

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2007, Pierce County Parks & Recreation Services began updating its Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan (PROS Plan) to identify opportunities to enhance the County's extensive park and recreation system. The PROS Plan is required to be updated every six years to maintain eligibility for state park and recreation grant funding.

As an update to the 2002 PROS Plan, this Plan establishes specific goals, objectives, recommendations, and actions for developing, conserving, and maintaining quality parks, trails, facilities, and open space. The 2008 PROS Plan builds on the 2002 Plan, but incorporates refinements to respond to critical key issues that Pierce County is currently facing.

KEY ISSUES

Pierce County is facing a number of issues that influence the provision of parks, recreation facilities, and recreation services. The 2008 Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan is designed to respond to these issues, positioning Pierce County Parks & Recreation Services (P&RS) to better serve citizens now and into the future.

- **Landscape, Development, and Population Diversity:** Pierce County is a unique and diverse place, in terms of its natural resources, land use, development, and people. From towering mountain peaks to saltwater shores, from vibrant cities to sleepy timber towns, from rhubarb farmers to business women, Pierce County is a place of contrasts. The majority of Pierce County's population and development are concentrated along the Interstate-5 corridor, in cities such as Tacoma, Lakewood, Puyallup, and University Place. The northwestern part of the County, consisting of the Key and Gig Harbor Peninsulas and several islands within the Puget Sound, is growing in population. The southeastern part is more sparsely populated, supporting scattered development, agriculture, forestry, and Mount Rainier National Park. This diversity creates widely different expectations about how the how P&RS should manage its parks and provide recreation services.
- **Demographic and Socio-Economic Change:** Certain areas within Pierce County are growing rapidly, altering the demographic and socio-economic profile of the county. This influx of new residents is creating different service expectations and recreation needs in varying areas of the County. Many unincorporated areas are experiencing rapid urbanization, creating areas that





lack adequate parks and recreation services. Residents in many rural areas want open space within their communities preserved, including agricultural resource areas and rural sensitive resources.

- **Overlapping Jurisdictions:** There are many different cities, towns, park districts, private organizations, and County, State, and Federal agencies involved in providing parks, recreation facilities, and open space in Pierce County. Some areas of the County have multiple park and recreation providers, whereas other areas depend on Pierce County and the Parks & Recreation Services department as the major provider.
- **Regional vs. Local Parks:** A directive in the 1994 Pierce County Comprehensive Plan indicates that P&RS should be a regional park provider. Consequently, the 2002 PROS Plan provided a regional strategy for P&RS to pursue in meeting park needs. More recently, the adopted Community Plans and other planning efforts suggest that P&RS should be more involved in providing local parks. The challenge is to find an appropriate balance in addressing the needs of County residents on various geographic scales.
- **Undeveloped Sites:** Sixty-five percent of P&RS's existing park inventory is undeveloped. While much of this land is intended for development as recreation areas, there is a lack of available capital funding to realize this goal. As a result, a number of sites have remained undeveloped for many years, tending to attract nuisance behavior and require maintenance without providing recreation opportunities.
- **Funding:** P&RS lacks sufficient funding to be able to adequately address all of its responsibilities to maintain and upgrade its parks and facilities, develop new sites, provide more trails and water access, acquire and develop innovative regional parks and signature recreation areas, land-bank neighborhood and community parks to be developed by local providers, support the maintenance increases that new parks will require, and expand programming to support growing community needs all at the same time.
- **Deferred Maintenance:** Because of past funding shortages, P&RS has a significant backlog of deferred maintenance projects. A 2007 Deferred Maintenance Plan identified \$4,594,155 worth of high-priority projects at these nine sites alone that should be addressed in the next 1-5 years, and not all P&RS sites were evaluated during this process. An architectural evaluation has identified a need for \$28 million in updates to Sprinker Recreation Center, which has not been updated or improved since it was constructed more than 30 years ago.

COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

This Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan is specifically designed to address community priorities for parks and recreation services in Pierce County. The planning process used three different strategies to ensure that the preferences and desires of community residents were represented in this Plan:

- 1) **Incorporation of Community Plans:** The PROS Plan incorporates key elements from eleven adopted Community Plans and creates an integrated approach to address a variety of community preferences and needs that are reflected in these plans. Based on a thorough Needs Assessment Scenario Review, which is summarized in Chapter 4, the PROS Plan evaluated several different approaches for incorporating proposed Community Plan projects and recommendations. The Adaptive Park System proved to be best-suited for meeting both regional and community needs, as well as addressing the core values of County residents. This approach responds to the Community Plans while balancing both local and regional needs to create a well-rounded park system that reflects community preferences.

- 2) **Public Involvement:** To supplement the directives of the Community Plans, the PROS planning process incorporated additional community feedback that was obtained through a variety of forums to further gauge the recreation preferences and needs of County residents. Described more extensively in the Chapter 4 of the Plan, these activities included:
 - **A Community Questionnaire**, administered on the web and including online questionnaires for youth and adults;
 - **A Jurisdictional Partners Meeting**, involving representatives from local parks and recreation agencies;
 - **Three Community Visioning Workshops**, held in different geographic areas in Pierce County;
 - **Stakeholder Contacts**, calling on key people to provide expertise on specific aspects of the project;
 - **Three Youth Focus Groups**, with middle school and high school youth at different schools in the County;
 - **Advisory Groups**, including the Parks and Recreation Citizens' Advisory Board (PRCAB), the Technical Advisory Group (TAG), and the Planning Advisory Committee (PAC); and





- **Master Planning Involvement**, including extensive public input to develop five master plans for specific sites in underserved areas.
- 3) **Visioning and Values:** The values of Pierce County residents and their aspirations for the future are guiding forces for this Park, Recreation & Open Space Plan. The Community Plan, key findings from all public involvement efforts, and feedback from key stakeholders and staff were used to define the vision, values, and goals that support the preferred future for parks, recreation, and open space in Pierce County. These elements helped create a planning framework for the recommendations, strategies, and actions that are included in the Plan. This framework is illustrated on the next page.

REGIONAL DIRECTION

The Pierce County Comprehensive (Land Use) Plan discusses parks, recreation, and open space in the form of objectives and policies that take precedence over text written in this document. For this reason, the PROS Plan takes a regional approach, as mandated by the Comprehensive Plan:

“The County should only assume direct responsibility for the development, operation, and maintenance of facilities that have a regional benefit . . .” (Title 19A.30.160 Recreation, LU-Rc Objective 55):

The adoption of Community Plans as elements of the Comprehensive Plan requires taking a broader interpretation of the regional directive, since the Community Plans generally identify the need for local parks in areas where Pierce County currently is the only park and recreation service provider. However, the role of P&RS in these cases is to land-bank strategically targeted local park sites for eventual transfer to local jurisdictions for development and maintenance.

THE ADAPTIVE PARK SYSTEM

As part of the PROS Plan, the planning team evaluated three conceptual approaches for providing park and recreation services, considering how well each addressed key planning issues and identified community priorities. After analyzing these approaches, the planning team reached the conclusion that the Adaptive Park System best meets Pierce County’s needs and priorities. This approach provides regional elements serving a countywide audience, while balancing needs for local park service in urbanized residential unincorporated areas.

Mission, Values, Vision, and Goals Framework

Mission

“Regionally deliver quality recreation opportunities and inviting parks, trails and open space facilities to the residents of Pierce County.”

Core Values

Conservation

We value the conservation of parks, natural and open spaces, wildlife habitat, shoreline environments, and ecological resources.

Inclusiveness

We value creating, enhancing, expanding and promoting opportunities for participation in and enjoyment of parks and recreation services.

Connectivity

We value an interconnected parks and facilities network that provides access to the parks system across Pierce County.

Stewardship

We value efficient and effective management of our assets and stewardship of our parks and open space, to sustain them for future generations.

Quality of Life

We value the health & well-being of the Pierce County community, and the benefits that parks, recreation and open space offer to our quality of life.

Vision

We envision an innovative, inclusive, and interconnected system of parks and recreation services that promotes recreation, health, and environmental conservation as integral to a livable community.

