

# DRAFT PARKS VISION 2030

## PARKS, OPEN SPACE & TRAIL SYSTEM PLAN



*Photo by Kevin Buettner*



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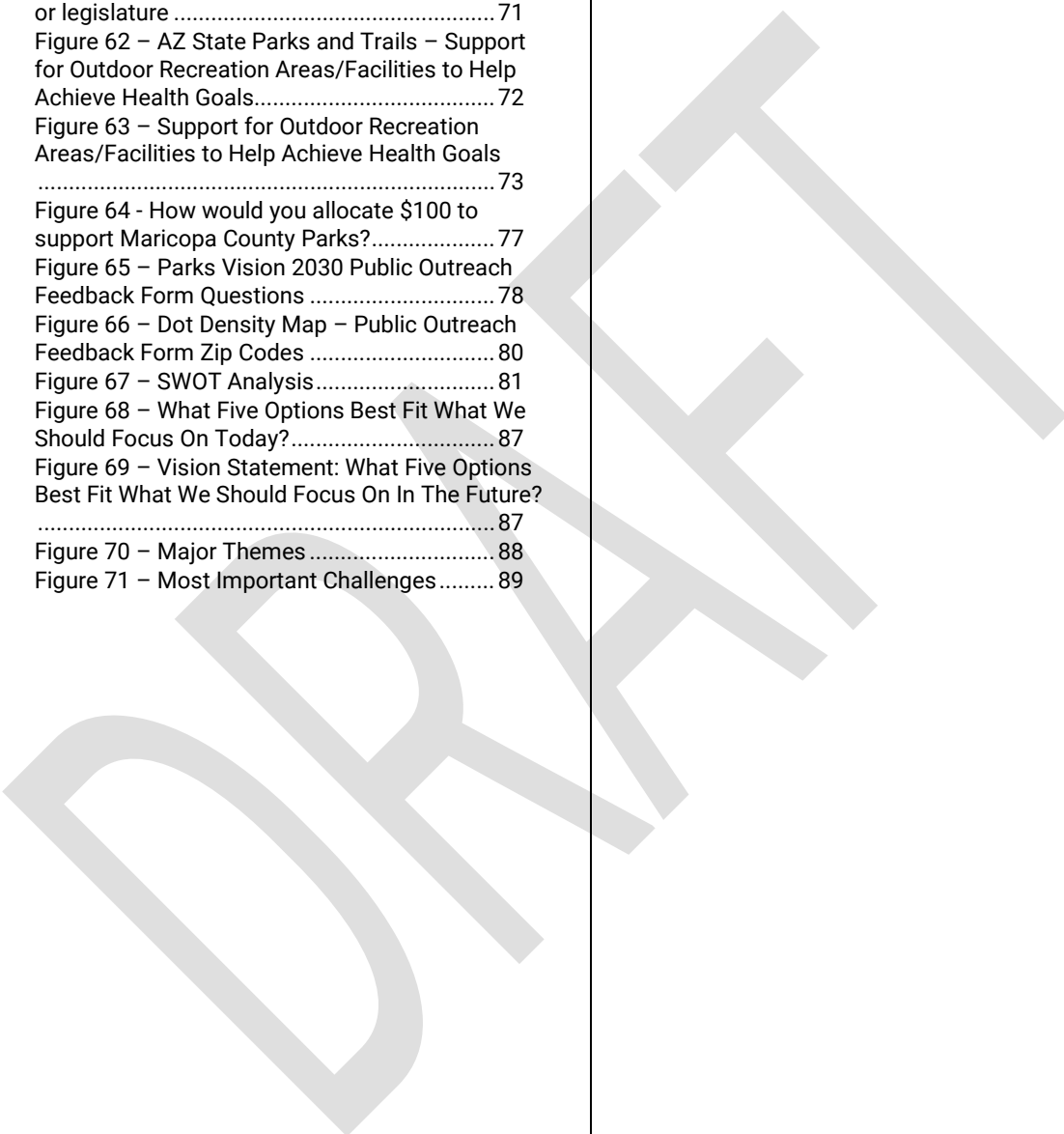
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## ACRONYMS

ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION	ACRONYM	DESCRIPTION
<b>1965 PLAN</b>	Maricopa County Regional Park System Plan	<b>DFLT</b>	Desert Foothills Land Trust
<b>2009 SSMP</b>	2009 Strategic System Master Plan	<b>DOC</b>	Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant
<b>ABOR</b>	Arizona Board of Regents	<b>DOT</b>	US Department of Interior
<b>ACC</b>	Anthem Community Council	<b>EMRP</b>	Estrella Mountain Regional Park
<b>ADA</b>	Americans with Disabilities Act	<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>ADMP/S</b>	Area Drainage Master Plans/Studies	<b>FAQ</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>ADOT</b>	Arizona Department of Transportation	<b>FDOC</b>	Friends of the Desert Outdoor Center
<b>ADRP</b>	Adobe Dam Regional Park	<b>FIT</b>	Fountain Hills Interconnected Trails
<b>AMA</b>	Arizona Mining Association	<b>FH</b>	Friends of Hassayampa
<b>AOT</b>	Arizona Office of Tourism	<b>GF</b>	General Fund
<b>APRA</b>	Arizona Parks and Recreation Association	<b>GI</b>	Green Infrastructure
<b>APS</b>	Arizona Public Service	<b>GIS</b>	Geographic Information System
<b>ARS</b>	Arizona Revised State Statute	<b>GPEC</b>	Greater Phoenix Economic Council
<b>ASLD</b>	Arizona State Land Department	<b>GR</b>	Gila River
<b>ASPT</b>	Arizona State Parks and Trails	<b>HECHO</b>	Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors
<b>ASPTB</b>	Arizona State Parks and Trails Board	<b>HOA</b>	Home Owners Association
<b>ASU</b>	Arizona State University	<b>HRP</b>	Hassayampa River Preserve
<b>AT</b>	Arizona National Scenic Trail	<b>IBA</b>	Important Bird Area
<b>ATP</b>	Active Transportation Plan	<b>IGA</b>	Intergovernmental Agreement
<b>AWMA</b>	Active Water Management Areas	<b>KOA</b>	Kampground Association of America
<b>AZGFD</b>	Arizona Game and Fish Department	<b>LAFB</b>	Luke Air Force Base
<b>BHRP</b>	Buckeye Hills Regional Park	<b>LEP</b>	Limited English Proficiency
<b>BIPOC</b>	Black Indigenous People of Color (Farmland Preservation section)	<b>LGRC</b>	Lower Gila River Collaborative
<b>BLM</b>	Bureau of Land Management	<b>LLID</b>	Logical Link Identifier (Demographics section)
<b>BMGR</b>	Barry M. Goldwater Range	<b>LNT</b>	Leave No Trace
<b>BMX</b>	Bicycle Moto Cross	<b>LPRP</b>	Lake Pleasant Regional Park
<b>BHRP</b>	Buckeye Hills Regional Park	<b>LWCF</b>	Land Water Conservation Fund
<b>BOR</b>	Bureau of Reclamation	<b>MAG</b>	Maricopa Association of Governments
<b>BOS</b>	Board of Supervisors	<b>MCDOT</b>	Maricopa County Department of Transportation
<b>CAP</b>	Central Arizona Project	<b>MCFCF</b>	Maricopa County Flood Control District
<b>CAZCA</b>	Central Arizona Conservation Alliance	<b>MCLD</b>	Maricopa County Library District
<b>CPTED</b>	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design	<b>MCDPH</b>	Maricopa County Department of Public Health
<b>CFA</b>	Center for the Future of Arizona	<b>COMMISSION</b>	Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission
<b>CCRP</b>	Cave Creek Regional Park	<b>MCPRD</b>	Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department
<b>CIP</b>	Capital Improvement Plan	<b>MCRTSP</b>	Maricopa County Regional Trail System Plan
<b>COP</b>	City of Phoenix	<b>MCSO</b>	Maricopa County Sheriff's Office
<b>County</b>	Maricopa County	<b>MCV 2030</b>	Maricopa County Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan
<b>CPA</b>	Community Planning Area	<b>MMRP</b>	McDowell Mountain Regional Park
<b>CRS</b>	Community and Recreation Services		
<b>CSA</b>	Community Supported Agriculture (Farmland Preservation section)		
<b>DFFM</b>	Department of Forestry and Fire Management		

<b>MRTSP</b>	Maricopa Regional Trail System Plan	<b>SPLMG</b>	Superstition Public Land Managers Group
<b>MSC</b>	McDowell Sonoran Conservancy	<b>SRPMIC</b>	Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
<b>MT</b>	Maricopa Trail	<b>SRP</b>	Salt River Project
<b>MT+PF</b>	Maricopa Trail + Park Foundation	<b>SRPMIC</b>	Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community
<b>MSA</b>	Metropolitan Statistical Area	<b>SSMP</b>	Strategic System Master Plan
<b>NRCS</b>	Natural Resource Conservation Service	<b>STAFF</b>	County Staff, Volunteers, and Leadership
<b>NRMP</b>	Natural Resource Management Plan	<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics
<b>NRPA</b>	National Recreation and Park Association	<b>STMRP</b>	San Tan Mountain Regional Park
<b>NVON</b>	North Valley Outdoor Network	<b>SUP</b>	Stand-Up Paddle Board
<b>OHV</b>	Off-Highway Vehicle	<b>SWCC</b>	Southwest Wildlife Conservation Center
<b>PMP</b>	Park Master Plan	<b>SCRCA</b>	Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area
<b>PV 2030</b>	Parks Vision 2030	<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
<b>R&amp;PP</b>	Recreation and Public Purposes Act	<b>System</b>	Maricopa County Regional Park System
<b>RCA</b>	Riverside Conservation Authority	<b>TCF</b>	The Conservation Fund
<b>RITZ</b>	Recreation Interface Transition Zone	<b>TNC</b>	The Nature Conservancy
<b>RIVCO</b>	Riverside County Regional Park	<b>TNF</b>	Tonto National Forest
<b>RR</b>	Rio Reimagined	<b>UMRP</b>	Usery Mountain Regional Park
<b>SCCA</b>	Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area	<b>U.S.</b>	United States
<b>SCORP</b>	Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan	<b>USFS</b>	US Forest Service
<b>SCTA</b>	Sun Corridor Trail Alliance	<b>UWFP</b>	Urban Waters Federal Partnership
<b>SDNM</b>	Sonoran Desert National Monument	<b>VMRA</b>	Vulture Mountains Recreation Area
<b>SEM</b>	Sierra Estrella Mountains	<b>WCF</b>	Wildlife Conservation Fund
<b>SFIA</b>	Sports and Fitness Industry Association	<b>WCMP</b>	Watercourse Master Plan
<b>SFIA REPORT</b>	2021 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report	<b>WHC</b>	Wildlife Habitat Council
<b>SI</b>	Sonoran Institute	<b>WTMC</b>	White Tank Mountain Conservancy
<b>SLIF</b>	State Lake Improvement Fund	<b>WTMRP</b>	White Tank Mountain Regional Park
		<b>WUI</b>	Wildland Urban Interface

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McDowell Mountain Regional Park – Photo by Kevin Beutner

## CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

### PROJECT BACKGROUND

Maricopa County (County) has one of the country's largest and most unique regional park systems, managed by the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD). With approximately 120,000 acres, the County's regional park system is rich with natural and cultural heritage, attracting nearly two million visitors in 2020. The Sonoran Desert has distinct beauty, natural biodiversity, and unique cultural history. The rugged landscape has drawn people to the region for centuries and continues to draw people today. Iconic regional landscapes are as diverse as those who have lived here and continue to live here.

From the rugged geologic features and the countless Hohokam petroglyphs dotting the canyon walls of the White Tank Mountain Regional Park (WTMRP) to the lush riparian habitat of Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area (SCRCA) and its many prehistoric ruins, the land forms our identity as a region. The County is home to one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world. The area is also rich in ranching, farming, and mining history. Lake Pleasant is located in the northwest valley and provides abundant water, which is the lifeblood of central Arizona. MCPRD currently manages eight (8) regional parks, two (2) conservation/preserve areas, one (1) education center, two (2) concession parks, and one (1) regional park under development (Figure 1). Appendix A provides a detailed overview of each property in the park system.

The Maricopa County regional park system (System) began in 1953 when the County Board of Supervisors (BOS) appointed a park commission to work on a park system master plan. It outlined the future needs for a park system and identified challenges it would face due to rapid population growth and a decline in the availability of land for dedicated parks. One of the primary goals of the regional park system was to preserve the mountain areas for future generations to enjoy.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, a group of visionaries, including elected leaders and officials from federal, state, County, and city governments, along with influential community leaders, worked to

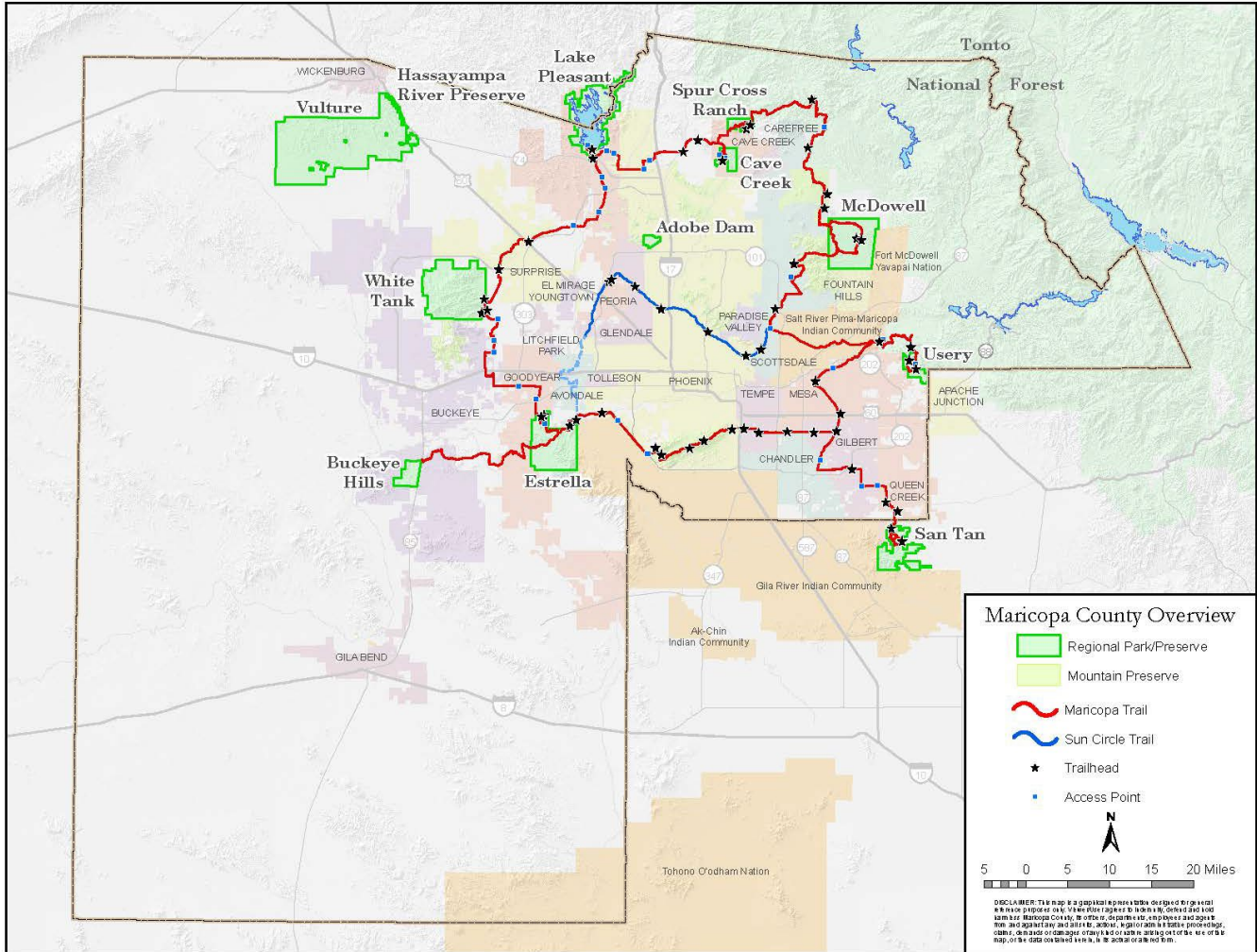


Figure 1- Project Area Map with Existing MCRPD Parks and Trails (2022)

develop a comprehensive park system plan to address the future recreational needs of a booming region. This information laid the foundation for the Department's first Maricopa County Regional Park System Plan (1965 Plan), which the BOS adopted in 1965. The 1965 Plan<sup>1</sup> was critical to creating the Maricopa County regional park system. Many aspects of the 1965 Plan continue to hold today.

MCRPD expanded on the 1965 Plan in the 2009 Parks and Recreation Strategic System Master Plan (2009 SSMP), which focused on many necessary internal and operational strategies. **Parks Vision 2030** (PV 2030), the Department's most recent strategic system master plan, builds on the 2009 SSMP and continues the legacy established in 1965. The PV 2030 focuses on looking outside existing park boundaries and expanding the lens to include park and open space opportunities across the County to serve best the needs of current and future generations.

<sup>1</sup> Riggs, L.A., Burns, B.W., Andrews, W.S., O'Neil, R.A., Herrick, J.C., and Huddleston, S.L. (1965). Maricopa County Regional Park System Plan, Maricopa County, Arizona. Retrieved from <https://www.maricopacountyparks.net>.

## HERITAGE, IDENTITY, AND LAND

The 1965 Plan was adopted to move the parks system forward. The System was considered a significant contributor to opportunities for a healthy lifestyle for people living and working in the burgeoning region and companies interested in doing business there. The 1965 Plan evaluated the future of the County's recreational facilities. It accurately reflected the needs and desires of county citizens for the proposed System. It incorporated specifications for the entire System through specific proposals on park locations, facility standards, and design criteria to prepare a solid, workable foundation for creating individual Park Master Plans (PMP). The 1965 Plan also analyzed the regional park system's long-range sociological and economic effects.

In the late 1960s and through the early 1990s, MCPRD began using the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (R&PP)<sup>2</sup> to acquire thousands of acres of parkland from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) at \$2.50 an acre. Arizona State Trust Land (ASLD)<sup>3</sup> was also patented and acquired during this period. A combination of leased and purchased land has allowed the MCPRD to develop a regional park system that preserves natural open space for residents and out-of-state visitors.

A high-quality, seamless system of regional parks, open spaces, natural areas, and trails is essential to a vibrant and healthy region. A region rooted in its natural and cultural heritage with a vision for the future that understands conservation and growth can coexist harmoniously to create a dynamic, cherished place.

Due to rapid population growth and reduced open space, the 1965 Plan defined elements of a regional park or open space, which are still relevant today.

*"A regional park is a large, unspoiled preserve removed from the urban area and protected from urban encroachment by a buffer zone. Although located near an urban area, it offers a remote setting. Activities in a regional park are generally passive in character, such as hiking, walking, horseback riding, picnicking, camping, nature study, and sightseeing. The openness of open spaces is preserved, and vegetation is protected. Picnic and camping areas are developed with space between to avoid crowding. Development is carefully designed to retain the unspoiled character of the landscape."*

Desirable elements of a regional park included:

- Unique topography
- Unusual physical phenomenon
- Unique plant and animal life
- Presence of historical resources and archaeological artifacts
- Intimate scenic interest
- Abundant acreage to offer individual isolation to disperse picnic and campground development
- The establishment of a buffer zone against encroachment on the park perimeter

<sup>2</sup> Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior Recreation and Public Purposes Act, July 25, 1979. – Retrieved from: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CFR-2004-title43-vol2/xml/CFR-2004-title43-vol2-part2740-subpart2740.xml>.

<sup>3</sup> Arizona State Trust Land Permits, Special Land Use Permits – Retrieved from: <https://land.az.gov/applications-permits>.

The 1965 Plan served the County well and built a solid foundation for a regional system meeting the needs of a rapidly growing region. By 2000, according to U.S. Census data, the population in the County was 3,072,149, and MCPRD'S System had grown into one of the largest in the United States (U.S.). The System contained nine (9) parks and over 100,000 acres of protected parkland. The vast majority, more than 90 percent, of the parkland was added between 1965 and 2000.



Roadrunner, Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area

## 2009 STRATEGIC SYSTEMS MASTER PLAN

The 2009 SSMP focused primarily on internal operations to enhance the visitor experience and reviewed the ability of the System to meet future needs. The 2009 SSMP ensured that:

- existing programs, operations, maintenance, and finances were evaluated
- policies were updated,
- best practices and benchmark plans were reviewed, and
- a full assessment of existing parklands, facilities, and operations was performed.

As a result, MCPRD formalized a 10-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)<sup>4</sup> and defined implementation strategies to continue meeting County citizens' needs. The BOS formally adopted the 2009 SSMP in June 2009.

As identified in the 2009 SSMP, the definition of a high-quality park system served as a reference point for recommendations. The Plan was developed through an extensive review of the current conditions of the System and multiple methods of obtaining public input from County residents on future priorities and needs.

The purpose of the 2009 SSMP was to:

- Provide a conceptual framework or blueprint to strategically position the MCPRD as the recognized leader in delivering regional parks and recreation services, opportunities, experiences, and benefits, to guide the MCPRD toward the desired future destination.
- Create a plan that will set forth the appropriate system structure and policies to guide County leadership in meeting the needs of the expanding population for the next 50 years.
- Affirm that the County's System will remain one of the finest park systems in the U.S.

According to the 2009 SSMP, a high-quality System provides a benchmark for the future. It comprises six major elements:

- the vision of a high-quality park and recreation system,
- presentation,
- value to the community,
- operational standards,
- maintenance and development standards, and
- acquisition standards.

<sup>4</sup> Capital Improvement Plan, 2009 System Strategic Master Plan.

In essence, a high-quality MCPRD System is:

- A premier conservatory of properties, facilities, and programs that reflect unique and significant relevance to the "Arizona Story," the history and heritage, the land and wildlife, and preserving the quality of our County's future. The System shall be a responsible steward of public assets and resources and protect the quality of visitor experiences.
- The steward for preserving aspects of Maricopa County's natural and cultural heritage and resources while fostering economic development by providing facilities and services aligned with the public's needs and interests.
- A representative piece of Arizona's vast and diverse landscape. It is large enough that the natural and cultural resource base can be protected, studied, and used as a teaching resource for those who seek to understand that location's history.
- Provides value to nearby and surrounding communities by celebrating the area's unique natural and cultural heritage, offers quality recreational opportunities to residents and visitors, and provides economic benefits for businesses in the region by promoting tourism to the area for single or multiple-day experiences.

The mission and vision were also updated to reflect the strategic direction of the 2009 Plan.

## MISSION AND VISION

### 2009 MISSION<sup>5</sup>

*"Our mission, through responsible stewardship, is to provide the highest quality parks, trails, programs, services, and experiences that energize visitors and create life-long users and advocates."*

### 2009 VISION<sup>5</sup>

*"Our vision is to connect people with nature through regional parks, trails, and programs, inspire an appreciation for the Sonoran Desert and natural open spaces, and create lifelong positive memories."*

## 2009 SSMP ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Over the last 14 years, staff implemented more than 100 strategies and actions to strengthen the System, including enhancing the MCPRD's fiscal position, improving operations and visitor experiences, and acquiring additional parkland. The mission has advanced significantly through these strategic actions, including great strides in furthering the vision.



*Hassayampa River Preserve*

Goal Areas included:

- **Land and Facilities** - Develop a diverse, exciting, well-maintained, and sustainable System with excellent and adequate facilities, providing various experiences.

<sup>5</sup> 2009 System Strategic Master Plan, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, Pg. 11 - [https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/Maricopa\\_Strategic\\_System\\_MP\\_-\\_Final\\_Report\\_w\\_2014\\_Addendum.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/Maricopa_Strategic_System_MP_-_Final_Report_w_2014_Addendum.pdf).



- **Programs** - Develop a wide range of age-segmented programs to attract visitors, encourage a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, and increase use.
- **Operations and Maintenance** - Provide quality and safe parks that encourage positive use and memorable experiences.
- **Financing and Administration** - Create a fiscally-sustainable System that can maintain parks and open space resources in perpetuity.



*Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area Dragonfly Trail Pool*

Some of the significant outcomes by Goal Areas included:

## LAND AND FACILITIES

- Acquired two new park properties – Hassayampa River Preserve (HRP) and Vulture Mountains Recreation Area (VMRA) and protected access through acquisition at SCRCA.
- Updated three and created two PMPs.
- Creation of a Natural Resource Management Program, including a Natural Resource Specialist position.
- Developed a Natural Resource Management Plan (NRMP).
- Completed an Integrated Pest Management Plan.
- Developed a wayfinding park signage standard program, and implementation is ongoing.
- Updated facility design standards.
- Revamped park road standards and guidelines with the Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) and affirmed via a BOS Resolution.
- Completed Phase I of the Maricopa Trail (MT)<sup>6</sup> (315 miles) and formally dedicated in November 2018.
- Updated park operation plans.
- Completed Economic Impact Assessments in 2014 and 2019 by Arizona State University (ASU)<sup>7</sup> and demonstrated the economic value of the parks on local economies.
- Updated the Trail Management Manual<sup>8</sup> as a reference point for best practices in trail planning, construction, and maintenance within the County trail system.
- Creation of a Park Master Plan Amendment Policy and Procedures.

## PROGRAMS

- Developed Interpretive education standards and lesson plans.
- Identified a departmentwide education lead to introduce program diversity, appeal, consistency, and quality to programs.

<sup>6</sup> Maricopa County Regional Trail System Plan, Maricopa County Trail Commission, August 2004, <https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/MaricopaTrailMasterPlan.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> 2014 and 2019 Economic Impact of the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation System by D. Chhabra, Ph.D., L He, J. Quansah, and D. Larsen, Arizona State University School of Community Resources and Development Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions - <https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/about-us/department-studies/>.  
[https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/2019\\_Economic\\_Impact\\_Maricopa\\_County\\_Parks\\_and\\_Recreation\\_System\\_ASU\\_Report\\_-\\_Final.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/2019_Economic_Impact_Maricopa_County_Parks_and_Recreation_System_ASU_Report_-_Final.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Trails Management Manual, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department - [https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/2018\\_Trails\\_Management\\_Training\\_Manual\\_Update.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/2018_Trails_Management_Training_Manual_Update.pdf).

- Initiated new programs, such as Go Wild for Flowers, 100 Miles in 100 Days Challenge, Paddle Fest, Rattlesnake Crawl, Junior Rangers, Leave No Trace, EcoBlitz, and Wag-n-Walk Adoption Hikes.
- Continued partnership development with national and local organizations.
- Established a Marketing Plan and incorporated individual strategies into each park's Operation Plans.
- Developed a new website to highlight programs and visitor experiences.
- Conducted periodic park visitor surveys to assess park visitors' educational value, program needs, and preferences<sup>9</sup>.

## OPERATIONS AND MAINTENANCE

- Completed individual Operation Plans.
- Developed operations standards and procedures to create consistency.
- Established a Volunteer Program, including hiring a Volunteer Coordinator.
- Updated Park policies to protect resources, offer better experiences for visitors, create consistency and efficiency, increase revenue, and promote innovation.
- Completed the Safety Training Plan.
- Developed preventative maintenance and life-cycle replacement programs.

## FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

- Established a comprehensive revenue and pricing policy and implemented it to sustain system-wide operations.
- A Point-of-Sale accounting and financial management system, including online reservations (Figure 2).
- Use cost-of-service to review and establish user fees.
- Conduct strategic planning yearly.
- Congress has introduced legislation to allow recreation concessions on parkland formerly owned by the BLM.
- Revised revenue-generating contracts, new concessionaires added, and concession revenues continue to trend upward.
- Each park has an operating budget, and the park supervisor maximizes expenditure effectiveness.
- The MCPRD has generated over 90 percent of its operating budget for the last five years through earned revenue.
- A 10-year CIP has been developed and is updated annually.

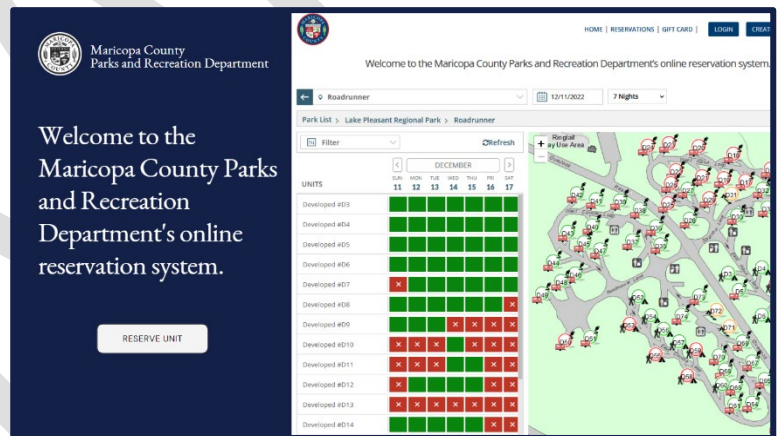


Figure 2 - Point of Sale Reservation System

<sup>9</sup> 2018-2019 Maricopa County Parks Visitor Study Final Report, May 2019, M. Budruk, Ph.D., M. Sampson, Arizona State University School of Community Resources & Development, College of Public Programs Arizona State University - [https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/MCPRD\\_Visitor\\_Use\\_Study\\_2018-19\\_Final\\_ON\\_LINE\\_.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/MCPRD_Visitor_Use_Study_2018-19_Final_ON_LINE_.pdf).

The County has invested significant General Fund (GF) dollars in park capital development and major maintenance projects to create sustainable and maintainable infrastructure. The following list contains examples of these projects:

- Sun Circle Trail completion
- Renovation of Estrella Mountain Regional Park (EMRP) day-use picnic and turf areas
- Five new energy-efficient nature centers EMRP, Utery Mountain Regional Park (UMRP), Cave Creek Regional Park (CCRP), WTMRP, and Lake Pleasant Regional Park (LPRP)
- Seven new nature-themed playgrounds system-wide - (two at UMRP and one at each of the following parks - LPRP, EMRP, WTMRP, McDowell Mountain Regional Park (MMRP), and CCRP)
- System-wide picnic ramada and restroom renovations and upgrades
- Electrical system replacement and upgrades in the following areas: LPRP Bajada Campground; UMRP Campground and Archery Range; WTMRP Family Campground; and EMRP electrical service sections
- Multi-boat docking facility for government agencies
- New campgrounds at CCRP and WTMRP
- Water and sewer system major maintenance
- HRP Master Plan improvements
- LPRP's Agua Fria Conservation Area restoration and development
- VMRA Master Plan, design and engineering
- LPRP trail system
- Installation of electrical services at Buckeye Hills Regional Park (BHRP)
- El Rio Watercourse Master Plan at EMRP



*Estrella Mountain Regional Park Playground*

The 2009 SSMP achieved many outstanding accomplishments. However, many tactics will require an ongoing effort to continue to achieve success, and several strategic objectives and tactics still need work. Therefore, while several strategies and tactics are no longer valid or deemed unachievable, others need consideration. These include:

- Analyzing and prioritizing future parkland needs based on sound science and planning analysis.
- Planning for and expanding a regional trail system, including additional community connectivity.
- Including diverse audiences in community outreach in all planning, management programming, and park development efforts.
- Updating both facility design and park maintenance standards.
- Formalizing and strengthening the employee and volunteer safety program with County Risk Management.
- Seeking new partnership opportunities with other governmental agencies, non-profits, and the private sector.
- Strengthening business planning and revenue generation opportunities.
- Assessing new or revised programs to enhance the visitor experience and increase park visitation.
- Improving and broadening park and program marketing efforts.

- Automating across all functional areas where feasible.
- Enhancing the volunteer program to expand resource management efforts and visitor services.
- Strengthening employee communication and training efforts.
- Updating remaining PMPs older than 15 years and continuing to update all PMPs regularly.
- Completing Park development projects as outlined in PMPs on a timely schedule.
- Completing individual park natural resource management plans.
- Developing a comprehensive grant solicitation program.
- Developing a stable capital improvement, land acquisition, and major maintenance-funding source.
- Developing a new user-friendly and efficient maintenance management system.
- Encouraging the use of green infrastructure where possible.
- Expanding resource stewardship efforts.

# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION STRATEGIC SYSTEM MASTER PLAN ADDENDUM 2014<sup>10</sup>

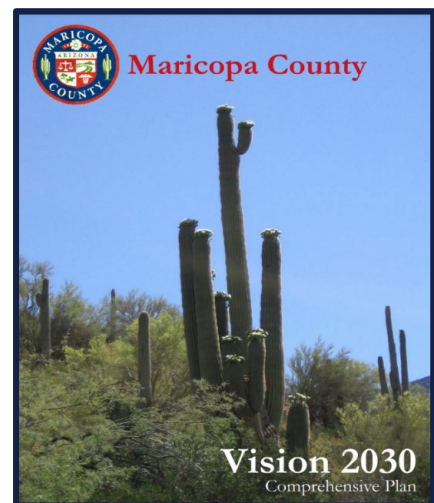
Following significant successes of the 2009 SSMP, an addendum occurred in 2014 to reflect the completion of tasks and to call out new trends and issues, which were concurrently pursued and listed below:

- Arizonan's value parks, trails, and open space
- Increasing need for stewardship, conservation, and restoration
- Growing supply and competitive advantage
- Economic development opportunities
- Developing and managing an expanding park system
- Expanding recreation opportunities

It also gave direction for refocusing existing goals from the 2009 SSMP towards specific tactics to produce more meaningful results.

## MARICOPA COUNTY'S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN - VISION 2030

Maricopa County also prepares for exponential population growth by developing a comprehensive plan every ten years to coordinate county citizens' present and future needs. In January 2016, the Maricopa County BOS approved the Maricopa County Vision 2030



*Maricopa County's Vision 2030  
Comprehensive Plan*

<sup>10</sup> 2014 Strategic System Master Plan Addendum 2014, Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department, [https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/Maricopa\\_Strategic\\_System\\_MP\\_-\\_Final\\_Report\\_w\\_2014\\_Addendum.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/Maricopa_Strategic_System_MP_-_Final_Report_w_2014_Addendum.pdf)

Comprehensive Plan (MCV 2030 ).<sup>11</sup> It forecasts future open space needs, identifies strategies to preserve and acquire open space as necessary, and integrates open space on a regional basis. The MCPRD Vision 2030 Plan fulfills the open space element of the County's Comprehensive Plan as required by Arizona Revised Statute (ARS) §9-461.05).

It ensures that regional leadership promotes environmental quality, including preserving open space, parks, and recreation lands. The open space element also provides protection and expansion of the System in proportion to population growth.

Below are key elements, goals, and policies from MCV 2030 that strongly align with PV 2030 and lay the foundation to integrate park system planning under the broader umbrella of current and future county comprehensive planning efforts.

## OPEN SPACE - OVERVIEW

The Open Space element recommends ways to increase the amount, quality, and variety of open spaces in unincorporated areas and design ways to link to existing parkland.

### OPEN SPACE GOALS

- **Goal 1:** Provide regional leadership to promote environmental quality, including preserving open, natural park and recreation lands.
- **Goal 2:** Protect and expand the regional park system proportionately with population growth.
- **Goal 3:** Build the Maricopa Trail and the Maricopa County Regional Trail System by working with municipalities to connect the trail system to their park and preserve systems.

## LAND USE - OVERVIEW

Sensible, balanced, and economically efficient land-use patterns are essential to successfully plan long-term growth and provide residents with a balanced quality of life.

### LAND USE GOALS

- **Goal 2:** Provide regional leadership on land use issues.
- **Goal 3:** Protect public health, safety, and well-being.

## ENVIRONMENTAL - OVERVIEW

Maricopa County's unique and scenic desert setting is one of the reasons why so many people choose to live here and why protecting it is a high priority.

### ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

- **Policy 1:** Provide regional leadership to promote all aspects of regional environmental quality.
- **Policy 4:** Support innovative project design and development that protects important animal habitats and migration corridors.
- **Policy 8:** Support flexible zoning techniques to keep new development below the 15 percent hillside slope and protect riparian areas.

<sup>11</sup> Maricopa County Vision 2030 Comprehensive Plan, J. Rich, D. Stark, D. Gerard, M. Holm, January 2016, <https://www.maricopa.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3786/Vision-2030-Maricopa-County-Comprehensive-Plan-PDF>.

## TRANSPORTATION - OVERVIEW

A functional and high-quality transportation system is necessary to move people and products efficiently. Moreover, it is essential for an economically competitive region.

### TRANSPORTATION POLICIES

- **Policy 5:** Maricopa County supports alternative transportation in the design of urban development, including the MT and related trail connections, the MAG Bikeways Plan,<sup>12</sup> Park-and-ride/public transit facilities, and other appropriate multi-modal practices (Figure 3).
- **Policy 14:** Maricopa County supports roadway planning that promotes identified scenic corridors, wildlife connectivity, and linkages.



Figure 3 - Maricopa Association of Governments Bikeways Map

## ECONOMIC GROWTH - OVERVIEW

The global economy means business, industry, and the workforce are more mobile than ever. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that other places in the U.S. and worldwide have advantages and characteristics that rival Maricopa County. The "New Economy" requires that communities continuously find new and innovative ways to compete for economic growth, new capital, and knowledge workers. Since the quality of the place is such an important factor in competing effectively, the County must focus on providing the amenities, features, and characteristics that create the quality places that knowledge industries and knowledge workers demand.

### ECONOMIC GROWTH GOALS

- **Goal 1:** Contribute to an effective regional economy.
- **Goal 2:** Have a diverse and balanced economy to promote long-term economic stability and economic resiliency.
- **Goal 3:** Attract a variety of industries from basic sector clusters and the workers needed to compete in the new economy where the quality of place and quality of life matters when attracting and retaining employers and employees.

## PURPOSE: PARKS VISION 2030

PV 2030 builds on the 2009 SSMP and incorporates the legacy established in 1965 in conjunction with supporting the MCV 2030. The current planning effort focuses on looking outside existing park boundaries and expanding the lens to include park and open space opportunities across the County.

<sup>12</sup> Maricopa Association of Governments Bikeways - <https://azmag.gov/Programs/Maps-and-Data/Bikeways>.

The PV 2030 Plan will help to ensure that:

- Planning protects and conserves high-quality, natural desert places.
- Planning promotes transparency, engagement, and partnerships.
- Planning connects people and nature through outdoor recreation opportunities.

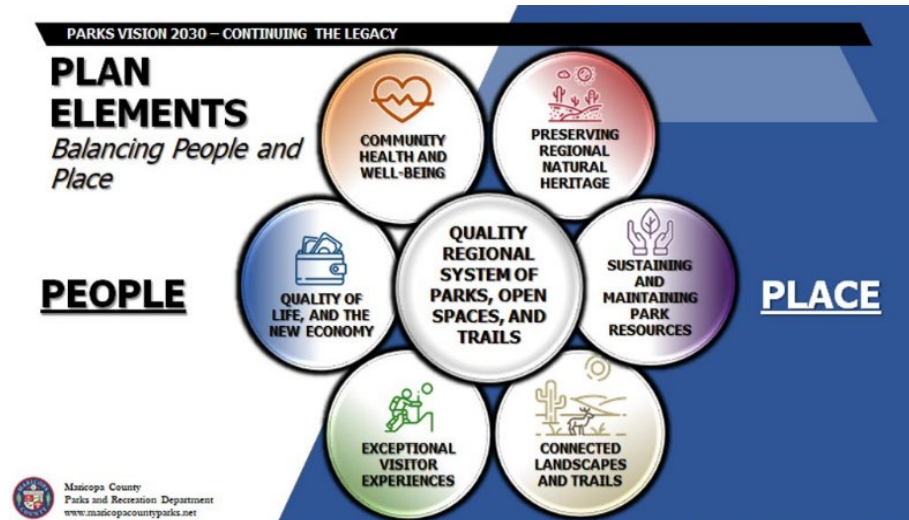


Figure 4 - Plan Elements/Guiding Principles

The PV 2030 Plan aims to identify the qualities and characteristics of a high-quality regional system and define the critical elements (Figure 4) needed to energize and engage in action toward success. Some of these qualities and attributes include:

- Identifying landscapes of a significant size to accommodate both people and nature.
- Providing diverse landscapes representing the various ecosystems that make up the County.
- Preserving a significant piece of our natural and cultural heritage.
- Providing ample opportunities to improve both mental and physical health through nature.
- Increasing economic development opportunities related to natural and cultural resources.
- Enhancing environmental sustainability through watershed and natural resource management.
- Designing a system of connected natural resources, including all entities and communities with a vested interest in natural resources.
- Providing parks, preserves, open spaces, and well-planned trails designed and managed with ample input and oversight from citizens.
- Ensuring acquisition and development are done at an appropriate scale and cost-conscious.
- Providing a sense of place and belonging.
- Supporting a system that is a point of pride for residents and revered by visitors.
- Providing parks that are actively programmed to provide interpretive education, health and wellness, regional history, outdoor recreation, and leisure opportunities.
- Protecting our County parklands for future generations and expanding the park system ahead of population growth.
- Ensuring inclusion and diversity, seeking new and unique opportunities for access by all.
- Focusing on outcomes and benefits for the community, citizens, and region, including physical and mental health and community cohesiveness.

## PLAN ELEMENTS: PARKS VISION 2030

To guide the direction of the PV 2030, MCPRD conducted a park visitor survey, reviewed secondary data sources, and generated preliminary input among staff and stakeholders. As a result, PV 2030 evolved into six essential growth-related elements that affect the future System and guide further discussion during the plan development. Each element identifies critical issues shaping the goals and policies MCPRD uses to make informed and effective decisions. The following is a brief description of

these elements, which concentrate on both people and place. Protecting important landscapes or places for people to enjoy and recreate is the Department's backbone function. These elements, in support of the MCV 2030 elements, provide the initial framework for this planning effort and will inform MCPRD's analysis and future decisions:



*Maricopa County's regional parks offer park visitors a wide variety of activities and services*

## PEOPLE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

There are personal and financial benefits to improving health and well-being. With the rising costs associated with chronic diseases, encouraging a healthy lifestyle is fundamental for communities. Similarly, the PV 2030 recognizes that parks, open spaces, and trails offer vast opportunities to improve the health and well-being of the County's citizens.

## QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE NEW ECONOMY

Within the PV 2030, providing quality places is essential for citizens, and plays an important role in economic health. It enhances employment opportunities near where people live, helping new businesses and supporting industries that develop in suburban and rural areas. In addition, it supports creating a robust economy by attracting and retaining knowledge-based employees and employers while providing opportunities for expanded tourism.

## EXCEPTIONAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE

Creating memorable visitor experiences through well-designed facilities, friendly customer service, and engaging programming is critical in developing life-long users. Everything that visitors do, think, sense, and feel in a park constitutes their park experience. Quality experiences may be influenced by interpretive media or activities, facilities, and design or by just getting out of the way and giving visitors perceived freedom to interact with the natural environment.

## PLACE

### PRESERVING REGIONAL NATURAL HERITAGE

PV 2030 recognizes that residents place a high value on the Sonoran Desert heritage. Therefore, protecting quality outdoor spaces for future enjoyment and other vital benefits such as flood control, wildlife habitat, and heat mitigation is critical amidst rapid population growth.



## SUSTAINING AND MAINTAINING PARK RESOURCES

PV 2030 intends to maintain, improve, and restore existing parks and natural resources, allowing visitors to enjoy a quality experience. Doing so will protect assets from deterioration and costly future repairs and increase carrying capacity.

