

**RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

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**RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

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**I. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this section of the Evaluation and Appraisal Plan for its successes and shortcomings. While discussed briefly in this section, identified major issues will receive further examination in the Identified Issues Section of the report.

**II. INTRODUCTION**

This document was prepared by the Washington County Planning Commission and the Washington County Planning Department in cooperation with other County agencies. While many issues will be presented in this section, those identified at the scoping meeting will be presented and further elaborated on in the Identified Issues Section the report.

**III. THE EXISTING SYSTEM ANALYSIS**

County Parks and Recreation Facilities. Despite Washington County’s lack of overwhelming population growth, the proactive open space and parks policy has created the provision of substantial areas of land and facilities dedicated to recreational use. The County is a rural county that should be considered sparsely populated with heavier concentrations in widespread areas. With this being the case, there should be a wide geographic distribution of recreational facilities; with some located centrally in cities and towns, with other being located throughout the county so as to enhance quality of life all over the County. Parks and recreational facilities should be accessible to everyone and not just concentrated in one or two areas.

- A. Levels of Service. Though the county has not experienced a high growth rate, and the population is generally stable, the level of service for recreational facilities has also been stable if not high. Because of the County’s small growth and dispersed development pattern, planning recreational facilities based solely on a per capita basis would not provide the most effective results for serving the county residents. Thus, the County has an established a LOS in relation to per capita, but the Parks and Recreation Department has also consistently developed parks that serve residents and visitors by placing a variety of recreational facilities in close proximity of people countywide in order to serve the greatest number of people. Quotas set forth in the LOS standards are included in the Goals, Objectives, and Policies. To have a proactive system of placing facilities requires that the per capita rule be combined with the distribution of facilities over the entire area of the County. During the planning period, all of the projects listed in Table F-6 of the Comprehensive Element of the existing plan were completed with the exception of the Five Points Recreation Center Expansion – Phase II and the Wausau Recreation Center. Both of these projects are currently listed on the Capital Improvement Element schedule

along with other projects planned for the future. The lower water levels of the recent drought provided a prime opportunity for repair of boat ramps, but funding and DEP permitting is an issue for being able to regularly commence such maintenance.

1. Inventory of Facilities. The Washington County parks system includes 65.1 acres of parks, 111.3 acres of boat ramp parks, omitting the Rosewood Resources site, and 61,166.89 acres for other types of recreation use, which include the Rosewood Resources site. An inventory of Washington County parks and recreational facilities are located in Tables F1 through F5 in the Comprehensive Plan. The inventory list of recreational facilities will need to be updated in the EAR-based amendment to reflect the new facilities added during the planning period. The new facilities to be added include:

- Jenkins Landing
- Daniels Lake Development to include parks, ball fields, pavilions, and equestrian center
- Hunter Park, Vernon EMS location
- Orange Hills recreation complex, kiddies' park, ball fields, and community center
- Wilder Park, Sunny Hills Subdivision to include kiddies' park, pavilion, picnic area, and skate park
- Campbell Park includes kiddies' park, pavilion, and picnic area

2. Type of Facilities

Generally, the parks offer a variety of facilities such as basketball courts, a skate boarding park, fishing docks, boat ramps, primitive camping sites, kiddy parks (swings and slides), community centers, meeting and conference rooms, barbecue grills and pavilions. Some private facilities are available as well, especially for hunting. There is also the golf course located on Deltona's Sunny Hills, which is open to the public. In addition to the County's dedicated parks facilities and private facilities, numerous acres are available through the holdings of the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD), namely within the Choctawhatchee River Basin and the Econfina Watershed Area and the State of Florida (Pine Log Forest). Combined with the 61,343.29 acres available in County parks, there are approximately 125,322.29 acres available for recreational use if all Conservation and Recreation parks are considered.

3. Handicapped Accessibility. The Parks and Recreation Department has made improvements to handicapped accessibility to all recreational facilities where possible. All restrooms sites are ADA compliant, but all boat ramps are not. One factor affecting this effort is the high cost of providing these services and features, especially in the older parks. Newly constructed parks are built to include handicapped accessibility in the original construction. Some of the older parks do not have handicapped facilities but will be modified, as time and funding permits, to have the necessary ADA requirements constructed when feasible.

