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CHAPTER 8. PARKS AND ~~OPEN SPACE~~RECREATION

8.1 INTRODUCTION/PURPOSE

With its unique range of outdoor recreational opportunities, Yakima County has much to offer outdoor recreationists. Our four distinct seasons, central location in Washington State and vast holdings of public land have made this area an increasingly popular place in which to recreate. Here, residents and visitors alike can enjoy many outdoor activities. Fishing and hunting, skiing and snowmobiling, hiking, biking, and walking are some of the more popular types of outings. Federal, state and regional parks, trails, and playgrounds help meet the demand to participate in outdoor recreation, stay physically fit and find relief from urban surroundings.

Not all of the open spaces we see are accessible to the general public and very little of our public land is close to where people live. It can be a challenge for people, particularly families, to find the time to drive to distant recreational areas in order to "get away from it all". With limited funds, Yakima County's ability to establish and maintain parks has often taken a back seat to more pressing needs. Many movements, such as Safe Routes to Parks and the Surgeon General's emphasis on walking for health, recognize the need for local, accessible, neighborhood-level recreation opportunities. Recreation opportunities within walking distance to residences is important for young children, older adults, and those with disabilities. As Yakima County's population grows, the demand for more parks and open space will grow proportionately.

The Parks and ~~Open Space~~Recreation Element ([Parks Element](#)) serves several purposes. The first purpose is to inventory the type and level of park and recreational services available in Yakima County. Most parks and recreational opportunities are found outside County jurisdiction, but they still contribute to the benefits derived from parks and recreation. The second purpose of the Parks ~~and Open Space~~ Element is to clarify the broader functions and benefits of Yakima County's open spaces. Finally, this [chapter-element](#) establishes a framework for considering other lands for future protection and identifies opportunities for regional approaches to providing park and recreational facilities.

The element builds upon principles and policies provided by the [County-wide](#)Countywide Planning Policy, the [Focus 2010](#) and [Vision 2010](#) documents, and the Visioning "check-in". During the [Plan 2015](#) process, policies for parks and recreation were developed through extensive public participation to provide long-term guidance for Yakima County in developing the comprehensive plan. This work, including the [Horizon 2040 Visioning "Check-In"](#), has been carried forward in

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Parks and Open Space Recreation Element

Horizon 2046 Most of the visioning goals related to the Parks Element are included under the heading, "Quality of Life and Government Services"; however, some parks-related goals are included within the "Environment" umbrella. The updated Parks and *Recreation* *Open Space*-related Visioning goals are included in insets throughout the Element.

Inset 1. Horizon 2040 Visioning Goals
Parks and Open Space – Related Goals

Environment:

1. Land

- Preserve and protect critical areas.
- Inventory public open space lands and define those to preserve for future generations.

2. Other Programs

- Create a comprehensive image that links together environmental, resources and quality of life elements.
- Preserve wetlands, open lands, and other habitat areas.

8.1.1 Growth Management Act Requirements

A park and recreation element is ~~required~~ *not required* by the Growth Management Act (GMA) RCW 36.70A.070 *during the 2026 periodic update because the legislature did not allocate funding for the element (RCW 36.70A.070(10)). However, the Washington Department of Commerce strongly encourages jurisdictions to update the element to update inventory trackers and readiness for future updates (8)*. Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA) contains 13 goals for the purpose of guiding the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations. The following ~~GMA Goals (goals 6, 9 and 12)~~ *Goals 6, 9, and 12 of the GMA* are applicable specifically to the Parks and *Open Space* *Recreation* Element:

- (6) Property rights. Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
- (9) Open space and recreation. Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.
- (12) Public facilities and services. Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

This element includes estimates of park and recreation demand for a ~~ten-year period~~ *twenty year period*; an evaluation of existing facilities and service needs; ~~and~~ an evaluation of intergovernmental coordination opportunities to provide for regional approaches for meeting

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park and recreational demand; and establishes a baseline for the future evaluation of a tree canopy cover within the UGAs as required by RCW 36.70A.070(8).

In addition to the Comprehensive Plan elements, the GMA requires jurisdictions to address parks, recreation, and open space through several other means. The GMA requires that before approving subdivisions or short plats, written findings must be made which show that appropriate provisions are made for a wide range of public facilities including open spaces, parks and recreation, and playgrounds (RCW 58.17.110). Communities planning under the GMA must also designate greenbelt and open space areas within and between each urban growth area, and identify land useful for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and connections of critical areas (RCW 36.70A.110(2) and RCW 36.70A.160). Comprehensive plans are to consider the use of innovative land use management techniques that help retain open space, such as clustering development and the transferring of development rights. (RCW 36.70A.090)

8.2 EXISTING CONDITIONS

About two-thirds of Yakima County is owned and managed by federal, state or tribal government. These lands, particularly the Wenatchee National Forest, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) trust lands and L.T. Murray and Oak Creek Wildlife Recreation Areas, offer the greatest opportunity for outdoor recreation. However, the majority of people in Yakima County live a long distance (at least 15 miles) away from these areas. Table 8.2.4-1 contains a summary of ~~parks and recreational acreage within Yakima County including~~ land owned by the state, various federal agencies, local governments, special districts, private ownership, conservation entities, cities and other providers.