## CONNECTED LANDSCAPES AND TRAILS CONNECTIVITY

PV 2030 emphasizes the importance of connected landscapes and trail connectivity through natural and trail corridors. These landscapes allow wildlife and people to move between larger landscape blocks, significantly enhancing the open space system's ecological viability and connecting our communities.



*San Tan Mountain Regional Park  
Crested Saguaro*

## THE PICTURE COMES INTO FOCUS

Based on all of the preliminary data and input collected, including guidance from the MCV 2030, it is clear that the system faces many challenges. Still, the root cause is the continued rapid expansion of the population in the region. The most significant influence impacting the current and future needs of and for regional open space parks and trails is a rapidly growing population and rapid development of land to accommodate the new people. This growth has occurred over an extended period and will continue relatively constant into the foreseeable future.

The main growth drivers are employment, climate, and abundant natural resources/open spaces enticing employees and employers. The Sonoran Desert environment drives growth and economic prosperity and is vital in maintaining a healthy and sustainable region. To make our growing area desirable, we must support the quality of life that makes our region, our home, desirable.

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Cave Creek Regional Park – Michelin Man

## CHAPTER 2 – EXISTING AND FUTURE CONDITIONS

This chapter will review County residents' current land use and demographics to help paint a picture of who lives here, revealing helpful information for the park and recreational planning. The MCPRD's structure has evolved in response to these changes by developing unique park resources and necessary amenities.

### LAND USE

Maricopa County has grown rapidly since the 1960s after completing the first System Master Plan. As seen from the projected trends chart below (Figure 5) from the 1965 Plan, the projections were not far from what the County population would become in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. For example, the amount of land devoted to urban development almost tripled between 1975 and 1995!"<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Knowles-Yáñez, K., Moritz, C., Fry, J., Redman, C.L., Bucchin, M., McCartney, P.H. (1999). Historic Land Use Team: Phase I Report On Generalized Land Use. Central Arizona – Phoenix Long-Term Ecological Research Contribution No. 1. Pg. 13. Retrieved from [https://static.sustainability.asu.edu/docs/caplter/contributions/HistoricLandUse\\_Color.pdf](https://static.sustainability.asu.edu/docs/caplter/contributions/HistoricLandUse_Color.pdf).

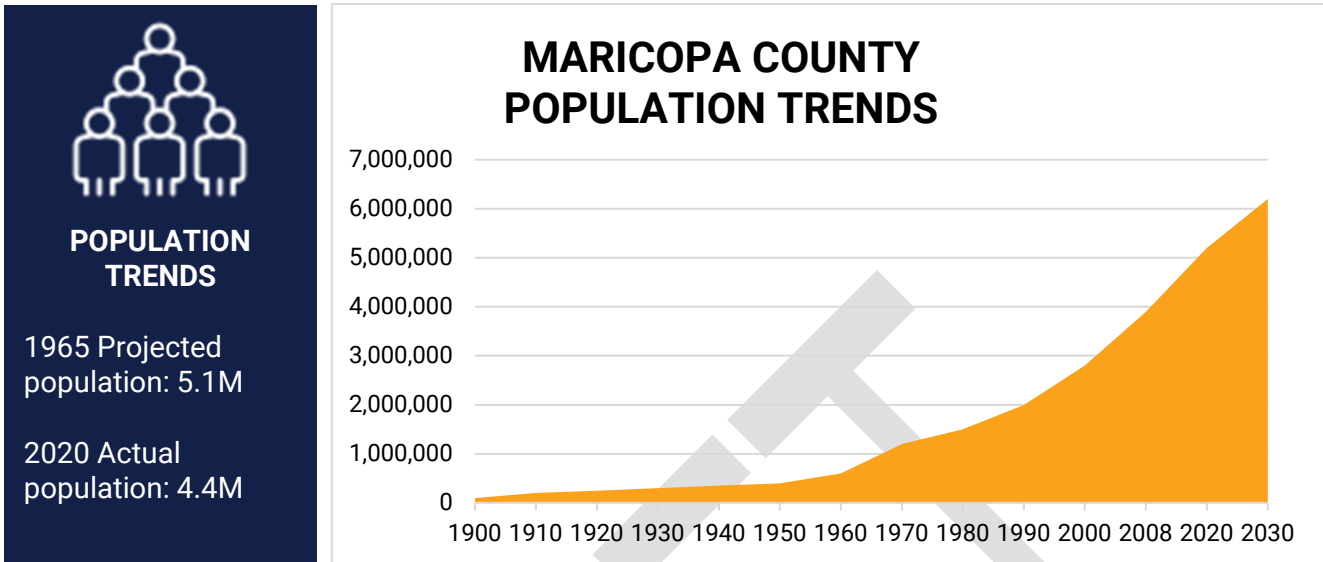


Figure 5 - Population Trends for Maricopa County 1900-2030

In 1965, there was a sense of urgency for increased services - not just fire, police, utilities, highways, and schools, but also parks and recreation. "While these other services are somewhat flexible and can be provided after the fact of population explosion, **parks and recreation perish if not planned decades into the future.**"<sup>14</sup> A true statement today and is as vital as the County continues to be one of the fastest-growing counties in the nation (Figure 5).<sup>15</sup> The 1965 Plan states, "Land, that priceless condition precedent to a park system, must be acquired and set aside before it becomes forever unattainable due to commercial and residential development."<sup>16</sup> As growth continues and development expands into previously undisturbed native landscapes, it is essential to utilize all resources available to protect natural resources, which will help **create places that thrive by balancing People and Place.**

Careful regional and local planning will be necessary to reduce impacts on the environment, parks, and natural areas by protecting habitat and avoiding fragmented wildlife and river corridors. Appendix C provides an overview of regional plans throughout the valley.

## HOUSING

The need for affordable housing is fueling the growth in the valley, specifically in the western and eastern edges of the region. In the West Valley, new construction can be seen following the alignment of the Loop 303 expansion and to the east along Interstate 10 into Pinal County. Plans for new housing communities put on hold during the Great Recession have reemerged. However, home prices have skyrocketed in the Phoenix region as demand for the available stock of homes is outpacing the construction of new homes, which appears will continue.

<sup>14</sup> Riggs, L.A., Burns, B.W., Andrews, W.S., O'Neil, R.A., Herrick, J.C., and Huddleston, S.L. (1965). Maricopa County Regional Park System Plan, Maricopa County, Arizona. Retrieved from <https://www.maricopacountyparks.net>. Volume 1, pg. 3.

<sup>15</sup> 12 News, (2021). Maricopa County is the fastest – growing county in the US, report says. Retrieved from <https://www.12news.com/article/news/local/valley/maricopa-county-the-fastest-growing-county-in-the-us-report-says/75-5e414a43-ffcb-4aa6-9092-906108f74a5e>.

<sup>16</sup> Riggs, L.A., Burns, B.W., Andrews, W.S., O'Neil, R.A., Herrick, J.C., and Huddleston, S.L. (1965). Maricopa County Regional Park System Plan, Maricopa County, Arizona. Retrieved from <https://www.maricopacountyparks.net>. Volume 1, pg. 3.

## WATER RESOURCES

Arizona has been in some stage of drought since 1994.<sup>17</sup> Although Arizona has been planning for drought conditions for years, the challenges relating to water resources will continue (Figure 6). In 2022, the federal government instituted a Tier II Water Shortage due to the extended period of drought in the southwest.

The System's water use is low compared to city parks. However, low-impact development and green infrastructure measures are good options to demonstrate best management practices.

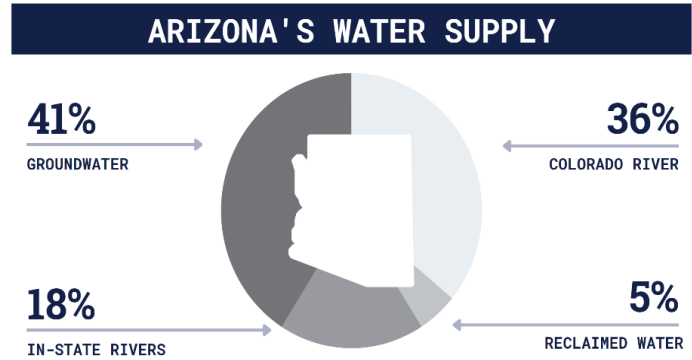


Figure 6 - Arizona's Water Supplies. Source: Arizona Water Facts. Retrieved from <https://bit.ly/AZWaterSupplies>.

## RIVER CORRIDORS – FUTURE PARKLANDS

Existing river conditions across the valley vary widely depending on their location and proximity to existing cities. On the County's outer reaches, much of the natural area of the rivers remain close to their natural state, with few exceptions experiencing minor sand and gravel mining operations or lying in proximity to power production facilities.

Towards the urbanized populace of the metropolitan area, we begin to see some work done by different municipalities and agencies to preserve the rivers or use them for recreational purposes. An abundance of sand and gravel mining operations extends into the riverbed and the floodplain of those rivers to provide aggregate needs. It is where residential, commercial, and industrial are the most intermingled in uses but remain scattered and disconnected from the entire network due to abrupt mining operations near the riverbeds. As mining is exhausted or transportation costs no longer make mining economically feasible, there is an opportunity for the reclamation and revitalization of the river corridors. Two examples of efforts to bring life and vitality back to the river corridors include:

- The Rio Reimagined Project (RR), a Federally designated Urban Waterway, has focused on restoring the Salt River to a more natural state so it can continue flowing through the heart of the Phoenix.
- The Aqua Fria Watercourse Master Plan encouraged partnerships between mining interests to create a recreational corridor while maintaining mining outside the river.

## TRANSPORTATION

Across the region, agencies are also supporting the developing multi-modal infrastructure due to roadway overcrowding and air quality concerns. The MAG Active Transportation Plan (ATP)<sup>18</sup> aims to shift the valley's culture from car-centric to people-centric, creating a happier, healthier, and more economically competitive region.

<sup>17</sup> Arizona Department of Water Resources (n.d.). Drought Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from <https://new.azwater.gov/drought/faq>.

<sup>18</sup> Maricopa Association of Governments (2020). Active Transportation Plan. Retrieved from <https://azmag.gov/Programs/Transportation/Active-Transportation/Active-Transportation-Plan>.

Through future regional trail planning and coordination with area cities, it is also important for the County to promote modes of active and multi-modal transportation options as the population grows and methods of transportation change. Providing active transportation infrastructure ensures resiliency in the future.

## COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS

According to the MAG ATP, 64 percent of Maricopa County residents are obese or overweight.

"Being physically active is one of the most important steps people can take to improve their health. Numerous studies have identified increasing physical activity levels as an effective strategy for reducing risks for chronic disease and associated it with reducing the risk of being overweight/obese, high blood pressure, diabetes, coronary heart disease, some cancers, depression, and more.<sup>19</sup>

Ultimately, park and land use planning aim to provide residents with the elements of a healthy community (Figure 7). MCPRD can assist in this effort by continuing to provide quality parks, trails, open spaces, and recreational opportunities to help address health equity and resiliency.

### OPEN SPACE

"Open space" means land that is generally free of land uses that would jeopardize the conservation and open space values of the land or development that would obstruct the scenic beauty of the land from [ARS §37-311.3](#). Fortunately, [ARS §11-935.01](#) supports open space land acquisition states:



Figure 7 – Shifting the Health Paradigm: Elements of A Healthy Community. Source: Vitalyst Health Foundation.

"The acquisition of interests or rights in real property for the preservation of open spaces or areas constitutes a public purpose for which public funds may be expended or advanced. For the purposes of this section, "open space lands or open area" means any space or area characterized by great natural scenic beauty or whose existing openness, natural condition or present state of use, if retained, would maintain or enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources, or the production of food and fiber."<sup>20</sup>

While housing, commercial, and other land uses continue, there is a need to protect public access to mountains, rivers, and open space areas and improve connections to regional parks and trails.

<sup>19</sup> Maricopa Association of Governments (2020). Active Transportation Plan, Pg. 3. Retrieved from <https://azmag.gov/Programs/Transportation/Active-Transportation/Active-Transportation-Plan>.

<sup>20</sup> Thomson Reuters, Arizona State Legislature, Arizona Revised Statute 11-935.01. Open Space Land Acquisition. Retrieved from <https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/11/00935-01.htm>.

# DEMOGRAPHICS OF MARICOPA COUNTY

With over 4.4 million residents in 2020, Maricopa County is one of the most populous counties in the U.S., encompassing well over half of the state's population (61.81 percent)<sup>21</sup>. With no slow-down in growth over the coming years, the County anticipates becoming the third most populous county in the country, just behind Los Angeles County in California and Cook County in Illinois.

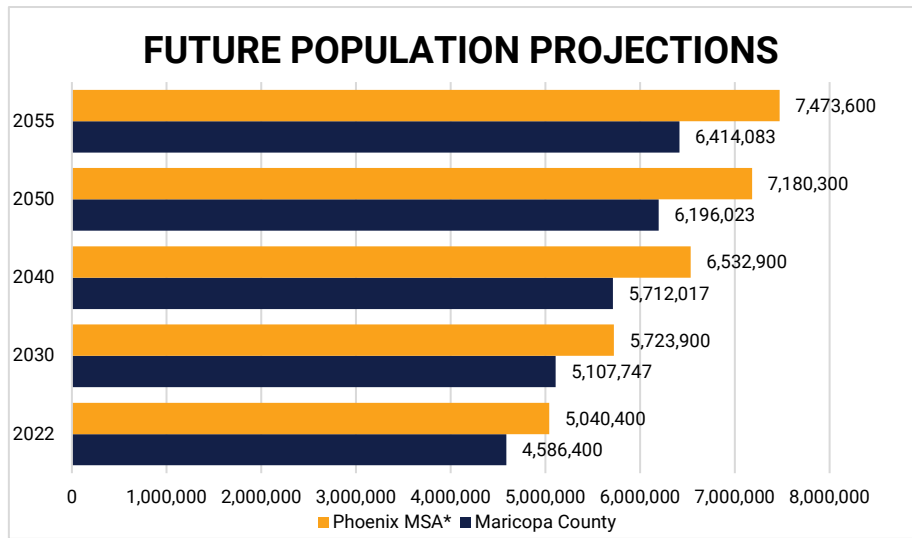


Figure 8 - Arizona State and County Population Projections: 2022 to 2055

According to the Census Bureau data, Phoenix was "the fastest-growing big city in the U.S. between 2010 and 2020, adding 163,000 more residents".<sup>22</sup> Buckeye and Goodyear in the West Valley were among the ten fastest-growing U.S. cities in the past decade.<sup>23</sup>

The prominent rise in population growth is due to an influx of people from other parts of the country coming to Arizona. There has been an exodus of residents from California to neighboring states as people search for more affordable places to live. Much of the migration started with the 2020 pandemic but was also occurring prior.<sup>24</sup>

According to the Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity, projections estimate a 15.1 percent change in population within the County between 2020-2030, adding approximately 670,000 residents (Figures 8 and 9).<sup>25</sup>

POPULATION							Percent increase since 1920
Location	1920	1960	1970	2000	2010	2020	
United States	106,000,000	179,000,000	203,392,031	281,421,906	308,745,538	329,500,000	310.85%
Arizona	334,000	1,302,000	1,745,944	5,130,632	6,392,017	7,151,502	2141.17%
Maricopa County	90,000	664,000	971,228	3,072,149	3,817,117	<b>4,420,568</b>	4911.74%
Phoenix	29,000	439,000	581,562	1,326,997	1,445,632	1,608,139	5545.31%

Figure 9 - Population and Housing Unit Estimate Tables<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> United States Census Bureau (2020). Quick Facts Tables. Retrieved from [www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/maricopacountyarizona.AZ/PST045222](https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/maricopacountyarizona.AZ/PST045222).

<sup>22</sup> Shapiro, D. (2021). Arizona among top states in population growth from 2020 to 2021. KTAR News 92.3 FM. Retrieved from <https://ktar.com/story/4821017/arizona-among-top-states-in-population-growth-from-2020-to-2021/>.

<sup>23</sup> Movebuddah (2022, June). 5 of 10 fastest-growing Arizona cities are in the West Valley. AZ Big Media. Retrieved from <https://azbigmedia.com/business/5-of-10-fastest-growing-arizona-cities-are-in-the-west-valley/>.

<sup>24</sup> CBS Bay Area. (2021, January 6). California Exodus: Study Shows State Among Top 5 Showing Largest Outbound Migration. Retrieved from <https://www.cbsnews.com/sanfrancisco/news/california-exodus-top-5-largest-outbound-migration/?msclkid=702edf33c69711ec9d90afb98067cff6>

<sup>25</sup> Chang, J., (2021, June). Demographic Trends in Arizona. Arizona Office of Economic Opportunity. Retrieved from <https://irc.az.gov/sites/default/files/meeting-files/State%20Demographer%27s%20Presentation.pdf>.

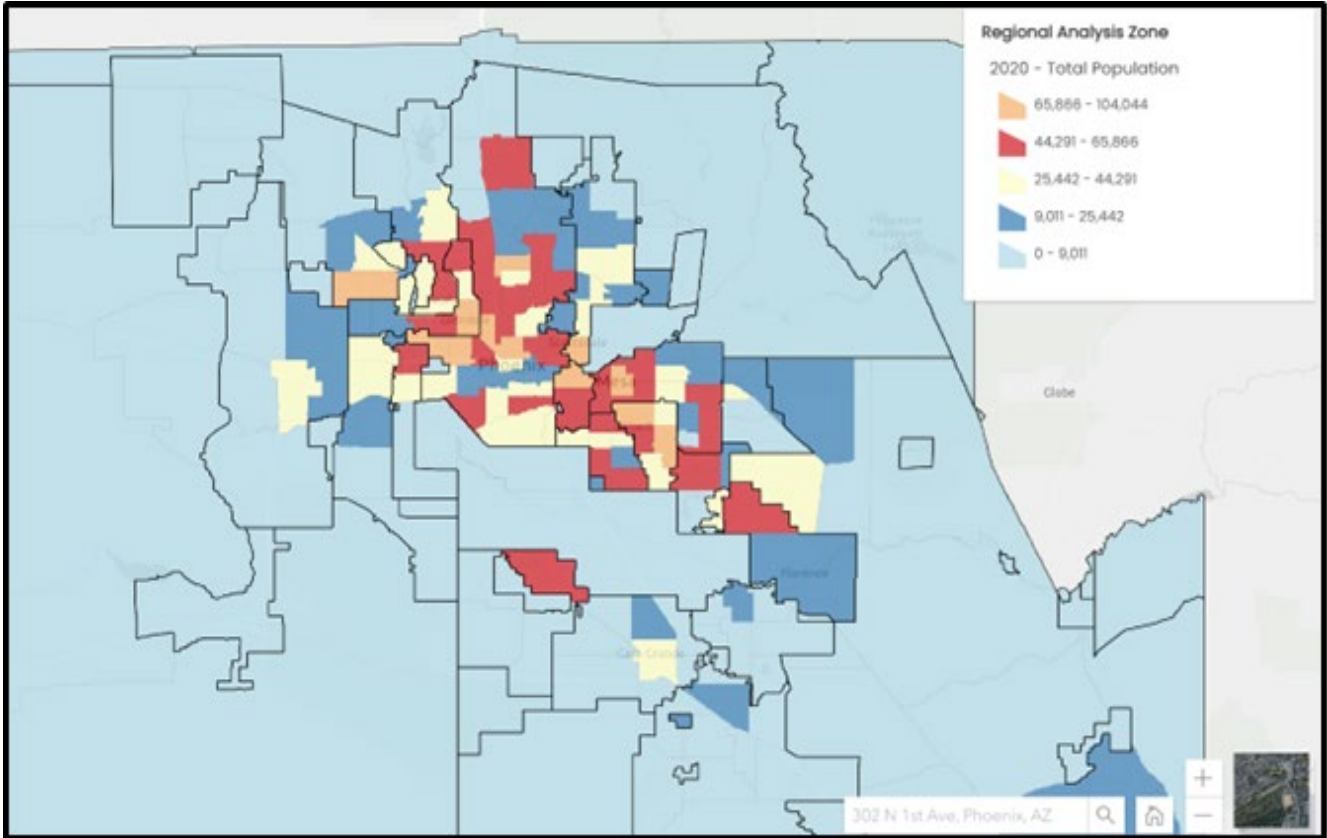


Figure 10 - 2020 Total Population - MAG 2019 Socioeconomic Projects – Regional Analysis Zone (based on density)

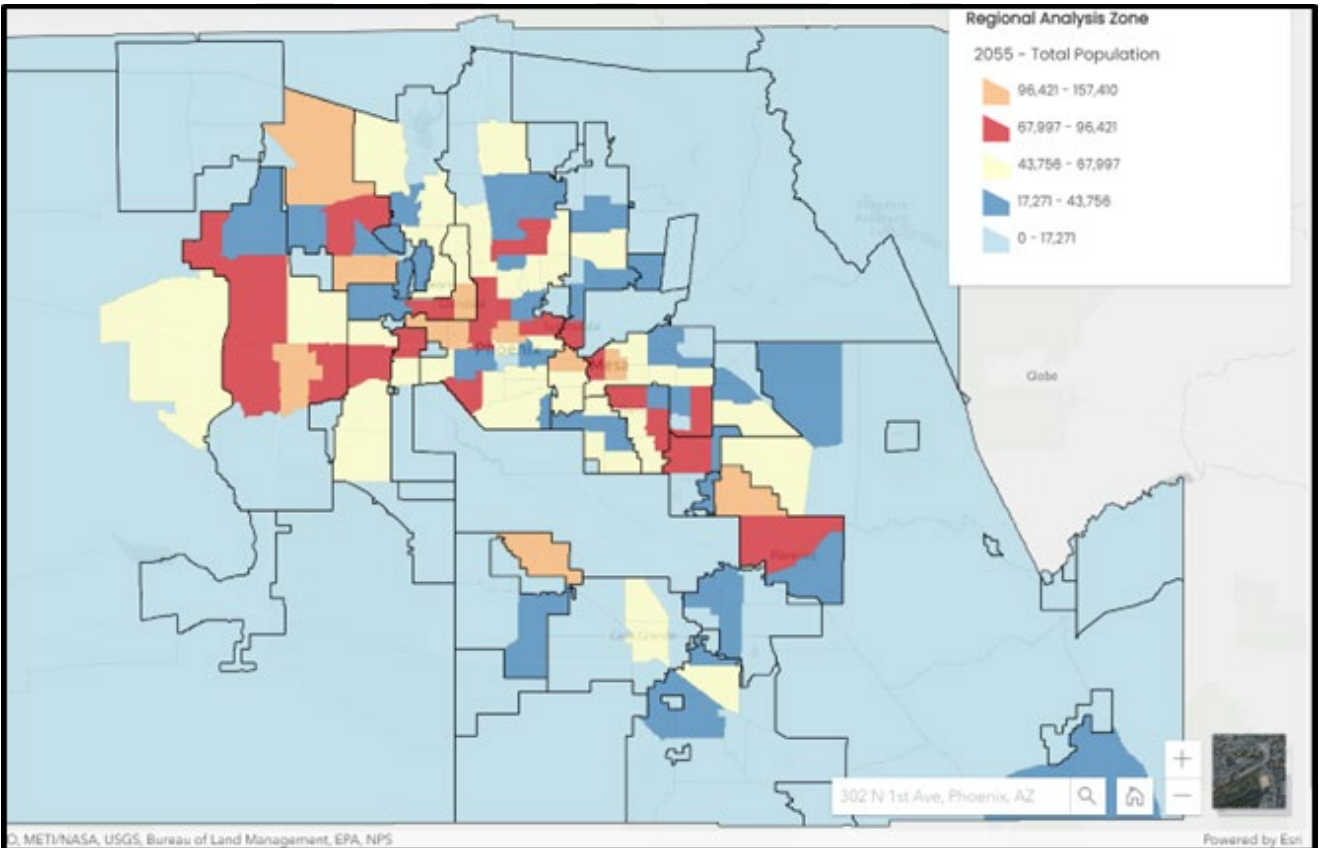


Figure 11- 2055 Total Population - MAG 2019 Socioeconomic Projects – Regional Analysis Zone (based on density)



The County expects the population to increase to over five million in 2030 and up to 6.4 million in 2055.<sup>26</sup>

Phoenix's Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) includes all of Maricopa County and neighboring parts of Pinal County. This area expects significant growth of up to **7.5 million people by 2055**.<sup>27</sup> In addition, Figure 10 shows the total population density for the region in 2020. Figure 11 demonstrates how the region's population density will change by 2055. Population growth in the entire West Valley is most notable. Population growth is likely around the Lake Pleasant area and the northwest valley.<sup>28</sup>

## AGE

The 2019 median age in Maricopa County was 36.4 years, an increase from previous years.<sup>29</sup> More notably, in 2010 when the median age was 34.1 years, indicating an aging population with approximately 15.5 percent of the population 65 and over age group being the fastest growing age group in Arizona, increasing 47.3 percent between 2010-2020.<sup>30</sup> As a comparison, today, persons under 18 make up almost a quarter of the population at 23.0 percent, with 5.7 percent being under five (Figure 12).

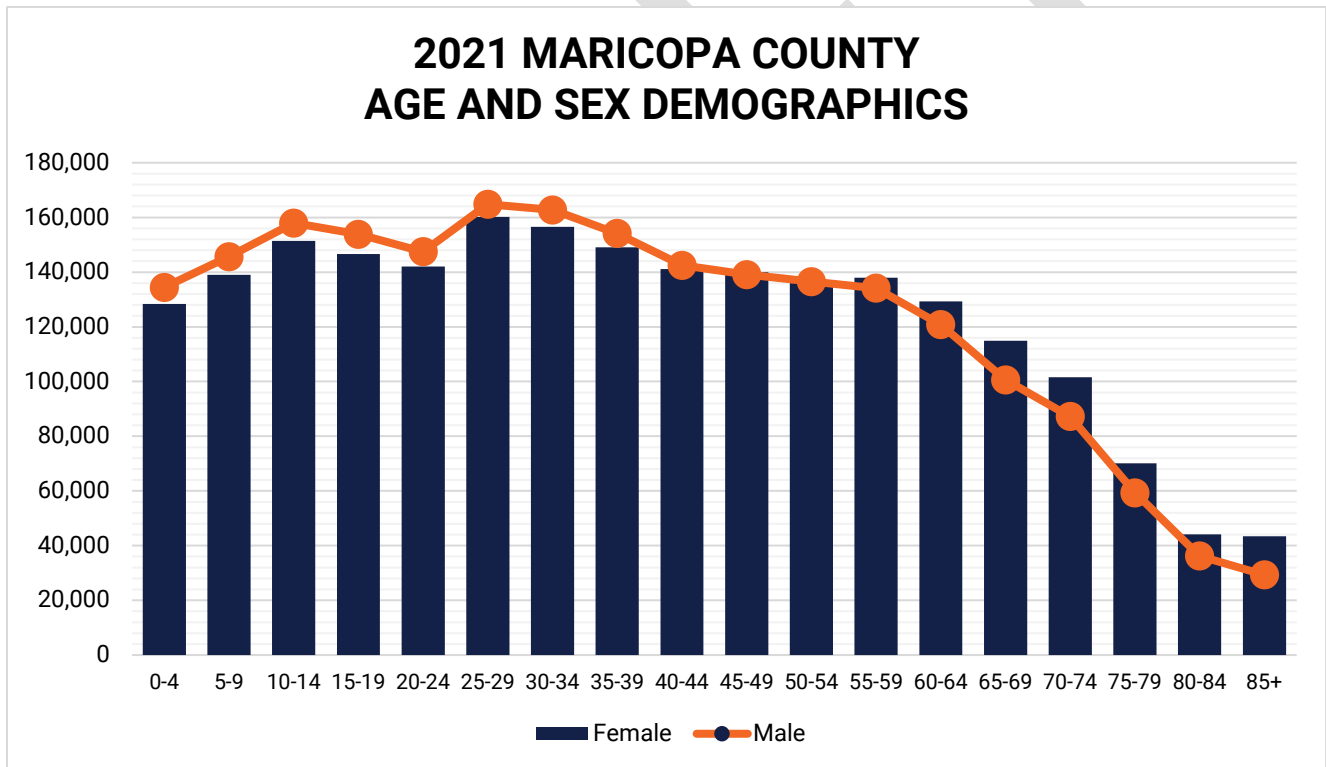


Figure 12 - 2021 Maricopa County Age and Sex Demographics

<sup>26</sup> Maricopa Association of Governments (2019). Socioeconomic Projections for Maricopa County. Retrieved from <https://azmag.gov/Programs/Maps-and-Data/Population-Housing/Socioeconomic-Projections/v/638228081750067323>

<sup>27</sup> Maricopa Association of Governments. Socioeconomic Projections. <https://azmag.gov/Programs/Maps-and-Data/Population-Housing/socioeconomic-Projections.A>

<sup>28</sup> Ayers, J. (2019, June). 2019 Socioeconomic Projections. Retrieved from <https://geo.azmag.gov/maps/projections/>.

<sup>29</sup> United States Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S0101 Age and Sex. Retrieved from [https://data.census.gov/table?q=maricopa+county+az&t=Age+and+Sex&g=010XX00US\\_040XX00US04&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S0101](https://data.census.gov/table?q=maricopa+county+az&t=Age+and+Sex&g=010XX00US_040XX00US04&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S0101)

<sup>30</sup> United States Census Bureau (2010). American Community Survey. S0101:AGE and SEX. Retrieved from [https://data.census.gov/table?q=maricopa+county+az&t=Age+and+Sex&g=010XX00US\\_040XX00US04&tid=ACSST5Y2010.S0101](https://data.census.gov/table?q=maricopa+county+az&t=Age+and+Sex&g=010XX00US_040XX00US04&tid=ACSST5Y2010.S0101)

## RACE AND ETHNICITY

Most of the population in Maricopa County is white, accounting for nearly 77.63 percent – (Figure 13).<sup>31</sup> People, who identify as Hispanic or Latino, make up 31.4 percent of the population (Figure 14).<sup>32</sup> Black or African American residents account for 5.63 percent<sup>33</sup>, while Asian residents account for 4.19 percent<sup>34</sup>. American Indians and Alaska Natives comprise about 1.98 percent<sup>35</sup>, with Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islanders representing 0.22 percent<sup>36</sup> of the population.

## POPULATION BY RACE IN MARICOPA COUNTY

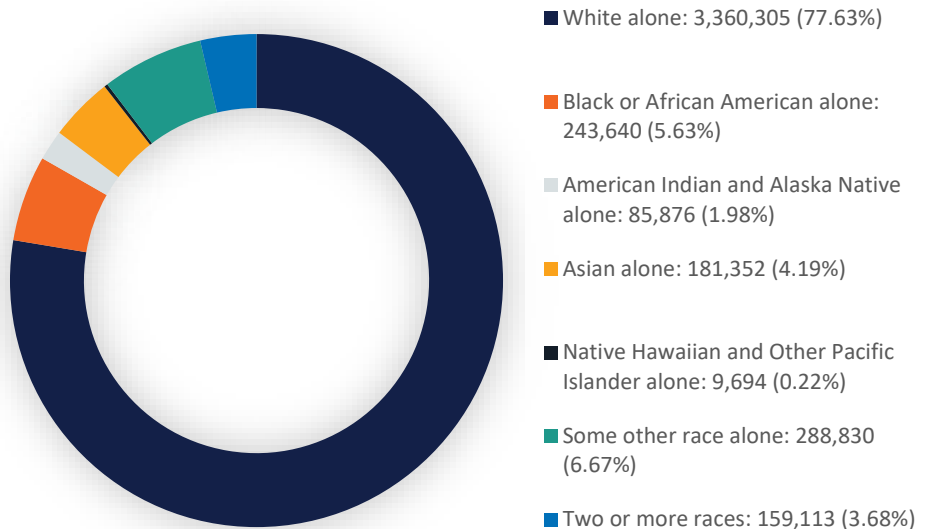


Figure 13 - 2019 United Census Bureau Data Based on 5-Year Estimates

<sup>31</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B01001ASEX BY AGE (WHITE ALONE). 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001A>

<sup>32</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B01001I Sex by age (Hispanic or Latino). 2019:ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001I>

<sup>33</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B010001B Sex by Age (Black or African American Alone). 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001B>

<sup>34</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B01001D Sex by Age (Asian Alone). 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001D>

<sup>35</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B01001C Sex by Age (American Indian and Alaska Native Alone). 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001C>

<sup>36</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. B01001E Sex by Age (Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander Alone). 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Ethnicity&t=Race+and+Ethnicity&y=2019&tid=ACSDT5Y2019.B01001E>

## LANGUAGE

The County is diverse, with many different languages spoken among its residents. Currently, English is the dominant language spoken by residents, with a sizeable portion also speaking Spanish. More than 800,000 residents speak Spanish in the County, making up 20.4 percent of the population.<sup>37</sup> Fluent Spanish speakers who speak English fluently also account for 67.9 percent.<sup>37</sup> However, for individuals who speak Spanish, 32.8 percent<sup>37</sup> speak English less than very well, with most being 65 and older (48.6 percent)<sup>37</sup>, indicating that these residents speak primarily Spanish with little knowledge of English.

### TOTAL POPULATION: HISPANIC OR LATINO

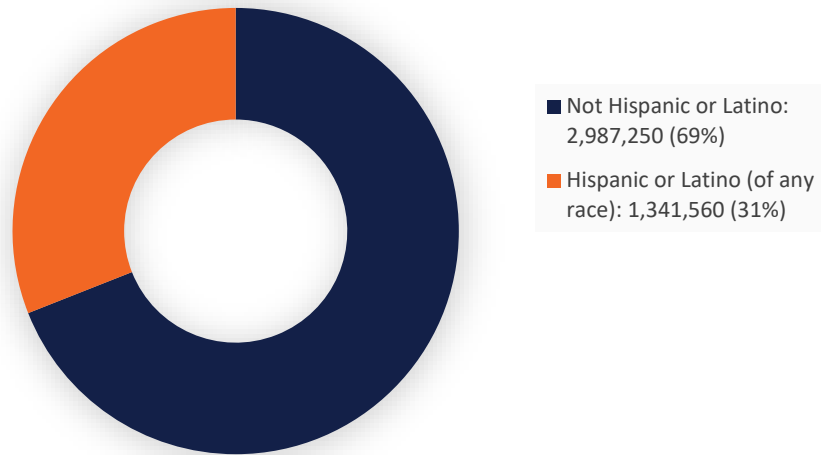


Figure 14 - Total Population - Hispanic or Latino

## HOUSEHOLD INCOME

The County median household income is \$64,468<sup>38</sup>, slightly higher than the statewide median household income of \$58,945.<sup>38</sup> Approximately 13.8 percent<sup>39</sup> of County residents live in poverty, somewhat lower than the 15.1 percent<sup>40</sup> statewide.

With a median household income slightly higher than the national average of \$62,843<sup>41</sup>, followed by a historically lower cost of living, it is said that Maricopa County is attractive to those looking for a place where their disposable income would be greater. However, a significant segment of the 25.4% population (25.4 percent) earns less than \$35,000, which may make it difficult to pay or have adequate time for recreation opportunities.

<sup>37</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S1601 Language Spoken at Home. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=Maricopa+County,+Arizona,+Spanish+Speaking&y=2019&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1601>.  
<sup>38</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S1901 Income in the Past 12 Months. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=household+income+in+maricopa+county,+AZ+in+2019&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1901>.  
<sup>39</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=lives+in+poverty+maricopa+county,+AZ+in+2019&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1701>.  
<sup>40</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S1701 Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=lives+in+poverty+AZ+in+2019&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1701>.  
<sup>41</sup> United Census Bureau (2019). American Community Survey. S1901 Income in the Past 12 Months. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Detailed Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=united+states+household+income&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1901>.

## TECHNOLOGY

Approximately 95.7 percent<sup>42</sup> of households have a computer, and 90.2 percent<sup>43</sup> have a broadband Internet subscription. The data is similar across the state, with about 94.4 percent<sup>42</sup> of households with a computer and 88.2 percent<sup>43</sup> with broadband Internet subscriptions.

MCPRD must consider how to utilize technology to bring visitors to the parks and uphold the parks' primary purpose: to provide an escape from the urban, modern, and technological society.

## INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES

Approximately 480,232 households (11.2 percent) have one person living with a disability in Maricopa County.<sup>44</sup> The 2022 Arizona Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) states, "Currently, 13 percent of Arizonans live with a disability." The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has emphasized the need for equity for those with disabilities by ensuring access to parks, trails, and recreation. As the County's population ages, individuals with disabilities who need accommodations to experience the outdoors will likely grow.

## COUNTY PARKS OVERVIEW

### ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

While the regional park system is vast, there is a crew of roughly 98 full-time employees, four temporary employees, and many volunteers (Figure 15).

The organizational structure is three divisions:

1. Office of the Director
2. Parks Operations Division
3. Administrative Division

Park Headquarters houses many financial and administrative functions, including a natural resource and souvenir program. Each park has a supervisor, administrative support, and multiple maintenance levels. In addition, a centralized education base supports

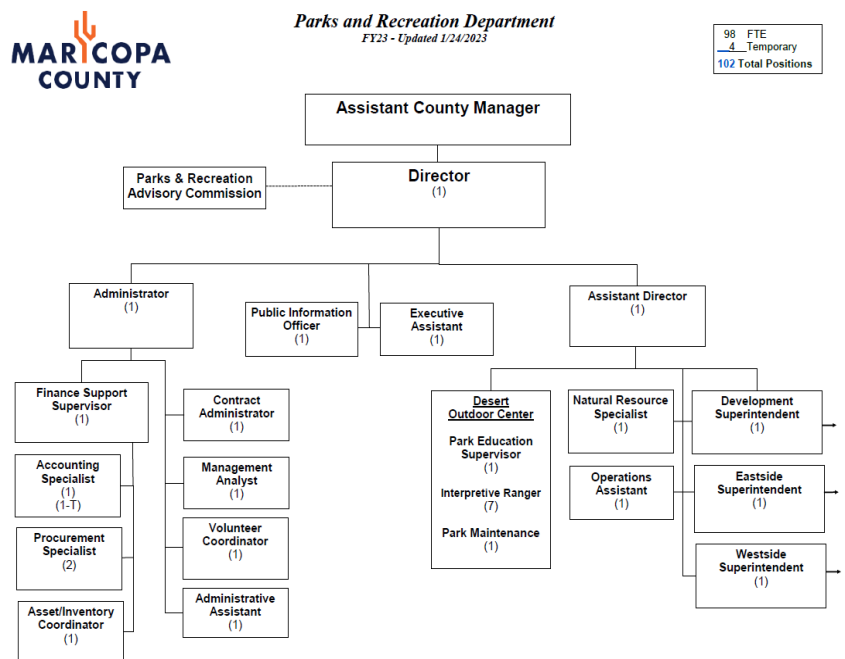


Figure 15 - Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Organizational Chart

<sup>42</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2021) QuickFacts. United States; Maricopa County, Arizona. Households with a computer, percent, 2017-2021. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AZ,maricopacountyarizona/COM100221>

<sup>43</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2021) QuickFacts. United States; Maricopa County, Arizona. Households with Internet Subscriptions, 2017-2021. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/AZ,maricopacountyarizona/COM100221>

<sup>44</sup> United States Census Bureau. (2021). American Community Survey. S1810 Disability Characteristics. 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=disability+in+maricopa+county,+az&g=010XX00US&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1810>

the education center and parks. Finally, construction and trail teams support all of the parks.

In addition, a volunteer program with a coordinator and approximately 210 core volunteers assist respective parks. These volunteers, also known as park hosts or community volunteers, are often interchangeable with park staff and perform similar functions. Also, 50 service volunteers serve various functions as advocates, episodic volunteers, docents, probation/community service, or site stewards. In Fiscal Year (FY)21, MCPRD recorded 95,170 volunteer hours—a financial impact of \$2,420,173. In addition, the parks held 66 special days of service events, which provided local community members with the opportunity to volunteer and learn more about maintaining their public lands.

## MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

The Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Commission (Commission) comprises seven members appointed and approved by the BOS. The Commission advises the BOS on matters about parks and recreation. In its advisory role to the BOS, the Commission recommends broad policies and long-range programs for acquisitions, planning, development, maintenance, and operation of the System.

### ATTENDANCE

MCPRD'S attendance grew to 2,720,806 in 2022, an increase of over three-quarters of a million visitors since 2012 (Figure 16). Over the next ten years, attendance may reach 3.7 million. During PMP updates, it will be necessary to plan for carrying capacities.

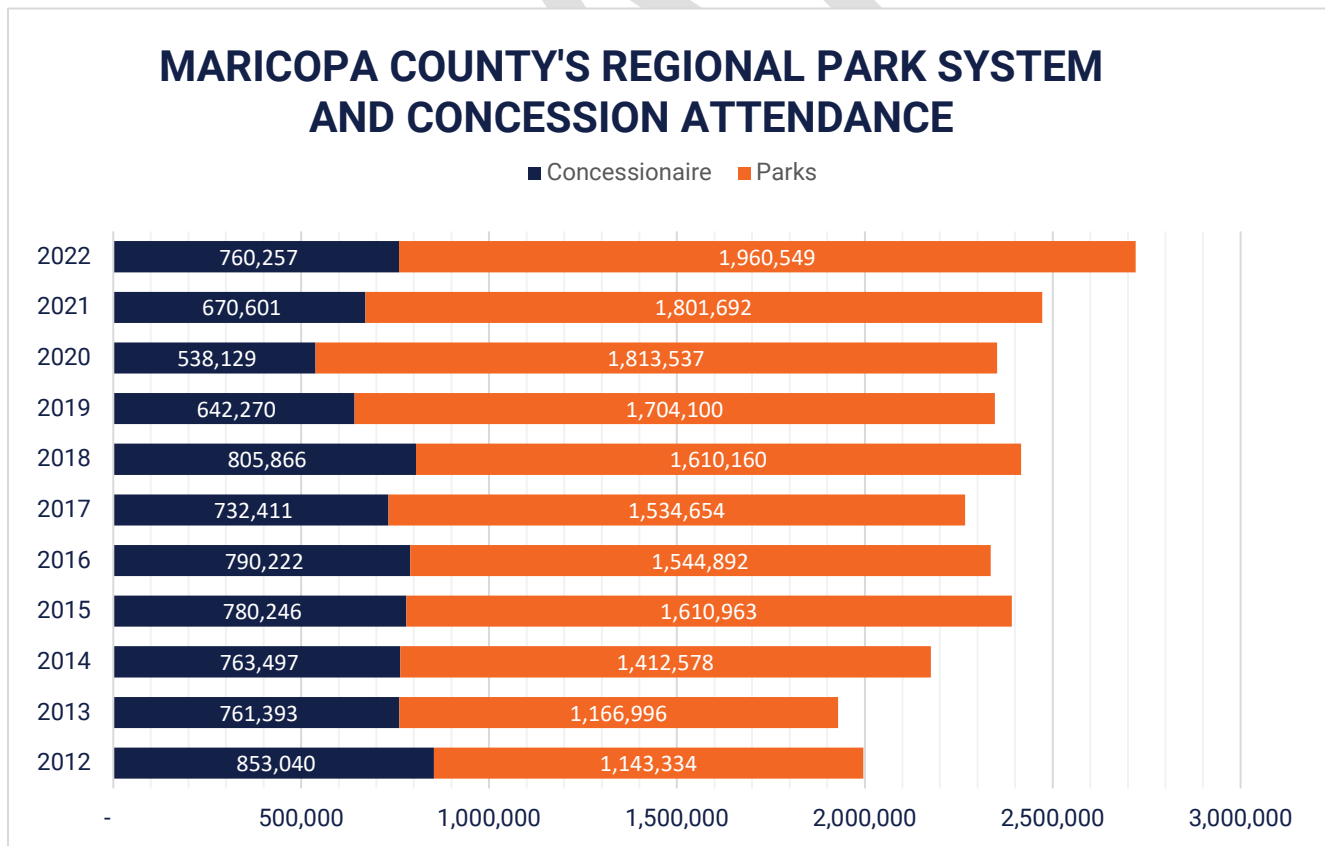


Figure 16 - Maricopa County Regional Attendance for 2012 through 2022.

