

connect.



# 2030 VISION CONNECTING COMMUNITIES TO PARKS AND NATURAL RESOURCES

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Arizona Parks & Recreation Association  
August 27, 2024



Online Presentations

Website

<https://www.maricopacountyparks.net/about-us/presentations/>

Canva public access link

[https://www.canva.com/design/DAGMdCf7LUE/EI12Y9VyZxeV-ZHLSC9m7g/edit?  
utm\\_content=DAGMdCf7LUE&utm\\_campaign=designshare&utm\\_medium=link2&utm\\_sourc  
e=sharebutton](https://www.canva.com/design/DAGMdCf7LUE/EI12Y9VyZxeV-ZHLSC9m7g/edit?utm_content=DAGMdCf7LUE&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link2&utm_source=sharebutton)

# connect.



**MARICOPA COUNTY**  
PARKS & RECREATION

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photograph by Kevin Bletzer



photograph by Ron Scott

**PARKS VISION**  
**2030**  
APPROVED DECEMBER 2023



# OVERVIEW

This workshop will share how Maricopa County's Parks Vision 2030 plan provides guidance in caring for existing parks while seeking opportunities for new parks and open spaces.

## Today's Topics:

- Our Parks Vision 2030 – System Master Plan
- The Parks Master Plan, 3-Year Project
- Maricopa County Parks Management

## Learning Objectives:

1. Seeking future areas for park expansion,
2. Maintaining and improving existing facilities and infrastructure, and
3. Balancing natural resource management with recreational opportunities.



# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS – ABOUT US



- Maricopa County has approximately 120,000 acres and attracted nearly two million visitors per year.
- The County is home to one of the most diverse ecosystems in the world and 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



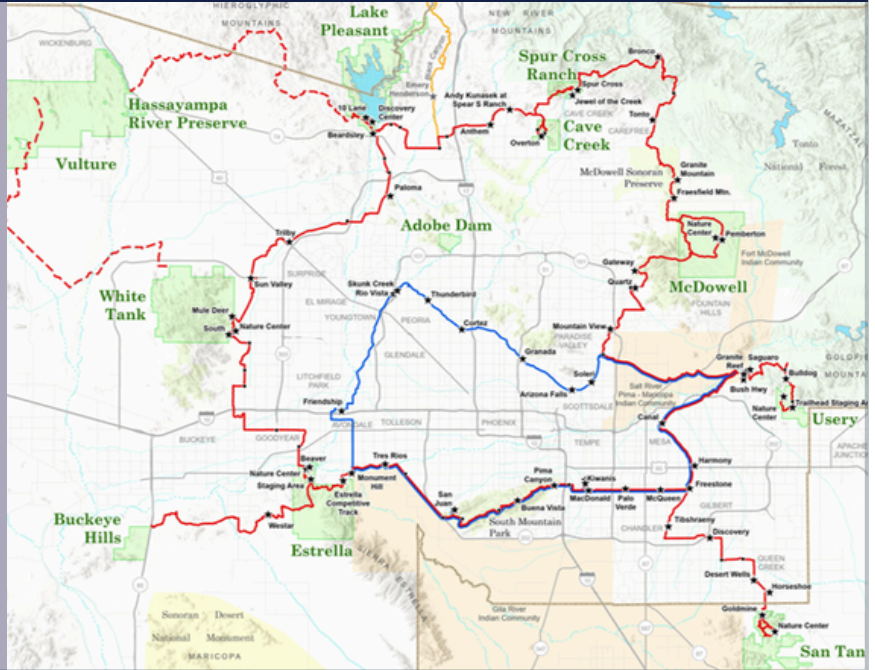
Maricopa County has one of the country's largest and most unique regional park systems, managed by the Maricopa County Parks and Recreation Department.



# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS & TRAIL SYSTEM

## PARKS VISION 2030 – SYSTEM MASTER PLAN:

- Larger regional system
- 10 to 50-year window
- Addresses growth and development
- Sustainable
- Plan for economic impact in the new economy



System Master Plan addresses growth and development pressure that may impact system sustainability

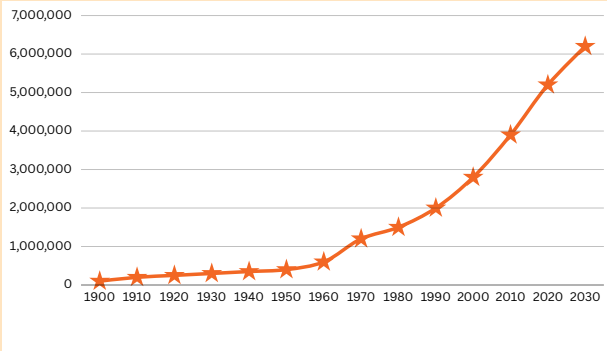
Identify growth of a park system through existing parkland buffering, new parkland acquisition, and greater partnerships with other land managers

