

# Parks and Recreation Master Plan



Adopted by the Gaston County  
Board of Commissioners  
September 27, 2007



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## **Section I Introduction**

### **1.1 Recreation Enabling Law**

Gaston County is empowered by the laws of the State of North Carolina (G.S. 160A-351) to establish and operate a supervised recreation system. The General Statute directs both state and local government to provide recreational opportunities for citizens of all ages, and also supports the establishment of a parks and recreation system as a proper government function. The state defines recreation as activities that are diversionary in character and aid in promoting entertainment, pleasure, relaxation, instruction, and other physical, mental, and cultural development and leisure time experiences.

The statute gives the county the authority to: 1) set aside land and buildings for parks, playgrounds and other recreational activities; 2) acquire real property for parks and recreation programs and facilities; 3) appropriate funds for the operation of a recreation system; and, 4) accept a gift of real or personal property for parks and recreation programs. The Gaston County Parks and Recreation is conducted as a line department, rather than an authority. The law also allows two or more local governments to establish and operate a parks and recreation system.

### **1.2 Benefits of Parks, Recreation and Open Space**

Individuals, communities, regional economies and the local environment all benefit from the existence of parks, recreation and open space. A 1999 survey conducted by the US Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties revealed 98% of Americans think parks and green spaces improve quality of life. This same study showed 80% of Americans feel parks and green space enhance economic stability and property values.

From an economic aspect, “green infrastructure” has become increasingly important in attracting new businesses. A 1995 study by the National Park Service indicates that corporate leaders list quality of life for employees as the third most important factor, behind access to domestic markets and availability of skilled labor, in locating a business.

Proximity to parks and open space has been shown to increase real estate values in America. A 1998 study completed for the real estate industry by American LIVES Inc. revealed homebuyers identified natural open space and walking/biking paths among the top four factors when making a purchase decision. In regard to tourism as an industry, a study done by North Carolina State University found outdoor recreation and entertainment opportunities to be a significant component of visitor attraction programs.

The preservation and/or improvement of water quality to ensure an adequate supply for consumption, habitat conservation and recreation is one of the goals of the Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program that was adopted by the county commissioners in 2002. It is important to recognize that parks and open space are green vegetated areas that can help filter pollutants from drinking water sources, provide undeveloped land for recharge of aquifers, and protect plant and wildlife habitats. Parks and open space can also preserve steep slopes, unstable soils and wetlands; protect natural landscape, scenic beauty and cultural resources, and become sites for environmental education.

Finally, the social and health benefits of parks and open space have been well documented in numerous studies by public and private agencies. Published findings reveal juvenile crime and delinquency rates decrease when recreational facilities and safe centers are available for children to attend during non-school hours. Moreover, healthy activity leads to improved physical and mental health in all age groups. It has been noted that human connection with nature reduces stress. And justifiably so, public health officials continue to call attention to the increase in obesity, diabetes and poor cardiovascular health among children and adults, due to little or no physical activity.

### **1.3 Scope of the Planning Process**

The role of the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department is to plan, develop, and maintain parks; to provide a variety of organized activities to help meet the leisure needs of the citizens of Gaston County; and, to protect and preserve Gaston County's natural resources.

The department also provides technical assistance to municipalities and other organized groups in the design and construction of facilities and the development of recreational programs. The county's parks and recreation programs are open to all citizens of Gaston County regardless of age, sex, race or economic status.

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There are fourteen incorporated cities and towns in Gaston County. Three of these towns do not directly provide recreation services; a minor portion of Kings Mountain is located within Gaston County and Spencer Mountain only has fifty residents. McAdenville's recreation facilities are privately owned and operated by the town's major employer, Pharr Yarns.

The scope of this plan is to examine the parks and recreational opportunities in both the incorporated and unincorporated areas of Gaston County. Gastonia, the largest city in Gaston County is meeting recreational needs on a county-wide and/or regional basis, while other cities and towns serve the local community. Gaston County's school/park program was the first of its kind in North Carolina and is presently a significant component of the county park system. Gaston County school/parks can be found in both incorporated and unincorporated locations.

Gardner Gidley & Associates prepared the three (1978, 1982 and 1998) previous parks and recreation master plans for Gaston County. Initially, Gaston County was primarily concerned with addressing areas not being served by municipal departments. However, today sixty percent of the population now resides within incorporated areas. This percentage figure will increase in the next ten years as cities such as Gastonia, Mount Holly, Belmont and Cramerton accept and pursue annexation opportunities.

The primary purpose for preparing the 2007 master plan is to develop a guide for providing park-land, facilities and programs for the next ten years. The primary objectives of the master plan are to: 1) assess current recreation facilities and programs; 2) ascertain the county's existing and future recreational needs; and, 3) develop a ten year implementation program for meeting those needs.

The tasks associated with the master plan process include: 1) conducting an inventory of the recreational facilities provided by Gaston County and the municipalities in Gaston County; 2) working with the Parks and Recreation Commission to define goals and objectives of the plan; 3) identifying future recreational needs of the county; 4) formulating draft proposals to be considered as recommendations; and, 5) seeking public input through all stages of the plan preparation.

## 1.4 The Role of the Parks and Recreation Commission

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Commission is an appointed citizen advisory group that provides input on department policy, budgets, programs and facilities. The sixteen member board is representative of all townships within the county. The commission is also charged with presenting park and recreation concerns before the public and elected officials. Along with the Parks and Recreation Director and staff, the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Commission served in a project advisory capacity for the project consultant, Earth Improvement Technologies. Throughout the development of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan, the committee assisted in gathering data, established the plan's goals and objectives, identified recreational needs, toured recreational facilities and evaluated proposals.

The Parks and Recreation Commission held six public meetings with the consultant to focus on the development of the master plan. Each meeting of the commission had a specific agenda as described below:

The *first* meeting was an introduction to the project. The consultant asked the commission to describe in broad terms what they hoped to accomplish in the next ten years. The consultant also provided an overview of the planning process including the initial objectives of the master plan, the tasks involved in the assignment and a review of the project schedule. The commission was briefed on their role in the project and the proposed public participation plan. The meeting concluded with an open discussion about the recreational needs of the county, in regard to both active and passive facilities.

In particular, the commissioners discussed the need on the eastern side of the county for a "hub" facility similar to Gastonia's Martha Rivers Park; the completion of Poston Park; the continuation of school parks only at elementary locations; and, a linear park plan. Multiple use trails for biking, hiking, cross-country running; picnic areas and a possible skate park were also included in the discussion.

The results of the Recreational Needs Survey were distributed and discussed at the *second* meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission. The consultant noted the top five recreational activities residents want the county to provide and the top five recreational facilities currently being used by the respondents. The consultant also presented the Inventory of Facilities for both the county and the municipalities. Finally, the commission began to define the major goal of the master plan and the categories for specific objectives. The Goals and Objectives of the Master Plan are further identified in Section III of the plan.

The *third* meeting of the commission involved the finalization of the goal statement of the master plan and additional discussion regarding the future recreational needs of the county. The customary standards for both park land and recreational facilities were presented by the consultant.

One of the topics discussed at the *fourth* meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was the field trip taken by the staff and members of the commission to Manchester Meadows Park in Rock Hill, South Carolina. The park is a soccer complex that also provides trails, picnic shelters and a community building. The consultant also presented the preliminary plan proposals and recommendations of the master plan.

The *fifth* meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission was scheduled to discuss revisions to the park land classifications and the park land and facility standards. The commission also agreed upon the schedule for plan review sessions to obtain public comment on the plan. Further discussion was held regarding linear parks and proposed regional greenway systems.

The completed draft of the plan was discussed at the *sixth* meeting of the Parks and Recreation Commission. The commission was apprised of the public comment received through the plan review sessions and discussed presentation of the plan to the county commissioners.

## 1.5 The Public Participation Plan

The purpose for developing a Public Participation Plan as part of the master plan is to outline what actions will be taken throughout the planning process to obtain citizen input. Since the Parks and Recreation Master Plan is a comprehensive document the Gaston County Board of Commissioners will consider for adoption and implementation; it is imperative the public has adequate time and opportunity to review and comment. The policies and recommendations contained in the master plan will guide parks and recreation decision making for years to come.

The goal of the Public Participation Plan is to provide adequate opportunities for every citizen to express their views, and to submit their comments, on the provision of parks and recreation services in Gaston County.

The Public Participation activities completed in the planning process included:

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Commission, a sixteen member group representing all geographic areas of the county, served as an advisory committee to the consultant throughout the preparation of the plan. The committee conducted six meetings that were open to the public. The time, location and agenda for each meeting were posted on the Gaston County web site. At each meeting the consultant presented information on the development of the plan and engaged the commission in discussion.

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation web site, [www.co.gaston.nc.us/parksandrec](http://www.co.gaston.nc.us/parksandrec) was used to post meetings and activities related to the preparation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. During the month of January 2007 both children and adults could complete an online survey seeking recreational needs input. The draft of the master plan was posted on the web site. Citizens could also submit their comments regarding the plan recommendations online.

**Public Forums:** For planning purposes, Gaston County is divided into five small areas: Northwest, North Central, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast. For the convenience of the citizens of Gaston County, six plan review sessions were held in the month of August 2007, one in each small area, with the exception of the Southeast, where two were held. The advertisement for the plan review sessions was published twice in *The Gaston Gazette* newspaper.

The plan review periods were between 5:00 P.M. and 7:00 P.M. at the following locations: Northwest: Tryon Elementary School; North Central: Gaston County Citizen Resource Center; Northeast: East Gaston High School; Southwest: Chapel Grove Elementary School; and Southeast: Gaston County Main Library and Gaston College East Campus in Belmont. At each session citizens were provided an opportunity to review the plan recommendations, ask questions, and submit verbal or written comments.

A Public Hearing by the Gaston County Commissioners was conducted at the county courthouse on September 27, 2007. After the hearing was closed, the Board of Commissioners passed a motion to adopt this master plan.

**Interviews:** Personal or telephone interviews were held with various members of the community who are representative of the organizations that utilize the parks and recreation facilities. Gaston County government department directors, including the county manager, were instrumental in providing data and feedback on the content of the plan; specifically for policies and budgeting. The consultant also interviewed many municipal planners and park and recreation administrators.

*The Online Connection* is electronic news for Gaston County employees and information about the master plan was periodically published in this format.

Local newspaper press releases and articles: Notices pertaining to the Plan Review Sessions and other public hearings on the master plan were submitted to the two local newspapers, *The Gaston Gazette* and *The Charlotte Observer* Gaston Bureau.

Gaston County Public Library Bulletin Boards: The library bulletin boards were used to announce the public Plan Review Sessions and the public hearing for the master plan. Citizens were also able to complete the online recreational needs survey at the public computer terminals at libraries.

Response to inquiries: The county Parks and Recreation Director and staff answered questions or referred citizens to the consultant for information pertaining to the project.

## **1.6 Land Use and Natural Features**

Gaston County is located in the south central Piedmont of North Carolina and is second largest in the ten county Charlotte-Mecklenburg metropolitan region. The Catawba River forms the eastern boundary separating Gaston from Mecklenburg County. Lincoln County is located to the north, Cleveland County to the west and York County, South Carolina borders on the south. There are fourteen municipalities; Gastonia is the county's seat and largest city. Historically, early development occurred along the Catawba River and its tributary, the South Fork River for agricultural purposes and eventually the textile industry. Commercial, office and industrial uses are concentrated in the cities and towns and along the major transportation routes: I-85, US 321, US 74, and the rail corridor that parallels I-85 and US 74. Residential development ranges from small urban mill villages to single family subdivisions.

Gaston County lies within the Piedmont Plateau, a geographic area located between the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains and the sand hills of the coastal plain. The land in the county can be described as rolling hills punctuated with the tributaries of the Catawba River. On the eastern side of the county, Mountain Island Lake and Lake Wylie, reservoirs in the Catawba River system, are a source for drinking water, wastewater discharge and recreational activities like fishing and boating.

Unlike other counties in the metropolitan area, over 40% of Gaston's land area still remains in woods, forests and open space. Rare plant species such as the bigleaf magnolia, Schweinitz's sunflower, Georgia aster and magnolia vine can be found here, as well as rare animal species like the bald eagle and the bog turtle.

## 1.7 Population and Housing Data

The 2000 Census population of Gaston County was 190,316. The state certified 2005 population was 193,886, an increase of 1.8%. Most of the population growth in the past twenty years has occurred in the eastern towns of Mount Holly, Belmont and Cramerton due to their close proximity to rapidly growing Mecklenburg County. The 2002 Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program predicted 8% population growth between the years 2000 and 2010. The program also estimates a total of 80,625 households in 2010, consisting of 20% multi-family and 80% detached single-family homes. The average number of persons per household in Gaston County is 2.54

The Gaston County Economic Development Commission's Economic Profile estimates the county's 2010 population at 199,762 and the 2020 population at 208,900. The largest age group is 25-44 years of age; followed by the 17 and under, 45-64 years and 65+ years. The smallest percentage age group is 18-24 years old. The median age in Gaston County has slightly risen from 33.5 in 1990, 36.2 in 2000 and 38 projected for 2010.