8.2.1 Federal Lands

U.S. Forest Service lands, particularly the Wenatchee National Forest, are found all along the western half of Yakima County. These lands provide endless recreational opportunities for locals and tourists. Trails provide opportunities for hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, ORV, mountain biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. The forested habitat allows for camping, wildlife viewing, birdwatching, hunting, and fishing. Other federally protected recreation areas include the Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge, which, in addition to protecting habitat and open space, allows for walking, birdwatching, and hunting. The Yakima River Canyon provides camping, fishing, and watersports through the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

8.2.2 State Lands

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Washington State Parks Commission all manage high quality outdoor recreational lands in Yakima County. These areas, with the exception of Sportsman's State Park in Terrace Heights, are far removed from the population centers of Yakima County, and therefore do not provide daily recreation opportunities for most residents.

8.2.3 Non-profit Lands

Non-profit organizations have responded to the need for additional, accessible park and open space recreation areas in Yakima County. Jim Sprick Park in the Nile area of Highway 410 provides a recreational park area that can be used by locals and is often used for larger festivals throughout the year. The Cowiche Canyon Conservancy protects nearly 2,000 acres of shrub steppe habitat while providing options for walking, running, hiking, mountain biking, and birdwatching in two locations near the City of Yakima Urban Growth Boundary.~~—~~ The Yakima Greenway provides a linear connection for non-motorized trail users along the Yakima and Naches Rivers from Union Gap to Selah and Naches.

8.2.4 Open Space

With 99 percent of its open space land owned and managed by federal, state, or tribal government, Yakima County has vast tracts of open space. Much of this land is accessible to the public for recreational purposes (national and state forests, wildlife areas, etc.), or set aside for protection of its cultural and natural values. The open space areas of the Yakima Training Center are not normally accessible to the public and not included in these calculations, yet they provide wildlife habitat, groundwater recharge, and view protection. ~~Table 8.2.4-1 shows the percentage of public open space in the cities and towns of Yakima County, State, Federal, and Tribal government, and those open spaces managed by Yakima County. Table 8.2.4-1 also includes nonprofit and trust lands, which provide significant park and open space areas, particularly in the Upper Valley.~~

While open space is not necessarily park land, all parks are usually considered open space. In highly developed areas, where open land is at a premium, parks are sometimes eyed as "free" public land to be used for any public purpose. Conflicts can arise between those who want to see parks kept as green and open as possible, and those who may place a higher priority on using land for fire and police stations, senior and community centers, and other public uses. Likewise, the protection of critical areas (such as floodways, shorelines, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, and geologically hazardous areas) can sometimes be at odds with locating public facilities (such as bike paths, roads, pipelines, swimming pools, etc.). Friction can also occur when siting or expanding a park facility in a residential neighborhood. Residents understand the need for more parks, yet they don't always want them in their "back yard." Parks by their nature will attract people, and with people come more cars, lights, noise, trash and the potential for increased crime and vandalism.

Table 8.2.4 Land Tenure in Yakima County

Entity	Acres	Percentage of Ownership
Yakama Nation	1,102,862.12	39.683%
Private	620,095.86	22.312%
USDA FS National Forest	288,615.79	10.385%
USDA FS Wilderness Area	223,550.65	8.044%
WA State DNR	190,837.47	6.867%
US Dept. of Defense	161,942.82	5.827%
WDFW	87,700.25	3.156%
ROW	44,246.17	1.592%
US Bureau of Land Mgmt	28,099.06	1.011%
Irrigation Districts	5,297.65	0.191%
Local Government	4,435.53	0.160%
Grant County	4,385.04	0.158%
Cowiche Canyon Conservancy	3,466.37	0.125%
Yakima County	3,332.91	0.120%
School Districts	2,240.71	0.081%
USFWS	1,898.78	0.068%
US Bureau of Reclamation	1,347.34	0.048%
US Bureau of Indian Affairs	1,007.60	0.036%
WA State DOT	825.73	0.030%
Port Districts	808.05	0.029%
Nature Conservancy	640.51	0.023%
WA State Dept. of Ag	375.69	0.014%
Other Federal Agencies	374.29	0.013%
Parks and Recreation	272.68	0.010%
Other State Agencies	231.33	0.008%
Yakima County Greenway	134.23	0.005%
School Districts	71.54	0.003%
Fire Districts	64.57	0.002%
Snow Mountain Ranch	28.33	0.001%
Other Conservation Agencies	5.55	0.000%
Total	2,779,194.623	100%

*Data from property ownership maintained by the Assessor's Office

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Table 8.2.4 Parks/Open-Space-Acreage-and-Percentage-Yakima-County

Jurisdiction	Total Park/Open-Space (acres)	Percentage of County Park/Open Space
Incorporated Cities	682.8	0.08%
Yakima County	67.7	0.01%
State Lands	304,310.3	36.08%
Yakama Nation	154.8	0.02%
Federal Lands	535,378.0	63.48%
Nonprofit/Trust Lands	2,723.0	0.32%