Identifies and plans for economic impact in the New Economy

Address regional scale conservation measures to sustain a system of connected landscapes - "Continue the Legacy"

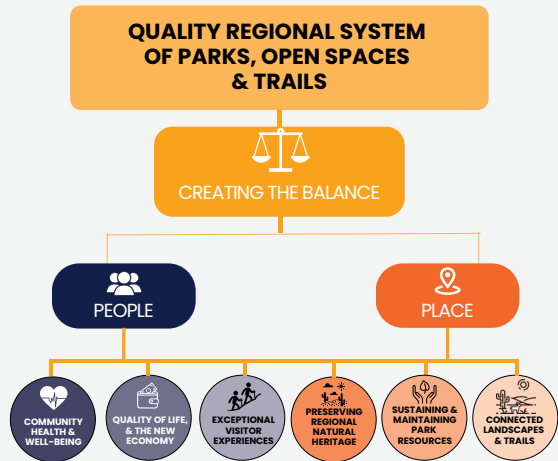
# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS – PURPOSE

**MARICOPA COUNTY POPULATION TRENDS:  
1900 - 2030**



1. Parks Vision 2030 builds on the legacy.
2. Growth is a driving factor.
3. Focuses on expanding park and open space opportunities.
4. Essential to protect high-value natural resources for the future.

## PLAN ELEMENTS



# IDENTIFYING WHAT'S IMPORTANT - FEEDBACK PROCESS



## 1 PUBLIC

- How often are you engaging with members of the public?
- What types of research have you done?
- What types of references are you relying on for information?
- Are you hosting public meetings?



## 2 STAKEHOLDERS

- Who are your stakeholders (representatives from local agencies, nonprofits, organizations, state and federal organizations, etc.)?
- How do you engage with them?
- Are you benchmarking against similar agencies?
- Are you conducting reviews with your stakeholders?



## 3 COUNTY STAFF, VOLUNTEERS & LEADERSHIP

- Are you engaging with staff members, focus groups, volunteers?
- Are you utilizing questionnaires to gather information?
- Did you conduct a SWOT Analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat)?
- Are you keeping your officials and board members updated on the project on a regular basis?

# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS – BIG PICTURE

## PARKS VISION 2030 PUBLIC OUTREACH FEEDBACK FORM



**95.5%**

Wildlife corridors and open space are important to protect for the health of the ecosystem now and in the future.



**93.4%**

Access to regional parks, natural areas, and trails is important to my health and well-being.



**92.9%**

Natural resource conservation efforts to protect native plants and animals throughout the park system and Maricopa County is important.



**87.8%**

Increased funding to provide for expanded regional park, recreation, trail, and open space opportunities is important.



**86.4%**

Restoration of the river corridors throughout the metropolitan Phoenix is important to provide increased public access to nature.

# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS – PRIORITIES

Parks Vision 2030 aims to meet the current population's needs, protect important resources and identify new opportunities for future generations. The plan outlines five priority areas with associated goals:



