used by local families in the summer for both open swim and swimming lessons.

Gibson Park and Pool were funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund and thus are subject to certain contractual grant agreements that the park or a highly comparable park always be open to the public. The North Carolina Division of Recreation and Parks administers such grant agreements.

### Aerial View of Property



Images for Gibson Park and Pool





## **Bradley Nature Preserve at Alexander's Ford**

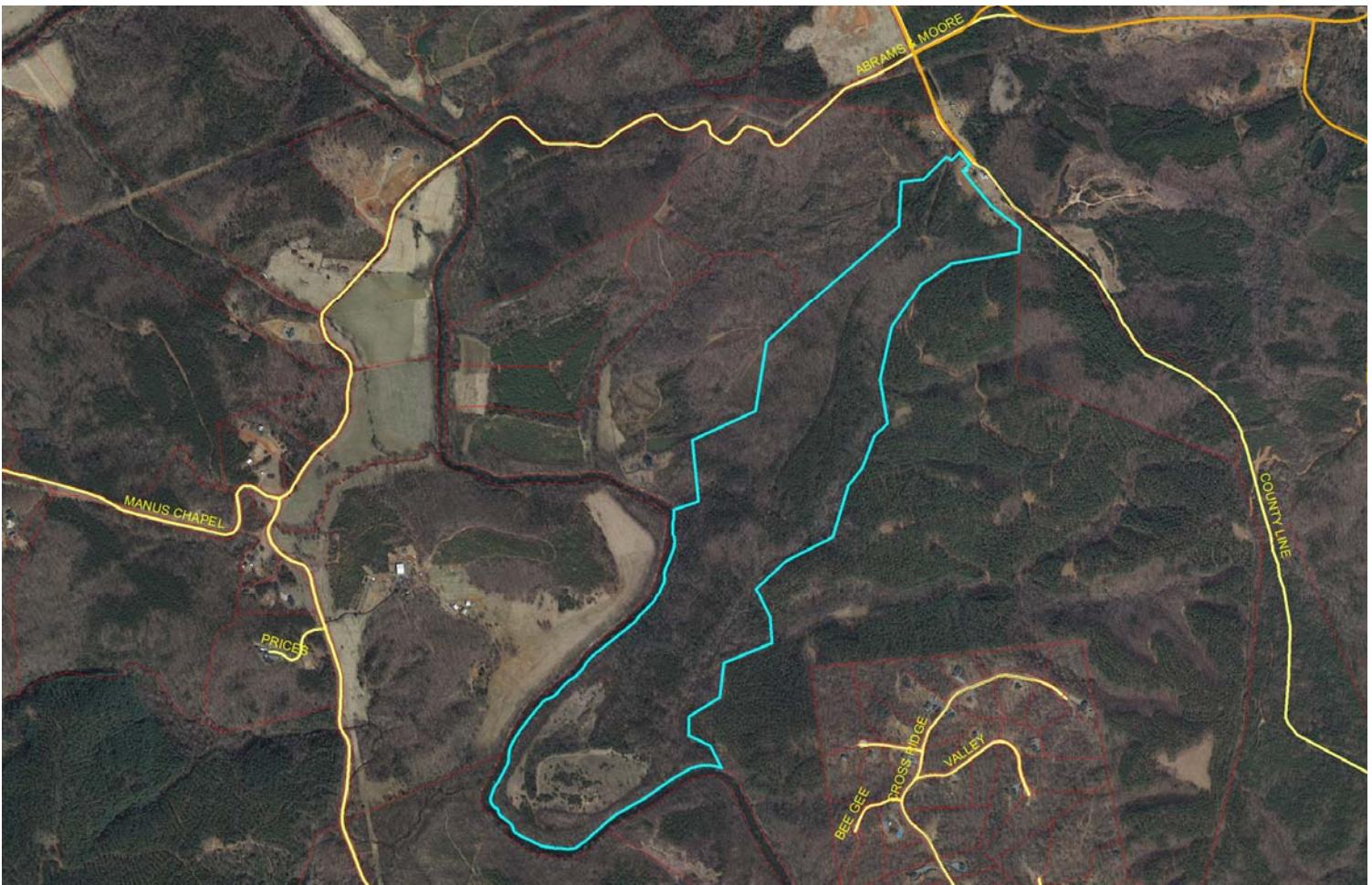
Address: Grays Chapel Church Road, Pea Ridge

The Bradley Preserve at Alexander's Ford came about due to partnership of several organizations and grants. It is a 163-Acre tract preserved largely for its connection to the Overmountain Men of the Revolutionary War. More than 1-mile of original Overmountain Victory National Historic Trail is on the property.

The Recreation Department currently has no specific role at the property though it is owned by the county. The county Maintenance Department will maintain the trails and picnic and parking areas. It is open for walking/hiking and picnics and borders the Green River.

A master plan for the property was prepared and is shown after the photographs below. The plan calls for additional trails, overlooks, historic interpretation and boat landing for people already paddling or tubing the river.

Aerial View of Property



Images for Bradley Nature Preserve at Alexander's Ford





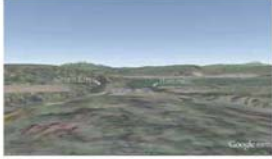
# Alexander's Ford Master Plan

## LEGEND

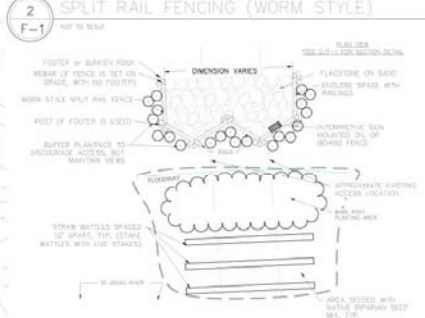
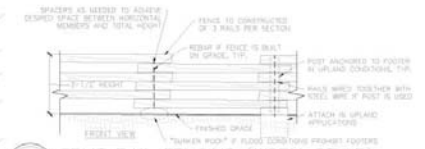
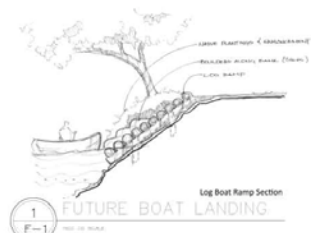
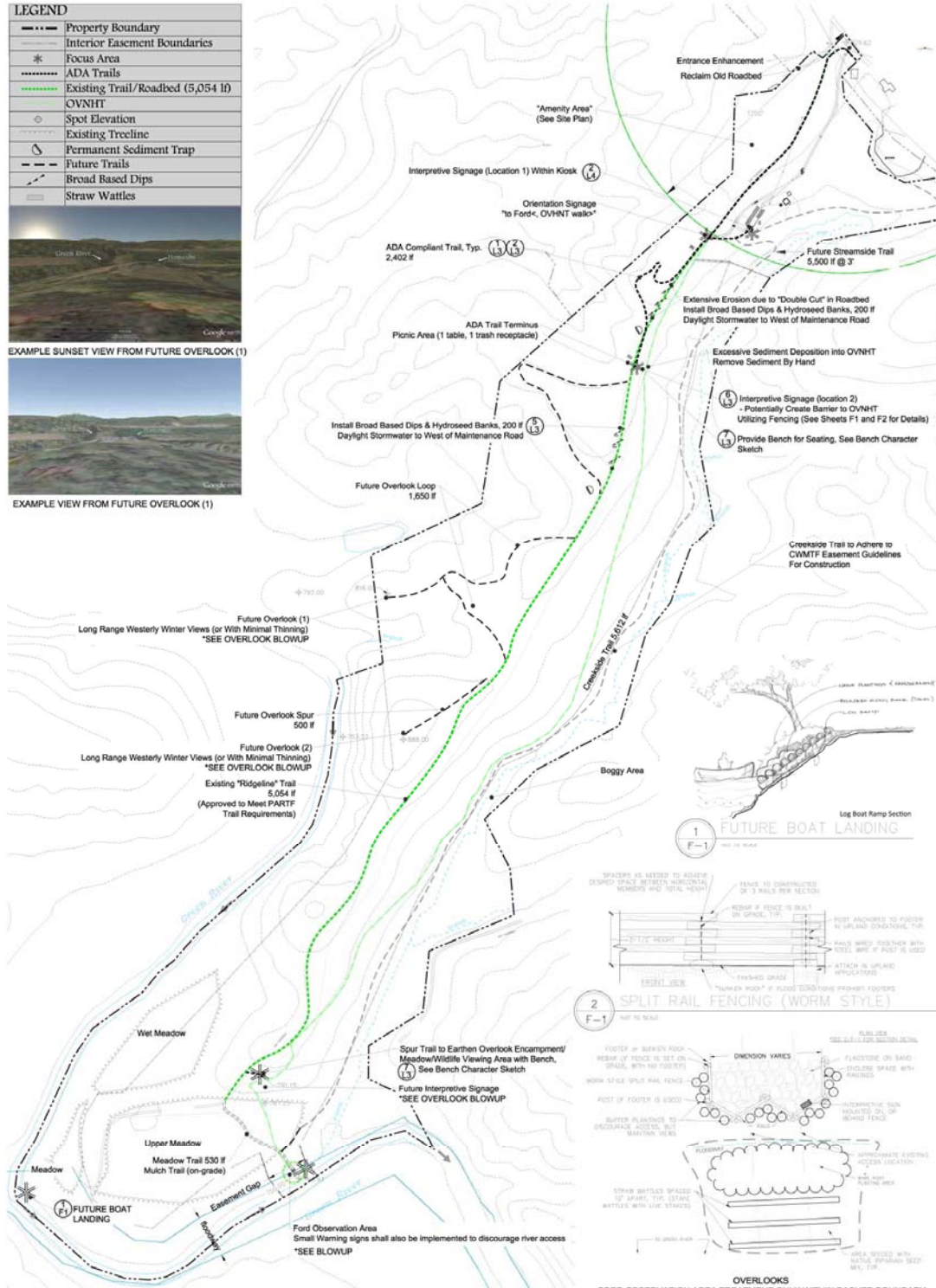
- Property Boundary
- Interior Easement Boundaries
- \* Focus Area
- ADA Trails
- Existing Trail/Roadbed (5,054 ID)
- OVNHT
- Spot Elevation
- Existing Treeline
- Permanent Sediment Trap
- Future Trails
- Broad Based Dips
- Straw Wattles



