

# Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas MASTER PLAN

Hays County, Texas  
*April 2012*



**DESIGNWORKSHOP**





# HAYS COUNTY PARKS, OPEN-SPACE AND NATURAL AREAS MASTER PLAN

April 2012

Prepared for  
Hays County, Texas

by

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## FORWARD

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*Texans have flocked to Hays County to cool off in spring-fed rivers or enjoy its unspoiled beauty and rural character for centuries. For many, Hays County is the gateway to the Hill Country, where the coastal plains give way to rolling hills, natural springs, clean rivers and unspoiled open vistas. In recent decades, these assets have drawn many to live as well as play here, bringing with them needs for new developments and recreational facilities. In guiding this plan, Hays County sought a way to balance the reality of advancing urbanization with the common desires of its citizens to maintain the character, traditions, and unique natural assets of its communities.*

*In a series of public meetings, surveys, and discussions with stakeholder groups in 2011, residents of Hays County consistently placed the highest priority for parks and open space programming on projects that provide river and creek access, trails, youth camping, and open spaces that provide general enjoyment of nature. These were the overarching themes within each of five planning areas, common to all of the communities.*

*We recognize that many of the local projects that will be needed in the next decade are already being addressed by the cities and municipalities within Hays County in their individual Master Plans. To define a role for county government in the future, we looked for overarching priorities and unmet needs in unincorporated areas.*

*The first priorities that emerge are a desire for parks and open spaces that preserve water corridors, beloved landscapes and our rural character for public enjoyment in the face of inevitable development. As large ranches that once dominated the landscape are divided into ever smaller pieces for development, there is a pressing need to preserve special places and natural amenities in the Hill Country that drew people here in the first place.*

*Hays County will provide a leadership role in developing parks and open space projects that address these priorities. Regional-scale projects will be accomplished by working in public/private partnerships, collaborating with local communities and non-profit groups, and initiating projects in unincorporated areas. These approaches will contribute to the county's vision for Hays County Parks and Open Spaces: a system of public lands and facilities retained with thoughtful attention and care to ensure that treasured places, natural amenities and local heritage remain available for recreation, enjoyment, and the well-being of the citizens of Hays County.*

**- Hays County Park and Open Space Advisory Board**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* will be used by Hays County, Texas to make decisions regarding parks and open space programs and facilities. It lays the groundwork for the County's involvement in providing park, open space and natural areas for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* was formed from the results of a multi-faceted process that included a current inventory, needs assessment and several community polls and meetings. Based on the findings of this phased process, a set of recommendations for the County's parks and open space system as a whole as well as for each of the County's six parks that make up that system was completed. What follows is a brief summary of that process, assessment results and recommended priority projects.

### Background

As Hays County continues to grow, its 4,300+ acres of parks and open space will not be able to handle the increased usage without destroying the County's celebrated natural features. The County's goal was to develop a focused plan that outlines how to preserve its existing holdings and expand its parks and open space acreage to meet growing demand and enable all residents to enjoy County parks and open space.

The goals of the *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* are to:

- Provide regional park and open space lands for an assortment of recreational experiences suited to a variety of users in the County. These shall include large, multi-purpose facilities that may connect to community features through trails, greenways and other parks.
- Utilize the County park and open space system to conserve land that has environmental value including habitat, watershed health, heritage and scenic

qualities, while providing appropriate recreation opportunities for the public.

- Create a financially balanced and economically viable parks and open space system.

Hays County controls six parks and open space areas. These include Five Mile Dam Sports Complex (encompassing Dudley Johnson Park, Randall Vetter Park and the Soccer Complex), Jacob's Well Natural Area, and the Regional Hike and Bike Trail near Wimberley. Recently, the County partnered in a conservation easement over the Dahlstrom Ranch. The conservation easement did not include a right of public access on the Dahlstrom Ranch. The County and the Dahlstroms have agreed to negotiate a lease to allow for public access on the property.

### Process

The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* is the result of a comprehensive process led by the County and consultant team enlisted for the planning process. This process was informed by review of existing County documents, focus-group input, Hays County Park and Open Space Advisory Board (POSAB) input and review, citizen participation, Commissioner input and County staff input and review from January to October 2011. From this phased process, a list of recommendations for the County's parks and open space system as a whole as well as each of the County's six parks was created.

The Master Plan was developed over the course of five distinct phases:

- Phase 1: The focus of first phase was to define goals and objectives for parks and open space in Hays County. Using the *2006 Parks and Open Space Master Plan* as a starting point, followed by input from the Hays County POSAB, goals and objectives were created, which were then shared with the County residents through public meetings and stakeholder interviews.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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- Phase 2: During this phase, the County's vision and desired role for future parks and open space projects began to be defined. This is also when the County narrowed down its list of priority projects and refined its role in park and open space facility development. Potential projects in the County were identified and categorized by their ability to meet the goals and objectives identified in Phase 1. A second set of public meetings was held and an online poll to garner resident feedback was conducted.
- Phase 3: During the third phase, a needs assessment was completed using four methods of assessment: standard-based, demand-based, resource-based and fiscal-based. The goals and objectives for the plan were used as baseline information to define a set of projects or strategies that could be implemented in Hays County. Additional public outreach and feedback was achieved.
- Phase 4: Priority projects were identified during the fourth phase. Project locations and specific goals were created through public input, opportunity analysis (i.e. ability to build additional capacity for projects and resources), comparison to existing inventory and partnership support. During a final public meeting, which was held on June 30, 2011 at the Hays County Extension Office in San Marcos, the consultant team reviewed the priority projects with the public and gathered their feedback on the direction of the plan through comment cards and informal discussion.
- Phase 5: During the final phase, potential partners and funding sources for project implementation as well as future park and open space planning objectives were identified. Management recommendations for inclusion in partnership agreements for future park and

open space projects the County undertakes were also created.

### Assessment Results

During the third phase of the master-planning effort, four different assessments were conducted to help inform Hays County's priority projects list.

#### *Standards-based Assessment*

##### *Conclusions:*

Based on comparison with park and open space standards it is recommended to:

- Increase the total acres of parks in the parks and open space system
- Increase the number and length of trails in the park and open space system
- Locate active recreation facilities in areas of denser population

#### *Demand-based Assessment*

##### *Conclusions:*

As a result of the public input it is recommended to:

- Create larger-sized facilities with both passive and active recreation
- Provide river access
- Provide multi-use trails that allow for biking, hiking and connecting parks where appropriate
- Promote the incorporation of camping and youth outdoor facilities
- Provide educational opportunities on general nature enjoyment and sports activities when possible

#### *Resource-based Assessment*

##### *Conclusions:*

To protect sensitive land it is recommended to:

- Provide river access and restoration
- Conserve land that provides opportunities for ground-water recharge and surface-water protection
- Protect scenic corridors along rivers, roads and ridge tops that allow for views to general open space lands
- Create Park Stewardship Plans for all facilities: removing invasive species, repairing the unstable soil conditions

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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and practicing land management and programs to better the environmental conditions at any park or open space

### *Fiscal-based Assessment Conclusions*

In achieving additional revenues or partnerships it is recommended to:

- Diversify tourism opportunities beyond sports to potentially include nature tourism, festivals or special events and educational events
- Build upon existing and new funding opportunities and partnerships to grow the parks and open space network.

### Priority Projects

In support of the goals for parks and open space in Hays County, Priority Projects were identified. This includes focusing resources to develop large multi-purpose spaces that encompass multiple Priority Projects within the park or open space area to service a larger population.

Priority projects for the County are:

1. River and Creek Access
2. Trails
3. Camping
4. Youth Camping
5. General Nature Enjoyment
6. Nature Center
7. Festival Space
8. Recreation and Sports Complex
9. Shooting Sports Complex
10. Community Gardens

# INTRODUCTION





This Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan is created for Hays County and lays the groundwork for the County's involvement in providing park, open space and natural areas for the enjoyment of current and future generations.

There are currently 1,225 acres of publicly owned parks and 3,083 acres of publicly owned open space in Hays County. The largest park facility is 105 acres, with most parks in the County being community and neighborhood-sized parks.

According to the 2010 US Census, Hays County is growing rapidly, more than doubling its population from 66,614 in 1990 to 157,107 in 2010. With the median age being 30.4 and approximately 30 percent of the residents under the age of 19, Hays County has a highly active population.

### History

The County was formed by the legislature in 1848, although several current counties were later carved out of the initial territory. The County has an area of 679.8 square

miles and is located on the border between the Edwards Plateau and the southern Blackland Prairie region in south central Texas. The City of San Marcos is the county seat. Incorporated cities within the County include Buda, Driftwood, Dripping Springs, Kyle, Wimberley, Hays, Mountain City, Niederwald, San Marcos, Uhland and Bear Creek.

There has been a long history of appreciation and conservation of the natural resources in Hays County. The first County park, Dudley Johnson Park, was acquired in 1973 through a donation of land along the Blanco River. Following the acquisition of this park, the County had no new acquisition of parks until 2003 when Randall Vetter Park was opened adjacent to Dudley Johnson Park. Additional parks have been acquired by the County recently and are discussed in the Accomplishments section of this Chapter.