Yakima County presents visual images of mountains, rolling hills, rangelands, orchards, and vineyards. Residents may perceive some or all of these areas as open space. Much of this land, however, is in private ownership and is neither accessible nor protected from future development. Neighbors may informally allow each other access to their orchards, rangeland, and wild places, but would not want the general public on their land. In order to fulfill most of its functions, open space need not be public. In fact, functions such as wildlife habitat may be better protected in private ownership, where public access is limited. Even when public access is desired, purchasing that right may be possible rather than purchasing the property itself. Usually, public ownership is required for parks and formal recreation facilities to allow adequate control of the facilities. But while publicly owned and managed open space provides maximum control over the land, it does so at the highest cost.

Resource lands also contribute to our sense of open space. Agricultural and forest lands still make up a large share of the County's open space. By maintaining larger minimum lot sizes on resource lands, the open space functions of resource lands are preserved and enhanced. The Natural Environmental Settings and Rural-Land Use chapters of this plan thoroughly discuss the protection of critical areas and resource lands.

As Yakima County continues to grow, creating both public and private open space areas ~~will be an ongoing issue~~is an ongoing issue.

Inset 2. Horizon 2040 Visioning Goals
Parks and Open Space – Related Goals

Quality of Life and Government Services:

1. **Identification and Protection:**
 - A. Identify, develop and protect historical sites as identified by the community.
2. **Community Consensus:**
 - A. Promote discussion and understanding of important County issues.
 - B. Promote private/public and private/non-profit partnerships.
3. **Parks and Festivals:**
 - A. Promote a comprehensive Parks Plan
 - B. Expand youth activities
 - C. Support and promote community celebrations and festivals.
 - D. Encourage broader financial support of the Arts in the community.
4. **The Arts:**
 - A. Support Accessibility to and Affordability for Entertainment and Performing Arts.
 - B. Encourage and support Professional Arts.

8.2.5 Corridors and Trails

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In the Yakima Valley, the most significant open space links between other cities and urban growth areas are the lands along the Yakima River and its tributaries. These areas include land that can be used for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and to connect communities. Several such corridors and greenbelts, most notably the Yakima Greenway, already exist, and there is significant potential for more. The Yakima Greenway runs along portions of the Yakima and Naches Rivers passing near the cities of Selah, Yakima, and Union Gap. The Cowiche Canyon Conservancy follows a portion of Cowiche Creek and connects rural lands west of Yakima with the city's edge. In the Lower Valley, the Lower Yakima Trail will provide additional recreational opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In 2014, Yakima County developed and adopted the ***Yakima County Trails Plan***. Extensive public participation, including two public meetings and an online survey, provided insight from trail users from around the County, including the types of trail activities people are interested in (Table 8.2.5). This plan identifies existing and proposed non-motorized trails within and between communities. It also includes recommendations for trail safety, education and enforcement, and funding and implementation.

Table 8.2.5 Types of Outdoor Trail Activities

Yakima County Trails Plan Survey, 2014	
What types of outdoor trails recreation are you interested in? (Check all that apply)	Responses (percentage)
Walking/Hiking	93.5%
Running/Jogging	41.8%
Road Cycling	49.4%
Mountain Biking	46.5%
Rollerblading	7.1%
Cross Country Skiing/Snowshoeing	39.4%

8.2.6 Parks and Recreation

While the County as a whole has a high ratio of accessible open space per capita, most of that land requires driving half an hour or more from the greater Yakima urban area. There is a need for open space areas and parks closer to Yakima and the Lower Valley cities. While some areas of accessible open space (Yakima Greenway, the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, Eschbach Park, and Sportsmen's Park) are near the City of Yakima, only small local and regional parks, Ft. Simcoe State Park, and Toppenish National Wildlife Refuge are available in the Lower Valley. Therefore

Yakima County's rapid growth calls for urban park planning. During the visioning check-in process, survey respondents identified a need for the protection of open spaces and natural areas, and better access to recreational opportunities (Table 8.2.6). In addition, a majority of survey respondents agreed that a comprehensive parks plan should be a County goal. A regional comprehensive Parks and Open Space plan would create cohesiveness between individual plans (i.e. State and County transportation, trails, parks, and recreation plans). Since most future development will occur within urban areas, the location of parks and open space within and between them will become particularly important. Unless park and open space lands are

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acquired and preserved in the very near future, area residents will not enjoy the convenience of nearby parks and recreational facilities.