**TABLE 1-1**  
**TABLE OF GASTON COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS**

Actual 1980 Population	Actual 1990 Population	Actual 2000 Population	Certified 2005 Population	Estimated 2010 Population	Estimated 2015 Population	Estimated 2020 Population
162,568	175,093	190,316	193,886	199,762	203,900	208,900

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Population growth can be affected by factors such as employment opportunities, quality and capacity of school systems, housing costs and changes in the regional and national economy. For Gaston County, many positive changes that boost population figures have occurred over the past few years and are expected to continue. The growing trends include: the national interest in the Charlotte Region which encourages companies to move their headquarters, relocate employees or build manufacturing facilities; the I-85 corridor, rated as one of the strongest development corridors in the nation; the recent completion of the western portion of the I-485, Charlotte Outer Belt; the decreasing availability of developable and affordable land in Mecklenburg County; the expansion of Charlotte Douglas International Airport; the increase in commercial/industrial development in both Gaston County and areas surrounding the airport; and new comers looking for small town lifestyle proximate urban employment and entertainment venues.



## Section II Inventory of Existing Recreation Facilities

The inventory of existing recreation facilities is organized in three parts: recreation facilities operated by the Gaston County Department of Parks and Recreation; recreation facilities operated by the cities and towns of Gaston County; and, public and private recreation facilities open to the general public.

For the sake of continuity with the remainder of the report, the facilities are categorized into one of the following park classifications: District, Community, School, Neighborhood, Mini-Parks, Linear Parks, and Unique or Special Use Parks. These classifications are described in more detail in Section IV. A second attempt to maintain continuity is reference to one of the five small areas created in the 2002 Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program that geographically describes the location of the park.

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department is charged with providing a broader level of service for an overall larger population than any single city or town in the county. For this reason, a more detailed analysis of district, community, and school parks has been completed. Neighborhood and mini-parks, although an important component of the entire park system, are primarily the responsibility of municipalities.

In addition to the park classifications, the recreational activities provided by Gaston County and the cities and towns are shown in Table 2-1 through Table 2-8, Tables of Recreation Facility Inventory Summary. There are eight inventory classifications: Outdoor and Indoor Facilities; Fields and Courts; Outdoor Water Based Facilities, Trails; Overnight Accommodations; Cultural; and Other Facilities. The inventory classifications have been selected to best describe the uses and to coincide with the inventory classifications generally used in the North Carolina Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan [SCORP].

There are many private recreational opportunities Gaston County. These include fitness clubs, church programs and sports leagues, country clubs, private schools, community organizations and golf courses. Private recreation providers typically require memberships, annual fees, contributions or other discretionary qualifications for participation. Therefore, while acknowledging their existence and contribution to the overall quality of life in Gaston County, the master plan does not take into account private facilities that are not available to the general public.

**TABLE 2-1 A**  
**OUTDOOR FACILITIES - PART A**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Dog Parks</b>	<b>Concession Stands</b>	<b>Frisbee / Disc Golf Courses</b>	<b>Equestrian</b>	<b>Picnic Shelters</b>	<b>Playground Tot Lots</b>
Gaston County		7		1	11	5
Belmont					2	4
Bessemer City					1	3
Cherryville		1			1	5
Cramerton		2			3	3
Dallas						2
Gastonia		2			23	15
High Shoals		1				
Kings Mountain						
Lowell		1			1	1
McAdenville						
Mount Holly		1			6	5
Ranlo						2
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>45</b>

**TABLE 2-1 B**  
**OUTDOOR FACILITIES - PART B**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Lakes</b>	<b>Ropes Courses</b>	<b>In-Line or Roller Skating</b>	<b>Skateboard Parks</b>	<b>Swimming Pools</b>	<b>Walking or Running Tracks</b>
Gaston County	3	1				8
Belmont						1
Bessemer City					1	1
Cherryville				1	1	1
Cramerton			1		1	2
Dallas						1
Gastonia	1		1	1	2	4
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						1
McAdenville						
Mount Holly						2
Ranlo						1
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>22</b>

**TABLE 2-2 A**  
**INDOOR FACILITIES - PART A**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Aerobics Studios</b>	<b>Recreation / Community Centers with GYM</b>	<b>Recreation / Community Centers without Gym</b>	<b>Senior Citizen Centers</b>	<b>INDOOR Swimming Pools</b>	<b>INDOOR Walking or Running Tracks</b>
Gaston County						
Belmont			1			
Bessemer City		1				
Cherryville			1			
Cramerton	1	1		1		
Dallas		1				
Gastonia		4	4			
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell			1			
McAdenville						
Mount Holly		2				
Ranlo			1			
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**TABLE 2-2 B**  
**INDOOR FACILITIES - PART B**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Weight Room</b>	<b>Exercise Equipment Room</b>		<b>Indoor Climbing Wall</b>	<b>In-Line or Roller Skating with Hockey</b>	
Gaston County						
Belmont						
Bessemer City						
Cherryville						
Cramerton	1	1				
Dallas						
Gastonia						
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly		2				
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

**TABLE 2-3 A**  
**FIELDS & COURTS - PART A**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Baseball single use	Football single use	Soccer single use	Tennis single use	Basketball Single use	Softball single use
Gaston County	2		6	14		10
Belmont				4	3	
Bessemer City				1	2	
Cherryville				6	4	
Cramerton	1			2	1	1
Dallas			1			
Gastonia	2		4	32	6	4
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell					1	
McAdenville						
Mount Holly					2	
Ranlo				1	1	
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>15</b>

**TABLE 2-3 B**  
**FIELDS & COURTS - PART B**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Volleyball single use	Horseshoes single use		Baseball / Softball MULTI use	Football / Soccer / MULTI use	Basketball / Tennis MULTI use
Gaston County		26		19	9	
Belmont	1			4	2	
Bessemer City				2		
Cherryville		1		5		
Cramerton	2					
Dallas				1		
Gastonia	1	5		9	3	
High Shoals				1		
Kings Mountain						
Lowell				1		
McAdenville						
Mount Holly	1			5		
Ranlo				1		
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley				2		
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>32</b>		<b>50</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>0</b>

**TABLE 2-4**  
**OUTDOOR WATER BASED FACILITIES**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Canoe Launch</b>	<b>Fishing Pier</b>	<b>Boat Launch</b>	<b>Boat Slips</b>	<b>Beaches</b>	
Gaston County		1				
Belmont						
Bessemer City						
Cherryville						
Cramerton	1	1				
Dallas						
Gastonia						
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly	2	2				
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	

TABLE 2-5

## TRAILS

## INVENTORY SUMMARY

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Walking / Hiking	Bicycling / Skating / Walking MULTI use	Equestrian	Linear Park / Greenway	Motorized Use	
Gaston County	1	1				
Belmont						
Bessemer City						
Cherryville						
Cramerton	2	1		1		
Dallas						
Gastonia				1		
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly						
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	

**TABLE 2-6**  
**OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Primitive Camp Sites</b>	<b>Tent Camp Sites</b>	<b>Cabins</b>	<b>Bathroom / Shower Facilities</b>		
Gaston County			4	4		
Belmont						
Bessemer City						
Cherryville						
Cramerton						
Dallas						
Gastonia						
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly	8					
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>4</b>		

**TABLE 2-7**  
**CULTURAL FACILITIES**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Outdoor Amphitheatre	Auditorium Conference Center	Art Center	Outdoor Historic Cultural	Indoor Historic Cultural	Museum
Gaston County	1	1		1	1	
Belmont	1				2	
Bessemer City						
Cherryville		1		1	1	1
Cramerton						
Dallas						1
Gastonia				1	2	1
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly						
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley					1	1
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4</b>

**TABLE 2-8**  
**OTHER FACILITIES**  
**INVENTORY SUMMARY**

<b>Jurisdiction</b>	Controlled Airplane	Gaston County YMCA	STOWE Botanical Garden	Crowders Mountain State Park	Lake Wylie Access	Mountain Island Lake Access
Gaston County	1			Public		
Belmont			Private		Public	
Bessemer City						
Cherryville		1				
Cramerton						
Dallas						
Gastonia		2				
High Shoals						
Kings Mountain						
Lowell						
McAdenville						
Mount Holly		1				Public
Ranlo						
Spencer Mtn.						
Stanley						
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>				

## Part 1      Gaston County Recreation Facilities

### 2.1.1      District Parks

*Name:*                    Gaston County Park at Dallas

*Location:*              North Central Area: US 321 and NC 279

*Acres:*                    80

*Facilities:*              Four Softball/Baseball Fields              Four Picnic Shelters

                                  Amphitheatre                                      Three Fishing Lakes

                                  Walking/Jogging Trail                            Six Tennis Courts

                                  Equestrian Facilities                              Play Equipment

*Name:*                    George Poston Park

*Location:*              Northeast Area: Lowell Spencer Mountain Road

*Acres:*                    350

*Facilities:*              Four Softball/Baseball Fields              Four Soccer Fields

                                  Horseshoe Complex                              Play Equipment

                                  Hiking/Mountain Bike Trail

**2.1.2 School Parks**

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Beam Elementary  
*Location:* Southwest Area: US 321 and Davis Park Road  
*Acres:* 5  
*Facilities:* Soccer/Football Field  
Walking/Jogging Track

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Bess Elementary  
*Location:* Southeast Area: NC 274 and Beatty Road  
*Acres:* 10  
*Facilities:* Softball/Baseball Field  
Soccer/Football Field  
Walking/Jogging Track

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Catawba Heights Elementary  
*Location:* Northeast Area: Belmont - Mount Holly Road  
*Acres:* 3  
*Facilities:* Softball/Baseball Field

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*Name:* Gaston County Park at Chapel Grove Elementary  
*Location:* Southwest Area: Lewis and Chapel Grove School Road  
*Acres:* 20  
*Facilities:* One Softball/Baseball Fields  
Soccer/Football Field

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Cramerton Middle  
*Location:* Southeast Area: NC 279/South New Hope Road  
*Acres:* 10  
*Facilities:* Two Softball/Baseball Fields  
Soccer/Football Field

*Name:* Gaston County Park at East Gaston High  
*Location:* Northeast Area: Lane Road and Hickory Grove Road  
*Acres:* 10  
*Facilities:* Two Softball/Baseball Fields  
Eight Tennis Courts

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Forestview High  
*Location:* Southeast Area: NC 274/Union Road  
*Acres:* 5  
*Facilities:* Two Softball/Baseball Fields

*Name:* Gaston County Park at New Hope Elementary  
*Location:* Southeast Area: NC 279/South New Hope Road  
*Acres:* 10  
*Facilities:* Softball/Baseball Field  
Soccer/Football Field  
Walking/Jogging Track  
Nature Trail

*Name:* Gaston County Pinewood Elementary  
*Location:* Northeast Area: NC 273/Mountain Island Highway  
*Acres:* 3  
*Facilities:* Soccer/Football Field  
Walking/Jogging Track

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Robinson Elementary  
*Location:* Southeast Area: NC 274/Union Road and Robinwood Road  
*Acres:* 10  
*Facilities:* Softball/Baseball Field  
Soccer/Football Field  
Walking/Jogging Track

### 2.1.3 Community Parks

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Bessemer City  
*Location:* Southwest Area: Crowders Mountain Road  
*Acres:* 35  
*Facilities:* Four Softball/Baseball Fields  
Soccer/Football Field  
Two Picnic Shelters  
Play Equipment

*Name:* Gaston County Park at North Belmont  
*Location:* Northeast Area: Hickory Grove Road  
*Acres:* 33.3  
*Facilities:* Two Softball/Baseball Fields  
Two Soccer Fields  
Three Picnic Shelters  
Nature Trail  
Walking/Jogging Track  
Play Equipment

*Name:* Gaston County Park at Tryon

*Location:* Northeast Area: NC 274/Tryon Courthouse Road

*Acres:* 35

*Facilities:* Five Softball/Baseball Fields  
 Soccer/Football Field  
 Two Picnic Shelters  
 Walking/Jogging Track  
 Play Equipment

#### **2.1.4 Unique or Special Use Parks**

*Name:* Camp Sertoma

*Location:* North Central: NC 279/Dallas Cherryville Highway

*Acres:* 7

*Facilities:* Picnic Facilities  
 Kitchen Facilities  
 Four Camping Cabins

*Name:* Lewis Brooks Airfield

*Location:* Northwest Area: Abel Road/Bessemer City

*Acres:* 52

*Facilities:* Radio Controlled Airplane Flying

*Name:* South Fork River Property  
*Location:* Northeast Area: Mountain View Street  
*Acres:* 43  
*Facilities:* Undeveloped Land

## Part 2      Municipal Recreation Facilities

### 2.2.1      District Parks

*Name:*                    Martha Rivers Park

*City/Town:*            Gastonia

*Location:*              Southeast: Neal Hawkins Road at Union Road

*Facilities:*            Athletic Fields, Walking/Jogging Track, Picnic Areas, Play Equipment, and Sand Volleyball.