A time line of park and open space planning efforts in Hays County can be found in Appendix A: Process and History.



## Demographics

Growth in Hays County has increased rapidly in the past 10 years and is anticipated to continue accelerating. The County needs to actively plan for future park, recreation and open space opportunities for the growing and changing population. The demographics, including existing and projected population, age, race and income, were reviewed to better understand the citizen base of Hays County for future parks and open space needs. Additional data on demographics, including age charts, race charts and population growth maps are included in Appendix A: Process and History.

### Projected Population Figures

The population of Hays County, and the Austin metro-area in general, is growing rapidly. Between 1990 and 2000, Hays County saw a 49 percent population increase. Between 2000 and 2010, the County experienced a 61 percent increase in population. This trend is anticipated to continue through the 10-year life of this plan.

CENSUS YEAR	POPULATION
<b>1990</b>	<b>66,614</b>
<b>2000</b>	<b>97,589</b>
<b>2010</b>	<b>157,107</b>
<b>2015 (proj.)</b>	<b>215,670</b>
<b>2020 (proj.)</b>	<b>271,388</b>
<b>2025 (proj.)</b>	<b>335,014</b>

*The Hays County projections were calculated in 2008 by the Texas State Data Center, but are using 2000 census data. As of the date of this report, projections based upon the 2010 census data have not been released.*

### Growth Patterns

Higher densities exist along the I-35 corridor, particularly in San Marcos and Kyle. Maps included in Appendix A: Process and History illustrate the population density of Hays County census block groups.

## Age Patterns

The median age in Hays County is 30.4 years old, with a third of the residents being under the age of 24. Approximately 13 percent of residents are over the age of 60, while 21 percent is under the age of 14. The largest portion of citizens are between the ages of 20 and 24, at 23 percent.

### Race

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, over three quarters of the population reports themselves as white, followed by 11 percent who identify themselves as "other" race, 3 percent black or African American or 3 percent two or more races. Approximately 35 percent of the residents identify themselves as Hispanic.

### Income

According to the US Census, the median income in Hays County in 2009 was \$53,113, 10 percent above the Texas average of \$48,268.

## Need for Parks and Recreation

As the number of people in the County increases and the percent of the population under the age of 24 grows, pressure will be placed on the County's parks and open space. Planning now for the future of Hays County's parks and open space will ensure that future generations of Central Texas residents can continue to enjoy recreational pursuits of all kinds and the wide-open, natural spaces that make Hays County such a desirable place to live.



### Past Planning Efforts

The Hays County Park and Open Space Advisory Board (POSAB) was established in 2000 to “advise the Hays County Commissioners Court on matters pertaining to acquisition, development, management, maintenance and use of parks, recreation facilities, open space and leisure services owned or controlled by Hays County.” The POSAB’s first role was to review and comment on the 2002 Park and Open Space Master Plan, which gave guidance and criteria for projects receiving support from the 2001 Bond Funding.

In 2006, the Parks and Open Space Master Plan was updated; and, in 2007, an additional bond was passed supporting park and open space development throughout Hays County. In most cases, the County and those recipients who were awarded funds partnered together to improve existing or to implement new park facilities throughout Hays County.

Over the past 10 years, the County has partnered with municipalities for park upgrades and projects through bond funding. During that time, the County leveraged a \$33.5 million bond to improve 32 parks and open space facilities throughout Hays County.

### Accomplishments

In 2010, the County, in partnership with the City of San Marcos, opened a Soccer Complex adjacent to the two previously acquired County parks. Most recently, the County has supported the acquisition and development of Jacob’s Well Natural Area and the regional Hike and Bike Trail (both near Wimberley) and was involved in the funding for the Dahlstrom Ranch conservation easement. (The County and the Dahlstroms have agreed to negotiate a lease to allow for public access on the property.) Funding of County park and open space projects that took place from 2001 through 2007 came through bond initiatives.

In addition, other parks and open space in local jurisdictions were also funded in part by County bond initiatives. Together, the County and local government jurisdictions currently have 1,225 acres of park and 3,083 acres of open space. The largest park facility in the County and local government jurisdictions is 105 acres. The majority of acreage is at the “community” or “neighborhood” park level (70%). The largest open space facility is approximately 1,000 acres.

### Parks and Open Space Support

The continued investment in parks and open space throughout Hays County has been largely due to bond funding in 2001 and 2007. In 2001 \$3.5 million supported 12 projects. In 2007, \$30 million supported 20 projects. Parks Bonds were supported by a margin greater than 2 to 1.

Numerous cities in Hays County have established parks and open space programs of their own. Many of the cities have Parks and Open Space Master Plans and some have parks departments to manage their parks. Details on cities’ parks department documents are located in Appendix A: Process and History.

# 2

## PLANNING PROCESS



## PLANNING PROCESS

The former Hays County Park and Open Space Master Plan was originally created in 2002 and was revised on July 20, 2006. To stay current with Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) guidelines, the Park and Open Space Master Plans must be updated every five years and a new plan is required every 10 years. With the last revision having been in 2006, a new plan needed to be prepared in 2011. Hays County enlisted the support of a consultant in the creation of this plan.

The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* is a planning document that can be used by the County to make future decisions about parks and open space projects. This document can be used as a guideline for parks and open space program and facilities priorities. The County can purchase land, develop facilities and/or operate and maintain facilities that provide a clear public benefit of park and open space to the citizens of Hays County.

## Methodology

The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* was guided by a multi-faceted process. This process was informed by review of existing documents, focus group input, Hays County POSAB input and review, public input, Commissioner input and County staff input and review from January to October 2011. Public input – a key element in the development of the plan – was received through key-pad polling, group activities, dot voting, online poll, comment cards, emails, one-on-one conversations and key stakeholder interviews. While polling methods were not administered in a statistically valid method, they do represent input from those who chose to participate in the process. A variety of methods were used to solicit input and provide some interpretation of what people wanted in the County parks and open space system. The process was completed in five phases.

## Phase 1

The focus of first phase was to define goals and objectives for parks and open space in Hays County. Using the 2006 Parks and Open Space Master Plan as a starting point, the consultant team received input from the Hays County POSAB to create goals and objectives for public comment. The objectives presented to the public included baseline conditions and potential measures of success for each objective.

The first public meeting was held on March 31, 2011 at the San Marcos Community Center. This meeting covered goals, objectives and measures of success for the *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan*. The information and activities included in this meeting encouraged feedback on resource maps of the area, goals and priorities for parks and open space in the County and ideas presented and planning process.

In conjunction with the first public meeting, stakeholder interviews were held on March 30 and 31, 2011 at the Five Mile Dam Sports Complex. These meetings involved individuals identified by the County as having a specific interest or fields of expertise in topics related to parks and open space. Key stakeholder interviews included park and recreation directors from local cities, agricultural and ranching interests, realtors and home builders, organized sports groups, conservation interests, agencies, environmental interests and economic development interests.



Figure 1: Community Kick-Off | March 31, 2011



## Phase 2

During this phase, the County's vision and desired role for future parks and open space projects began to be defined. This is also when the County narrowed down its list of priority projects and refined its role in park and open space facility development. Potential projects in the County were identified and categorized by their ability to meet the goals and objectives identified in Phase 1.

The consultant team facilitated a second set of public meetings on two evenings (April 20 and 21, 2011) in two different locations (the Precinct 2 Office in Kyle and the Dripping Springs City Hall, respectively). These meetings included a presentation and activities regarding the vision. Participants discussed the most appropriate role for the County in the development of parks and open space both in types of parks and open space and methods of support that should be pursued. Lists of projects were generated during the meeting to help prioritize projects.

In addition to the public meetings, an online poll (using Survey Monkey) was made available to the public from April 21, 2011 to May 14, 2011. A link to the survey was available on the County website. The poll had almost 1,000 responses from various areas in the County, including 40 percent from the San Marcos area, 23 percent from the Kyle Area and approximately 10 percent each from the Dripping Springs and Buda areas. This additional outreach measure allowed the planning process to reach more people than just those who attended the meetings.

## Phase 3

During the third phase, the consultant team facilitated a needs assessment using four methods of assessment: standard-based, demand-based, resource-based and fiscal-based. The goals and objectives for the plan provided baseline information to produce a set of projects or strategies that could be implemented in Hays County. The details of the methods and findings of these assessments are discussed in the Needs Assessment section of this document. The goals and objectives analysis can be found in the Appendix.

The consultant team held a fourth meeting on May 26, 2011 at the Jacobs Well POA Building in Wimberley. This meeting covered the needs analysis and reviewed the polling results to determine local standards and to get feedback on potential priorities/preferences for planning areas within the County. Comment cards and informal discussions were used to gather feedback on the direction of the plan.



Figure 2: Open House | April 20/21, 2011



Figure 3: Conceptual Blueprint | May 26, 2011

## PLANNING PROCESS

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### Phase 4

Priority projects were identified during the fourth phase. Project locations and specific goals were identified through public input, opportunity analysis (ability to build additional capacity for projects and resources) and comparison to existing inventory and partnership support in planning areas in Hays County. The priority projects are described in detail in Appendix E: Priority Project Descriptions. Location-specific prioritization of these projects is also discussed in Appendix F: Planning Area Preferences.