## DRIVE TIME ANALYSIS

Important to visitation is access and visitor proximity to the regional parks. Figure 17 illustrates a 10-Mile Service Area from the park entrances, now within the urban growth area. Figure 17 also shows that approximately half of the regional parks have a population of over 100,000 within 10 miles of a park entrance.

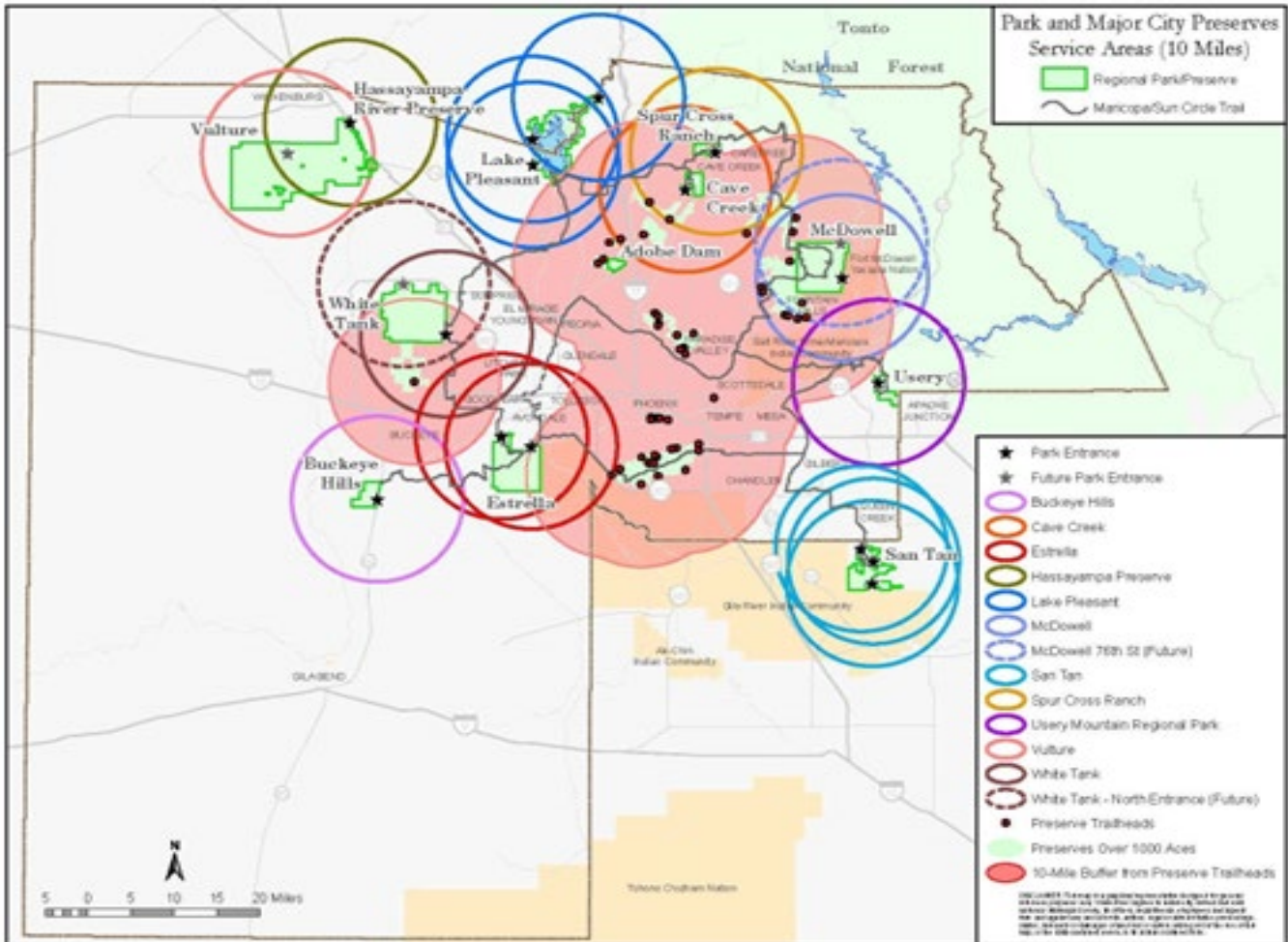


Figure 17 - 10-Mile Service Area from Park Entrances and Major City Preserves

Adobe Dam Regional Park (ADRP), UMRP, and EMRP have the highest populations within 15 and 30 minutes. ADRP has the highest population within all three timeframes, 15 and 30 minutes, and is almost double that of the other highest parks within the 15 and 30-minute timeframes (Figures 18 and 19).

UMRP and EMRP have a significantly higher 2020 total population within 15 minutes than the rest of the system at more than double the next highest population at WTMRP at over 97,000 people.

### HIGHEST POPULATION WITHIN 15 MINUTES

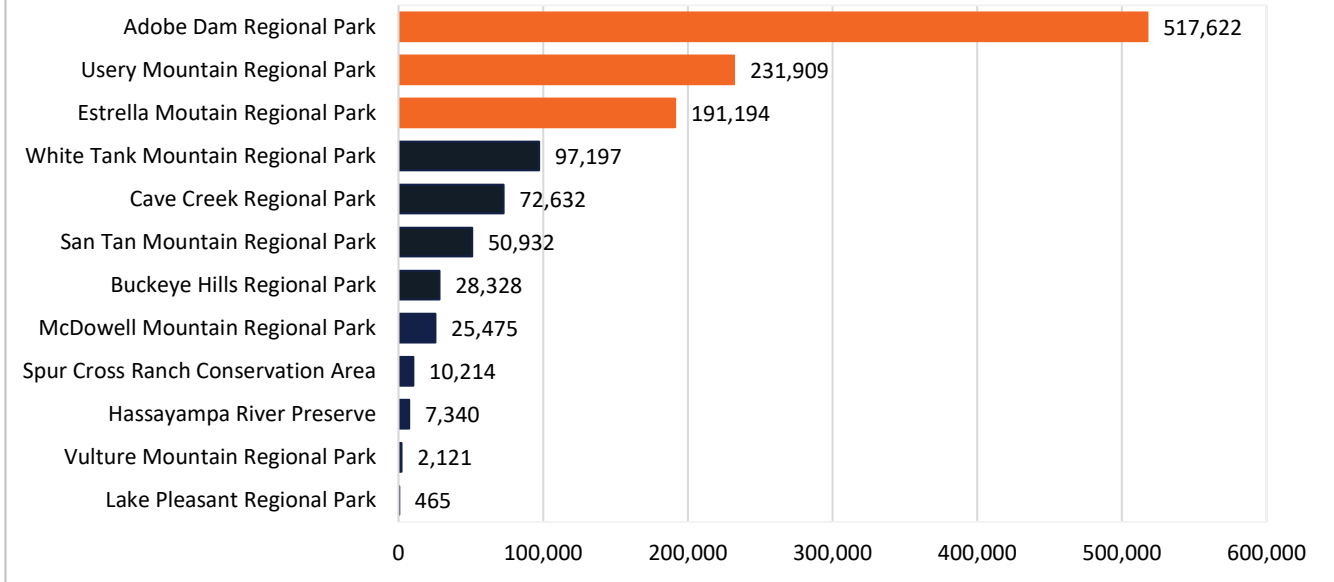


Figure 18 - Highest Population within 15-minutes

### HIGHEST POPULATION WITHIN 30 MINUTES

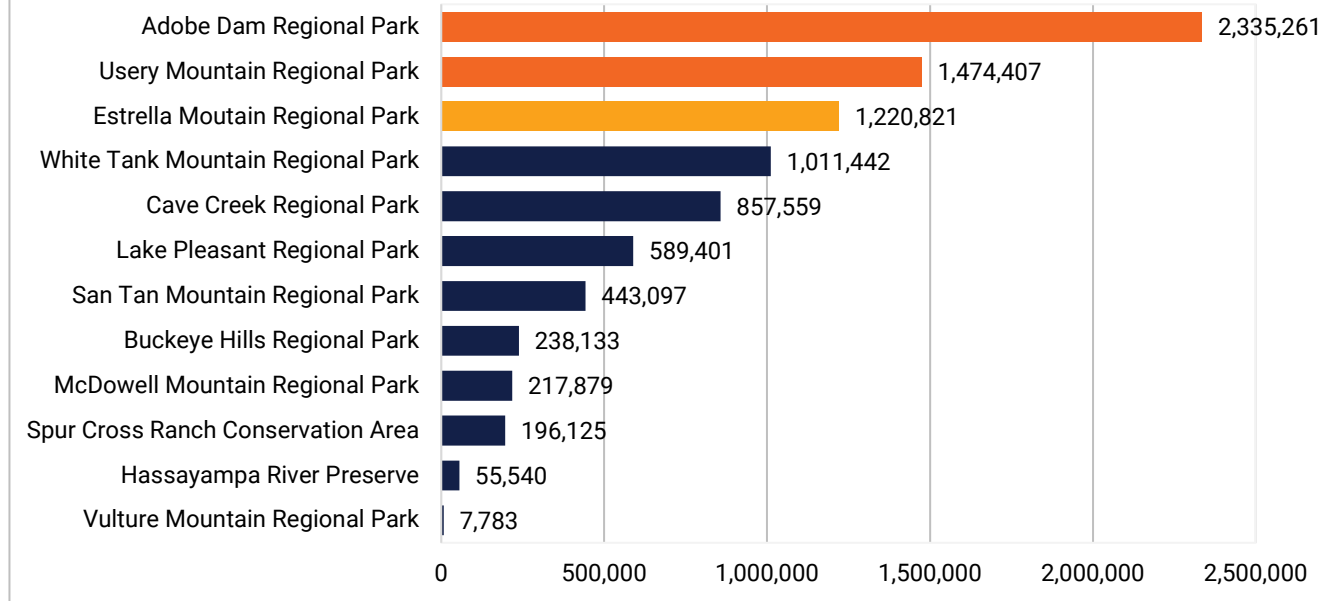


Figure 19 - Highest population within 30 minutes

The proximity of the population indicates an opportunity and a challenge; an opportunity to increase visitation both in numbers and visitation frequency; the challenge is to accommodate greater visitation with the preservation and conservation of natural lands, as well as maintain a high-quality visitor

experience in the enjoyment of the natural environment. As the population grows, roadway volume will create transportation challenges, particularly increasing vehicle traffic within short distances of the parks. There will need to be a continued evaluation of alternative access modes to diversify transportation options.

## NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

The System is rich in natural and cultural resources. The MCPRD NRMP will be the primary source for guidance on natural and cultural resources.

The System includes high-quality natural areas, natural open space, recreational areas, river corridors, and one of the largest lakes in the state. Ten of the fourteen regional parks reside at the urban-wildland interface, where native wildlife abruptly meets urbanization (buildings, development, and suburbs). The parks are rich in biodiversity, with functioning ecosystems connected to the immense surrounding wildlands, natural areas, and habitat blocks.

The lands between the parks and habitat blocks contain wildlife corridors that allow for the interchange and flow of wildlife and plant genetic materials. Maintaining and protecting plant and wildlife species within these natural ecosystems is essential to maintain the current biodiversity so that the parks have functioning natural ecosystems.

## CORRIDORS AND CONNECTIONS

The System has natural connections and linkages connecting them to the larger federal, state, and public land habitat blocks, allowing the flow of genetics, biodiversity, and wildlife between them. However, future development will disconnect many linkages or connections (Figure 20). Without proper planning, housing and business developments could forever change the natural areas and wildlife inhabiting them. The threats and challenges may affect ecological function, biological diversity, sustainability, conservation, future preservation, and recreation potential.

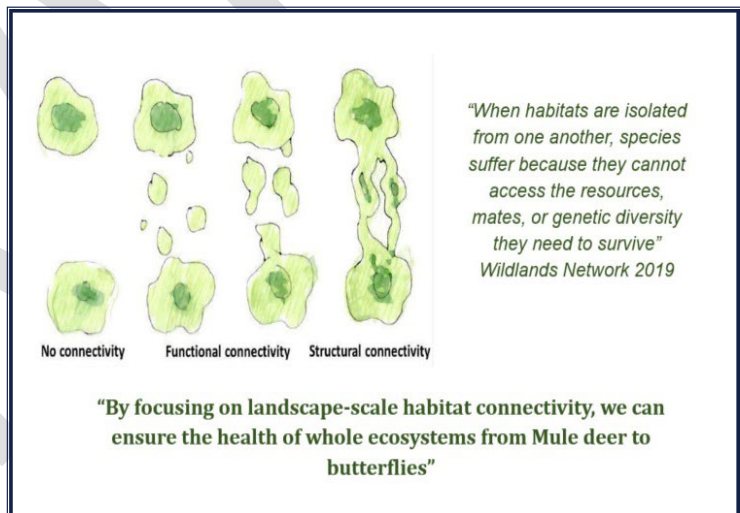


Figure 20 - Differing Levels of Connectivity

In short, elements of our natural heritage may be in peril. Without adequate ecological connectivity between habitat blocks, species will begin disappearing from these untouched landscapes, often starting with the larger mammals such as bighorn sheep and mule deer.<sup>45</sup>

Where are the priority corridors needed? While investigating the System's locations concerning proposed future developments and other preserved natural areas, wildland blocks, and natural features,

<sup>45</sup> Kenneth, D.A, D.F. Dock, K.E. Hodges, L.R. Pugh, W. Fagan, C.H. Sekercioglu, S.H.M. Buchart, and M. Kauffman (2017. 26:115-127). Global ecology and biogeography: A global analysis of traits predicting species sensitivity to habitat fragmentation.



including rivers, washes, and mountains, wildlife corridor projects are essential for future health and long-term vitality.

## CONSERVATION, COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT, AND INVASIVE SPECIES

Invasive species management is often a significant component of conservation management. Invasive species can become problematic after invading an area and require effective management to preserve the landscape's natural biodiversity. Invasive species are becoming more prevalent throughout the region. Understanding invasive species' effects on landscape communities and their plant biology is vital to their successful suppression or reduction.

## COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT AND RESTORATION

Enhancing or restoring areas is necessary to improve or maintain native biodiversity and include many areas disturbed or altered from their natural and historical landscape. These disturbances, such as grazing, wildfires, invasive species, illegal trailblazing, and other recreational activities, including developments, are often anthropogenic influences. Strategic community enhancement and management of these areas will help reduce the spread of invasive species, especially after several years of consistent management. In addition, planting native plants with seeds will help the areas recover and provide soil stabilization.

## CLIMATE, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND WILDFIRES

The Sonoran Desert has a bimodal precipitation regime. The general climate is considered arid. With low-intensity winter rains (January/December) and fierce summer monsoon rains (July/ August). These distinct rainy seasons are the driving forces that provide the Sonoran Desert with unique and diverse plant and wildlife species.



*Sunrise in the distance surrounded by Cholla and Saguaros - White Tank*

The Sonoran Desert has been in a severe drought for over 25 years. Although we have had a few years of above-normal precipitation, it has not been enough to reverse the drought effects or replenish the groundwater and subsidence areas. Predictions suggest that the County's climate may change significantly over the coming century, with many observable changes over the next few decades.

Fire ecology is a scientific discipline concerned with natural processes involving fire, its ecological effects, interactions, and the abiotic/biotic components within the ecosystem. The Upland Sonoran Desert habitats are not fire-adapted communities. Over the past 45 years, the number of wildfires has dramatically increased in frequency and magnitude within the Sonoran Desert;<sup>46</sup> the native species most negatively affected by these wildfires are saguaro (*Carnegiea gigantea*) and foothill palo verde (*Parkinsonia microphylla*).<sup>47</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Maricopa County staff extrapolated historical GIS data from the AZGeo Data Hub ([AZGeo \(arcgis.com\)](http://AZGeo.arcgis.com)). Upon review of this data, wildfire trends emerged using data from 1990 up to 2022.

<sup>47</sup> Alford, E.J. et al. USDA Forest Service Proceedings RMRS-P-26 2005. Effects of Fire on the Sonoran Desert Plant Communities

## REGIONAL CONSERVATION PLANNING

MCPRD will continue to protect the essential elements of the County's rich natural heritage in concert with thoughtful urban growth and robust economic development. The success depends on the collaborative partnerships and regional planning efforts to look at the entire Maricopa County instead of silo solutions.

## PARK PROGRAMS

Park programs emphasize education, health and wellness, and coordinating volunteer events for natural resource conservation efforts. The interpretive ranger staff consisted of one at each park, except LPRP and the Desert Outdoor Center (DOC) at Lake Pleasant, which has multiple rangers. Most recently, the MCPRD has restructured interpretive staffing so that all report to the DOC and share in providing programming to the System.



*A group of youth learning about the Sonoran Desert from an interpretive ranger at Utery Mountain Regional Park.*

In 2009, after completing the SSMP, programs delivered to the public were examined and improved. The evaluation created a core program list to tie all programs back to the core or foundation of visitor expectations and eliminate any topic confusion caused by program titles. This creation allowed for measurable outcomes and helped to develop programs around a standard of theme, goals, and objectives.

The core program areas are:

- Animals
- Archaeology or History
- Entertainment or Social Activities
- Health and Fitness
- Geology
- Outdoor Skills
- Plants
- Special Interest – such as astronomy or aquatics

## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Maricopa County Budgeting and Accountability Policy guides MCPRD's budget and budget process. The policy aims to direct the development and management of BOS-approved budgets for County Departments to ensure accountability and compliance with the law. The policy further promotes financial stability while providing flexibility in managing allocated resources.

A fundamental budget guideline directs County departments to generate reasonable revenues to fund operating costs. Specifically, the policy states, "Where user fees will support appropriate services and programs. Fees should be developed based on current market conditions and full cost recovery, including Indirect Costs."

## EXPENDITURES

MCPRD has two significant areas of expenditure:

- **Operating:** Includes operations, administration, trades, trails, natural resources, planning and development staffing, and volunteer coordination. Operating expenses include supplies, services, park repair and maintenance, technology, and County overhead costs.
- **Capital Improvements/Major Maintenance:** Include repair, maintenance, or new installation of infrastructures such as parking lots, electrical, water, and sewer systems, upgrades, or addition of facilities such as restrooms, trailheads, campgrounds, contact stations, picnic facilities, and trails maintenance/renovation.

Operating expenditures are derivative from four primary sources:

### 1. FUND 100 – GENERAL FUND

The GF is the County's primary operating Fund that accounts for all the County's financial resources except for those required to be in another fund. Fund 100 revenue includes property taxes, tax penalties, interest payments, state-shared sales taxes, vehicle license taxes, and other miscellaneous income.

### 2. FUND 225 – SPUR CROSS RANCH CONSERVATION FUND

The County created Fund 225 under an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the Town of Cave Creek. The Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Fund enabled MCPRD to plan, develop, and operate the SCRCA. Funding can also apply to other County parks in Cave Creek.

### 3. FUND 240 – LAKE PLEASANT RECREATION FUND

Recreational Management Agreement between the U.S. Department of Interior and Maricopa County formed Fund 240. The Lake Pleasant Recreation Fund is to track revenue and expenses related to LPRP's development, operation, maintenance, and other needed expenditures.

### 4. FUND 241 – ENHANCEMENT FUND

[ARS §11-941](#) establishes Fund 241 to operate and enhance facilities and services at existing County parks, acquire real estate for new County parks, or expand existing ones. The Enhancement Fund consists of monies budgeted by the BOS, grants, unconditional gifts, and donations specifically designated for the Fund, all funds derived from System user fees, concession contract fees, excess fees generated from the County parks publication, and souvenir revolving.

In conjunction with the four operating funds identified above, MCPRD has three additional funding sources to offset operational costs in specific circumstances:

### 1. FUND 230 – GRANT FUND

The Grant Fund is to process grant revenue and expenditures. Grantors typically include Arizona Game and Fish, Arizona State Parks & Trails (ASPT), and the Department of Forestry and Fire Management.

## 2. FUND 239 – SOUVENIR FUND

ARS §11-941 formed the Souvenir Fund. The Fund exclusively produces, purchases, and distributes county parks publications and information and operates concessions selling publications, souvenirs, services, and sundry items.

## 3. FUND 243 – DONATION FUND

The Donation Fund was established to accept revenue through monetary donations. Unless specifically earmarked by the donor for a purpose (i.e., memorial benches), the Fund is used to care for and feed MCPRD's captive animals and other park-specific projects (i.e., butterfly gardens, tortoise habitats, and other small projects).

## OPERATING EXPENDITURES

During the development of the last plan, the 2009 SSMP, the funding future for MCPRD's operating budget was somewhat tenuous. In 2008, the County's Strategic Budget Plan called for MCPRD to be financially non-reliant on the GF by the end of 2009. In FY 2007, 25 percent of the GF funded the annual operating budget, and user fees accounted for 75 percent of expenditures. The total operating budget in 2007 was \$6,981,659, and the GF allocation toward the park operating budget was \$1,761,208.

Since 2008, MCPRD revenue has grown significantly, allowing expansion of the operating budget while GF allocations have decreased. From 2008 through FY21, GF funding has been reduced dramatically (\$1,761,208 in FY07 to \$861,313 in FY21), thus reducing the percentage of operating expenditures supported by the GF from 25 percent in FY07 to eight percent in FY21.



Multi-agency boathouse at Lake Pleasant

Operating expenditure increases to primarily accommodate inflation are afforded due to revenue growth in the Enhancement Fund and Lake Fund.

These two funds have grown by 45.7 percent and 25.1 percent, respectively, over the past five years. Expenditure growth in these funds directly correlates to earned income or revenue. In order to maintain a structurally balanced budget, expenditures cannot exceed revenues in any operating fund.

The following table depicts MCPRD's operating/expenditure budgets from FY17 through FY21 (Figures 21 and 22).

Expenditures by Fund	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	Percent Increase/Decrease FY17-21
General	\$792,071	\$867,899	\$884,772	\$878,891	\$861,313	8.7%
Spur Cross	\$264,501	\$246,983	\$279,888	\$157,358	\$246,704	(6.7)%
Lake	\$2,496,701	\$2,604,080	\$3,245,451	\$3,219,318	\$3,122,794	25.1%
Enhancement	\$4,324,589	\$4,788,986	\$5,696,291	\$5,737,738	\$6,301,321	45.7%
Total	\$7,877,862	\$8,507,948	\$10,106,402	\$9,993,305	\$10,532,132	33.7%

Figure 21 - Expenditures by Fund

In FY17, the Enhancement Fund comprised approximately 55 percent of the budget, while the Lake Fund comprised 32 percent.

In FY21, Enhancement Fund accounted for 60 percent of the budget, and the Lake Fund contributed 30 percent.

## REVENUES

MCPRD derives revenues mainly from user fees and falls into categories. Revenues are by type (day-use versus camping) and park for a clearer picture of the income derived and source amounts.

LPRP, followed by MMRP and UMRP, continues to generate the most significant camping revenue (Figure 23). LPRP has more than 160 spaces, while MMRP and UMRP each have approximately 80 R.V. spaces.

MMRP also has a small, dedicated tent camp area. CCRP and WTMRP have smaller R.V. campgrounds; however, both have added new spaces in the past five years.

As mentioned, day-use revenues are also a significant source of income (Figure 24). LLRP generates the most income from daily use, followed by WTMRP, UMRP, and STMRP. In addition to user fees, concessionaire revenues make up a significant source of income. In FY21, concession revenues comprised over 15 percent of all generated income.

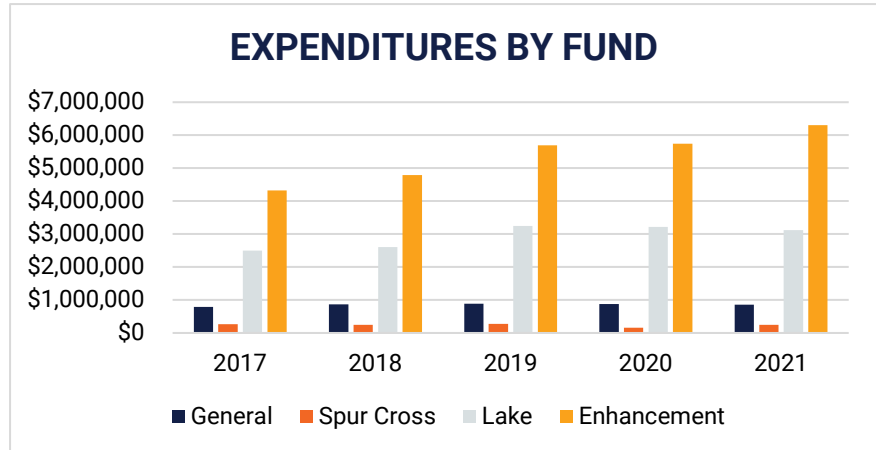


Figure 22 - Expenditures By Fund

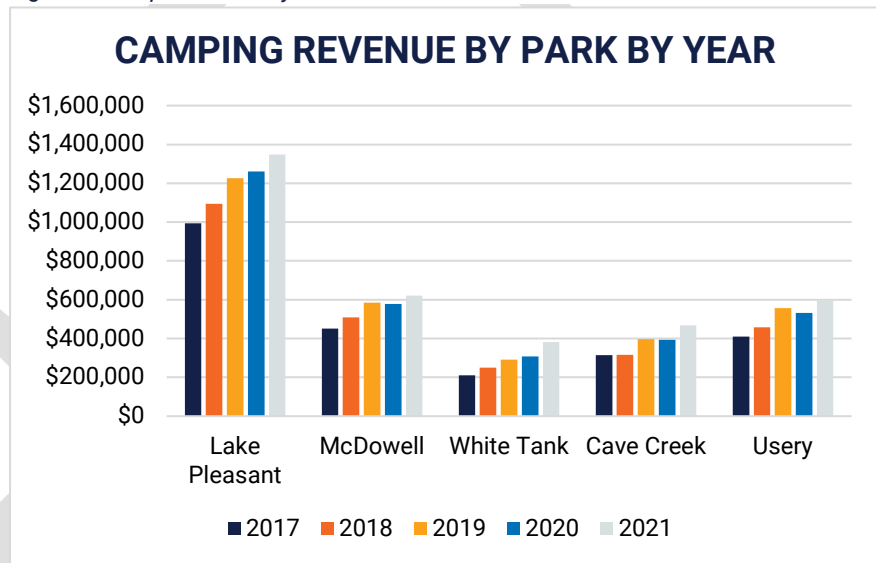


Figure 23 - Camping Revenue By Park By Year

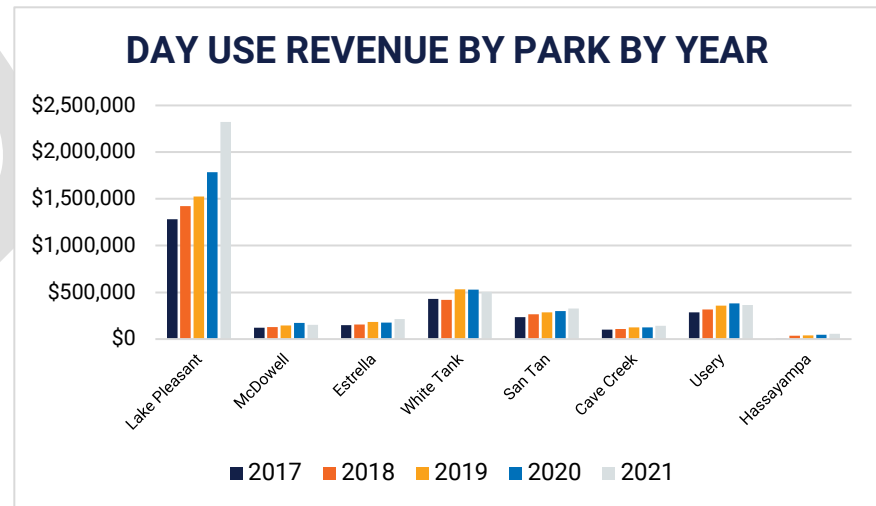


Figure 24 - Day Use Revenue By Park By Year

Revenue is not the only benefit provided by concessionaires. Their services are value-added for park visitors and make the parks more attractive resulting in increased visitation. In addition, the larger concessionaires, who have longer-term agreements, generally fund their capital improvements, reducing operating expenditures for these parks.

Another critical factor in forecasting revenue is analyzing park visitation. In nearly all cases, visitation correlates with revenue. Still, visitation is not always in direct or proportionate correlation with expenditures on a park-by-park basis. The type of visitation or use of a given park generally affects revenues. For example, parks with more amenities, attractions, and facilities typically have more significant revenue and expenditures. Camping is a prime example. The parks with campgrounds generally have more substantial revenue than those without, and those with more campsites also have increased revenue.

Finally, it is important to understand that the County budget policy requires a structurally balanced budget. Since most operating funds are from earned income and revenues can fluctuate annually for various reasons (i.e., weather, facility closures for renovations), MCPRD somewhat conservatively budgets revenue. As a result, MCPRD typically ends each FY with a small positive balance of revenue to expenditures. MCPRD retains those funds in "Fund Balance." In future years, non-recurring expenses can use Fund Balances, such as vehicles, park repair and maintenance projects, and contingency for emergencies.

## CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT

MCPRD plans new projects and major maintenance/renovation in a combined 10-Year CIP. Per the budgeting policy, MCPRD projects are based on BOS-approved PMP(s) or for major maintenance of facilities and infrastructure that have reached their expected life span or replacement for maintenance efficiency. Improvement projects are generally ranked based on improving the visitor experience, public health and safety, operating revenue offset, enhancing maintenance efficiency, or enhancing conservation. The table on the next page (Figure 25) provides CIP funds allocated by the park over the previous five FYs.

### CIP PROJECT TOTAL ACTUALS BY CATEGORY FOR ALL PARKS, FY17-21

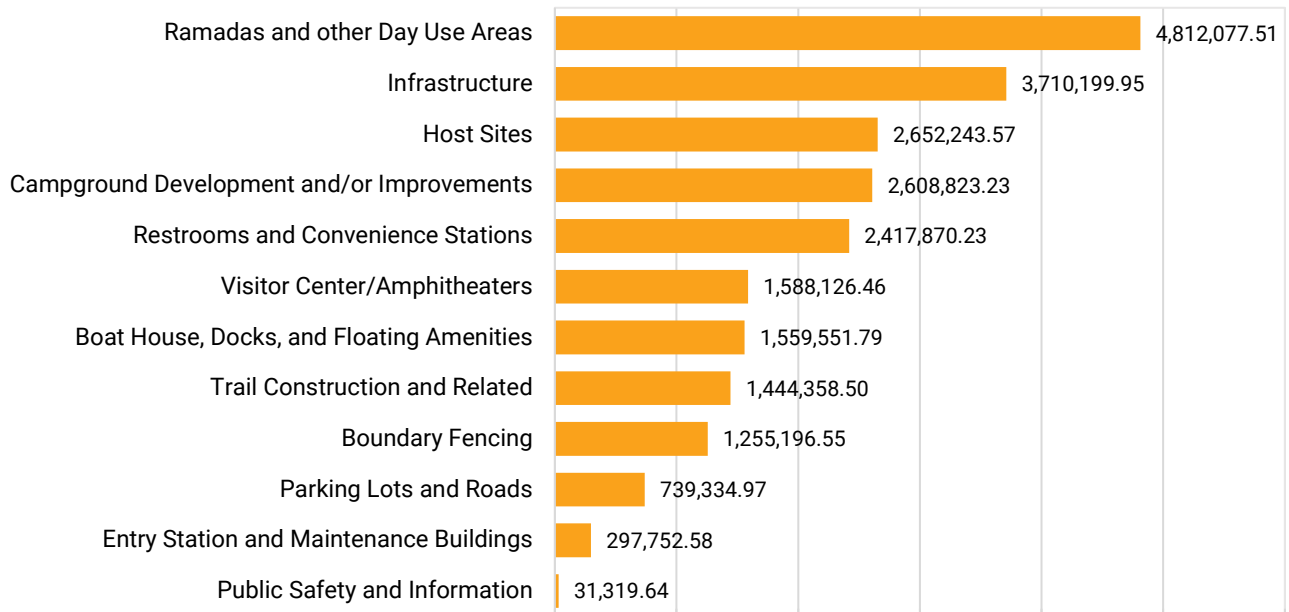


Figure 25 - CIP Project Total Actuals By Category for All Parks, FY17-21

MCPRD spent \$23,116,854.97 on CIP during the FYs 2017-2021. The top five project categories across all parks were restroom and convenience stations (\$2,417,870.23/10.46 percent), campground development or improvement (\$2,417,870.23/11.29 percent), host sites (\$2,652,243.57/11.47 percent), infrastructure (\$3,710,199.95/16.05 percent), and ramada and day-use areas (\$4,812,077.51/20.80 percent). Most projects during that time were considered major maintenance projects, including restroom renovations, water, sewer, electrical system replacement and upgrades, and picnic shelter replacements and renovations.

## ECONOMIC IMPACT

The System continues to evolve to improve the community's facilities, programs, and services, and feedback from visitors plays a significant role in helping to shape that process. In 2018-2019, MCPRD, in partnership with ASU, conducted an economic impact analysis to understand visitor spending better. The study found that for every \$1 invested in the parks, there was a regional financial benefit of **\$4.85**, almost five times the economic benefit from the investment. While the economic impact is not the system's primary purpose, it is essential to consider its future growth.

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Lake Pleasant Regional Park – Sunrise over the water.

## CHAPTER 3 – TRENDS & BENCHMARKING

It is essential to understand trends to best plan for the needs of current and future visitors. Proper planning can open new experiences while seeking to balance preserving the natural areas.

### NATIONAL TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

National data sources, such as The Sports and Fitness Industry Association, Outdoor Foundation, Kampgrounds of America, National Recreation and Park Association, and American Planning Association, were reviewed to assess national trends. As shown in multiple sources below, outdoor recreation participation has been steadily trending upward.

### 2021 SPORTS, FITNESS, AND LEISURE ACTIVITIES TOPLINE PARTICIPATION REPORT

The Sports & Fitness Industry Association's (SFIA) 2021 Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report (SFIA Report) is a source for national sports and fitness research in the U.S. and evaluates sports and fitness trends.

According to the SFIA report, 229.7 million (75.6 percent of the U.S. population) people, ages six years and over, reported being active (Figure 26).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

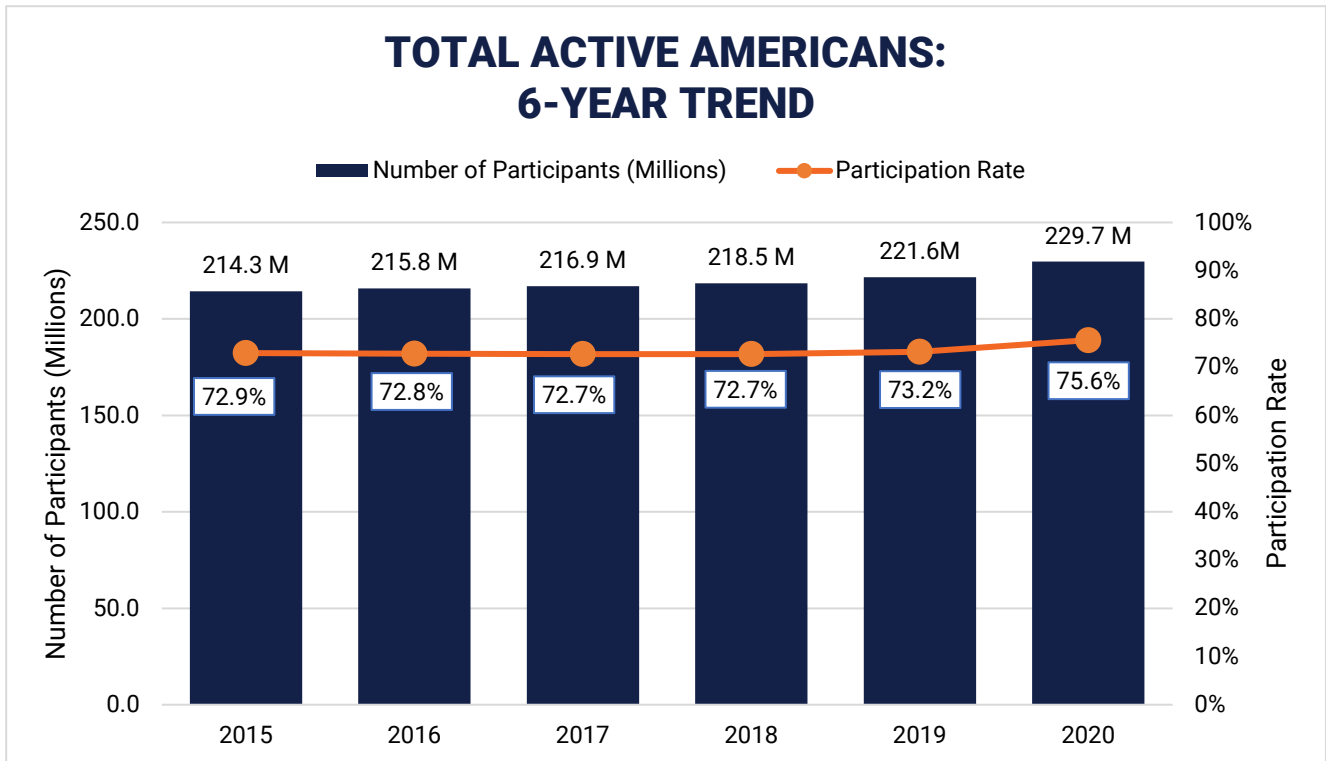


Figure 26 - Total Active Americans: Six-Year Trend

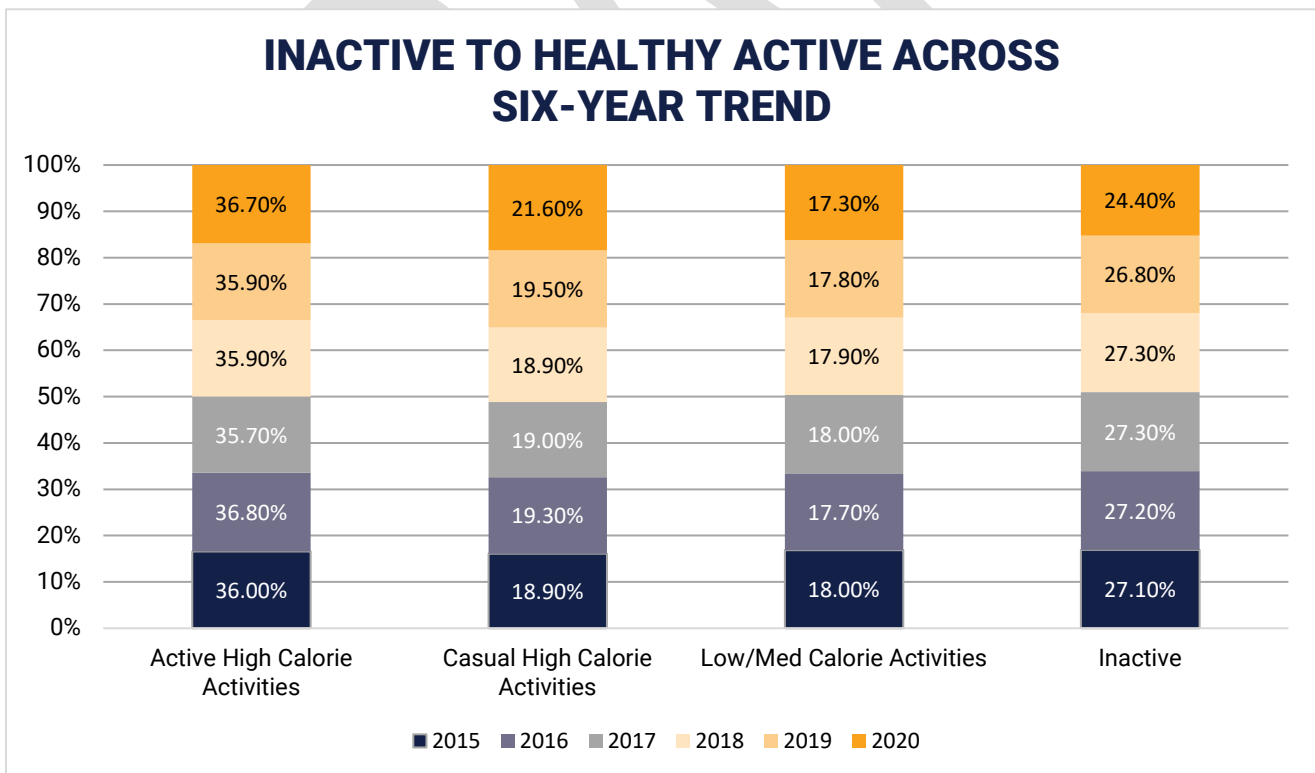


Figure 27 - Inactive to Healthy Active Across 6-Year Trend - SFIA Report

During the COVID-19 pandemic, outdoor recreation activities underwent significant shifts in participation. Before the pandemic, in December 2019 and January 2020, recreation rates were higher than in April 2019, reflecting a trend in increased fitness participation. Though the overall activity participation rate increased, the frequency and intensity of activity remained consistent (Figure 27).<sup>49</sup> The number of people reporting as inactive or non-participating in 2020 decreased to 74 million (8.8 percent) from 81.2 million in 2019, the lowest inactivity level in the last five years.