*Acreage:*                58

*Name:*                    Rankin Lake Park

*City/Town:*            Gastonia

*Location:*              North Central: US 321 and Rankin Lake Road

*Facilities:*            Clubhouse, Picnic Shelters, Play Equipment, and 160 acre lake for viewing only.

*Acreage:*                192

### 2.2.2      Community Parks

*Name:*                    Ferguson Park

*City/Town:*            Gastonia

*Location:*              Southeast: Golf Course Drive

*Facilities:*            Athletic Fields, Tennis Courts and Play Equipment

*Acreage:*                80

*Name:* Mountain Island Park at Mount Holly  
*City/Town:* Mount Holly  
*Location:* Northeast: NC 273 – Mountain Island Highway  
*Facilities:* Walking/Hiking Trail, Picnic Areas, Play Equipment, and Canoe Launch  
*Acreage:* 49

*Name:* Bradley Center  
*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* North Central: Modena Street  
*Facilities:* Community Center, Athletic Fields, Tennis Courts, Basketball, Picnic Areas, and Play Equipment  
*Acreage:* 46

*Name:* Jeffers Center  
*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* Southwest: Whitener Street  
*Facilities:* Community Center, Athletic Field, Tennis Courts, Basketball, Picnic Areas, and Play Equipment  
*Acreage:* 39

*Name:* Philips Center  
*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* Southwest: W. Hudson and Echo Lane  
*Facilities:* Community Center, Athletic Fields, Tennis Courts, Volleyball Court, Skate Area, Horseshoe Courts, Walking/Jogging Track, Picnic Areas, and Play Equipment  
*Acreage:* 36

*Name:* Linford Park  
*City/Town:* Belmont  
*Location:* Northeast: Woodlawn Street  
*Facilities:* Undeveloped  
*Acreage:* 30

*Name:* Davis Park  
*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* Southwest: Davis Park Road  
*Facilities:* Undeveloped  
*Acreage:* 25

*Name:* Tuckaseege Park  
*City/Town:* Mount Holly  
*Location:* Northeast: Tuckaseege Road at Broome Street  
*Facilities:* Community Center, Athletic Fields, Picnic Areas, and Play Equipment  
*Acreage:* 10

*Name:* C.B. Huss Recreation Complex  
*City/Town:* Cramerton  
*Location:* Southeast: Eighth Avenue  
*Facilities:* Community Center, Swimming Pool, Athletic Fields, Walking/Jogging Track, Picnic Areas, Play Equipment, and Sand Volleyball  
*Acreage:* 8

### 2.2.3 Neighborhood Parks

*City/Town:* Belmont  
*Location:* Southeast Area  
*Names:* Stowe Park, Davis Park, Reid Park, Crescent Park and Rodden Park

*City/Town:* Bessemer City  
*Location:* Southwest Area  
*Names:* Bessemer/City Park, Millwood Park

*City/Town:* Cherryville  
*Location:* Northwest Area  
*Names:* Stroupe Park, Aaron Moss Park, Robert Ballard Park, Kenwood Park, Ben Black Park, Bill Edwards Park and Westgate/C.V. Thornburg, Jr. Park

*City/Town:* Cramerton  
*Location:* Southeast Area  
*Names:* Central Park, and Lakewood Park

*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* North Central, Southwest and Southeast Area  
*Names:* Adult Recreation Center, All American Park/Linwood, East Park, Erwin Park, I.C. Falls Park, Lineberger Park, Southwest Center/NG Armory, Smyre Millennium Park

*City/Town:* High Shoals  
*Location:* North Central Area  
*Names:* High Shoals Community Park

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*City/Town:* Kings Mountain [Gaston and Cleveland County]  
*Location:* Southwest Area  
*Names:* The city contracts recreation services with the Cleveland County YMCA

*City/Town:* Lowell  
*Location:* Northeast Area  
*Names:* Harold Rankin Park

*City/Town:* McAdenville  
*Location:* Southeast Area  
*Names:* Pharr Park and McDonald Field are privately operated by Pharr Yarns

*City/Town:* Mount Holly  
*Location:* Northeast Area  
*Names:* River Street Park, Woodlawn Park, Central Park, and Mount Holly Jr. High

*City/Town:* Stanley  
*Location:* Northeast Area  
*Names:* Thompson Park

#### **2.2.4 Mini - Parks**

*City/Town:* Bessemer City  
*Location:* Southwest Area  
*Names:* Uptown Park/Founders Park/Indian Springs

*City/Town:* Cherryville  
*Location:* Northwest Area  
*Names:* Gazebo Park

*City/Town:* Cramerton  
*Location:* Southeast Area  
*Names:* Constitution Park

*City/Town:* Ranlo  
*Location:* North Central Area  
*Names:* Ranlo Town Park

**2.2.5 Linear Parks**

*City/Town:* Cramerton

*Location:* Southeast Area

*Names:* Riverside Park and Greenway

*City/Town:* Gastonia

*Location:* Southeast Area

*Names:* Avon/Catawba Creek Greenway

**2.2.6 Unique or Special Use Parks**

*City/Town:* Belmont

*Location:* Southeast Area

*Names:* J. Paul Ford Recreation Center

*City/Town:* Bessemer City

*Location:* Southwest Area

*Names:* Bessemer City Gym and Walking Track

*City/Town:* Cherryville  
*Location:* Northwest Area  
*Names:* J. Ralph Beam Jr. Heritage Park, Cherryville, Community Center, Municipal Auditorium and Historic Museum

*City/Town:* Dallas  
*Location:* North Central Area  
*Names:* Dennis Franklin Gymnasium, Squad Field and Cudd Memorial Field [proposed]

*City/Town:* Gastonia  
*Location:* North Central, Southeast and Southwest Area  
*Names:* Memorial Hall, Sims Park, Skeet and Trap Range, and Gastonia Municipal Golf Course

*City/Town:* Lowell  
*Location:* Northeast Area  
*Names:* Lowell Community Center

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## Part 3      Public and Private Recreation Facilities Open to the Public

### 2.3.1      Public Facilities

*Name:*                      Crowders Mountain State Park

*Location:*                Southwest Area

*Owner:*                    North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation

*Description:*            A registered national heritage site, the peaks of Crowders Mountain rise 800 feet about the surrounding countryside. In the year 2000, an additional 2,000 acres was added to the park to connect it with Kings Mountain National Military Park and Kings Mountain State Park in South Carolina. The park offers camping, hiking, picnicking, rock climbing, fishing and canoeing.

*Name:*                      Mountain Island Educational State Forest

[Under construction, will open to the public in near future]

*Location:*                Northeast Area

*Owner:*                    North Carolina Forest Service

*Description:*            Concentrating on Forestry Best Management Practices related to water quality, the 1,300 acre Mountain Island Educational State Forest straddles both Gaston and Lincoln Counties on the important conservation easement, Mountain Island Lake. The lake provides water for one out of every twelve residents of North Carolina. Not yet open to the public, the forest will feature classes and exhibits designed to educate school children, forestry professionals and the general public about the importance of forest health.

*Name:* Lake Wylie Boating Access Area  
*Location:* Southeast Area  
*Owner:* North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

*Name:* Mountain Island Lake Riverbend Boating Access Area  
*Location:* Northeast Area  
*Owner:* North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

### 2.3.2 Private Facilities

*Name:* Gaston County YMCA  
*Location:* Northwest, Southeast, Northeast  
*Description:* The YMCA provides recreational programs for all age groups at their four Gaston County branches: Central, Cherryville, South Gaston and Stowe.

*Name:* Stowe Botanical Garden  
*Location:* Southeast  
*Description:* In 1989, Daniel J. Stowe, a retired textile executive, reserved 450 acres of rolling meadows, woodlands and lakefront and established a foundation to build a world class botanical garden. The site includes a visitor center and will eventually have over 100 acres of planted gardens.

Figure 1, Park Inventory and Main Reference Map, shows the location of the facilities described above.

## **Section III Statement of Goal and Objectives**

### **3.1 Goal of the Master Plan**

The process for formulating the recommendations of the master plan begins with identifying the overall goal. The Parks and Recreation Commission spent a good deal of time discussing the long-term purpose of the plan. They wanted to plan for a ten-year period of time. They were concerned about protecting the county's natural resources and preserving open space for future generations. They were interested in creating standards that would result in an increase in both the amount of park land and the number and types of facilities that would be available in the future. And finally, they wished to improve the public perception of Gaston County and think this can be accomplished with an exemplary park and recreation system.

Therefore, the GOAL of the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan is to provide a ten-year guide for making decisions pertaining to park land, open space, and natural resources; recreational facilities; and, programs that ultimately leads to the establishment of a positive identity for Gaston County.

### **3.2 Objectives of the Master Plan**

Objectives are specific and measurable actions that mark progress toward achieving the goal. The objectives of the master plan are:

To provide park land and open space areas which meet the needs of current and future generations.

To provide parks and recreational facilities in locations throughout the county to meet needs and facility standards based upon population.

To create a linkage system that connects land uses with parks and open space to provide recreational opportunities; environmental protection; enjoyment of nature; access to natural resources; and to enhance the image of the county.

To increase cooperation among governmental jurisdictions, institutions and recreation providers to cultivate efficiency in meeting the recreational needs of citizens.

To develop a sense of community involvement and ownership in the parks, recreation and open space system by encouraging citizen input, participation and volunteerism.

## Section IV Description of Future Needs

### 4.1 Determining Recreational Needs

An important part of the master plan framework is the definition of the existing and future recreational needs of the community. The following methods were used to assess the recreational needs of Gaston County.

*Input from the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Commission:* The sixteen member advisory group meets once a month and represents all geographic areas of the county. Some members have served for many years and have personal experience in coaching, facility management, budgeting and construction. They have numerous opportunities to interact with the public and municipal officials. The Parks and Recreation Commission conducted six open meetings through the course of the master plan development. Their familiarity with park system operations and overall experience greatly contributed to the needs assessment.

*Online Survey:* During the month of January 2007 both children and adults had the opportunity to complete an online survey on recreational needs. A copy of the adult and youth survey is contained in Appendix A. Section 4.2, describes the results of the survey.

*Gaston County Parks and Recreation Web Site:* The web site served as the official source for all information pertaining to the development of the master plan. Meeting announcements and updates were posted frequently. The draft versions of the master plan were available on the web site and individuals could email comments to the parks and recreation department.

*Public Plan Review Sessions:* Public forums are most valuable when information and exhibits are available for the public to review and react to. The county consists of a large geographic area, so in order to facilitate access and convenience, six plan review sessions were held throughout the county to give the public an opportunity to review the draft master plan. The plan review sessions were held at public buildings in the Northwest, North Central, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast sections of the county.

*Interviews:* A variety of individuals representing civic groups, athletic organizations, municipal and state government, schools, conservancies and tourism were interviewed to gain insight on the recreational needs of the county.

*Recreation Standards for Park Land Acreage and Facilities:* In the past forty years many park and recreational professional organizations, as well as, state and federal government agencies have attempted to establish guidelines for discerning the need for recreational and facilities, primarily based on population data. The standards developed by the National Recreation and Park Association are the most widely recognized, therefore these standards shall establish the basis for the recommended standards of the master plan.

## 4.2 Survey Interpretations

The recreation needs survey was completed by fewer than 100 people, arguably not a wide sampling of the population. However, the parks and recreation department appreciates those who participated in the survey. Generally persons between the ages of 35-59 were most responsive, and the majority of the respondents lived within the City of Gastonia.

The three primary questions were:

I. What recreational activities [both indoor and outdoor] do you expect the county to provide for you and your family?

The *top five* activities were:

Walking, running and hiking trails

Bicycling trails

Greenways/linear parks

Multi-use fields for baseball, soccer and football

Dog parks

II. What parks and recreational facilities [public, YMCA, private athletic facilities] do you currently use?

The *top five* facilities were:

Avon/Catawba Creek Greenway

Gaston County YMCAs

Martha Rivers Park

Crowders Mountain State Park

Dallas County Park and George Poston Park [tied]

III. What comment regarding parks and recreation services in Gaston County would you like to offer?

The following quotes are *representative of the most recurring*:

“It is so easy to incorporate single track trails [in park plans] that can be used for running or mountain biking. They can wind around sports fields and parking lots.”

