

## **RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

With the projected rate of increase in the population of Wakulla County, the need for recreational facilities is always increasing and protection of open space resources within growth areas will be necessary to protect the rural nature of the County. Wakulla County, along with other governmental agencies, shares in the responsibility of providing recreational opportunities and protection of natural resources. This element of the comprehensive plan assesses current opportunities, examines future needs and suggests goals, objectives, and policies statements which may be used by the County to further the system of public and private recreation and open space facilities available to the public.

Wakulla County has a growing population and is visited by ever increasing numbers of tourists. Residents and visitors alike enjoy the amenities and recreational resources in Wakulla County. Currently most of the recreational opportunities are centered on the beautiful lakes, rivers, coastal resources and state and national parks. In order to provide adequate recreational opportunities and keep pace with demands generated by growth, Wakulla County must plan for the development of new recreational facilities and acquire additional recreation sites.

The rivers, forests, wilderness areas, state parks, wetlands, and coastal beaches and marshes provide a beautiful natural environment. Wakulla County must plan now to ensure protection and proper use of the many thousands of acres of open space for the years to come. Fortunately the majority of open space within the County lies within conservation areas but many acres of open space are within areas of increasing urbanization. These areas of concern warrant the most protection for the purpose of serving the various communities within the County.

### **II. INVENTORY: EXISTING RECREATIONAL AND OPEN SPACE FACILITIES**

Wakulla County contains approximately 3,555 acres of parkland, not including the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge and the Apalachicola National Forest. The parks, their acreages, and the amenities and activities at each park are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: State Recreation Facilities in Wakulla County, 2008

FACILITY	ACREAGE	AMENITIES/ACTIVITIES
St. Marks Wildlife Refuge	68,000 <sup>1</sup>	Restrooms, Visitor Center, Picnic Facilities, Hiking Trails (74 miles), hunting, fishing, boating, and Canoeing/Kayaking
Apalachicola National Forest	564,961 <sup>2</sup>	Hunting, Boating, Fishing, Swimming, Hiking (85 miles), Biking, Horseback Riding, ATV and Motorcycle Riding, Camping, Interpretive Trails, and Canoeing/Kayaking
Edward Ball Wakulla Springs State Park	3,000	Hiking (6 miles), Swimming, Picnic Areas, Lodge, Educational and Interpretive Ranger-lead programs, boat tours, horse trails, interpretive exhibit, and lodge
San Marcos de Apalachee Historic Site	4.63	Museum, boat ramp, guided tours
Ochlocknee River State Park	395	Picnic Areas, Boat Ramp, Nature Trails. Bicycling, Campfire Circle, Fishing, Camping

1 Spans Wakulla, Jefferson, and Taylor Counties

2 Spans Wakulla, Leon, Franklin, and Liberty Counties

Table 1A: County Operated Recreation Facilities, Wakulla County 2008

Facility	Acreage	Amenities/Activities
Azalea Park	7.4	Lighted walking trail (0.5 mile), water fountains, picnic tables, gazebos, benches, and interpretive signage
Hickory Park	4.01	Pavilion, volleyball court, picnic tables
Hudson Park	3.8	Pavilion with stage, picnic tables, restrooms

Lawhon Mill Road	163	Future park site for 3 major park projects (Wakulla Equestrian Center, Wakulla Heritage Project, and Wakulla Wildlife Sanctuary)
Mash Island Park	489.76 <sup>1</sup>	Boat ramp, fishing pier, beach access, trailhead with trail access for the Ochlockonee Bay Trail
Medart Recreation Park	38.6	Walking trail (1.1 miles), 9 softball/baseball fields, 2 soccer/football fields, 3 concession areas, 2 basketball courts, 2 playgrounds, 4 picnic pavilions, 6 buildings
Newport Park	7.8	Campsites (36), bathhouse, boat ramp, picnic tables, observation deck, fishing
Ochlockonee Bay Trail	11 <sup>2</sup>	Multi-purpose bicycle/pedestrian trail, 5.5 miles passes through St. Marks Wildlife Refuge
Panacea Women's Club	2.1	Large building with kitchen facilities, restrooms, and meeting room, small baseball field, large parking area, basketball court
Shell Point Beach Park	5.8	Beach access, fishing, non-motorized boat launch, pavilion (seats 40-50), sun shelters (seats 6-8), playground, volleyball court, restrooms with outdoor showers
Wooley Park	3.25	Stage area, restrooms, playground, lighted walking trail (0.3 miles)
Lawhon Mill Road	163	Future park site for 3 major park projects: Wakulla Equestrian Center, Wakulla Heritage Project and Wakulla Wildlife Sanctuary

<sup>1</sup> Approximately 50% is protected wetlands and cannot be developed.