Goals

Provide a quality, diversified park and open space system that supports opportunities for active and passive recreation and conserves and enhances significant environmental or historical resources and features.

Incorporate features and amenities into parks that fit the local context; contribute to environmental sustainability; and are accessible, safe, and easy to maintain for the long term.

Provide a regional system of off-street trails and corridors that links parks, open spaces, significant environmental features, public facilities, and areas of interest.

Use effective and innovative funding methods to build, maintain, operate and promote the parks recreation, and open space system.

Promote, coordinate, facilitate, or provide recreation programs that serve regional needs, support community livability, connect the community with their parks, and encourage greater recreation participation in areas not served by other providers.

Develop and operate regional-serving recreation facilities to support core recreation program areas or economic development goals and meet identified recreation needs.

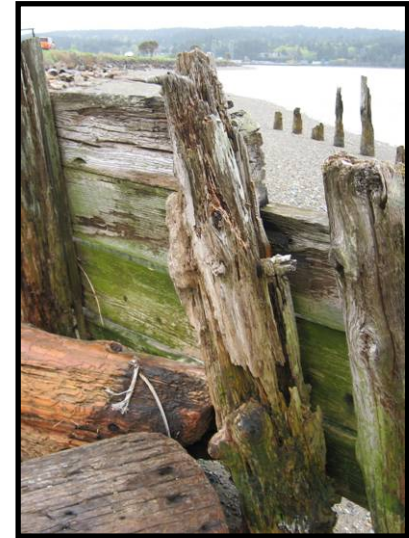
Incorporate natural areas and unique ecological features into the park and open space system to protect threatened species, conserve significant natural resources and habitat, and retain migration corridors that are unique and important to local wildlife.

Serve as a regional recreation coordinator, forging partnerships and fostering opportunities for countywide collaboration among all major recreation providers in the provision of parks, facilities, programs, and services.

Develop, train, and support a professional parks and recreation staff that effectively serves the community in the realization of the goals and objectives of this Plan.

Engage Pierce County residents in the planning, stewardship, and programming of park and recreation resources, and provide effective community outreach and marketing to increase public awareness and support of recreation services.

In comparison to the 2002 Plan, which focused on regional service only, the management approach recommended here is more flexible in finding appropriate ways to serve communities with high population growth rates, where community needs may change radically by the time land can be acquired and developed. The provision of parks in the Adaptive System considers population density and geographic distribution to identify countywide needs for specific types of parks. It prioritizes the development of ten county parks in rapidly-growing, underserved areas for the priority. It aims to land-bank strategically located local park sites in heavily-developed unincorporated areas, such as South Hill, Frederickson, and Spanaway, which are not served by other providers. These local parks can be transferred to local jurisdictions, when park and recreation service areas, park and recreation districts, or metropolitan park districts are formed to finance development and maintenance. Finally, the adaptive approach proposes the provision of three regional parks, multiple water access sites, and a system of regional trails from a broader perspective—recognizing that regional scale resources draw people from throughout the County and beyond to areas where unique recreation opportunities can be provided, and that some regional-scale recreation amenities will need to be located outside of dense urban areas in order to take advantage of unique environmental or cultural resources.



The Adaptive Park System will provide significant recreation opportunities for many underserved residents by providing parks in areas where they are needed most. It also will retain smaller parcels and preserve unique recreation opportunities in strategic locations to provide open space, close-to-home recreation, and diverse recreation experiences. Finally, this approach will strategically land-bank specific park sites for residents in individual communities where needs are the greatest and where community preferences have been documented through the Community Plans.