“I hope that Gaston County officials would envision something special and different for our county. I’d like to see more passive parks, more trail systems, linear parks and greenways connecting parts of the county.”

“I think there is a need for more baseball and soccer fields in the growing parts of the county.”

“I currently use mountain bike trails at Poston Park for hiking and look forward to seeing the park completed, including more trails.”

“Poston Park is a great asset to the county.”

“How about linking the county parks with a greenway?”

“Development of recreational facilities should be based on the number of users. A baseball park provides for a more diverse group of taxpayers than an equestrian arena.”

“Parks should be more than ball fields.”

“I think the county should look into an aquatics facility.”

“I think it is neat to have horse facilities in the county even though I do not use them or have a horse.”

“I have to drive ten miles to play tennis or outdoor basketball.”

“Four wheelers is a big issue, much of it is illegal on private land. If areas were set aside for four wheelers, that might reduce the damage these vehicles are doing to land all over the county.”

“Canoe access to the South Fork River.”

“Address the needs of senior adults. I think you can do a better job for seniors.”

“I think things seem to be going in a great /growing / improving direction.”

Although the total number of survey respondents was low, some conclusions may be drawn from the responses. First, there is a strong level of interest in individual activities like walking, hiking, cycling. Second, residents desire access to trails for walking, hiking, cycling, etc. Third, multi-use facilities that provide fields, trails and open space [for dog parks, etc.] would meet the needs of many recreation enthusiasts. And fourth, there is strong support for linking facilities and neighborhoods with linear parks and utilizing natural resources in the county.

### **4.3 Notable Trends in Parks and Recreation**

Through the years, many studies have been conducted to identify popular recreational activities. The Presidents Commission on Americans Outdoors reports outdoor recreational activities that have grown in popularity are: canoeing, bicycling, attending outdoor cultural events, all types of camping, sailing, hiking and backpacking, attending outdoor sporting events, walking for pleasure and water skiing.

The 1989 North Carolina Outdoor Recreation Participation Study [SCORP] identified the five most popular outdoor recreation activities in North Carolina as walking for pleasure, driving for pleasure, viewing scenery, beach activities and visiting historical sites.

The 1999 survey conducted by the US Conference of Mayors and the National Association of Counties reported that 92% of Americans believe federal, state and local governments should expand park and green space systems for future generations. US Census data indicate a growing US population that is increasingly diverse, older, and more urban, with less married couples and more single parent families. In summary, the future holds more people with increased recreational demands.

In the past forty years local government's role in providing recreation has expanded due in part to federal programs that provided matching funds to local governments for the construction of outdoor recreation facilities. Gaston County Parks at Bessemer City and at North Belmont are county facilities constructed with money from the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In other situations, some North Carolina communities have inherited their recreation responsibilities from the textile companies who built the facilities and operated programs for employees and their families' use, but then eventually left the area, or downsized their operations. Some towns have been deeded real property that they have been able to develop for parks.

The past decade has seen a major trend in the public's growing interest in physically challenging sports like mountain biking, skateboarding, rollerblading, ropes courses, BMX racing and mini triathlons. Non-traditional park facilities like dog parks and disc golf courses are soaring in popularity. And another growing national trend in recreation is the proliferation of private workout facilities and home based gyms and spas.

Today there is strong public interest in the protection of open space and natural resources for passive recreation opportunities. The North Carolina Million Acre Initiative, established by the General Assembly in 1999, validated the public's desire to preserve open space. A state government program, One North Carolina Naturally, is a collaborative effort to preserve at least one million acres of farmland, recreation areas, wildlife preserves, wetlands, forests and trails by the end of 2009. In addition, Land for Tomorrow, a network of concerned citizens is working to build awareness of why streams, farms, forests, parks, game lands and historic places are critical to the future of North Carolina. Their goal is to add \$1 billion over five years to state wide conservation trust funds and to the One North Carolina Naturally program.

The local economic structure has been strengthened with the migration of businesses and people from more urbanized states. However, these newcomers bring higher expectations for parks and recreation services. In the past fifteen years Gaston County's, higher paying manufacturing jobs have been lost and replaced by lower paying service sector jobs. These types of jobs create an economic class that is typically more dependent upon free or inexpensive public parks and programs for leisure activities.

Other notable societal trends to consider include: the decreasing amount of available leisure time in the average American life; the emphasis by the media and the health care industry on health and fitness activities; the increasing number of two income or single parent households that create a demand for after school activities and summer day camps; the aging, but physically active, baby boom generation that has free time and significant amounts of disposable income; and, for school age children, organized sports programs have taken the place of sport for enjoyment and spontaneity.

#### **4.4 Recreation Standards**

Recreation standards are published guidelines for the provision of both park land and recreation facilities in relation to the population served by the park or recreational facility. Standards have been published by the US Forest Service, the National Park and Recreation Association [NRPA] and the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resource's [NCDENR] 1989 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). With the exception of a few modifications, the recommended standards in the 1998 Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan are consistent with those issued by NRPA and NCDENR.

The 1996 NRPA publication, *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, recommends using planning guidelines that 1] achieve a level of service that is desired by the citizens [customers] and 2] provide an equitable distribution of parks, open space and light traffic facilities throughout the community. A level of service guideline is a ratio expressed as acres per 1,000 people, which represents the minimum amount of ground space needed to provide the level of quality of park and recreation services desired by the community.

The NRPA guidelines publication also recommends park, recreation, open space and greenway classifications that are an expression of the amount of land a community determines should constitute the minimum acreage and development criteria for various classifications of parks, open space and pathways. The recommended Gaston County park classifications are discussed in more detail in Section 4.5.

While industry standards are necessary to establish baseline standards, local standards are equally important because they reflect the expressed needs of the people, the socio-economic characteristics of the community and existing natural resources. The local standards also address the administrative, operational and maintenance capabilities of the county for providing parks and recreation services.

Amidst the process of discerning the proper combination of industry and local standards for Gaston County, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the county staff, including the county manager, all agreed the standards should set a level of service to aspire to. The park and recreation standards of Buncombe, Forsyth, Guilford, and New Hanover counties were examined because like Gaston, these counties are located in a regional/metropolitan area; have interstate highway corridors; are growing; and, are comparable in size and population.

Therefore, the standards established by this process for Gaston County Park Land [see Table 4-2) and Facilities [see Table 4-3) will be used in evaluating the current inventory. See Sections 4.6 and 4.7, to determine future park and facility needs for the county.

#### 4.5 Classifications of Park Land

The recommended park classifications for Gaston County are separated into three general categories: sites for active recreation, resource oriented areas, and specialized facilities. Space requirements, typical facilities and programs and unique natural features further define the park classifications. Table 4-1 illustrates the recommended Gaston County park classifications.

A **Regional Park** is an area of natural quality for natural resource based outdoor recreation that is within a one hour driving distance of several communities. Generally, 80% of the land is reserved for conservation and natural resource management with less than 20% developed for recreation. The size is 1,000 acres or more and typically includes state parks, state natural areas, and large natural resource based county parks. Activities include nature study, picnicking, camping, fishing, boating, swimming, and various trail uses.

A **District Park** provides recreational opportunities similar to a regional park, but on a significantly smaller parcel of land. Like regional parks, district parks emphasize passive recreational opportunities but they may also include, or exclusively provide, active recreational facilities. A district park usually has at least 200 acres of land and provides a 5 to 8 mile service radius. A district park can be very specialized [such as a golf course], or be relatively small in size, but still have great impact on recreation within a region. Active recreational facilities located in a district park can include play areas, ball fields, hard surface courts, golfing, swimming, boating, multi-purpose fields, picnic facilities and various types of trails.

A **Community or School Park** provides a wide variety of active recreational opportunities, including a recreation center building, ball fields, hard surface courts, walking/jogging trails and picnicking. When possible it is usually developed adjacent to a school or provides a swimming pool. Natural or landscaped areas are provided for passive recreation. The minimum size for a community or school park is 3 to 5 acres, but 40 to 80 acres is more desirable. The average service area for this park is 2 to 3 miles.

The **Neighborhood Park** is a basic unit of a park system and serves as the recreational and social center of the neighborhood. Its focus is on informal active and passive activities like field and court games, playground apparatus, picnic shelters and tables for crafts and board games. Ideally the neighborhood park is safely accessible through sidewalks and bike paths. The park should be 5 to 15 acres in size and serve an area population of up to 5,000 or more.

A **Linear Park** or Greenway is an area developed for one or more varieties of recreational travel such as hiking or biking. The key functions of linear parks are: they tie park components together to form a cohesive park, recreation and open space system; they emphasize harmony with the natural environment; they allow for uninterrupted and safe pedestrian movement between parks and throughout the community; they provide people with a resource based outdoor recreational opportunity and experience; and, they enhance property values.

The acreage and service area of a linear park is variable and is subject to existing natural and man-made features, the existence of public right-of-way and the public demand for this type of park. Although corridor widths can be as little as 25 feet, 50 are considered the minimum, and widths exceeding 200 feet optimal. Based upon the assumption that a linear park will contain some type of trail, the standard of .5 mile per 1,000 population is established for this classification.

**Unique or Special Use** areas exist to enhance or utilize a special man-made or natural feature. They can include beaches, geological formations, historical sites, arboretums, conservation easements, floodplains, botanical gardens, parkways and sites of archeological significance. They can also include specific purpose facilities such as athletic stadiums, civic centers, natatoriums and gymnasiums. The park and recreation industry has not established minimum standards for acreage, nor population service areas for unique and special use areas.

See Appendix B for tabulation of current Gaston County park lands for each classification and location on Figure 1. A summary of the combined Gaston County and Municipal park lands per classification is shown in Table 4-1. See Figure 2 for the existing District Parks Service Areas and Figure 3 for the existing Community/School Parks Service Areas in Gaston County.

TABLE 4-1

TABLE OF PARK CLASSIFICATIONS IN GASTON COUNTY

Classification	Typical Size Ranges	Typical Service Area	Total Number in Gaston County	Current Total Acreage
Regional Park	1,000 Ac.	50-60 mi. radius 100,000 pop.	1	3,500 Acres
District Park	200 to 400 Ac.	8-10 mi. radius 20-50,000 pop.	4	680 Acres
Community / School Park	40 + Ac. Minimum	2-3 mi. radius 5-15,000 pop.	22	512 Acres
Neighborhood Park	5 to 15 Ac.	½ to 1 mile 5,000 pop.	31	214 Acres
Linear Park	Varies	County-Wide	2	89 Acres
Unique or Special Use Park	Varies	County-Wide	16	196 Acres

#### 4.6 Comparison to Park Land Standards

The following table compares Gaston County's current park land (combined County and Municipal facilities) with the recreation classifications shown in Table 4-1 and the recommended standard. The comparison includes the current population of 193,886 (2005) and the projected Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan population of 208,250 in 2020. The population projections figures are published by the Gaston County Economic Development Department.

**TABLE 4-2**

**TABLE OF COMPARISONS BETWEEN RECOMMENDED STANDARDS AND EXISTING GASTON COUNTY PARKS**

Classification and Standard per 1,000 people	ACREAGE Requirements to Meet Standard		CURRENT Gaston County Combined Facilities	Requirements Met ?		Notes
	2007	2020		2007	2020	
Regional Park 10 Ac.	1,940	2,090	3,500 Ac.	Yes	Yes	Crowders Mtn. S.P.
District Park 10 Ac.	1,940	2,090	680 Ac.	No	No	South Fork River property not included
Community / School Park 4 Ac.	776	836	512 Ac.	No	No	Future school parks limited to elem./mid. only
Neighborhood Park 2 Ac.	388	418	210 Ac.	No	No	Local government responsibility
Linear Park 0.4 mi	78 mi.	84 mi.	89 Ac. 3.5 mi. est .	No	No	Gastonia and Cramerton
Unique or Special Use Park [no standard]	NA	NA	196 Ac.	NA	NA	Includes land & bldgs.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the park land comparison:

Crowders Mountain State Park meets the current and 2020 need for a regional park in Gaston County.

The county is more than 1,000 acres deficient in district park land; however, the eight mile service radius of the four existing district parks covers the entire county with the exception of Cherryville.

The county is 200 to 300 acres deficient in community/school park land. The three mile service radius of the existing community and/or school parks illustrates land deficiencies in the North Central, upper Northeast and Northwest areas of the county. There is an immediate need to acquire land for district, community/school and linear parks.