4. Users' Fees. Overall, the use of the parks and related activities are mostly free to the public. There are some facilities where it is necessary to charge users' fee due to the cost involved in providing utilities and maintenance for the certain facilities. Fees are charged for primitive camping sites, and for the use of community centers serving the private needs of the public (i.e., wedding receptions, reunions, etc.). This money is deposited into accounts earmarked for the maintenance and utility bills for these facilities. User fees are extended to:
    - Blue Lake Community Center
    - Hinson Crossroads Community Center
    - Five Point Recreation Community Center
    - Orange Hill Community Center
    - Washington County Equestrian Center
    - Wilder Parks Pavilion (for private functions such as reunions, etc.)
  5. The Parks and Recreation Committee. The requirement for establishing this committee is included in the Comprehensive Plan; the makeup of the committee is provided for in County Ordinance 2007-3. Five members serve with one member coming from each County Commissioner District; the committee meets as required. The committee serves in an advisory capacity making recommendations to the County Commissioners in regards to the use and operation of all County parks and recreational areas. A County ordinance provides for enforcement of all rules and regulations for parks and open space.
- B. Open Space Requirements for New Development. All new subdivisions are required to dedicate a percentage of the new development to be reserved for open space and recreation. Dedication of open space is consistently part of the recorded plats. While individual lots may have deed restrictions protecting the trees and vegetation, there is no policy in place that will protect the vegetation in any of the recreation and open spaces dedicated to the County in the residential subdivisions. This will be discussed further in the Identified Issues section of this report.
- C. Countywide Master Plan. There is currently no comprehensive countywide master plan for the provision of parks, open space and recreation. As the County continues to evolve and change, the need for such a plan becomes more evident in order to support the strategic planning efforts for existing parks and recreation assets. This plan would be an ideal avenue for documenting existing parks, recreational facilities, and the programs offered by the County and its municipalities. Not only would the plan define a mission statement, but the master plan would identify future needs and general recommendations for locating new facilities as well as outline an action plan. Criteria for signage, landscaping, and alternative funding sources to assure adequate support for the operation, maintenance, acquisition, and construction of park and recreation facilities would be established through the master plan. The plan would also address the creation of facilities that would meet the future needs of the County through 2030 in an effective and feasible manner. This plan would be compiled and supported by a combined effort

of the Parks and Recreation Committee, the Parks and Recreation Department, county residents, and interested citizens including a survey and public workshops as needed.

D. Issues. s.163.3191 (2)(e) and (g), F.S.

1. The master plan has not been accomplished.
2. Dedicated open space needs to be inventoried and as plats are approved new space should be added to the County's inventory of open space and recreational open space. This inventory should also include NFWFMD and the State of Florida lands.
3. The current recreational areas and open space is not always designated on the Future Land Use Map (FLUM).

E. Proposed Changes. s.163.3191(2)(i), F.S. Overall, the County's recreational program has been a resounding success. However, both growth of the County and the program itself dictates that while no major changes to the goals, objectives, or policies are required (except to be updated as needed), future growth should be planned for in a more cohesive manner.

- a. Master Plan. The Parks and Recreation and Planning departments should work together to ensure that a master plan is formulated.
- b. Dedicated Open Space. Land dedicated to open space in subdivision should become a part of the Recreation and Open Space inventories. Lands obtained by the NFWFMD and the State of Florida need to be categorized as such and included in the recreational properties inventory of the County.
- c. Designated Recreation Areas and Open Space. These areas should be included on the FLUM as recreational lands.
- d. New Policies to be Added. The New policies to be added to this element are included at the end of the Goals, Objective, and Policies section of this report

#### **IV. GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES FOR WASHINGTON COUNTY AND THE MUNICIPALITIES OF CARYVILLE, EBRO, VERNON AND WAUSAU**

All goals, objectives and policies stated apply to all of the local governments mentioned in the title unless otherwise stated.

The following assessment of the Recreation and Open Space Element is presented to analyze the Element as it relates to the major issues listed in the Identified Issues section of this EAR, as well as to assess the overall performance of the Element. Specific attention has been placed on Identified Issue 6, 8 & 9. These Identified Issues address the protection of open space, the revision of the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code and the Public School

Facilities Element. Objective 2, below, called for policies to support the needs for recreational facilities in the future and this has been supported by policies in the PSFE. This Element details many Objectives to secure more open space throughout the County. Each Objective of this Element has been assessed to determine if further revision is necessary for both the Comprehensive Plan and the Land Development Code.