Table 8.2.6 Horizon 2040 Visioning Check-in Responses

Goal	Agree	Agree with modifications	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Already achieved/not relevant
Develop a comprehensive parks plan	69%	2%	2%	13%	14%
Inventory open space lands and define those to preserve for future generation;	63%	7%	10%	20%	0%
Preserve wetlands, open lands, and other habitat areas for the benefit of the county's indigenous wildlife;	73%	0%	10%	3%	13%
Recreation activities and community centers	70%	6%	8%	4%	4%
We must provide necessary services that address health related aspects as well as encourage prevention and safety	68%	8%	5%	7%	11%

Source: **Horizon 2040** Visioning "Check-In Report" 2016

8.2.7 Parks and Recreation Maps

Maps 8.2-1 through 8.2-5 show the location of recreation areas in Yakima County. Maps 8.2-1 and 8.1-2 present a large-scale overview of existing parks and trails in the Upper (North) and Lower (South) Valleys of Yakima County. Map 8.2-3 shows County-owned Parks and Major Non-County Parks. Eschbach Park is shown in Map 8.2-3 and Lower Naches Park is shown in Map 8.2-4. Finally, lands owned by the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy and trails that connect their recreation areas represented on Map 8.2-5.

8.3 NEEDS ANALYSIS

The demand for more recreational opportunities, particularly from residents within and near urban areas, is going to increase as the population increases. Parks and recreation facilities, like other capital facilities, can be measured through the Level of Service (LOS) offered. The simplest method for calculating demand is using an LOS of a certain number of acres of park per 1,000 residents. More complex calculations may involve measuring the number of sports fields, tennis courts, swimming pools, etc., per 1,000 residents. A LOS may be determined by using a national standard, or through community input. Yakima County has used a national standard of number of acres per 1,000 residents, based on information provided by [National Recreation and Parks Association \(NRPA\) in their 2024 Agency Performance Review](#). [The Center for City Park Excellence, Trust for Public Land \(TPL\), TPL-NRPA Agency Performance Review](#) provides information on standards for parks across the country broken down into specific population ranges, issued a report and data set in 2014 with information on parkland in the 100 largest cities in the United States. Based on their review, the median number of park acres per 1,000 residents for cities with a population of 20,000 and fewer is 12.6 and for cities between 50,000 to 99,000

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is 10.2.~~is 12.9.~~ This analysis uses [the 12.6 baseline for all cities except for the City of Yakima which uses the 10.2 that baseline](#) to conduct the LOS analysis for Yakima County.

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Parks and ~~Open Space~~ Recreation Element

Table 8.3-1 shows the projected demand for parkland between 2015 and 2025 in Yakima County, unincorporated Yakima County, and each of the 14 municipalities.

Table 8.3.1 Level of Service (LOS) for Parks in Yakima County

City/Town Name	2020		2025		2030		2035		2040		2045	
	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS	Projected Pop.	Acres of park to meet LOS
Grandview	10,910	137	11,797	149	12,399	156	13,031	164	13,696	173	14,394	181
Granger	3,624	46	3,861	49	4,101	52	4,356	55	4,627	58	4,915	62
Harrah	585	7	586	7	594	7	601	8	609	8	616	8
Mabton	1,959	25	1,941	24	1,827	23	1,719	22	1,618	20	1,522	19
Moxee	4,326	55	4,961	63	5,728	72	6,614	83	7,637	96	8,818	111
Naches	1,084	14	1,147	14	1,265	16	1,396	18	1,540	19	1,698	21
Selah	8,153	103	8,771	111	9,566	121	10,432	131	11,378	143	12,409	156
Sunnyside	16,375	206	16,703	210	17,381	219	18,088	228	18,823	237	19,588	247
Tieton	1,389	18	1,640	21	1,856	23	2,099	26	2,375	30	2,687	34
Toppenish	8,854	112	8,930	113	9,006	113	9,083	114	9,161	115	9,239	116
Union Gap	6,568	83	6,727	85	7,070	89	7,430	94	7,809	98	8,208	103
Wapato	4,607	58	4,637	58	4,695	59	4,754	60	4,814	61	4,874	61
Yakima	96,968	1,028	99,985	1,060	103,118	1,093	106,349	1,127	109,681	1,163	113,118	1,199
Zillah	3,179	40	3,235	41	3,339	42	3,445	43	3,555	45	3,669	46
Unincorporated Area	88,147	1,111	89,742	1,131	90,153	1,136	90,341	1,138	90,276	1,137	89,921	1,133

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Table 8.3.1 Level of Service (LOS) for Parks in Yakima County Continued

City/Town Name	Acres of Parks (2020)	Park (Deficit)/Surplus 2020	Park (Deficit)/Surplus 2045
Grandview	43	(94)	(138)
Granger	5	(41)	(57)
Harrah	1	(7)	(7)
Mabton	10	(15)	(10)
Moxee	3	(52)	(108)
Naches	45	32	24
Selah	43	(59)	(113)
Sunnyside	65	(141)	(182)
Tieton	3	(15)	(31)
Toppenish	15	(97)	(102)
Union Gap	277	194	173
Wapato	53	(5)	(9)
Yakima	333	(694)	(866)
Zillah	9	(31)	(37)
Unincorporated Area	825,375	824,264	824,242