Another public meeting was held on June 30, 2011 at the Hays County Extension Office in San Marcos. The prioritized projects and the planning areas were reviewed and comment cards and informal discussions were used to gather feedback on the direction of the plan. The final public meeting will occur when the Commissioners Court adopts or accepts the plan.

### Phase 5

During the final phase, the team identified potential partners and funding sources for project implementation as well as future park and open space planning objectives. They also created management recommendations for inclusion in partnership agreements for future park and open space projects that the County undertakes. Implementation details can be found in Implementation section of this plan.

Details on specific outreach tools, meeting agendas and supplementary materials are included in Appendix B: Public Input Documentation.



**Figure 4:** *Draft Plan | June 30, 2011*

## Vision

Hays County is a burgeoning, vibrant community characterized by abundant natural resources. The parks and open space system in the County plays an important role in allowing people to enjoy these unique features, conserve valuable resources and provide a variety of recreation opportunities in the County.

## County Role

The role of the County is to support park and open space projects that have clear public value, to protect public interest and to provide public access to desired, needed and well-designed facilities. The County can support this role through acquisition of land for parks and open space and potentially develop, operate and/or maintain facilities on the park or open space land.

Land acquisition by the County can only be pursued with willing landowners. Land can be acquired either through purchase of property in fee-simple, wherein a landowner sells his or her property outright, or the County can establish a conservation easement where a landowner willingly conveys certain interests on the property, such as the restrictions on development. When land is purchased in fee-simple, the land is obtained in its entirety. When a conservation easement is purchased from a willing landowner, the landowner still owns and operates the land and the County or partnering non-profit owns the development or other rights to the land. A purchase of a conservation easement is a voluntary agreement between a landowner and either a non-profit conservation organization or government agency and requires the landowner's consent for public access.

A Resolution of the Hays County Commissioners Court regarding the County's authority for land acquisition is included in Appendix A: Process and History.

## Goals

The *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan* has three major goals with related objectives. The objectives under each goal have measures of success that are used to further define the objective. Detailed analysis of each objective and measure of success can be found in Appendix D: Assessment.

The goals are focused around the concept of the County supporting large regional facilities that help conserve natural features in the County.

### Goal 1: Community Goal

Provide regional parks and open space for an assortment of recreational experiences suited to a variety of users in the County. These shall include large, multi-purpose facilities that may connect to community features through trails, greenways and other parks.

- Objective 1.1: Provide ample parks and open spaces in the park and open space system.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan contributes to a system that provides 30 acres of parks and open space per 1,000 residents, while ensuring that open space and park areas are located proportionate to the population density.
- Objective 1.2: Utilize the park and open space system to provide a range of recreational experiences to service a variety of age groups and user-types year-round.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan contributes to increased diversity of program types in response to the needs of the various areas of the County.
- Objective 1.3: Connect the parks and open space system where appropriate.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan contributes to increased connectedness of parks and

open space where appropriate. Determining “where appropriate” includes looking at adjacency of other parks and open space facilities, community node or places and their proximity to urban areas.

### Goal 2: Environmental Goal

Utilize the County park and open space system to conserve land that has environmental value including habitat, watershed health, heritage and scenic qualities, while providing appropriate recreation opportunities for the public.

- Objective 2.1: Utilize the parks and open space system to improve the condition of water quality and quantity in Hays County.

#### Measures of Success

- The plan increases acreage of land within the park and open space system that has high priority for surface water retention including flood zones, wetlands, riparian corridors and protections buffers. Encourage techniques to minimize erosion and storm water runoff at all scales.
- The plan increases acreage of land within the parks and open space systems that has high priority for water recharge to improve the quality and quantity of water entering into the aquifer.
- Objective 2.2: Utilize the parks and open space system to conserve important natural resource areas that contribute to the health and vitality of the County.

#### Measures of Success

- The plan increases acreage of woodland areas and grassland within the parks and open space system to improve air quality while also improving habitat and stabilizing slopes to prevent runoff.
- The plan increases the amount of tree canopy in developed areas to improve air quality and lower the urban heat-island effect.

- The plan increases acres of protected land with high potential erosion risk to integrate the natural topography and hydrology into the parks and open space system.
- Objective 2.3: Utilize the parks and open space system to protect scenic qualities throughout the County.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan increases the amount of significant scenic qualities that are in parks and open space as a way of protecting those views.

### Goal 3: Financial Goal

Create a financially balanced and economically viable parks and open space system.

- Objective 3.1: Incorporate a variety of funding mechanisms and partnerships for park and open space funding.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan creates a 60/40 mix of public private financing in order to balance park and open space development priorities with fiscal responsibilities.
- Objective 3.2: Promote economic development through increased year-round tourism.

#### Measure of Success

- The plan increases the County's tourism-related sales taxes by 10% and increases visitor spending per day for park and open space activities by 10%.



## Park and Open Space Classifications

Parks, open space and natural areas have many definitions specific to each jurisdiction. The National Parks and Recreation Association breaks down parks and open space into many sub-categories. These definitions were used as a basis for public input and feedback from the Hays County POSAB to create a local definition of parks, open space and natural areas.

For purposes of this plan, Open Space includes the classification of Natural Areas but the County focuses attention and has increased consideration for areas with natural resources in Hays County, thus calling it out specifically in the title of this plan. This plan defines parks and open space as follows:

### Parks

Parks are traditionally developed and managed to accommodate multiple recreation activities. They are open to the public and designed for a high intensity of use. Parks often include a wide variety of amenities and facilities that support active recreation such as sports fields and courts, play structures and recreation centers. Parks can be various sizes, ranging from the neighborhood to the regional scale.

This plan establishes six classifications of parks for Hays County: mini-parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, multi-purpose parks, sports complexes and special-use parks. All of these coincide with the NRPA definitions except for Multi-Purpose Parks. Hays County has added this park type to the NRPA standard list of park classifications because the NRPA classifications lacked a park type that addressed the regional nature of park facilities for a county.



Figure 5: Parks Definitions

### Open Space

Open space areas are managed primarily for resource conservation and low-impact passive recreation opportunities. These areas often include trails, water access and educational activities. Open spaces can be of various sizes, from linear greenways of limited width to larger block areas encompassing significant resources.

This plan establishes two classifications of open space for Hays County: natural areas and greenways. These two classifications align with the NRPA classifications. Hays County has added that both have public access included in their definitions.

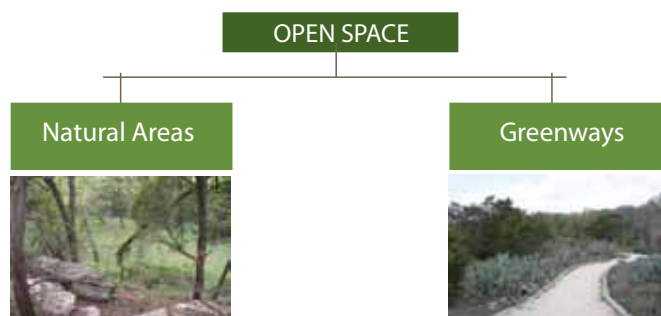
## Concepts and Standards

The County has a relatively small parks system with only six facilities, but includes a diversity of park types from natural areas, such as Jacob's Well, to recreation facilities, such as Five Mile Dam Sports Complex.

Through the planning process, a desire for large facility with multiple uses that was accessible to all was clear. The concept of a large multi-purpose facility focused on trail and passive recreation became the foundation of project development and priorities.

The process to identify projects and activities to occur in a large multi-use facility took a four part approach that build upon the standard park planning analysis of standards, demand and resource analysis and additionally included a fiscal analysis. The standards analysis used the NRPA standards to analyze the baseline inventory conditions. Simply, this supported the need for a larger, multi-purpose facility in the County. The demand analysis used public input to establish the local standard for Hays County. This analysis supported the desire for trails and passive recreation. The resource analysis identified key location of resources and standards for incorporation of environmental practices to be incorporated into projects. The analysis supported the numerous ecological resources in the area to focus passive recreation around. The fiscal analysis looked for potential economic impacts and benefits for projects. Simply, there are many tourism and partnership opportunities in the area to capitalize on. By using a multi-dimension approach, projects identified for the County were able to meet multiple needs identified during assessment process.

The Assessment Chapter of the Master Plan Book and the Appendix D: Assessment elaborate on this process and findings.



Natural areas are managed primarily for natural resource conservation. They are often conserved because of their scenic, wildlife, cultural or hydrologic values.

Greenways are linear tracts of land that are accessible to the public and offer passive recreation opportunities. Often multi-use trail systems through greenways enhance local and regional connectivity.

**Figure 6:** Open Space Definitions

## INVENTORY



As part of the planning process, an inventory of existing public parks and open space properties was conducted to assess the number and types of facilities available in the County. This information was gleaned primarily from local parks and open space plans of communities in Hays County (Buda, Dripping Springs, Kyle, San Marcos and Wimberley) and from the limited database held by Hays County.