**GOAL:** Provide adequate recreation facilities, active and passive, and open space to sufficiently meet the needs of the present and future population of the County and the municipalities of Caryville, Ebro, Vernon, and Wausau.

**Objective 1:** Throughout the planning period, provide public access to all existing and future recreation facilities within the County and the municipalities (including fresh water beaches and shores).

*The County is currently meeting this objective.*

**Policy 1-1:** The County and the municipalities will continue to provide parking areas and bicycle racks for all user-based recreation sites.

*The County is currently meeting this policy where feasible (Blue Lake and Wilder parks). The County is rural and bicycle travel is not a common mode of travel. There are bike racks at Blue Lake Park and Wilder Park. Future planning will continue to evaluate the location of the facility when considering and planning for new bicycle racks at the County's recreational facilities.*

**Policy 1-2:** Within the municipalities, bike paths and pedestrian walkways shall be built when necessary to provide access to recreation areas.

*The County is currently meeting this policy, which will be discussed further in the Issues section of the Evaluation and Appraisal Report with regard to developer requirements concerning bike paths and sidewalks. The first of these paths has been funded and the contract awarded for a path that begins at SR 77 to Falling Waters Road to State Park Road and back to SR 77.*

**Policy 1-3:** All Planned Unit Developments (PUD's) shall be required to provide sufficient on-site recreational areas and facilities as well as bicycle and pedestrian access.

*The County is currently meeting this policy, but this will be further addressed in the Issues section of this Evaluation and Appraisal Report with regard to developer requirements concerning bike paths and sidewalks.*

**Policy 1-4:** Through the subdivision approval process, the County and municipalities shall be afforded the opportunity to secure public access to all natural water bodies of 20 acres or more in size.

*The County is currently meeting this policy.*

Policy 1-5: Public parks and facilities shall be designed and constructed with access-ways which are compatible with the character and quality of natural resources found on-site.

*The County is currently meeting this policy.*

Objective 2: Throughout the planning period, the County and the municipalities shall coordinate with each other, other local governments, and the private sector to ensure that future recreation needs of the County are met.

*The County is currently meeting this objective. The County and municipalities work cooperatively in the establishment and maintenance of new facilities. The County has an active Parks and Recreation Committee that meets as required. Advertised public meetings are held on a regular basis. The public is invited to attend meetings to express their needs and desires on new parks and recreational facilities within the county. The most recent example is the new Washington County Horse Arena that was the culmination of efforts of private citizens and County Staff. The requirements set forth in the ordinance creating the Parks and Recreation Committee should be incorporated into the EAR-based amendment.*

Policy 2-1: Seek formal or informal agreements with the Washington County School Board for use of school playgrounds and facilities. These agreements should specifically address the provision of areas/facilities suitable for walking and jogging.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. The County and local school district have a good record of cooperation even though there is no formal agreement for joint use of most of the recreational facilities. However, there are agreements existing for the joint use of Hunter Park in Vernon. As identified, it is expected that future agreements will be established as needs develop and the affected facilities will be appropriately identified for joint use. The need for cooperation is addressed in the policies of the Public School Facilities Element. This new Element requires for collocation of recreation and educational facilities.*

Policy 2-2: Continue to require of developers/subdividers the dedication of land for recreation, or a fee in lieu of land dedication for future residential developments in accordance with the following standards.

- a. All residential subdivisions of 20 parcels or more shall dedicate land for parks and/or open space equal to 5% of the total land area of the subdivision with a minimum area of 1.0 acre required.