Table 8.3.1 Level of Service (LOS) for Parks in Yakima County

City/Town Name	Acres of Parks (2015)	2015			2020			2025		
		Projected Population	Acres of park needed to achieve LOS	Park (Deficit)/Surplus 2015	Projected Population	Acres of park needed to achieve LOS	Park (Deficit)/Surplus 2020	Projected Population	Acres of park needed to achieve LOS	Park (Deficit)/Surplus 2025
Grandview	42.8	11,269	145.4	(102.6)	11,762	151.7	(108.9)	12,239	157.9	(115)
Granger	2.9	3,561	45.9	(43)	3,905	50.4	(47.5)	4,269	55	(52.2)
Harrah	0.0	650	8.4	(8.4)	677	8.73	(8.7)	703	9.1	(9.1)
Mabton	4.9	2,325	30	(25.1)	2,401	31	(26)	2,471	31.9	(26.9)

May 1997 – GMA Update June 2017/2026

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Moxee	2.7	3,831	49.4	(46.7)	4,430	57.2	(54.4)	5,108	65.9	(63.2)
Naches	42.8	830	10.7	32	881	11.4	31.4	931	12	30.8
Selah	37	7,489	96.6	(59.6)	7,965	102.8	(65.7)	8,445	108.9	(71.9)
Sunnyside	25.6	16,265	211.1	(185.5)	17,030	219.7	(194)	17,668	227.9	(202.3)
Tieton	2.7	1,272	16.4	(13.7)	1,357	17.5	(14.8)	1,443	18.6	(15.9)
Toppenish	14.55	9,004	116.2	(101.6)	9,241	119.2	(104.7)	9,454	121.7	(107.4)
Union Gap	102.6	6,185	79.8	22.8	6,404	82.6	20	6,611	85.3	17.3
Wapato	52.6	5,105	65.9	(13.2)	5,232	67.5	(14.9)	5,380	69.4	(16.8)
Yakima	338.2	94,566	1,219.9	(881.7)	97,493	1,257.7	(919.4)	100,993	1,302.8	(964.6)
Zillah	13.3	3,202	41.3	(28)	3,523	45.5	(32)	3,864	49.9	(36.5)
Yakima County		256,341	3,306.8	(3,306.8)	269,347	3,474.6	(3,474.6)	282,057	3,638.5	(3,638.5)
Unincorporated Area	842,633.8	91,460	1,179.8	841,454	97,047	1,252	841,382	102,478	1,322	841,311.8

According to this analysis, most municipalities in Yakima County provide a lower LOS than the median for U.S. Cities. The growing populations in the Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) were not included in this analysis; neither were school playgrounds and fields, private parks, and other outdoor recreation opportunities located within their cities and UGAs. The need for parks and recreation opportunities in and near city centers and in densely developing neighborhoods is going to increase as the populations and residential densities increase.

Yakima County has reduced the number and size of parks it maintains over the past 20 years; however, there are still many parks and other open space areas open to the public, as discussed in earlier sections of this chapter.

8.3.1 Facility Needs and Opportunities

While Yakima County contains many large recreation areas, it lacks smaller park facilities that can be easily accessed as part of a daily routine for most residents. Yakima County's UGAs are designed to be eventually annexed by their respective cities. Therefore, the residential densities of these areas are higher than in the rural areas of the County. Smaller neighborhood and community parks can address neighborhood needs for easily accessible parks and recreation facilities as the UGAs prepare for incorporation. Descriptions of these smaller park types are listed below:

8.3.1.1 Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks are a combination playground and park, designed primarily for non-supervised, non-organized recreation activities. They are relatively small (5 to 10 acres), and typically serve residents within a half-mile radius.

8.3.1.2 Community Parks

A community park is planned primarily to provide day use activities of both structured and passive nature. For Yakima County, these parks will most often be found outside the cities but within their urban growth boundary. Overall, community park facilities are designed to provide passive recreation areas and facilities although sport fields are appropriate as long as they do not dominate the park.

8.3.1.3 Development Criteria

Yakima County should encourage or require the development of neighborhood parks as part of the subdivision process. In Urban Growth Areas of Yakima County, where residential density is greater than in the Rural and Resource areas, residents should have access to a neighborhood or community park within a half-mile of their home. Parks should be easily accessible for children and adults who choose to walk or bike, and accessible for people who have physical limitations.

Community parks may be developed through collaboration between the County and the appropriate local city, with the objective to turn the park maintenance responsibilities over to the city before or during annexation. A community park should average about 30 acres in size with about 70 percent being developable for active use.

Appropriate facilities in a community park could include:

- Formal ballfields - softball, baseball, soccer, etc.
- Tennis courts
- Open free play area
- Restrooms
- Picnic facilities (including shelters)
- Trail/pathway systems
- Outdoor basketball and volleyball courts
- Children's playground (if needed to serve the local area)
- Natural open space

If possible, buffer areas, natural open space or habitat areas should be used to separate active use areas from surrounding homes.

Site selection criteria:

- The area should be located within the urban growth boundary of a city or recognized urban development area.
- The site should be reasonably central to the area it is intended to serve
- The park should be located on an arterial street or County roadway.
- If possible, part of the site should have a heavily landscaped setback to help buffer active uses from residential areas.
- Environmentally sensitive areas should be protected from overuse.