In 2020, many activities saw significant participation increases. The most popular fitness activities were walking, with 114 million participants in 2020, up 2.3 percent over the previous year - followed by running and jogging, up 1.2 percent with 50.7 million participants, bicycling, up 12.9 percent with 44.5 million participants, and yoga, up 7.7 percent with 32.8 million participants.<sup>50</sup>

Other outdoor recreation activities showing a participation increase nationwide include:

- Camping – 28%
- Birdwatching - 18.8%
- Hiking - 16.3%
- R.V. camping 15.5%
- Kayaking 14.2%
- Road bicycling 12.9%
- Fishing 8.6%
- Trail running 7.8%
- Canoeing 6.7%
- Wildlife viewing 5%
- Mountain bicycling 4.4%
- Stand-up paddling - 3.2%

## INACTIVITY RATES SEGMENTED BY INCOME

U.S. POPULATION AGES 6+

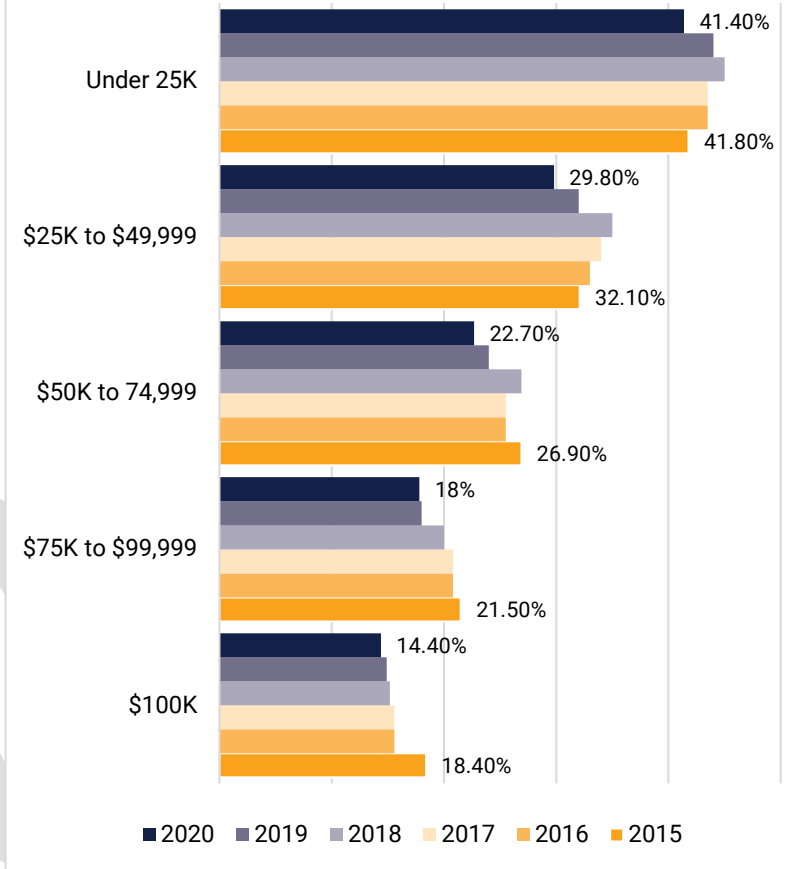


Figure 28 - Inactive Levels in the U.S. – based on income segment -SFIA Report

<sup>49</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

<sup>50</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

Household income disparity is an important factor in recreation participation. It can impact access to recreation and community needs, influencing park location, amenities, and programming considerations. Historically there has been a positive correlation between household income and recreation activities. The lower the household income, the higher the inactivity rate (Figure 28). Income continues to be a factor in recreation activity; however, all income levels, including the two lowest, showed a decline in inactivity during 2021. Households with an annual income under \$75,000 ranked fishing, hiking, and camping as the top three activities they intended to participate in in the future.<sup>51</sup>

In 2020, many activities saw participation increases (Figure 29). For example, since 2015, fitness sports have grown by approximately five percent. In addition, outdoor sports have increased by 4.5 percent. The most popular fitness activity was walking, with 114 million participants in 2020, up 2.3 percent over the previous year, followed by running/jogging, up 1.2 percent, with 50.7 million participants, and bicycling, up 12.9 percent.<sup>52</sup>

The most popular outdoor recreation activities were running/jogging, camping, hiking, fishing, and bicycling, ranking in the top 10 of almost every age group. Hiking, camping, and fishing were the most popular among all age groups. Activities such as running/jogging and bicycling varied in popularity by age category. As people grow older, active recreation tends to change to passive pursuits.

National surveys show growth trends for all types of biking, including mountain and Bicycle Moto Cross (BMX). For example, from 2017 to 2020, mountain biking increased by 1.5 percent, BMX by 4.4 percent,

**OVERALL PARTICIPATION IN THE U.S.**  
U.S. POPULATION AGES 6+

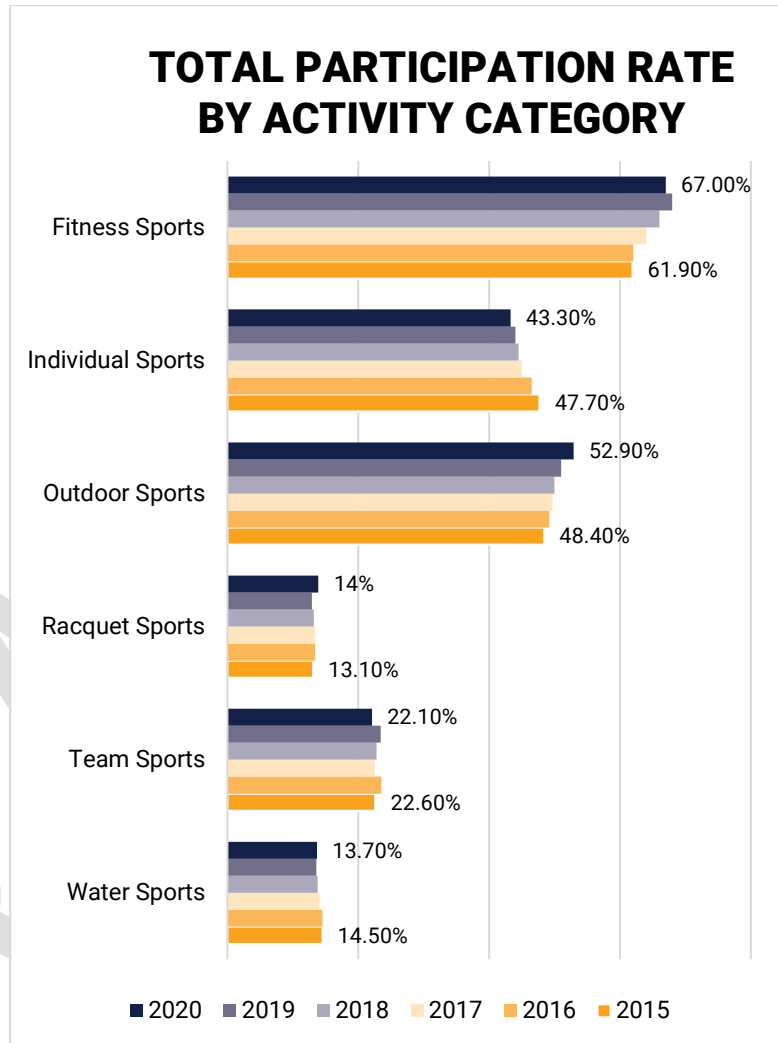


Figure 29 - Overall Participation in the U.S. - Participation rate by category - SFIA Report

<sup>51</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

<sup>52</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

and road biking by 4.7 percent.<sup>53</sup> Between 2019 and 2020, mountain biking increased by 4.4 percent, and road biking increased by 12.9 percent in the same period, with a five-year average upward trend of 1.6 and 3.2 percent, respectively.<sup>53</sup> For adults between the ages of 24 and 40, bicycling is the fourth most popular activity.

Trends show that participation in less active outdoor activities, such as bird and wildlife viewing and interpretive walks, increases as people age. In addition, older age groups also tend to prefer activities that are stimulating and beneficial to mental wellness.<sup>53</sup>

Fishing participation trends are increasing nationwide. Fly fishing increased 10.5 percent between 2019 and 2020, following a five percent average annual growth over five years. Freshwater fishing increased by 8.6 percent in 2020 and 2.5 percent over five years. Hunting saw smaller increases.<sup>53</sup>

Nationally, water sports, like jet skiing, rafting, wakeboarding, and waterskiing, have trended downward. Jet skiing declined by 4.8 percent, wakeboarding declined by three percent, and waterskiing declined by five percent. In contrast, watersports such as canoeing, kayaking, and stand-up paddling increased between 2015-2020. Participation in canoeing increased by 6.7 percent between 2019 and 2020. Kayaking increased by 14.2 percent, with a 6.5 percent increase over a five-year average. Rafting declined by 1.2 percent over five years.<sup>53</sup>

## 2021 OUTDOOR PARTICIPATION TRENDS REPORT

The 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report prepared by the Outdoor Foundation also provides valuable nationwide data focused on traditional outdoor recreation trends. For example, the outdoor participation rate – the percentage of the population reported participating - rose to 52.9 percent in 2020, up from 50.7 percent in 2019. It was the most significant one-year jump on record (Figure 30).<sup>54</sup> The data also shows a steady increase in participation over the last five years. However, "despite a COVID-related jump, the number of times participants engage in outdoor recreation continued to decline in recent years."<sup>54</sup> According to the report, in 2015, the average number of outings per participant was 82. Still, in 2020 that number fell to 71, representing a 13 percent decline in only five years.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Sports & Fitness Industry Association. (2021). Report from Sports & Fitness Industry Association Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report.

<sup>54</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2021). Outdoor Foundation Annual Report 2021. [Outdoor-Foundation-Annual-Report-2021-1-1.pdf](#) ([outdoorindustry.org](#))

**KEY FINDINGS**

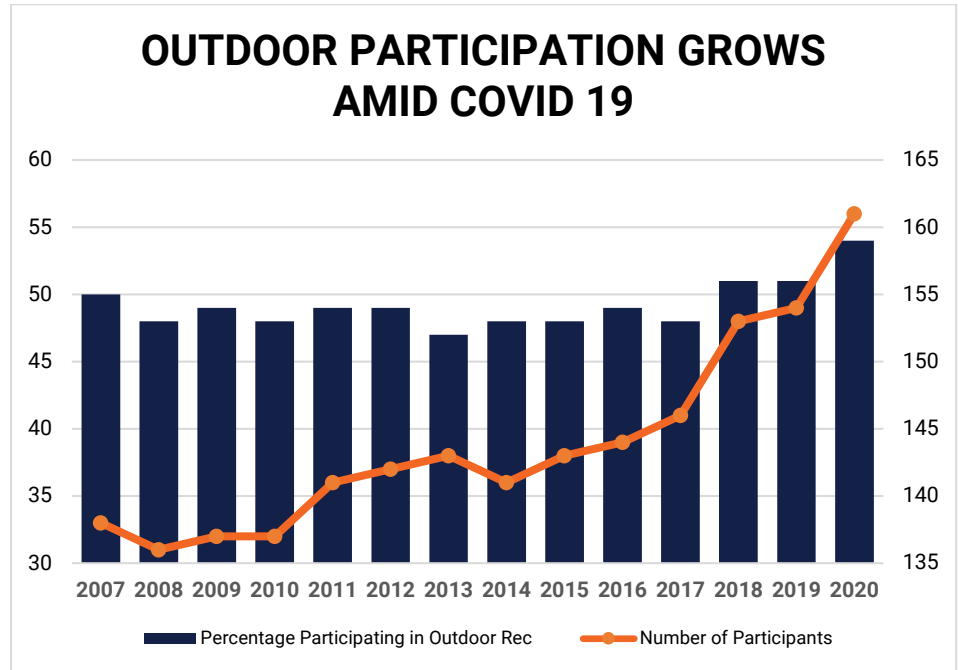
**In 2020, 160.7 million Americans ages 6 and over participated in at least one outdoor activity.**

Driven by COVID impacts, 7.1 million more participated than in 2019.

The outdoor participation rate – the percent of the population reported participating – rose to 52.9 percent in 2020, up from 50.7 percent in 2019.

**This was the largest one-year jump on record.**

*Figure 30 - Nationwide Outdoor Grows Amid COVID-19*



**MOST POPULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES BY PARTICIPATION RATE**

1	RUNNING, JOGGING, AND TRAIL RUNNING	21.0% of Americans	63.8 million participants
2	HIKING	19.0% of Americans	57.8 million participants
3	FRESHWATER, SALTWATER, AND FLY FISHING	18.0% of Americans	54.7 million participants
4	ROAD BIKING, MOUNTAIN BIKING, AND BMX	17.3% of Americans	52.7 million participants
5	CAR, BACKYARD, BACKPACKING, AND RV CAMPING	15.8% of Americans	47.9 million participants

National trends show that age demographics significantly influence the number of participants in outdoor activities, how frequently people participate, and the types of activities people engage in. The graphic below (Figure 31a) includes findings relating to nationwide data, including participant demographics (Figure 31b) from gender, age, ethnicity, education, and income.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2021). Outdoor Participation Trends Report

## PARTICIPANT PROFILE

### KEY FINDINGS

Fifty-four percent of participants were male, while 46 percent were female. **This gender gap has not changed in eight years**, suggesting that industry efforts to expand the participation base have been ineffective or stagnated.

**About thirty percent of participants reported they were more active in the outdoors in 2020** than the year before. These participants were more likely to be under 25 years old, live in Southern states, and have house incomes above the national average.

**Seventy-two percent of participants were White**, unchanged from the year prior. Over the past three years, Hispanic participation grew over 4 percent annually. Black participation increased just 1 percent annually, and Asian participation fell 1 percent each year.

**The lowest and highest earners reported the strongest participation growth.** The participation rate among households with incomes under \$25,000 grew six percent annually in the last three years, while those with household incomes over \$100,000 increased three percent annually in the past three years.

Figure 31a – Participant Profile

## PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

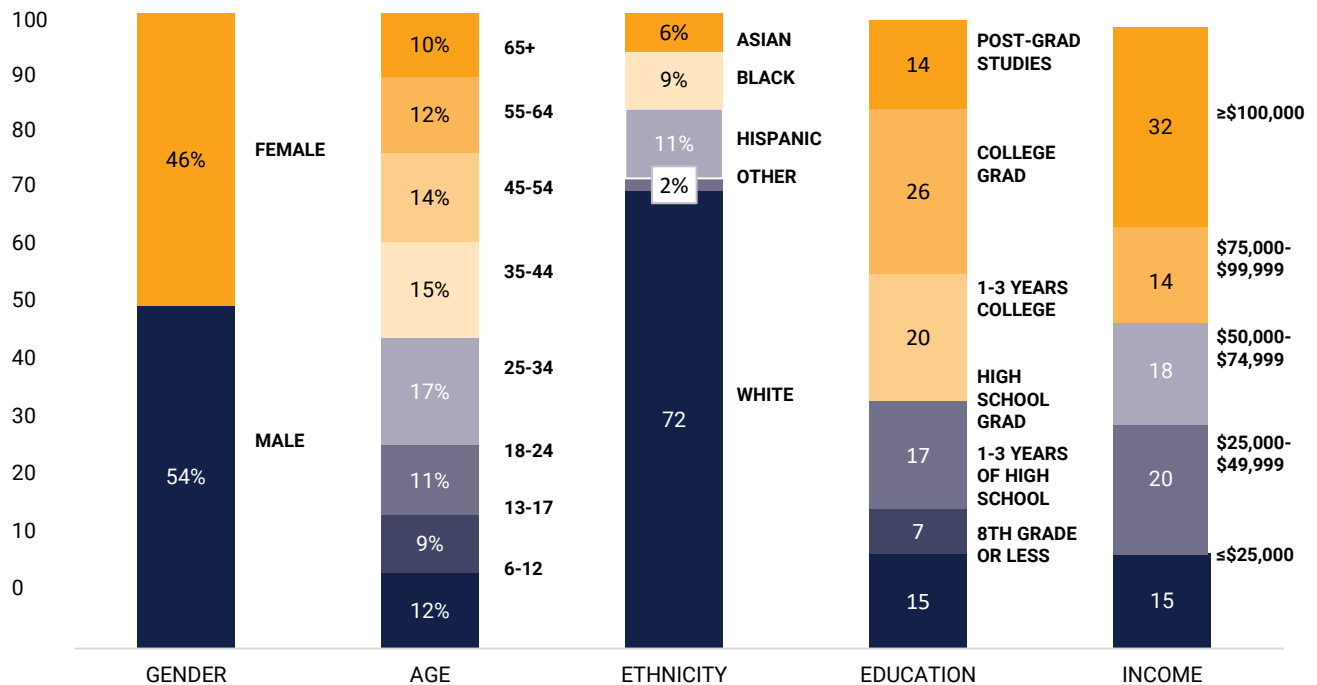


Figure 31b- Participant Demographics

## TRENDS AND BENCHMARKING

### PARTICIPATION IN OUTDOOR RECREATION AMONG ADULTS WITH CHILDREN

Households with children had much higher participation rates than those without children - 60 percent versus 46 percent. Households with children ages 6 to 12 had the highest overall household participation rates at 62 percent.

Households with children continued to drive participation growth. Without families and young participants the outdoor industry risks losing ground.

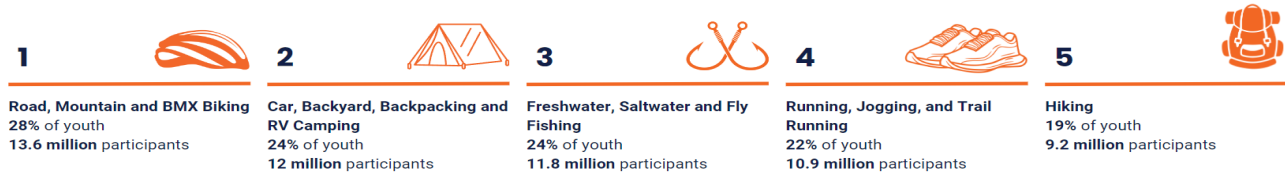
### HOUSEHOLDS (HH) WITH CHILDREN DRIVE PARTICIPATION GROWTH

Households with children had much higher participation rates than those without children - 60 percent versus 46 percent. Households with children ages 6 to 12 had the highest overall household participation rates at 62 percent.

Households with children continued to drive participation growth. Without families and young participants the outdoor industry risks losing ground.

### YOUTH (6 to 17) MOST POPULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES\*

The popularity of outdoor activities has been determined by those with the highest participation rates.



### YOUNG ADULTS (18 to 24) MOST POPULAR OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES\*

The popularity of outdoor activities has been determined by those with the highest participation rates.

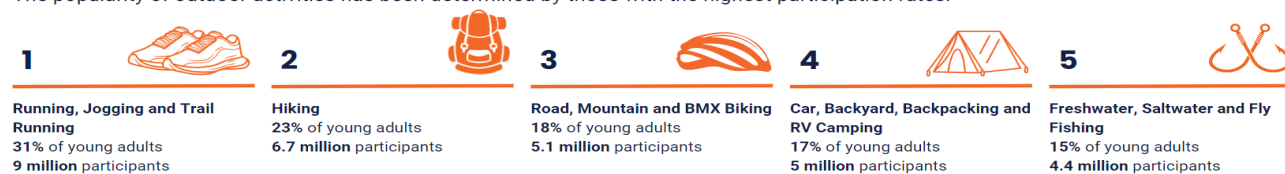


Figure 32 - Young Adult Participation

Younger population groups showed higher interest in outdoor recreational participation in 2020, especially in more physically engaging activities. In 2020, nearly 34 million children between six and 17 participated in outdoor activities, the highest amount on record. In addition, households with children were more likely to partake in outdoor recreational activities than those without (Figure 32).<sup>56</sup> Sixty percent of families with children participated in outdoor activities, while only 46 percent of households without children participated.<sup>56</sup>

Almost 71 percent of children ages six to 12 participated in outdoor activities in 2020, increasing six percent from 2019. However, teen participation increased by only two percent, from 64 to 66 percent over the year. As can be seen in (Figure 33),<sup>57</sup> the most popular activities for youth ages six to 17 are:

- biking,
- camping, and
- fishing.

In comparison, young adults indicated higher participation in:

- running, jogging, trail running,
- hiking, and
- biking.

<sup>56</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2021). Outdoor Participation Trends Report

<sup>57</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2021). Outdoor Participation Trends Report

## THE NEXT GENERATION

### KEY FINDINGS

2020 brought good news about youth participation.

Nearly 34 million children ages 6 to 17 participated, the highest number on record.

Almost 71 percent of children ages 6 to 12 participated, another record and a strong increase from 65 percent in 2019.

Teen participation also grew from 64 percent in 2019 to 66 percent in 2020.

Like adults, children and young adults have drifted away from frequent participation toward casual, less frequent outdoor activity.

Among males, young adults ages 18 to 24 reported solid three-year participation growth, up two percent annually.

Among females, teens 13 to 17 reported strong three-year participation growth, up three percent annually.

Bicycling, camping and fishing were the most popular outdoor activities for children ages 6 to 17, while running, hiking and bicycling topped the list among young adults 18 to 24.

Boys ages 6 to 12 had the highest participation rate among children, young adults and adults that participated.

Youth and young adults were about twice as likely as adults to describe themselves as outdoor fanatics. Older age groups tended to describe themselves as casual participants.

Outdoor participants ages 6 to 17 were much more likely than non-participants to join extracurricular activities, including Scouts, student council, music, dance and other clubs and classes.

Figure 33 - The Next Generation – Key Findings



Figures 33 and 34 indicate teen participation grew two percent from 2019 to 2020, but "like adults, children, and young adults have drifted away from frequent participation toward casual, less frequent outdoor activity."<sup>58</sup> Also, according to the Outdoor Participation Trends Report 2021, "youth and young adults were about twice as likely as older adults to describe themselves as outdoor fanatics," and "older age groups tended to describe themselves as casual participants."<sup>58</sup>

They also found that "outdoor participants ages six to 17 were much more likely than non-participants to engage in extracurricular activities including Scouts, student council, music, dance, and other clubs and classes."<sup>58</sup>

Young adult participants have had a more drastic decline, with a seven percent decrease in outdoor activity from 2019 to 2020 and an overall two percent decline over the past three years. The average number of outings for young adults also decreased despite a record increase in participation. In addition, "history indicates that adults who were not exposed to outdoor recreation as children are far less likely to become adult outdoor participants."<sup>58</sup>

2020 was a year with many short-term shifts in trends due to pandemic regulations; however, the more significant trend shows a continued increase in outdoor recreation. Many people during COVID restrictions even tried new activities for the first time.

Despite overall interest in outdoor recreational activities reaching more people, the ability to retain consistent and frequent engagement among those new participants has not been as efficient. Post-COVID challenges will include retaining the new participants, lack of diversity, declining intensity, fewer outings, and stagnant female participation. A collective strategy can only meet these organizational challenges (Figures 35-36).<sup>58</sup> To retain new participants, we must understand their motives, values, activity preferences, and participation habits to tailor opportunities and messaging to encourage continued activity and growth in participation (Figures 37-39).<sup>58</sup>

### ANNUAL OUTINGS PER YOUTH PARTICIPANT

Children ages 6 to 17 embarked on an average of 77 outdoor outings per person per year, unchanged from the year prior. Even with a COVID bump, the average number of outings has not topped 80 since 2015, confirming a downward trend in youth outdoor engagement.

### ANNUAL OUTINGS PER YOUTH PARTICIPANT

Young adult outdoor participants ages 18 to 24 embarked on 1.53 billion outdoor outings in 2020, down 7 percent from the previous year. Average outings also fell 7 percent, despite the number of young adult participants topping 18 million for the first time since 2012.

AGES 6 TO 7	2020	1-YEAR CHANGE	3 YEAR CHANGE
Total outings	2.57 billion	3%	2%
Participants	33.7 million	4%	2%
Average outings per participant	76.5	-1%	0%

AGES 18 TO 24	2020	1-YEAR CHANGE	3 YEAR CHANGE
Total outings	1.53 billion	-7%	-2%
Participants	18 million	1%	2%
Average outings per participant	91.2	-7%	-4%

Figure 34 - The Next Generation Participation

<sup>58</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2021). Outdoor Participation Trends Report

**POST-COVID CHALLENGES**

**RETAINING COVID PARTICIPANTS**

Research from **Outdoor Industry Association** indicated that about one-quarter of new participants say they don't want to continue their new outdoor activities, a number that may grow sharply as consumers return to pre-pandemic habitats.

**LACK OF DIVERSITY**

Nearly three-quarters of outdoor participants in 202 were White, versus roughly 60 percent of the U.S. population. Participation rates:

- Declined 7 percent annually among Asians for the past three years
- Stagnated for the last three years among Blacks
- Grew among Hispanics but their rate remained well below whites

**DECLINING INTENSITY**

There were fewer devoted outdoor participants but more casual ones. A decade ago, 24 percent of total participants reported participating more than twice a week, while in 2020 just 20 percent did. The same pattern occurred among children, young adults and adults.

**FEWER OUTINGS**

The average number of annual outings per participant continued a steady, long-term decline, falling from 87 in 2012 to just 71 in 2020.

**STAGNANT FEMALE PARTICIPATION**

Despite significant industry efforts to address gender disparities, for the last eight years females have represented just 46 percent of outdoor participants, even though 51 percent of Americans were female.

Collective action through philanthropy, marketing, and policies at the local, state and federal levels must address these challenges, help bring individuals and entire communities outside, and inspire them to build life-long relationships with the outdoors.

Figure 35 - Special Report: The New Outdoor Participant - Post-COVID Challenges **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

**WHAT CAN WE DO TO IMPROVE RETENTION OF NEW PARTICIPANTS?**

**1**



Create more outdoor recreation opportunities close to home.

- Parks and open areas near where people live are a crucial part of growing participation. The pandemic has shown that there is a demand for close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities (e.g., snowboard, skate, bike, paddle parks and nature centers).

**2**



Help new participants make their activities more social as restrictions lift.

**3**



Develop programs and services with the specific goal of diversifying the participant base.

**4**



Develop strategies for encouraging people to start small (e.g., walking, running, hiking, birdwatching).

**5**



Position outdoor recreation as:

- An antidote to the mental health consequences of the pandemic.
- A way to get out from behind the screens that have dominated pandemic life.
- A method to maintain the focus on what is important in life.

Figure 36 - Improving Retention of New Participants

**WHAT ACTIVITIES DID NEW OUTDOOR PARTICIPANTS PICK UP DURING COVID?**

**WALKING DURING FREE/LEISURE TIME**



**RUNNING/JOGGING OUTSIDE**



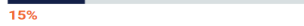
**BICYCLING OUTSIDE**



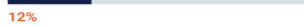
**BIRDWATCHING**



**FISHING**



**WILDLIFE VIEWING**



**CAMPING**



**KEY TAKEAWAY:**

Those who participated in an outdoor activity for the first time alone did so close to home and chose an activity with a low barrier to entry (e.g., walking, running, biking, hiking, etc.).

**OPPORTUNITY:**

How people spend their free time during the pandemic is largely motivated by what is available to do close to home and alone or with others in their household. The pandemic has shown that there is a demand for close-to-home outdoor recreation opportunities.

**STAND UP PADDLING**



**BACKPACKING**



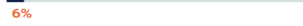
**CANOEING/KAYAKING/RAFTING**



**CLIMBING OUTSIDE**



**SKATEBOARDING**



**HUNTING**



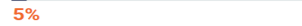
**SKIING**



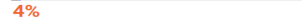
**SCUBA DIVING**



**SURFING**



**SNOWSHOEING**



**BOARDSAILING/WINDSURFING**



**TRIATHLON (OF ANY KIND)**



**SAILING**



**IN THEIR OWN WORDS: PRE VS. POST PANDEMIC PARTICIPATION FREQUENCY**

I've started hiking and walking in local parks to get out of the house. I spend too much time inside because of the pandemic and I need the physical activity.

Figure 37 - Activities Started Due to the Pandemic - What Activities Did New Outdoor Participants Pick Up During Covid

**HOW MUCH DO NEW PARTICIPANTS VALUE THE FOLLOWING OUTDOOR AND NON-OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES DURING COVID?**

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**

Spending time with family and friends is, by far, the most important and enjoyable non-outdoor activity among new participants

**OPPORTUNITY:**

Positioning the outdoors as a safe and accessible way to spend time with friends and family could help retain new participants.

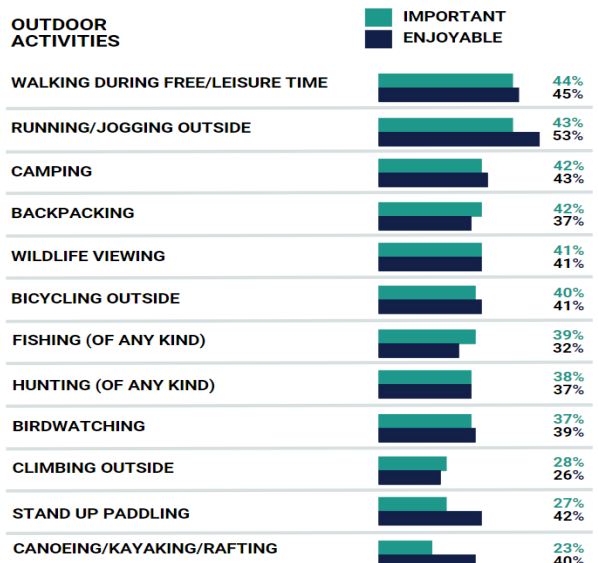
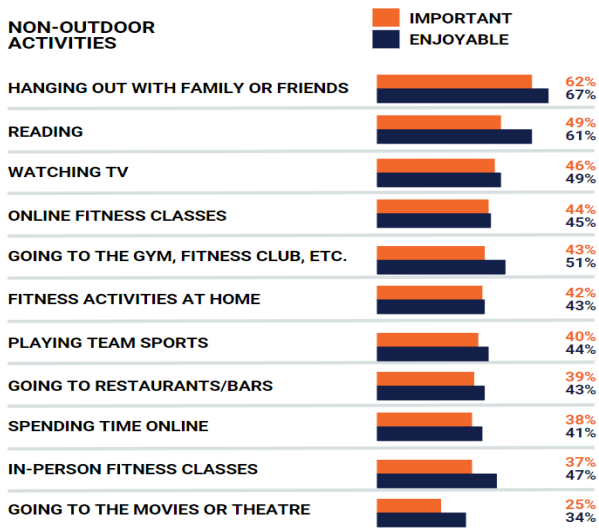


Figure 38 - Activities Started Due to the Pandemic - How Much Do New Participants Value the Following Outdoor and Non-Outdoor Activities During Covid

**WHY DID NEW PARTICIPANTS START OR RESUME OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES DURING COVID?**

**KEY TAKEAWAY:**

Get exercise, staying healthy, and getting out of the house are the top reasons new participants took up outdoor activities. about 40 percent took up new outdoor activities to spend time with others.

**OPPORTUNITY:**

Promoting outdoor activities as safe and fun ways to spend time with friends and family could lead to stronger retention among new participants.

**GET SOME EXERCISE**



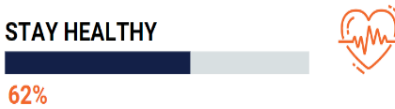
**FOR SOMETHING FUN TO DO**



**SPEND TIME WITH FAMILY**



**STAY HEALTHY**



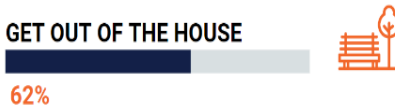
**SPEND TIME OUTSIDE/ CONNECT WITH NATURE**



**SPEND TIME WITH FRIENDS**



**GET OUT OF THE HOUSE**



**MANAGE STRESS**



**I HAVE MONEY TO SPEND ON THESE ACTIVITIES**



**GET OR MAINTAIN FITNESS**



**I HAVE MORE FREE TIME**



Figure 39 - New Participants Start or Resume Outdoor Activities During Covid?

The pandemic caused a shift in employment locations, with many working remotely from home. This shift decreased employee commute time and increased available free time. As a result, people sought alternative opportunities for activity that were not as feasible pre-pandemic. Outdoor recreation was a common choice as it provides essential physical and mental health benefits while maintaining pandemic health standards such as social distancing.

## NRPA TOP TRENDS IN PARKS AND RECREATION

Every year, the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) publishes a summary of top trends impacting the parks and recreation industry. The following summarizes the key trends from 2020 to 2022 with implications for outdoor recreation.

### HEALTH

NRPA found that focusing on health and health equity was one of the most vital emerging trends for parks and recreation. They discuss a movement towards health and wellness being magnified by the pandemic and how it will "intertwine with a greater focus on meeting the social needs of communities."<sup>59</sup> The findings indicated that parks will play a more significant role in supporting physical and mental health and well-being and helping to "address social and racial equality and disparities in providing services to the public." The article recognizes trends from the "skyrocketing rates of social isolation and loneliness will call for a more holistic focus on well-being and access to

<sup>59</sup> Dolesh, R. (2021, January 1). Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2021. Parks & Recreation Magazine. [Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2021 | Feature | Parks & Recreation Magazine | NRPA](#)

parks and green space. This will lead to greater cross-sector partnerships with public health departments, school systems, and social service agencies."<sup>3</sup>

## TECHNOLOGY

Another emerging trend is how technology impacts parks and recreation, including "how it does business, interfaces with the public, maintains parks, and manages data." For example, parks are embracing new technology such as "robotic cleaning systems, self-maintained toilets, autonomous line-painting vehicles, mowing equipment, and semi-autonomous drones for a variety of tasks."<sup>60</sup> With the rise in electric vehicles, MCPRD may need to consider how to accommodate visitors by providing electric vehicle charging stations in or near the parks. In addition, parks may be able to use cellphone data to analyze where and when people use various amenities, including sending notifications to visitors and alerting them about public health and safety concerns.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

Extreme heat is a public health and safety concern that continues to pose challenges for the industry throughout the U.S. NRPA explicitly mentions that "by mid-October 2020, the daytime temperature in the city of Phoenix, Arizona, exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit on more than half the days during that year. Not only were there more than 20 weeks of 100-degree days but also there were 34 days on which the temperature reached at least 110 degrees!"<sup>60</sup> Increased heat and more severe weather conditions will require innovative thinking to provide recreational opportunities safely.

## PARK INFRASTRUCTURE

Recent federal legislation has provided new and ongoing funding for parks and recreation. The passage of America's Great Outdoors Act of 2020 and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act offers significant funding opportunities to help alleviate deferred maintenance and infrastructure backlogs and provide new recreation amenities. Many agencies have also taken advantage of the recent American Rescue Plan Act to improve park infrastructure and add facilities. Finally, the proposed Recovering America's Wildlife Act promises open space acquisition, mitigation, and restoration. These federal funds and local investments should provide significant opportunities for park and recreation agencies that are prepared to actively pursue and use the funds.

## NORTH AMERICAN CAMPING REPORT: THE 2019 FIVE-YEAR TRENDS

The Kampground Association of America (KOA) periodically commissions a study of outdoor recreation and camping habits among Americans that provides insight into the camping industry.

Hiking, backpacking, and camping are increasing in popularity, and 96 percent of teens who have been camping state that they enjoy the time with family and friends.<sup>61</sup>

Nationally, since 2014 the number of households that camp at least once per year has grown by nearly 22 percent, adding more than 7 million households. Those who camp three or more times yearly have

<sup>60</sup> Dolesh, R. (2021, January 1). Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2021. Parks & Recreation Magazine. [Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2021 | Feature | Parks & Recreation Magazine | NRPA](#)

<sup>61</sup> Kampground of America. (2019). The 2019 North American Camping 5-Year Trends. [Kampgrounds of America Inc. - 2019 KOA North American Camping Report \(uberflip.com\)](#)

increased by 72 percent in the same time frame.<sup>62</sup> When asked how campers selected a site, 24 percent of campers listed campground atmosphere as the top factor, followed by the campground's location (22 percent) and the quality of the sites (1 percent).<sup>62</sup>

Trends indicate that a larger percentage of non-white enthusiasts started camping. Among new campers nationally in 2018, 49 percent were Caucasian, 14 percent African American/Black, 22 percent Hispanic, 14 percent Asian, and one percent Other.<sup>62</sup>

## ARIZONA TRENDS IN OUTDOOR RECREATION

### ARIZONA STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (2018)

Arizona completes a Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) per the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1964 every five years. It provides decision-makers and outdoor recreation managers with an analysis of Arizona's most significant outdoor recreation issues. In addition, it suggests strategies to address these issues during the next five years.<sup>63</sup> Outdoor recreation professionals provided information to understand better what residents and visitors do when they recreate outdoors. First, providers had to indicate the outdoor recreation activities that users currently participated in at the sites they managed and then asked to indicate the expected future participation. The survey identified the eleven most common activities on public lands in Arizona.<sup>63</sup> The activities, including current and future expected participation (Figure 40).

According to the survey, the five recreation activities with the most potential for future growth within the state are:

1. technology-enabled outdoor recreation, which includes activities such as the use of drones and geocaching,
2. nature study or environmental education activities,
3. visiting wilderness areas or nature preserves,
4. non-motorized water-based activities such as paddle sports and
5. visiting developed natural and/or cultural features such as a park, botanical garden, scenic feature, or archaeological site.<sup>63</sup>

## ARIZONA TRAILS 2020: A STATEWIDE MOTORIZED AND NON-MOTORIZED TRAILS PLAN

In addition to the 2018 SCORP, ASPT completed a Trails Plan in 2020.<sup>64</sup> The plan identified a profile of motorized and non-motorized trail recreationists through a random sample survey. In addition, it provided a summary of trends over 10 years.

<sup>62</sup> Kampground of America. (2019). The 2019 North American Camping 5-Year Trends. [Kampgrounds of America Inc. - 2019 KOA North American Camping Report \(uberflip.com\)](#)

<sup>63</sup> Arizona State Parks & Trails. (2018). Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. [20220628065324ASPT-SCORP2017-web.pdf \(usedirect.com\)](#)

<sup>64</sup> Arizona State Parks & Trails. (2020). Arizona Trails 2020 – A Statewide Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails Plan. [20220628044955ASPT - 2020 Trails Plan - 6-29.pdf \(usedirect.com\)](#)

## OUTDOOR RECREATION CURRENT AND EXPECTED FUTURE PARTICIPATION

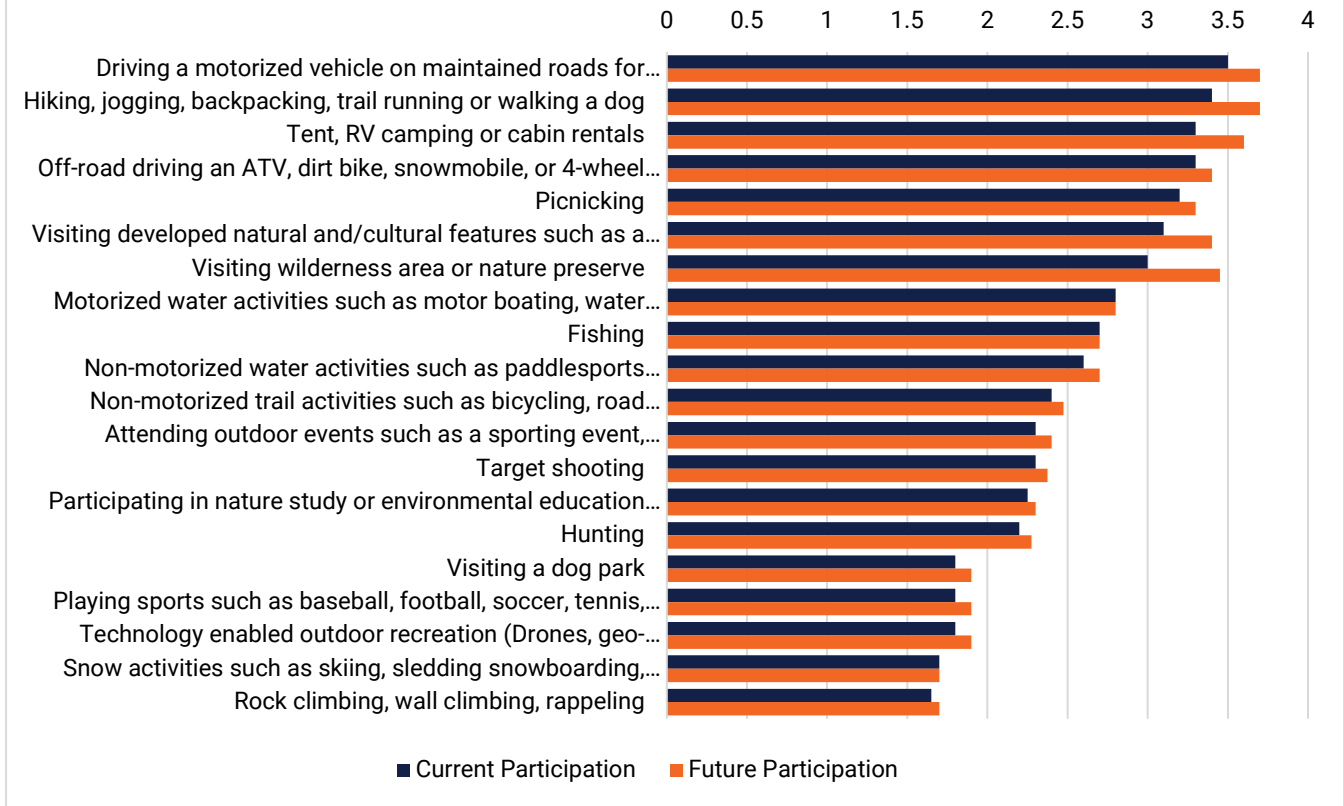


Figure 40 - Arizona State Parks Outdoor Recreation Current and Expected Future Participation

## MOTORIZED RECREATIONISTS

According to the survey, the majority (96%) of motorized trail users resided in Arizona for more than 10 years (62%). Compared with the U.S. Census demographics, motorized trail users are younger, with 42 percent ages 18 to 34, male (54%), and Hispanic origin (35%).<sup>65</sup>

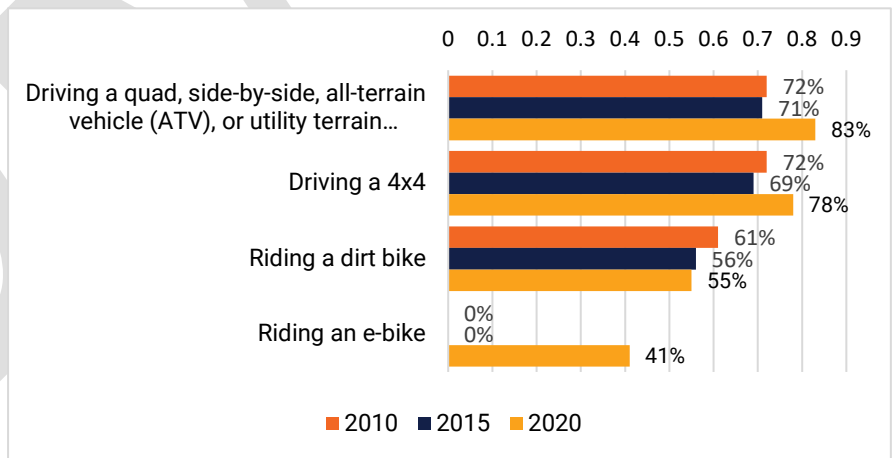


Figure 41 - Arizona Trails 2020 - Motorized Recreationists

<sup>65</sup> Arizona State Parks & Trails. (2020). Arizona Trails 2020 – A Statewide Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails Plan. [20220628044955ASPT - 2020 Trails Plan - 6-29.pdf \(usedirect.com\)](#)

Trend analysis of the main motorized activities indicates participation in driving an Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) and 4x4 are gaining in use while riding a dirt bike is showing a decline (Figure 41).<sup>66</sup>

In addition, a new use category was added to the recent survey, riding an e-bike.<sup>66</sup> There is a current debate about whether e-bike use is motorized or non-motorized, which could have led to an undercounting of the actual use. Still, there is strong evidence that this use will continue to grow on trails.