**Acquire and manage new parklands and corridors.**



**Parks and open space role in community health and well being.**



**Reinvest, protect, and continue improving the existing park system.**



**Leadership in conservation and preservation matters for our future.**



**Developing sustainable and diversified funding is critical.**



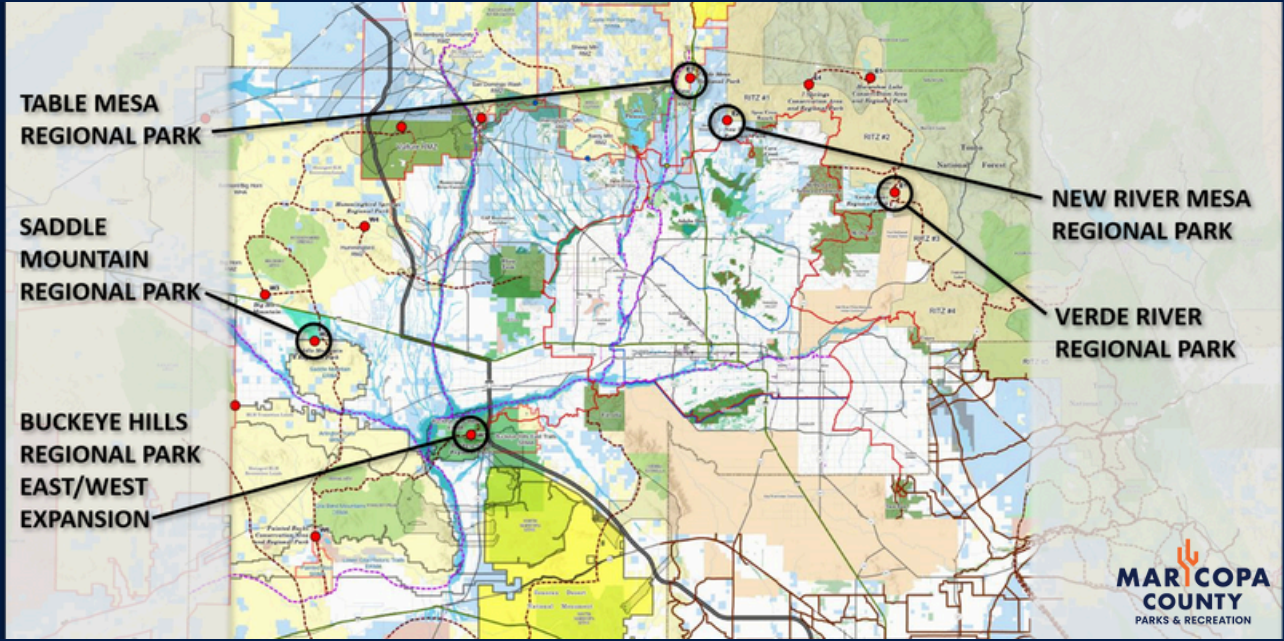
# ACQUIRE AND MANAGE NEW PARKLANDS



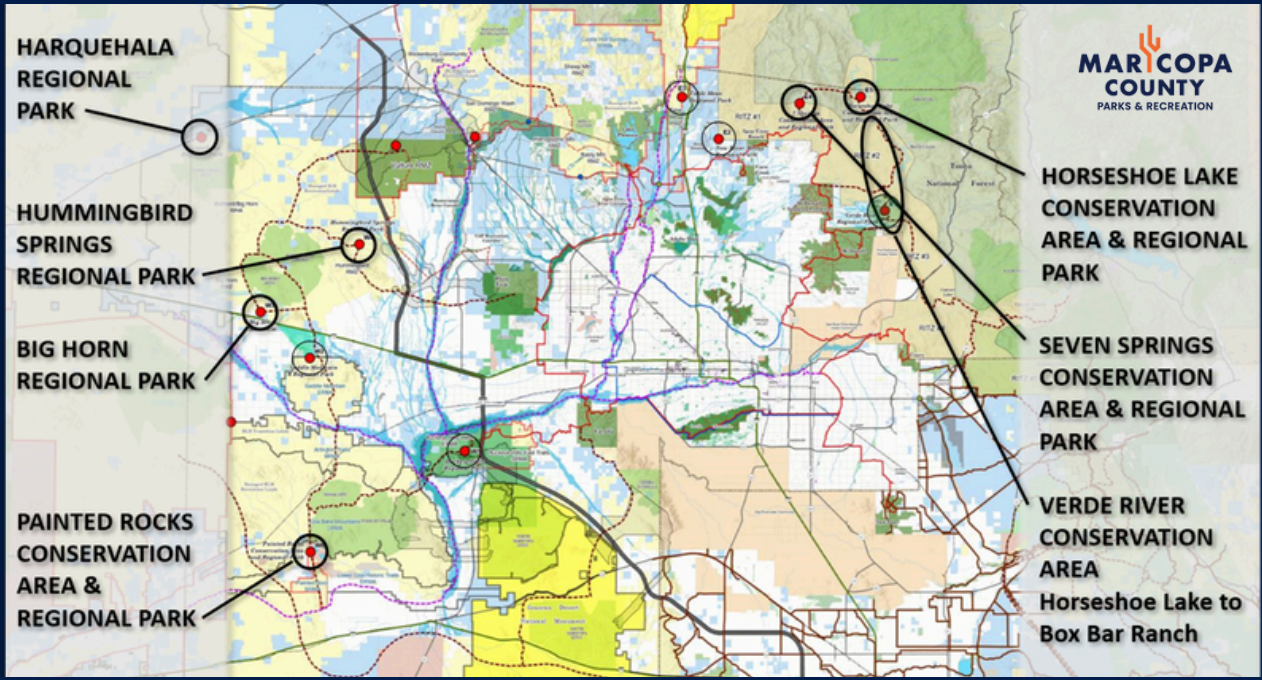
- **Goal 1:** Identify and prioritize new parklands, corridors, and connections.
- **Goal 2:** Protect critical open space and expand the regional park and trail system proportionately with population growth.
- **Goal 3:** Continue to develop new partnerships in the acquisition and management of new parklands and open space