EXAMPLE SUNSET VIEW FROM FUTURE OVERLOOK (1)



EXAMPLE VIEW FROM FUTURE OVERLOOK (1)

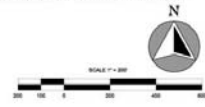


Sheet: **F1** of F2

# ALEXANDER'S FORD

## Future Phases Master Plan

December 30, 2011



# Non County-Owned Facilities

## Harmon Field

<http://www.harmonfield.com>

46 Acres

Town of Tryon

Governed by the Harmon Field Board of Supervisors

4 horse rings, 140 stalls, 3 baseball fields, 2 soccer fields, 4 tennis courts, an open air gym with basketball courts, playground, horseshoes, tetherball, putting green, walking trails, rental facilities, shelters, grills, a river, and a concession stand

## Rogers Park

Town of Tryon

Small downtown park and amphitheatre

## Woodland Park

Town of Tryon

## Vaughn Creek Greenway

Town of Tryon

.75 mile greenway

## Foothills Equestrian and Nature Center (FENCE)

<http://www.fence.org/>

384 Acres

5 miles of trails for riding, hiking, running open to the public. Extensive equestrian facilities, numerous events.

## Green River Gamelands

Over 10,000 acres

Owned by the State of North Carolina, operated by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Activities including hunting, fishing, hiking, paddling and tubing.

## Weaverbarton Shuford Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary

<http://www.pacolet.org/documents/WeaverbartonShufordMemorialWildlifeSanctuary-TrailMap.pdf>

The Sanctuary is an 89-acre tract preserved with a conservation easement by Pacolet Area Conservancy. It is open to the public for nature walks and has 1.3 miles of wooded trails. Access is at 215 Shuford Rd. Connects to Tom Raymond Fitness Trail.

## Tom Raymond Fitness Trail

St. Luke's Hospital

NC Hwy 108

1/3 mile long fitness trail with exercise stations, benches. Connects to Weaverbarton Shuford trails and ICC trails.

## Isothermal Community College Trail

ICC- Polk Campus, Polk County Library

NC Hwy 108

1/2-mile long woodland trail. Connects to Tom Raymond Fitness Trail and Weaverbarton Shuford trails.



### Norman Wilder Forest

NC Hwy 176

Pacolet Area Conservancy

<http://pacolet.org/pac-trails/>

185-acre nature preserve with 1.86 miles of wooded natural surface trails.

### Pearson Falls

Pearson Falls Rd.

Tryon Garden Club

<http://www.pearsonfalls.org/>

268-Acre botanical preserve and 90-foot waterfall. Quarter-mile trail to falls. Fee required.

### Lazy Girl Loop Trail

Behind Saluda Truck Stop

Saluda Community Land Trust

<http://saludaclt.org/initiatives-projects/>

1-mile natural surface walking trail

### McCreery Park

Main Street, Saluda

Playground, picnic shelter, skate park

### FETA/CETA Trails

<http://www.fetatrails.org/home.htm>

<http://cetatrails.com/trail-closings.htm>

Private equestrian trail systems open to members only.

### Chimney Rock State Park

<http://www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/chro/main.php>

<http://www.chimneyrockpark.com/>

More than 5,000 acres of public land have been acquired by the state as of May 2013 including the main park property that includes Chimney Rock. The park has land in four counties including Polk though access is limited at this time. The master plan calls for 60 miles of new trails for hiking and mountain biking. Outstanding rock climbing is also available. Camping options are planned.

### Town of Lake Lure Parks

<http://www.townoflakelure.com/town-parks-recreation.php>

The town offers a number of recreational facilities including a the Donald Ross Nature Trail Park just across the county line near the Ingles on NC Hwy 9.

### Palmetto Trail

<http://www.palmettoconservation.org/aboutthetrail.asp>

Statewide trail in South Carolina with segments on the NC/SC border and near Polk County such as the Blue Wall Preserve.

Broad River Paddle Trail

<http://rutherfordoutdoor.org/outdoor-activities/paddling>

Planned paddle trail on 40+ miles of Broad River between Lake Lure and Cleveland Co. Several public access points are open. Green River joins the Broad.

Polk County Schools

<http://www.polkschools.org/>

Seven school and associated facilities.

# **RECOMMENDATIONS, PRIORITIES & TIMELINE**

## **Key Recommendations**

The following outlines the main recommendations of this plan. Details on each recommendation are included on the pages that follow. This is a list and not in priority order.

- Focus most major upgrades/additions to the Polk County Recreation Complex in Mill Spring.
- Tie together Recreation Complex, Ag center, Searcy Park and Polk County Middle School
- Maintain/improve other existing facilities (Stearns Gym & Park, Gibson Park, Searcy Field) while keeping an eye towards long-term needs
- Develop joint use agreements through school board
- Develop and enforce contracts with youth sport groups for use of county facilities
- Enhance current marketing
- Facilitate trail development
- Develop current job descriptions for existing and potential staff
- Develop fund raising and volunteer recruitment plan
- Develop alternatives to all plans based on whether or not YMCA comes to county.

### Additional Recommendations (not detailed below)

- As shown in the demographic data, Polk County has a large percentage of seniors. Regularly assess whether the needs of seniors are being met by the Recreation Department or by other organizations.
- Encourage youth sports leagues not run by the county to make annual presentation to Recreation Board
- Encourage participation or board membership by either county staff or a Recreation Board member with key stakeholders such as the Harmon Field Board of Supervisors, Polk Fit, Fresh & Friendly, Pacolet Area Conservancy, Saluda Community Land Trust and FENCE.
- Partner with Polk Fit, Fresh & Friendly to advertise areas to walk and be physically active. Consider outdoor walking clubs, church walking groups or other means to get more citizens using the county's recreation facilities especially the Recreation Complex paths.

## **1. Focus most major upgrades/additions at Polk County Recreation Complex in Mill Spring.**

The Polk County Recreation Complex is the county's best recreation asset. It is centrally located, has multiple recreation options and ample parking. In addition, there are approximately 50 acres of undeveloped land to the west of existing facilities. The county's survey of recreation desires indicated a wish for an indoor pool, more trails and places to walk and picnic. The Recreation Complex offers the best location for most expanded recreation options.

### Indoor Pool/Recreation Center

The desire for an indoor pool has been on the wish list for county residents for years. The most recent survey of citizen recreation desires again put it on top of the list. The cost to build and operate an indoor pool is significant and is the biggest hurdle to providing one.

In order for an indoor pool to be sustainable it should be combined with other uses of the pool such as therapy and with other recreation such as a gymnasium, exercise facilities, multipurpose rooms for county programs and other community uses. While the financial commitment to operate such a facility is significant, the citizens are likely to support it if no other alternative is present. Caution should be exerted prior to any pursuit of such a facility given the limited financial resources of the county government and potential alternatives such as a YMCA.

Should a new indoor recreation complex with a pool be pursued the current Stearns Gym facility would no longer be the primary indoor facility and could be repurposed for other recreational or community uses.

It makes sense to locate such an indoor facility at or near the Recreation Complex.

### Trails

In both recent public meetings and the recent survey citizens expressed an interest in more trails (see additional trail discussion below). The Recreation Complex has a set of trails, but they are not well connected. Several relatively easy enhancements could connect the exiting trails.