Open space lands incorporated in the inventory include those with public access and/or where a public entity owned or purchased rights for public use. Private properties that have conservation easements where public access is prohibited were not included in this inventory.

For purposes of this plan, school recreation facilities, private parks, small subdivision parks, golf courses and non-profit group parks were not included in the inventory. Although they add recreational opportunities to the park and open space system, the County has incomplete information available for these facilities.

Total Park Acreage	1,225 acres	Number
Mini Parks	12 acres	3
Neighborhood Parks	250 acres	18
Community Parks	625 acres	26
Multipurpose Parks	132 acres	3
Sports Complex Parks	145 acres	5
Special Use Parks	61 acres	2

Total Open Space Acreage	3,083 acres	Number
Greenways	1,090 acres	14
Natural Areas	1,993 acres	9

## County Facilities

The County owns six facilities with a variety of recreational activities at four locations. These facilities include both parks, open space and trails and range in activities and sizes. Four of the facilities are currently in operation, while two have been recently acquired and are in the planning and development phases.

## Five Mile Dam Park

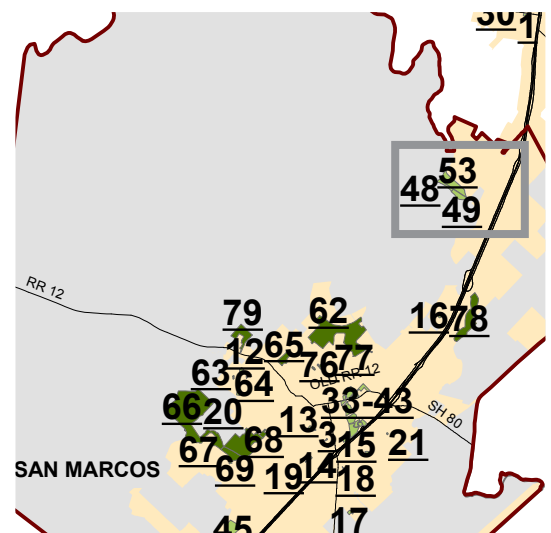
The Five Mile Dam Park includes the Five Mile Dam Soccer Complex, Dudley Johnson Park and Randall Vetter Park. These three parks offer a range of recreational opportunities from active soccer and playscapes to passive river access with fishing and picnicking.

### Five Mile Dam Soccer Complex

The Soccer Complex at the Five Mile Dam Complex is a 44-acre park that provides 10 full-size soccer fields, a concession stand, play ground, picnic facilities, pavilion, parking and trail access. The facility is operated and maintained through an agreement with the City of San Marcos. In addition to the recreational amenities the park offers, the park also generates a portion of its own electricity through wind and solar energy.



Five Mile Dam Soccer Complex



Facility 53| Five Mile Dam Sports Complex Location

### *Dudley Johnson Park*

Dudley Johnson Park is located at the Five Mile Dam Complex along the Blanco River. The 15-acre park includes picnic areas; river access; and a small, non-motorized boat launch. A trail currently runs along the bank of the river.



Dudley Johnson Park



Dudley Johnson Park

### *Randall Vetter Park*

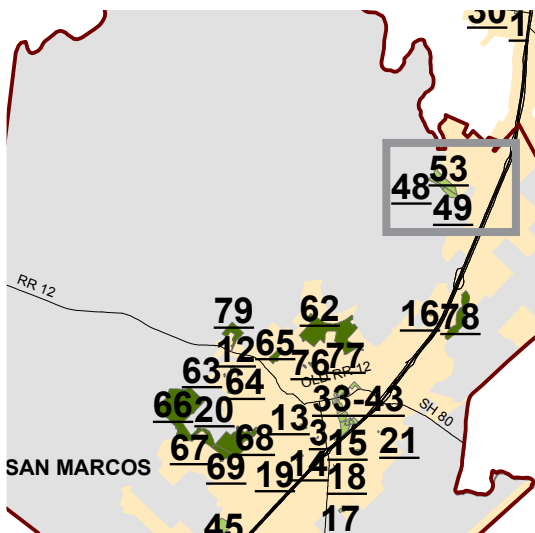
Randall Vetter Park is also located at the Five Mile Dam Complex along the Blanco River. The 12-acre park has river access, a trail and picnic facilities adjacent to Dudley Johnson Park.



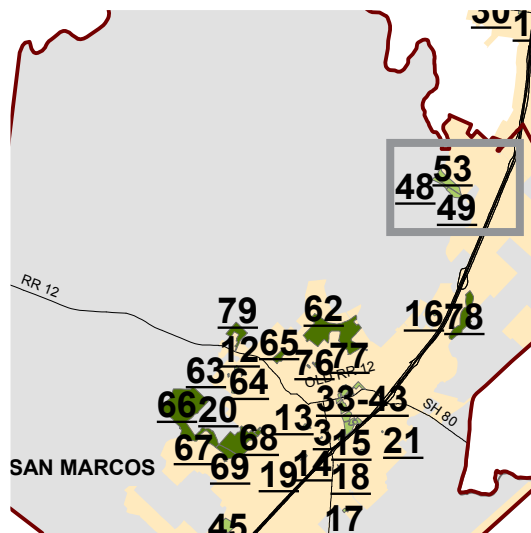
Randall Vetter Park



Randall Vetter Park



Facility 48 | Dudley Johnson Park Location



Facility 49 | Randall Vetter Park Location



### Hays County - City of Wimberley Regional Hike and Bike Trail

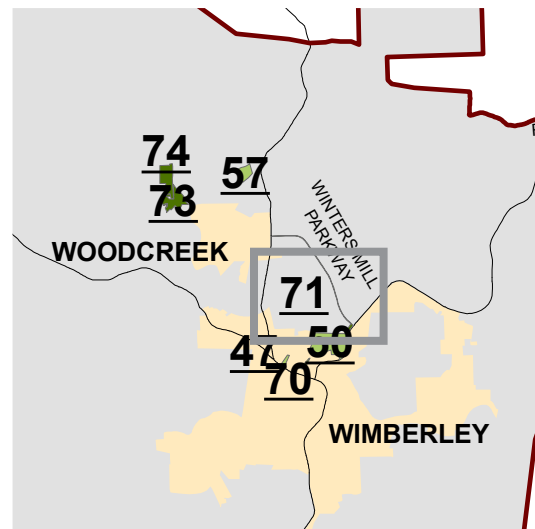
The Regional Hike and Bike Trail in Wimberley is currently a 3.1-mile trail connecting Ranch Road 12 and Winters Mill Parkway to Blue Hole Regional Park. The trail is made of crushed granite and concrete and connects the communities of Wimberley and Woodcreek with Blue Hole Park.



Regional Hike and Bike Trail



Regional Hike and Bike Trail



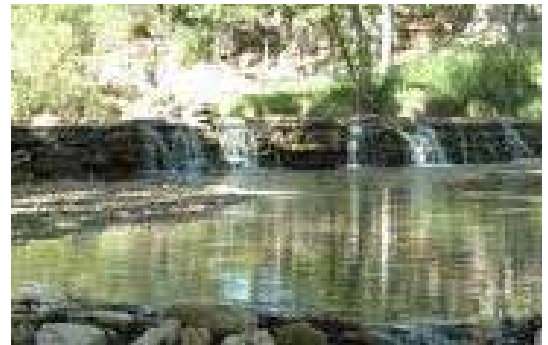
Facility 71 | Regional Hike and Bike Trail Location

### Jacob's Well Natural Area

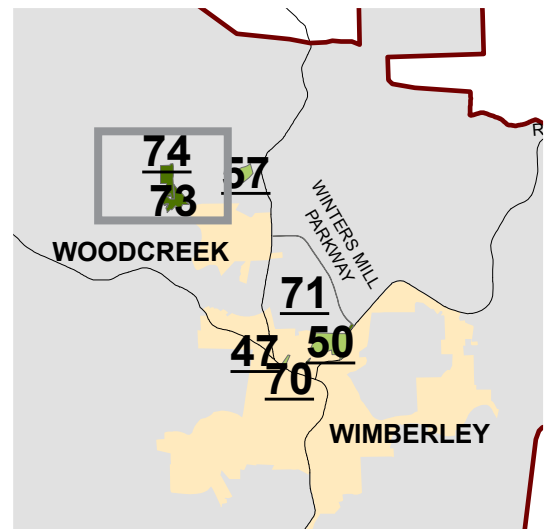
Jacob's Well Natural Area has recently been acquired by the County. The 81-acre facility is centered around the artesian spring, Jacob's Well, and several acres of natural area. Jacob's Well is the entrance to underwater caves that connect directly to the Edwards Aquifer and Cypress Creek. The Jacob's Well facility is currently being developed and is anticipated to include environmental education, passive recreation and continued water access.