# PRIORITY NEW REGIONAL PARKS – NEXT 10 YEARS



# FUTURE REGIONAL PARKS NEXT 20-30 YEARS



# ENHANCE COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

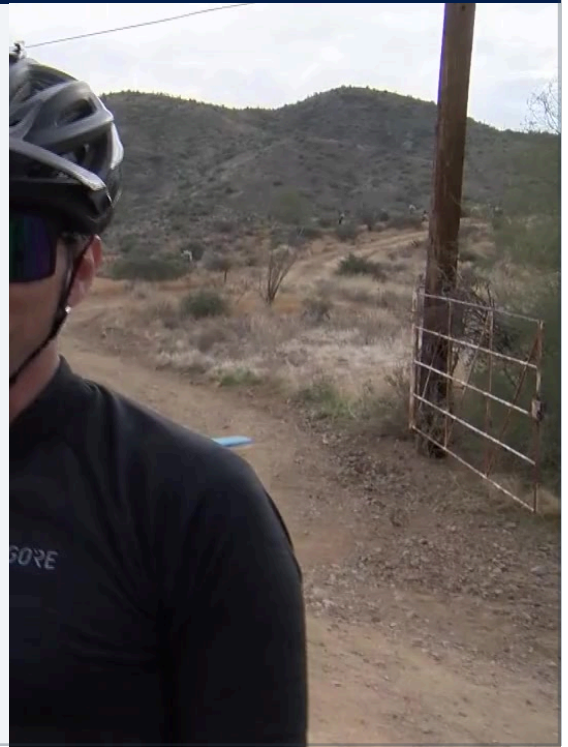
- **Goal 1:** Promote the Regional Park system as a place where visitors experience the natural environment.
- **Goal 2:** Expand natural open space park and trail experiences.
- **Goal 3:** Develop parks, amenities, and programs that consciously address improved physical fitness and mental health.





# REINVEST, PROTECT, AND CONTINUE TO IMPROVE THE EXISTING PARK SYSTEM

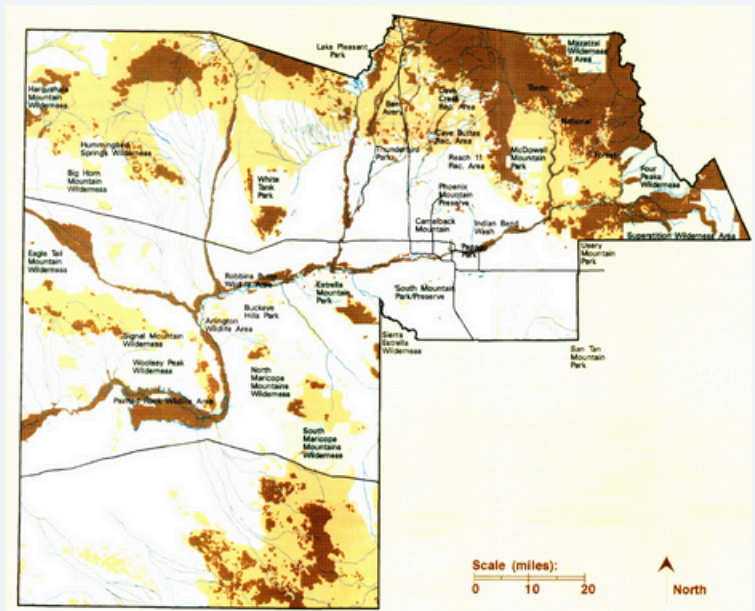
- **Goal 1:** Expand the visitor capacity and recreation opportunities of parks.
- **Goal 2:** Promote and protect public health, safety, and well-being.
- **Goal 3:** Promote and expand the regional trail system as both a nature-based recreation opportunity, and an alternative regional transportation.
- **Goal 4:** Refine and standardize park operations and management.
- **Goal 5:** Attract and retain quality staff.