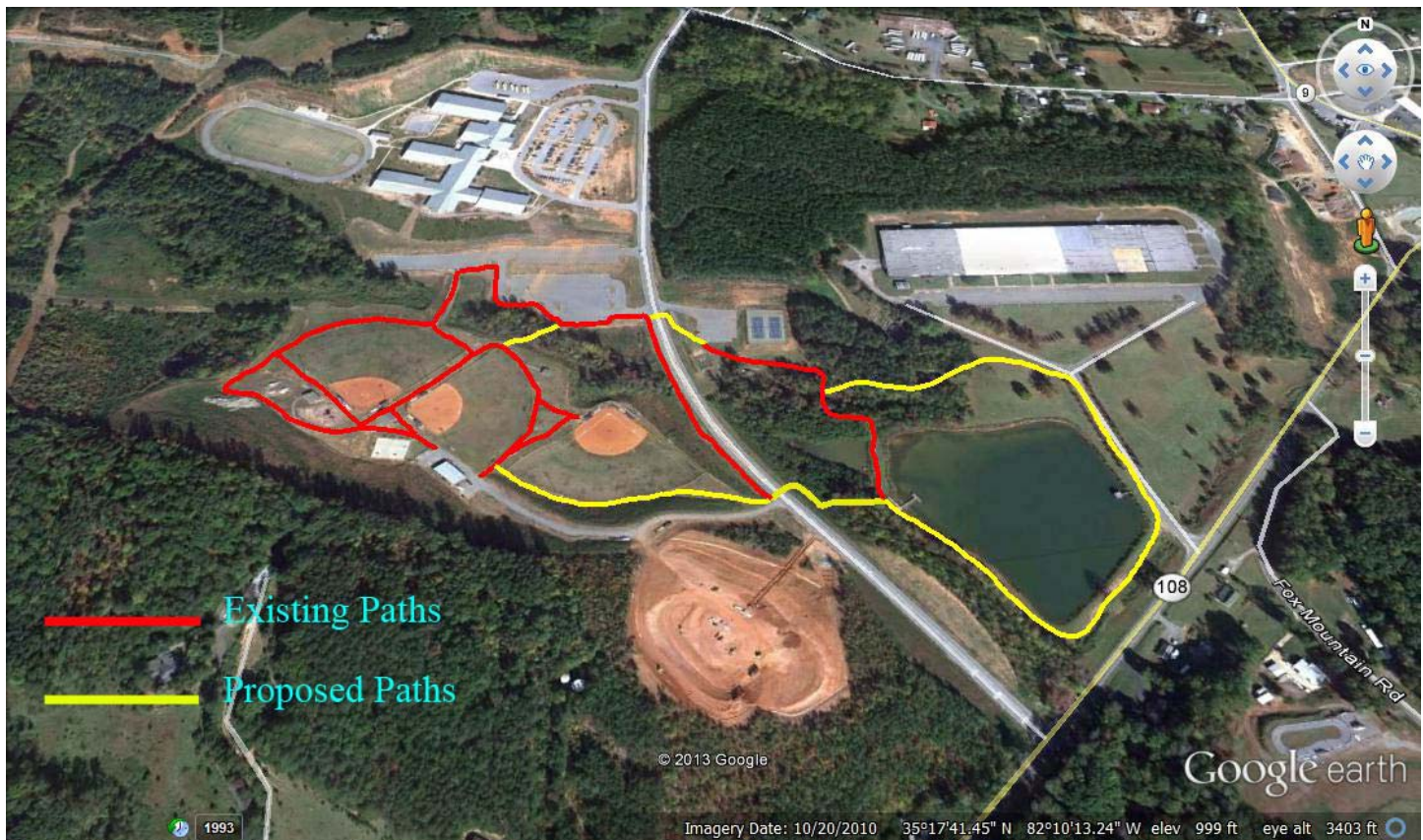
There are about 1 mile of paved paths at the complex now that are used regularly. The path along the main drive dead ends at the drive that accesses the storage building and handicapped parking area for the ball fields and playground. That path could easily be extended around the outfield fence of Field 3 and connect to existing paths to create a loop.

In addition, a pair of connections to the Laughter Pond access path should be created including crosswalk. A paved loop around Laughter Pond would be used extensively, be visible from the NC Hwy 108 and allow access for people fishing that is less muddy during wet weather. The path around the lake could be gravel to start and paved later when the resources are available.

Finally, a short connector from the southeast parking lot over the creek would encourage greater use of that parking area during Little League season and other times of heavy use.

The Google Earth image below shows the existing paved trails in red and the proposed paved trails in yellow. The county should create a phased cost estimate and priority list for the trail enhancements.

Additional natural surface trails are discussed later.



### SOCCER

The county's soccer program is operated at Harmon Field which is currently the best location for the program and may always be. Every effort should be made to have a strong relationship with Harmon Field to assure the youth of the county have a quality, safe place to play. All arrangements for use of the fields at Harmon Field for soccer should be in writing the responsibilities of each party clearly stated.

The county should, however, always be prepared to offer facilities for soccer on its own property to be sure the needs of the county youth are met. To that end, the county should develop a set of plans for in-house use that show whether and how 2-3 soccer fields could be built on the undeveloped land to the west of the existing ball fields. Given the terrain and existing creeks in the area a landscape architect and an engineer should be used to develop the plans. The need for additional facilities such as parking and bathrooms should be part of the assessment.

### Multi-use Natural Surface Trails

Additional trail opportunities exist on undeveloped land at the Recreation Complex. The property farthest to the west could be utilized for multi-use natural surface trails with potential tie-ins to the Polk County Middle School. Potential uses of the trails are hiking, mountain biking and equestrian. See additional discussion below in Recommendation No. 5. The potential exists to extend those trails beyond the boundary of the county-owned property but would require negotiation and easements from neighboring property owners. There is a Green River Gamelands tract of more than 1000 acres approximately a half-mile from boundary of the Recreation Complex as the crow flies. Most gamelands in the state are open only to foot traffic. Any new use of that property would need approval from North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

### Maintenance

Every effort should be made to maintain high quality facilities at the Recreation Complex. Maintenance budgets should reflect the true facility needs. In addition, any repairs or improvements to existing facilities should be prioritized and systematically done (i.e. one improvement per budget year). For example, the drainage on Field 3 needs improvement.

## **2. Tie together Recreation Complex, Ag center, Searcy Field and Polk County Middle School.**

The county has four main assets all in the Mill Spring area near the intersection of NC Highways 108 and 9. In addition to the Recreation Complex described above, the county operates Searcy Park and several public agencies share in the operation of the Polk County Agricultural Development and Community Center in the old Mill Spring school (<http://www.polkcountyfarms.org>). The Polk County Middle School shares a parcel with the Recreation Complex. All four properties are within a half-mile or less of each other.

Efforts should be made to tie these properties and agencies together in unique ways. Trails or sidewalks could be built to create a physical connection, special events held using multiple facilities and alternate/shared uses considered that would enhance both local recreation, agriculture and education.

No specific recommendations are offered here other than to encourage creative partnerships with the agencies and users of the facilities.

## **3. Maintain/improve existing facilities (Stearns Gym & Park, Gibson Park, Searcy Field) and programs while keeping an eye towards long-term needs.**

The Recreation Department does a great job making the most use of limited resources and older facilities such as Stearns and Gibson. The Stearns Gym was recently renovated and now has a new floor and bleachers. Other improvements were made to office and classroom space. Volunteer labor was tapped for much of the work.

The Gibson Park pool, while older, is well maintained and heavily used. The Health Department's recent inspection found the pool to be remarkable free of deficiencies. A state required lift for disabled persons was recently purchased and installed for the 2013 season.

The county must assess the long-term viability of this pool for serving the needs of the county. The county could benefit from a specific study about the current pool and how much longer it can be effectively used. That study will determine when plans should commence for replacement of the pool.

The combination of Stearns Gym and school gymnasiums does serve the community needs for sports like basketball and volleyball. Stearns has limitations though including space for spectators and insufficient bathrooms.

For the foreseeable future, both Stearns Gym and the Gibson Park pool must be maintained and utilized to their fullest extent. They appropriately serve the community's long-term needs, however, both facilities may need to be replaced during the scope of this plan which is 10 years.

Searcy Park currently gets limited use, mainly as a practice facility for area baseball and softball teams. Currently youth football uses Gibson Park for its practices. The lack of parking at Gibson poses a significant problem and a safety risk. Consideration should be given to using Searcy Field for youth football practices. The main limitation at Searcy for youth football use is the lack of lights.

The county should seriously consider establishing a long-term capital replacement fund to set aside money for future needs such as a new pool and other facility upgrades.

#### **4. Develop joint use agreements through school board**

The county currently utilizes three schools for its programs, mainly for youth basketball. In its most recent basketball season the county used Tryon Elementary, Saluda Elementary and Polk Central Elementary. All the use was through verbal agreements made by county staff and various staff at each school.

While the county staff has made the current situation work, the arrangements at each school are tenuous and subject to change due to personnel changes at schools or preferences of school staff.

A top priority of the county should be to pursue formal written joint use agreements for not only the basketball needs but all potential recreation at all county schools. Those agreements should be made through a policy requirement of the Polk County Board of Education. In other words, it should not be left up to individual schools whether to allow or disallow use by the county for its programs. The school facilities should be automatically available so long as both parties sign a joint use agreement. Such agreements spell out the responsibilities of each party and assure that no facility will suddenly become unavailable. The county for its part must provide sufficient resources in terms of staff, responsible coaches and maintenance and cleanliness to satisfy the school per the written agreement.

School facilities are primarily for the use of the school and its students, but since they were built with taxpayer dollars every effort should be made to make them available to public through use agreements.

Use agreements should not be limited to basketball and thus should the county need school facilities for other uses then the schools should be used.

A copy of a typical joint use agreement between a county/town and a school is included in the appendix.