Jacob's Well



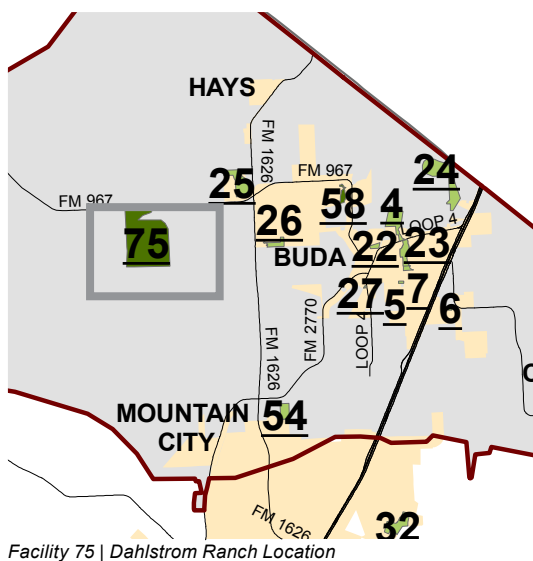
Jacob's Well



Facility 73 & 74 | Jacob's Well Location

## Dahlstrom Ranch Public Access

The Dahlstrom Ranch Public Access project is a partnership between a private landowner, the County, a federal agency, a non-profit conservation organization and the City of Austin. It utilizes a conservation easement to protect water resources and natural resources and character and to conserve a working ranch. Through an agreement with the landowner, the County will lease part of the total conservation easement area to provide public access to a 384-acre portion of the property for education and nature programs.





Local Plans and Parks

Inventory Conclusions

Hays County includes multiple cities and their respective parks departments or divisions. The goal for County park and open space planning is not to overlap City efforts, but instead to complement their work. Various cities’ park and open space planning documents were compared in order to identify any overlap in goals, needs and inventory of parks and open space in the County.

Hays County has 1,225 acres of park land and 3,083 acres of open space. Local jurisdictions are responsible for 1,151 acres of park land and 1,466 acres of open space. The majority (72%) of park land in the County is made up of local facilities such as neighborhood and community parks. Only eight facilities include multi-purpose parks and sports complexes.

In all of the cities’ plans, preserving open space was a goal for the park and open space system. Other common goals and priorities include developing diverse recreational opportunities, working with neighbors or overlapping jurisdictions to expand the park network, connecting a system of parks and marketing parks to locals and tourists.

The County has a relatively small parks system with only six facilities, but includes a diversity of park types from natural areas to recreation facilities.

A full inventory can be found in Appendix C: Inventory.

All of the cities’ plans included some form of public outreach to determine the needs of the community, yet only one of the plans completed a resource-based analysis.

In addition, the County has requirements under subdivision regulations regarding park land dedication that establishes standards for the dedication of park land for new subdivisions developed outside the cities. This policy requires 1 acre of park land per 50 acres of development, with some exceptions. A fee-in-lieu of dedicated park land/open space may also be paid, to be utilized by the County for acquisition, development, rehabilitation or improvement of parkland and open space.

# 4

## ASSESSMENT



This study uses several different approaches to identify the needs of park and open space facilities in the County. An assessment and analysis of existing conditions was conducted, resident's desires for additional resources were compiled and opportunities for future projects were identified. The needs assessment used in this plan included four categories:

- Standards-Based
- Demand-Based
- Resource-Based
- Fiscal-Based

The first three methods are commonly accepted in park planning practices and are utilized throughout the nation. The fourth method is a way to address the economics of parks and potential revenue generation to offset operational costs, along with benefits to other economic sectors of the community.

Each assessment resulted in recommendations on potential projects and strategies that could be implemented in Hays County to meet their goals and objectives. These assessments were the basis for the list of County priorities. Diagrams explaining the process of each assessment can be found in Appendix D: Assessment.

### Standards-Based Assessment

The standards-based assessment uses commonly agreed upon standards to compare Hays County parks and open space facilities to the national recommended averages. Historically in parks and recreation administration, analysis has been completed using population or "capacity" ratios known as the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) Standards. The NRPA standards were developed in the 1980s and revised in 1990 as a method for calculating the number of park and recreation facilities a community should have based on providing X number of acres or X number of facilities per 1,000 population.

These standards were intended to help define the needs based on a national level, although it is recognized that they must be adjusted for the needs and desires of each community. Different geographic areas of the country have varying user groups, trends, interests, etc. In many cases, the individual community needs are different from those of the historically-referenced population ratios.

Although these ratios have been used over the last 30 years in parks and recreation planning, most park and recreation professionals now consider the standards methodology obsolete because they do not include newer types of recreation. Some of the types of parks amenities in Hays County, such as recreation centers, disc golf courses, dog parks, skate parks, playscapes, community gardens, picnic areas, nature centers and fishing docks, are not listed in the NRPA standards. Also not included are standards for open space or passive recreation activities.

### Process

The NRPA capacity ratios can provide a snapshot over time but are limited to specific components and are shown here primarily for reference only.

This report uses population numbers based on the 2010 US Census data and projections. Park amenity and facility information used to calculate comparison to the NRPA Standards for Hays County was based on the inventory and available data at the time this report was compiled. Deficiency estimates are based primarily on those numbers. An inventory of school and private facilities was not conducted as part of this study and may adjust these deficiencies, specifically organized sports facilities such as football. A full table of the NRPA Standards comparison can be found in Appendix D: Assessment.

## Results and Recommendations

Based on the current population, the existing level of service indicates that Hays County is deficient in the following categories:

- Overall Park Acreage
- Trails
- Swimming Pools
- Baseball Fields
- Softball Fields
- Basketball Courts
- Volleyball Courts
- Tennis Courts
- Track
- Shooting Sports

In addition, the County would also be deficient in football fields in 2020, based on the projected growth of Hays County to a population of 271,388. School facilities were not factored into the inventory or projections. Many have football fields.

Based on the standards assessment, priority projects in Hays County should focus on:

- Increasing the total acres of parks in the parks and open space system
- Increasing the number and length of trails in the park and open space system
- Locating active recreation facilities in areas of denser population

## Demand-Based Assessment

The demand-based assessment relies on identifying those types of facilities and amenities that people desire to have available. Demand is dependant not only on the opinions and desires of the participants, but also on evaluating the overall facilities in the County and comparing those to the demographics of the local population.

## Process

The interest of residents in specific activities was taken from an online poll as well as community input during meetings. Although not considered statistically valid, these

polls provide good information concerning general trends and desires of the community. This information is used to inform the direction of park and open space planning specific to the local needs. Participants were asked to rate the importance and significance of recreational activities from not at all important to very important. Responses for each activity were then plotted on a chart. Activities that have high importance and low satisfaction indicate an unmet need and could become future priorities for County or City parks and open space projects. Activities that have a high importance and high satisfaction could be maintenance projects that cities and counties should continue to address as the County population increases. Details from this process can be found in Appendix D: Objective Assessment.

## Results and Recommendations

Based on the demand-based analysis, Hays County has many active recreation facilities located in urban areas. Many of these are connected through small trail systems. There is currently a deficiency in overall park and open space acres for the County; this is especially true for larger multi purpose parks that have both passive and active facilities.

Based on the demand assessment, priority projects in Hays County should focus on:

- Creating larger-sized facilities with both passive and active recreation
- Providing river or creek access
- Providing multi-use trails that allow for biking, hiking and connecting parks where appropriate
- Promoting the addition of camping and youth outdoor facilities
- Providing educational opportunities on general nature enjoyment and sports activities when possible



## Resource-Based Assessment

Hays County has diverse ecological regions and environmentally sensitive landscapes. The resource-based analysis looked at varying land sensitivity in Hays County. When possible, the purchase of these lands from willing land owners can allow the County to provide additional conservation to these lands and allow the public to enjoy the beauty and uniqueness of Hays County.

### Process

This resource analysis used Geographic Information System (GIS) information to map the various land conditions related to the environmental goals for the *Hays County Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan*. The resources mapped are existing conditions in Hays County. Each map identifies a percentage of the County that has the sensitive land feature and a baseline condition of the percentage of the sensitive land feature that is currently protected by parks or open space in Hays County. Details from this process can be found in Appendix D: Assessment.

### Results and Recommendations

According to the resource-based analysis, water issues are a large concern for Hays County. Efforts need to be taken to protect and enhance water quality and quantity throughout the County. Great opportunities exist for protection and enhancement through the parks and open space system.

In addition, there is support to protect the natural beauty and ecosystem services the County has to offer. These range from scenic corridors, erosion protection, tree-canopy enhancement and protection, and general natural-area protection.

Based on the resource assessment, priority projects in Hays County should focus on:

- Providing river or creek access and restoration
- Conserving land that provides opportunities for ground-water recharge and surface-water protection
- Protecting scenic corridors along rivers, roads and ridgetops that allow for views to general open space lands
- Creating Park Stewardship Plans for County facilities: removing invasive species, repairing unstable soil conditions, and practicing land management and programs to better the environmental conditions at County park or open space.

## Fiscal-Based Assessment

Although not a commonly employed method of assessment, Hays County also completed a fiscal-based assessment in order to identify opportunities for funding partnership and development of their parks and open space. This assessment focused on implementation opportunities used in the past and ones that could potentially be furthered moving forward.

### Process

The fiscal analysis looked at potential funding opportunities in the County related to the parks and open space activities existing and potentially occurring throughout the County.