# PROVIDE LEADERSHIP IN CONSERVATION & PRESERVATION

- **Goal 1:** Develop and implement a Natural Resources Plan.
- **Goal 2:** Provide leadership in balanced, economically efficient land use patterns and infrastructure.



Source: Desert Spaces  
An Open Space Plan for the Maricopa Association of Governments

Created: 1995

<https://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/nodes/view/26024210>

Page 47.

Legend:

Conservation Areas (Rust) 962,244 acres

Public and Private Lands with outstanding open space value. Recommended for protection from development and its effects through policy amendment, easements, restrictions, and/or acquisition.

Retention Areas (Yellow) 1,419,265 acres

Public and Private Lands with high open space value. Recommended for sensitive development regulation.

Secured Open Space

645,798 acres

Designated Parks, Wilderness, and Wildlife Areas.

## DEVELOPING SUSTAINABLE FUNDING SOURCES

- **Goal 1:** Identify and promote a diversified and sustainable funding portfolio.
- **Goal 2:** Attract new and retain current visitors, thus growing revenue streams.
- **Goal 3:** Update Park User Fees to cover 100% of park operations.
- **Goal 4:** Develop sustainable funding sources for natural resource restoration, cultural protection, and conservation.
- **Goal 5:** Contribute to the regional economy by promoting recreation opportunities.





# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLANS

You have heard how the system-wide park master plan was a tool that helped county understand the history as well as current barriers to park access.

It also noted that updated parks master plans were necessary for each park.

**WHAT DO YOU  
THINK A PARK  
MASTER PLAN  
NEEDS TO  
INCLUDE OR  
CONSIDER?**



This Parks Master Plan will focus on landscapes, both currently and in the future. It will collect information on trends, census data, and benchmarking.

It will examine the parks and recreation assets' ability to meet the needs of the community. It will outline steps for closing the gap between its current capabilities and those needs.

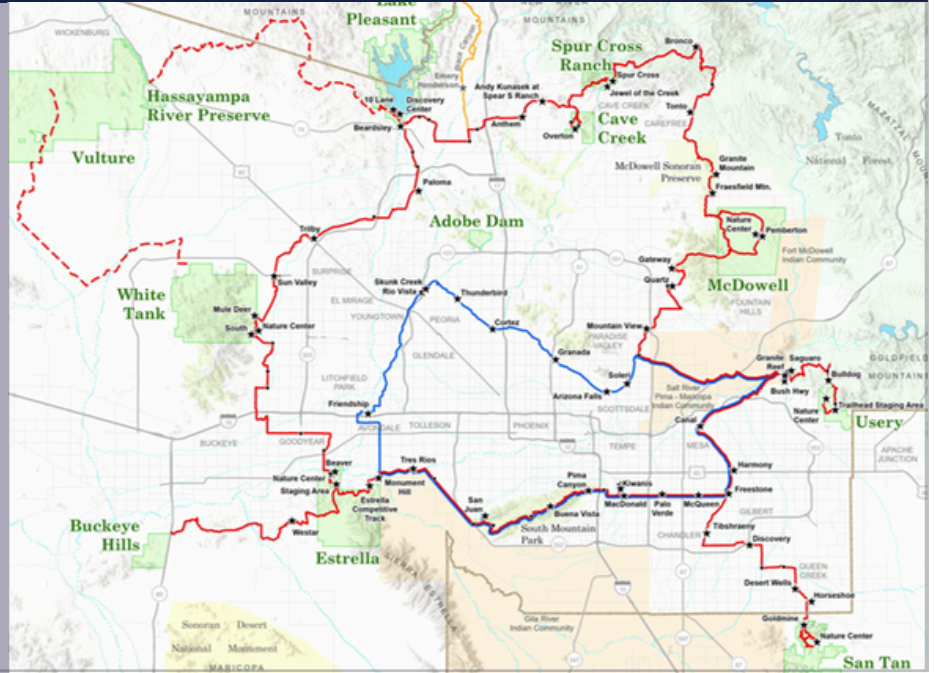
With that brief definition what do you believe is needed in a Parks Master Plan to collect this information.

# MARICOPA COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLANS

## PARKS MASTER PLANS:

Long-range strategy for specific parks will be used to examine the future of:

- each park,
- recreational facilities,
- open spaces, and
- trends over the next 10-15 years.