#### **5. Develop and enforce contracts with youth sport groups for use of county facilities**

Polk County currently has two arrangements with youth sport organizations for use of its facilities. Polk County Youth Football and Polk County Little League use county facilities. The youth football group uses the field at Gibson Park primarily for practices while the Little League uses the ball fields at the Recreation Complex for both practices and league games.

Polk County has invested time and money in constructing, maintaining and managing its public recreation facilities and it is important that any user of those facilities be a steward of them. It is also important for youth sport leagues to have consistency in the facilities they use. It is the nature of youth sports leagues to have significant turnover in their board of directors as children of those directors age out. Thus having a written agreement that assures them of the use of the facility will ensure continuity.

The exact responsibilities of each party are not critical and simply factors for negotiation. What is important is that there is a written use agreement and it is enforced. This is the best way to assure that each organization is protected. This also assure the number one objective, the enjoyment and enrichment of the youth participants, is kept a priority for all.

A sample agreement for youth sport league use of a public park is included in the appendix.



## 6. Enhance current marketing

Marketing comes in many forms and encompasses many venues. For a recreation department it means promoting its programs, special events, use of its facilities, and other recreation opportunities.

Polk County uses traditional means to get the word out about its programs such as flyers, news releases, word of mouth as well as using the social media website Facebook. The department also uses the county website to post registration forms and other information.

### Signage

Polk County's facilities have some identifying signage, but critical additions are needed to help highlight those facilities and enhance brand recognition of its department logo (see cover page of this report).

All facilities need a primary free standing sign on the grounds of the facility that includes the name of the facility and the county recreation logo. These signs should be uniform and prominent in appearance to ensure recognition of the facility as one provided by Polk County. Here are two examples...



In addition to the main park signs, directional signs are needed for all facilities. Specific signs needed are...

- ✓ At NC Hwy 108 identifying the entrance to the Polk County Recreation Complex
- ✓ On Mills Street in Columbus identifying the turn to Gibson Park (this sign was apparently misplaced during the addition of a sidewalk in the area)
- ✓ Multiple signs directing people to the Alexander's Ford nature preserve

### Social Media

The county has a decent following on Facebook with over 400 'likes.' For maximum benefit, social media experts recommend posting to Facebook multiple times a week, and preferably at least once or twice a day. Photos and videos sell! They are consistently the most viewed and liked posts and generate the most interactivity with supporters. Facebook and other social media can be critical, and sometimes the only, way to reach youth. While there are multiple social media options, it is best to focus on one or two and do them well. The county may benefit most from adding a YouTube channel and begin posting videos from various programs and events.

Link to the county's Facebook page...

<https://www.facebook.com/PoCoRec?fref=ts>

### Recreation website

The recreation department has a portion of the county government's website for its main web presence. It contains basic information about the department and is used primarily as a source to download registration forms for various programs.

It is our understanding that the recreation department has limited access to the site for updates but that arrangement is set to change soon. With more control of their website the department should add significant details to the page including information and site maps of all its parks and facilities. It can also consider an online registration system for its programs.

A large percentage of people exploring recreation options will do so on the Internet first and thus having a strong web presence is critical for first impressions and for providing good, detailed information.

Additionally, the county's tourism office has an interactive map and information about local recreation options. The county recreation department should work with tourism to boost the information on the tourism website.

Link to the department's webpage...

<http://www.polknc.org/departments/recreation/index.php>

## **7. Facilitate trail development**

One of the top requests according to both the county's recreation survey and in public meetings was for more trails. Trails, greenways, walking paths are now a normal part of the expected recreation offerings of an area.

Trails run the gamut from paved paths to natural surface to paddle trails or blueways. Wide, paved trails are the most popular because they are suitable for walking, running, cycling, baby strollers and more. They are also the most expensive to build and maintain.

The county should, with the help of partners, develop a formal trail plan that is specific to Polk County. Isothermal Planning and Development Commission has already developed a regional trail plan that includes Polk County and thus can serve as a strong starting point to develop a formal local plan. IPDC maintains a regional trail map including existing trails in Polk County. That data was used to publish the recent map for the Fit, Fresh & Friendly group. The map shows all of the places to be physically active including trails, parks and schools.

Other good trail partners include the municipalities (Columbus, Tryon & Saluda), Pacolet Area Conservancy, Saluda Community Land Trust, Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy, Green River Watershed Alliance, Chimney Rock State Park, Rutherford Outdoor Coalition (for Green/Broad River paddle trail), NC Wildlife Resources Commission, ECO (Hendersonville), Polk County Cooperative Extension and Polk County Schools.

Additionally, the county could pursue an AmeriCorps Member to work on trail development and volunteer recruitment. Rutherford County created a similar position in 2013.

The formal trail plan could include the following...

- a. Green River Paddle Trail
- b. Additional trail development and connectivity to Green River Gamelands
- c. Multi use trail including public equestrian trails. There are 200 miles of equestrian trails in the area but they are for private member use only.
- d. Connection between Green River Gamelands and Chimney Rock State Park
- e. Local greenways to connect neighborhoods and towns
- f. Regional trail connections such as the Overmountain Victory Trail and connections to neighboring counties. Consideration of enhanced use of Alexander's Ford including equestrian use.

## **8. Develop current job descriptions for existing and potential staff**

Recreation Director Patty Aldred has been with the county for 18 years. Her job has changed dramatically over the years and thus warrants an updated job description. Other full and part-time staff also should have updated job descriptions.

Further it is recommended that adding staff be considered when the budget allows. The highest priority addition is Director of Programs, which allow the Recreation Director to focus more on bigger picture goals of the department and the county rather than day-to-day management of the programs and facilities. The Recreation Director would still be heavily involved on those programs but long-term goals such as fund raising and developing partnerships could be accomplished with the added position. A job description for Director of Programs should be developed and an alternative job description for the Director of Recreation developed should the new position be added. Additional potential staff could be considered and job descriptions written for those positions.

The county should also prepare contingency plans in the event of management emergency for youth football and Little League which are currently managed by volunteer boards.

## **9. Develop fund raising and volunteer recruitment plan**

The recreation department has had some success with donations and grants in the past, including a recent grant from the Polk County Community Foundation to help purchase a transport van. There is also a small reserve fund that was created by donations. They have also had significant contributions from volunteers for such things as labor for upgrades at Stearns Gym.

Given the potential, it would be advantageous for the department to set up a more formal organization such as a non-profit Friends of Polk County Parks to focus more time on raising money and recruiting volunteers.

Setting up a separate non-profit group will make it more likely that people will donate since it is sometimes hard to get donors to give directly to a government entity.

All Friends groups make their own priorities and thus one may look vastly different from another. For example, the Friends group in Polk County could be a focal point for trail development in addition to seeking donations for existing park facilities. It is important for a Friends group to fully understand the needs of the community and the recreation department.

## **10. Develop alternatives to all plans based on whether or not YMCA comes to county.**

As of the writing of this plan, a YMCA for the area is again being studied. The wish for an indoor pool is one of the primary driving factors. Polk County is in the Spartanburg area YMCA district. The director of the Spartanburg YMCAs attended a recent public meeting related to the this plan. He noted a new study was underway to assess the feasibility of a new YMCA in Polk County or possibly in nearby Landrum, SC.

The effect on the Polk County Recreation Department and on the citizens of the county of a YMCA would be significant and close attention should be paid to these efforts. All of the recommendations in this plan would need to be reexamined should a YMCA facility be built.

It is possible for a YMCA and a county recreation department to coexist but the only way for that relationship to work for the citizens of the area, both organizations must communicate and partner extremely well. If not, then some citizens are at risk of not having recreation options that work for them.

We strongly encourage the county and its recreation leadership maintain an open line of communication with the YMCA leaders.

# Implementation Priorities & Timeline

Establishing priorities for the department and the county as a whole is a challenge since a different focus (i.e. the county government, a parent, the department head) will result in different priorities.

Here we will attempt to balance all of those priorities so that the recreation needs of the citizens of the county are best served.

## **Priority #1 - Develop Joint Use Agreements with the school system and develop and enforce use agreements with youth sports leagues (Recommendations #4 & #5 above).**

In a county with limited resources, it is critical that all recreational facilities constructed with public dollars be utilized to their fullest extent. If schools facilities are available for use, then they should be used. The same applies for youth sports leagues which must use public facilities to practice and play. Signed agreements protect all parties and ensure that the recreation participants are the focus.

## **Priority #2 - Maintain/improve existing facilities & programs**

While this is not as exciting as new facilities or new trails, if existing facilities and programs are not maintained then there is little point in looking at adding anything new.

## **Priority #3 - Develop current job descriptions for existing and potential staff.**

Again not a glamorous priority, but critical for long-term stability of the department.

## **Priority #4 - Focus most major upgrades/additions at Polk County Recreation Complex in Mill Spring and tie together with Ag Center, Searcy Field and Middle School.**

With its central location and additional available land, the county should look first to the Recreation Complex for any new additions. In particular, the addition of connector trails and a loop around the fishing pond would markedly enhance the complex and encourage use.

## **Priority #5 - Facilitate trail development**

This was requested in multiple ways in both the survey, in public meetings and in discussions with the Polk County Recreation Board. Trails should be seen as a core recreation asset, just like playgrounds, ball fields and swimming pools.

## **Priority #6 - Enhance current marketing**

The main focus here should be signage and improvements to the information provided on the county website. Of particular priority is a directional sign on NC Hwy 108 for the Recreation Complex.