<sup>2</sup> This is a linear park within existing right-of-way.

Table 1B: City Municipalities Recreation Facilities, Wakulla County, 2007

Facility	Acreage	Amenities/Activities
Myron B. Hodge City Park (Sopchoppy)	34.42	Camping, boat ramp, swimming
St. Marks River Park	0.02	Boat ramp, restroom, picnic pavilion
Wakulla River Park	5.82	Canoe/kayak launch, restroom, pavilion, playground

Given the acreages of the above parks, Wakulla County can meet the established level of service for Parks through the planning horizon, given in Table 1, above. However, additional federal and state grants should be sought to provide the amenities described in Table 2 and 2A below in order to meet the growing need for user-oriented and resource based recreation at these parks. Additional park lands should be acquired to meet projected need through the year 2020 as these resources are quickly vanishing. Efforts should be made to connect all open space lands and fully expand these parcels to meet the growing recreation demand. The recreation standards for user-oriented facilities are shown in Table 2, below.

In order to plan, an examination of existing recreational facilities and opportunities must be reviewed. Recreational opportunities may be classified in several ways. One approach is to look at the type of recreation offered, active or passive. Another would consider the type of site, resource-based or activity-based. Though these classifications result in some overlap, they are useful approaches to understanding recreational opportunities of an area.

#### A. Existing Recreational Facilities

##### 1. Resource-Based and Activity-Based Sites and Facilities

Recreational sites are frequently classified as resource-based or activity-based. Resource-based sites and facilities are defined as sites and facilities centered on particular natural resources and may provide recreational opportunities for picnicking, hiking, hunting, water sports, fishing or just enjoying nature. Activity-based recreational sites and facilities are generally defined as basketball, baseball, soccer, or recreational programs such as aerobics, painting, senior citizen activities, and other spectator sports. The distinction between these two types is not clear cut since many resource-based recreation sites often contain activity-based facilities.

Wakulla County has several large resource-based parks and natural reservations. These include the Apalachee National Forest, St. Marks Wildlife Refuge, Aucilla Wildlife Management area, and other state and county parks of lesser size. Cumulatively, these parks and natural areas constitute over half of the total land in the County.

## 2. Passive and Active Recreation

The different recreation facilities and parks in Wakulla County afford recreation users with both passive and active recreation opportunities. Active recreation opportunities involve the user in direct participation, such as little league baseball or aerobic dancing. Passive recreation activities are pursued in a more leisurely fashion. These activities include fishing, bird watching, hiking, or picnicking. Some activities such as biking or hiking may be either passive or active depending on the amount of effort expended.

Spectator sports are another aspect of recreation in Wakulla County. The Wakulla County High School hosts football games and other athletic events at their stadium. St. Marks hosts an annual 5K run which draws many spectators and participants alike.

### **PUBLIC RECREATIONAL FACILITIES LIST**

- 1 Wakulla County Ballfield Complex
- 2 Fiddlers Point Boat Ramp
- 3 Hudson Park
- 4 Lake Ellen Boat Ramp
- 5 Levy Bay Boat Ramp
- 6 Mashers Sands Park
- 7 Ochlockonee Boat Ramp
- 8 Wakulla River Boat Ramp (SR 61)
- 9 Wakulla River Boat Ramp (US 98)
- 10 Woolley Memorial Park
- 11 Wakulla Springs State Park
- 12 Newport Recreation Area
- 13 Ochlockonee River State Park
- 14 San Marcos De Apalachee Historic Site
- 15 St. Marks Rail-To-Trail
- 16 City Park (St. Marks)
- 17 St Marks Ballfield
- 18 St Marks Park
- 19 City Pare (Sopchoppy)
- 20 Sopchoppy Elementary School
- 21 Lighthouse Point Recreational Site
- 22 Office/Visitors Center (St Marks NWR)
- 23 Otter Lake Recreation Center
- 24 Picnic Pond Recreation Site
- 25 Bradwell Bay Wilderness Area
- 26 Mack Landing Recreation Area

- 27 Morrison Hammock Scenic Area
- 28 Pine Creek Boat Ramp
- 29 Wood Lake Recreation Area

### 3. Recreation and the Private Sector

Although the majority of recreation sites in Wakulla County are publicly owned, some privately owned recreation sites provide a great service to the people of Wakulla County and tourists alike. These opportunities include water related facilities like marinas or combination of marinas and fish camps. These marinas provide approximately 404 wet slips and 261 dry slips for a total of 665 boat slips. Most of the marinas are located near either Shell Point or St. Marks and are supported by some type of camping facilities. Other than the marinas, land holdings allow tracts of land to be used for hunting.