The parks master plans for each of the nine parks managed by Maricopa County will include:

- Capacity analysis
- Needs assessment
- Goals
- Overall strategy
- Financial plan
- Roles and responsibilities
- Action steps and timeline
- Tools to prioritize projects



# THREE-YEAR PROJECT SCHEDULE

- **Year One (2024):**

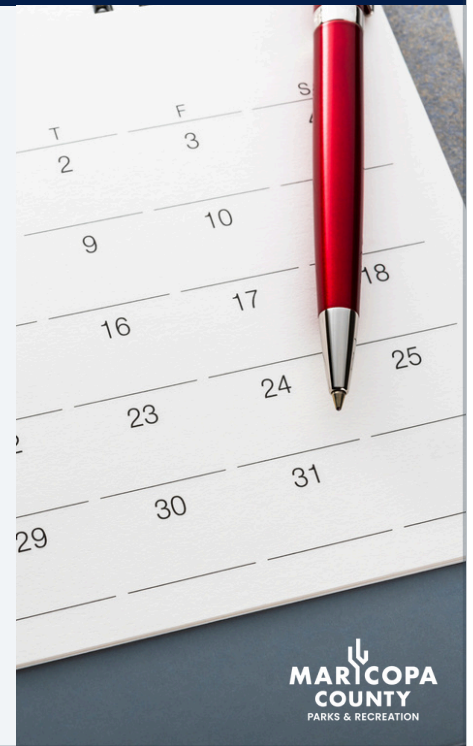
- Cave Creek Regional Park
- Spur Cross Conservation Area
- McDowell Mountain Regional Park

- **Year Two (2025):**

- Buckeye Hills Regional Park
- Estrella Mountain Regional Park
- Lake Pleasant Regional Park, including
  - Agua Fria Conservation Area, and
  - Desert Outdoor Center

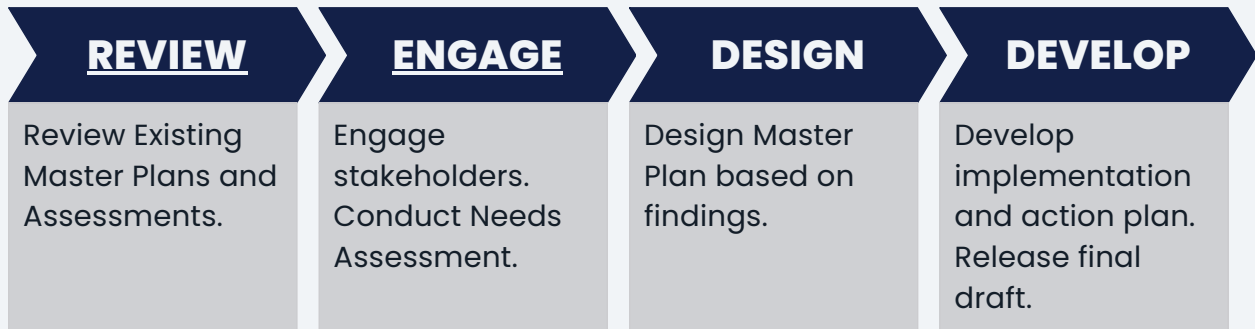
- **Year Three (2026):**

- San Tan Mountain Regional Park
- Usery Mountain Regional Park
- White Tank Mountain Regional Park



Nine parks in three years is an aggressive approach but it is important to study each park in current environment. Understand today's trends and community needs. It is important to not space parks out as previously done and there are so many changes between one plan and another that we do not have a consistent layout. For instance, one park plan was written in 1965, another one was completed in 2019. Times have changed so has the way to conduct studies, community needs, and demographics.

# THE PROCESS OF A PARKS MASTER PLANS



Our consultant will REVIEW existing master plans and assessments.

- How many are you familiar with AI?
- Why would we use AI to assess parks?

We also want to ENGAGE stakeholders, park users and the community in understanding concerns, needs, and answer questions as the park master plan is being designed.

- Our consultants has conducted open houses, stakeholder meetings, focus group sessions and have onsite, offsite, random mailing samples, and used social pinpoint to collect feedback.

After data collection, studying, conducting site visits, and public communication, the DESIGN of the master plan will begin for that park.

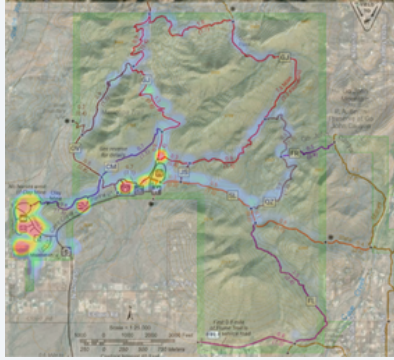
- Release of master plans is more than just a narrative; it will include implementation and action plan for us to use and continue to use after our consultant services are complete.