Based upon the inventory, a large number of unique and special use parks exist in the municipalities, but there are only two county owned sites. The special use parks classification includes single purpose athletic facilities and stadiums. The Parks and Recreation Commission had identified a need for a multi-field “hub” athletic complex. Acquisition of hundred or more acres of land for this type of facility would decrease the need for community/school park land.

#### **4.7 Comparison to Park Facility Standards**

The following table compares Gaston County’s current park facilities (combined County and Municipal facilities) with the recommended standards for the current population of 193,886 [2005] and the projected Gaston County Parks and Recreation Master Plan population of 208,250 in 2020. The population projections figures are published by the Gaston County Economic Development Department. The table also indicates whether the facility standard is currently met and whether the standard will be met at the end of the master plan period.

TABLE 4-3

TABLE OF COMPARISONS OF GASTON COUNTY TO PARK FACILITY STANDARDS

FACILITY	Gaston County STANDARDS	Gaston County Combined FACILITIES	
		Current / 2007 Required / Meet	2020 Required / Meet
Baseball (regulation) 90' base, 300' foul lines	1 / 20,000	20 / 10 / Yes	10 / Yes
Softball / Baseball LL 60' base, 200' foul lines	1 / 5,000	50 / 39 / Yes	42 / Yes
Soccer / Football	1 / 4,000	11 / 48 / No	52 / No
Tennis Courts	1 / 2,000	60 / 97 / No	104 / No
Basketball Courts	1 / 5,000	20 / 39 / No	42 / No
Volleyball Courts	1 / 5,000	5 / 39 / No	42 / No
Horseshoe Courts	1 / 5,000	32 / 39 / No	42 / No
Picnic Shelters	1 / 6,000	48 / 32 / Yes	35 / Yes
Dog Park	1 / 50,000	0 / 4 / No	4 / No
Trails	1 mi / 4,000	20 / 48 / No	52 / No
Bicycling	1 mi / 2,000	3.5 / 97 / No	104 / No
Indoor Facilities	1 / 20,000	19 / 10 / Yes	10 / Yes
Cultural Facilities	1 / 20,000	18 / 10 / Yes	10 / Yes
Swimming	1 / 75,000	5 / 3 / Yes	3 / Yes
Skateboard Park	1 / 50,000	2 / 4 / No	4 / No

The following conclusions can be drawn from the park facility comparison:

The need for regulation baseball fields, softball/Little League Baseball, picnic shelters, indoor facilities, cultural facilities and swimming facilities is met in 2007 and can be met with existing facilities in 2020.

The current need for soccer/football fields; tennis, basketball, volleyball and horseshoe courts; dog parks; trails; bicycling paths; and, skateboard parks is not being met. Most significant are the needs for soccer fields, trails and bicycling facilities.



## **Section V      Proposals and Recommendations**

### **5.1                    Introduction**

The recommendations of the master plan include proposals for improving and expanding the county's existing system of parks and recreational facilities. They are intended to fulfill the goals and objectives established by the Parks and Recreation Commission and to provide a useful guide for both staff and elected officials for meeting the recreational needs of the citizens of Gaston County for the next ten years and beyond.

The principal recommendations are:

- Maintain and/or upgrade the existing facilities in the system.
- Complete the proposed improvements at Poston Park.
- Convert the existing softball fields at Dallas Park to baseball fields.
- Acquire land in the North Central, Northwest and upper Northeast areas of the county for the future development of community/school parks.
- Create a Linear Park System plan and develop the South Fork River property as a trailhead for the purpose of connecting parks, open space, public facilities and neighborhoods.
- Acquire property that is centrally located and easily accessible to transportation and commercial facilities for the single purpose of developing a special use facility for soccer.

### **5.2                    Proposed Park System**

As detailed in Section II Inventory of Existing Recreational Facilities, both the Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department and the majority of the county municipalities provide park and recreational facilities throughout Gaston County. The purpose of this plan is to specifically define Gaston County's role for providing recreational facilities for use by all county residents within and outside municipal service areas.

In Section 4.5, Classifications of Park Land, six types of parks are established for Gaston County. The park types are regional, district, community/school, neighborhood, linear and unique/special use. The regional park, Crowders Mountain State Park, is owned by the state of North Carolina. The Mountain Island Educational State Forest, a 1,300 acre site that straddles Gaston and Lincoln Counties, will become the second regional park in the county when it opens to the public within the next five years. The educational forest is owned and operated by the North Carolina Forest Service.

Of the four existing district parks, Gaston County Park at Dallas and George Poston Park are provided by Gaston County; and, Martha Rivers Park and Rankin Lake Park are provided by the City of Gastonia. Gaston County operates ten school parks in cooperation with the Gaston County Schools. The county also provides three community parks at Bessemer City, North Belmont and Tryon. The nine remaining community parks are operated by Gastonia [5], Mount Holly [2], Belmont [1] and Cramerton [1]. As a provider, Gaston County does not have any neighborhood or linear parks. Gaston County owns two of the eight special use facilities located in the county.

Gaston County can best meet the recreational needs of the county by providing district, community/school and linear park facilities. These types of parks are designed for large population service areas ranging from 15,000 to 50,000 and for optimal utilization of natural resources such as rivers, lakes and open space.

The park system proposed to meet the recreational needs of the citizens of Gaston County for the next ten years includes the following types of parks.

**Regional Park:**

- Continue to maintain a co-operative relationship with the Crowders Mountain State Park superintendent and the park's volunteer organization.
- Monitor plans and activities undertaken by the state park to acquire more land.
- Establish a co-operative relationship with the superintendent of the new Mountain Island Educational State Forest in order to coordinate future recreational facilities and programs.

- Connect Crowders Mountain State Park and the Mountain Island Educational Forest with other recreational facilities through the Linear Park system.
- Plan for beyond 2020 the potential future need for additional regional park facility in the northeast or southeast portion of the county. The construction of the proposed Garden Parkway and the completion of the northeast segment of the I-485 Outerbelt highway will significantly impact residential and commercial growth rates in Gaston County.

**District Park:**

- Continue to upgrade and maintain the existing facilities at Gaston County Park at Dallas. Paving of walkways, ball field lighting, park fencing and equestrian facilities are projects to be undertaken in the near future.
- Investigate feasibility of converting the existing softball fields at Dallas Park to regulation size baseball fields.
- Remove the existing Animal Control operations from Dallas Park.
- Continue to maintain the existing facilities at George Poston Park.
- Continue development of facilities at Poston Park in accordance with the revised park master plan as shown in Figure 4. This includes construction of a dog park; the lake; a maintenance building, additional parking and a sprayground.
- Work jointly with the City of Gastonia to develop a linear park connection from Rankin Lake Park, to the Technology Park Business Park, to Gaston College to Dallas Park. This project is also recommended in the City of Gastonia Comprehensive 2020 Plan.

**Community/School Park:**

- Continue to upgrade and maintain the three existing community parks.
- Acquire property in the Northeast, North Central and possibly the Northwest areas of the county for the development of future community/school parks. Even if a school is not immediately planned for construction, the land should be obtained in the near future.
- Continue to upgrade and maintain the ten existing school parks.
- Cooperate with Gaston County Schools in the planning of new school parks at elementary school sites only, particularly in the upper Northeast and North Central areas of the county.

**Linear Park:**

- The existing natural resources in the county provide an ideal opportunity for the development of a Linear Park System. Linear parks are linear in shape and often link parks, other recreational facilities and open space. They are often located along creeks and rivers and are typically developed with trails for walking, hiking and biking. With the advent of the Carolina Thread Trail, whose purpose is to weave communities of the Charlotte region together through greenways and linear parks, now is the time for Gaston County to assume a leading role in the planning, coordination and development of a linear park/greenway system that connects parks, schools and neighborhoods.
- Prepare a detailed master linear park/greenway plan with the participation of a representative group of county and municipal planners; trail advocates; and elected officials.
- Develop the existing 43 acre South Fork River property that is located in the Northeast area of the county as a trail head for a linear park trail along the South Fork of the Catawba River. [See Figure 5].

- Coordinate the planning and development of linear parks with state and local governments and the private sector. As recommended in the 2002 Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program, the county's "green assets": Crowders Mountain State Park, the Stowe Botanical Garden and the Mountain Island Educational State Forest, should be connected through a pedestrian/bicycle trail system.
- Coordinate the planning and development of linear parks with the Gaston County Economic Development Commission when new technology and business parks are being planned.
- Coordinate the planning and development of linear parks with the Gaston County Department of Planning and Development Services when new residential and commercial developments are in the conceptual planning stage.

**Special Use Facility:**

- Acquire 100+ acre property that is centrally located and easily accessible to transportation and commercial facilities for the single purpose of developing a special use facility for soccer. The soccer complex should include six to eight fields and secondary facilities such as a pavilion for offices, concessions and meeting space; perimeter walking trails; a playground; and, picnic shelters. The fields can also be used for lacrosse, field hockey, rugby and open space for special events.

The North Central area has good access to US Hwy 321 and I-85 and will eventually be connected with the proposed Garden Parkway. This area is currently deficient in community park land and a present opportunity may exist to acquire land at a reasonable cost that could fulfill both the land and facility/service area needs of the county.

- Upgrade Camp Sertoma lodging facilities to enable year round use.
- Continue operation of Lewis Brooks Airfield and monitor participation and use before making significant capital improvements.

### 5.3 Recommended Recreational Facilities

In ten years Gaston County should have several improved, expanded and possibly new parks. These parks will provide for a variety of new or expanded recreational facilities. The recommended facilities are based upon the county needs assessment performed as part of preparing the master plan and should be considered when planning future parks or upgrading existing ones. Residents of areas where a new community/school park may be proposed should be given an opportunity to express their demand for specific facilities through a site master plan public process. Recommended new or expanded recreational facilities include:

#### *Soccer Fields:*

- New special use facility with six to eight soccer fields designed for tournament play.
- New soccer/multipurpose fields as part of the master planning process for all new community/school parks.

#### *Ball Fields:*

- Study upgrading Dallas Park softball fields to baseball fields.
- New baseball little league fields as part of the master planning process for all new community/school parks.

#### *Tennis Courts:*

- Repave tennis courts at Dallas Park.
- Renovate tennis courts at East Gaston High School.
- Construction of tennis courts at Poston Park only if there is demand by county residents.

#### *Ball Courts:*

- New basketball courts as part of the master planning process for all new community/school parks if supported with community demand.
- New volleyball courts as proposed in the Poston Park master plan.
- New horseshoe courts as proposed in the Poston Park master plan.

*Pedestrian Bicycle Trails and Connectivity:*

There is an extremely high demand for walking and biking trails in parks. Pathways, sidewalks and bike routes are a form of recreational facility that connect neighborhoods to park and recreation resources. The 2004 Gaston County Bicycle Map describes five specific bicycle routes throughout the county that connect bicyclists to public parks.

- Develop walking/biking trails as proposed in the Poston Park master plan.
- Create a walking/bicycle trail system in the master plan for the South Fork River property.
- Prioritize consideration of additional walking/biking trails in existing parks.
- Link trails in parks with external sidewalks and bike routes when feasible.
- Incorporate walking/bicycle trails in new park facilities, including the special use park for soccer.

*Other Facilities:*

- New water based facilities such as a canoe launch and fishing pier as proposed in the Poston Park master plan and for the South Fork River property.
- Construct playground areas in new community/school parks.
- New dog park as proposed in Poston Park master plan.
- New sprayground as proposed in Poston Park master plan. The sprayground is a recreational fountain or water play area.
- New skateboard facility in at least one location if there is public demand.
- Consider other specialized facilities, such as a disc golf course or climbing wall, if demand is established.

## 5.4 Parks and Open Space

Parks are generally considered part of an open space system because along with providing active recreation, they provide passive recreation, one of the objectives of open space. The passive portions of parks contribute to the protection of natural resources, environmentally sensitive land and historic features. Streams and their adjoining wetlands, which are often located within parks, are subject to development restrictions and can serve as open space and buffers in areas of development. It is estimated that approximately 40% of the land in the county remains wooded or forested.

In addition to public owned park land, privately owned land also contributes to the open space inventory. The Catawba Lands Conservancy, a Charlotte region non-profit land trust organization, has 561 acres of land in Gaston County in the conservation easement program. These five properties are located in the North Central and Northeast areas of the county. The conservancy projects the inclusion of another 3,000 acres in the future. The 350 acre Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, located in the Southeast area is privately owned open space, that is currently not regulated by the Catawba Lands Conservancy easement program.

The Gaston County Department of Natural Resources is responsible for planning and establishing the county's natural resources conservation programs. In conjunction with the Gaston Conservation District, they have created a Conservation District Preservation Program that educates property owners about land preservation and assists them with process of dedicating land for this purpose. Land owners have many options to consider such as conservation easements, outright land dedications, donation by will, donation with a life estate reservation, leasing and selling their land for a bargain.