PROPOSED SERVICE REGIONS

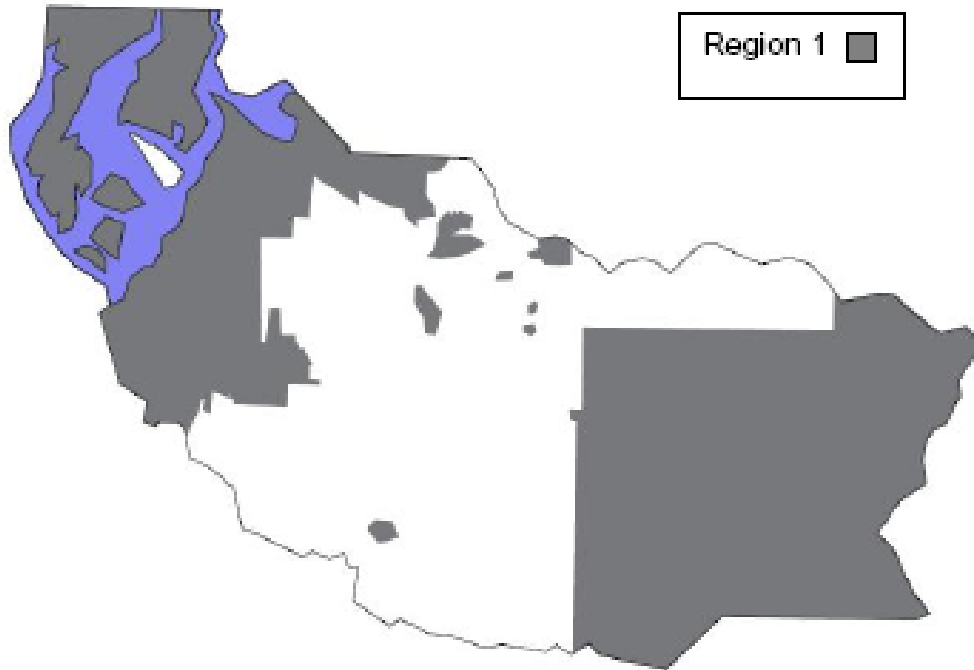
One of the elements that distinguishes this PROS Plan from its 2002 predecessor is how it strives to address the needs of individual communities within a regional approach. A key concept of this 2008 PROS Plan is the service regions concept, which targets resources and services to different regions based on their differing needs. In this manner, both regional and local needs are addressed, and no community is left out of the planning process.

To best address different opportunities and challenges in various areas of Pierce County, P &RS will have to vary its level of service accordingly to be able to meet the park and recreation needs of residents County-wide. For this reason, the preferred park system for Parks &



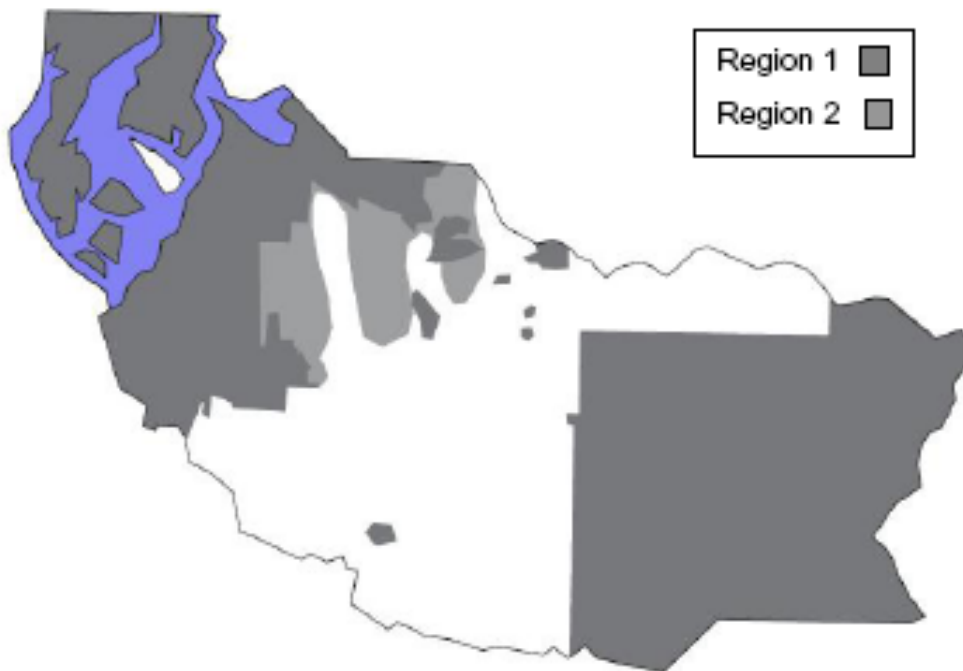
Recreation Services reflects a different role in the provision of parks and recreation services within three service regions. In all three regions, P&RS should strive to coordinate with other providers of parks, facilities, and services, and serve as a clearinghouse for information. The Service Regions are described in greater detail in Chapter 6 of the PROS Plan.