As a current tourism destination, Hays County already has opportunities for economic development and revenue-generation through sales tax. The fiscal analysis reviewed existing tourism and potential tourism based upon recreational facilities and scenic resources in the County. Details from this process can be found in Appendix D: Objective Assessment.

### Results and Recommendations

Based on this analysis, projects for the County should build upon already existing partnerships and development of new

partnerships for future park and open space development.

In Hays County, there are significant sports tourism events currently held and natural amenities exist that could be further enhanced.

Based on the financial assessment, priority projects in Hays County should focus on:

- Diversifying tourism opportunities beyond sports to potentially include nature tourism, festivals or special events and educational events
- Building upon existing and new funding opportunities and partnerships to grow the parks and open space network.

## Needs Assessment Conclusions

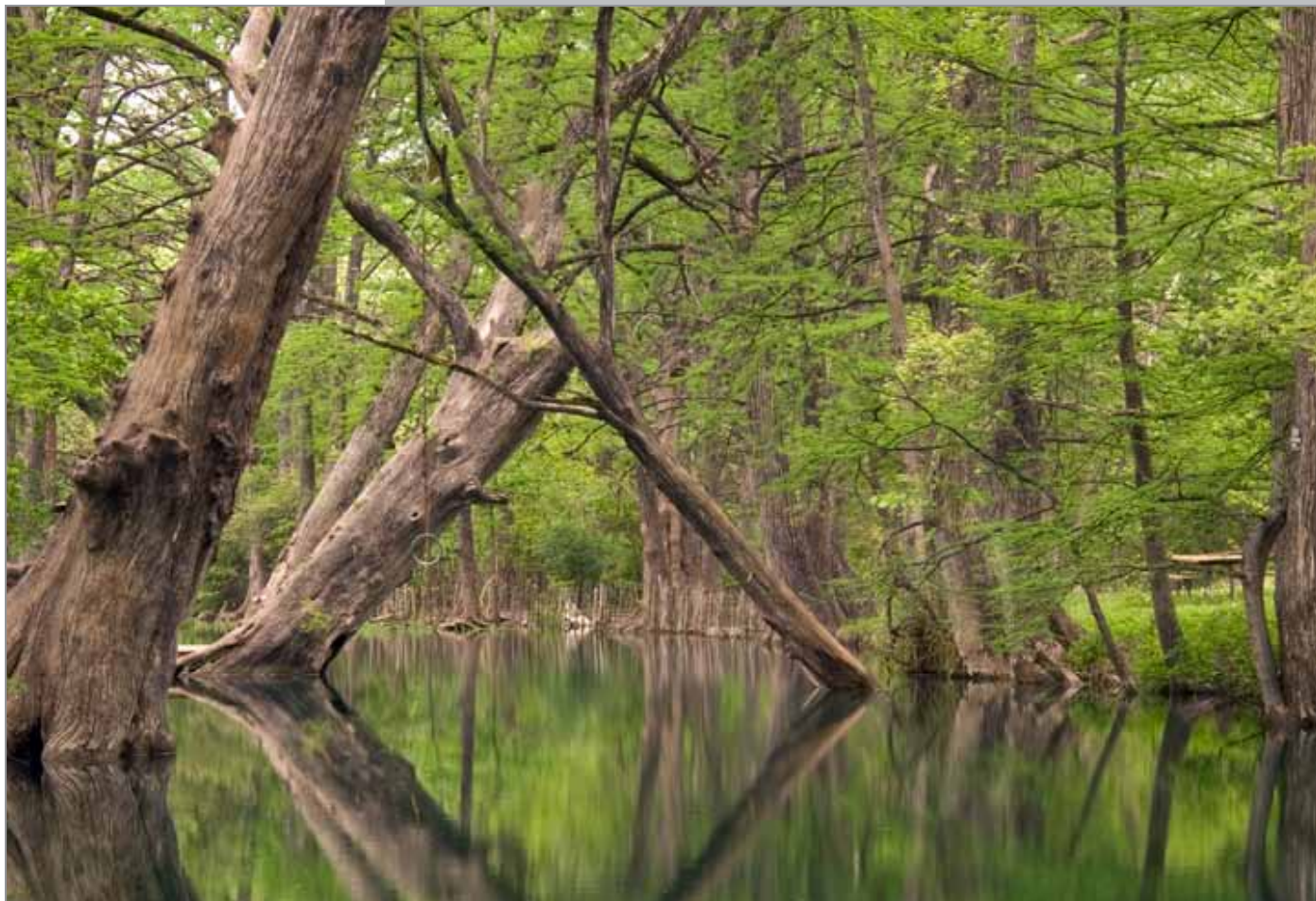
Through the four assessments, some themes came up in multiple categories. These common elements were recognized as having the potential to meet many of the goals for the County and should therefore be considered a priority for the County to incorporate into future projects. The priorities for the County were based upon the following re-occurring themes:

- Need for a larger-sized, regional facility
- Need for increased trail access
- Need for activities and facilities that provide opportunities to passively enjoy the scenic and natural beauty of Hays County
- Need for river or creek access and restoration
- Need for outdoor education opportunities through public access





## PROJECT PRIORITIES



## PROJECT PRIORITIES

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Through the planning effort, a number of activities were identified by the various participants that would serve to enhance and further develop those amenities important to Hays County residents in the parks and open space system. These ranged from those elements considered somewhat “passive” in character, such as trails and nature based opportunities, to active sports venues and special purpose facilities. The re-occurring themes from the assessment and analysis phase placed emphasis on passive opportunities to enjoy the scenic qualities of Hays County through trails, river access and educational opportunities in large, regional-sized parks and open space facilities.

The focus for the County is to encompass many of the priority needs into one large facility that offers diverse activities to serve a large population. The ideal property would combine qualities of both park and open space by having scenic values and corridors, river or creek access and aquifer recharge opportunities while allowing more active uses for portions of the property. The ideal property would combine qualities of both park and open space by having scenic corridors, river or creek access, aquifer re-charge opportunities and road access in some portions for more active uses.

In support of the vision for parks and open space in Hays County, priorities support opportunities for citizens to enjoy special features, such as river and creek access, to conserve valuable resources, such as general nature enjoyment and rivers and creeks and to provide a variety of recreation opportunities in the County through active recreation and passive trails and camping. The following projects are listed in order of priority.



### 1. River and Creek Access

Increased public access to rivers will provide recreational opportunities such as swimming, floating, kayaking and fishing. Special attention and education needs to be given to users in order to minimize the environmental impact on the river and any conflicts with river-side private landowners.



### 2. Multi-Use Trails

New trails will offer hiking and biking opportunities and can be designed as part of the City-developed system for local connectivity and part of the larger system for increased regional connectivity.



### 3. Camping

Increasing the number of designated campgrounds will allow for a diversity of overnight getaway locations as well as provide new park space for day users.



### 4. Youth Camping Facilities

This type of facility offers a venue for educational activities and scout-type camps. The multi-purpose site would have other facilities and spaces that are accessible to all users.



### 5. General Nature Enjoyment Lands

Natural areas provide wildlife viewing, water resource protection and general nature enjoyment.



### 6. Nature Center

A nature center will showcase the unique ecology of the Hill Country while providing educational opportunities for students and local residents. These can include elements for education, nature enjoyment and classroom opportunities while showcasing best management practices for environmental restoration and conservation.



## 7. Festivals and Special Event Spaces

These facilities offer a venue for public events and community activities. They can be varied in scale and range from large amphitheaters to smaller outdoor classroom spaces.



## 8. Recreation Center and Sports Complex

This space will serve as a location for a large-amount of active recreation in a concentrated space. This can include both indoor and outdoor facilities that provide a range of facilities, activities and classes for the public.



## 9. Shooting Sports Complex

This project will offer firearm enthusiasts the opportunity to engage in a wide range of shooting activities as well as provide education on firearm safety.



## 10. Community Gardens

These gardens create productive social spaces that can bring the community together and produce local fresh food.

Priority Project details can be found in Appendix E: Priority Project Descriptions.

# Planning Areas

Due to the diversity of both County terrain and resident desires, priority/preference lists were developed for specific regions of the County called Planning Areas. Planning Areas were defined based on zip codes (that include the community and adjacent areas). Priorities/Preferences for each planning area were based upon area-specific demand analysis, evaluation of resources and opportunities in each planning areas, input from the public, and City parks and open space projects and partnership opportunities, and analysis based upon current satisfaction of facilities and importance of facilities. Further discussion of this analysis can be found in Appendix F: Planning Area Priorities/ Preferences.

When cities indicated certain projects were priorities/preferences, the County did not indicate that project type would be a priority/preference for this study in order to reduce duplication of efforts.

Additional information on planning area priorities/preferences can be found in Appendix F: Planning Area Priorities/ Preferences.