## **Priority #7 - Develop fund raising and volunteer recruitment plan**

## **Priority #8 - Develop alternatives and maintain communication regarding the YMCA**

## **TIMELINE (Simple, by priorities)**

### Immediate

Priority #1 - Develop Joint Use Agreements with the school system and develop and enforce use agreements with youth sports leagues

Priority #3 - Develop current job descriptions for existing and potential staff.

### Ongoing...

Priority #2 - Maintain/improve existing facilities & programs

Priority #4 - Focus most major upgrades/additions at Polk County Recreation Complex and Mill Spring area.

Priority #8 - Develop alternatives and maintain communication regarding the YMCA

### In the next 1-2 years...

Priority #5 - Facilitate trail development (begin...)

Priority #6 - Enhance current marketing

Priority #7 - Develop fund raising and volunteer recruitment plan

## **TIMELINE (detailed, including other recommendations...)**

### **Immediate & Ongoing**

- 1) Develop Joint Use Agreements with the school system
  - a) Board members and recreation director work with county manager to develop proposal
  - b) Present proposal to Polk County Schools superintendent
  - c) Work with superintendent to get authorization from Board of Education
  - d) Work with the schools' and county attorney to develop joint use agreement(s)
- 2) Develop and enforce use agreements with youth sports leagues
  - a) Work with county manager and county attorney to develop use agreement and enforcement plan
  - b) Meet with youth sports league boards to discuss importance of use agreements for both county and the league
- 3) Develop current job descriptions for existing and potential staff
  - a) Meet with Human Resources Director to develop job descriptions
  - b) Include potential new position of Director of Programs and include alternative description for two current staff members given the potential new position.
- 4) Maintain existing facilities & programs
- 5) Focus most major upgrades/additions at Polk County Recreation Complex in Mill Spring.
- 6) Develop alternatives and maintain communication regarding the YMCA

### **In the next year...**

- 1) Get cost estimates for new connecting paths and pond loop at Recreation Complex and research grants and other funding options
- 2) Get cost estimates, options for design work and building costs for monument signs at each park
- 3) Work with IPDC and partners such as Fit, Fresh & Friendly to pursue a formal county trails plan
  - a. Explore the following elements in the plan...
    - i. Green River Paddle Trail
    - ii. Multi-use trails for equestrian, hiking, mountain biking
    - iii. Consult with NC Wildlife Commission regarding additional uses of Green River Gamelands
    - iv. Pursue connections between the towns
    - v. Status and potential for Saluda Grade rail corridor
- 4) Utilize Facebook more frequently to post photos of events and games and other information
  - a. Recruit volunteers (parents?) to take photos and video to post
- 5) Begin annual invitations to Polk Youth Football and Polk Little League to make presentations to the Recreation Board after their season's are complete
- 6) Upgrade information on county website about the recreation department and its facilities
- 7) Develop capital upgrades plan with priorities for improvements to existing facilities (i.e. drainage on Field 3 at Rec Complex and bathrooms at Stearns Gym)

### **In the next two years...**

- 1) Start a Friends of Polk County Parks non-profit organization to take lead on fund raising and volunteer recruitment for county recreation needs
- 2) Get a formal assessment of the Gibson Park pool to determine its lifespan and a timeframe for replacement
- 3) Work with Polk County Tourism to utilize their interactive map for showing details about parks and trails
- 4) Implement Phase 1 of new connecting trails and pond loop at Recreation Complex
- 5) Look ways to connect (physical and in programs and events) the Recreation Complex, Ag Center, Searcy Field and Polk County Middle School
- 6) Work with partners to develop programs for walking and physical activity for adults and families, particularly at the Recreation Complex

### **In the next two to four years...**

1. Continue to pursue additional trail development based on the priorities developed on the county trail plan
2. Assess the feasibility of a county indoor recreation center (depending on YMCA...)
3. Consider adding staff. Possibly a Director of Programs position and realign the priorities of the Director's position based on the job descriptions developed.

#### In the next four years...

1. Reassess the elements of this plan and begin process for a new plan and new community survey

#### In the next five years

1. Develop a new plan to replace this one

# APPENDIX

Approved 12/2/13





# Promoting Physical Activity Through Joint Use Agreements

A GUIDE FOR NORTH CAROLINA SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES TO DEVELOP AND USE JOINT USE AGREEMENTS





**North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Division of Public Health. (2012). Promoting Physical Activity Through Joint Use Agreements. North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Raleigh, North Carolina.**

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## WHAT IS A JOINT USE AGREEMENT?

Physical activity is an important part of good health for everyone, regardless of age or ability. Adults who are regularly active can better manage stress, maintain a healthy weight and decrease their risk of developing chronic diseases such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.<sup>2</sup> Across North Carolina, communities are identifying ways to encourage people to be more active. Joint use agreements remove barriers to physical activity by providing places to be active.

In fact, allowing access to school physical activity spaces and facilities is a recommended strategy in the Healthy People 2020 goals for the nation's health.<sup>3</sup> Schools may have facilities for physical activity and can work with partners to create joint use agreements. In addition, city or county parks and recreation departments – as well as some community organizations – have playing fields, gymnasiums, or pools they can make available to schools. Joint use agreements allow organizations to open their facilities to outside organizations and the greater community. By working together to share facilities, schools and communities can achieve multiple benefits.

From the perspective of school staff, joint use agreements provide a venue for students to get more physical activity. Physical activity contributes to students' health, which is a key factor in their success in school.<sup>4,5</sup> Active children and adolescents can improve their health and their success in school. Healthy children miss less school and are more prepared for the school day. Schools may expand programs and opportunities for students and staff through access to community pools and unique recreation facilities not usually provided on the school campus. Also, agreements may outline ways in which resources can be shared, which often means cost savings on the maintenance and security of existing facilities.

Joint use agreements that increase access to physical activity venues are also an opportunity to align resources and work together to meet the needs of the entire community. Individuals and families may have increased access to playgrounds, basketball courts and walking trails. Community organizations can gain access to fields and gymnasiums to practice and compete, and schools may share some of the costs associated with increased use by charging rental fees. Furthermore, participating in physical activity in safe and clean public spaces helps everyone to feel more connected to their community.

This guide provides information for North Carolina school systems, school administrators, members of local government, parks and recreation staff, community based organizations, and community members on how to share physical activity resources through joint use agreements in North Carolina.

Joint use agreements are formal agreements between two or more entities – often a school and one or more public or private organization – outlining terms and conditions for shared use of public property or facilities.<sup>1</sup> These are written documents agreed upon by all parties and can apply to various types of facilities.

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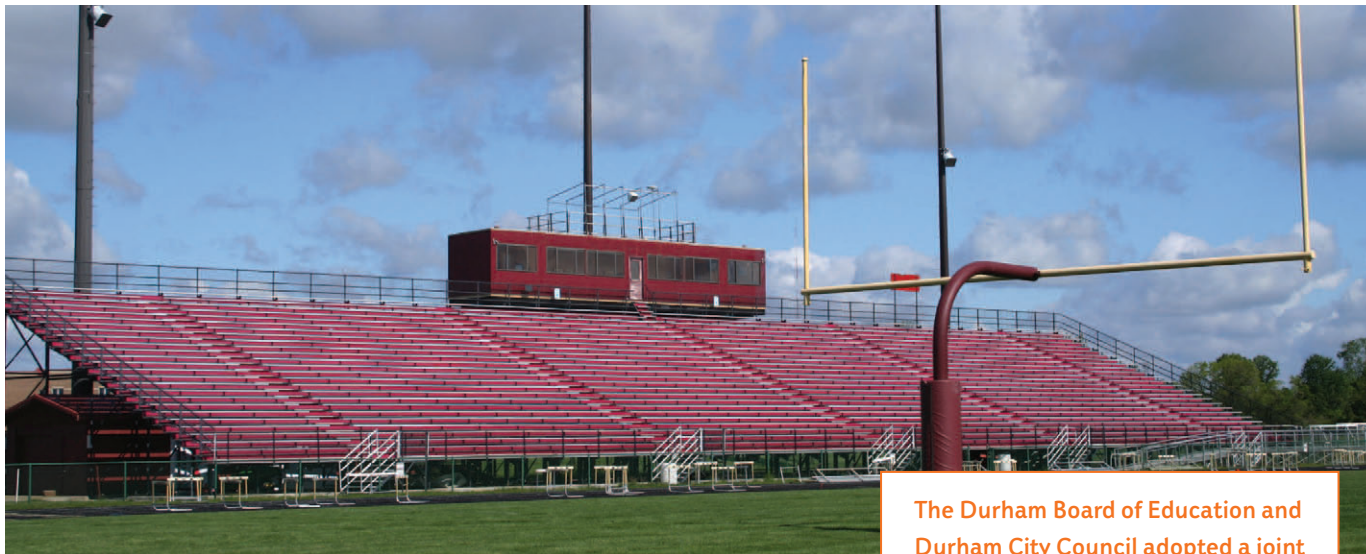
**Q:** My school has an unwritten agreement to allow community members to use our school spaces when school is not in session. Is this a joint use agreement?