*The County is currently meeting this policy consistently. All platted subdivisions must include open space. There is no record of any variances being granted for this requirement.*

- b. The fee paid in lieu of land dedication shall be equal to the fair market value of the required land area dedication prior to subdividing.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. While this is an option left open to developers, none that have chosen this method.*

- c. The option to require dedication of land or payment of the fee in lieu of dedication shall rest with the county.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. Final approval by the Board of County Commissioners is required based on the recommendation from the Planning Commission, if and when such conditions are offered to the County.*

Policy 2-3: The County shall continue to provide funds for recreational purposes to each of the municipalities located in the County.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. However, due to budget constraints for the coming years, the amount of funding contributed to recreational purposes may be reduced. The county is hopeful that alternative funding or additional funding will support the county in its ability to fund recreation as liberally as it has in the past.*

Objective 3: Ensure the recreation needs for the projected population as determined in this Element's analysis continues to be affordable and efficiently met throughout the planning period.

Policy 3-1: The County and the municipalities hereby adopt the recreation levels of service as shown below

Washington County Receptions Areas Levels of Service Standards (LOSS)	
Category	LOSS
USER BASED	
<u>Neighborhood Parks, Playlots, Pocket Parks</u>	
Persons per Facility	2,000
Persons per Acre	352.0
RESOURCE BASED	
<u>Hunting &amp; Fishing</u>	
Persons per Facility	6,500
Persons per Acre	0.59
<u>Canoe Trails</u>	
Persons per Facility	6,500
Persons per Mile	590
DUAL PURPOSE	
Persons per Facility	5,000
Persons per Acre	8.2

Washington County Recreations Facilities Levels of Service Standards (LOSS) (in people served per facility)	
Category	LOSS
Baseball, Softball and Youth Diamonds	3,000
Tennis Courts	2,200
Basketball Courts	4,000
Swimming Pools	10,000
Neighborhood and Community Centers	6,000
Golf Courses	25,000
Athletic Fields ( Track, Football, Soccer)	30,000
Picnic Tables	150
Beach Areas Freshwater	5,000
Equipped Playgrounds	3,000
Hiking Trails (Persons per trail mile)	2,000

*The County is currently meeting this policy.*

Policy 3-2: The County and the municipalities shall ensure that the adequate number of acres of land for new park and recreational facilities is maintained throughout the planning period. If the established LOSS for recreational land area cannot be maintained through voluntary dedication by developers/subdividers and by acquisition of land by other governmental entities, then the County shall acquire the required additional acreage necessary to meet or surpass such standards.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. This policy will be further addressed in the Issues section of this Evaluation and Appraisal Report. The requirement for dedication of open space from developers is not an optional process, but a requirement. The Planning Department, upon plat approval, should identify those areas to be dedicated to open space and provide this information to Parks and Recreation to maintain in open space records.*

Policy 3-7: The County and the municipalities shall preserve and maintain existing parks and recreation facilities through the use of adequate operating budgets and proper management techniques.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. The Parks and Recreation Department maintains a staff of approximately 12 individuals who are dedicated to the care and maintenance of parks within the County. There have been some budgetary concerns over the past few months, but the Parks and Recreation Department has maintained an acceptable level of service.*

Policy 3-8: Priority for neighborhood parks/playgrounds and equipped play areas will be in the pockets of under-served areas, especially in the southwestern portion of the County.

*The County is currently meeting this policy. A new park has been constructed in the unincorporated area adjacent to Ebro and a new town park is under construction in Ebro with the County contributing assistance in land clearing and grounds preparation. Five Points Recreational Center will receive further renovation and expansion during the next fiscal year. Orange Hill Park and Recreation is a new facility on the east side of the County. Wilder Park has been renovated and expanded in the southeastern portion of Washington County. Campbell Park is new to the rural area north of Ebro as is Hunter Park on the east side of Vernon.*

Policy 3-9: The County will pursue extending the Holmes Creek Canoe Trail designation, through DEP's Office of Greenways and Trails, to end at the Holmes Creek Campsites Preservation 2000 acquisition project site.

*The County needs to pursue the conclusion of this issue.*

Policy 3-10: As part of the district-based recreational survey, the County will add a level of service standard for horseback riding trails, by 2005. Recreational districts coincide with Commissioner Districts.

*This policy should be reworded to establish planning districts to coincide with the Impact Fee districts.*

Policy 3-10: As part of the district-based recreational survey, the County will add a level of service standard for horseback riding trails, by 2005. Recreational districts will coincide with Fire, EMS, and Transportation districts as established in the Impact Fee Ordinance.

Objective 4: Throughout the planning period, the County and the municipalities, state and federal agencies, and the private sector shall coordinate in a continuing and professional effort to provide adequate open space within the County.