## Buda Planning Area

The Buda Area responses indicates preference for more active recreation and community facilities. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The Buda Area had some satisfaction with active recreation activities but dissatisfaction with passive activities. The City of Buda's location allows for more direct connections to the highway and opportunities for more active recreation partnership. The following are priorities/preferences for the Buda Planning Area:

1. River and Creek Access
2. Multi-Use Trails
3. Community Gardens
4. Recreation Center and Sports Complex
5. Shooting Sports Complex

## PROJECT PRIORITIES

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### Driftwood Planning Area

The demand assessment for the Driftwood area indicates the desire for mostly passive recreation and outdoor activities. There was an emphasis on youth in the Driftwood area with education opportunities and youth camping and outdoor facilities, as there is a dissatisfaction with existing passive activity opportunities. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The Driftwood Area indicated low importance of active recreation. The location of the Driftwood area away from major highways but connected with developed Farm-to-Market Roads, provides many opportunities for open space and passive activities for larger groups. Due to these factors, the following are priorities/preferences for the Driftwood Planning Area:

1. River and Creek Access
2. Multi-Use Trails
3. General Nature Enjoyment Lands
4. Nature Center
5. Youth Camping Facilities

### Dripping Springs Planning Area

Preferences for Dripping Springs area were for mostly passive recreation and outdoor activities. There was a strong emphasis in the Dripping Springs area on education opportunities and passive activities. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The location of the Dripping Springs area along a major highway but in the Hill Country, provides many opportunities for open space and passive activities for that require more access. Due to these factors, the following are priorities/preferences for the Dripping Springs Planning Area:

1. Multi-Use Trails
2. General Nature Enjoyment Lands
3. River and Creek Access
4. Nature Center
5. Community Gardens

### Kyle Planning Area

The demand assessment for the Kyle area indicates the desire for community spaces and passive recreation activities. There was a strong emphasis in the Kyle area on the importance of community facilities but also general satisfaction with them. There was overall dissatisfaction with existing passive activities in the area. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The Kyle area's location along a major highway provides opportunities larger gathering facilities that require access and nearby amenities to support them. Due to these factors, the following are priorities/preferences for the Kyle Planning Area:

1. Multi-Use Trails
2. River and Creek Access
3. Camping
4. Recreation Center and Sports Complex
5. Festivals and Special Event Spaces

### San Marcos Planning Area

The San Marcos area demand assessment indicates the desire for cultural and special use spaces and passive recreation activities. Overall, the residents of San Marcos were satisfied with the existing facilities and activities available to them, but there was also overall dissatisfaction with existing camping facilities. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The location of the San Marcos area along a major highway and the San Marcos River provides opportunities for focused larger activities that provide passive outdoor recreation easily accessible to a larger population. Due to these factors, the following are priorities/preferences for the San Marcos Planning Area:

1. Camping
2. Multi-Use Trails
3. River and Creek Access
4. Community Gardens
5. Festivals and Special Event Spaces

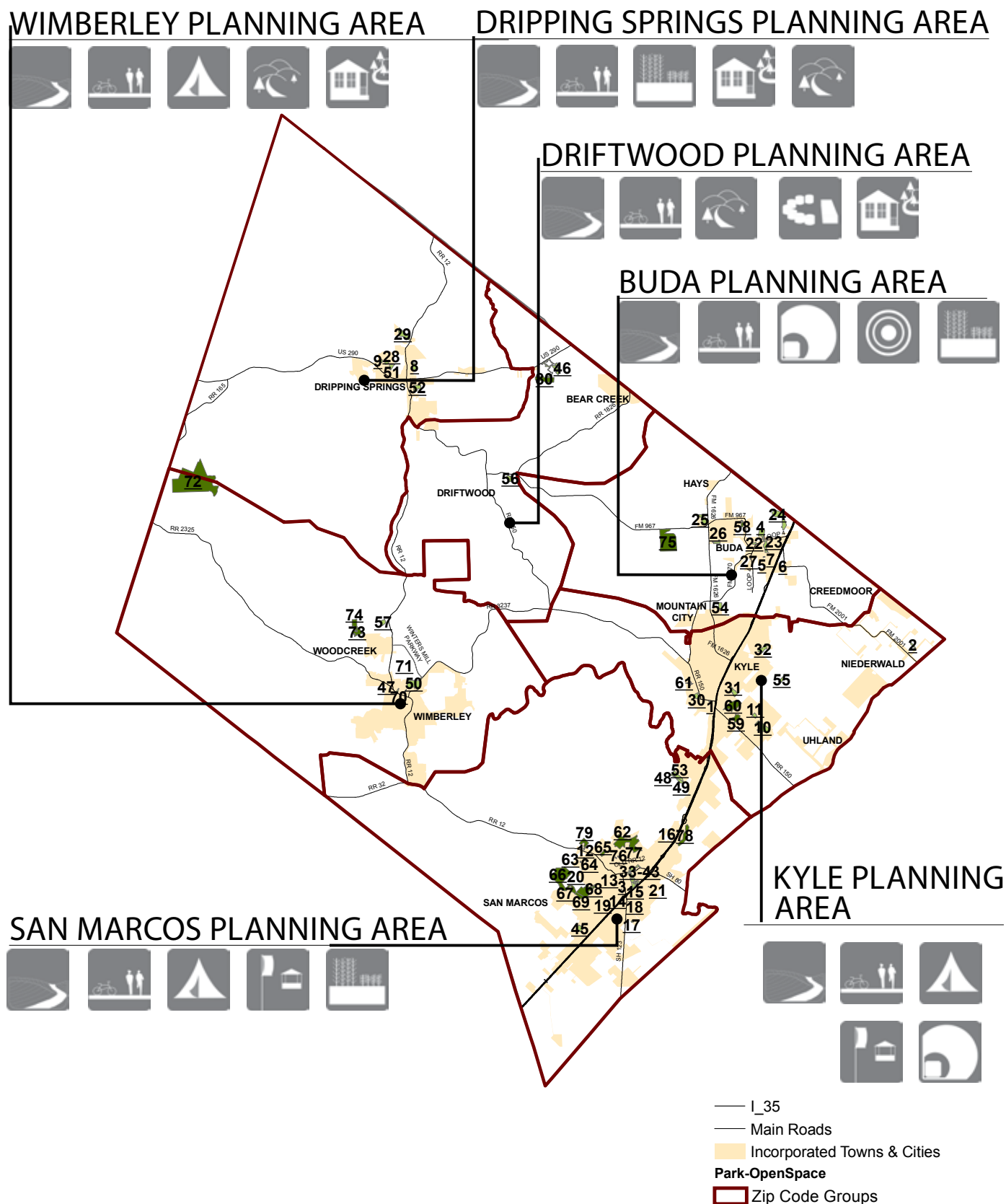
## Wimberley Planning Area

The Wimberley area preferences indicate mostly passive recreation and outdoor activities. There was a strong emphasis in the Wimberley area on general nature enjoyment and education. There was also overall dissatisfaction and lack of desire for active recreation in the area. As in all planning areas, trails and river and creek access were high priorities/preferences. The location of the Wimberley area in the Hill Country provides opportunities for open space and passive activities for that can also provide conservation benefits. Due to these factors, the following are priorities/preferences for the Wimberley Planning Area:

1. River and Creek Access
2. Multi-Use Trails
3. General Nature Enjoyment Lands
4. Nature Center
5. Camping



## PROJECT PRIORITIES



**Figure 7: Parks and Open Space Project Master Plan**

## IMPLEMENTATION



As a regional governmental entity, Hays County has the capacity to organize large planning and implementation efforts. The County can use this to focus on land acquisition for the implementation of projects that meet the County priorities. This is best achieved through partnering with other entities for the capital development and operations and maintenance of the park or open space facilities.

If the appropriate opportunity arises, the County may also participate in capital development and/or operations and maintenance of park or open space facilities.

### Implementation Timeline

The County has recently made two major investments for future facilities: the acquisition of Jacob's Well Natural Area and the Dahlstrom Ranch conservation easement. (The County and the Dahlstroms have agreed to negotiate a lease to allow for public access on the property.) These two facilities are currently natural areas where generally more passive recreational activities are being planned. Both of these facilities are potentially larger than most current park and open space opportunities the County has and have multiple natural resources on the properties.

Over the 10 year life-span of this document, the emphasis of the County is developing a large-multipurpose facility that includes multiple activities, including trails, river or creek access and passive recreation. Some of this could be accommodated in either of the recent County acquisitions but further acquisitions of larger acreage should be pursued. The focus of the County should be to partner and work together on moving the development of these facilities forward and identification of additional land for acquisition that can accommodate larger facilities.

### Short-Term

Due to the economic situation of the nation and Hays County, limited resources are available for implementation of projects. Therefore the tasks for the County in the immediate future should be on establishing master plans for each park facility and initiating partnerships for capital implementation, fund-raising, and operations and maintenance.

### Mid-Term

The mid-time range should include tasks related to designing the park facilities, creating operations and management plans and continued work with partners for funding. Once enough funding is secured, the master plans could be implemented.

### Long-Term

Long term, the County should look toward purchasing land for additional large-multipurpose facilities to complement the growing park and open space system in the County.

### Partnerships

The County should look to a variety of entities for partnership. In many cases the County will need to partner with a combination of public, private and non-profit agencies in order to implement projects. These partnering entities will be specific to the project being pursued.