After review of documentation, an official release of master plan will be DEVELOPED/finalized.

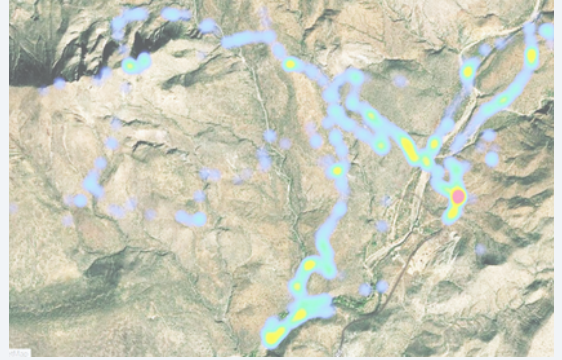
# PLACER.AI – STUDYING VISITORS BEHAVIOR

**Heat Maps** – used to visualize the most popular (hot) and unpopular (cold) elements of park areas using colors on a scale from red (hot) to blue (cold).

- The maps will allow Parks to identify user behavior patterns and trends to make changes accordingly.



Cave Creek Regional Park Heat Map (Data From Jan – Dec 2023)



Spur Cross Heat Map (Data From Jan – Dec 2023)



# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT – SURVEYS

SURVEY(S)	DISTRIBUTION METHOD	UPDATE(S)
ASU – Onsite Survey	<p>450-500 Visitors was contacted onsite at the following parks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cave Creek</li> <li>• Estrella Mountain</li> <li>• McDowell Mountain</li> <li>• Spur Cross Ranch Conservation Area</li> <li>• San Tan Mountain</li> <li>• Usery Mountain</li> <li>• White Tanks Mountain</li> </ul>	<p>Goal is to conduct 3,150 total onsite surveys (95% response rate per site):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As of June 25: 2,518</li> </ul>
ASU – Offsite Survey	<p>Longer online option/mail-in surveys were offered to park visitors</p>	<p>Goal is to forward 1,230+ surveys (expecting 40-50% response rate):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As of June 25: 378</li> </ul>
BerryDunn – Resident Survey	<p>4,500 surveys mailed to randomly selected households (online option available)</p>	<p>Expected Response Rate of 600</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As of June 24: 605</li> </ul>
BerryDunn – SocialPinpoint	<p>Open to Public</p>	<p>Over 400 contributed feedback to the three parks scheduled in 2024.</p>

**WHAT DO  
YOU THINK IS  
IMPORTANT  
TO YOUR  
VISITORS?**



What do you think was important to visitors?



# SURVEY – IMPORTANT RATINGS

**Please indicate which outdoor recreation opportunities you/your household participated in during the past year.**

- Walking for Pleasure = 77%
- Trail Hiking = 66%
- Nature Experience = 58%

**Please check all the reasons that prevent you/your household from visiting the County's parks more often.**

- Lack of shade = 35%
- Not aware of park locations or facilities = 24%
- Not aware of amenities in park = 23%
- Lack of restrooms = 20%

**Please check all the reasons that prevent you/your household from participating in programs more often.**

- I don't know what is offered = 64%
- Too busy/not interested = 18%
- Program times are not convenient = 13%

**Need for facilities/amenities.**

- Restrooms = 88%
- Shade & Trees = 88%
- Large Regional Parks = 84%
- Regional Trails = 84%
- Nature Preserves/Conservation Areas = 83%



As you can see, current trends from households that have visited a park was Q1. To enjoy walking, hiking and nature.

Q4 help us understand reasons why individuals do not visit our parks regularly. Lack of shade is understandable in AZ. Awareness and access to restroom facilities was a concern as well.

We have park rangers, guided tours, and educational programs available at parks, therefore, we ask reason for not participating in these programs. As we can see awareness plays a role.

Another question what do you think is needed at the park? We see a trend that restrooms and shade is top pick.



# MANAGEMENT PLANS

## HOW DO YOU ENSURE SUCCESS?



So now that we have discussed System Master Plans or General Plans and individual park master plans, I would like you to take a moment to think about what's next: How do you ensure the success of the front-end large-scale plans?

How long to management plans last? There is no expiration, they are breathing and everchanging tools. They should be looked at regularly.

# IMPORTANCE OF MANAGEMENT PLANS



This tool plugs in the boots on the ground, the day-to-day. It gives you the opportunity to think of everything - brain dump, including the ahoos.