- **REGION 1 : EXISTING SERVICES:** Incorporated cities, existing park and recreation districts, and other agencies are the primary providers of parks, recreation, and open space services in Region 1. In these areas, P&RS should focus on providing regional-scale recreation opportunities, regional trails, and freshwater and saltwater access where appropriate.



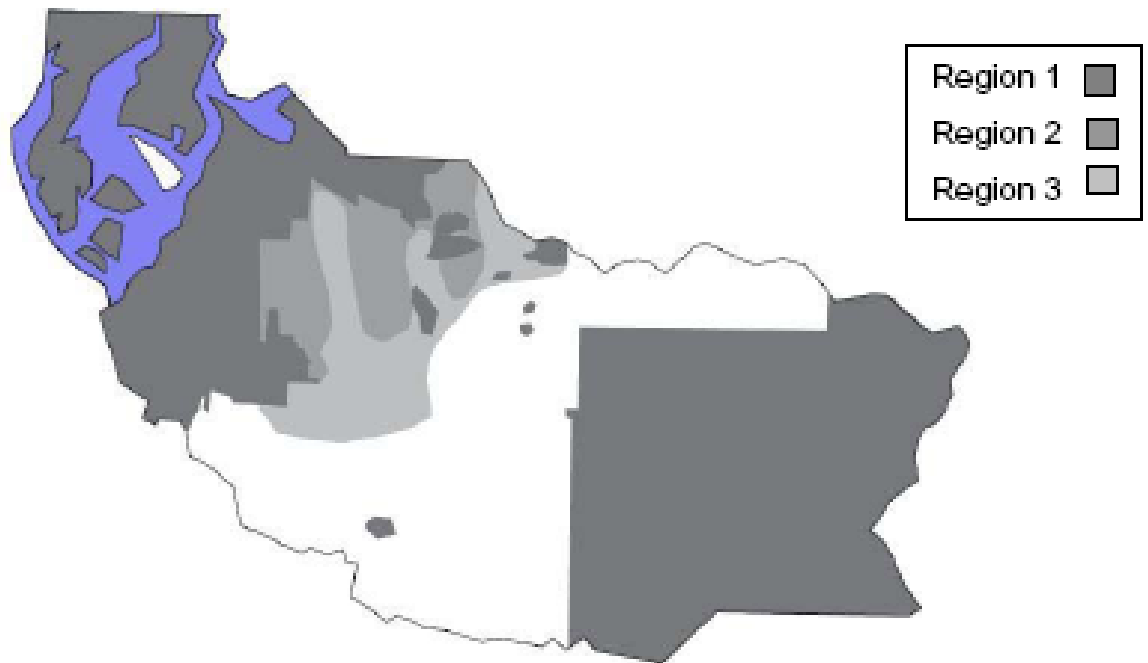
REGION 2: URBAN UNINCORPORATED: Many unincorporated areas within Pierce County are rapidly urbanizing or are already urbanized. Unlike Region 1, the communities within Region 2 have significant parks, recreation, and open space needs that are not being met by other providers. In these areas, which are located within identified Urban Growth Areas, P&RS should strive to provide regional parks, regional-scale facilities, County parks, trails, and water access. In addition, P&RS should:

- Land-bank strategically-located, local parks. Using the criteria notes in Chapters 4 and 6 of this Plan, P&RS should utilize existing undeveloped parks and sites recommended in the Community Plans where appropriate; and
- Facilitate the formation of park and recreation service areas, park and recreation districts, or metropolitan park districts in Region 2.