An increasing number of Gaston County citizens are actively involved in the pursuit to preserve stream corridors and open space. When the Gaston County Comprehensive Planning Program was prepared in 2002, the citizens of Gaston County rated open space preservation a high priority. The Department of Natural Resources has hosted informal advisory group forums for both the Carolina Thread Trail project and the Land For Tomorrow Initiative. Presently an ideal opportunity exists for the Parks and Recreation Department to assume the role as the lead agency in the county for the planning and coordination of linear parks and greenways.

## 5.5 Parks and Schools

Gaston County's school park program was the first of its kind in North Carolina and is a significant component of the county park system. Gaston County school parks can be found in both incorporated and unincorporated locations. The school parks primarily contain ball fields, and walking/jogging tracks that are utilized by students, athletic organizations and local residents.

The county school system estimates that every 100 new homes deliver 64 additional school age children. These 64 students will include 34 elementary school students; 16 middle school students and 14 high school students. There is a current need for three elementary schools, two middle schools and one high school. To date, no sites have been acquired to build these schools. According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, the required standard acreage for an elementary school is 16 acres; for a middle school 30 acres; and, 50 acres for a high school.

The cooperative working relationship between the Parks and Recreation Department and the Gaston County Schools is good and the department is included in discussions pertaining to site selection for schools. It is recommended the Parks and Recreation Department continue to be involved with the planning of new school sites to provide input on suitability of the site for a school park and types of recreational facilities that may be needed in the proposed school service area.

## 5.6 Programs and Events

Programs provided by the Parks and Recreation Department should respond to the needs and interests of youths, adults and seniors. The department should research activities that promote youth involvement in recreational activities other than organized sports. Hiking, and bicycling are activities that individuals and families enjoy and small events can build momentum for public support for the construction of hiking and biking trails.

In early 2008, a new addition to the Gaston County Citizen Resource Center will be completed. This portion of the building will serve as a Senior Citizen Center for county residents over the age of sixty. The senior center will be incorporated in the Parks and Recreation Department however, a Senior Center Director will be appointed. Existing programs such as exercise and fitness classes, creative arts and dances should continue. However, the maturing WW II baby boom generation has begun turning sixty and they are a healthier and more active generation than their predecessors. Now is the time to begin identifying programs and activities that will appeal to this new “Forever Young” generation of seniors.

The Parks and Recreation Department should continue to host annual special events such as the Pops in the Park, Cotton Ginning Days, Just Plain Dog Show and other popular events including horse shows, horseshoe tournaments and the Edith Poston Easter Egg Hunt. The new mountain bike trail in Poston Park provides an opportunity to sponsor an event that appeals to both experienced riders and novices.

The department can establish their leading role in recreational trail planning and coordination by identifying opportunities to educate the public about the physical, social and environmental benefits of linear parks and greenways. The Carolina Thread Trail will be providing grants to local governments for sponsoring public forums and producing educational materials about greenways. The department’s sponsorship of annual events like community hikes, canoe races, fishing contests, etc. will further define the county’s dedication to connectivity of people and public places.

## 5.7 Other Recommendations

### *Policy and Planning:*

- Utilize the Parks and Recreation Master Plan to identify areas that are deficient in parks and recreational facilities and take appropriate action to acquire land, obtain easements or develop facilities when possible.
- Prepare feasibility studies and master plans prior to developing large parks or special use facilities.
- Reinvest in existing parks with routine maintenance programs and capital improvement projects.
- Continue to offer advisory services to groups and small municipalities.

*Partnerships:*

- Establish cooperation between Gaston County and its municipalities in identifying, funding and implementing projects.
- Collaborate with state, regional and local agencies on regional parks and facilities.
- Increase collaboration with non-profit, corporate and private organizations for the provision of recreational facilities and open space.
- Encourage voluntary land dedication for parks and open space.
- Collaborate with the Park Partners foundation to increase the endowment for capital development and facility maintenance.
- Continue the Incentive Grant Program for municipal agencies.

*Design and Development:*

- Include in the proposed Unified Development Ordinance required dedication of land for parks and open space by developers or payment of cash in lieu.
- Utilize sustainable design principles and best management practices in the design, construction and maintenance of parks and recreational facilities.
- Ensure all facilities comply with the requirements of the American with Disabilities Act [ADA].
- Obtain linear park easements on all utility easements.

*Public Involvement:*

- Involve citizens in park master planning.
- Offer citizens opportunities to volunteer in the planning, programming and stewardship of the parks and recreational facilities.
- Interview or survey park users on a regular basis to determine user satisfaction and preferences.
- Utilize a variety of media sources to inform citizens of the available parks and recreation services.



## Section VI      Implementation

### 6.1                      Introduction

The implementation of the Parks and Recreation Master Plan begins when the Gaston County Commissioners adopt the plan. This action affirms the commitment of the county's elected officials, staff and citizens to providing a system of parks and recreational facilities that meets as many recreational needs as possible over an extended period of time. The implementation data supports requests for capital funds and guides financial decision-making.

### 6.2                      Cost Estimates for Recommendations

The cost estimates contained herein are for the proposed capital projects recommended in Section V. The cost estimates [2007] are general and based upon information provided by county staff and similar recent projects in the state.

#### **District Parks:**

<u>Dallas Park</u>	<u>Cost Estimate</u>	<u>Sub-Total</u>
Upgrade Picnic Shelters	\$ 15,000	
New Picnic Shelters [2]	\$ 40,000	
Baseball Field Feasibility Study	\$ 5,000	
Athletic Field Lighting	\$ 160,000	
Repave Tennis Courts	\$ 80,000	
Amphitheater re-grading & Cover	\$ 90,000	
Ballfield Concession Building	\$ 100,000	

Upgrade existing Concession Bldgs.	\$ 100,000		
Repave Parking Lots & Roads	\$ 200,000		
New Playground Equipment	\$ 50,000		
New Ballfield Scoreboards	\$ 32,000		
New Sand Volleyball Court	\$ 20,000		
New Disc Golf Course	\$ 5,000		
Irrigate Athletic Fields	\$ 40,000		
Equestrian Facility Improvements	\$ 500,000		
Lake Fishing Piers	\$ 20,000		
Improvements to County Home	\$ 100,000		
Upgrade Fencing in Park	\$ 250,000		
Restroom Buildings Improvements	\$ 60,000		
Linear Park Trail connection w/ Gaston College, Tech Park & Rankin Lake	\$ 150,000		
Landscape & Signage Improvements	\$ 100,000		
Dallas Park	Sub-Total	\$ 2,117,000	

Poston Park

Construct Dam and Lake	\$ 500,000
New Maintenance Facility	\$ 80,000
Construct Park Loop Roads	\$ 1,000,000
Irrigation to Athletic Fields	\$ 250,000
Hiking – Mountain Biking Trails	\$ 30,000
Picnic Shelters	\$ 160,000
Conference Center	\$ 1,000,000



**Community Parks:**Tryon Park

Add Picnic Shelters	\$ 20,000	
Landscape & Signage	\$ 25,000	
Upgrade Fencing	\$ 60,000	
Add Field Scoreboards	\$ 24,000	
Add Playground Equipment	\$ 20,000	
New Storage/Maintenance Bldg.	\$ 10,000	
Upgrade Ballfield Lights	\$ 80,000	
Remove Concrete Drain Covers	\$ 2,000	
Irrigate Athletic Fields	\$ 60,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$ 10,000	
	Sub-Total	\$ 411,000

Bessemer City Park

Irrigate Athletic Fields	\$ 40,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$ 10,000	
New Storage/Maintenance Bldg.	\$ 10,000	
Add Covered Tables @ Concession Area	\$ 20,000	
Landscape & Signage	\$ 18,000	
New Storage/Maintenance Bldg.	\$ 10,000	
New Paved Walking Trail	\$ 50,000	
Remove Concrete Drain Covers	\$ 2,000	
	Sub-Total	\$ 160,000

North Belmont

Renovate Restroom / Concession Bldg.	\$ 20,000	
Eliminate Rip Rap & add Piping Basins	\$ 50,000	
Add Vandal Resistant Dugout Covers	\$ 20,000	
Upgrade Ballfield Lighting	\$ 180,000	
Soccer Field Lighting	\$ 60,000	
Re-Pave Parking Areas	\$ 70,000	
Irrigate Athletic Fields	\$ 50,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$ 10,000	
Playground Equipment	\$ 20,000	
	Sub-Total	\$ 580,000

COMMUNITY PARK Sub-TOTAL	<hr/>	\$ 1,151,000
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**School Parks:**

Renovate Tennis Courts @ East Gaston	\$	200,000	
Upgrade Lighting @ 13 Athletic Fields	\$	700,000	
Add Lighting @ 3 Unlighted Fields	\$	160,000	
New Parking Lot @ Robinson Elem.	\$	60,000	
Pave Parking Lot @ New Hope Elem.	\$	60,000	
Upgrade Fencing [remove split rail]	\$	75,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$	50,000	
Heat Restrooms @ Bess, Cramerton, East Gaston & New Hope	\$	40,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$	50,000	
New Restroom Bldgs. [3]	\$	105,000	
Site Development Funds for Athletic Fields & Recreational Facilities @ Future School Sites	\$	3,000,000	
		Sub-Total	\$ 4,500,000

SCHOOL PARKS Sub-TOTAL	\$ 4,500,000
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**Linear Parks:**South Fork River/Mountain View Street

Earthwork, Parking & Paving	\$ 176,000	
Landscape & Signage	\$ 80,000	
Lighting	\$ 13,000	
Paved Walking Trails	\$ 136,000	
Picnic Shelters	\$ 50,000	
Playground Equipment	\$ 20,000	
Fishing Pier	\$ 15,000	
Canoe Launch	\$ 8,000	
Restroom Bldg.	\$ 18,000	
Park Equipment & Accessories	\$ 20,000	
	Sub-Total	\$ 536,000
Engineering & Contract Admin. [15%]	\$ 80,400	
Contingency [10%]	\$ 53,600	
	Sub-Total	\$ 670,000

Linear Park/Greenway Master Plan

Prepare master plan	\$ 30,000	
	Sub-Total	\$ 30,000

LINEAR PARK Sub-TOTAL	\$ 700,000
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**Unique or Special Use Parks:**Camp Sertoma

Renovate Cabins / ADA Compliance	\$	120,000	
Renovate Lodge [HVAC]	\$	55,000	
Add Play Equipment	\$	20,000	
Improve Entrance & Gate	\$	10,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$	10,000	
Landscape & Signage	\$	5,000	
		Sub-Total	\$ 220,000

Lewis Brooks Airfield

Gravel Parking Area	\$	10,000	
Re-Pave Runways	\$	10,000	
Restroom/Storage Building	\$	20,000	
Add Security Lighting	\$	10,000	
Upgrade Entrance Gate	\$	5,000	
Pave Road	\$	100,000	
		Sub-Total	\$ 155,000

UNIQUE & SPECIAL USE Sub-TOTAL			\$ 375,000
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Special Use Athletic Facility

Site Acquisition [100 ac. @ \$10,000/ac.]	\$	1,000,000
Site Development	\$	19,000,000
	Sub-Total	\$20,000,000

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<b>ALL PARKS GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>33,468,000</b>
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### 6.3 Funding the Master Plan

According to the US Census Bureau, per capita funding for parks and recreation in North Carolina is 33% below the national average. However, numerous studies and surveys indicate the low level of funding is not an accurate representation of the high value citizens place on parks and recreation. If surveyed, probably a majority of Gaston County households would favor the improvement of existing parks and the development of additional recreational facilities for the future.

The estimated cost to construct the improvements proposed in the master plan exceeds \$ 33,000,000. Gaston County will not be able to support the proposed capital projects and associated operating costs solely through the current amount of contributions from the General Fund. The county will need to utilize a combination of revenue sources to accomplish the recommendations contained in the master plan. Typically capital improvements are prioritized by staff or the elected officials and funded over a period of ten years and beyond.

#### **Funding Sources:**

*General Fund:* allocations are made in the county's annual operating budget.

*General Obligation Bonds:* long term financing through general obligation bonds offered to public and private investors through an investment banker or bonding agent for the county. General obligation bonds are usually approved by referendum vote of the citizens for specific approval of the investment because very often the approval may require a property tax increase to meet the debt obligation. In North Carolina, general obligation bonds are still the most common funding source used to finance park projects.

*User Charges:* typically a very small amount of the total parks and recreation department operating budget, user fees come from providing a benefit to a private user when there is no loss of benefit by the general taxpayer.