Motorized recreationists provided feedback about access to motorized trail opportunities (Figure 42). The findings indicate that access has either stayed the same or improved over the past 10 years.<sup>66</sup>

Finally, the group had to help prioritize management actions to assist resource managers in planning improvements with limited funding. As seen in Figure 43, the top three priorities, based on a 5-point scale, were to (1) maintain existing trails, (2) prevent or repair damage to environmental and cultural sites near trails, (3) provide trail signs, which was closely followed by (4) provide trail maps and information.<sup>646</sup>

## NON-MOTORIZED RECREATIONISTS

According to the survey, most (97 percent) of non-motorized trail users were year-round residents of Arizona. They lived here for over ten years (69 percent) and were primarily white (82 percent). Those of Hispanic origin were consistent with the state's census data

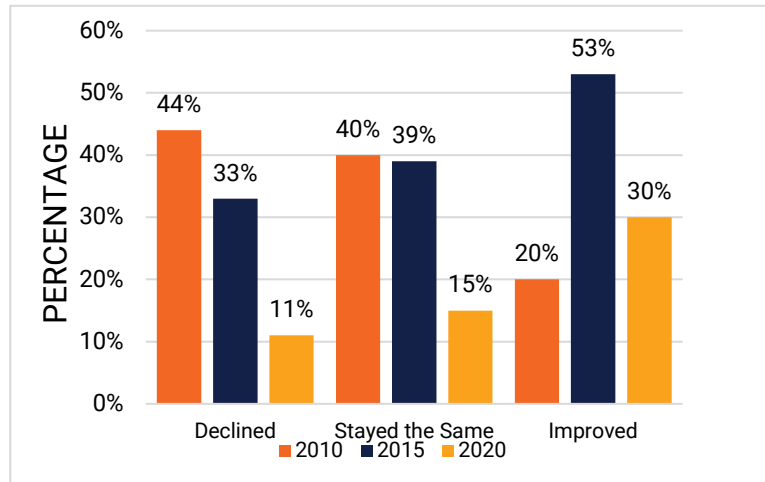


Figure 42 - Arizona Trails 2020 - Motorized Trail Access

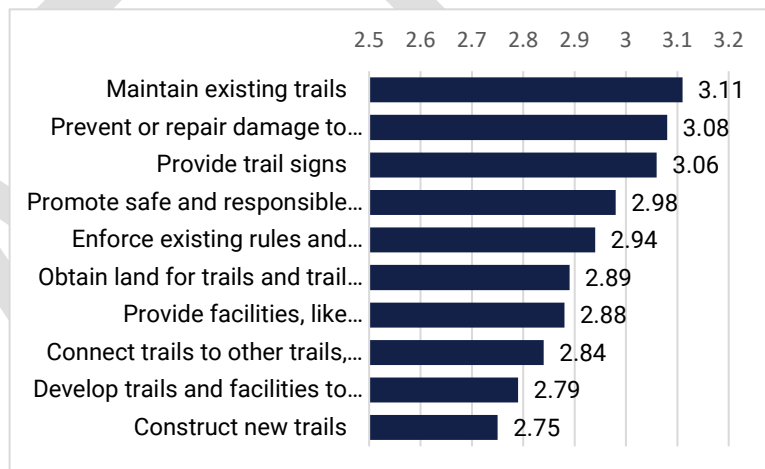


Figure 43 - Arizona Trails 2020 - Management Actions

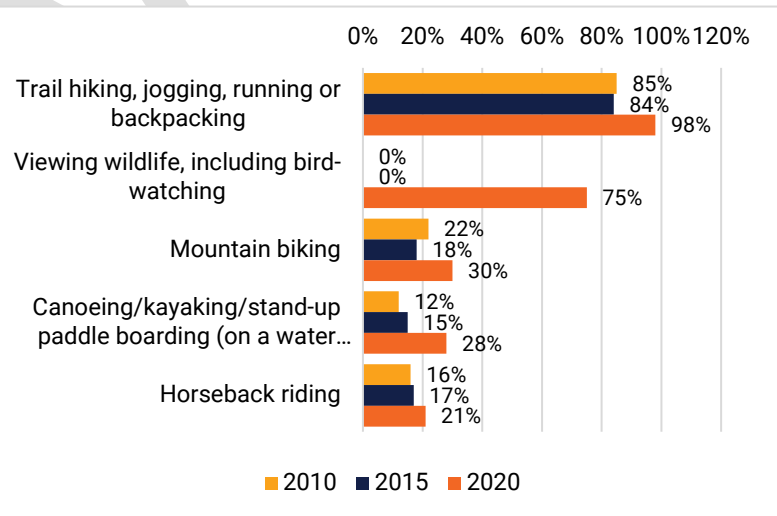


Figure 1 - Arizona Trails Non-Motorized 2020

<sup>66</sup> Arizona State Parks & Trails. (2020). Arizona Trails 2020 – A Statewide Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails Plan. [20220628044955ASPT - 2020 Trails Plan - 6-29.pdf \(usedirect.com\)](https://www.azedirect.com/20220628044955ASPT-2020%20Trails%20Plan-6-29.pdf)



(27 percent). Respondents appear equally divided between males (49.6 percent) and females (49.5 percent). Non-motorized recreationists seem more evenly dispersed across age groups, with one-third ages 18 to 34, one-third ages 35 to 54, and one-third ages 55 to 65 or older.<sup>67</sup>

Trend analysis of the main non-motorized activities shows participation in trail hiking, etc., continues to dominate use, and mountain bike use continues to increase (Figure 44). The survey in 2020 also added watchable wildlife as a category, and the findings indicated a strong demand for this activity type.<sup>64,7</sup>

Like motorized users, non-motorized recreationists were asked their opinion on trail access over time. Generally, respondents indicated access had stayed the same or improved over time (Figure 45).

Finally, the group prioritized management actions to assist resource managers in planning improvements with limited funding. As seen in Figure 46, the top three priorities, based on a 5-point scale, were:

- maintain existing trails,
- provide trail signs, and
- prevent or repair damage to environmental and cultural sites near trails.<sup>63</sup>

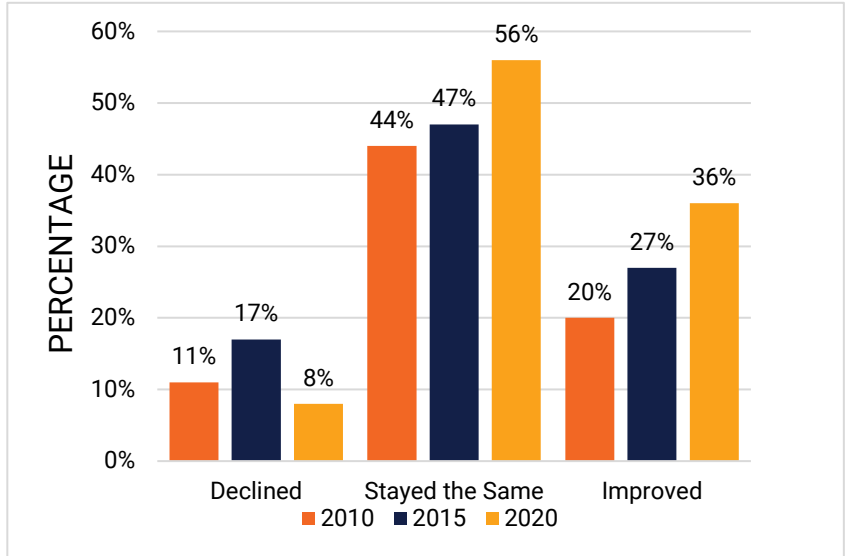


Figure 45 - Arizona Trails Non-Motorized Access2020

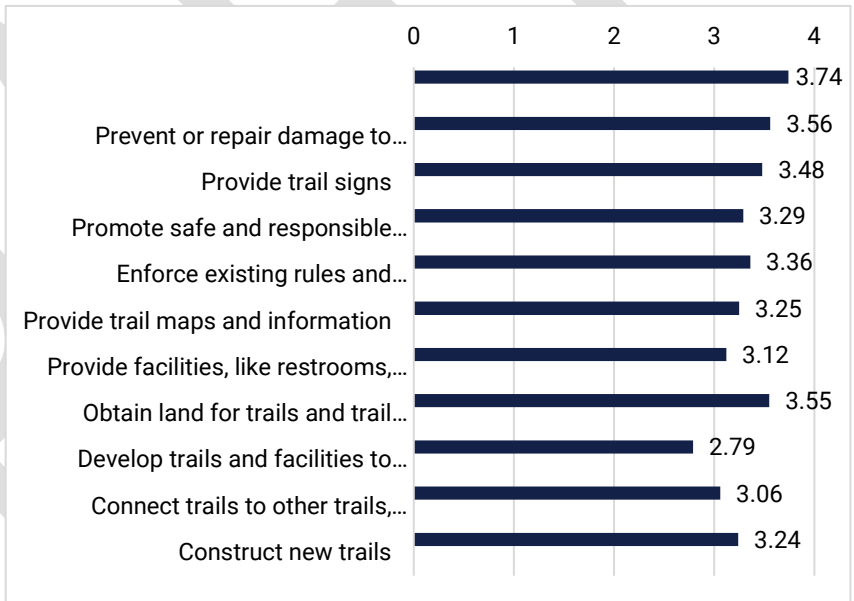


Figure 46 - Arizona Trails 2020 - Non-motorized Management Actions

<sup>67</sup> Arizona State Parks & Trails. (2020). Arizona Trails 2020 – A Statewide Motorized and Non-Motorized Trails Plan. [20220628044955ASPT - 2020 Trails Plan - 6-29.pdf \(usedirect.com\)](#)

## BENCHMARK ANALYSIS

The benchmark analysis compares and contrasts various park systems while reviewing park agencies' inventory, management, and financial structure that may share common traits. The benchmarking process also highlights unique or best practices in other jurisdictions, aiming to enhance a park system by learning from peer organizations.

Benchmark analysis can be challenging because park systems vary widely and have complicated direct comparisons. In addition, every park system is unique and operates within a unique legal structure and geographic location. However, the evaluation of specific measures and individual practices can serve as guides to bettering any park system.

## COMPARABLE AGENCIES

For this analysis, staff chose park agencies for comparison for various factors, including population size, system size, geography, and mission.

Note: A park district is a form of a special-purpose district that provides public parks, recreation, and open space in or near its geographic boundaries. Unless otherwise noted, the respective agencies provided all data in the benchmarking chapter.

## THE BENCHMARKING AGENCIES

- [Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Arizona State Parks and Trails](#)
- [Clark County Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation](#)
- [San Diego County Parks and Recreation](#)
- [Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District \(RivCo\)](#)
- [East Bay Regional Park District](#)

## POPULATION

JURISDICTION AND POPULATION			
AGENCY	STATE	JURISDICTION TYPE	POPULATION (2020 CENSUS)
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department	AZ	County	4,420,568
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation	CA	County	10,014,009
Arizona State Parks and Trails	AZ	State	7,151,502
San Diego County Parks and Recreation	CA	County	3,298,634
East Bay Regional Park District	CA	Special District (two counties)	2,848,280
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	CA	Special District	2,418,185
Clark County Parks and Recreation	NV	County	2,265,461
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	AZ	County	1,043,433

Figure 47 - Benchmarking Organizations – Jurisdiction and Population

Los Angeles County, California, has the highest population at approximately 10 million, followed by the State of Arizona at 7 million and Maricopa County, Arizona at almost 4.5 million. MCPRD represents the third largest population in this benchmarking analysis. Alternatively, Pima County, Arizona, represents the smallest population in this analysis, at just over one million people. The other park organizations range between two and three million (Figure 47).

## PARK INVENTORY

The County has a total of 121,185 acres – see Figure 48. It provides the third-highest amount of parkland (acres) behind Pima County (250,000 acres) and East Bay District, California (125,186 acres). Note - that a significant portion of Pima County's acreage is for grazing with a conservation easement overlay. East Bay Regional District, Maricopa, and Pima Counties emphasize providing larger regional parks. It is the most likely explanation for these significant differences compared to the other park systems.

Maricopa County's large park acreage contains 14 parks, mainly characterized by large undeveloped regional parks. RivCo, California, has the following fewest parks, with 20 total, and Los Angeles County has the most at 182. Many jurisdictions are not just mountain areas, such as the County, but have small neighborhood parks, regional sports facilities, historic sites, and recreation centers. The average number of acres per park is generally below 2,000 among our agencies of interest. Clark County, Nevada, and Los Angeles County prioritize smaller neighborhood parks to fill the service gaps in their unincorporated regions. However, the County averages over 10,000, and Pima County averages just under 4,000 acres per park.

AGENCY	TOTAL NUMBER OF PARKS	TOTAL PARK ACRES	TOTAL PARK ACRES PER 1,000 POP.	PERCENT OF DEVELOPED ACRES	PERCENT OF UNDEVELOPED ACRES
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation	12	121,185	27	7%	93%
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	63	250,000	239	5%	95%
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	20	93,427*	39	7%	93%
San Diego County Parks and Recreation	154	56,130	17	18%	82%
Clark County Parks and Recreation	115	8,216	4	33%	67%
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation	182	70,079	3	94%	6%
Arizona State Parks and Trails	33	63,712	9	2%	98%
East Bay Regional Park District	73**	125,186	44	2%	98%

Figure 48 - Park Inventory

## TOTAL PARK ACRES PER 1,000

The parks with the top three in acreage also were the same top three spots for park acres per 1,000 population, with the County at 27.4 regional park acres for every 1,000 people (Figure 48). At the same time, Pima County has 239, and East Bay has 44. Clark County and RivCo had the lowest park acreages. They had the lowest per thousand people at 3.6 and 6.5 acres, respectively. Los Angeles County took the third spot at least park acres per thousand at 7.2 acres.

## DEVELOPED ACRES VS. UNDEVELOPED ACRES

The System is largely undeveloped open spaces, comprised of 93 percent (Figure 48). Pima and Riverside County are similar, with 95 percent and 93 percent, respectively. ASPT and Los Angeles County reported being the most developed, with only two percent and five percent undeveloped.

## TOTAL TRAIL MILES

The County maintains approximately 651 trail miles, with 290 miles within existing regional parks. It includes the MT (315 miles) and Sun Circle Trails (35 miles). East Bay maintains the most trail miles at 1,330 total, of which 845 are unpaved. Pima County maintains 411 miles, and Clark County maintains the fewest miles at 115. Trail miles per person follow a similar trend to total park acres. The County ranks third with East Bay District and Pima County, containing the most trail miles per person (Figures 49 and 50).

AGENCY	TOTAL NUMBER OF TRAIL MILES	TRAIL MILES PER 10,000 POP.
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation	651	1.45
East Bay Regional Park District	1,330 (845 unpaved)	4.67
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	411.8	3.95
San Diego County Parks and Recreation	381	1.16
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	180	0.74
Clark County Parks and Recreation	115 (unincorporated County only)	0.51
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation	233	0.23
Arizona State Parks and Trails	140.3	0.20

Figure 49 - Total Number of Trail Miles

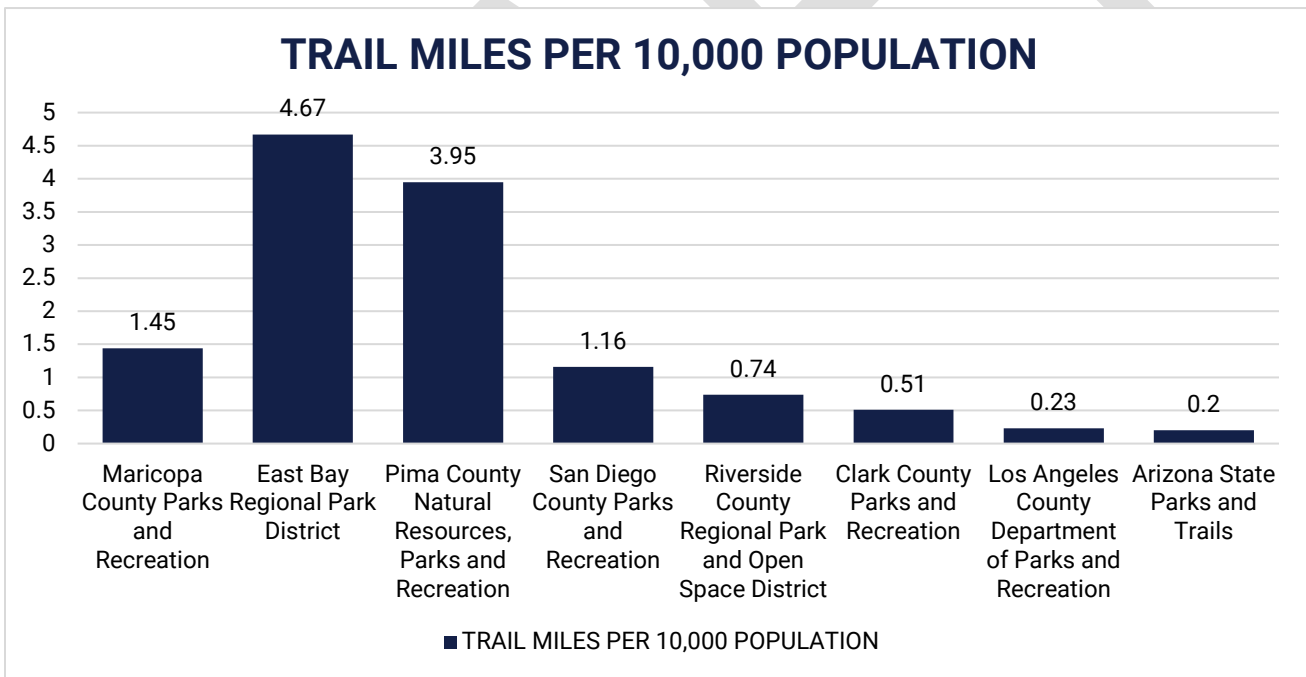


Figure 50 - Trail Miles Per 10,000 Population

## FACILITIES AND PROGRAMS

MCPRD consists of various facilities and programs to accommodate wide-ranging individual needs. The following focuses on some unique facilities and programs the benchmarking organizations have that may be useful in planning future MCPRD.

**The Los Angeles County Parks and Recreation Department** Operations Plan outlines the details of the core and special programming offered throughout their park system. They partner with community-

based organizations to engage youth sports, science, technology, engineering, arts, mathematics (STEM) activities, environmental education, arts and culture, and community service. Core and community partners are eligible for reduced fees for using park facilities and equipment.

**San Diego County** provides a wide array of various facilities throughout the County. However, their botanical garden is one unique facility that offers numerous benefits. In addition to highlighting the region's biodiversity, the botanical garden hosts events and educational programs.

**Riverside County Parks District** has historical sites with recreation areas, ranches, and museums. A historic lodge, cabins in the San Jacinto Mountains, and more developed camping cabin rentals near the Santa Ana River also exist. Riverside is also working on an OHV feasibility study with the State of California Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Recreation Division. The purpose was to identify the best locations for a regional OHV recreation area in the County while reducing environmental and social impacts.

**Pima County** adopted the Pima Regional Trail System Master Plan in 2010 to update and expand its regional trail system to internal urbanized and outlying areas. The regional trail system consists of shared-use paths and short segments of buffered bike lanes totaling over 136 miles of pathways.

**Arizona State Parks and Trails** owns or manages 16 camping facilities. In 2017, these facilities were the largest source of revenue for the department, signaling their importance to the department's budget. In addition to generating revenue, they had 2.9 million visitors being the most visited sites. The system also has many historic parks that are important to local communities.

**Clark County** manages mostly urbanized parks, several small museums, and a shooting complex. They also have a 1936 historic overnight camp facility, a Wetlands Nature Center, a Horseman's Park, and a dog park.

**East Bay Regional Park District** is the most like MCPRD for the acreage and their focus on providing regional parks. For example, Roberts Regional Park contains a barrier-free playground, allowing those traditionally excluded from outdoor recreation to be included and further the goal of ADA accessibility. In addition, East Bay Regional Park District provides interpretive programs, including a mobile unit.

## VISITATION

From the organizations that were able to provide visitation data, ASPT was 1.5x that of MCPRD, with over 3 million visitors in 2021, compared to MCPRD at just under 2 million visitors. RivCo has a population approximately half as large as the County, and their visitation data was roughly half as well at 1 million visitors. However, note that Los Angeles County had the highest visitation at over 7.4 million.

## TRANSPORTATION, ACCESS, AND EQUITY

Increasing access to the County's parks is necessary to build new park users and enhance healthy relationships with the outdoors. Part of this will include utilizing public transit options for communities across the County.

**Pima Regional Trail System Master Plan** (2010) outlines the goal of developing parks and trails in conjunction with existing public transit routes. The county also conducted a pedestrian latent demand

assessment to guide pedestrian improvements to their trails. Part of this assessment was the trail's connection to bus, train, or streetcar.

**The East Bay Regional Park District** offers the Parks Express Program to increase opportunities for access in low-income and underserved communities. This program is oriented towards groups and must meet one of two criteria.

**Clark County Parks and Recreation Department** works to provide services to the public "at a moderate, low, and no cost." They are committed to making programs available to all population segments and have a scholarship program that helps provide financial assistance to qualifying residents.

In addition, Clark County was also involved with the development of the River Mountains Loop Trail. This paved multi-use path loop surrounds the River Mountains, including Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Hoover Dam, Henderson, Boulder City, and the rest of the Las Vegas Valley. It was Nevada's first endeavor where resource management agencies, private landowners, and citizens combined to serve as part of their regional transportation system and provide recreation opportunities.

## PARKS AND OPEN SPACE REGULATIONS AND ORDINANCES

The Maricopa County Flood Control (MCFCD) Zoning Ordinance has no requirements for parks, trails, or open spaces. However, Area Plans help some unincorporated regions with higher population growth. For example, some of these Area Plans include four acres of parks for every 1,000 people and up to 10 acres for every 1,000 in the White Tank/Grand Avenue Area Plan. In comparison, the MCV 2030 includes a goal of 15 acres of open space and parks for every 1,000 (Figure 51).

The Los Angeles County General Plan (2015) adopted standards of four acres of local parkland per 1,000 residents in the unincorporated areas and six acres of regional parkland per 1,000 residents of the total population. Los Angeles County uses a formula to determine the in-lieu fee developers pay, equal to local park space obligation in acres multiplied by the representative land value.

In San Diego County, the Park Lands Dedication Ordinance requires new residential development projects to dedicate parkland and/or pay park impact fees to develop parks. In-lieu fees vary by Community Planning Area (CPA).

RivCo adopted an ordinance that dedicates in-lieu fees that vary between area plan boundaries. RivCo also follows the minimum open space requirement of three acres per 1000 residents.

Pima County Development fees are focused primarily on roadway improvements. However, they passed bonds and other measures to support parks, trails, and open spaces.

Clark County, Nevada Local Park Code dictates that one percent of the valuation of each residential dwelling unit, or one thousand dollars per residential dwelling unit or, whichever is less, shall be paid as a Residential Construction Tax. After collection, the funds are for only the acquisition, capital improvements, and expansion of facilities in Clark County. The Clark County Parks and Recreation

Master Plan, adopted in 1999, states that the Residential Construction Tax "has been the most consistent source of funding for park development."

In East Bay Regional Parks, 80 percent of the District's operating budget is from property tax revenues provided to the District per the tax-sharing agreements with Alameda and Contra Costa Counties. Additional funding for parkland acquisition comes from Alameda and Contra Costa County development impact fees.

AGENCY		DEVELOPMENT IMPACT FEES	PARK/OPEN SPACE GOALS (COMPREHENSIVE PLAN)
Maricopa County, Arizona		No	All Parks & Open Space: 15 acres/ 1,000
Los Angeles County, California		Yes	Regional Parks: 6 acres/ 1,000 Local Parks: 4 acres/ 1,000
San Diego County, California		Yes	Regional Parks: 15 acres/ 1,000 Local Parks: 10 acres/ 1,000
Riverside County, California		Yes	All Parks & Open Space: 3 acres/ 1,000
Pima County, Arizona		Yes	N/A
Clark County, Nevada		\$1,000 or 1%	Urban: 2.5 acres/ 1,000 Rural: 6 acres/ 1,000
East Bay Regional Park District	Alameda County (Part of East Bay Regional)	Yes	N/A
	Contra Costa County (Part of East Bay Regional)	Yes	All Parks: 4 acres/ 1,000

Figure 51 - Park/Open Space Goals



## FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

AGENCY	STATE	2021 YEAR JURISDICTION TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET	OPERATIONAL BUDGET PER CAPITA	GENERAL FUND TAX SUPPORT	EARNED / GENERATED REVENUE	FEDERAL AND/OR STATE GRANTS	OTHER
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation	AZ	\$11,209,126	\$2.58	8.8%	91.2%	0.0%	0%
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation	CA	\$228,822,000	\$22.85	78.0%	17.0%	3.0%	2.0%
San Diego County Parks and Recreation	CA	\$60,553,540	\$18.36	76.0%	15.0%	9.0%	0.0%
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	CA	\$17,277,712	\$7.14	0.0%	52.0%	0.0%	48.0%
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	AZ	\$22,175,168	\$21.25	90.0%	5.7%	1.2%	3.1%
Arizona State Parks and Trails	AZ	\$23,000,000	\$3.22	0.0%	73.0%	10.0%	17.0%
Clark County Parks and Recreation	NV	\$38,980,018	\$17.21	45.2%	54.8%	0.0%	0.0%
East Bay Regional Park District	CA	\$258,500,000	\$90.76	83.6%	12.9%	0.6%	2.9%

Figure 52 - Operating Expenditures

## TOTAL OPERATING BUDGET

MCPRD's operating budget was the lowest compared to the other jurisdictions at \$11,409,129 and the highest percentage earned income. The next lowest was RivCo at \$18,153,779 and Pima County at \$22,175,169. East Bay is the highest total operating budget at \$290,400,000 (Figure 52-53).

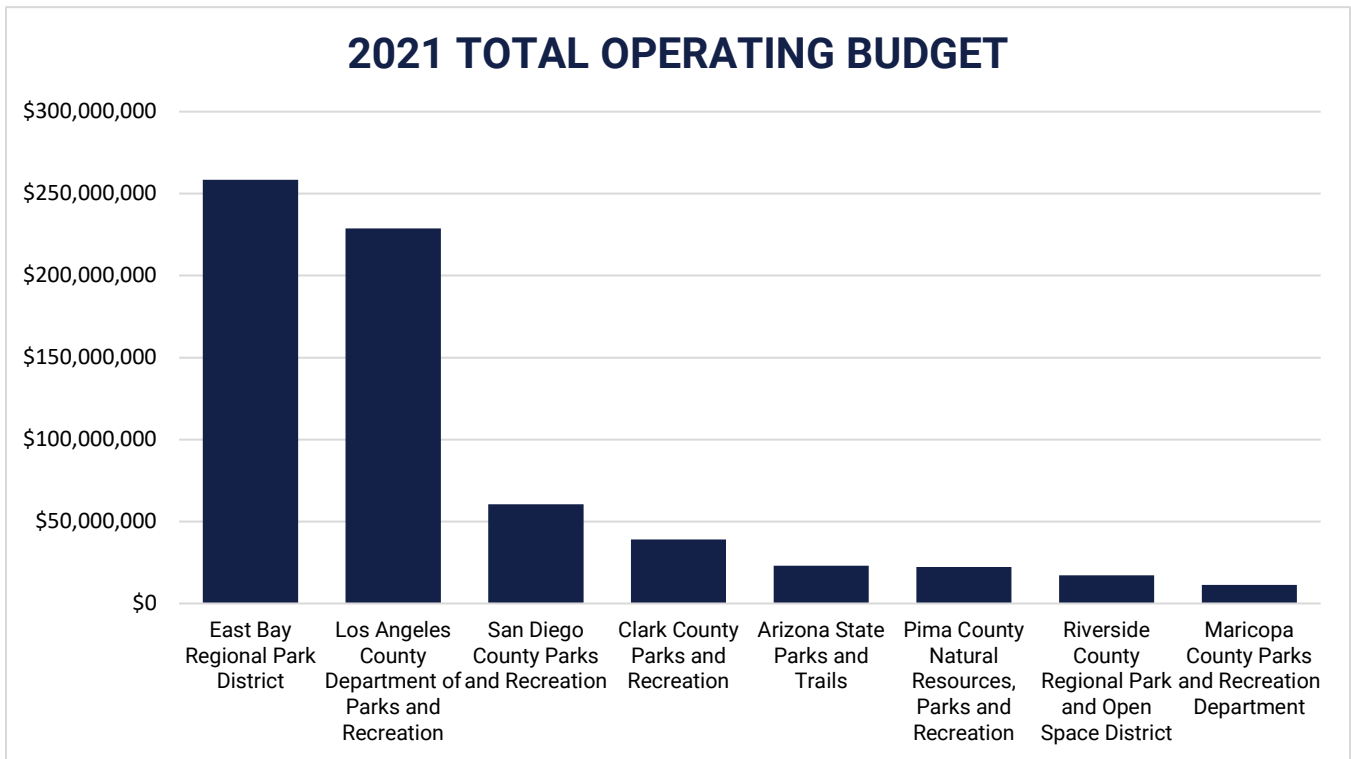


Figure 53 - Total Operating Budget

2021 OPERATIONAL BUDGET PER CAPITA		
AGENCY	STATE	OPERATIONAL BUDGET PER CAPITA
East Bay Regional Park District	CA	\$90.76
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation	CA	\$22.85
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	AZ	\$21.25
San Diego County Parks and Recreation	CA	\$18.36
Clark County Parks and Recreation	NV	\$17.21
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District	CA	\$7.14
Arizona State Parks and Trails	AZ	\$3.22
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department	AZ	\$2.58

Figure 54 - 2021 Operational Budget Per Capita

Figure 54 above reflects the total operating and operating budgets per capita. East Bay Regional Park District has the highest budget and spends the most per capita, and Los Angeles County comes in second. Alternatively, Pima County comes in third for most spent per capita at \$21.25, rising from sixth in the total operating budget. Interestingly, the ASPT budget is just slightly higher than

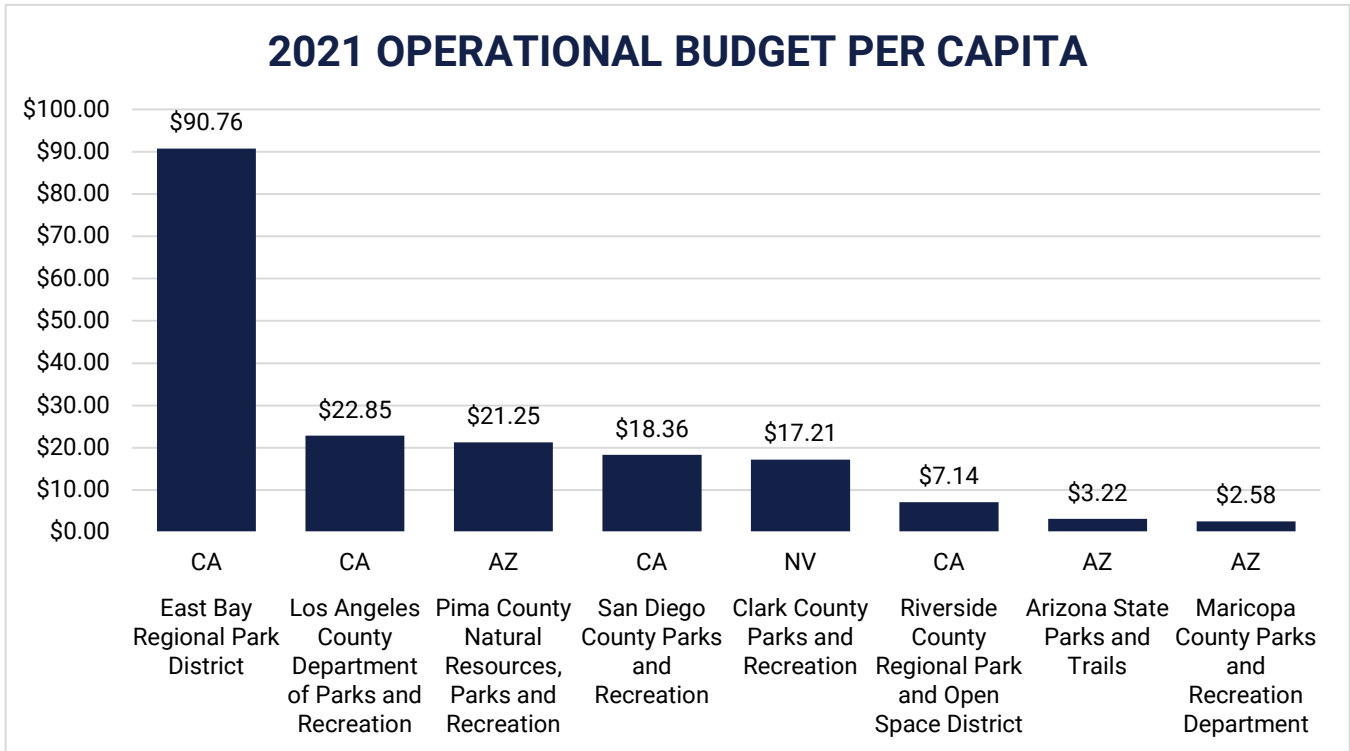


Figure 55 - Operational Budget Per Capita

Pima County. They were fifth in the total operating budget and second to last for the total operating budget per capita at \$3.22 (Figure 55).

## TOTAL FUNDING SOURCES

Most of MCPRD funding (91.2%) comes from earned revenue, with 8.8 percent from general fund tax dollars. Across the jurisdictions, funding sources varied significantly. However, MCPRD has significantly lower general fund than other jurisdictions, except ASPT, which received no support. ASPT had the next highest funding source from earned revenue at 49 percent, and Riverside County had 45 percent.

The majority of earned revenue derived by MCPRD comes from user fees, including day-use, annual passes, and camping. Figure 56 shows a general comparison of fees for the agencies benchmarked. Day-use fees range significantly from \$0 in several jurisdictions to a maximum of \$20, with MCPRD at \$7 per vehicle. Similarly, annual passes have a wide range from \$0 to \$200. Developed camping fees tend to be more uniform but there are outliers of \$20 on the low side and \$50 on the upper end.

AGENCY	STATE	JURISDICTION TYPE	PARK ENTRANCE / PARKING FEE	ANNUAL PASS	DEVELOPED CAMPING FEE
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department	Arizona	County	\$7	\$85	\$32
Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (Castiac Lake)	California	County	\$12	\$150	\$20
San Diego County Parks and Recreation (Lake Moreno)	California	County	\$3	N/A	\$34
Riverside County Regional Park and Open Space District (Idylwild Regional Park)	California	Special District	\$6	\$50	\$35
Pima County Natural Resources, Parks and Recreation	Arizona	County	\$0	\$0	N/A
Arizona State Parks and Trails (Lost Dutchman State Park)	Arizona	State	\$7-10	\$75-200	\$35
Arizona State Parks and Trails (Lake Havasu State Park)	Arizona	State	\$15-20	\$75-200	\$40
Clark County Parks and Recreation	Nevada	County	\$0	\$0	N/A
East Bay Regional Park District (Del Valle Regional Park)	California	Special District (two counties)	\$6	\$60	\$50

Figure 56 – Total Funding Sources Fee Comparison

## TOTAL NON-TAX REVENUES

MCPRD has a non-tax revenue of \$11,219,369. Pima County has the lowest at \$1,150,475. East Bay is the highest at \$33,706,445. RivCo and San Diego are similar to the County, with \$10,392,996 and \$14,300,000, respectively.

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San Tan Mountain Regional Park – Mountain biker enjoying the trails.

## CHAPTER 4 – OUTREACH

### INTRODUCTION & PURPOSE

A critical component of the planning process is gathering input to inform priority goals and objectives. The most credible and valid insights are those from a variety of audiences that have an interest in the planning outcome. Triangulation is a one-planning method to ensure insights, goals, and objectives are widely supported through multiple input points.

In this planning process, various methods and data sources develop recommendations, goals, and objectives that are central across all or most input sources. The main points of outreach included (Figure 57):

- **Public** - The plan kicked off with a year-long park visitor survey. Two conservation and open space statewide surveys and one state park plan provided data. Two virtual public meetings occurred with more than 100 participants, and more than 1,400 public members completed a feedback questionnaire explicitly designed to guide future park and trail priorities. In addition, 831 public members joined the Parks Vision 2030 public contact list to be updated as new information became available.
- **County Staff, Volunteers, and Leadership (Staff)** – Survey results included input from over 85 park supervisors, administrative assistants, interpretive rangers, and maintenance, along with over 100 park volunteers who work at the contact

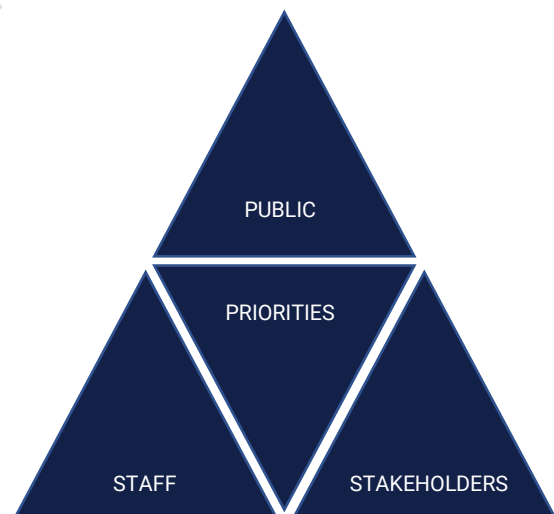


Figure 57 - Triangulation Method for Determining Priorities

PUBLIC	COUNTY STAFF, VOLUNTEERS & LEADERSHIP (STAFF)	STAKEHOLDERS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Park Visitor Survey</li> <li>▪ Visitor Survey – Understanding COVID</li> <li>▪ Trends Analysis</li> <li>▪ Gallup Poll for Center for the Future of Arizona</li> <li>▪ Morrison Institute Poll for Pulliam Institute</li> <li>▪ 2 Virtual Public Meetings</li> <li>▪ Public Feedback Questionnaire (1420)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 85+ staff members – focus groups</li> <li>▪ 100+ volunteers – focus groups</li> <li>▪ Input questionnaire</li> <li>▪ Executive Committee - 25+ Representatives from various Maricopa County Departments and key partners</li> <li>▪ SWOT Analysis</li> <li>▪ Park Commission Updates and Discussion (10)</li> <li>▪ Three Board of Supervisors Updates</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ 135+ Representatives from local park and recreation departments, nonprofit organizations, state, and federal recreation organizations, etc.</li> <li>▪ 6 Regional Workshops</li> <li>▪ Follow-up Meetings with BLM and United States Forest Service (USFS), AZG&amp;F, ASPT, etc.</li> <li>▪ Peer County Park Systems Benchmark Analysis</li> <li>▪ 2 Review Periods</li> </ul>

Figure 58 - Outreach Groups and Methods

stations and nature centers and serve as park hosts at campgrounds. In addition, a 25-member group formed the Executive Committee with representatives from MCPRD, the MCFCD, Maricopa County Planning and Development Department, the County Manager's Office, the BOS, Commissioners, the Central Arizona Conservation Alliance, and the Maricopa Trail + Park Foundation (MT+PF).

- **Stakeholder Partners** - Over 135 park and recreation and planning professionals from 61 organizations, including local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and academia across the County, participated. Stakeholders met during regional workshops and provided feedback throughout the process. Appendix B reflects the MCPRD partners that have strengthened the County (this list is not all-inclusive).

The following sections summarize input from outreach conducted for the Parks Vision 2030 planning process. The trends and benchmark analysis discussed in Chapter 3 are also part of the input process.

## **PUBLIC INPUT**

### **PARK VISITOR INPUT – MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS**

#### **2018/2019 VISITOR SURVEY**

The MCPRD 2018/2019 Visitor Survey is one of the vital building blocks for public input. It is the cornerstone of the planning process. Maintaining high satisfaction among park visitors is critical to long-term success. Visitors who have a vested interest in the system tend to provide valuable and constructive feedback.

The School of Community Resources and Development at ASU completed a study. The study, administered from June 2018 to March 2019, was conducted to generate visitor input regarding the System. It included eight MCPRD parks.

The survey collected visitor information on service and facility quality perceptions, activity preferences, setting, and facility preferences, benefits sought and realized, and attitudes toward park fees. It is a follow-up and comparison to park visitor surveys from 2005-2006, 2007-2008, and 2012-2013.



*Hikers stopping for a rest along the Go John Trail at Cave Creek Regional Park.*

## VISITOR DEMOGRAPHICS

- The System has a diverse visitor population, but the most typical visitor is 49 and white.
- The racial/ethnic diversity of the users shows that white respondents comprised 86.9 percent of the sample. Hispanics were the largest minority group comprising 6.8 percent of the overall sample.
- Just as in 2012-13, Arizona residents comprise 85.4 percent of the users. Less than 10 percent of all park visitors from Arizona live outside the Phoenix Metropolitan Area.

## VISITOR BEHAVIOR

- When asked what your primary activity was when visiting the parks, the number one response by far was trail hiking, followed by walking for pleasure, mountain biking, and photography.
- Activities that the County park visitors participated in most, in order of magnitude, were:
  - Trail hiking (76.3 percent)
  - Walking for pleasure (48.8 percent)
  - Photography (29.4 percent)
  - Nature experience (23.5 percent)
  - Watching wildlife (20.1 percent)
  - Visiting Nature Center (16.6 percent).
- Approximately 62 percent of the visitors contacted were returning visitors, and the park was the primary destination for 87.5 percent of the visitors.
- The typical County park user visits a park approximately ten times per year, and visits are typically 2.7 hours long during the day.
- Approximately 86.5 percent of visitors planned a return visit to the park. The most frequent reason visitors indicated they would not return or were unsure was travel distance.
- Park users visit parks for a host of reasons. The most important reasons for visiting County parks were to observe the scenic beauty, enjoy physical exercise, experience the open space, improve my physical health, and relax.
- Visitors were most informed about the park through the internet, friends or family members, word of mouth, or local information.



- Visitors traveled an average of 34 miles to the park. Visitors traveled the farthest to reach Cave Creek (80 miles) and the shortest distance to San Tan Mountain (15 miles). Overall, the most frequent distance traveled was 10 miles.
- In the 2018-19 onsite survey, a question inquired if they had used the trails and, if so, approximately how many miles they had trekked on the trails. Overall, participants used the trails for an average of 4.37 miles.
- Most respondents felt that operation and maintenance funds should come equally from taxes and user fees (41.3 percent) when considering the proper balance between taxes and user fees for generating park operating funds.

**VISITOR SATISFACTION**

- In the 2018-19 study, visitors had to express their satisfaction with four statements. Visitors averaged between extremely satisfied and very satisfied with their primary activity, the services, and what the facilities offered. Visitors also felt extremely satisfied or very satisfied with their overall visit to the park (Figure 59).

Level of Satisfaction with Recent Visit Overall (Onsite)				
	2006	2008	2013	2019
<b>OVERALL</b>	4.51	4.47	4.56	4.80
<b>CAVE CREEK</b>	4.63	4.65	4.67	4.86
<b>ESTRELLA</b>	4.49	4.12	4.34	4.75
<b>LAKE PLEASANT</b>	4.31	4.25	4.46	4.56
<b>MCDOWELL</b>	4.63	4.62	4.65	4.89
<b>SAN TAN</b>	4.46	4.43	4.64	4.87
<b>SPUR CROSS</b>	4.45	4.63	4.72	4.79
<b>USERY</b>	4.55	4.55	4.60	4.89
<b>WHITE TANK</b>	4.57	4.51	4.47	4.80

1 = Not at all satisfied, 5 = Extremely satisfied

Figure 59 - Level of Satisfaction with Recent Visit Overall

**ADDITIONAL KEY FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY**

- The System is becoming increasingly popular for residents who live near the park, a trend that has increased since the 2012-13 study. The average distance traveled to the park was significantly less in 2018-19 compared to the previous studies.
- The average trip expenditure of park visitors increased to \$237.41 in 2019.<sup>68</sup> It is about \$80.00 more than the previous study. While many visitors were local, they mentioned spending money on additional equipment and other luxuries. Out-of-town visitors spent more money on transportation and lodgings.
- Respondents in the 2018-19 survey felt that operations and maintenance funding should come equally from taxes and user fees. It is a reversal of the 2012-13 trend that saw a rise in support for mostly user fees.
- Overall, visitors were very satisfied with their trip. Satisfaction questions on both the onsite and offsite questionnaires indicated that satisfaction was very high and has increased since the 2012-13 study.

<sup>68</sup> Arizona State University School of Community Resources and Development. Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department 2018-2019 Visitors Study (11/2020, Pg. 9). [https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/MCPRD\\_Visitor\\_Use\\_Study\\_2018-19\\_Final\\_ON\\_LINE\\_.pdf](https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/assets/1/6/MCPRD_Visitor_Use_Study_2018-19_Final_ON_LINE_.pdf)

- Primary trails and directional signs were among the top five essential and best-performing services.
- The facilities most desired were wildlife viewing areas or blinds, restaurants/snack bars, outdoor exercise/circuit courses, an event venue, and a zipline.
- In addition to overall satisfaction with their visit to the park, respondents indicated high satisfaction with their primary activity and the services and facilities offered for that primary activity.
- Visitors showed a high interest in programs on animals, archaeology and history, astronomy, health and fitness, geology, and plants.
- Hikers and mountain bikers visited the park to improve their physical health, enjoy physical exercise and observe the scenic beauty.
- Walkers visited the park to enjoy the solitude, observe the scenic beauty and enjoy the sounds and scents of nature.
- Only about 40 percent of visitors were aware of the MT. However, over 75 percent of those who said that they currently use the trail will continue using it in the future.