8.3.2 Evaluation of Tree Canopy

8.4 IMPLEMENTATION

Parks and recreation opportunities have proven benefits of increasing the value of neighboring residential areas, improved local air quality, and physical health improvements for the residents. Public officials planning for the long term must be aware of the benefits of providing parks and recreational opportunities as the area grows. Acquisition and/or development of parks should be implemented in a timely manner to keep pace with residential development and growth.

In addition to parks and recreation facilities, and traditional open space opportunities, we must also examine the potential for open space corridors that follow rivers, ridge tops, unused rights-

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of-way, and other linear features. These places provide a visual and mental break from the asphalt and buildings of our urban landscape. These critical areas are an opportunity to provide high-quality recreational opportunities that link people within and between communities. Open space around urban areas also brings order by creating a distinct beginning and end to cities. As a result, protected open space limits urban sprawl and creates a "sense of place." Open space policies also allow us to protect undeveloped lands of exceptional value and protect wildlife and their habitat. Open space is protected through the Critical Areas Ordinance (CAO), which protects our wetlands, shorelines, steep slopes and other geologically hazardous areas. These areas are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2 Natural Settings.

If the open space serves to confine and contain growth, there may be reduced service costs associated with more compact development. The case for lower service costs for compact versus sprawl development is well documented. Open space can also potentially attract new industry and commercial investment to the community, bringing new tax revenue. It may be too simplistic to assume that open space will inevitably decrease local revenues.

8.4.1 Challenges

Open space is not free. Except for critical areas and resource lands, it cannot be simply regulated into existence. Tax incentives, such as Yakima County's Open Space Tax Program, encourage land owners to keep their land in open space through tax breaks based on the current use of the land, rather than its potential value. Cluster development can result in open space preservation without loss of development potential and may even enhance development potential. Other tools, such as the purchase of development rights, require a substantial commitment of public funds.

Even when open space is donated to the County, it has a public cost. Removing the property from the tax rolls means the County loses that tax revenue source while gaining the responsibility of supervising and maintaining the land. This loss may not be substantial when land is of low value due to constraints (such as floodplains adjacent to streams). There may also be a compensating increase of property value adjacent to the park as well as compensating savings to the public if flood damage, runoff problems, and other flood-related impacts are avoided.

8.4.2 Implementation Strategies

Residents often raise the concern of how the park and recreation facilities will be paid for and maintained over time. There are several strategies for funding both the creation of parks and recreation facilities and ensuring ongoing maintenance of these facilities. Open space areas are often kept in a more "natural" condition, which requires less maintenance, but also may be less inviting for recreation. Open spaces can be protected through special tax programs, [conversation](#) easements, zoning regulations, and subdivision incentives. Below are several strategies to fund, promote, and support parks, recreation, and open space without digging deep into the County's coffers.

8.4.2.1 Develop Alternative Funding Sources

Yakima County participates in the Open Space Taxation Act, a program that encourages the preservation of ~~A~~gricultural and ~~T~~imber lands in open space by reducing the tax assessments on them. Open space lands other than those in agricultural and timber production can also qualify for reduced assessments if they provide some public benefit by being preserved in their current use or natural state. Such lands include those that conserve and enhance scenic resources, protect streams and water supplies, contain wetlands, and enhance recreation opportunities. Other funding opportunities available for the County to pursue include a Conservation Futures Levy as part of the property tax package, implementing a Local General Obligation Bond to develop parks, and establishing a parks and open space line item in the Capital Improvement Fund budget.

8.4.2.2 Public/Private Partnerships

Several non-profit organizations in the area are integral to providing parks, recreation, and open space within Yakima County. The Yakima River Greenway, Cowiche Canyon Conservancy, and Nile Civic Betterment (owners/managers of Jim Sprick Park), among others, address the lack of publicly accessible parks and open space in Yakima County. Yakima County can partner with these organizations to support grants, provide matching local funds for private grants, identify park needs, and assist with negotiating regulatory controls. The County can also work with private companies to develop park sponsorship programs.

8.4.2.3 Partner with School Districts

Schools are natural partners for parks planning. Most elementary, middle, and high school campuses include recreational facilities—playgrounds and basketball courts at elementary and middle schools, and sports fields and tracks at high schools. School districts can partner with local communities to allow public use of existing and future recreation and sports facilities. Neighborhood elementary schools can provide additional benefit to their community because they provide park space aimed at younger children who cannot travel far to visit parks. Funding programs such as Safe Routes to School can benefit the elementary school population and the neighborhood community by installing sidewalks and street crossings that improve the safety and access to the school (and its playground) for all. In addition to sports fields and tennis courts, high schools have the potential to furnish interns and volunteers to help manage both park grounds and recreation activities.

8.4.2.4 Establish a Regional Parks Commission

A Regional Parks Commission should be established to help develop new strategies for financing the necessary future parks and open space. The Commission would include representatives from Yakima County, municipal jurisdictions, interested non-profit organizations, and Yakama Nation, and combine their resources to develop regional parks that can provide recreation opportunities for many residents across a larger geographical region. The Commission can identify parks and open space needs of communities and address those needs through a cost-sharing program that spreads the financial burden across multiple jurisdictions.