#### **PRIVATE RECREATION FACILITIES LIST**

- 1 Bayside Marina
- 2 Holiday Park & Campground
- 3 Jack Langston's Place
- 4 Riverside Marina
- 5 Shell Island Fish Camp/Marina
- 6 Shell Point Marina
- 7 Shield's Marina
- 8 Marsh Harbor Marina
- 9 YMCA Camp Indian Springs
- 10 Wilson Marina

In addition to the recreation sites and facilities just inventoried, an inventory of open space is undertaken. The concept of open space incorporates a whole range of resources. Open space in this plan is defined as principally undeveloped land suitable for passive recreation or conservation uses and, as such, determines the parameters of the open space inventory. The different types of open space are classified by their functions: a) pastoral, b) utilitarian c) corridor. Some open space uses obviously serve more than one function.

#### B. Existing open space

##### 1. Pastoral Open Space

Pastoral lands are the most familiar form of open space. The primary role of these lands is to provide resource based and user-oriented recreation. These include federal, state, and regional parks, forests, historic sites, and other areas established for the protection of a site's natural resources.

Of the pastoral land in the County, the Apalachicola National Forest is the largest with 143,000 acres of forest land contained within the Apalachicola Wildlife Management Area. The Forest offers recreational activities such as hiking, hunting, canoeing, picnicking, and other outdoor pursuits. Within the Forest are various recreational opportunities including the Bradwell Bay

Wilderness Area, the Florida Trail, Lost Creek Canoe Trail, Sopchoppy River Canoe Trail, Mack Landing Recreational Area and the Ochlockonee River Canoe Trail.

The St. Marks Wildlife Refuge is the second largest pastoral open area which covers vast southeastern sections of the County including the coastal areas from the Ochlockonee River to the Jefferson County line. The Refuge generally offers similar recreational opportunities to that of the National Forest.

The Aucilla Wildlife Management Area is located in the eastern third of the County and is primarily used for silviculture purposes. This is the largest contiguous open space area owned by the private sector. Recreational uses are generally the same in this area as in the wildlife areas mentioned above.

Ochlockonee River State Park, located in the southwestern section of the County, has recreational opportunities that include camping, picnicking, boating and freshwater beaches.

The following list indicates the number of pastoral open space areas in the County and respective acreage.

1. Apalachicola National Forest: 143,153 acres (in Wakulla County)
  2. St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge: 55,171 acres (in Wakulla County)
  3. Aucilla Wildlife Management Area: 14,352 acres (in Wakulla County)
  4. Wakulla Springs State Park: 2,902 acres
  5. Ochlockonee River State Park: 392 acres
- Total pastoral open space acres = 215,970

#### 2. Utilitarian Open Space

Lands not suitable for development due to primitive conditions are deemed utilitarian open space. These areas generally include floodplain areas.

#### 3. Corridor Open Space

Corridor open spaces are areas through which people travel but which are designed for aesthetic enjoyment. These corridors can provide a linkage between open space, residential areas and commercial areas. The corridors are in the form of abandoned railroads, rivers, and recreation trails.

The most prominent corridor in the County is the abandoned railroad right-of-way running parallel to Highway 363 from Tallahassee to St. Marks. This corridor is currently being used for a biking, hiking and horseback riding trail, and is called the St. Marks Trail.

#### CORRIDOR OPEN SPACE LOCATIONS

- 1 St Marks Rail to Trail
- 2 Wakulla River

- 3 Florida Trail
- 4 Sopchoppy River Canoe Trail
- 5 Ochlockonee River Canoe Trail
- 6 St. Marks River

### III. ANALYSIS: DEMAND AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

#### A. Population Growth and Future Residents

The existing and anticipated population's needs for recreation in Wakulla County are the foundation upon which a plan for future recreation and open space is designed. The demand for greater recreational opportunities is buffered in Wakulla County by the abundance of natural areas, wildlife refuges, national forests and state owned lands that are available for resource-based recreation. The County does not wish to diminish its role in providing these opportunities, or in protecting these resources.

Wakulla County's recreational opportunities are centered around its four beautiful rivers, the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Wakulla Springs State Park, Mashie Sands Island County Park, Ochlockonee River State Recreation Area, Apalachicola National Forest, Apalachee Bay, and a network of four County operated recreation parks. The parks and natural areas provide necessary user-oriented opportunities as well as an abundance of open space.

In order to address the recreational opportunities for a growing county, to keep pace with the attraction to tourists for our resource-based opportunities, Wakulla County plans for the development of new recreational facilities in the form of neighborhood parks and will plan to include adequate access to the above mentioned resources.