## 2020 ANNUAL PASS HOLDERS COVID-19 STUDY

To better understand how the COVID-19 pandemic affected visitor behaviors, MCPRD conducted an online Visitor Survey in collaboration with ASU Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions School of Community Resources and Development. The study aimed to determine recreational behavioral changes, acceptability of visitation requirements and management actions, and visitor safety concerns. Of 15,000 annual pass holders, a random selection of 2,846 of the annual pass holders received a questionnaire link via email in early August 2020. The survey closed in late September 2020 with 652 responses.

The results of the survey showed:

- The most frequently visited was WTMRP, and BHRP was the least visited. On average, visitors use the parks 33 times annually.
- Visitors who reduced the number of visits due to COVID-19 attributed the reduction to concerns about overcrowding and adherence to stay-at-home orders.
- Survey results showed that recreation patterns changed among visitors. Visitors reported checking recreation areas' health policies to minimize exposure before visiting. Visitors also reported recreating with the same people to reduce exposure.
- When asked about future outdoor recreation, visitors indicated a desire to support health by spending time outdoors and through exercise and to remain informed of the status of public lands and facilities.
- Touch-free payment options, mobile in-app experience, online day-use payments, hand sanitizer stations, and self-serve pay stations at entrances were potential management actions most acceptable to visitors.
- Visitors reported bathroom closures, reduction in park hours, and closure of frequently used parks and individual campgrounds as the least acceptable potential management actions.
- Visitors indicated that they felt that MCPRD maintained well-trained staff. They indicated feeling confident in staff to manage a safe experience, and the areas were well managed.
- Visitors also strongly intend to return and would recommend the parks to others.
- Finally, visitor information sources most likely to be used are park websites, brochures, and mobile apps.

## GENERAL POPULATION INPUT

Understanding the park and open space needs and environmental priorities of the County's general population is vital in planning a system of parks for the County. Gaining a greater understanding from a broader cross-section of residents (not just those that currently use County parks) affords future planning of parks and facilities that will attract new visitors and better address all residents' environmental, social, and economic concerns. During the past few years, several highly regarded surveys listed below reflected the implications of this planning process.

## CENTER FOR THE FUTURE OF ARIZONA/GALLUP

The Center for the Future of Arizona (CFA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization founded in 2002 to improve the lives of Arizona residents both now and in the future. "The mission of CFA is to bring Arizonans together to create a stronger and brighter future for our State and to achieve prosperity, quality of life, and opportunities for all. CFA has long believed that the best way to discover how Arizonans view their community and our State – and what they want for the future – is to ask them. The 2020 Gallup Arizona Survey builds and expands upon the first-of-its-kind Gallup survey sponsored by CFA in 2009".<sup>69</sup>

The Gallup survey results provide great insight into how Arizonans prioritize key issues for a brighter future. One of the key priorities for residents directly related to this planning effort is caring for our environment and providing for a sustainable future. CFA has also made data available specifically for County residents to determine if there are significant differences between the County and State. An analysis of the results indicates a general agreement on all priorities for the future, including responses to environmental-related questions.

<sup>69</sup> Center for the Future of Arizona. (2021, pg. 6). *The Arizona We Want: The Decade Ahead*. Retrieved from [https://www.arizonafuture.org/media/unfojhmh/cfa\\_arizona\\_we\\_want\\_the\\_decade\\_ahead\\_digital.pdf](https://www.arizonafuture.org/media/unfojhmh/cfa_arizona_we_want_the_decade_ahead_digital.pdf)

## HOW IMPORTANT IS IT THAT ARIZONA MAKES THE FOLLOWING CHANGES OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS? PERCENT 'VERY IMPORTANT' TO 'IMPORTANT.'

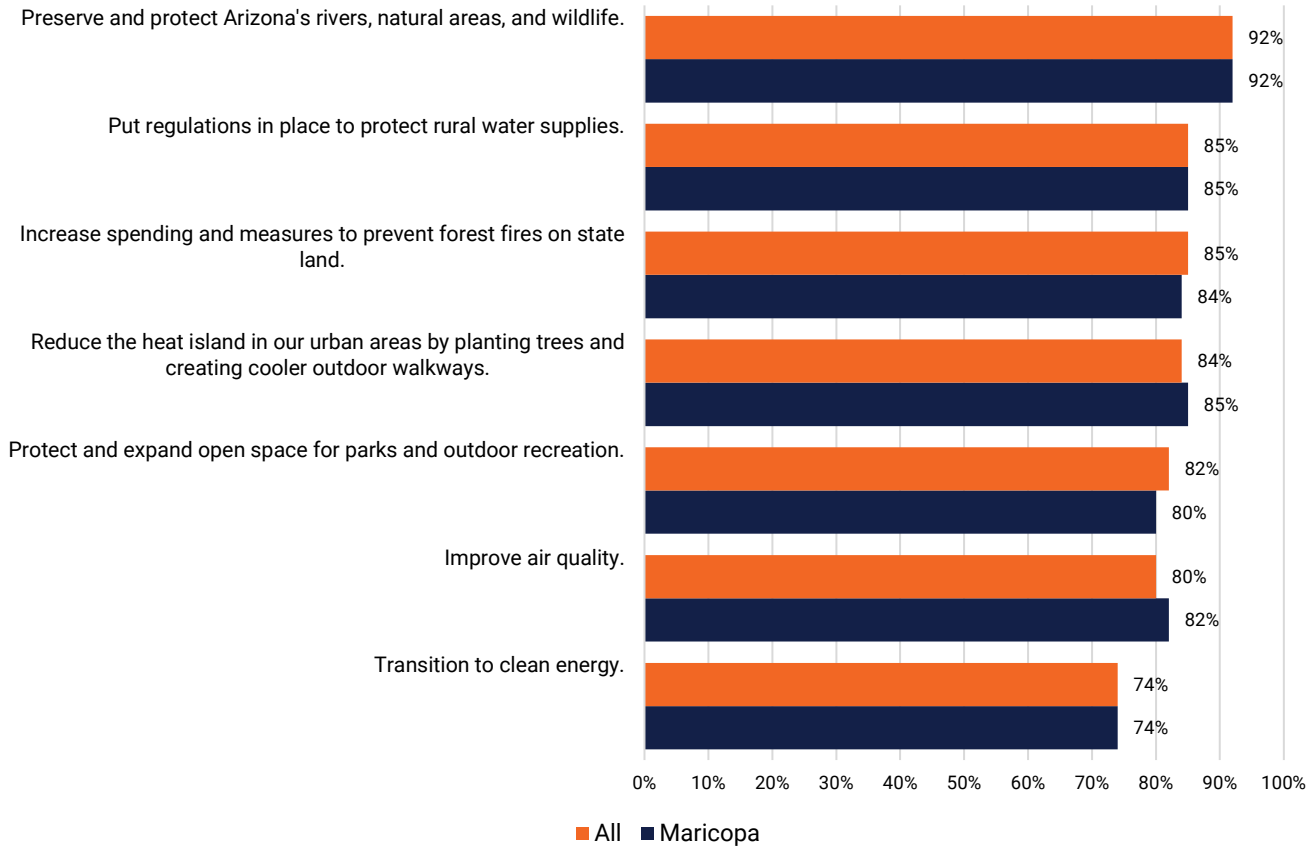


Figure 60 - Environment and Sustainable Future: Actions Arizonans Want by the 2021 Center for the Future of Arizona and Gallup Poll.

Public support for protecting Arizona's rivers, natural areas, and wildlife and protecting and expanding parks and recreation was solid in the 2021 Center for the Future of Arizona and Gallup Poll study (Figure 60). Ninety-two percent of respondents (Maricopa County and the State) agreed that preserving and protecting Arizona rivers, natural areas, and wildlife was important. This key indicator was the highest-rated consensus item across all priorities tested in the survey. Additionally, 82 percent of the respondents favored protecting and expanding open spaces, parks, and outdoor recreation.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Center for the Future of Arizona. (2021, pg. 50). *The Arizona We Want: The Decade Ahead*. Retrieved from [https://www.arizonafuture.org/media/unfojhmh/cfa\\_arizona\\_we\\_want\\_the\\_decade\\_ahead\\_digital.pdf](https://www.arizonafuture.org/media/unfojhmh/cfa_arizona_we_want_the_decade_ahead_digital.pdf)

## NINA MASON PULLIAM TRUST/MORRISON INSTITUTE

The Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust was established upon the death of Nina Mason Pulliam on March 26, 1997, to support the causes she loved in her home states of Arizona and Indiana.

The mission of the Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust is to help people in need, especially women, children, and families, protect animals and nature, and enrich community life, primarily in metropolitan Phoenix and Indianapolis.

In 2020 the ASU Morrison Institute of Public Policy developed a report on Attitudes and Opinions About Environmental Issues in Arizona for Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust.<sup>71</sup> The 2020 study followed a similar survey conducted in 2017 and allowed for comparison over time.

One of the most notable findings concluded, "In general terms, Arizona voters are as interested or more interested in and concerned about the environment in 2020 as they were in 2017. This includes attitudes toward and opinions about wildlife, land use, rivers and streams, global warming, preservation of water, air and water quality, and government spending on and attention to the environment." **Specifically, 98 percent of respondents said that parks preserve, forests and open spaces are important to them.** And protecting the State's air and water quality, land use, and wildlife were among the top three priorities for future action from the survey (Figure 61).

WHICH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING DO YOU BELIEVE SHOULD BE THE TOP PRIORITY FOR THE GOVERNOR OR LEGISLATURE?		
	2020	2017
Improving the public education system	33%	43%
Making health care more accessible	20%	17%
Protecting the State's air and water quality, land use, and wildlife	16%	10%
Immigration reform	12%	8%
Lowering taxes	7%	5%
Attracting and retaining businesses and jobs	7%	13%
Improving public safety	5%	4%

Figure 61 - Which one of the following do you believe should be the top priority for the governor or legislature?

## ARIZONA STATE PARKS – STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN

The ASPT's 2022 SCORP indicated that those who participated in active land-based outdoor recreation during the last 12 months primarily responded that the activities included walking, jogging, or running on trails at a park/day hiking (69 percent) or bicycling (43 percent) from the public and were even higher from the invested user group (86 percent and 75 percent, respectively). Other top outdoor recreation activities were visiting a local park such as a playground or city park (93 percent), picnicking or gathering outdoors with family or friends (89 percent), and visiting a natural or wilderness area (87 percent). The invested user indicated a higher response to visiting a natural or wilderness area (98 percent), with the other responses over ninety percent.

<sup>71</sup> Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust. (2020). *Arizonans' Attitudes and Opinions about Environmental Issues*. Retrieved from [https://www.ninapulliamtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/NMP-Environ-Infographic\\_AZ\\_FNL\\_web-1.pdf](https://www.ninapulliamtrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/NMP-Environ-Infographic_AZ_FNL_web-1.pdf)

In addition, ASPT also asked about the importance of Arizona recreation settings and the preference for open spaces in natural settings. Of utmost importance for planning recreation in the next 12 months were open spaces in natural settings with very little development, followed by large, nature-oriented parks and small neighborhood parks.

## IMPORTANCE OF ARIZONA RECREATION SETTINGS – PREFERENCE FOR OPEN SPACES IN NATURAL SETTINGS

Arizonans rated on a scale of (1) Not at all important to (7) Extremely important; how important are each of the following Arizona recreation settings to them and other people in their household?

### IMPORTANCE OF ARIZONA RECREATION SETTINGS

Among those planning to recreate outdoors in the next 12 months. Scale of (1) Not all important to (7) extremely important.

RANK	IMPORTANCE OF ARIZONA RECREATION SETTINGS	ARIZONA PUBLIC N = 5,088	INVESTED USER N = 1,322
1	<b>Open spaces in natural settings with very little development,</b> such as national forests or other recreation areas managed by government agencies	5.56	6.58
2	<b>Large, nature-oriented parks</b> primarily used for hiking, picnicking, or camping, with only a few facilities - such as some regional, state, or national parks	5.58	6.25
3	<b>Small neighborhood parks</b> have only a few facilities - such as playgrounds, common areas in housing complexes, etc.	4.95	4.53
4	<b>Large, developed parks in urban areas</b> with many facilities and uses - such as parks with community centers, event spaces, ball fields, etc.	4.93	4.48
5	<b>Open spaces in natural settings with very little development.</b> Such as national forests or other recreation areas managed by government agencies.	4.18	3.30

Figure 62- Arizona Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2023 - Draft for public review and comment: August 2, 2022.

The top two responses are similar to MCPRD System (Figure 62):

- open spaces in natural settings with very little development, and
- large, nature-oriented parks primarily used for hiking, picnicking, or camping, with only a few facilities.

**TO HELP SUPPORT HEALTH GOALS – PROVIDE MORE WALKING TRAILS AND PATHWAYS AND INCREASE ACCESS.**

When asked how could outdoor recreation areas and facilities in Arizona help in achieving their goals or properties related to physical and mental health fitness, all three groups agreed on their top recommendations.

<b>RANK</b>	<b>SUPPORT FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION AREAS/FACILITIES TO HELP ACHIEVE HEALTH GOALS</b> (Public & Users: Planning to Recreate Outdoors in Next 12 Months)	<b>ARIZONA PUBLIC</b> <b>N = 5,088</b>	<b>INVESTED USER</b> <b>N = 1,322</b>	<b>PROVIDER</b> <b>N = 122</b>
1	(Provide more) walking trails and pathways.	60.3%	70.7%	87.5%
2	(Increase) easy/confident access points to trails, pathways, waterways, and facilities.	56.3%	70.1%	76.8%
3	(Protect and encourage more) natural settings at outdoor recreation areas have only a few facilities.	55.6%	82.0%	83.0%
4	(Support) community projects and activities that connect people to each other and the environment.	42.5%	56.3%	58.9%
5	(Support) health and fitness community events (e.g., running and bicycling races, yoga, tai chi, other fitness and exercise programs, adventure races, etc).	42.4%	41.3%	53.6%
6	(Provide more) programs aimed at specific groups such as older adults, families with young children, etc	39.9%	42.4%	51.8%

Figure 63 - AZ State Parks and Trails – Support for Outdoor Recreation Areas/Facilities to Help Achieve Health Goals

From the general public, the highest support was for providing more walking trails and pathways, increasing easy/convenient access points to trails, pathways, waterways, and facilities, and protecting and encouraging more natural settings at outdoor recreation areas and facilities (Figure 63).

**PARKS VISION 2030 PLANNING OUTREACH**

In 2020, MCPRD created a website with a project summary to engage the public in the Parks Vision 2030 project. In early 2021, a notification was posted on the website to include project details, a PowerPoint presentation from the focus group meetings, and a public contact list form to keep in touch about project updates. The sign-up form, available in English or Spanish, allowed members of the public to receive information regarding project updates and future public meetings. In total, 831 members of the public joined the contact list.

**PARKS VISION 2030 - PUBLIC VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

Virtual public meetings occurred on Monday, November 8, 2021, and November 10, 2021, with 117 participants. The sessions provided participants with an update on the PV 2030 and preliminary key findings. The public participated by responding to poll questions and submitting questions for the question-and-answer segment of the meeting. Participants completed a public outreach feedback form via SurveyMonkey to gather community input to help guide priorities.

Throughout the outreach process, the MCPRD actively engaged a wide variety of stakeholders to help reach a greater diversity of public members. MCPRD engaged 61 stakeholder organizations to share information regarding the PV 2030 project and share it with their membership through their contact lists and newsletters, including Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting and the Outdoors (HEHCO) and Ability 360, which empowers people with disabilities.

MCPRD also used a variety of social media apps. To accommodate Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations, MCPRD prepared graphics and outreach in Spanish whenever possible. PowerPoint presentations utilized subtitles at public meetings to show real-time translations from English to Spanish on the screen. The MCPRD website is also translatable into more than 20 languages as part of the public outreach on the project. Every effort was made to address reasonable accommodations based on language or disability throughout the public outreach process. Announcements for the public meeting included information regarding reasonable accommodations based on language or disability. The public was encouraged to request accommodations early to ensure adequate time for the County to comply.

## PUBLIC OUTREACH FEEDBACK FORM RESULTS

One of the critical methods for collecting input from the public and stakeholders was using surveys. With over 1,420 public feedback forms returned, it proved a successful outreach method, especially during COVID-19 (Pages 74-77).

Public outreach feedback from results	YES	NO	NOT SURE
Have you ever visited a Maricopa County regional park?	87.9%	3.7%	8.4%
Have you visited a Maricopa County regional park in the last year?	87.6%	12.6%	1.2%

Which is your favorite Maricopa County park to visit?	YES
Lake Pleasant Regional Park	20.9%
White Tank Mountain Regional Park	16.6%
McDowell Mountain Regional Park	15.2%
Usery Mountain Regional Park	12.1%
Cave Creek Regional Park	8%
Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area	7.8%
San Tan Mountain Regional Park	6.1%
Estrella Mountain Regional Park	3.8%
Hassayampa River Preserve	2.9%
Adobe Dam Regional Park	0.6%
<i>The New River Community Park and other parks outside the County system were mentioned. Some comments said all of the parks are my favorite.</i>	



## OUTREACH

RANKING	What are the primary reasons preventing you from visiting a Maricopa County park more regularly? Please choose three (3) options.	PERCENT
1	I was not aware of the parks	36.9%
2	I use local parks more often	34.6%
3	Too busy and haven't had the opportunity	31.4%
4	Too far from where I live	27.2%
5	Other (please specify)	12%
6	Entrance/user fees too expensive	11.7%
7	I visit federal lands more often	10.4%
8	Poor health/disability	5.8%
9	Park amenities not appealing	4.2%
10	No interest	3.9%
11	Lack of transportation	3.6%
12	Facilities not well maintained	1.6%
	<i>Twenty-eight respondents also listed the pandemic.</i>	

AWARENESS	AWARE	UNAWARE	UNSURE
Are you aware of the Maricopa Trail, a 315-mile loop trail system that links Maricopa County's regional park system?	52.9%	40.9%	5.9%

ACTIVITIES	PERCENT
Which are the top three (3) activities you would participate in at a Maricopa County park?	
Trail hiking	62.2%
Mountain biking	22.3%
Walking	21%
Kayaking/canoeing/paddleboarding	15.4%
Running/jogging	15%
Photography	12.3%
Park interpretive programs	12.3%
Watching wildlife/birding	11.2%
Biking	11%
R.V. camping	10.6%

AMENITIES
When visiting the parks, which amenities would you use the most? Please choose up to three (3).
Trails
Water access
Picnic ramadas
Nature centers
Campgrounds
Playgrounds
Bathrooms
Equestrian Area
Other comments

PERCENT
88.5%
38.6%
34.9%
30.6%
28.7%
15.7%
5%
1%
10.3%

PROGRAMS
What programs would you be most interested in? Please choose up to three (3).
Outdoor Adventure
Nature-based/educational
Moonlight hikes
Fitness related
Community special events

PERCENT
46.4%
44.5%
32.1%
31.3%
23.8%

PRIORITIZING IMPROVEMENTS ON TRAILS
Please rate the importance of each of the following when prioritizing improvements to trails on a scale of one (1) to five (5) (five being very important)
Maintaining trails
Adding new trail signs
Adding trail/information signage
Providing separate trails for hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians
Adding new hiking (specific trails/facilities and amenities)

RATING
5
4
3
2
1

**PRIORITIZING IMPROVEMENTS FOR AMENITIES**

Please rate the importance of each of the following when prioritizing improvements for amenities on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being very important). The top three items of importance:

General Park Maintenance (significantly higher than all other responses)
Adding restroom facilities and drinking water stations (tied)
Maintaining campgrounds

**RATING**

5
4
3

**PRIORITIZING ACTIONS TO IMPROVE THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE**

Please rate the importance of each of the following when prioritizing actions to improve the visitor experience on a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being very important):

Quality web-based park maps
Increasing access for low-income/underserved populations
Improving ADA accessibility

**RATING**

5
4
3

**How would you allocate \$100 to support the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department among the categories below (Figure 64)?**

As seen in the graphic, the public devoted the most considerable portion at \$32 towards maintaining the existing parks, with \$22 for acquiring and protecting new open space and \$21 for restoring or protecting river and wildlife corridors. It is significant to combine the last two responses, which are \$43 towards protecting elements of the natural environment outside of existing park boundaries.



Figure 64 – How would you allocate \$100 to support Maricopa County Parks?

Summarizing the public survey results, Figure 65 shows significant support from the public on how access to regional parks, natural areas, and trails is essential to their health and well-being (93.4 percent). It is interesting to note that what came in even higher was the consensus that wildlife corridors and open space are important to protect the health of the ecosystem now and in the future (95.5 percent). It is interesting to note that what came in even higher was the consensus that wildlife corridors and open space are important to protect the health of the ecosystem now and in the future (95.5 percent).

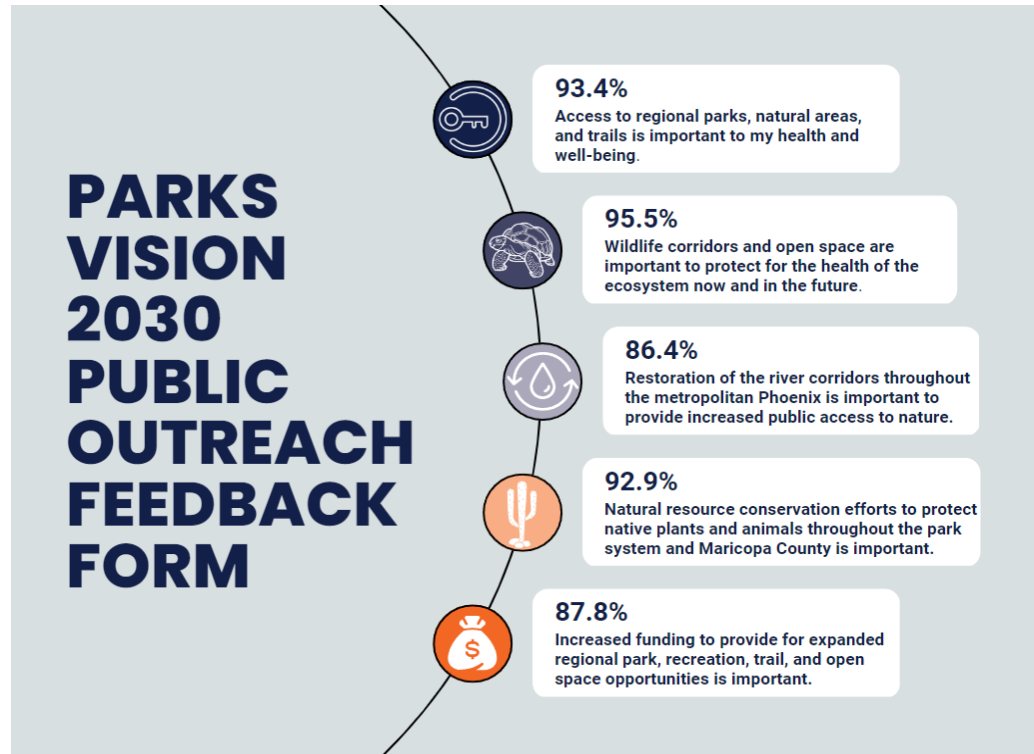


Figure 65 - Parks Vision 2030 Public Outreach Feedback Form Questions

There is also strong support for natural resource conservation efforts to protect native plants and animals. There is even strong support for restoring the river corridors throughout metropolitan Phoenix to increase public access to nature (86.4 percent). There was also strong support for increased funding to provide for expanded regional park, recreation, trail, and open space opportunities (87.8 percent)

In addition, four open-ended questions generated hundreds of responses. A summary of the comments is in Appendix D.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

- Respondents to the survey were primarily Maricopa County Residents, with over 90 percent indicating they are full-time residents and have lived in the valley for more than ten years.
- All age groups were close to being equally represented, especially those between 35-75 years old (80 percent of respondents), with a slight underrepresentation of the 25-35 age group (11.9 percent).
- The gender split was approximately 60 percent female and 40 percent male. Most respondents, 79 percent, identify themselves as white. Hispanic or Latino represent roughly 9.7 percent, and respondents preferring not to identify at 9.7 percent.
- The information in the bullet points above comes from the data in the tables provided on pages 79-80.

**DO YOU LIVE IN MARICOPA COUNTY?**

DO YOU LIVE IN MARICOPA COUNTY?	PERCENTAGE
Yes, full-time resident.	90.8%
Yes, part-time resident for four months or more.	4.9%
No, resident of another county in Arizona.	2.7%
No, resident of another state.	1.3%

**WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?**

WHAT IS YOUR GENDER?	PERCENTAGE
Female	56%
Male	40%
Prefer not to answer	3.7%
Other	0.3%

**WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RACE?**

WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR RACE?	PERCENTAGE
White / Caucasian	79%
Hispanic / Latino	9.7%
Prefer not to answer	9.5%
American Indian / Alaska Native	2%
Asian	1.8%
Other	1.3%
Black / African American	1.0%
Native Hawaiian / Other Pacific Islander	0.2%

**WHICH CATEGORY BEST DESCRIBES YOUR TOTAL ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAXES?**

WHICH CATEGORY BEST DESCRIBES YOUR TOTAL ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME BEFORE TAXES?	PERCENTAGE
Prefer not to answer	21.4%
Between \$100,000 and \$150,00	20.5%
Over \$150,000	19.1%
Between \$50,000 and \$74,000	12.7%
Between \$75,000 and \$99,999	12.0%
Between \$30,000 and \$49,999	9.0%
Between \$15,000 and \$29,999	3.4%
Under \$15,000	1.5%
Other	0.6%

**PLEASE PROVIDE THE LOCATION OF YOUR PRIMARY RESIDENCE. IF YOU ARE A PART-TIME RESIDENT, PLEASE USE YOUR ARIZONA INFORMATION.**

- The map below (Figure 66) illustrates the location of the survey respondents. Interesting that many of the respondents are in the West Valley, and the balance is equal throughout the valley, including respondents outside of the urban areas.

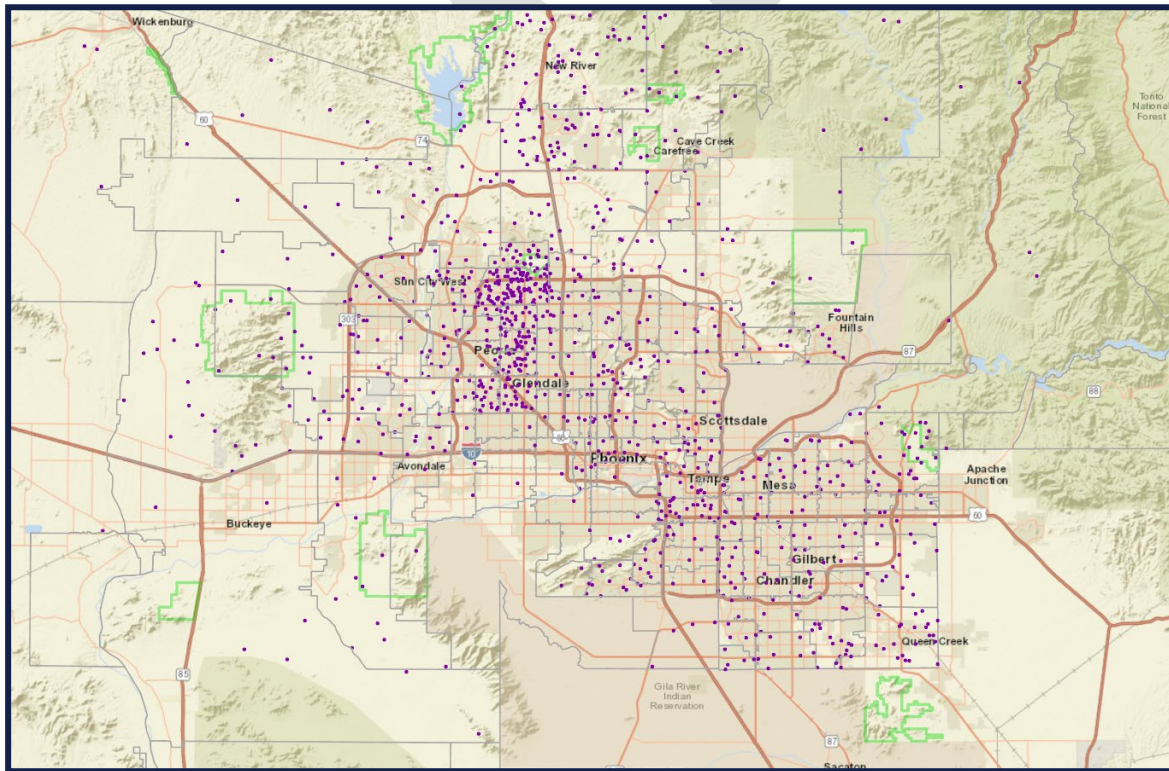


Figure 66 - Dot Density Map – Public Outreach Feedback Form Zip Codes

# SWOT ANALYSIS WORKSHOP

In December 2019, two Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) workshops were conducted. The workshops include two groups: the Executive Team; and the Operations Committee. The Executive Committee included approximately 20 representatives, including both inside and outside of the MCPRD. The Operations Team had more than 50 park staff members. The same agenda was used for both workshops, beginning with a presentation of the visitor surveys and the Countywide context maps. The Executive Team meeting also reviewed the results of the Operations Team Workshop.

**Operations Team:** The workshop was a two-part exercise: beginning with a facilitated SWOT analysis and then group presentations with discussions of their findings. Staff members were divided into East and West Districts and further divided based on the area of responsibility, including park supervisors, interpretive rangers, administrative staff, and maintenance. Each group presented the top five findings for each SWOT topic to the larger group.

**Executive Team:** The Executive Team followed a similar presentation and workshop. Due to the smaller group size, the Executive Committee group elected a scribe and a facilitator. Following the work session, each group reported the top five findings for each SWOT topic to the larger committee.

The two groups compiled a list of top strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to the System today and in the future. The responses and their representative comments by percent were recorded and presented for discussion (Figure 67).

From the group SWOT presentations and discussion, four focus areas evolved:

1. Regional impacts on quality of life and economy: Providing and maintaining quality outdoor places to attract visitors, retain knowledge-based employers and employees, and provide opportunities to expand tourism.
2. Preserving the regional, natural heritage: Visitors value our Sonoran Desert heritage and protect quality outdoor places for future enjoyment.

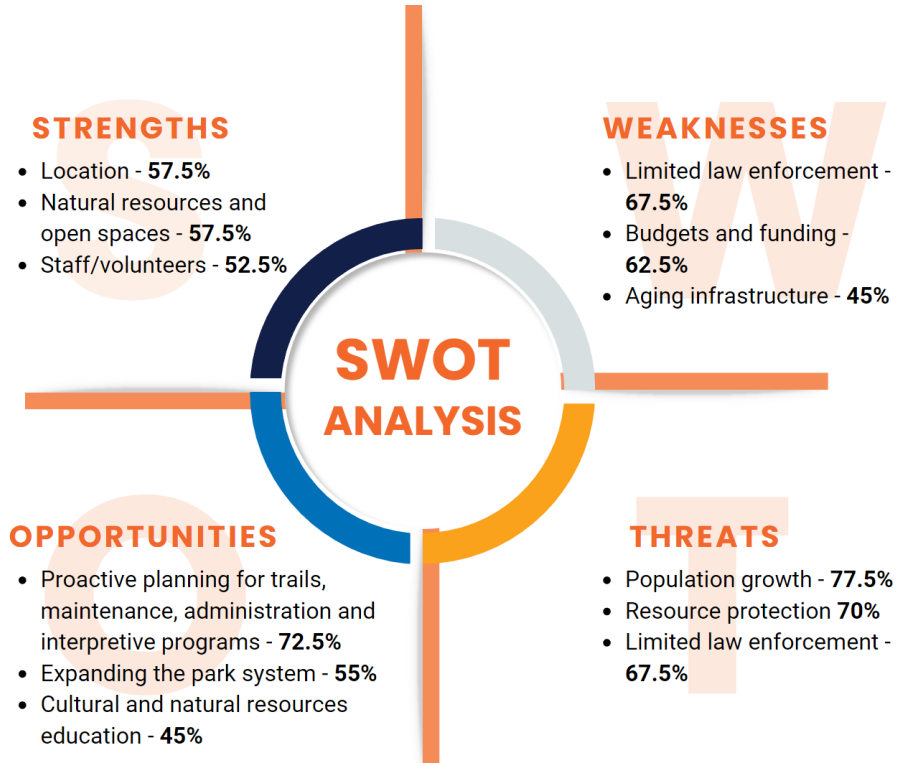


Figure 67 - SWOT Analysis

3. Exceptional visitor experiences: Quality outdoor places are critical in providing visitor experiences that energize, inspire, and restore visitors.
4. Sustainable resource management: Rapid growth poses a serious challenge to protecting, maintaining, and restoring quality outdoor places requiring diligence, leadership, and regional collaboration.

## STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

In January and February 2021, six region-wide virtual focus group meetings occurred, involving over 200 stakeholders and 61 organizations. Participants included park and recreation and planning professionals throughout Maricopa County, local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and academia. One hundred thirty-five stakeholders from 61 organizations participated. The meeting format included the history and purpose of the MCPRD PV 2030 and a presentation of the various discussion topics, including priorities, opportunities, and challenges of a regional park system. Through a facilitated workshop, participants provided feedback, discussed best practices, and shared the status of park planning and other active regional projects. Five major themes emerged from the focus group sessions:

1. Improve existing regional parks
2. Respond to population growth and increased visitation
3. Improve connectivity for people and wildlife
4. Address priority concerns and challenges
5. Improve communication, collaboration, and coordination

A subsequent virtual stakeholder meeting took place to provide stakeholders with a summary of the major themes and comments identified from the six focus group meetings. A feedback form was shared with participants to gather additional input on ranking goals and priorities.

To further understand the five major themes, the following describes each theme and the factors that helped inform them.

### IMPROVING EXISTING REGIONAL PARKS

Focus group discussions included improving existing regional parks to enhance the visitor experience. Improvements discussed included possible additional access points and enhancing park trail connections. Regional and local parks are experiencing high use and development pressures along their boundaries. Other controlled access point improvements may assist with overburdened local parks. Balancing the diversification of assets and recreational opportunities with capacity and visitation is necessary. Also, there must be a balance between maintenance and operations with wildlife and conservation efforts.

### RESPONDING TO POPULATION GROWTH AND INCREASED VISITATION

Parks throughout the U.S. experienced increased visitation in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The BLM and the USFS experienced increased use and pressures in response to increased population growth and visitation. Unsanctioned recreational activity is also growing, and organizations are working toward a proactive approach to managing activities such as OHV and target shooting in areas where

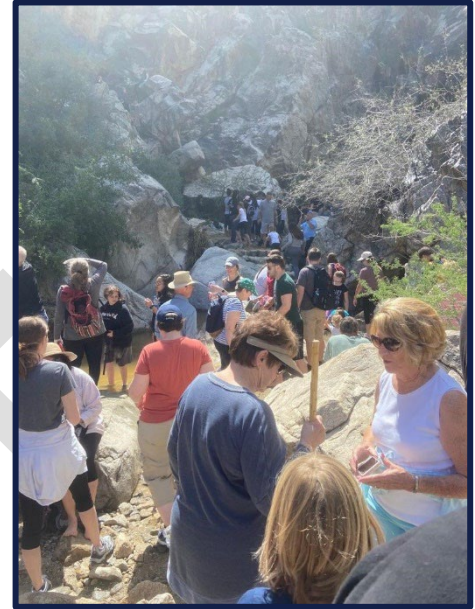


those activities are not allowed. Under the BLM multi-use mandate, recreational space planning and design would provide for various activities while responding to potential program conflicts.

In addition to increased park visitation, Arizona is experiencing accelerated population growth. To accommodate growth and visitation, the focus group participants discussed land acquisition opportunities in the valley's east and west regions that would allow for future expansion.

## **IMPROVING REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY FOR WILDLIFE AND PEOPLE**

Several areas identified locations for future regional recreational connectivity for people and wildlife. As the region increases in population and park use continues to rise, wildlife movement and isolation are of concern. A loss of genetic diversity of certain wildlife species, specifically large mammals that rely on migration, could occur due to isolation. There are also fragmented growth concerns as the number of developments increases through a leapfrog pattern further away from cities where cheaper land may be available. Occurring more rapidly after the COVID-19 pandemic as more people may have flexible work schedules and be able to work from home or only commute part-time.



*Park visitors flock to White Tank Mountain Regional Park.*

Understanding the impacts of climate change on wildlife habitats is essential to prioritize conservation efforts and sustain diversity, including wildlife corridor types and width. Consider the following:

- Incorporate Audubon Important Bird Areas into wildlife connectivity efforts.
- Corridors may serve as highways for animals to move from urban to natural settings.
- The Wildlife Corridor Best Practices Guide, developed by the City of Buckeye, can be used as a tool for developers to employ wildlife-friendly design principles.
- The Town of Queen Creek identified long-term goals incorporating connections and open space corridors to preserve greater ecological value and improve the wash system.
- Arizona Public Service (APS) electric transmission corridors may serve as important wildlife corridors through their management practices, including vegetation management and encouraging plants attractive to pollinators.
- The groups also discussed trails and the various projects communities are working on. Communities may begin to collaborate with other each other on how projects might connect for increased cohesion of trail systems within the region.
- There are also significant opportunities to connect communities with the MT to help improve regional connectivity.
- The City of Peoria is currently working on best practice guidelines for the MT, which other communities may use as a reference when developing policies in their community.

## ADDRESSING PRIORITY CONCERNS AND CHALLENGES

The focus groups identified several priority concerns and challenges related to parks and recreation. These include organizational resources such as training; escalating maintenance and operational costs; staff capacity; partnership development; and consistency with political direction as town and city councils change over time. Additionally, increased stress is on areas where the urban and rural areas meet, known as the urban-rural interface, both from a recreational use standpoint and increased development due to population growth.



*Focus group participating in planning efforts for the Vulture Mountains Recreation Area.*

With increased use, particularly during 2020, there is a concern about encroachment on wildlife habitats and loss of biodiversity in the parks. Cities and towns expressed that they may not own or have control over areas best suited for recreational corridors, such as along the river or utility corridors.

Consideration for environmental stewardship, public knowledge on conservation, and protecting the park and open space resources were also concerns, including maximizing high-quality, diverse public open spaces, including various user groups, and equitable access. Funding was a significant challenge, including budgetary matters and funding for acquisition and development.

## IMPROVING COMMUNICATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION

There is a need for improved communication, collaboration, and coordination among park agencies to address concerns and secure dedicated funding sources. One idea supported by the group is to develop a new regional park interagency cooperative group to pursue long-term funding and support for parks and recreation. With a focus on community health and well-being, the group recognized the next ten years as critical to identify multiple funding sources, which could include:

- Increase in general funds from Park and Recreation Bond
- Secure statewide major funding sources and new federal funding initiatives
- Implement Quality of Life tax initiative
- Sales tax
- Lobbying state and federal delegations for funding to prioritize the quality of life and natural resources
- Secure funding through philanthropy groups
- Increase in County General Fund support

## STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSION ON PARK SYSTEM MISSION

In addition to the theme discussion, stakeholders shared opinions on the immediate focus to serve County residents and visitors. Among the responses, stakeholders felt that the focus should be on the present and future of what citizens desire. Providing quality parks, trails, programs, services, and

experiences while maintaining and improving current assets and protecting valued places ahead of exponential growth. The groups also considered managing and expanding a system of public lands and regional trail system that preserve and maintain the unique Sonoran Desert heritage through developing partnerships to ensure a robust regional network of natural open spaces for future generations,

Looking forward to 50 years, the stakeholder group focused on ensuring a robust regional network of natural open spaces that preserve and maintain our unique Sonoran Desert heritage while continuing to manage existing future parklands.

## PARTNERSHIP RECOMMENDATIONS

Stakeholders identified working collaboratively through partnerships were essential to protecting open space. Partnership discussion from the stakeholder meetings identified areas of focus, including:

- **Wildlife Corridors:** Work collaboratively across jurisdictions and agencies to understand and identify land priorities, emphasizing protecting wildlife corridors and other areas of high importance.
- **State/Federal Partners:** Work with state and federal agencies on recreational and open space opportunities that benefit Arizona residents and visitors.
- **Funding Workgroup:** Develop a new regional park interagency cooperative group to pursue long-term funding and support for parks and recreation.
- **River Corridors:** Focus on a comprehensive strategy with partners to connect spaces and create substantial greenways along the river corridors to benefit residents and wildlife.
- **Local Partners:** Collaborate with various partners to develop connections between regional parks.

## ENGAGEMENT OF VISITORS

The success of the park system relies on visitors and their support of the System. The stakeholders address the importance of visitor engagement through:

- Valuing protecting wildlife and river corridors for improved quality of life.
- Encouraging visitors and citizens to connect to nature by utilizing the park and Maricopa Trail system to benefit their physical and mental health.
- Promoting the regional park and trail system as part of our community, cultivating pride in our public spaces.

The goals discussed at the stakeholder meetings that are most important for MCPRD are to:

- Establish dependable and dedicated funding for regional park improvements and open space initiatives.
- Identify future areas of high priority for expanding parks and open space that MCPRD would manage.
- Maintain and improve existing park facilities and infrastructure.
- Develop new parks consistent with the population growth of the County.
- Balance natural and cultural resource management with recreational opportunities.



## EXECUTIVE TEAM (STAFF) INPUT

The Executive Team was 27 department leaders across the County and other key stakeholders. The first Executive Team meeting was in late 2020, with follow-up meetings in April and December 2021. The sessions provided the Executive Team with an update on the project's progress and a review of themes collected from the stakeholder focus groups. The executive team provided feedback via a form to gather input, ranking goals, and priorities for MCRPD. Participants who could not attend had access to a video recording of the presentation and the feedback form. Executive team input included challenges, partnership goals, and visitor engagement goals.

Challenges included:

- Population growth and development impacts
- Collaborative partnerships to protect the County's open spaces
- Funding

## PARTNERSHIP GOALS THAT EMERGED FROM THE MEETING WERE:

- Wildlife Corridors: Work collaboratively across jurisdictions and agencies to understand and identify land priorities with an emphasis on protecting wildlife corridors and other areas of high importance
- State/Federal Partners: Work with state and federal agencies on recreational and open space opportunities that benefit Arizona residents and visitors
- Funding Workgroup: Develop a new regional park interagency cooperative group to pursue long-term funding and support for parks and recreation
- River Corridors: Focus on a comprehensive strategy with partners to connect spaces and create substantial greenways along the river corridors for the benefit of residents and wildlife
- Local Partners: Collaborate with various partners to develop connections between regional parks

Goals relating to engaging visitors, inspiring park advocates, parks departments, and other goals related to the Parks Vision 2030 process included:

- Elevated visitor experience
- Funding
- Expansion area prioritization

## FEEDBACK FORM RESULTS

Throughout the outreach and planning process, it was critical to receive input from stakeholders, including over 135 park and recreation and planning professionals from 61 organizations, including local governments, state and federal agencies, nonprofits, and academia across the County.

As a component of outreach efforts, staff, stakeholders, and the executive team provided feedback for questions related to the MCRPD mission and vision and prioritized goals and challenges heard from the focus group meetings. Below summarizes the form's results, including input from 18 executive team members, 55 stakeholders, and 40 staff members.