It is also a way to empower your team to manage the plan, from your director to your field staff and volunteers. With good management plans, there is less misguided direction, less misinterpretation, and a cohesive effort. All from the same sheet of music.

Need to include the who, why, what, where, and how

Challenges

# WHY DO A MANAGEMENT PLAN?



Who, why, what, how, and who

They can be specific to the overarching department or to a specific park.

# TYPES OF MANAGEMENT PLANS



If your foundation is strong, then you can determine the rooms you need for the family.

You might even create sub-items such as Standard Operating Procedures to support your management plans.

Or do you know your agency's various plans?

Making defensible processes.

Trees  
Mines



# WHO DO YOU NEED TO WORK WITH?



# IMPLEMENT THE PLAN...

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							
Review existing management plan efforts and documents	High	Deputy Director			FY24	FY25	Completed
Identify necessary MPRD management efforts	High	Deputy Director			FY24	FY25	75%
Develop a strategy to complete department management plans	Medium	Deputy Director			FY24	FY25	0%
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	Medium	Deputy Director			FY25	FY27	
Research similar types of organizational management plans and benchmark best practices to include staffing practices to attract and retain quality staff	High	Deputy Director			FY24	FY25	0%
Develop a standard template and format with guidelines for completing each element	High	Deputy Director			FY25	FY25	
Complete each operation plan in coordination with the park master plan development and completion	Low	Park Superintendents			FY26	FY30	25%
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	High	Deputy Director			FY24	FY24	Completed
Explore contract maintenance opportunities or shared staffing with other County departments	Medium	Park Superintendents			FY24	FY26	25%



**WHAT DOESN'T GET MEASURED, DOESN'T GET DONE**

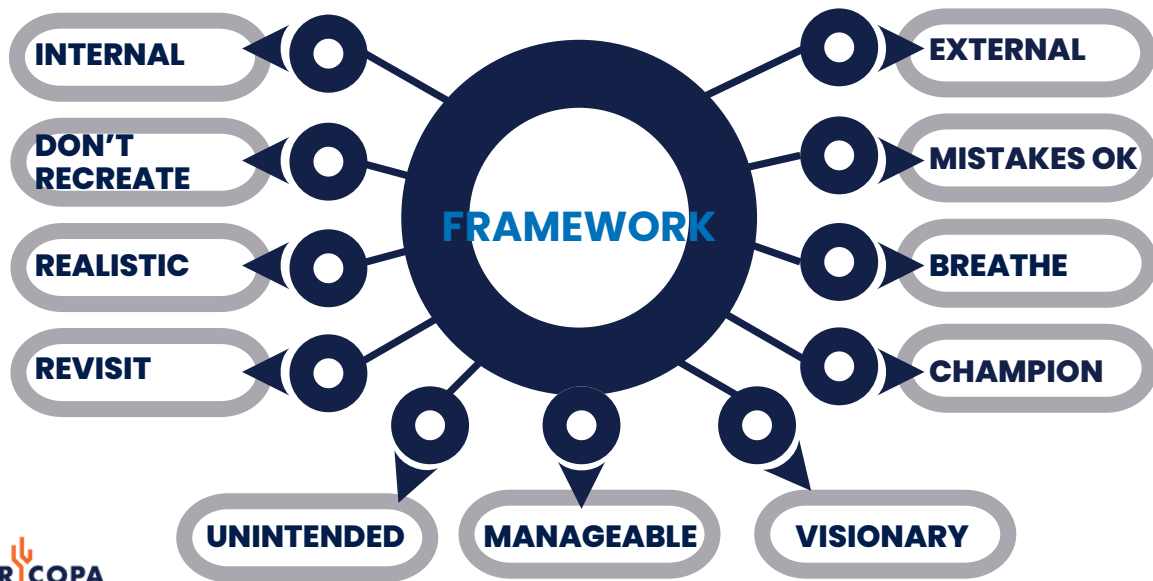
Use whatever tool you have to measure your success to keep things moving forward

Visit often

Make sure there is a champion

Use your performance plans

# TAKE AWAYS.....



Create a FRAMEWORK

Champion

Make realistic

Consider unintended consequences

Living breathing document - always able to adjust and re-evaluate

Buy-in: internal and external

Don't recreate the wheel

Mistakes happen

Revisit often

# QUESTIONS?

TO VIEW THE FULL  
PRESENTATION,  
SCAN THE QR CODE.





**MARICOPA  
COUNTY**  
PARKS & RECREATION

**THANK YOU!**

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