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8.4.2.5 Provide Developer Incentives

Providing developer incentives may effectively help to meet the costs of maintaining park facilities. An optional park fund donation in exchange for appropriate regulatory flexibility could allow developers and the community to mutually benefit. Development regulations, such as the subdivision ordinance, can provide density bonuses for cluster developments and other projects that maintain areas of open space. The zoning ordinance can also provide a streamlined process for land use approval of parks in designated areas, such as within the UGAs.

8.4.2.6 Invoke Land Use Regulations

The pattern of development planned by the comprehensive plan and development regulations (e.g., zoning ordinances, Critical Areas Ordinance) can help to preserve land for parks and open space. Certain zoning districts protect open space by limiting subdivisions and other developments. The Shoreline Master Program protects major streams corridors from incompatible development. The subdivision ordinance can require dedication of a percentage of the subdivision area towards parks and recreational open space.

8.4.2.7 Use Non-Regulatory Incentives

Incentive-based land use options, such as the transfer of development rights, offering appropriate incentives to developers in exchange for open space or park land, or funds in lieu of parks and open space, and other incentives can help protect open space and create parks. In certain landscapes and certain areas, land owners may have the option to work with land trusts, such as the Cowiche Canyon Conservancy or The Nature Conservancy, to place conservation easements on portions of their land in order to protect them as open and natural space in perpetuity.

8.4.2.8 Develop Creative Maintenance Programs

As an alternative to jail time, offenders might provide community services such as working on a park maintenance crew or providing other recreation services in a work release program. The program has the benefit of improving and maintain the parks while also providing the inmates and offenders valuable job skills. The parks may also benefit though volunteer programs and student interns who provide skilled and unskilled manual labor and park programming. Volunteers and interns may receive several benefits, including job skills, resume building, Eagle Scout badges, fresh air, and fun!

8.5 PARKS AND OPEN SPACE: GOALS AND POLICIES

The goals and policies listed in this element that apply throughout Yakima County are identified as follows:

- [County-wide Parks and Open Space Goals and Policies – POS X.XX](#)

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The policies incorporated from the Yakima Urban Area Comprehensive Plan 2025 and West Valley Neighborhood Plan that apply throughout Yakima County are identified with a superscript as follows:

- Yakima Urban Area Comprehensive Plan 2025 —^{YUACP}
- West Valley Neighborhood Plan —^{WVNP}

The policy incorporated from the Terrace Heights Neighborhood Plan that only apply to the Yakima UGA in Terrace Heights is identified as follows:

- Terrace Heights Neighborhood Parks and Open Space Goals and Policies —^{THPOS} X.XX

GOAL POS 1: Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities.	
POLICIES:	
POS 1.1	Include hazardous critical areas, ecological critical areas, long-term commercially significant resource lands, lands which shape urban form, aesthetic value lands, selected cultural resources (archaeological sites, historic landscapes, and traditional cultural properties) and urban reserve lands in the County's definition of open space lands.
POS 1.2	Amend the Open Space Tax Program to provide additional points for contiguous parcels that provide open space corridors or increase the continuity of other designated open space areas.
POS 1.3	Develop additional incentive programs to protect open space.
POS 1.4	Protect and give public access to County public open space.
POS 1.5	In identifying lands that the County wishes to recognize as open space, consider the following functions and benefits: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Active and passive recreation.● Direct health and safety benefits (flood control, protection of water supply, groundwater recharge areas, cleansing of air, separation from hazards).● Important critical areas and natural systems (such as shorelines and wetlands) and other areas needed to protect wildlife diversity and habitat.● Boundaries between incompatible uses and breaks from continuous development, to shape land use patterns to promote more compact, efficient-to-service development.● Commercially significant resource lands and jobs.● Economic benefits including increased property value, increased tourism business, and the attraction, retention, and expansion of local businesses and job opportunities.● Links to the past (cultural and historic sites).● Educational and cultural benefits (zoos, aquariums, community centers, cultural and historical sites).● Natural features and spaces that help define community image and character.● Visual or physical connections between cities, towns or neighborhoods.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greenbelts that help shape urban growth patterns and maintain the separate character of neighboring cities. Aesthetic focal points that foster civic pride. Public and private outdoor recreation. Easily accessible for residents in dense, urbanized area of the Urban Growth Areas.
POS 1.6	Plan for open space in Yakima County, including open space used for appropriate public outdoor recreation.
POS 1.7	Provide ways and means to maintain open space lands to ensure that they continue to provide the desired functions.
POS 1.8	Develop a process for reviewing, accepting, preserving and maintaining donations of open space lands.
POS 1.9	Define "Community Open Space" to include any parcel or area of land or water essentially unimproved and set aside, dedicated, designated, or reserved for public or private use, enjoyment, as well as the use and enjoyment of owners, occupants, and their guests of land adjoining or neighboring such open spaces. Community open space may include neighborhood and community parks, commons, plazas, community green or lawn, landscaped buffers, or other areas, decorative plantings, formal and informal gardens, pedestrian walkways or paths, and active or passive recreation areas (swimming pools, tennis courts, playgrounds, etc.). Community open space shall not include street rights-of-way or any area within a residential lot. <small>WVNP</small>
POS 1.10	Utilize existing irrigation canal right-of-way and Yakima Valley Transportation (YVT) corridors for pathway development. <small>YVACP</small>
THPOS — POS 1.11	Encourage a variety of parks, including pocket parks, and community parks.