### MISSION STATEMENT: WHAT FIVE OPTIONS BEST FIT WHAT WE SHOULD FOCUS ON TODAY?

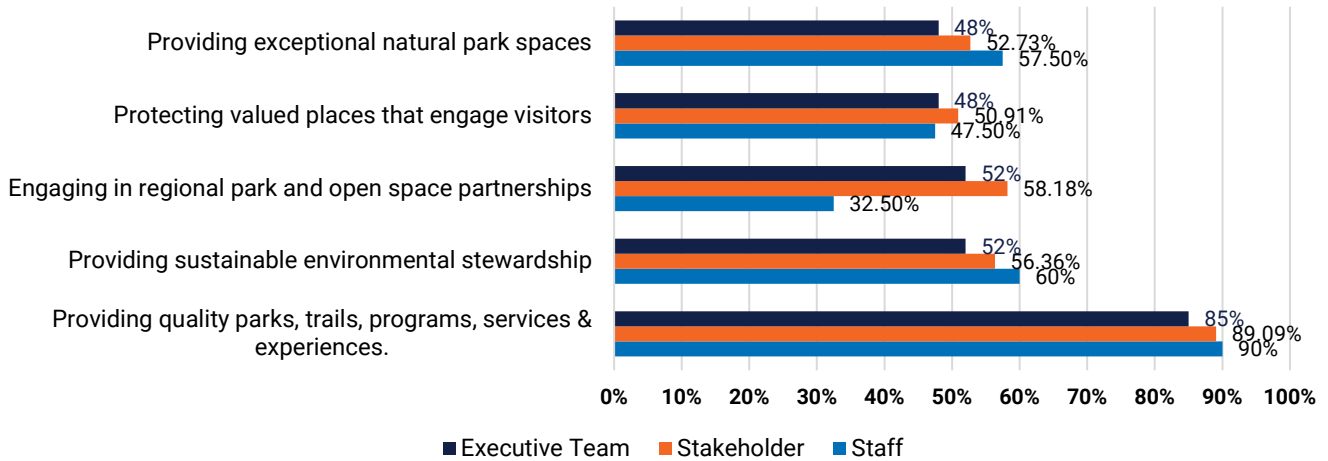


Figure 68 - What Five Options Best Fit What We Should Focus On Today?

## MISSION

When asked about the mission statement, the top five goals were similar among the three groups. However, staff rated "engaging in a regional park and open space partnership" significantly lower than other items compared to the stakeholder and the executive team, which ranked it much higher. The overall top five goals that the three groups selected were (Figure 68):

- Provide quality parks, trails, programs, services, and experiences
- Provide sustainable environmental stewardship
- Protect valued places that engage visitors
- Engage in regional park and open space partnerships
- Provide exceptional natural park spaces

## VISION

The feedback form also included a list of goals for MCPRD to focus on in the future. The three groups combined felt that the most crucial goal for

### VISION STATEMENT: WHAT FIVE OPTIONS BEST FIT WHAT WE SHOULD FOCUS ON IN THE FUTURE?

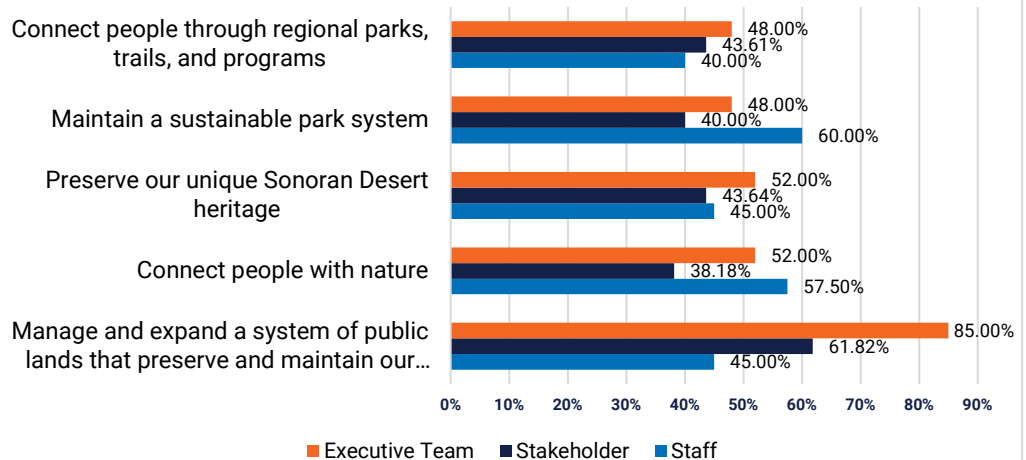


Figure 69 - Vision Statement: What Five Options Best Fit What We Should Focus On In The Future?

the future was to "maintain a sustainable park system"; however, each group varied when ranking the vision. For example, the stakeholder group felt that "managing and expanding a system of public lands that preserve and maintain our unique Sonoran Desert heritage" was the most important among the future goals. Staff ranked this as the fourth most important. Developing partnerships was ranked second among stakeholders but tenth among staff members (Figure 69).

## MAJOR THEMES

When asked to rank major focus group themes in order of importance, results among the three groups varied significantly. For example, staff ranked "trails in existing parks" among the top five, although overall, it did not rank high enough in the top five. Similarly, the executive team and stakeholders ranked "regional recreation connectivity" high. Still, staff did not rate this theme as high, resulting in an average that fell below the top five rankings. All groups agreed that "additional access points at the park" was the least important of the themes. On a scale of one (not important) to five (very important), overall results among the three groups combined are as follows (Figure 70):

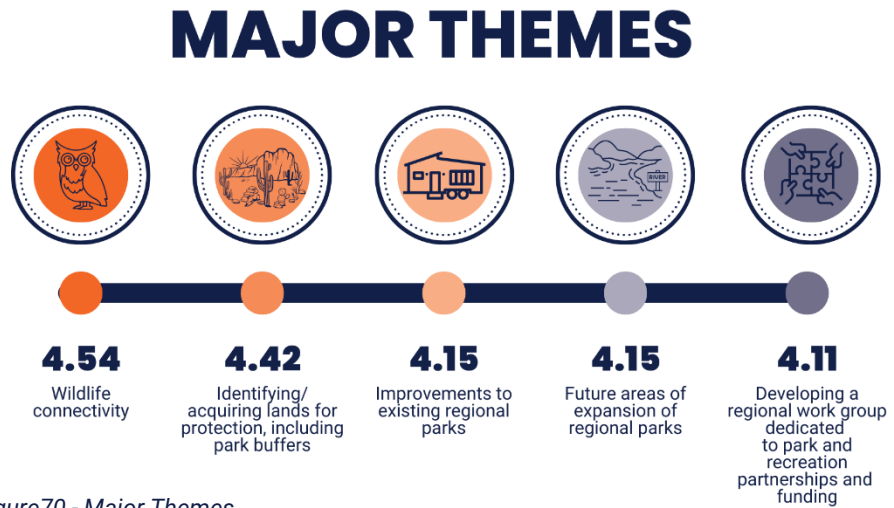


Figure 70 - Major Themes

- Wildlife Connectivity (4.54)
- Identifying/Acquiring Lands for Protection, including park buffers (4.42)
- Improvements to Existing Regional Parks (4.15)
- Future Areas of Expansion of Regional Parks (4.15)
- Developing a regional work group dedicated to park and recreation partnerships and funding (4.11)

## MOST IMPORTANT CHALLENGES

The groups ranked the most critical challenges to focus on. The top five across all the groups (Figure 70):

- Impacts of population growth and development (64.6%)
- Working collaboratively through partnerships to protect open space in Maricopa County (56.6 percent)
- Funding (53.1 percent)
- Wildlife isolation, loss of diversity and habitat (42.5 percent)
- Overuse of resources (27.4 percent)

## RANKING PARTNERSHIP GOALS

The groups generally agreed on the top three partnership goals, ranking them similarly. The only exception was the stakeholder's third selection: "Local Partners: Collaborate with various partners to develop connections between regional parks." The top three partnership goals among all groups are as follows:

- **Wildlife Corridors:** Work collaboratively across jurisdictions and agencies to understand and identify land priorities, emphasizing protecting wildlife corridors and other areas of high importance.
- **State/Federal Partners:** Work with state and federal agencies on recreational and open space opportunities that benefit Arizona residents and visitors.
- **River Corridors:** Focus on a comprehensive strategy with partners to connect spaces and create substantial greenways along the river corridors to benefit residents and wildlife.

## RANKING GOALS OF THE PARKS DEPARTMENT

When ranking goals most important for MCPRD, there were variations between the three groups. For example, "Identifying future areas of high priority for the expansion of regional parks and open space that MCPRD would manage" ranked as the top goal cumulatively among the three groups.

However, it was ranked first by the executive team, second by the stakeholder group, and third by the staff group. Vast differences were also present in the second goal, "Establish dependable and dedicated funding for regional park improvements and open space initiatives" The Executive team ranked this goal as second, the stakeholder group as first, and the staff group as sixth. Results among the

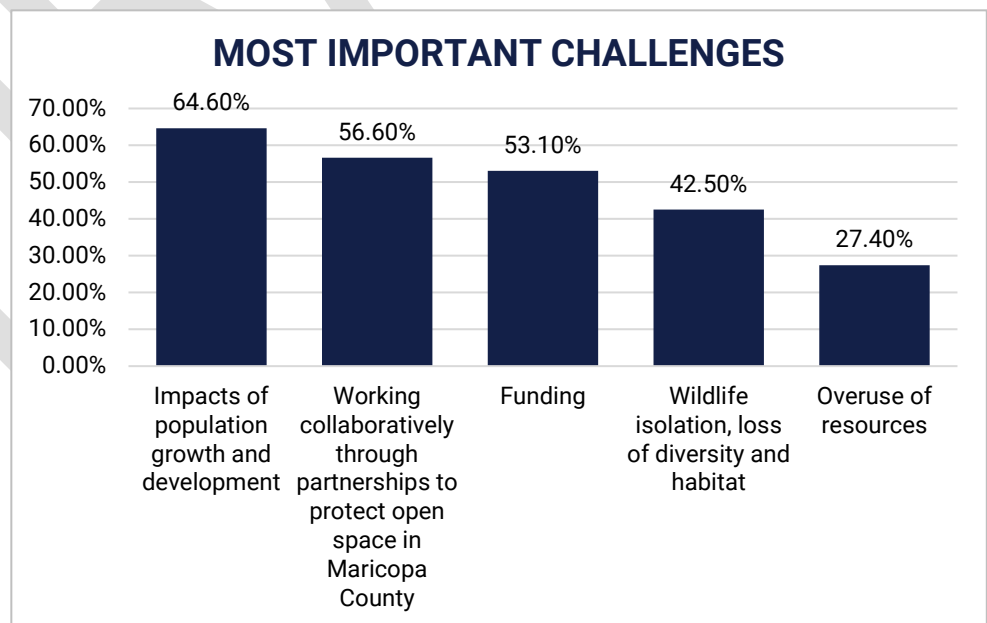


Figure 71- Most Important Challenges

groups altogether are as follows:

- Identify future areas of high priority for expanding regional parks and open space that MCPRD would manage.
- Establish dependable and dedicated funding for regional park improvements and open space initiatives.
- Maintain and improve existing park facilities and infrastructure.
- Balance natural and cultural resource management with recreational opportunities.
- Develop new regional parks consistent with the growth of the population of Maricopa County.

The multiple queries encouraged participants to identify the issues, opportunities, and challenges now and in the future. Engaging community leaders through individual or small group discussions or focus group settings ensures that the PV 2030 creates a foundation for a community-driven, collaborative process that identifies high-priority consensus-based recommendations for the future.

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*Cholla basking in the sun at White Tank Mountain Regional Park*

## CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND IMPLEMENTATION

### INTRODUCTION

The most pressing parks and open spaces issue facing Maricopa County and the central region of Arizona is exponential population growth. Growth is a perceived benefit to the region's economic vitality and a concern for the people who live here, as it can strain resources such as open spaces, wildlife, and water supplies. Conversely, it can also lead to overcrowding of park and trail resources as they become "loved to death." According to numerous statewide public opinion polls, MCPRD park visitor surveys, community park and recreation leaders, and staff input, the prolonged and continued population expansion will increase pressure on using existing parks.

In the short-term, new and expanded facilities in existing parks are critical. However, over the long-term, the current and projected growth will heighten the need to identify future parklands, trails, and open spaces, to meet the outdoor recreation needs for the future. This necessitates a coordinated effort to protect iconic landscapes and unique places, preserving our rich natural and cultural heritage.

### IDENTIFYING WHAT PRIORITIES ARE MOST IMPORTANT

From the public and stakeholder outreach effort, two overarching truths emerged:

1. The public expects **high-quality natural resources, regional open spaces, wildlife habitats, trails, and regional parks**. Recent surveys ranked reinvesting in our current regional parks as the top priority.
2. Growth is causing **loss of open spaces, fragmented ecosystems, diminished wildlife richness, and placing undue demand on existing natural and outdoor recreation systems at an alarming rate**. Survey input from multiple sources ranks protecting significant, threatened open space and wildlife and river corridors just as, if not more important than, reinvesting in our current park system\*.

\*The public outreach feedback survey indicated when given \$100 to support the parks system, the public spent \$34 of the budget on maintenance. Protecting new open space was \$22, and restoring/protecting river and wildlife corridors was \$21, for a combined total of \$43.

## CONTINUING THE LEGACY

A significant theme within the PV 2030 is the continuation of the 1965 Plan. The 1965 Plan recommended acquiring eight new Regional Parks, taking a fledgling system from several hundred acres to tens of thousands over a relatively short time. The BOS and the Commission of Maricopa County, through Resolution, were charged with the perpetuation, protection, development, and operation of a System for the benefit and use of all citizens, which through their ongoing support, continues this legacy today. The System now contains 14 regional parks and conservation areas. Over the last ten years, the County has added two new properties and invested heavily in renovating and developing new facilities.



1965 Master Plan Parks and Recreation Commissioners

This forward-thinking was displayed again in 2003 with the adoption of the Maricopa County Regional Trail System Plan (MCRTSP). Over 15 years, the effort culminated in achieving a major vision "to connect the majestic open spaces of Maricopa County Regional Parks with a non-motorized trail

system." The MT is a loop of more than 300 miles that links communities with nature.

With the same forwarding-looking urgency to meet the demands of an ever-growing population and the need to preserve natural open space, the following Vision Statement outlines the challenges to meet the need for tomorrow's regional park system:

### Maricopa County Park System Plan Vision Statement

*Dedicated to preserving a connected system of exceptional open spaces for current and future generations.*

To meet this challenge, Chapter Five outlines the findings and recommendations based on the research conducted and described in the previous chapters. Finally, it synthesizes recommendations into implementable goals, associated objectives, and supporting strategies. The strategies listed are not a complete blueprint but highlight initial steps to move an objective toward a process or measure, resulting in a tangible outcome. As strategies evolve, tracking progress should include implementation timelines.

PV 2030 aims to meet the current population's needs while improving new opportunities for future generations.

# PARKS VISION 2030 – MAJOR PRIORITIES

The findings closely mirror the plan elements outlined in Chapter One, which provided the framework for this planning process. Therefore, all the PV 2030 elements are identified as priorities, except for "Exceptional Visitor Experience," which runs throughout.

## 1. THE ROLE OF PARKS AND OPEN SPACE IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



The health and wellness benefits of spending time outdoors are significant for physical and mental well-being. As growth continues, regional parks and outdoor programs must grow with the population to ensure a healthy, vibrant, and attractive region.

### **Findings:**

Over the past five years, the demand for regional parks, natural open spaces, and trails has steadily increased, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The increase reflects the need for people to connect with nature for physical and mental health reasons. In addition, visitor survey data indicated that people visited for scenic beauty, passive recreation, and fitness opportunities. M CPRD can help provide essential elements of a healthy environment and society by providing regional parks, trails, and open spaces supporting mental health, physical fitness, relaxation, and education.

### **Recommendations:**

The need to holistically integrate community health presents a unique opportunity beyond typical park planning. There is an opportunity to engage with public health, transportation, and environmental agencies to provide collaborative, inclusive, and cost-effective services. Recommendations include:

- **Expand opportunities for an active, health-conscious population.** Trends in mountain biking, competitive courses, fitness hiking, and trail running are booming, partly due to the COVID pandemic, and indicate a need for additional amenities regional parks can provide. M CPRD has larger landscapes to expand opportunities providing challenging physical environments for runners, distance hikers, equestrians, and mountain bikers. New park master plans should consider developing challenging mountain bike courses or trails that provide endurance opportunities. Additional outdoor fitness equipment or adventure courses would also expand opportunities for improved health.
- **Engage with non-profit and business organizations that recognize the importance of natural open space in promoting wellness.** The Arizona Alliance for Livable Communities, CFA, outdoor retailers, and others could promote the System as part of their fitness and healthy communities initiatives. Furthering these alliances through research, marketing, and aligning their mission and programs will continue to promote the importance of regional parks and trail systems.
- **Continue to connect people to nature and protect the Sonoran Desert.** Through careful and thoughtful management, education, marketing, and planning, the System will continue demonstrating its value of preserving high-quality natural lands for wellness benefits.



- **Provide mental health benefits through access to nature.** Spending time in natural settings helps individuals fight against mental health issues. An overwhelming body of evidence demonstrates that separation from nature is detrimental to both physical and mental health. Enlist support from the healthcare industry to advocate for additional close-to-home natural spaces and develop programs to provide greater access in urban areas.
- **Create a comprehensive healthy community initiative within public agencies.** Work with other County Departments on initiatives to help address health equity and resiliency.
- **Develop strategies with cities and towns to provide seamless access to nature for underserved and low-income populations.** Improving equitable access is vital in all future planning efforts. For example, a new approach might be the development of "closer-to-home" natural settings using river corridors and providing programs in partnership with community service organizations.
- **The MT can provide a fitness amenity to residents throughout the County.** Promoting and expanding the MT as a fitness opportunity may bring up the visibility of the trail system as a regional amenity with regional opportunities.

**Implementation:**

**Goal 1.1: Promote the System as a place where visitors experience the natural environment.**

**Objective 1.1.1: Create a branding and awareness campaign promoting the benefits of parks**

MCPRD must continue to promote the full range of community benefits that the current and future regional parks, trails, and open spaces can offer. This branding effort should promote economic, family, physical fitness/wellness, community, and environmental benefits.

**Strategies:**

- The first step in branding should include changing the name of the Parks and Recreation Department to reflect better the nature-based experiences offered versus a city parks and recreation department
- Develop marketing strategies and campaigns with the County Office of Communication, Arizona Office of Tourism (AOT), local chambers of commerce, recreation industry, resorts and lodging, current and future park concessionaires, and the healthcare industry
- Engage and promote the System and the MT through the Arizona Alliance for Livable Community and the CFA

**Objective 1.1.2: Enlist the recreation and tourism industry to strengthen opportunities**

The recreation industry is one of Arizona's largest private-sector economic engines. Rural and suburban communities receive significant financial benefits from regional parks, open spaces, and trails. Increased and diversified outdoor opportunities benefit the quality of life for residents, enhance local economies and help the recreation industry grow through sales of goods and services. The County should develop an Outdoor Recreation Industry Forum to explore opportunities to advance common goals.

**Strategies:**

- MCPRD, BLM, and TNF, in conjunction with the North Valley Outdoor Network (NVON), should host an annual meeting to determine the interest in formalizing a Recreation Industry partnership program to be led by the industry members
- Work with the outdoor industry retailer(s), such as REI, Camping World, and Ride Now, to develop a complete list of potential industry partners, including retailers, wholesalers, concessionaires, travel and tourism providers, relevant non-profits, chambers of commerce, and government entities
- Hold a day-long meeting to understand the recreation economy better, invite players in the industry, recreation providers, and their shared interests
- Develop a working committee
- Develop a plan of work that may include future co-sponsored development projects, advocacy initiatives, marketing opportunities, and other topics
- Include various recreational opportunities compatible with the current and future activities, including passive recreation, OHV use, and controlled shooting ranges



**Goal 1.2: Expand natural open space, parks, and trail opportunities for underserved communities.**

**Objective 1.2.1: Create a comprehensive healthy communities initiative**

MCPRD will organize and conduct a meeting with Maricopa County's Public Health Department, Arizona Department of Environmental Quality, Maricopa County Department of Environmental Services, and non-profits (Arizona Alliance for Livable Communities and the Center for the Future of Arizona) to discuss a more robust Healthy Communities initiative that incorporates natural open space and trails as a vital component of a holistic approach. This initial meeting aims to examine how each organization promotes physical health, mental health, and well-being and recognize areas where efforts overlap or where implementation through a multi-agency or multi-organization approach would create economies of scale and greater effectiveness.

**Strategies:** Following this initial meeting, a *Recommendations Strategy* outlining the issues, overlapping efforts, and how the participating organizations could cooperate in meeting their actions, as well as identifying areas where their collective efforts could be more effective. The recommendation should include the following:

- Individual agency responsibilities and efforts to address physical and mental health
- Identify target populations
- Identify possible overlaps and areas of cooperation
- Recommended actions for agency cooperation
- Other agency or non-profit involvement not at the initial meeting
- Identify initiative leadership
- Timeframe for follow-up meetings
- Cost
- Action items

**Objective 1.2.2: Bring nature to underserved communities**

Recognize that many of the County's urban neighborhoods have limited or no access to nature, which may impact their community health and well-being. Establishing open spaces and parks within existing neighborhoods can be challenging. It will require leadership by cities, agencies, and possibly private entities to identify opportunities. River corridors have been identified as possible areas to restore and make available as public open spaces.

In addition to river corridors, other public lands may be available to introduce natural places. Existing parks represent the best opportunity to introduce natural landscapes. In contrast, formalized landscapes may present an opportunity to introduce natural landscapes as part of the park programming. Excess city or county land and decommissioned sand and gravel operations hold significant potential for partnership restoration that could create pocket natural areas close to urban communities along the rivers.

**Strategies:** Develop a strategy or plan for implementation, which could include:

- List possible public land types suitable for renovation and revitalization as natural areas
- Identify neighborhoods or areas that are underserved
- Review city and town open space and trail plans for alignments and gaps
- Identify pilot projects by type and level of need
- Identify lead organizations such as cities and towns in incorporated areas or other partners in unincorporated areas
- Develop a strategy for the implementation of a Demonstration Pilot Project
- Develop cost, funding sources, and methods for implementation
- Implement one project
- Document process, challenges, and successes
- Work with the Arizona Mining Association (AMA) to identify restoration partners and other related opportunities

**Objective 1.2.3: Bringing underserved communities to nature**

Realizing that land resources may not be available, there may be an opportunity to introduce nature by taking populations to nature. One possible avenue could include a "Nature Outreach" program as a stepped introduction to nature. For example, the program could begin by providing transportation to visit a nature center and learn about the desert environment, followed by a short hike. A follow-up visit could include a hike with an interpretive ranger and a possible supervised overnight camp. Ultimately, the program could evolve into a weekend or a week-long camp.

**Strategies:** Working with organizations identified in Objective 1.2.1. above, develop a "Nature Outreach" program with a detailed work plan including regional park programs, staff, materials, and transportation. The concept is transitioning urban dwellers from a city park through a step process into more natural parks or areas. For example, the Nature Outreach could include:

- Introduction to regional park amenities and programs
- Nature walks with Interpretive Ranger
- Overnight camp
- Weekend and week-long camps
- Statement of benefits and need

- Identify possible partners (i.e., Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, etc.)
- Identify possible funding sources
- Develop a youth pass for fourth-grade students that includes park access with a stipulation of giving back to the land (volunteering)
- Partnerships to fund/provide reduced or free entrance to visitors based on income level

**Goal 1.3: Develop parks, amenities, and programs that consciously address improved physical fitness and mental health through planning, design, and development.**

**Objective 1.3.1: Plan for new fitness trends and increase in park use**

As the ever-increasing population becomes closer to regional park boundaries, frequency and access by adjacent residents will be a growing trend, similar to city preserves. In addition, this increasing trend for outdoor physical fitness opportunities, heightened during the COVID pandemic, will require new or expanded fitness trails and facilities.

**Strategies:** This increased interest in fitness may require improvements to existing facilities or provide for fitness trails by:

- Review and update the MCPRD Trail Management Manual:
  - Include standards for hardening some primary trail surfaces designed for increased use/carrying capacity
  - Review the need for trails, including competitive tracks, to be single-use trails during specific periods
  - Assess the viability of "peak" trails or similar types of high-endurance trails
  - Define carrying capacity by trail types and design trail heads to accommodate for capacity, i.e., parking
  - Include design and communication recommendations for dispersing use when appropriate
  - Incorporate other identified trends
- Designing select trails for fitness with a focus on varying degrees of difficulty
- Incorporate fitness amenities into park master plans where appropriate
- Revise, formalize, and standardize the MCPRD's education, interpretive, and recreation programs to include more fitness and wellness programs (both formal and informal)
- Design fitness-specific opportunities, events, and programs for the MT

**2. THE NEED AND RESPONSIBILITY TO REINVEST, PROTECT, AND CONTINUE TO IMPROVE OUR EXISTING PARK SYSTEM**



Increased visitation and underdevelopment of planned park facilities may damage the System's natural resources in and around existing parks. Moreover, it would diminish the visitor experience and erode support for the System. On the other hand, build-out and improvements of existing parks, based on the PMPs, will provide immediate capacity relief for pent-up demands. In addition, timely renovation of existing facilities will provide more efficiency in maintenance.



### **Findings:**

The quickest and least costly way to increase regional park capacity for the growing County is to renovate, upgrade, build-out, and maintain the existing System properties. Therefore, a top priority is to continue investment in park development and programming.

As the parks become more accessible, development and management must balance park user capacity with protecting wildlife biodiversity and conservation efforts.

In addition, new and renovated park facilities enhance the perceived value from a transactional perspective. MCPRD relies on fees-for-service; thus, quality facilities and new amenities positively influence visitor acceptance of fees and provide continued support for the system.

As part of the ongoing improvement effort, each park must have an individual PMP that guides appropriate planning and development. The PMPs are used extensively in developing CIPs and forming an annual project budget request for new development and major maintenance of aging facilities and infrastructure.

### **Recommendations:**

- MCPRD updated several PMPs, including three recent ones. However, several are significantly outdated, requiring major updates. The goal is to update obsolete PMPs over the next three years. In addition, amend recent PMPs to conform with the latest trends and growth projections. In developing the updates, MCPRD shall consider the following elements:
  - **Develop standards and guidelines.** Planning standards and guidelines will streamline the planning process and ensure consistency. They also assist in prioritizing CIPs across the system. Finally, PMP amendments are warranted for specific elements as new development occurs and trends emerge.
  - **Consider emerging trends.** Often, visitor surveys illustrate the immediate need for improvements but may not identify emerging trends. Examples are the increased use of non-motorized watercraft or how electric bikes have arrived on the scene. Also, identifying these trends may attract new concessionaires or encourage greater investment by existing concessionaires to promote the use of their services.
  - **Address unauthorized access as development approaches the parks.** As the development grows, the borders of the parks are more accessible to unauthorized access, and these issues will become a more significant challenge. In addition, trailblazing damage can cause wildlife and/or cultural site disturbances presenting a challenge to manage and maintain a quality environment. Partnerships may be necessary to control and enforce access through no-trespassing boundaries or as a cooperative agreement for new trailheads or access. This cooperation could include improved connections from city-controlled open spaces and trails to promote buffers along the County System boundaries.
  - **Respond to current and future park encroachment and connectivity.** Guidelines will address the importance of buffers from urban encroachment. Providing for the expressed demand for escape, solitude, and a feeling of remoteness will require planning, design, acquisition, and development that effectively transitions from the developed boundary to the natural



setting. Additionally, the guidelines need to keep parks connected for trails and biological diversity.

- **Update the Maricopa County Regional Trail System Plan (MCRTSP).** The MCPRD completed the MCRTSP in 2002. Phase One of the plan was a trail linking the County's System, known as the MT. The 315-mile loop was completed in 2018. Like many of the PMPs, the MCRTSP is outdated and should be updated with regional input to offer new recreational and multimodal transportation opportunities.
- **Provide additional opportunities for Concessionaires.** Concessionaires are critical in providing services for visitors and revenue for operations. As PMPs are updated, the planning process should capitalize on opportunities to expand the role of concessionaires in providing and maintaining facilities and opportunities.
- **Determine appropriate visitor capacity strategies.** Visitor capacity is the maximum allowable use an area can accommodate while maintaining the desired resource conditions. Use management and development strategies have been developed to increase capacity in specific locations while protecting resources and visitor experiences. For example, site hardening is a technique that works well in popular high-traffic areas. Essentially, there is a suite of options designed to assist in managing the ability of an area to accommodate visitor capacity. Other strategies include dispersing use, modifying the type of use, or changing visitor behavior. Guidelines available under Visitor Capacity Guidebook Managing the Amounts and Types of Visitor Use to Achieve Desired Conditions Edition One | February 2019.<sup>1</sup>
- **Execute the updated PMP.** MCPRD must implement the new PMPs timely to meet current demand. Accordingly, developing a financial plan to implement these improvements within the CIP should be considered a high priority.
- **Identify and budget to improve existing facilities and infrastructure.** Modernized facilities and infrastructure are crucial to the visitor experience and decrease the associated costs of regular park maintenance. As facilities and infrastructure are built or renovated, analyze opportunities to incorporate new technology to ensure the highest maintenance efficiency and positive visitor experience. Determine life-cycle replacement and build into future budget scenarios.
- **Encourage sustainable development.** Use low-impact development and green infrastructure, such as wind and solar power, and educate others on sustainability and resource protection when possible. For example, reduce visual impacts on the landscape by using low-reflectivity items and colors that blend into the landscape and are not high-contrast. In addition, encourage multimodal transportation options in the parks to reduce traffic congestion and emissions.
- **Develop comprehensive MCPRD management and park operation plans.** Establishing MCPRD management standards based on research and best practices such as Natural Resources, Visitor Capacity/Management, Fire, and Cultural plans ensures that the system effectively addresses visitor satisfaction while consistently protecting park resources.

Furthermore, with the completion of the PMPs, establishing effective operation plans enable the parks to effectively manage the daily operations, optimize staffing, and identify any issues or gaps to address in planning efforts.

- **Enhance public safety and law enforcement efforts.** As parks become more crowded, user conflicts, resource damage, and other illegal activities increase. Therefore, additional law

<sup>1</sup> Interagency Visitor Use Management Council (IVUMC). (2019). *Visitor Capacity Guidebook: Managing the Amounts and Types of Visitor Use to Achieve Desired Conditions*. Lakewood, CO. Retrieved from <https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/VUM/Framework>

enforcement and rule education are needed and will become increasingly important. Work with Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO) to develop law enforcement-level standards based on visitation numbers, resource sensitivity, and other pertinent metrics. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is one approach to reducing crime through environmental and design techniques. In addition, there will be a need to expand law enforcement service levels as new facilities or visitation increases. For example, a volunteer park patrol program provided through a cooperative venture between MSCO and MCPRD may help supplement certified law enforcement.

### **Implementation:**

#### **Goal 2.1: Update park master plans to meet current needs.**

##### **Objective 2.1.1: Update all PMPs**

The PMPs developed for each park identify physical improvements and programmatic needs to ensure the parks provide meaningful visitor experiences and the required revenue to sustain park operations and programming. One main focus area is updating all PMPs over the next two to three years.

**Strategies:** This significant undertaking will align parks to form a systematic approach and allow individual character at each site. It should also help in identifying gaps in regional services.

- During FY24, MCPRD will develop a scope of work for a contractor to assist with updating and amending all plans
- Evaluate the current system through a SWOT analysis, including park and trail asset biological health, cultural protection, scenic quality, and recreation potential
- Develop a streamlined, standardized process and a template for all current and future PMPs, including innovative methods for gathering public input, developing sustainable partnerships, and providing clear development objectives and costs

##### **Objective 2.1.2: Meet emerging trends in planning and design**

In conjunction with the standard practices in updating the plans, the PMPs will also consider the Findings, Recommendations, and Implementations covered in this chapter.

**Strategies:** Evaluate the existing resources, facilities, and programming against emerging trends and benchmarks for gaps in service and new opportunities. These may include:

- New and expanded recreation opportunities and facilities
- Controlled and managed trail access at remote/neighborhood locations – Review Access Matrix and update as needed
- Opportunities for new concessionaires and expanded revenue sources
- Partnership opportunities with cities for park activities

##### **Objective 2.1.3: Actively plan for encroachment from the development**

As development expands and becomes immediately adjacent to park boundaries, buffers around the parks and managing unauthorized access will become increasingly necessary. As part of the PMP updates, identify opportunities and challenges to provide additional controlled access points while protecting the natural park resources.

**Strategies:** Identify current and future conflicts with development encroachment for each PMP, including:

- Determine areas of unauthorized park entry
- Identify required lands for buffers and corridor protection around existing parks, including within and adjacent to park boundaries
- Revise/update the Access Policy and Selection Matrix to include current conditions and issues identified in the plan
- Add remote/secondary trail access outside the park's primary entry
- Access agreements with city, County, and state agencies
- Access agreement with private development
- All new construction should include, where feasible, low-impact design, night sky consideration, green infrastructure, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) principles, and mechanization/automation for the greatest staff efficiency possible

**Objective 2.1.4: Evaluate and plan to manage visitor capacity**

As visitor use increases in popular areas within a park, determine appropriate visitor capacity strategies for each area to accommodate use responsibly.

**Strategies:** Manage locations where carrying capacity is or will not be in alignment with resource protection or visitor experience standards

- Identify and prioritize degraded and deteriorating facilities due to use
- Identify trails and open space areas where overuse is currently or may become a problem
- Develop a strategy to determine and adhere to the carrying capacity
- Implement corrective measures to include site hardening, dispersing, etc.
- Identify measures to restore damaged environments, including closures of facilities or trails, including limits of acceptable change measures identifying impacted areas
- Develop measures for ongoing evaluation and include them in individual PMP updates

**GOAL 2.2: Continue developing, maintaining, and renovating park infrastructure and facilities.**

**Objective 2.2.1: Develop and implement a revised CIP for each park**

A CIP will include budget line items to renovate and replace existing facilities and infrastructure. New parks, facilities, and infrastructure line items will appear under a separate budget sheet.

**Strategies:** Establishing a realistic improvement budget is critical in maintaining park assets, programming, and staffing. Budgeting will identify the following:

- All existing infrastructure and amenities within each park and document development dates in a database
- Accurate life-cycle costs to maintain and replace critical infrastructure (i.e., restrooms, water/wastewater, electrical, etc.)
- Improvements to meet increased visitor use and emerging activities
- Budget lines specifically for conservation and preservation projects to maintain or restore natural resources
- Land acquisition cost estimates for all buffers and park expansions
- All planning, design, resource assessment, and permitting cost estimates

- Level of service and cost of service standards development, identify and budget staffing and volunteer needs for all new development
- Additional cooperative planning opportunities with MCDOT for park roads, circulation, emergency access, and bike lanes
- Identify capital improvements priorities, potential revenue sources, and timeframe

### **GOAL 2.3: Promote and expand the regional trails as a nature-based recreation opportunity and an alternative regional transportation system.**

#### **Objective 2.3.1: Continue to enhance and expand the Maricopa Regional Trail System Plan (MRTSP)**

Completing the MRTSP in 2002 led to a new way of envisioning trails on a regional scale. Therefore, MCPRD, in partnership with MCDOT and MAG, should develop a new plan for the future MT and Pathways 2.0.

##### **Strategies:**

- Develop a partnership with MCDOT and MAG to assist in leading this effort
- Form a planning team
- Develop planning resource needs and collaborative funding sources
- Assess MT and multimodal pathways' existing conditions and deficiencies to include needed reroutes, pinch points and buffers required and necessary expansion
- Develop a Plan (MT and Pathways 2.0) for a future regional system of trails and pathways that meet the recreation and non-motorized transportation needs
- Ensure connectivity to MAG's ATP and the public transit facilities
- Develop a standardized maintenance program for the MT
- Utilize various methods such as the BLM's R&PP to acquire land to develop bikeways along existing transportation routes or other corridors and partner with MCDOT and MAG

### **GOAL 2.4: Refine and standardize park operations and management using best practices and models from federal, state, county, and city agencies and academia.**

#### **Objective 2.4.1: Develop innovative department management and park operation plans**

In an effort for MCPRD to provide overarching guidance, develop multiple levels of plans such as natural resource, cultural, souvenir, development, capital improvement, marketing, etc.

Each park's operation plan provides direction and guidance on daily and annual management for facility maintenance, resource preservation, visitor use management, development, and boundary management. In addition, the operation plans may include innovative programming; law enforcement with associated staffing and volunteers; operational policies and procedures; resource stewardship strategies; business and marketing strategies; and an implementation component.

##### **Strategies:**

- Review existing management plan efforts and documents
- Identify necessary MCPRD management efforts
- Develop a strategy to complete department management plans

- At the park level, incorporate a level of service, cost of service, visitor use management, recreation opportunity spectrum, limits of acceptable change, and other relevant management practices and metrics
- Research similar types of organizational management plans and benchmark best practices to include staffing practices to attract and retain quality staff
- Develop a standard template and format with guidelines for completing each element
- Complete each operation plan in coordination with the PMP development and completion
- Review and update the park law and rule enforcement model with the MCSO and develop a Law Enforcement Ambassador program to assist with rule and law education and enforcement
- Explore contract maintenance opportunities or shared staffing with other County departments

**GOAL 2.5: Attract and retain quality staff to ensure a high level of park programming, preservation, and maintenance.**

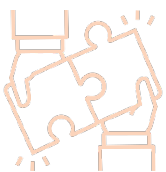
**Objective 2.5.1: Promote competitive salaries and advancement opportunities to attract and retain quality staff.**

High-qualified and engaged staff are the backbone of well-maintained and effectively programmed parks. Staff who invest in the mission expand the useful life of existing facilities and provide quality customer service. Competitive salaries and advancement opportunities are significant components of employee satisfaction. Staff with high satisfaction and engagement will accelerate the fulfillment of all priorities and goals.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a plan to ensure employees can improve/grow their skills for advancement
- Work with County Human Resources to assess salary, market ranges, and position classifications to be competitive in the marketplace
- Work with the County's Innovation Studio to develop a staffing strategy, including support models and tools for forecasting staffing needs

**3. THE IMPORTANCE OF ACQUIRING AND MANAGING NEW PARKLANDS AND CORRIDORS TO STAY AHEAD OF GROWTH**



Adding new parks and open space lands through acquisition, development, partnership, or management agreements will become increasingly essential to meet recreational needs. Equally important, reclaimed river and wash corridors have considerable wildlife potential and connect those in urbanized areas to nature while providing expanded transportation and economic benefits.

**Findings:**

In the 1965 Plan, the vision for a new System noted that, unlike other services, the planning and acquisition of parks and open spaces must occur decades ahead of commercial and residential development to meet the socio-economic needs of a community. This is especially true for natural parks, where the desire to attain a sustainable ecosystem directly competes with development and often becomes economically unattainable or fragmented once development occurs. Therefore, it is

essential to establish these boundaries so that future planned development does not conflict with open space.

Planning and action over the next 10, 20, and 50 years are necessary to keep pace with growth. There is an urgent need to project into the future and identify new parklands and buffers around our existing parks in the direct development path.

As the population of the County increases and city development continues, residents' access to undeveloped natural areas will become more critical. Based on projected population growth, and input from County residents, MCPRD needs to acquire approximately 15,000 acres every ten years to maintain the current baseline of 27 acres per thousand people. Compared to other park agencies, MCPRD is positioned in the mid to upper quartile in terms of acres per 1,000 residents in providing trail miles per resident. Maintaining that level of service compared to the other benchmarked agencies is a worthy goal as the population growth continues.

Interestingly, the 1965 Plan did not consider natural parks' sustainability and biological health. Science and best practices surrounding biodiversity now prove that maintaining biodiversity through migratory land-bridge routes is essential for mammals to move between habitats to escape desert temperatures, mating, find reliable water sources, and genetic exchange. The recognition of connected landscapes will continue to challenge the biodiversity of the existing System.

Similarly, the valley's major river corridors are receiving more attention at the local and national levels as important connected landscapes for recreation, wildlife movement, and tourism. In addition, the river corridors represent the largest potential infill natural park opportunities in the County.

Many of the County's river corridors have master corridor plans (West Valley Recreation Corridor Master Plan, El Rio, and Tres Rios Watercourse Master Plans, Rio Reimagined, etc.), and cities have implemented limited recreational improvements. Still, for the most part, these are untapped resources. River corridors, by nature, are connected landscapes. However, industrial uses are degrading natural functions in or along rivers. In addition, the historic industrial use has made the surrounding residential communities generally lower income with few open spaces or recreational opportunities. Identified by the stakeholder focus groups and additionally supported by public surveys, the river corridors provide a chance to increase the available open space for established neighborhoods that have been traditionally underserved populations.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Identify and prioritize critical landscape blocks and corridors.** Through the best available science, resource expert guidance, and public input, expand partnerships to identify, promote, and protect essential landscapes for natural open space and recreational opportunities. The PV 2030 recognizes that the scale and complexity of providing a sustainable natural area park system extend beyond the management capabilities of MCPRD. Current and future partnerships, built around cooperative agreements, can employ the



resources from each agency to manage and protect particular parklands and open spaces based on their mission and legal authority.

- **Provide a Future Parklands Acquisition and Development Priority Strategy.** The future land priorities should be based partly on new park lands' ability to satisfy the growing population's future recreational needs, the threat level posed on the property by existing use, current and future development patterns, and landscape quality. The focus is on identifying complete, self-sustaining ecosystems, supportive partners, and the ability of the new parklands to generate revenue once developed.
- **Protect regional park buffers and establish wildlife corridors.** Protecting regional park buffers and establishing wildlife corridors is a priority in maintaining the sustainability of wildlife and surrounding open space. However, creating buffers and connecting landscapes may be the most difficult to implement. Migration beyond regional park boundaries is important to the sustainability of biodiversity. Therefore, it is vital to identify and protect/acquire wildlife corridors and determine how or where they connect outside the boundaries. Promoting wildlife migration by partnering with cities, state and federal agencies, and non-profit organizations is imperative. Many corridors will require greater cooperation or acquisition beyond the park boundary to protect the corridors, mainly if a wildlife corridor is within the development path, including collaboration with private landowners and possibly legislative action by state and local governments.
- **Partner with federal and state agencies to manage increased recreation participation threatening natural and cultural resources.** Many federally-owned open space lands and wilderness once considered remote are now experiencing increased use due to development near their boundaries. These areas are commonly referred to as the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) and create unique challenges for land managers, including impacts on visual resources and environmental quality, barriers to human access and wildlife movement, resource degradation, and conflicts between users and private landowners. The agencies are typically well-equipped to manage remote, less frequently visited sites. Still, now these sites are experiencing more visitors and related impacts. MCPRD can manage natural and cultural areas used frequently by more visitors; partnering may provide greater interpretation, protection, and recreation opportunities. For example, utilizing the Vulture Mountain Cooperative Recreation Area partnership as a prototype, the County and BLM are working together to navigate recreation management for 70,000 acres. It began with the County pursuing an RP&P of over 1,000 acres to manage and develop for recreation. Under the County's leased lands, they will construct new park facilities, including a visitor center, RV and tent camping, trails, restrooms, and parking. In addition, the County will provide policing of their immediate improved facilities, along with the shared management of the greater 70,000-acre open space system. It will be important to develop a model for managing and interfacing between lease land with County facilities and backcountry to provide a seamless experience for visitors and mutual benefits for the agencies involved.
- **Identify, plan, and classify regional parks and connected landscapes.** Securing new lands requires time to work with partnering agencies, identify and promote funding sources, and secure public and political support. There is also the need to analyze and develop criteria for identifying and recognizing these lands as part of a regional park system structure.

