



E. PLANNING AND PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS



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I. Planning Development and Methods

The Washtenaw County Parks and Recreation Commission (WCPARC) hired a private consulting firm, URS, Inc., who in turn subcontracted JJR, LLC, to compile the 5-Year Recreation Master Plan. The process of developing the Plan involved extensive research and evaluation integrated with cooperation and communication with WCPARC, park users, and parks staff. The following procedures were used during the process to produce the Plan and its ultimate goal, the Action Program.

- An assessment of both national and state recreational trends.
- An evaluation of the County's physical characteristics for natural preservation and recreational opportunities.
- A review and evaluation of the County demographics, including population, social, and economic data, in addition to anticipated demographic trends as they relate to recreation needs and/or opportunities.
- A study of local, regional, state, and federal initiatives related to recreation.
- A survey of Border to Border trail users.
- Meetings with County recreation staff and officials.
- Meetings with the Greenway Collaborative.
- Publication of the Plan on the County website for public review.
- Public presentations to the community.



Public Meeting on Border to Border Trail through Dexter, Michigan. Source: WPARC

Detailed information on each of these planning processes is described below.

2. Planning Process

a. Comparison to Recreation Standards and Assessment of Recreation Trends

In the past, recreation plans typically utilized an inventory of a community's parks and facilities and compared this against the National Recreation and Park Association's (NRPA) "Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines". Table 2 in Section D contains Washtenaw County's recreation inventory and Appendix B contains

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the NRPA “Suggested Facility Development Standards”, but this table is to be used as a guideline only. A more accurate and comprehensive method is to integrate and evaluate information from all of the above listed processes to determine the Washtenaw County community’s recreational needs.

Various sporting and recreation-based organizations such as the National Sporting Goods Association (NSGA) and the United States Forest Service have conducted extensive research and surveyed thousands of people to determine where the general population’s interests lie for recreation needs. The NSGA’s latest research study “Sports Participation in 2008” is one such study, where a mail panel resource of more than 300,000 pre-recruited households was used for the survey. These recreation statistics have been compiled and are available for the industry to utilize.

Nationally, the top 20 most popular recreational activities in 2008 based on percentage of times a person (7 years and older) participated in the activity at least once are:

▪ Exercise Walking	97%
▪ Swimming	64%
▪ Exercising with Equipment	63%
▪ Bowling	50%
▪ Camping	49%
▪ Bicycle Riding	45%
▪ Fishing	42%
▪ Workout at Club	39%
▪ Hiking	38%
▪ Weight Lifting	38%
▪ Aerobic Exercising	36%
▪ Running/Jogging	36%
▪ Billiards/Pool	32%
▪ Basketball	30%
▪ Boating, Power/Motor	28%
▪ Golf	26%
▪ Target Shooting	20%
▪ Hunting with Firearms	19%
▪ Yoga	16%
▪ Soccer	16%

Interestingly, cross-country skiing and ice hockey were the least participated activities.



Nationally, the activities 45 – 54 year old people participated in most frequently were:

- Exercise Walking
- Exercising with Equipment
- Camping
- Hiking
- Working out at Club
- Boating, Power/Motor
- Bowling
- Golf
- Aerobic Exercising
- Bicycle Riding

The NRPA conducted another survey on 20,000 U. S. households, "Sports Participation in 2006: State-by-State", that projects sports participation on a state-by-state basis for 33 sports. Only those sports which project at least six million participants nationally are included in the study. This survey shows activities in which Michigan residents would be more likely to participate compared to the national average, and the results are:

- In-line Roller Skating
- Water Skiing
- Softball
- Snowboarding
- Hunting with a Bow and Arrow

These surveys must be taken in consideration with other factors, since the activities that Michigan citizens seem to be interested in are activities that are showing significant waning in national interest.

A recreation study and survey published in February 2008 concerning outdoor nature-based recreation finds that overall participation has been decreasing for the past two decades. The study measured visitation to public lands, the number of various types of U.S. game licenses issued, times spent camping, and time spent hiking or backpacking. The fear is that people will lose interest in both nature and its protection resulting in a loss of preservation funds. Reasons surfacing to explain the continuing trend include the use of the internet consuming people's relaxation time, increased TV programming available through cable and satellite, and the use of video games. The drop in frequency of outdoor recreation is especially dominant among 18 to 29 year olds, an age group that is most heavily influenced by use of the Internet, and younger groups as video games have become



increasingly popular. Richard Lowe, author of the book “Last Child in the Woods”, claims other factors leading to a trend away from nature-based recreation include increasing school and work pressure on children and parents, the rising cost of park visits, and the fear of the safeness in the outdoors (from strangers, not wildlife). The United States Forest Service denies the trend away from nature-based recreation, however, by showing via their own surveys that participation in outdoor recreation grew nationally by 4% from 2000 to 2007. Their report, “Outdoor Recreation for 21st Century America”, based on results from the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment, says the trend for outdoor recreation is increasing, especially viewing, photographing, identifying, and visiting elements of nature such as wildlife and birds.