*Good planning practice requires the developer to establish required open space in new development projects. Northwest Florida Water Management District owns and maintains several thousand of acres of open space, as does the State of Florida with parks and forestlands. The County has many acres of parks scattered throughout the County and all municipalities have either parks or are currently in some phase of park construction.*

*The County is currently meeting this policy.*

Policy 4-1: The County and the municipalities shall include a definition of open space in its LDR's and shall include recommendations concerning natural vegetation, including requiring green areas and appropriate buffer zones and regulating signage. Open space in this plan is defined as "undeveloped land suitable for passive recreation and/or conservation uses." The definition included in the LDR's shall include land uses which may be defined as Open Space (i.e. Silviculture Land, land in its natural vegetative state, etc.) and shall continue minimum open space standards for specific land uses.

*The County is currently meeting this policy, and will be further addressed in the Issues section of this Evaluation and Appraisal Report.*

Policy 4-2: The County and the municipalities shall include in the adopted LDR's buffering provisions to ensure adequate protection of the major managed areas located throughout the County.

*The County is currently meeting this policy, and will be further addressed in the Issues section of this Evaluation and Appraisal Report.*

Objective 5: The County shall better serve the recreational needs of its citizens by basing level of service standards on individual districts instead of a County-wide basis. Recreational districts coincide with Commissioner Districts.

*The County is currently meeting this objective. It is recommended that the Planning Districts for recreational needs be concurrent with the Transportation, Fire, and EMS planning districts. Allowing the boundaries of all the different types of planning districts to be coincident with the districts as established in the Transportation, Fire, and EMS Impact Fee plan will aid in streamlining and simplifying the planning process and the provision of services.*

*This policy should be reworded to read:*

*The County shall better serve the recreational needs of its citizens by basing level of service standards on the impact fees planning districts rather than the commissioners' district system.*

Policy 5-1: The County shall apply the adopted level of service standards to each district.

*The County is currently meeting this policy.*

Policy 5-2: The County shall draft a district-based recreational survey and plan by 2005 to ensure that the adopted level of service standards are being met in each district.

*The County has not met this policy. There has been no Countywide Master Plan developed by the County. This policy needs to be reworded as follows.*

Policy 5-2: The County shall draft a district-based recreational survey and master plan by 2015 to ensure that the adopted level of service standards are being met in each planning district.

*This will be pursued by the County Parks and Recreation and Planning departments.*

*Recommendation: An objective and corresponding policies should be included in the EAR-based amendments.*

*Objective 6: By the year 2020, the County parks and recreational facilities will be as safe, or safer than they currently are. The number of accidents occurring in the County parks and other recreational facilities will be targeted to be reduced, or minimally, remain constant.*

*Policy 6-1: The County will promote safety at public parks and recreational facilities through regular risk assessment and safety inspections. The frequency of the inspections for facilities will occur no less than twice in a calendar year and will be established by the County risk manager.*

*Policy 6-2: The County will promote safety at public parks and recreation facilities through the use of information signage, lighting, rails, fences, and other appropriate measures.*

*Policy 6-3: The County will promote playground safety through the use of impact-absorbing ground materials, by separating playgrounds from vehicular traffic, and by selecting safe play equipment.*

*Objective 6-4: The County will continue to provide adequate levels of funding to properly and efficiently maintain park and recreation facilities within Washington County.*

*Objective 6-5: The County will continue to utilize the Florida Boating Improvement Plan (FBIMP) for funding available for boat ramp improvements.*

*Policy 6-6: The County will establish a maintenance program for each park and recreational facility and will prepare a schedule of expenditures required to maintain each park and recreation facility.*

*Policy 6-7: To the extent possible as allowed by funding, the County will provide and improve recreation facilities' safety deficiencies within one year of the date for which the deficiency was first identified.*

*Policy 6-8: The County will aggressively pursue an increase in private and public funds for the acquisition, development, maintenance, and operation of parks and recreational facilities.*

*Policy 6-9: The County will make attempts to offer park concessions to private vendors as well as community-based not-for-profit organizations. Such arrangements will be pursued through the use of formal agreements as to the sharing of income between the vendor and the County's Park and Recreation Department.*