Recognizing that not all public lands can or should be preserved as open space, each potential site must be evaluated based on location, ability to support public recreation, scenic quality, and the ability of the land to function as a sustainable natural resource.



In recognition of various management interests in natural parks, the following are definitions of parkland classifications to use as a single discrete property or as a zoning tool in developing distinct management approaches within a much larger area.

- **REGIONAL PARK:** Natural, unspoiled preserve removed or within an urban area and usually protected by a buffer zone. The size is generally large (500+ acres). However, size is not a strict criterion. It can include activities of a passive character, including hiking, walking, camping, horseback riding, and nature study while providing ample open space. A regional park can serve one community, several communities, or a metropolitan area, focusing on extensive weekend use. As both development and recreational use expand toward critical habitats such as wilderness or other protected areas, the regional parks can act as a buffer by providing facilities, services, and programs that accommodate and absorb higher visitation while protecting adjacent backcountry areas.
- **CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION AREAS:** Dedicated to preserving and protecting significant natural biodiversity, culturally significant landscape(s), and structure(s). These areas are generally associated with conserving and protecting natural and human-made resources to preserve and maintain biodiversity, natural and cultural heritage, and education with scientific research. In addition, management of these areas may include compatible recreational use with limited human activity.
- **LINEAR PARKS AND GREENWAYS:** Corridors are natural or human-made/altered open spaces, including riverways, that connect or create linkages to recreational use or provide wildlife movement. As urban river corridors are restored, "pocket preserves," or nodes, similar to the urban pocket park concept, ranging from 5-50 acres, could be established to provide natural areas and associated benefits near urban population centers.
- **SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS:** These are multijurisdictional areas, usually 15,000+ acres, cooperatively planned with a common recreation vision acknowledging separate or shared management practices. These may include conservation and preservation goals while providing recreational uses through a natural interface setting designed to protect the backcountry and promote a high-quality nature experience.

*Note: Some areas may contain multiple designations.*

**Implementation:**

**GOAL 3.1: Protect critical open space and expand the regional park and trail system proportionately with population growth.**

**Objective 3.1.1: Expand partnerships with the BLM and the USFS**

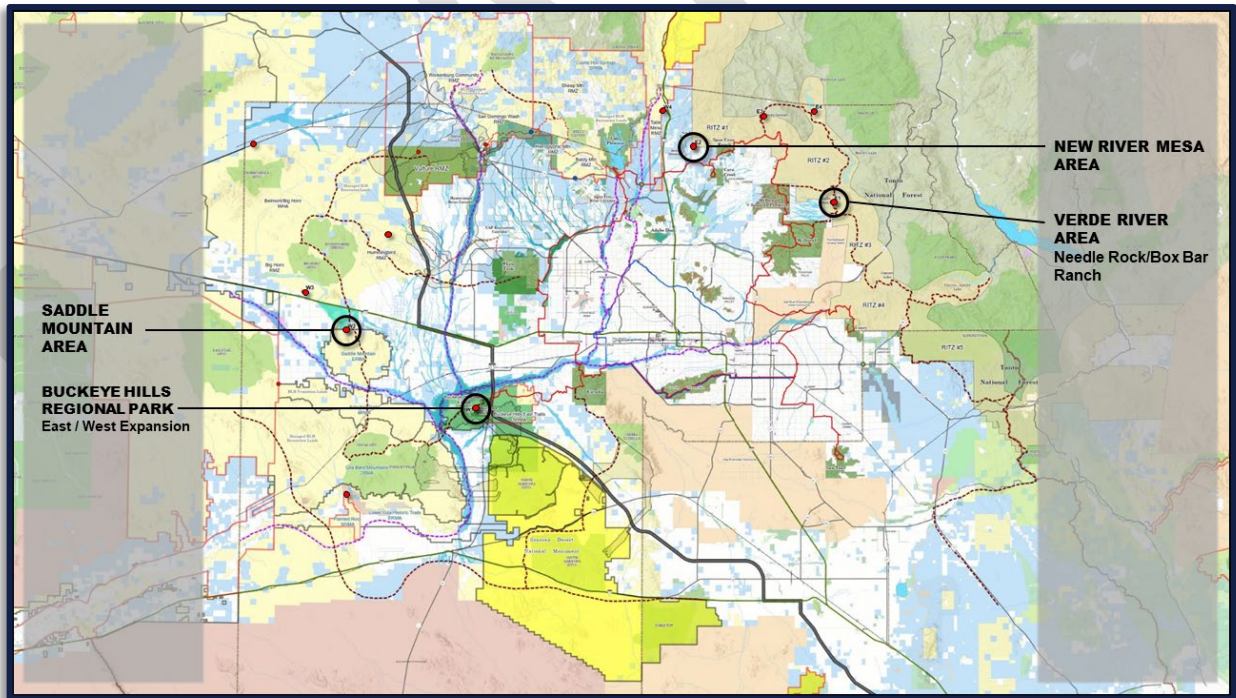
An essential aspect of this Plan is identifying the relationship of federally managed lands with the increased urban pressure on these lands and how MPRCD can partner with USFS and BLM to protect resources and expand recreation opportunities.

**Strategies:** The areas to the east and west of the valley illustrate the urban interface zone where partnerships identify opportunities for the County and federal land managers to manage these lands cooperatively.

- Identify the abilities and roles of each agency to continue developing and managing these lands
- Develop a management framework for each property, including cooperative or collaborative development, stewardship, and visitor services responsibilities
- Develop site specific management plans and guidelines

**Objective 3.1.2: Identify land acquisitions – the next 10 years (2023-2033)**

During the next 10 years, prioritize lands, develop lease agreements, and memorialize partnerships for new parklands and begin the administrative processes for future park areas.



The priorities include:

**East Valley Park Priorities**

1. Verde River Area (USFS)

The Box Bar to Needle Rock Day-Use Area is owned and operated by the TNF. The USFS designates the recreation sites as Fee Area Recreation Sites. The existing recreation area has one dispersed campground along the river near Box Bar Ranch, a day-use river-side beach, and a developed picnic site. The lower Verde River exemplifies where the USFS and MCPRD can partner to manage an area to address the increased use due to its proximity to the urban environment.

2. New River Mesa Area (USFS)

The New River Mesa Area is a unique opportunity to provide a regional gateway park into one of the southernmost boundaries of the Tonto National Forest. The USFS manages the area with limited use due to the few trail connections into the greater Tonto National Forest. Still, it features a pristine Sonoran Desert environment against a mountain backdrop. To the west, Daisy Mountain (ASLD) provides trails, and south of the property is the MT. Both provide connections between the New River and Desert Hills communities.

**West Valley Park Priorities**

1. Buckeye Hills Regional Park (BHRP) Expansion (MCPRD)

BHRP is currently part of the System. The park is primarily undeveloped other than the Joe Foss Shooting Range, established in 2006. The growth of the West Valley provides an opportunity to develop the park further to meet the recreational needs of the growing population.

2. Buckeye Hills East (BLM)

Buckeye Hills East is 25,800 acres immediately east of State Highway 85. BLM designated the parcel as a special recreation management area. The area provides an opportunity to partner with BLM and possibly the City of Buckeye. The establishment of BHRP–East, and the Gila River corridor, is a natural expansion of the park system, connecting crucial open space and wildlife corridors to EMRP.

3. Saddle Mountain Area (BLM)

Saddle Mountain Area is an open space and wildlife corridor between Hummingbird Mountain and Woolsey Peak Wilderness. In addition, Saddle Mountain and BHRP are important areas by creating buffers to sensitive wilderness areas while providing recreation opportunities to the rapidly growing west valley.

**Strategies:**

- Begin the acquisition process
- Develop a master plan for each site in a priority order
- Finalize the management framework and site management plan

**Objective 3.1.3: Begin new park development**

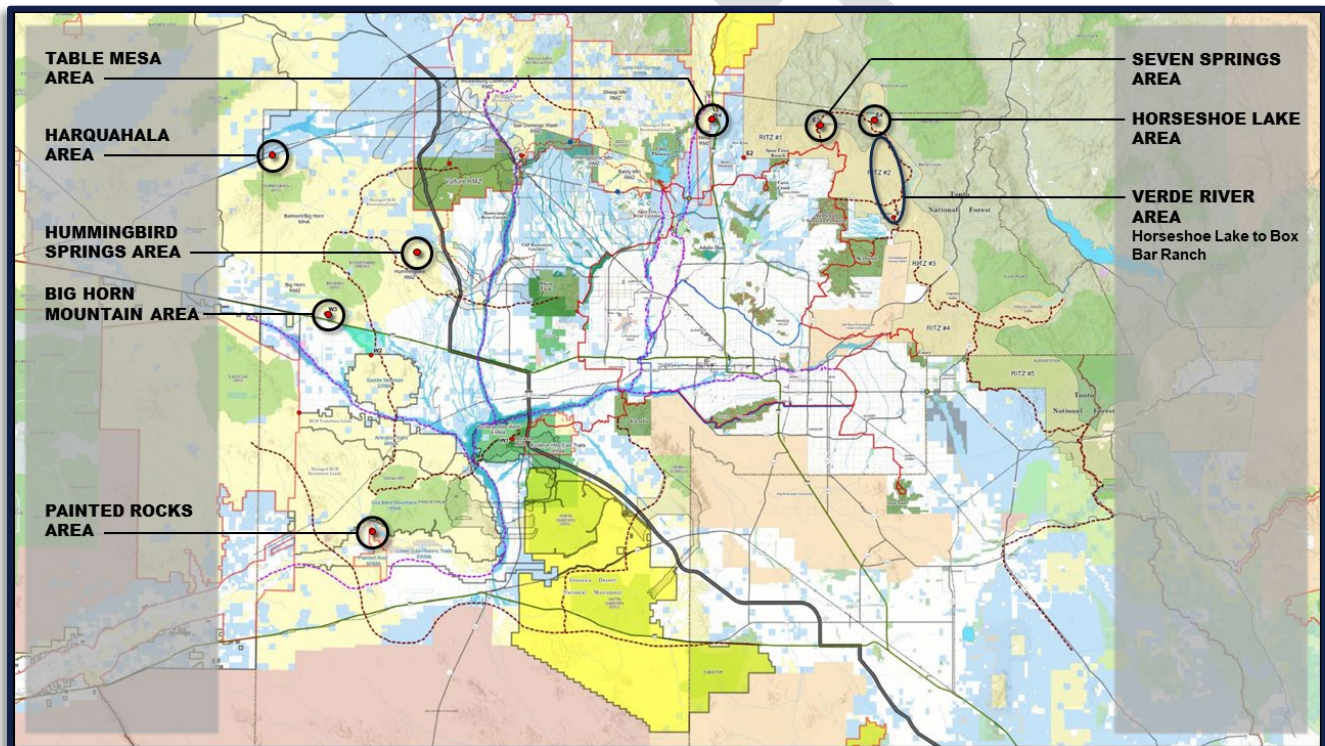
Once new agreements are in place and there is the completion of the master plans, construction will occur on the first five new parks.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a realistic capital improvement budget for each new park, including potential partnership funding and a phasing plan for budgetary purposes
- Develop four new parks by 2050

**Objective 3.1.4: After initial land acquisitions, identify and prioritize additional future parks**

The addition and priority of new sites will be determined and dependent on population growth and other factors.



**Strategies:**

- Identify and evaluate parklands for future expansion. Areas tentatively identified include:
  - West Valley Parks
    - Big Horn Mountains Regional Park (BLM)
    - Harquahala Regional Park (BLM)
    - Eagletail Mountains Regional Park (BLM)
    - Hummingbird Springs Regional Park (BLM)
    - Painted Rocks Conservation Area and Regional Park north of Gila Bend (BLM)
    - Lake Pleasant Regional Park (West)(BLM)
  - East Valley Parks:
    - Verde River Conservation Area (Horseshoe Lake to Box Bar Ranch) (USFS)
    - Seven Springs Conservation Area and Regional Park (USFS)

- Horseshoe Lake Conservation Area and Regional Park (USFS)
- Bartlett Lake Expansion Area (USFS) – Dependent on future increase of Bartlett Dam
- Table Mesa Area (BLM & USFS)

**GOAL 3.2: Refine and prioritize linear parks and connected landscapes.**

**Objective 3.2.1: Evaluate rivers, canals, and utility corridors as open space and trail opportunities**

In addition to parkland blocks, linear parks, and corridors must be further evaluated and prioritized in collaboration with other regional governmental jurisdictions. For example, reclamation and restoration of river corridors would provide opportunities for wildlife corridors to ensure parklands stay connected and function as intact ecosystems. In addition, these corridors could provide open space opportunities for underserved communities. For example, several plans led by MCFCD, including the West Valley Recreation Corridor and Tres Rios Master Plan, identify the Agua Fria River and the Gila River as crucial open space corridors with specific reclamation and recreation enhancement strategies. Additionally, connections to natural open space through canals, drainage ways, and multimodal transportation corridors could further connect communities.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a regional corridor planning committee
- Review existing corridor plans and determine gaps in the planning
- Identify underserved communities based on access to open space (possible distance to natural parks or means of which to access natural parks)
- Provide recommendations on refining and updating existing river corridor plans, and develop new plans when needed, in cooperation with cities and towns to eliminate gaps in service
- Develop cooperative implementation and management plans for corridors

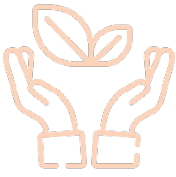
**Objective 3.2.2: Participate in establishing wildlife corridors**

Identify and secure wildlife corridors throughout the County modeling after the White Tank Mountains Conservancy efforts in the White Tank Mountains to preserve the current biodiversity.

**Strategies:**

- Participate in efforts that are underway by the City of Buckeye and the White Tank Mountains Conservancy (WTMC) to work with private landowners and developers, the MCFCD, and BLM to identify possible multi-use corridors
- Acquire critical ASLD to act as a park buffer for wildlife and provide viable wildlife corridors
- Recommend the WTMC model to establish future corridor conservancy groups to advocate for conservation

## 4. LEADERSHIP IN CONSERVATION AND PRESERVATION MATTERS FOR OUR FUTURE



MCPRD and other Maricopa County departments should expand regional leadership and education by furthering a coordinated planning and landscape-scale natural resource conservation effort. Partnerships in managing existing natural resources for increased visitor use and expanding environmental education will become increasingly important, especially as the development reaches further into the unincorporated County towards public land borders. In addition, coordinated efforts among all jurisdictions are required to improve regional resiliency, including reducing wildland-to-urban (WUI) interface conflicts, addressing diminished air and water quality/supply, reducing habitat fragmentation of natural areas, mitigating heat island impacts, and minimizing the effects of wildfire.

### **Findings:**

Over the past ten years, many public and non-profit organizations have stepped forward to champion specific challenges related to open space, trails, habitat enhancement, and conservation efforts. These organizations, such as the Central Arizona Conservation Alliance (CAZCA) and WTMC, have made significant strides in planning and implementing localized and issue-specific conservation measures.

However, no single organization or collaborative has emerged as a regional champion to provide an integrated approach for oversight and coordination. MCPRD, in collaboration with several other county agencies, including MAG, is uniquely positioned to understand the larger regional context in which the various city, County, state, and federal agency-managed lands may benefit through greater cooperation.

As identified by both the BLM and the TNF, population growth is creating a greater impact on public lands that come near urbanization. Primarily, the increase in daily visitors, and development pressure on natural area edges where the intersection of the WUI interface occurs, often have unsanctioned OHV and target shooting, which will have an immediate need for greater oversight.

It will be necessary to collaborate in creating a more cohesive regional park and open space system, working with our state and federal partners to focus on buffering the wildlands and wilderness areas. Bringing numerous existing partnerships to the table positions MCPRD on good ground to convene, coordinate and lead in developing a comprehensive natural resource strategy.

### **Recommendations:**

- **Develop a regional natural resource plan and strategy.** Developing a natural resource plan will direct future conservation efforts, identify park and wildlife corridor acquisition, and provide collaborative guidance for success. Recognizing that a connected landscape is paramount to the biodiversity of parks and public lands, greater emphasis should be on identifying and securing lands as part of an overall System.

Working with partners on habitat enhancement and growing programs like the Desert Defenders program will improve invasive species management, reduce fire fuel, and increase biodiversity. Continuing and establishing a regional scale strategy is vital to enhancing the County's natural areas' overall health and biodiversity. If all agencies with natural open spaces collaboratively work on issues, there is a strong likelihood of a shared resource management success story.

- **Preserve quality habitats through assessments.** Using the Floristic Quality Assessment and Natural Quality assessment tools, identify crucial natural areas that can provide a buffer for wildlife species, biodiversity, and linkages.
- **Prevent the loss of biodiversity.** Work with partners to ensure development that occurs in the WUI, especially adjacent to these lands, should include using science-based solutions, maintaining natural areas within the development, and using natural and hybrid flood control to maintain the health of the natural systems, retain connectivity to other wildlands all while providing healthy communities. Additionally, working with MCFCD to identify intermittent and perennial streams and water tanks in public and private planning and protect them using low-impact development (LID) and green infrastructure (GI) that minimizes impacts on these natural systems.
- **Develop park-specific natural resource plans.** Each park should have an individualized natural resource plan as a component of the park's management plan that guides specific actions to improve biological health and diversity. In addition, this plan should address mitigating invasive species and wildfire threats and interfacing with the surrounding communities and open spaces and wildlife movement.
- **Strengthen partnerships with regional, county, state, and national organizations.** Working with partner organizations and their studies, plans, and comprehensive databases expands the focus on conservation, preservation, and restoration, thus benefiting planning within a regional context. The national and statewide organizations also offer insight into best practices used effectively in other regions and states in the West. For example, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the TNF have developed science-based wildlife studies identifying essential wildlife corridors that could influence future land and transportation planning.
- **Advocate for a larger regional system of parks, open spaces, and trails through partnerships.** The valley is fortunate to have several cities, county and state agencies, and non-profits focusing on regional recreation, conservation and preservation, and landscape restoration. As a result, many jurisdiction-specific parks, recreation, open spaces, corridor, and trail plans have been developed and reflect local needs. The plans often include precise implementation strategies and could be combined to create a true regional plan.



MAG is integral in convening city leadership, coordinating regional planning efforts, and synchronizing large volumes of information. MAG should expand to include and coordinate with city, county, federal, parks, open spaces, and trail plans.

### ***Implementation:***

#### **GOAL 4.1: Develop and Implement a Natural Resources Plan**

##### **Objective 4.1.1: Implement Department Natural Resource Plan, including park plans**

An NRMP exists that outlines the goals, objectives, and strategies to implement natural resource priorities while minimizing environmental impacts. The NRMP focuses on five major challenges, threats, and opportunities that affect the parks' natural resources. The threats and challenges from explosive population growth affect ecological function, biological diversity, sustainability, conservation, future preservation, and recreation potential. MCPRD faces issues with protecting the natural and cultural resources; maintaining the parks' biological connectivity and corridors to the surrounding wildlands; conservation, community enhancement, and invasive species

management; planning for climate change and preventing wildfires; and providing outdoor recreation opportunities and outreach with our partners and stakeholders.

**Strategies:**

- See NRMP

**GOAL 4.2: Provide leadership in balanced, economically efficient land use patterns and infrastructure to promote sustainable long-term growth while maintaining a high quality of life.**

**Objective 4.2.1: Establish an interdepartmental County team to address high-priority, cross-jurisdictional land use, regional planning, and environmental issues**

Establish a team of County staff and officials to address cross-jurisdictional/comprehensive issues such as law enforcement, fire suppression, threatened natural resources, invasive species, air, and water quality issues, land use planning and zoning, and emergency management.

**Strategies:**

- Establish a County team including both leadership and technical experts from various departments
- Hold an initial meeting to discuss issues, concerns, and coordination protocol
- Determine planning, zoning, and legislative actions needed
- Meet annually to address priority items along with ongoing concerns and issues
- Set up working teams as required for specific issues
- Provide updates to department directors and County leadership

**Objective 4.2.2: Establish a long-term planning partnership through the Maricopa Association of Government (MAG)**

Most cities and towns in the County have open space and corridor plans or elements with their comprehensive city plans that address the importance of open space and connectivity to residents and identify the need for added open space protection within their borders. In addition, some jurisdictions have worked closely with their neighbors to encourage better connectivity. However, as community borders expand and intersect with other local jurisdictions, there is a greater need to coordinate efforts to create and manage connected systems of open spaces and trails to maximize benefits for communities, residents, and ecosystems.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a comprehensive land use, open space, trails, and wildlife corridor GIS map based on the current park, open space, and wildlife linkage studies with MAG support
- Support efforts by MAG to develop and sustain a workgroup or committee dedicated to Resilience, Open Space, and the Environment (ROSE). The workgroup's measures should include the interests of river corridors, fostering a larger connected open space framework, a robust regional trails network, active transportation interfaces, and addressing healthy environments and residents.
- Encourage the MAG to develop a comprehensive regional open space and trails plan
- Include federal and state land managers who are not MAG members
- Review annually to ensure the information is updated to provide one complete source of information for agencies and cities to reference when updating general plans, roadways, infrastructure, or evaluating private development proposals



**Objective 4.2.3: Share best practices on parks, trails, recreation, and open space**

Coordinate best practice forums with municipal park leadership to exchange and share issues, challenges, and operational strategies.

**Strategies:**

- Host an annual forum for municipal and county park leadership to discuss best practices
- Develop peer-to-peer relationships around responsibilities (i.e., Park Supervisors, Facility Management, etc.)
- Develop a list of goals and possible joint efforts to advance shared interests

## 5. DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE AND DIVERSIFIED FUNDING IS CRITICAL



The economic impacts of the current system demonstrate the benefits of providing and growing a regional park and trail system. A balanced and diversified portfolio of planning, acquisition, development, maintenance, programming, and stewardship funding sources is necessary to adequately address the needs outlined in a fiscally responsible and timely manner.

**Findings:**

Funding was identified as a primary issue in protecting critical landscapes and corridors, maintaining a high-quality park experience, and growing the park system to meet the needs of a growing population. The current funding sources for MCPRD primarily rely on fee-for-service and leasing land-based facilities to third-party recreation concessionaires for operation funding. In addition, there is variable capital improvement funding from the County general fund.

A sustainable balance between revenues, costs, and expenses will take active management to continue providing quality visitor experiences. MCPRD should continue looking for possible new earned revenue sources and additional, long-term, and reliable funding sources for acquisition, capital development, partnership implementation, natural resource management, and park operations.

**Recommendations:**

- **Prioritize major maintenance and renovation of existing parks and facilities.** Keeping existing facilities in top shape increases visitor experience and lowers operating/maintenance costs. Therefore, creating a priority list identifying funding for major maintenance and renovation of existing facilities should be considered as significant as funding new capital.
- **Enhance revenue through capacity building within existing parks.** The construction of significant new projects will help expand existing parks' capacity and enhance revenue-generating opportunities. Capital funding for parks has recently grown significantly; funding new projects, renovations, and major maintenance has helped significantly with the deferred projects backlog. Still, additional development is needed to accommodate additional day-use and camping visitors.
- **Evaluate the County's parkland inventory to realize the highest and best use.** Evaluate existing land assets in the County's inventory for their highest and best use potential for additional revenue. For example, the County may consider different RV-style parks, extended-stay RV parks, lodges, cabins, and recreational vehicle/boat storage.

- **Evaluate dedicated funding sources in addition to the fee-for-service.** Dedicated taxes or bond funding for park acquisition and development require the support of both elected officials and residents. By carefully evaluating the costs and benefits, develop a menu of funding sources, including a dedicated sales tax or property tax, a park, trails, rivers district, or an alternative special use source. Following the success of local cities, bonding for projects that focus on specific improvements to existing parks, strategic land acquisition, and development of new parks may be the likely funding source to meet the rapidly growing demand for recreation and preservation of natural lands.

The 2009 SSMP found that "while the largest group of residents felt that operations funding should come equally from taxes and user fees (47.7 percent), there was slightly more support for improvement funds coming from taxes." Development impact fees are another significant funding source for many benchmarked agencies. These fees are assessed on new residential construction and incorporated into the development costs to fund needed facilities for new residents to an area. Maricopa County last explored Development Impact Fees in 2010, but given the state of the economy at the time, the discussion was tabled for future consideration.



- **Maintain and grow the diversity of revenue streams.** Continue to maintain a diverse mix of revenue streams to fund park operations. Seek ways to grow existing and develop new streams of income. New and expanded facilities will increase capacity in existing parks, increasing the traditional revenue streams of day-use and camping. Fee-based programming is a way to increase revenue from day-use visitors and off-peak discounts to increase park use during weekdays and shoulder seasons.

New long-term park concessionaires are a source of new revenue. Continue to expand concession opportunities to generate revenue and enhance tiered revenue opportunities/services. Concessionaires can also be tasked with relevant park maintenance duties to alleviate certain department responsibilities. With new and expanding existing streams, consider carrying capacity and analyze the costs and benefits of various alternatives.

- **Evaluate a mix of revenue streams to remain competitive.** Influenced by public and private recreation facilities, some parks may need to restructure their revenue mix and portfolio due to local competition or other environmental conditions, especially parks near free-of-cost city areas. These parks could expand their unique opportunities, such as camping not offered by the cities, or develop niche opportunities (e.g., expanding the mountain bike facilities or adding cabins at MMRP).
- **Promote Intergovernmental Type Agreements.** Entering into agreements with cities, towns, state, and federal agencies, or Memorandums of Understanding with non-profits, can enhance maintenance, expand stewardship efforts, increase park programming, acquire property and provide certain facility development opportunities.
- **Build on the Maricopa Trail successes through expanded partnerships.** The Maricopa Trail is one of the most popular recent additions to the County system. With the completion of the initial loop, work continues to connect with new parks like the Hassayampa River Preserve and Vulture Mountain Recreation Area. This non-fee-based trail system connects communities with County parks, other trails, community parks, and points of interest. However, maintaining this regional gem will struggle without a reliable operating revenue source.

- **Recognize and plan for tax-based funds for conservation management.** Preservation is not enough to sustain the natural resources within the parks. Given recent fires, drought, and an increased abundance of invasive species, it will become increasingly important to bolster efforts concerning the County's landscapes' long-term health and viability.

Natural resource funding is an investment in the future revenue generation of the parks and the overall future quality of our region. This effort will require more resources than can be provided through funds derived from visitor fees and concession revenues.

- **Investments in technology and innovative maintenance systems are necessary to optimize visitor experience.** These investments may include self-pay technology to reduce the need for the number of park entry staff positions and innovative maintenance features, including fully self-cleaning or partial mechanization of restroom facilities. In both scenarios, the benefit to the visitor should be at the forefront of the consideration. Investing in these technologies should be evaluated when maintaining, improving, or replacing infrastructure systems.
- **Monitor cost containment of overhead as visitation and programs grow.** Internal overhead should be measured and only grown proportionately to increase revenue and operational allocations. Overhead costs associated with County general services will be harder to control. Ensuring appropriate safety inspections, programs, and training will minimize Risk Management charges. Work with County internal service departments to identify ways to evaluate charges, encourage competition, and promote fee-for-service charges versus blanket increases.
- **Attract and retain quality staff members.** The success of any organization is its people. The County has successfully attracted and retained quality staff specializing in maintaining park resources, managing natural resources, and developing quality park programming. The County must continue demonstrating that they value dedicated employees through competitive salaries and benefits, professional development, and by providing the resources needed to achieve success.
- **Recognize volunteers' value.** Volunteers are vital in filling roles in operations, maintenance, and as advocates for the parks. Working with the Maricopa County Sheriff, a volunteer ranger program, would also enhance rule enforcement, which is time-consuming for sworn deputies but important in protecting park resources and maintaining a quality visitor experience. Also, volunteers are now active in natural resource management. The volunteer program can continue diversifying and expanding; however, maintaining and training may need additional resources.

**Implementation:**

**GOAL 5.1: Identify and promote a diversified and sustainable funding portfolio to acquire, develop, and renovate existing and new parklands, corridors, and trails.**

**Objective 5.1.1: Secure reliable acquisition and development sources for new parks**

Expanding the park and trail system to meet the future needs of a rapidly growing region will require a substantial investment. Dedicated funding, proportionate with population increase projections, would ensure prospective properties and improvements are available for new residents. The following are a menu of options to consider in consultation with County Management, Budget, and Finance Departments.

**Strategies:**

- Identify adequate financial resources to implement and manage an aggressive acquisition and development program

- Identify General Obligation Bonds for the purchase and development of parklands
- Utilize previous agreements to guide acquisitions and partnerships
- Funding should be from a mix of sources to ensure stability, including:
  - General Obligation (GO) Bonds with the following categories
    - Parkland and wildlife corridor acquisition
    - Regional trails and trailhead development
    - Long-range planning
    - Park Development (further segmented between new parks and existing parks)
    - Natural areas restoration and wildfire mitigation
      - Development Impact Fees – use similar categories recommended in the GO Bonds
      - GF for significant maintenance and new capital development
      - Rivers, Trails, and Wildlife Corridor District or consider language to the MCFCD statute that would allow a small percentage of district revenue for multi-use amenities funded in conjunction with park and future flood control projects – would require legislative action for the creation of a new district and a vote to enact
      - Concessionaire development projects and partnership funding
      - Outdoor equipment sales tax – would need to assess the impact, but if including camping equipment/trailers, it appears 1/10 of a cent would be reasonable
      - Partnership property acquisition, development, and management – SCRCA, HRP, and VMRA models

### **Objective 5.1.2: Secure reliable sources to renovate and improve the current parks**

Throughout the sixty-plus years of the MCPRD's existence, many of the years, there was limited funding for major maintenance and renovation of facilities and infrastructure. Not having a dedicated funding source meant that many facilities fell into disrepair. MCPRD has received County CIP funding over the past five (5) years; however, no guarantee exists for the future.

#### **Strategies:**

- Establish an annual funding source based on a fixed sum plus inflation or a percent of the County's GF dedicated solely to park development
- Establish, where appropriate, development impact fees to ensure that MCPRD can meet the recreational needs associated with growth
- Promote and expand compatible concessionaire development opportunities in parks to provide new amenities and services for visitors and generate park operating revenue
- Secure non-county funding sources to include:
  - Grants and federal funds
  - Heritage funds
  - OHV Program funds
  - State Lake Improvement funds
  - Recreation Trails Program Funds
  - ARPA or similar federal funds
  - Federal Appropriations for Partnership Projects (See Southern Nevada model and others)

- City Development block grants

**Objective 5.1.3: Manage and expand the regional trail system**

Looking for creative partnerships and funding solutions will enable a united and accelerated effort for regional connectivity.

**Strategies:**

- Establish partnerships for sustaining trails and disperse costs
- Coordinate development opportunities with city and state agencies
- Identify new funding sources, including:
  - Grants and federal funds
  - Heritage funds
  - OHV Program funds
  - Recreation Trails Program funds
  - City Development Block Grants for shared multi-use trails
  - Multimodal transportation funds
  - Transportation multi-use and active transportation grants
  - Trail use fees or voluntary user donations through a friends group
  - Maricopa Trail and Park Foundation grants and in-kind donations

**Objective 5.1.4: Identify partnerships for land acquisition, development, and management of future park areas**

These partnerships could include new agreements and expansion of existing agreements that provide shared management and development responsibilities.

**Strategies:**

- Identify management responsibilities that promote each agency's mission and develop a partnership management framework that provides a seamless visitor experience and ecosystem-level conservation approach while dispersing the funding burden across agencies
- Strengthen city and town partnership opportunities through Intergovernmental Agreements (IGA) to provide cooperative funding for existing park buffer acquisition, access, development, regional trailheads and trails, park maintenance, law enforcement, and park programming
- Identify all potential non-profit partners and determine their mission-based niche that fits with park acquisition, development, and programming opportunities

**GOAL 5.2: Conduct quality research and visitor surveys to ensure quality control of the park's efforts to attract new and maintain current visitors, thus growing revenue streams that support the long-term financial stability of park operations.**

**Objective 5.2.1: Grow visitation and revenue by continuing to evaluate satisfaction and demand**

It is essential to keep the Department current and relevant to the park users' needs and that each park is responsive to demands for services and experiences. By doing this, we offer diversified revenue growth.

**Strategies:**

- Continually evaluate existing and new activities, opportunities, and experiences through participation and interest exit surveys, general population surveys, and best practices research to determine future needs
- Develop a survey program to determine satisfaction and schedule(s)
- Determine the viability of new offerings through a cost-benefit analysis
- Assess and develop fee-based offerings to meet visitor needs at a fair market price
- Determine which amenities are in high public demand and that will maximize revenue and include in new and revised PMPs

**GOAL 5.3: Update Park User Fees to cover 100% of operations and directly associated administrative costs.**

**Objective 5.3.1: Based on the level of service standards, park user fees are to contend with inflation and established staffing levels**

To effectively contend with the increased population and the management of visitors and resources, MCPRD must regularly evaluate and update fees to fund park operating costs.

**Strategies:**

- Based on PMPs, determine the desired level of service and associated costs
- Contract for a Park User Fee Analysis
- Explore and develop new fee-based revenue opportunities that expand services and opportunities
  - Maricopa Trail Supporter – voluntary fee/donor/supporter
  - Enhanced fee-based programming opportunities
  - Peak use fees to encourage increased use during non-prime times
  - Tiered level of service opportunities

**GOAL 5.4: Develop sustainable funding sources for natural resource restoration, cultural protection, and conservation in parks and at a regional level.**

**Objective 5.4.1: Identify funding to protect, restore, and promote conservation efforts**

An increase in use, encroachment, and changing climate conditions will threaten the natural ecosystem. As a result, it will be necessary to monitor ecological health and promote an active conservation management program.

**Strategies:**

- Identify the funding needed to restore damaged or threatened lands and cultural sites
- Requisition a dedicated GF appropriation for long-term stewardship primarily for resource protection, restoration, and education
- Additional funding sources may include grants and one-time funding for major restoration and mitigation projects
- Coordinate with all relevant County departments

**GOAL 5.5: Contribute to the regional economy by promoting recreational opportunities that support economic development and tourism.**

**Objective 5.5.1: Promote landscapes to meet new economic demands where the quality of place and life matters to employee retention and business attractiveness to the region**

Maricopa County's parks within the Sonoran Desert offer the close-to-home escapes that residents desire. The parks can also support compatible business opportunities, thus increasing visitor services.

**Strategies:**

- Proactively advertise and promote the regional park system by developing an adequate marketing budget
- Cross-advertise with nature-based organizations
- Develop collaboration opportunities such as with Westmarc, East Valley Partnership, GPEC, and League of Arizona Cities and Towns
- Develop joint promotion opportunities such as with the AOT, Greater Phoenix Chamber, Greater Phoenix Economic Council

**GOAL 5.6: Evaluate operations and cost containment as visitation and programs grow while ensuring a high-quality visitor experience.**

**Objective 5.6.1: Promote a high-level visitor experience through internal cost control to ensure that consistent and high-quality facilities and programs are adequately staffed and financially sustainable**

Developing a sustainable and structurally-balanced budget for growth requires new revenue to balance-added expenditures. Another way to maintain balance in the face of increased costs is to implement cost-saving measures or programs.

**Strategies:**

- Continually evaluate park operations and programming costs through visitor participation and satisfaction
- Continue to expand technology and artificial intelligence (AI) to provide direct services to visitors through online sales and automated entrance machines, including entrance passes, annual pass renewals, program notifications, parking availability, etc.
- Continue to expand technology and AI in park administration, maintenance, and resource protection to supplement existing administrative and operating staff
- Strengthen volunteer participation and training to offset operating costs and add value to the visitor experience

**GOAL 5.7: Evaluate MCPRD's opportunities to develop revenue-generating business opportunities.**

**Objective 5.7.1: Non-preservation or passive recreation parklands may provide opportunities to generate additional revenue**

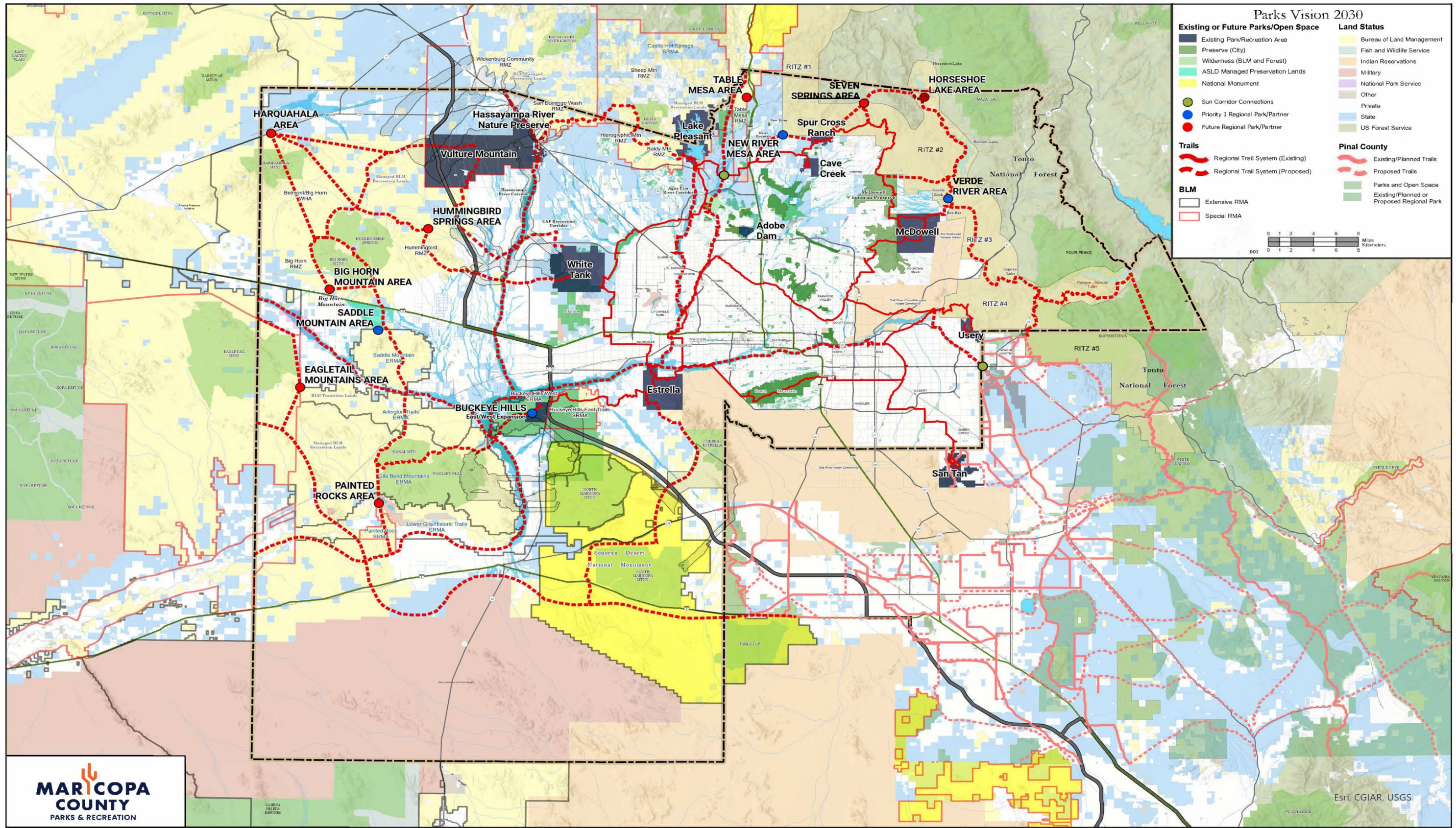
These opportunities may include land leases for commercial use, capital improvements to establish or expand an existing revenue source, and assertively pursuing active recreation partners.

### Strategies:

- Evaluate non-preservation lands for possible commercial development that align and supports the recreation offerings of the regional parks, such as boat storage, RV storage, convenience stores, and bike rental shops
- Evaluate potential for-profit active sports facilities, primarily focused on large-scale tournament-style facilities
- Evaluate lands next to parks that may provide an RV park setting
- Evaluate the sale of excess land that is County owned suitable for development

DRAFT





**Parks Vision 2030**

<b>Existing or Future Parks/Open Space</b>	<b>Land Status</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #4F81BD; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Existing Park/Recreation Area</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Preserve (City)</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Wilderness (BLM and Forest)</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFFF00; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> ASLD Managed Preservation Lands</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFD700; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> National Monument</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Sun Corridor Connections</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #0000FF; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Priority 1 Regional Park/Partner</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FF0000; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Future Regional Park/Partner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #D3D3D3; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Bureau of Land Management</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #ADD8E6; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Fish and Wildlife Service</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFDAB9; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Indian Reservations</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFA07A; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Military</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #DDA0DD; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> National Park Service</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #D2B48C; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Other</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #ADD8E6; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> State</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> US Forest Service</li> </ul>
<b>Trails</b>	<b>Pinal County</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border-bottom: 2px solid red; width: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Regional Trail System (Existing)</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border-bottom: 2px dashed red; width: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Regional Trail System (Proposed)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border-bottom: 2px solid red; width: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Existing/Planned Trails</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border-bottom: 2px dashed red; width: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Proposed Trails</li> </ul>
<b>BLM</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 10px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Extensive RMA</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid red; width: 20px; height: 10px; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Special RMA</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Parks and Open Space</li> <li><span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black; margin-right: 5px;"></span> Existing/Planned or Proposed Regional Park</li> </ul>

0 1 2 4 6 8 Miles  
0 1 2 4 6 8 Kilometers

**MARICOPA COUNTY**  
PARKS & RECREATION

Esri, CGIAR, USGS





## Maricopa County's regional parks provide beautiful open spaces to connect with nature:

**Adobe Dam Regional Park**  
23280 N. 43rd Avenue  
Glendale, AZ 85310  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 8

**Buckeye Hills Regional Park**  
26700 W. Buckeye Hills Drive  
Buckeye, AZ 85326  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 6

**Cave Creek Regional Park**  
37019 N. Lava Lane  
Cave Creek, AZ 85331  
(602) 506-2930 ext 8

**Desert Outdoor Center at Lake Pleasant**  
41402 N. 87th Avenue  
Peoria, AZ 85383  
(602) 372-7470

**Estrella Mountain Regional Park**  
14805 W. Vineyard Ave.  
Goodyear, AZ 85338  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 6

**Hassayampa River Preserve**  
49614 U.S. Hwy. 60 89  
Wickenburg, AZ 85390  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 9

**Lake Pleasant Regional Park**  
41835 N. Castle Hot Springs Rd.  
Morristown, AZ 85342  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 1

**McDowell Mountain Regional Park**  
16300 McDowell Mtn. Park Dr.  
Fountain Hills, AZ 85268  
(602) 506-2930 ext 3

**San Tan Mountain Regional Park**  
6533 W. Phillips Road  
Queen Creek, AZ 85142  
(602) 506-2930 ext 7

**Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area**  
44000 N. Spur Cross Road  
Cave Creek, AZ 85331  
(602) 506-2930 ext 8

**Usery Mountain Regional Park**  
3939 N. Usery Pass Rd.  
Mesa, AZ 85207  
(602) 506-2930 ext 4

**Vulture Mountains Recreation Area**  
Located South of Us60  
Wickenburg, AZ 85390  
(602) 506-2930

**White Tank Mountain Regional Park**  
20304 W. White Tank Mountain Road  
Waddell, AZ 85355  
(602) 506-2930 ext. 5