b. Evaluation of County Physical Characteristics

An evaluation of the Washtenaw County demographics can be found in Section E.

c. Evaluation of County Demographics

An evaluation of the Washtenaw County physical characteristics can be found in Section F.

d. Analysis of Criteria for Open Space

An analysis of the criteria for open space would involve a discussion on the quality of life recreation brings to its citizens, the recreational and economic value of natural areas, the health benefits, and ethical environmental concerns. However, with 1767 acres of land already protected by WCPARC in the form of 18 Natural Preservation Areas, WCPARC has already considered and implemented these criteria in these choices. Washtenaw County’s Natural Areas Preservation Program (NAPP) purchases these unique natural areas to ensure their preservation for the benefit of the County and its people, plants, and animals. This is done with the guidance of the Natural Areas Technical Advisory Committee (NATAC), described under Section C, the Administrative Structure. NAPP’s goal is to identify lands which, through long-term preservation, will:

- Protect and preserve the natural and ecological diversity/heritage of Washtenaw County
- Complement the existing network of publicly and privately protected lands
- Maximize the public benefit



Natural areas are distributed throughout the County, ensuring a better quality of life and enhanced health benefits that viewing, walking in, communing with, and enjoying nature gives humans. Moreover, surveys across the country have shown that home buyers identify open space and trails near their home as among the top features in choosing a home, thus providing their economic value to the County.

e. Surveys

Border to Border Trail Users Survey:

Michigan State University recently coordinated a study and survey of the Border to Border trail as part of their ongoing 10-year research of several trails in Michigan. The study was conducted by MSU's Department of Community, Agriculture, Recreation and Resource studies, but was financed by the WCPARC, who also provided staff support along with volunteers from other Washtenaw County departments. The study was performed at 4 different points along the trail during September 2008 and May 2009. A total of 102 hours of survey and 305 one-page questionnaires (of 452, or 68%) were completed. Observations recorded included classification of adult vs. child and their mode of travel. A total of 1,835 trail uses were observed.

Observation highlights include:

- 114,405 estimated uses (using extrapolation) for spring and fall.
- 51% uses occurred on weekdays, 49% on weekends.
- Adults (19 years +) accounted for 91% of uses.
- Children accounted for 9% of uses.
- Of adult uses:
 - 36% bicycled
 - 2% in-line skated
 - 62% walked/jogged
- Of children's use:
 - 29% bicycled
 - 2% in-line skated
 - 69% walked/jogged

User survey highlights include:

- 95% users were Washtenaw County residents or workers.
- 91% users were Washtenaw County residents.
- Of adult users, 50% were male and 50% were female.
 - 18% were 19 – 24 years old
 - 21% were 25 – 40 years old
 - 41% were 41 – 60 years old
 - 20% were 61 years and older



- 66% users did not use a vehicle to arrive at the trail; primary mode was on foot.
- 44% users lived within 1 mile or less from the trail.
- 92% of uses were for 2 hours or less.
- 96% rated the experience as satisfactory.
- 18% used the trail 10 or more times during the spring or fall seasons.
- 5% were disabled (had an impairment that seriously limits their participation in work or recreation)
- User suggested improvements include:
 - Improve signage and wayfinding (17%)
 - Provide more/better comfort facilities (bathrooms, benches, drinking fountains, picnic sites) (17%)
 - Doing fine/no change needed (15%)
 - Improve/widen trail surface (12%)

Pittsfield Township Park Survey:

A recent survey conducted for Pittsfield Township via mailed survey form and online survey shows residents are interested in... nature-based recreation! The top 5 (of 18) forms of recreation in order of priority were:

- Walking/Biking Trails
- Nature Trails
- Bicycling Trails
- Restroom Facilities
- Playground Structures

For community center activities, the top 6 choices (of 15) in order of priority were:

- Swimming Pool
- Aerobic Training Area
- Weight Training Area
- Running Track
- Senior Activity Area
- Teen Activity Area

f. Meetings

Several working meetings were held at the park offices with select park commissioners, park staff, consultants and critical stakeholders. Topics discussed at these meetings included:

- Development of goals and objectives
- Formulation of strategies to obtain public input,



- Review and refinement of the Capital Improvement Program (CIP)
- Discussions on schedule and potential grant opportunities
- Review of Master Plan text and graphics,
- Exchange of research and relevant documents to be included in the Master Plan.

g. Publication of Plan on Website

A draft version of the Plan was made available on the Parks and Recreation page of Washtenaw County's website, www.ewashtenaw.org, prior to adoption of the Plan, to enable the public to supply their input and/or comments.

h. Public Presentations of Plan

Presentations occurred on January 26, 2010, at Washtenaw Community College; February 3, 2010 at the Dexter Library; and on March 9, 2010 at the Commission Office in Ann Arbor.