REGION 3: RURAL AREAS: Large areas of Pierce County remain rural in character, including significant natural and forested areas. These natural assets require a different approach in order to conserve and enhance them in a way that allows for public access and recreation, while still balancing ecological needs. In Region 3, P&RS should prioritize the development of regional parks, county parks, regional facilities, and open space to support outdoor recreation and trail-oriented opportunities, water access, environmental education, and interpretation. Moreover, the Department should explore opportunities for conservation of critical habitat, natural areas, and open space through partnerships or acquisition.



IMPLEMENTATION

This PROS Plan represents community and regional desires and needs for parks and recreation, not the amount of funding that P&RS has or can acquire. The PROS Plan includes specific strategies for renovating existing parks and facilities, acquiring new sites, providing programs and services, and maintaining County park and recreation resources in a sustainable way that conserves them for future generations. Funding these needs will be a challenge.



A Capital Improvement Plan, presented in Chapter 6, includes projects that are needed to support the vision, goals, and objectives in this Plan. Some projects can be implemented immediately, but others will need to be carried out over the long term, within the 15-year timeframe for this Plan, or in some cases, even beyond. The total cost for implementing needed projects in this Plan is approximately \$332 million. These costs are divided by park classification in table below.

Capital Improvement Plan Summary by Classification

Park Type	Estimated Cost ¹
System-wide Improvements	2,110,000
Regional Parks	49,320,000
County Parks	179,880,000
Local Parks	19,530,000
Special Use Facilities	39,080,000
Resource Conservancy Parks	12,805,000
Linear Parks/Trails	22,140,000
Undeveloped Sites	250,000
Other County-Owned Parks	7,000,000
Other Plans and Projects	520,000
TOTAL	\$332,635,000

¹Costs are presented in 2008 dollars, which will need to be updated annually to adjust for inflation and changing land and labor costs.

Given the County’s limited funding resources, clearly not all of these projects can be implemented within the next 15 years. Consequently, the PROS Plan includes a set of prioritization criteria to assist in the CIP decision-making process. By applying the criteria outlined in Chapter 6, P&RS can decide which projects should move forward first in alignment with the community values and visions as put forth in the Plan. The criteria favors projects that achieve the following:



- *Improve maintenance efficiency.* Projects that improve maintenance efficiency or that will reduce life-cycle costs should be considered as high priorities.
- *Utilize alternative funding or partnerships.* Projects that have a potential to be funded through grants, donations, or partner contributions should be considered as high priorities, over projects that do not have other funding sources.
- *Ensure equitable distribution.* Priority consideration should be given to projects that support a fair and equitable distribution of opportunities throughout the County, based on the Service Regions concept presented in this Plan.
- *Provide the “biggest bang for the buck.”* Projects where the cost/benefit ratio is favorable should be considered as high priorities. In other words, projects that are less costly but serve a broader population are desired. In comparison, a project that is costlier, meets a localized need, or serves a limited number of residents would be assigned a lesser priority, even though these projects are still valuable.
- *Implement existing master plans.* Projects called for in adopted site master plans should be considered as high priorities.
- *Strengthen the community.* Proposed projects should be prioritized based on their ability to strengthen community identity, foster interaction between citizens, and build true community. For example, projects that support the adopted Community Plans, new community priorities, or community events should be considered as high priorities.

In addition to focusing resources to where they count the most, P&RS should consider all possible options to fund projects noted in the CIP, including:

- Expanding or capitalizing on existing sources of funding;
- Evaluating impact fees;
- Exploring bonding as a possible financing tool for priority projects;
- Facilitating the formation of park and recreation service areas and/or park and recreation districts to fund local projects, particularly projects that are noted both in this Plan and the Community Plans; and
- Considering all sources of funding, including grants, donations, capital campaigns, sponsorships, partnerships, sources of revenue, etc.

Finally, community support and collaboration among residents, County agencies, the County Executive, County Council, individual communities, potential partners and other jurisdictions is needed to ensure that park and recreation needs are met County-wide. Only when all these entities start seeing the region-wide benefits of working together to implement an approach to providing park and recreation services in a way that emphasizes regional service while respecting local context, will residents and P&RS be able to embrace and take advantage of the diversity that makes Pierce County unique.