*Open Space Dedication and Payment in Lieu of Dedication:* a provision in the land development ordinance that establishes the fact that residential and commercial development increases population, thereby affecting parks and recreation levels of service. The developer therefore dedicates land for parks; or, provides payment, based on an established formula, to a capital reserve fund specifically designated for parks and recreation expenditures.

*Partnerships, Grants and Gifts:* unique opportunities to develop land owned by another quasi-governmental agency; obtain funding from the federal or state government; or, be the recipient of a private donation of land or cash.

### **Revenue Sources:**

Traditional funding sources, like the general fund allocation, can no longer keep pace with the growing capital needs of the county, particularly for parks and recreation projects. Therefore a strategy for using alternative sources of revenue must be developed to accomplish the goals of the master plan. The following is a descriptive list of possible revenue sources:

*Federal Grants:* the well known US Park Service recreation program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund [LWCF], distributes funds to states. The funding has been severely diminished over the past fifteen years, but it may see a return to previous levels of funding if approved by Congress.

*State Grants:* the state of North Carolina provides several grant programs including the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund [PARTF], the North Carolina Recreational Trails Program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund [LWCF], the former Intermodal Surface Efficiency Act [ISTEA], now known as TEA-21, and the Clean Water Management Trust Fund [CWMTF].

*Intermodal Transportation and Efficiency Act:* commonly called TEA-21 grants, this program was authorized by the federal government in 1991. The funds are distributed through the state. Transportation related projects such as bicycle and pedestrian trails are eligible for these funds.

*Foundations/Gifts:* tax exempt, non-profit organizations solicit private funds through donations to promote a specific cause. The Park Partners is a foundation.

*Irrevocable Remainder Trusts:* an individual, usually worth more than a million dollars, leaves a portion of their wealth to the parks and recreation department in a trust fund that allows the fund to grow with periodic interest payments, thereby creating a stream of revenue that can be tapped without affecting the principal.

*Life Estates:* while living, an individual can leave their property to the county for the use as a park, in exchange for them to live on the property until their death.

*Capital Projects Sales Tax:* a sales tax enacted by both approval of a referendum and the state legislature. The tax must be used for a specific purpose and is limited to a specific period of time. This tax may be used for recreational facilities.

*Hospitality Tax:* a tax placed on prepared meals and beverages that are served. The revenue must be used for promotion of tourism; parks and recreation projects are permitted.

*Revenue Bonds:* used to finance high use specialty facilities like athletic complexes, golf courses and aquatic centers, the debt is paid off using user fees and/or money generated from the operation.

*Corporate Sponsorships:* corporations pay money to market and promote their business brand. Sponsorships are also used for programs and events.

*Partnerships:* two [or more] separate agencies jointly fund the development or operation of a revenue producing recreational facility. The partners share risk, operational costs, responsibilities and management.

*Recreation Service Fees:* a dedicated user fee established for the purpose of constructing or maintaining recreation facilities. Typically used for organizational activities, which require a reservation, such as athletic leagues.

*Private Concessionaires:* a contract with a private business to provide and operate recreational facilities financed, constructed, and operated by the private business, with additional compensation paid to the county.

*Annual Appropriation/Leasehold Financing:* a complex financing structure that requires the use of a third party to act as the issuer of a bond, construct the facility and retain title until the bonds are retired. The county enters into a lease agreement with the third party, with annual lease payments equal to the debt service requirement. Third party bonds are considered less secure than county general obligation bonds, thus more costly. Separately issued bonds do not affect the county's debt limitations, nor do they require a referendum.

*Others:* naming rights, licensing rights, and merchandise sales.

#### **6.4 Administration**

The Gaston County Parks and Recreation Department is currently staffed with a director; two district park supervisors; an administrative assistant; a maintenance supervisor; a landscape coordinator; a maintenance crew chief; and, five maintenance employees. When the construction of the Senior Center is completed in early 2008, a full time center director and two part time assistants will join the department.

By the end of the planning period, the department will need one additional full time district park supervisors and one additional maintenance supervisor and crew. It would also be beneficial to create a position for a Recreation Planner/Trails Coordinator.

The operation and maintenance of the parks system will continue to be the responsibility of the department director. It is recommended that the parks and recreation director and the county police chief devise and implement a park security program that addresses public safety and protection of park facilities. This program could involve increasing staff with a park police division, employing off duty police officers to patrol parks or contracting with a private security company.

It is also recommended that the director maintain a liaison with the Planning and Development Services Department to be kept apprised of proposed residential and commercial developments.

The parks and recreation system can also benefit from the administration of a volunteer program. The department has received assistance from scout troops and individual Eagle Scout candidates, as well as community and athletic organizations. The Parks and Recreation Department should establish a formal volunteer program that matches specific tasks with individuals who are willing to offer their time and talents.

Other administrative tasks to be given a high priority include: the preparation and the submittal of state and federal grant applications for facility development; the preparation of an annual parks and recreation capital improvement budget; and the distribution of the new parks and recreation promotional brochure.

## Appendix A Recreation Needs Surveys

## Gaston County Recreation Needs Adult Survey

Please complete the survey by January 30, 2007

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

City or area of county where you live: \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you lived in Gaston County? \_\_\_\_\_

1) What recreational activities (both indoor and outdoor) do you expect the county to provide for you and your family?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2) Rate the following activities in order of importance to you:

1 = Very important    2 = Somewhat important    3 = Not important

\_\_\_ Walking            \_\_\_ Bicycling            \_\_\_ Picnicking            \_\_\_ Basketball

\_\_\_ Baseball            \_\_\_ Soccer            \_\_\_ Football            \_\_\_ Golf

\_\_\_ Playgrounds            \_\_\_ Tennis            \_\_\_ Softball            \_\_\_ Volleyball

\_\_\_ Canoeing            \_\_\_ Fishing            \_\_\_ Swimming            \_\_\_ Jogging

\_\_\_ Skateboarding            \_\_\_ Nature Study            \_\_\_ Hiking            \_\_\_ Dog Park

\_\_\_ Other (specify): \_\_\_\_\_

3) What parks and recreational facilities (public, YMCA, private athletic facilities) do you currently use?

\_\_\_\_\_

4) What comments regarding the parks and recreation services in Gaston County would you like to offer? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Gaston County Recreation Needs - Youth Survey

Please complete the survey by January 30,2007

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

City or area of county where you live: \_\_\_\_\_

What school do you attend? \_\_\_\_\_

1) What do you like to do after school?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2) What sports or games do you like to play?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3) What types of recreational activities would you like to try?  
(examples: swimming, canoeing, skateboarding, hiking, etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4) I would like to tell the parks and recreation folks that Gaston  
County could be more fun if we had what?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix B Tabulation of Current Gaston County Park Lands By Classification

**TABLE B 1**

**REGIONAL PARKS**

**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
1	Crowders Mountain State Park	Southwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	3,500
	<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>3,500</b>

**TABLE B 2**  
**DISTRICT PARKS**  
**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
2	Gaston County Park at Dallas	North Central	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	80
3	George Poston Park	Northeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	350
4	Martha Rivers Park	Southeast	Gastonia	58
5	Rankin Lake Park	North Central	Gastonia	192
	<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>680</b>

**TABLE B3**  
**COMMUNITY PARKS**  
**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
6	Gaston County Park at Bessemer City	Southwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	35
7	Gaston County Park at North Belmont	Northeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	33
8	Gaston County Park at Tryon	Northwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	35
9	Linford Park	Southeast	Belmont	30
10	C.B. Huss Recreation Complex	Southeast	Cramerton	8
11	Bradley Center	North Central	Gastonia	46
12	Davis Park	Southwest	Gastonia	25
13	Ferguson Park	Southeast	Gastonia	80
14	Jeffers Center	Southwest	Gastonia	39
15	Phillips Center	Southwest	Gastonia	36
16	Tuckaseege Park	Northeast	Mount Holly	10
17	Mountain Island Park at Mount Holly	Northeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	49
	<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>426</b>

**TABLE B4**  
**SCHOOL PARKS**

**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
18	Gaston County Park at Beam Elementary	Southwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	5
19	Gaston County Park at Bess Elementary	Southeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	10
20	Gaston County Park at Catawba Heights Elementary	Northeast	Mount Holly	3
21	Gaston County Park at Chapel Grove Elementary	Southwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	20
22	Gaston County Park at Cramerton Middle	Southeast	Cramerton	10
23	Gaston County Park at East Gaston High	Northeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	10
24	Gaston County Park at Forestview High	Southeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	5
25	Gaston County Park at New Hope Elementary	Southeast	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	10
26	Gaston County Park at Pinewood Elementary	Northeast	Mount Holly	3
27	Gaston County Park at Robinson Elementary	Southeast	Gastonia	10
	<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>86</b>

**TABLE B 5**  
**NEIGHBORHOOD PARKS**  
**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
28	Stowe Park	Southeast	Belmont	6
29	Davis Park	Southeast	Belmont	15
30	Reid Park	Southeast	Belmont	9
31	Crescent Park / Dwight Frady Field	Southeast	Belmont	4
32	Rodden Park	Southeast	Belmont	6
33	Bessemer/City Park	Southwest	Bessemer City	12
34	Uptown/Founders/Indian Springs Park	Southwest	Bessemer City	.5
35	Kevin Millwood Park	Southwest	Bessemer City	7
36	Stroupe Park	Northwest	Cherryville	1
37	Aaron Moss Park	Northwest	Cherryville	21
38	Robert Ballard Park	Northwest	Cherryville	8
39	Kenwood Park	Northwest	Cherryville	.5
40	Ben Black Park	Northwest	Cherryville	.5
41	Bill Edwards Park	Northwest	Cherryville	10
42	Westgate/C.V. Thornburg, Jr. Park	Northwest	Cherryville	6
43	Central Park	Southeast	Cramerton	8
44	Lakewood Park	Southeast	Cramerton	2
45	Adult Recreation Center	Southwest	Gastonia	5
46	All American Park/Linford	Southwest	Gastonia	8.5
47	East Park	North Central	Gastonia	7
48	Erwin Park	North Central	Gastonia	11

49	I. C. Falls Park	Southeast	Gastonia	5
50	Lineberger Park	Southeast	Gastonia	18.5
51	Southeast Center/Nat'l Guard Armory	Southeast	Gastonia	19
52	Smyre Millennium Park	Southeast	Gastonia	2
53	High Shoals Community Park	North Central	High Shoals	1
54	Harold Rankin Park	Northeast	Lowell	2
55	River Street Park	Northeast	Mount Holly	10
56	Woodlawn Park	Northeast	Mount Holly	1
57	Central Park	Northeast	Mount Holly	1
58	Mount Holly Junior High	Northeast	Mount Holly	1.5
59	Thompson Park	Northeast	Stanley	1
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>210</b>

TABLE B 6

## LINEAR PARKS

## TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
60	Riverside Park Greenway	Southeast	Cramerton	49
61	Avon / Catawba Creek Greenway	Southeast	Gastonia	40
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>89</b>

**TABLE B 7**  
**UNIQUE OR SPECIAL USE PARKS**  
**TABULATION OF CURRENT GASTON COUNTY PARK LANDS**

Park / Ref. No.	Park Name	Plan Quadrant	Municipality	Size ( acres )
62	J. Paul Ford Recreation Center	Southeast	Belmont	.5
63	Bessemer City Gym & Walking Track	Southwest	Bessemer City	.5
64	Beam Heritage Museum	Northwest	Cherryville	6
65	Community Center, Auditorium and Historic Museum	Northwest	Cherryville	.5
66	Franklin Gymnasium & Squad Field	North Central	Dallas	2
67	Memorial Hall	Southeast	Gastonia	.25
68	Sims Legion Park	North Central	Gastonia	33
69	Skeet and Trap Range	North Central	Gastonia	4
70	Municipal Golf Course	Southeast	Gastonia	90
71	Lowell Community Center	Northeast	Lowell	.25
72	Camp Sertoma	North Central	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	7
73	Lewis Brooks Airfield	Northwest	Unincorporated Area Gaston County	52
	<b>TOTALS</b>			<b>196</b>







274

Northwest

321

North

Central

COMMUNITY & SCHOOL PARKS  
SERVICE AREAS

27

Northeast



HORIZONTAL  
GRAPHIC SCALE



Note: 1 inch = 5,280 ft., then 1 in. = 1 mile  
scale for original 22"x34" drawing

1 mi. 0  
if 0.5 inch,  
scale is 1"=10,560 ft.  
(2 mi.) for 11"x17" dwg.

### LEGEND

3 mi. radius

### SERVICE AREAS

Intensity of Hatching shows  
Level of Service

- 1 park within 3 mi.
- 2 parks within 3 mi.
- 3 parks within 3 mi.