**A:** Opening your school doors is a first step. However, agreeing upon and writing down details of the agreement, including hours of use and partner responsibilities, helps protect the schools and the users. Creating a mutually agreed upon joint-use agreement ensures participants are familiar with their role, clearly establishes the rules for using facilities, and creates a process that prevents or addresses issues as they arise.

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Although this guide focuses on physical activity, joint use agreements can also be implemented for other purposes. Classrooms can be opened up for community organizations or adult learning groups and kitchens can be shared with faith-based organizations. Collaboration and synergy among partners can lead to other opportunities, such as leveraging funds for other community needs such as a library. For example, Pitt Community College has long partnered with Pitt County School System to provide joint use of facilities. Pamela Hilbert, Ed.D., Vice President of Academic Affairs at Pitt Community College, explains, "Pitt Community College offers welding classes at one of the high schools, and may soon be doing this at a second school, which gives the high school students a head start on a diploma or Associate in Applied Sciences Degree in Welding Technologies."



## TYPES OF JOINT USE AGREEMENTS

There are four types of joint use agreements: opening outdoor facilities, opening outdoor and indoor, opening facilities for third-parties, and joint use of school district and city/county facilities.<sup>1</sup> Representatives from all the relevant stakeholders, such as schools and community agencies and members, should work together to determine which type of agreement will best meet the needs of all involved. Keep in mind that more than one type of agreement might be appropriate.

- 1. Opening outdoor facilities for use during non-school hours** – Schools identify outdoor facilities such as tracks, fields and playgrounds that will be open for use by community members.
- 2. Opening indoor and outdoor facilities for use during non-school hours** – Schools open both outdoor and indoor facilities for use by community members. This includes tracks, fields, playgrounds, gymnasiums and pools.
- 3. Opening school facilities for use during non-school hours and authorizing third parties to operate programs** – Schools allow groups like youth sports leagues to rent facilities for a small fee. This requires scheduling but schools can earn money to assist with maintenance.
- 4. Joint use of school district and city/county recreational facilities** – Schools and communities are encouraged to share the cost of building new facilities or co-locating a shared need, such as a pool.

The Durham Board of Education and Durham City Council adopted a joint use agreement that allows specified facilities to be shared without a rental charge. Durham's Parks and Recreation Department uses school playing fields and gymnasiums for recreation programs and schools use the Durham Parks and Recreation Department facilities for sports and recreation. This has been especially beneficial for four of Durham's high school swimming teams who, for no cost, have scheduling priority at Durham Parks and Recreation's two indoor pools. According to Amy Pehowic, manager at the Edison Johnson Aquatic Center, the joint use agreement is an example of the City of Durham Parks and Recreation commitment to youth swimming.



## POINTS TO CONSIDER

Developing a joint use agreement requires consideration of several different points. Engage all stakeholders in the process to ensure the needs of everyone are addressed.

**Definition of terms** – Define all items important to the agreement. This includes naming partner agencies, the facility open for use and the hours of operation.

**Guidelines for Operation** – Create guidelines that say who can use the facility, when they can use it, how much it costs and when payment is due. Also, decide who will schedule the facilities and who will lock the facilities if open past normal hours. All collaborating partners should develop and agree upon these guidelines. Guidelines should be documented in a written contract mutually agreed upon and signed by all parties.

**Partner Roles and Responsibilities** – Clearly define roles and responsibilities for all partners. Decide who is responsible for general clean-up or maintenance, long term maintenance updates, cost for operation and any additional responsibilities related to the agreement.

**Liability** – North Carolina schools are well protected by sovereign immunity, a type of immunity that protects the school from civil suit. Partners should agree on liability and establish procedures to resolving conflict. This will provide more protection for everyone involved in the agreement.

## BENEFITS OF JOINT USE AGREEMENTS

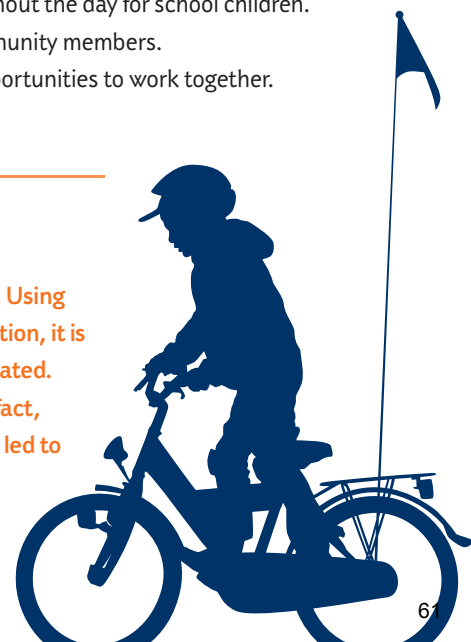
Joint use agreements can:

- Facilitate cost-sharing for maintenance of school grounds and buildings.
- Provide increased resources for physical education and physical activity throughout the day for school children.
- Improve access to places to be physically active for families and individual community members.
- Promote partnerships across community agencies that may influence other opportunities to work together.
- Create a sense of community ownership and engagement.

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**Q: When should my school consider a joint use agreement?**

**A: Joint use agreements can be put into place at any time, in any type of community. Using existing structures and resources can be a cost- and time-saving strategy. In addition, it is important to consider an agreement when new schools are being planned or updated. Including joint use in the planning of these projects can save time and money. In fact, partnerships between some schools and parks and recreation departments have led to new or improved facilities the school could not have otherwise afforded.**





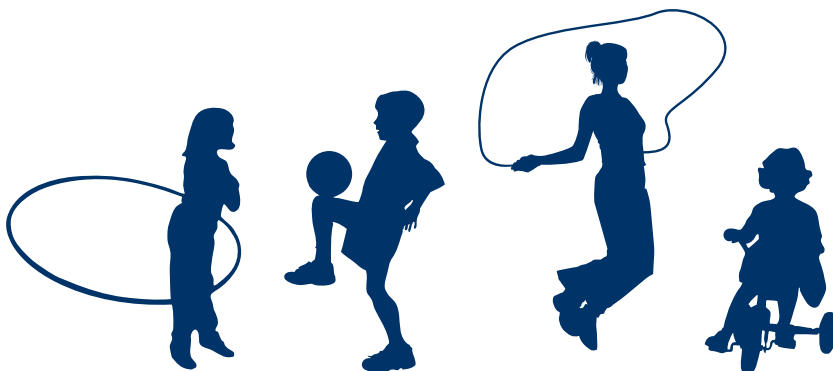
## POLICIES THAT SUPPORT JOINT USE IN NORTH CAROLINA

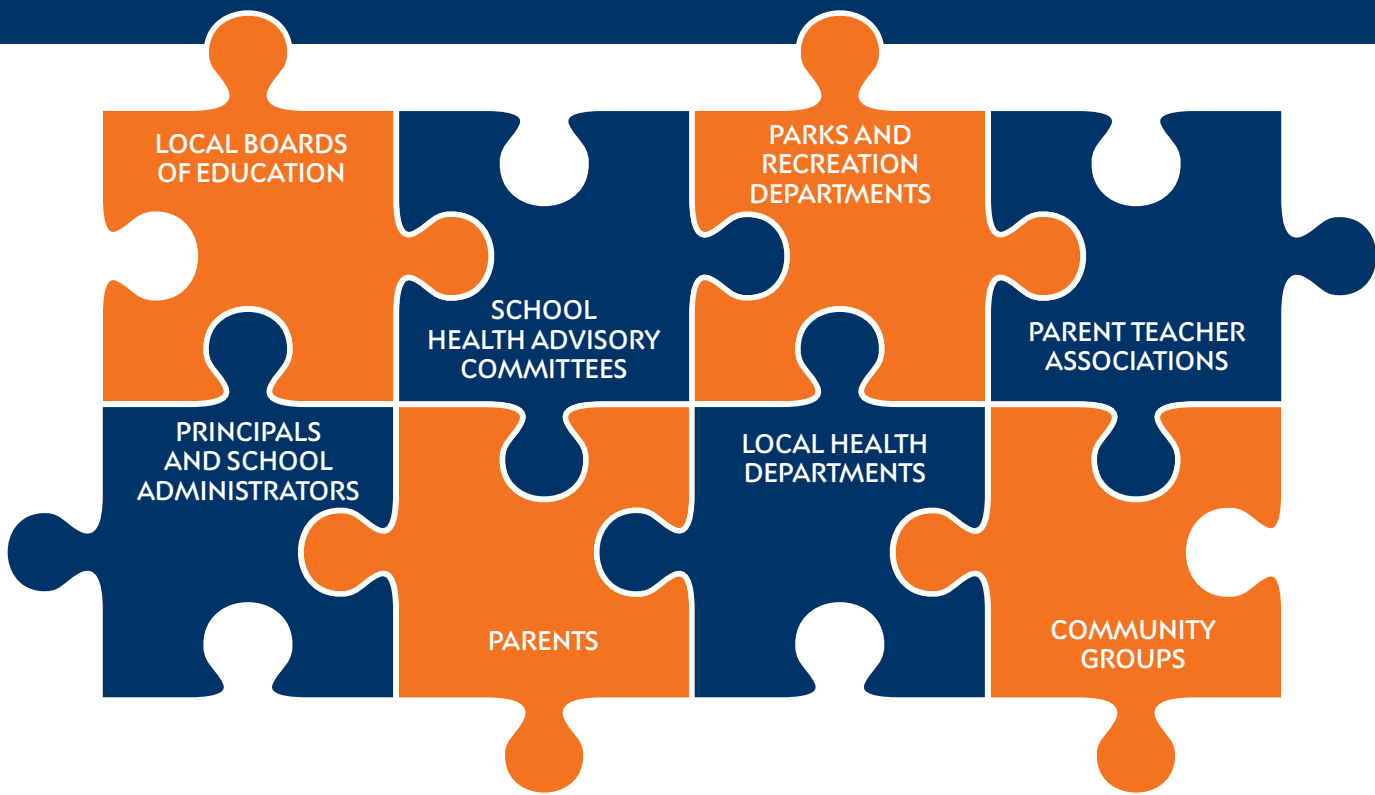
The North Carolina General Assembly has created legislation to encourage and protect schools that develop joint use agreements. In 2009, the General Assembly passed Session Law 334, which amended General Statute 115C-12 by adding a new sub-division encouraging local boards of education to enter into joint use agreements for physical activity. The statute reads, "The State Board of Education shall encourage local boards of education to enter into agreements with local governments and other entities regarding the joint use of their facilities for physical activity. The agreements should delineate opportunities, guidelines, and the roles and responsibilities of the parties, including responsibilities for maintenance and liability."

