

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Skagit County Parks and Recreation Plan updates the 1998 plan. It is intended to lay the groundwork for the future of the County park system. The plan inventories existing parks and identifies current and future park needs. It explores potential park development and/or improvements, and prioritizes strategies to meet a level of service which fits the needs of County residents. The plan also describes existing and potential funding sources that will be needed to meet the desired LOS and maintain park facilities and recreation services.

In addition, the plan sets forth several goals and objectives to help guide County staff and elected officials in implementing the park plan.

The plan establishes project priority by analyzing: **1) LOS standards**, which provide service levels from other Washington State Counties and provide guidance in establishing LOS standards in Skagit County; **2) Public Input**, which provides fundamental information from those who use or oversee facilities and programs in Skagit County and indicate facility or program need; **3) Use Patterns**, which provides information from those who use or oversee facilities and programs in Skagit County and indicate facility or program need; **4) Surveys**, which provide a statistically valid means of distinguishing the needs of Skagit County residents.

Skagit County grew in population by nearly thirty percent during the 1990's with the fastest growth occurring the first half of the decade. Future projections indicate similar growth will occur during the following decade. During this ten year time-frame, a portion of this growth will happen in the unincorporated Urban Growth Areas. The Bayview subarea will receive a higher concentration of development than the surrounding rural lands and, consequently, will increase the need for parks and recreational facilities. The changing pattern of projected growth may require that the County's priorities and strategies related to the growth of park and recreation facilities will need to adapt in several ways. Among the ways that such strategies may change is by focusing more attention and resources into areas of projected growth. This will help assure the needs are being addressed and the services are centrally located.

The parks plan includes a discussion of sources available to fund the maintenance and expansion of the County parks system; a system that must meet the growing needs of an increasingly urbanized area. These sources include a variety of tax revenues, user fees, mitigation fees, and grants and loans from state, federal, and private sources. While the plan makes general recommendation regarding specific funding options, it assumes that most existing sources will be continued. It also enables the County to consider future funding options as circumstances may dictate. The park plan builds upon historical data to ensure that assumptions regarding projected facility and program needs are realistic.

The park plan contains an inventory of county facilities: parks, recreation, open space areas, trails, and related sites. The inventory is supplemented by a description of other facilities available to County residents; specifically, sites and facilities owned or controlled by state or federal agencies, and sites owned by municipalities and school districts. Inventories primarily show facilities and speak very little about the condition of the facilities.

The “level of service” standards used for this plan are derived from an average of three Washington State. The counties used for comparison are Whatcom, Snohomish, and Spokane. Level of Service (LOS) standards are often derived by the number and size of facilities without accounting for the facility conditions. The condition of facilities becomes important for making proper comparisons in service levels. It is one of the reasons SCPR is incorporating several other factors into the equation when determining priorities.

Use patterns can be analyzed in a variety of ways. Lack of facility space, a shortage of campsites, or an overrun trail system may lead SCPR staff and/or Parks Board members to easily conclude needs are not being met. In other cases, the analysis may be more difficult. The fact that a facility is being used under capacity may lead some to believe the needs are being sufficiently met. Whereas, the real reason the facility is being under used may be due the facility is in need of maintenance, in need of expansion, or in some other way may be inadequate. In other situations, there may be a surplus of baseball fields on the west side of the county but a shortage on the east side, even though the LOS standards indicate there is sufficient amount of fields’ county-wide. Because of all of these variables, it becomes necessary for SCPR Staff/Board to look at every facility and/or program “site specifically” to determine if in fact the needs of the community are being met. SCPR staff/board oversees facility use, has a current knowledge of the inadequacies and/or deficiencies of these facilities, and is the best resource for making this determination.

The focus of this Comprehensive Plan Update is to chart the course for the Skagit County Parks and Recreation Department for the next six years. The update will also allow continued SCPR eligibility for Interagency for Outdoor Recreation (IAC) grants. A high priority of the plan update is to ensure the need for adequate public facilities that maintain an adequate level of park and recreational services for Skagit County residents is being met. Although stormy waters may force the voyage to deviate from the original charted course, the direction will be remain the same and the destination will be one of which will satisfy the needs of Skagit County residents.