GOAL POS 2:	Provide and facilitate development of a range of appropriate parks and recreation services to effectively meet the needs and interests of Yakima County residents.
POLICIES:	
POS 2.1	Coordinate the provisions of park and facility services between city, town, state, federal and private recreation providers in Yakima County to ensure area leisure needs are met.
POS 2.2	Encourage school districts to provide community use of school facilities and plan bike and jogging trails to connect the school locations to local needs and different neighborhoods.
POS 2.3	Encourage and assist local communities in their development of park and recreation services to meet incorporated populations' needs and facilitate connections with nearby recreation opportunities.
POS 2.4	Encourage joint ventures with private groups or individuals in developing recreational opportunities.
POS 2.5	Be active in pursuing alternative funding sources, bequests and endowments.

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POS 2.6	Investigate new and innovative methods of financing facility development, maintenance and operating needs.
POS 2.7	Provide services efficiently and charge fees according to fairness and what the market will bear.
POS 2.8	Provide incentives to developers to preserve open space and parks, such as density bonuses and appropriate flexibility in development standards.
POS 2.9	Provide developers the option of paying into a park fund in lieu of open space development requirements.
POS 2.10	Maintain the Yakima County Trails Plan.
POS 2.11	Guide and encourage the development of neighborhood and community parks in the high-density neighborhoods of Urban Growth Areas.
POS 2.12	Encourage development of non-traditional recreation venues including a white water park, BMX track, skate parks and other facilities for emerging sports activities ^{YUACP}
POS 2.13	Support the expansion of the Yakima Greenway. ^{YUACP}
POS 2.14	Support the Yakama Nation's efforts in establishing their Heritage Trails.

GOAL POS 3:	Provide parks, open space, trails, and other recreation facilities that will meet the County's interests and needs in a cost-effective manner.
POLICIES:	
POS 3.1	Encourage acquisitions and development reflect an interconnected system of facilities, trails, and open space.
POS 3.2	Preserve areas that are unique natural features, and/or cultural resources, especially where threatened by development. Coordinate with land trusts to achieve open space and wildlife protection goals on a community-wide basis.
POS 3.3	Facilitate a ^{County-wide} Countywide network of open space and greenbelts to protect sensitive lands (such as stream corridors, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.) to serve as urban connectors and dividers, to retain some wildlife habitat, and for passive recreation (where compatible).
POS 3.4	Develop trails to accommodate multiple uses and sign accordingly.
POS 3.5	Follow the recommendations provided by the Yakima Trails Plan (2014) to develop trails that connect our communities.
POS 3.6	Consider ultimate development patterns when acquiring land for park and recreation purposes, to ensure parks are centrally located, accessible, and serve the needs of future residents.
POS 3.7	Ensure park, recreation, and open space investments are distributed relatively evenly through the County.
POS 3.8	Incorporate into facility planning the interests and needs of visitors to the County when compatible with resources and community needs and interests.
POS 3.9	Pursue inter-local agreements with school and other agencies or organizations for the provision and maintenance of recreational facilities.

GOAL POS 4:	Spread the costs of parks and facilities and reduce County ownership and maintenance responsibility for parks. Operate and maintain County-owned facilities in a manner that will minimize maintenance costs, provide for user
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	access and safety, and foster user respect and care for recreation resources and facilities.
POLICIES:	
POS 4.1	Seek ways to spread the costs for operation and maintenance of existing facilities to reduce reliance on County funds.
POS 4.2	Ensure facilities are developed and maintained in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
POS 4.3	Continue the maintenance focus on user safety, ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessibility improvements, and renovation and repair of existing sites.
POS 4.4	Expand the use of volunteers, service groups, contractors, inmates, and "adopt-a-site" programs, where practical, to maintain areas or sites, especially small sites far from central maintenance facilities.
POS 4.5	Pursue innovative partnerships with local law enforcement agencies to enhance user safety in existing and new facilities.
POS 4.6	Spread the costs of maintenance to other public or private organizations when appropriate.

GOAL POS 5:	<u>Take advantage of available funding sources supporting different ways to engage and enhance the community through parks and recreation.</u>
POLICIES:	
POS 5.1	<u>Support ways to include public art and local artists in open space, parks, and recreational opportunities through local, state, federal, and public-private partnerships.</u>
POS 5.2	<u>Coordinate with school districts on streetscaping efforts surrounding existing schools to support nature classroom activities on urban landscapes.</u>
POS 5.3	<u>Support the creation of a volunteer service to document and geolocate the different vegetative species within the urban growth areas of Yakima County.</u>