Proj. #: C06028

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548-6679

EARTH IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

Southwest

Southwest

321

Southwest

### LEGEND

### PARK INVENTORY

- REGIONAL Parks
- DISTRICT Parks  
see Tables B1 & B2
- Community Parks  
see Tables B3 & B4
- Linear Parks  
see Tables B6 & B7
- Special Use Parks

PARK REF.# 24 Community Parks  
see Tables B3 & B4

68 Linear Parks  
see Tables B6 & B7

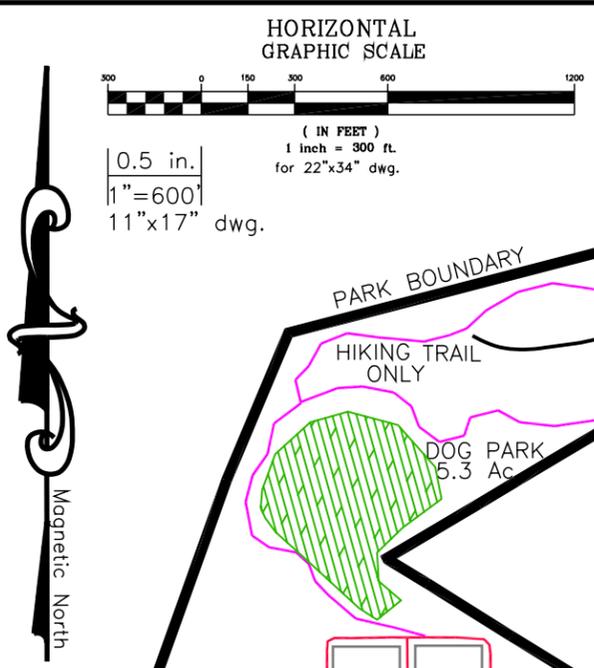
### GASTON COUNTY PARKS and RECREATION MASTER PLAN

GASTON COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT

### Figure 3 - COMMUNITY & SCHOOL PARKS SERVICE AREAS

Revision: 06-AUG-2007  
DRAWN BY: JMS  
DESIGN BY: JMS  
APPROVED BY: JMS  
DATE: Jun. 13, 2007  
FIG. NO. 3A

**EARTH IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGIES**  
 121 Lozenby Dr.  
 P.O. Box 1346  
 Fort Mill, SC 29716  
 (803) 548-6690  
 Fax: 548-6679  
 Proj. #: 006028

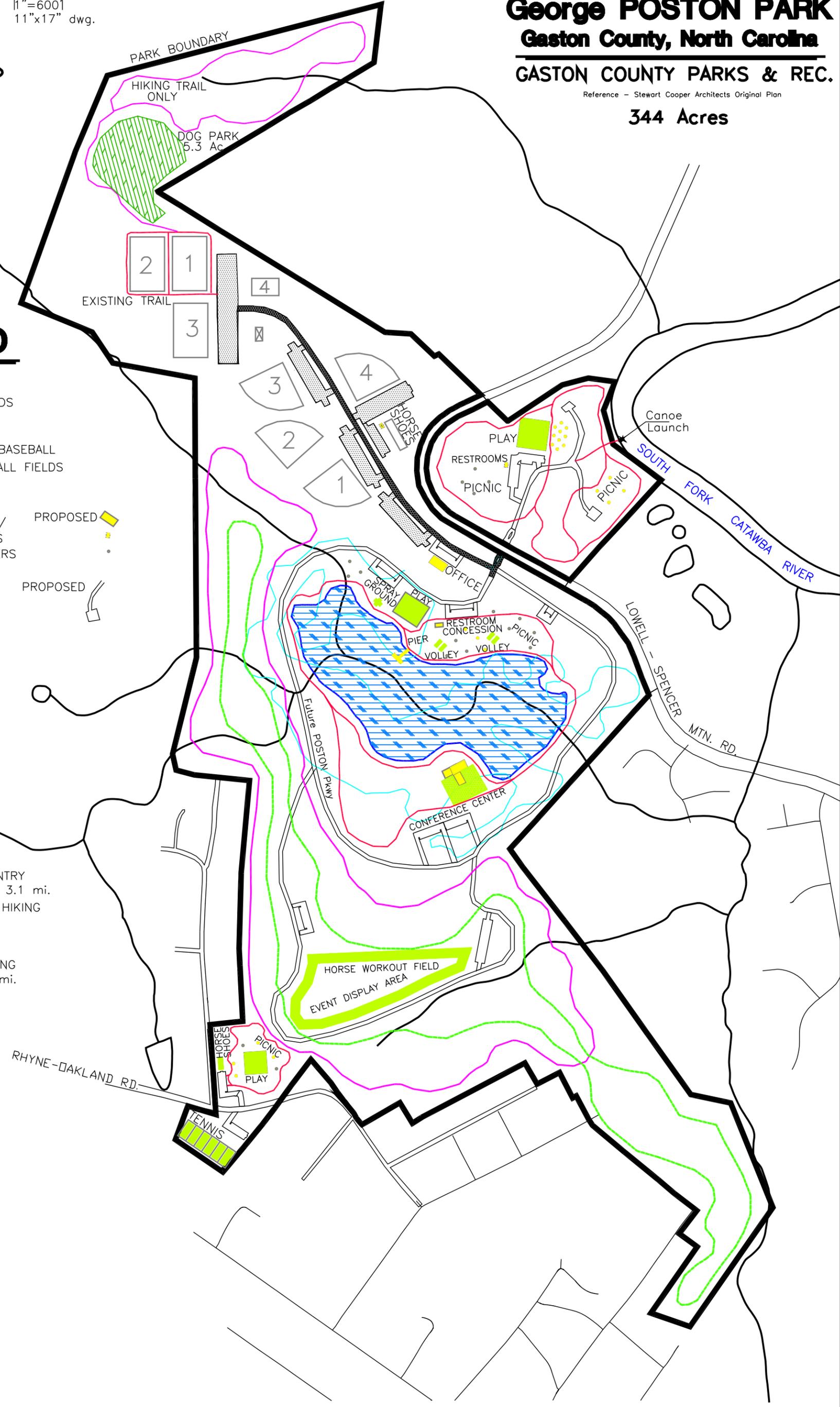


**UPDATED** August 6, 2007  
**MASTER SITE PLAN**  
**George POSTON PARK**  
**Gaston County, North Carolina**  
**GASTON COUNTY PARKS & REC.**  
 Reference - Stewart Cooper Architects Original Plan  
**344 Acres**



**LEGEND**

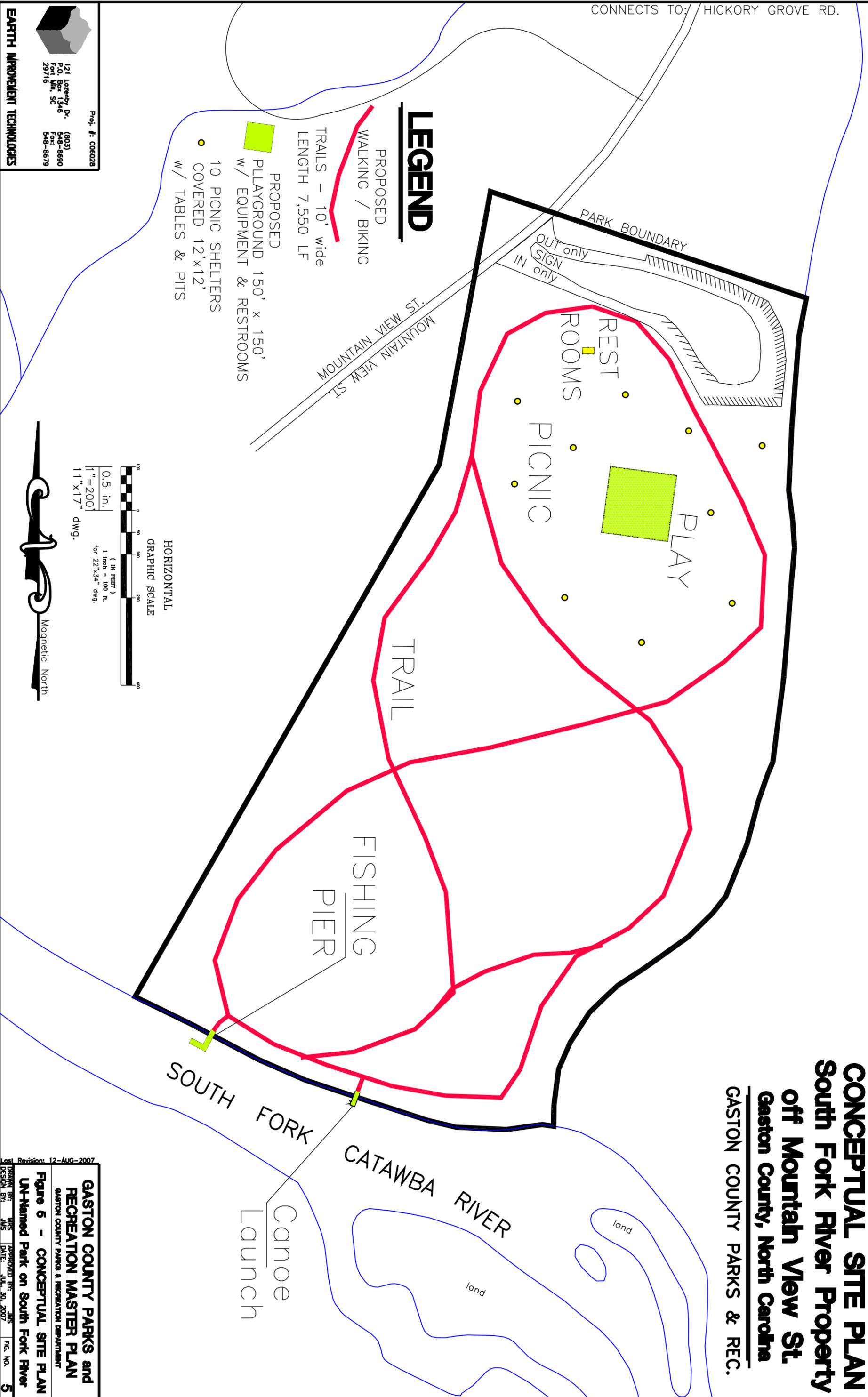
- EXISTING SOCCER FIELDS
- EXISTING BASEBALL or SOFTBALL FIELDS
- EXISTING BUILDINGS / REST ROOMS PICNIC SHELTERS
- PROPOSED PARK FACILITIES
- PROPOSED POND
- PROPOSED WALKING TRAILS
- PROPOSED CROSS COUNTRY RACE TRAIL, 3.1 mi. SUITABLE for HIKING
- PROPOSED HORSE RIDING TRAIL, 3.6 mi.
- PROPOSED BIKING TRAILS
- PROPOSED OFFICE
- PROPOSED RESTROOM
- PROPOSED CONCISSION
- PROPOSED PICNIC
- PROPOSED VOLLEY
- PROPOSED PIER
- PROPOSED PLAY
- PROPOSED SPRAY GROUND
- PROPOSED HORSE SHOES
- PROPOSED HORSE WORKOUT FIELD
- PROPOSED EVENT DISPLAY AREA
- PROPOSED CONFERENCE CENTER
- PROPOSED CANOE LAUNCH
- PROPOSED TENNIS



Revision: 06-AUG-2007  
**GASTON COUNTY PARKS and RECREATION MASTER PLAN**  
**Figure 4 - UPDATED MASTER PLAN**  
**GEORGE POSTON PARK**  
 GASTON COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT  
 DRAWN BY: JMS  
 DESIGNED BY: JMS  
 APPROVED BY: JMS  
 DATE: JAN. 22, 2007  
 FIG. NO. 4

# 43 Acres

## CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN South Fork River Property off Mountain View St. Gaston County, North Carolina GASTON COUNTY PARKS & REC.



### LEGEND

- PROPOSED WALKING / BIKING
- TRAILS - 10' wide LENGTH 7,550 LF
- PROPOSED PLAYGROUND 150' x 150' w/ EQUIPMENT & RESTROOMS
- 10 PICNIC SHELTERS COVERED 12'x12' w/ TABLES & PITS

HORIZONTAL GRAPHIC SCALE



0.5 in. = 100 ft.  
1" = 200 ft.  
11" x 17" dwg.



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EARTH IMPROVEMENT TECHNOLOGIES

Revision: 12-AUG-2007  
GASTON COUNTY PARKS and RECREATION MASTER PLAN  
GASTON COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT  
Figure 6 - CONCEPTUAL SITE PLAN  
UN-Named Park on South Fork River  
DRAWN BY: JMS  
DESIGN BY: JMS  
APPROVED BY: JMS  
DATE: JUL. 30, 2007  
PG. NO. 5