Furthermore, North Carolina General Statute 115C-524 states that "local boards of education may adopt rules and regulations under which they may enter into agreements permitting non school groups to use school and personal property, except for school buses, for other than school purposes so long as such use is consistent with the proper preservation and care of the public school property. No liability shall attach to any board of education, individually or collectively, for personal injury suffered by reason of the use of such school property pursuant to such agreements."

**"Empowering healthy, responsible students is one goal of the NC State Board of Education and the NC Department of Public Instruction which is supported by creating healthy environments, programs and practices. Joint use agreements can provide greater access to facilities and encourage physical activity opportunities outside of the school day for staff members, students and their families by strongly connecting the community to the school!"**

– Paula Hudson Hildebrand, Chief Health and Community Relations Officer, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction





## WORKING TOGETHER

Joint use agreements are usually between a school board and a city or county agency (e.g., parks and recreation department). There are, however, opportunities and roles for others to be involved in the process.

### Local Board of Educations

- Approve the concept of the venture.
- Help partners decide roles and responsibilities.

### School Health Advisory Committees

- Assess the needs of the community.
- Identify resources to support joint use agreements.
- Approach the school board about implementing a joint use agreement.

### Parks and Recreation Departments

- Work with schools interested in co-location.
- Share facilities with school teams.

### Parent Teacher Associations

- Provide assistance with programming and promotion of joint use agreements.
- Write letters of support to the local board of education.

### Principals and School Administrators

- Create community partnerships.
- Allow access to school facilities.
- Engage the leadership of the local board of education to encourage more schools to open facilities.

### Parents

- Encourage the school board to implement a joint use agreement.
- Bring families to the facilities to play and be active.

### Local Health Departments

- Promote open facilities to community members.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of the joint use agreement.
- Assist in developing partnerships.
- Work collaboratively to secure grants to enhance the agreements with additional programs or resources.

### Community Groups

- Non-profit organizations that incorporate or provide physical activity opportunities can provide programs in the space. Examples including faith-based organizations using tracks for walking groups and after-school programs using gymnasiums or outdoor spaces for recreation programs.





## STATE LEGISLATION

- General Statute 115C-12 (35) – [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us)
- General Statute 115C - 524 – [www.ncga.state.nc.us](http://www.ncga.state.nc.us)

## EXAMPLES OF NORTH CAROLINA JOINT USE AGREEMENTS

Schools and communities across North Carolina are working together to create joint use agreements. Listed below are joint use agreements that are currently in place. Visit the websites to learn more about the agreements.

- Bertie County – [www.bertie.k12.nc.us](http://www.bertie.k12.nc.us)
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools: Community Use of Schools – [www.cms.k12.nc.us](http://www.cms.k12.nc.us)
- City of Durham – [www.ci.durham.nc.us](http://www.ci.durham.nc.us)
- Pitt County Community Schools and Recreation: Facilities and General Information – [www.pittcountync.gov](http://www.pittcountync.gov)
- Wake County Public Schools – [www.wcpss.net](http://www.wcpss.net)

## NATIONAL RESOURCES

- Checklist for Developing a Joint Use Agreement, ChangeLab Solutions – <http://changelabsolutions.org>
- Joint Use Agreements: Creating Opportunities for Physical Activity, Bridging the Gap: Research Informing Policies & Practices for Healthy Youth – [www.bridgingthegapresearch.org](http://www.bridgingthegapresearch.org)
- Playing Smart: Maximizing the Potential of School and Community Property Through Joint Use Agreements, National Policy and Legal Analysis Network to Prevent Childhood Obesity – [www.nplanonline.org](http://www.nplanonline.org)
- Research Synthesis, Summaries, & Briefs, Active Living Research: Building the Evidence to Prevent Childhood Obesity and Support Active Communities – [www.activelivingresearch.org](http://www.activelivingresearch.org)





# Success Stories



## MOUNTAIN HERITAGE HIGH SCHOOL – YANCEY COUNTY

The track at Mountain Heritage High School in Yancey County had long been a place for community members and students to move more. However, over the years the track had fallen into disrepair, becoming so cracked and weathered that track meets could no longer be held on the grounds.

The track at Mountain Heritage High School provided a much needed physical activity resource to students and community residents in a county with only two miles of sidewalks and handicap access at some indoor fitness facilities.

The “Getting on the Right Track” project at Mountain Heritage High School helped the school secure grant funding to resurface and upgrade the security of the track. It also prompted project leaders to refine the joint-use understanding between the school and community with defined hours, improved signage and promotion of the track as open for community use.

As a result of this project, several community events have been hosted at the track including the region’s Special Olympics. In addition, many community residents are using the track regularly; some have even started walking groups.

Project leaders see all of the project components as the basis for a more vibrant, healthier community. Colby Martin, project director, noted, “The project is just a piece in the many things that make our community better for residents and future residents. It sends a message that the school, and the seven partners that came together for this, care not only for the health of the student population but also for the community they serve.”



## CHARLOTTE-MECKLENBURG SCHOOLS

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system is successfully working with the county government to implement joint use agreements. Schools and recreation facilities are co-located to meet the needs of both organizations. When land is being purchased to build new recreation facilities, the availability/need for schools is assessed. If new recreation facilities are built where there is a need for new schools, land is donated to the school system to build the school near the new facility. If there is not a need for new schools, the recreation facilities are built near existing schools. And if needed, current schools are updated to include new recreation facilities that are shared between the school and the community.

Sterling Elementary and the Charlotte Area Transit System created an agreement to build a Park and Ride structure near the school. By working together, the elementary school was able to build a play space on top of the parking structure. This maximized limited space and met the needs of both organizations.

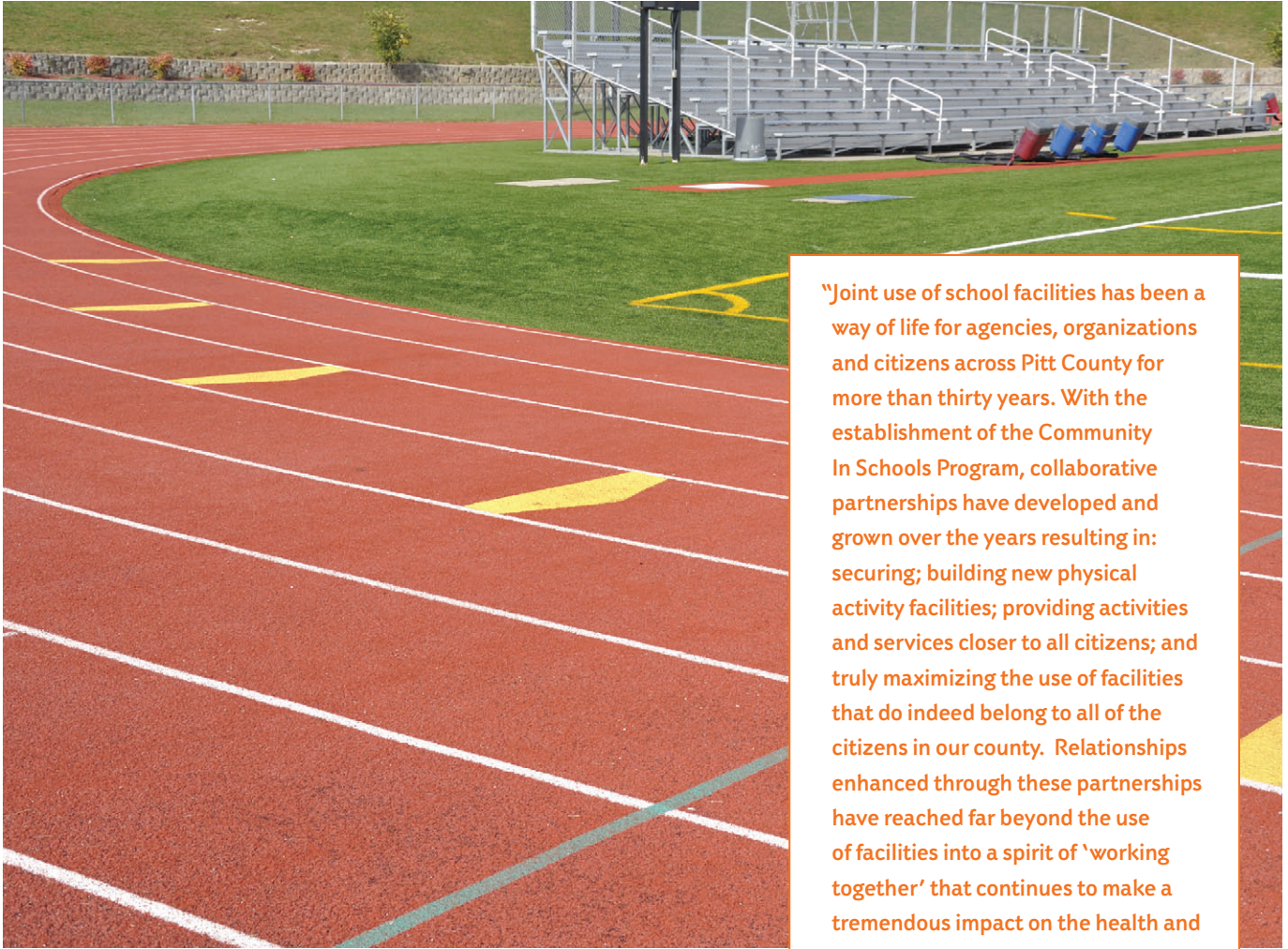
Dennis LaCaria, Director of Facilities Planning and Real Estate Planning for Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools said that county school and park partnerships are hard to beat. “There are many benefits to joint use agreements, most importantly, they make good financial sense. Joint use agreements create more places in the community for people to be active and schools and the municipality share the cost.”



## REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> ChangeLab Solutions: Model Joint Use Agreement Resources, ChangeLab Solutions, 2012.
- <sup>2</sup> US Department of Health and Human Services. 2008 Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans. Washington, D.C. Available at [www.health.gov](http://www.health.gov). Accessed April 11, 2012.
- <sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Healthy People 2020. Washington, DC. Available at <http://www.healthypeople.gov>. Accessed March 30, 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> Carlson SA, Fulton JE, Lee SM, Maynard M, Drown DR, Kohl III HW, Dietz WH. Physical education and academic achievement in elementary school: data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study. *American Journal of Public Health* 2008;98(4):721-727.
- <sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The association between school based physical activity, including physical education, and academic performance. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.





“Joint use of school facilities has been a way of life for agencies, organizations and citizens across Pitt County for more than thirty years. With the establishment of the Community In Schools Program, collaborative partnerships have developed and grown over the years resulting in: securing; building new physical activity facilities; providing activities and services closer to all citizens; and truly maximizing the use of facilities that do indeed belong to all of the citizens in our county. Relationships enhanced through these partnerships have reached far beyond the use of facilities into a spirit of ‘working together’ that continues to make a tremendous impact on the health and wellbeing of our community.”

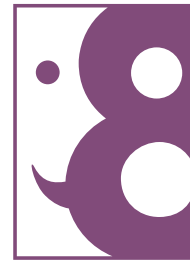
– Alice F. Keene, Past Director,  
Pitt County Community Schools  
& Recreation





**Public Schools of North Carolina**

State Board of Education  
Department of Public Instruction



**NC HEALTHY  
SCHOOLS**



**BYRON TOWNSHIP RECREATION DEPARTMENT**  
and  
**Byron Township Little League**

**Facilities Agreement**

This agreement will begin on January 1, 2011 between Byron Township, 8085 Byron Center Avenue, Byron Center, MI 49315, and Byron Township Little League, PO Box 320, Byron Center, MI 49315.

Byron Township is the owner of Whistlestop Park, Bicentennial Park and Cutler Park. Byron Township Little League (BTLL) has permission to use above listed parks as written in this agreement.

This agreement shall be a term of one year from the date listed above. This agreement shall thereafter be automatically renewed annually for successive one year periods, unless either Byron Township or BTLL has notified the other in writing at least ninety days prior to the end of the initial term or any renewal hereof that the agreement shall terminate at the end of the then current term. If such notice is properly and timely given, this agreement will terminate at the end of the then current term, and no further automatic renewal shall occur thereafter.

**Byron Township Little League**

BTLL shall provide the following to Byron Township 3 weeks prior to the start of the season.

1. Proof of insurance and indemnification.
2. Financial report of all expenditures and revenues from previous year, including balance sheet.
3. Proposed budget for upcoming year.
4. List of current officers and board members with addresses, phone numbers, and emails. Byron Township must be notified of any changes immediately.
5. A block schedule will be given to Byron Township Recreation Department.
6. Provide documentation that criminal history background checks were performed on all BTLL coaches and assistant coaches before being assigned to coach a team.
7. Provide an inventory of all equipment owned by BTLL such as buildings, sheds, concession stand equipment and pitching machines.

BTLL shall have permission to use youth baseball and softball fields located at Whistlestop Park, Bicentennial Park and Cutler Park from **April 1-June 30** (Monday-Saturday) and the month of July (Monday-Thursday). Byron Center Christian School and Legacy Christian School will be allowed use of Bicentennial Park and Cutler Park fields for their regular season games. Byron Township will supply BTLL with the Christian school schedules as soon as they are available. If Byron Township decides to limit the use of any baseball and /or softball fields that BTLL used the previous year, Byron Township will inform BTLL by the 10<sup>th</sup> of January for the upcoming season. BTLL will provide Byron Township with their proposed dates, times, and field usage by January 31 for the upcoming season to allow for the coordination of the BTLL and Byron Township's use of the Township fields.

BTLL will have the first right to rent the fields on Fridays and Saturdays during the month of July. BTLL will receive a 25% discount on the field rental rate.

BTLL shall have exclusive use of the concessions stands at Bicentennial Park, Cutler Park and Whistlestop Park to raise funds for their program.

BTLL understands and agrees that at times weather and/or field conditions may result in Byron Township denying the use of certain fields on dates for which approval has been granted. BTLL understands and agrees that the Township has the authority to deny the use of said facilities.

BTLL will be responsible for the following tasks between April 1-July 31.

1. Line and drag fields on weekends.
2. Maintain trash around the youth fields (put in barrels).
3. Maintain scoreboard controllers during season at BTLL own cost.
4. Request field improvements in writing to the Township Board.
5. Maintain concession stands and keep them clean and sanitary.
6. Maintain sheds and storage buildings.

**Byron Township Parks and Recreation Department**

Byron Township will be responsible for the following tasks between April 1-July 31.

1. Maintain all dugouts, fences, bleachers and gates to make sure they are in a safe and secure condition.
2. Maintain all turf areas on the fields to include weekly mowing, weed control and fertilizing.
3. Provide sand, soil, and seed to be used in leveling or backfilling low areas when necessary.
4. Line and drag fields during the weekdays.
5. Maintain trash during the weekdays.
6. Maintain structural integrity of concession stands and restroom buildings.
7. Maintain field irrigation system.
8. Maintain restroom facilities, including routine cleaning and stocking of paper products.

**Insurance and Indemnification**

BTLL shall at all times during the term of this Agreement maintain in effect general public liability insurance covering Byron Township at the Facilities against claims for personal injury, death or damage to property. Byron Township shall be named as additional insured on such policy and shall be entitled to thirty (30) days notice of cancellation or changes of any kind.

BTLL shall indemnify and save harmless Byron Township and its officers, agents and employees from and against any and all suits, actions, or claims of any character, type, or description, including all expenses of litigation, court costs and attorney's fees, brought or made for or on account of any injuries or damages received or sustained by any person or persons or property, arising out of, or occasioned by, the act or failure to act of BTLL or its agents, volunteers, or employees in the use of the Facilities arising out of obligations of BTLL as set forth in this Agreement.

Byron Township shall indemnify and save harmless BTLL and its officers, agents and employees from and against any and all suits, actions, or claims of any character, type, or description, including all expenses of litigation, court costs and attorney's fees, brought or made for or on account of any injuries or damages received or sustained by any person or persons or property, arising out of, or

occasioned by, the act or failure to act of Byron Township or its agents, volunteers, or employees in the use of the Facilities arising out of obligations of Byron Township as set forth in this Agreement.

**Termination of Agreement**

This agreement may be terminated at any time for cause, provided Byron Township complies with the following termination procedure: If any obligations under this agreement are not met by BTLL, Byron Township shall provide written notice to BTLL which describes the obligation that is not being met. BTLL shall have 15 days from the receipt of the written notice to meet their obligation as described in the notice. If there is a disagreement between the Byron Township Recreation Department and the BTLL with regard to whether BTLL has met or is meeting their obligations under this agreement, BTLL shall have the right to appeal the Byron Township Recreation Department's decision to the Byron Township Board.

**BYRON TOWNSHIP LITTLE LEAGUE**

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President Date

**BYRON TOWNSHIP**

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Carrie Klingelsmith, Byron Township Recreation Director Date

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Audrey Nevins, Byron Township Supervisor Date