The following is a list of potential partners the County could look to for implementation support:

- Municipalities
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Outdoor Grant
- Texas Parks & Wildlife Trails Grant
- Lower Colorado River Authority Community Development Partnership Grant
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization/ Texas Department of Transportation – Bike/Pedestrian Grant

- U.S. Department of the Interior – Fish and Wildlife
- Edward's Aquifer Authority
- Water Control and Improvement District Park Development Fund
- U.S. Soccer Foundation
- McCoy Foundation
- Boy Scouts of America Troops
- Donations through Trust for Public Land
- Friends of the Blue Hole
- Burdine Johnson Foundation
- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
- HEB Foundation
- Rachael and Ben Vaughn Foundation
- Raymond Dickson Foundation
- Dripping Springs Rotary Group - Fund-raising
- San Marcos Soccer Association
- Dripping Springs Soccer Association
- North Hays Optimist Club (in-kind match)
- Buda Economic Development Corporation Contributions
- Community Donations (banks, businesses, individuals)
- Meadows Foundation

## Partnership Criteria

A partnership is a cooperative venture between two or more parties with a common goal, who combine complementary resources to establish a mutual direction or complete a mutually beneficial project. Partnerships should enhance public offerings to meet the mission and goals of the *Hays County and the Parks, Open Space and Natural Areas Master Plan*.

In order for partnerships to be successful, the following elements should be in place:

- Support for the project at the highest level of organization
- Establishment of a partnership policy with clear parameters and selection criteria for proposed partnerships
- Identification of priorities and multiple points for go/ no-go decisions on the project
- Creation of a public process for review of partnership creation.

Partnerships can take many forms. These include cash gift and donor programs, improved access to alternative funding, property investments, charitable trust funds, labor, materials, equipment, sponsorships, technical skills and/or management skills, and other forms of value such as volunteering.

Partner members can also take various roles in decision making. Active partnerships include management agreements, program partnerships, facility leases, intergovernmental agreements and marketing partnerships. Limited decision-making partnerships include grant programs, donor programs and volunteer programs.

## Partnership Agreements

Detailed agreements between partners should outline specific roles and responsibilities of each partner. Partnership agreements could take the following forms:

- Lease Agreements
- Management and/or Operating Agreements
- Maintenance Agreements
- Intergovernmental Agreements (IGAs)
- Combination of these and/or other appropriate agreements

Partnership agreements should ensure that the mission and goals of the partnership are compatible with the goals and objectives for the *Hays County Park, Open Space and Natural Area Master Plan*. At a minimum, the partnership proposal and agreements should include:

- Description of Proposing Organization
- Decision-making Authority
- Summary of Proposal
- Benefits to the Partnering Organization
- Benefits to the County
- Details regarding meeting the needs of the community, financing, logistics, agreements and evaluations

## Funding sources

Funding can come from a variety of sources. Potential funding sources are listed below and are ranked according to their appropriateness for Hays County. Current funding sources include partnerships, fees, grant awards, private donations and voter-approved park bonds. Other funding sources that could be easily incorporated include foundation grants. Longer term options for funding would require additional planning, approvals and partnerships include agency grants, additional bonds, corporate or private marketing or sponsorship and fees. Full descriptions of the existing and potential funding sources that have been classified by the County for appropriateness for pursuing for park and open space projects are below.

### 1. Current Funding Sources

***These funding sources are currently being used by the Hays County Parks Department to create the existing budgets for capital and operational expenditures.***

#### *Partnerships*

Partnerships are joint development funding sources or operational funding sources between two separate agencies, such as two government entities, a non-profit and the County, or a private business and the County. Two partners jointly develop potential revenue-producing park and recreation facilities and share risk, operational costs, responsibilities and asset management based on the strengths and weaknesses of each partner.

#### *Dedication/Development Fees*

These fees are assessed for the development of residential and/or commercial properties with the proceeds to be used for parks and recreation purposes, such as open space acquisition, community park site development, neighborhood parks development, regional parks development, etc.

#### *Texas Parks and Recreation Account*

These funds are awarded for acquisition and development of parks, recreation and supporting facilities through the State Park System.

#### *Land and Water Conservation Fund*

These funds are awarded for acquisition and development of parks, recreation and supporting facilities through the National Park Service and State Park System.

#### *Inter-local Agreements*

Contractual relationships entered into between two or more local units of government and/or between a local unit of government and a non-profit organization for the joint usage/development of sports fields, regional parks or other facilities.

#### *Friends Associations*

These groups are formed to raise money typically for a single focus purpose that could include a park facility or program that will better the community as a whole and their special interest.

### 2. Easily Incorporated Funding Source

***These funding sources are relatively easy for the Hays County Parks Department to create the existing budgets for capital and operational expenditures. These would be used to attempt to fund the Master Plan and Projects currently being developed.***

#### *Foundation/Gifts*

These dollars are raised from tax-exempt, non-profit organizations established with private donations in promotion of specific causes, activities or issues. They offer a variety of means to fund capital projects, including capital campaigns, gifts catalogs, fundraisers, endowments, sales of items, etc.



### Grants

A variety of special grants either currently exist through the Federal and State governmental systems or will be established through the life of current and proposed facilities.

## 3. Potential Long-Range Funding Sources

***These are potential funding opportunities the Hays County Parks Department could consider. These would be used for long-range projects and plans.***

### Inter-modal Transportation and Efficiency Act

This funding program, commonly called TEA-21 Grants was authorized by the Federal Government in 1991. Funds are distributed through the state. There are several million dollars in enhancement revenues available for transportation related projects, including bicycle and pedestrian trails, rail depot rehabilitation, landscaping and beautification projects.

### General Obligation Bonds

Bonded indebtedness issued with the approval of the electorate for capital improvements and general public improvements.

### Volunteerism

This is an indirect revenue source in that persons donate time to assist the department in providing a product or service on an hourly basis, such as trail clean ups, forest management, etc. This reduces the County's cost in providing the service plus it builds advocacy into the system.

### Security and Clean-Up Fees

Counties will charge groups and individuals security and clean-up fees for special events and other types of events held in parks.

## 4. Potential Partnership Agreement Funding Sources

***These are potential funding opportunities the Hays County Parks Department could consider. These funding sources may not be available currently in the state or an intergovernmental agreement may be necessary for implementation. These funding sources may meet with some resistance and be more difficult to implement.***

### Corporate Sponsorships

This revenue-funding source allows corporations to invest in the development or enhancement of new or existing facilities in park systems. Sponsorships are also highly used for programs and events.

### Naming Rights

Many counties have turned to selling the naming rights for new buildings or renovation of existing buildings and parks for the development cost associated with the improvement.

### Private Developers

These developers lease space from County-owned land through a subordinate lease that pays out a set dollar amount plus a percentage of gross dollars for recreation enhancements. These could include a golf course, marina, restaurants, driving ranges, sports complexes, equestrian facilities and recreation centers, and ice arenas.

### Irrevocable Remainder Trusts

These trusts are set up with individuals who typically have more than \$1 million in wealth. They will leave a portion of their wealth to the County in a trust fund that allows the fund to grow over a period of time and then is available for the County to use a portion of the interest to support specific park and recreation facilities or programs that are designated by the trustee.

### Life Estates

This source of money is available when someone wants to leave their property to the County in exchange for them to live on



their property until their death. The County usually can use a portion of the property for park purposes and then all of it after the person's death. This revenue source is very popular for very wealthy individuals whose estates will be highly taxed at their death and whose children will have to sell their property because of probate costs. This allows the person to receive a good tax deduction yearly on their property while leaving a life estate. The County benefits because they do not have to pay for the land.

### *Permits (Special-Use Permits)*

These special permits allow individuals to use specific park property for financial gain. The County either receives a set amount of money or a percentage of the gross service that is being provided.

### *Reservations*

This revenue source comes from the right to reserve specific public property for a set amount of time. The reservation rates are usually set and apply to group picnic shelters, meeting rooms for weddings, reunions and outings or other type of facilities for a special activity.

### *Special Fundraisers*

Many park and recreation agencies have special fundraisers on an annual basis to help cover specific programs and capital projects.

### *Manufacturing Product Testing and Display*

This is where the County works with specific manufacturers to test its products in parks, recreation facilities and program services. The County tests the product under normal conditions and reports back to the manufacturer how its product is doing. Examples are in lighting, playground equipment, vehicle tires, mowers, irrigation systems, seed and fertilizers, etc. The County gets the product for free but must pay for the costs of installation and tracking results.

### *Recycling Centers*

Some counties operate recycling centers for wood, mulch and glass as profit centers for their park systems.

## Plan Conclusion

This plan represents the opinion, desires and needs for Hays County for a specific period of time in 2011. Invariably, the needs and desires of the community will change over time and should be reassessed regularly. Public input should be pursued through multiple means during implementation of project priorities.

This plan will need to be updated again in 5 years to be current with TPWD guidelines. At regular intervals between plan adoption and then, the County should assess how well the plan is being implemented and consider where to focus resources for upcoming years. This regular monitoring of plan implementation will assist in the information needed for the TWPD 5-year update.