The County must plan now to ensure the protection of its rivers, forests, state parks, recreation areas, and other public owned areas, to preserve the lush natural environment. Such planning may ensure the proper and careful use of the many acres of open space for future generations. Cultural opportunities in Wakulla County are largely provided by arts and crafts festivals, the County Library, and an historic site located in St. Marks. As the County grows, so will the desire for more cultural opportunities.

The County's adopted LOS standard is 5 acres/1,000 people. Wakulla County contains approximately 3,392 acres of parkland, not including the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge and the Apalachicola National Forest, which span several counties. With a project population of 47,300 in year 2030, the County will have 71.7 acres of parkland per 1000 people, far exceeding their LOS standard throughout the planning horizon.

#### B. Recreational and Open Space Standards

### 1. Recreational Standards

Established standards play a big role in planning recreational needs. These are numerical approximations to estimate the number of recreation sites that will be necessary to supply the needs of the County's population and visitors. To meet the needs of Wakulla Residents, the County as adopted the standard of Five (5) acres of developed recreation per (1000) thousand population (or fraction thereof). An infrastructure concurrency management report was completed for Wakulla County in 2007. The report suggested "no changes" to the County's recreation and open space standards.

### 2. Provision of Open Space

Enjoying the natural amenities of pastoral open space is one of the advantages of the rural atmosphere typical to Wakulla County. As a bedroom community to the state's capital, the County faces a tremendous influx of medium income families seeking a rural lifestyle away from urban sprawl. This places an immediate need to preserve open space resources for recreational use in pastoral land use. By planning now to preserve a more appealing rural, Wakulla County can assure aesthetic relief for future generations.

Land development code regulations will be adopted subsequent to this plan to include standards to ensure open space and bicycle and pedestrian facilities in future developments. Residential subdivision should incorporate open space in their design features to enhance layout and design, provide for buffers between conflicting uses, and provide accents to natural amenities present on the site. Wakulla County's population growth indicates a growing school-age population. By incorporating such open space requirements in new developments, this age group can be provided with play space.

Bordering Crawfordville, the unincorporated County seat, the Apalachicola National Forest acts as a backdrop of open space for the community. In the downtown area, Hudson Park provides essential open space along U.S. 319.

This type of development pattern is true of other communities in the County. In Panacea, the second largest unincorporated community in the County, the St. Marks Wildlife Refuge lies in the west and north. To the east, Dickerson Bay provides abundant open space for water-related activities. Within Panacea, the County operates Woolley Park as a passive recreation area. In the future, these communities will be surrounded by vast open space areas and beautiful vistas.

### 3. Proximity and Access to Recreation Facilities

The creation of parks and recreation facilities serves little purpose if residents and tourists have no access to them. Just as recreation facilities should be equitably distributed throughout all areas of population in order to adequately meet localized needs, facilities should be developed so that residents and visitors are provided adequate access to facilities.

Abundant recreation sites are concentrated in the southern and central areas of the County. The addition of Florida's first rail-to-trail linear park has added a well used bicycle, hiking, and horseback riding facility to the east side of the County.

Multiple accesses to other recreation areas are provided by roads and waterways. Additionally, the County plans to provide adequate and safe access to all recreation sites in order to increase the service provided to residents and tourists. A variety of access plans will be considered, including the creation of a bicycle and pedestrian master plan. Planning for future recreation facilities and parks takes into account the special accessibility needs of the physically challenged and the elderly. Accessibility requirements include ramps instead of stairs, railings for senior citizens and for the young to grasp, and restroom facilities that provide special access for these groups.

#### C. Future Recreation Demand

When the number of existing facilities is compared to the existing demand, existing needs are determined. By estimating per capita need proportionally to the expected increase of population, future demand can be projected. According to the infrastructure concurrency management system report completed for Wakulla County in 2007, the existing facilities are anticipated to serve the growing population of Wakulla County throughout the planning horizon.

Table 2: Recreation Targets for User-Oriented Facilities, Wakulla County, 2010

FACILITY	LEVEL OF SERVICE	EXISTING	2010 DEMANDS	ADDITIONAL NEEDED
Basketball Courts	1 court per 5,000 persons	3	7	4
Tennis Courts	1 court per 2,000 persons	1	18	17
Baseball/Softball Fields	1 field per 5,000 - persons	10	7	0
Football/Soccer/Rugby	1 field per 6,000 persons	2	6	4
General Play	1 Equipped Play Area per 10,000 persons	6	4	0
	1 multipurpose field per 3,750 persons	1	10	9

	1 Multipurpose Court per 3,500 persons	0	10	10
Swimming Pools	1 pool per 25,000 persons	0	1	1
Physical Exercise	1 exercise/parcours -trail per 15,000 persons	1	2	1
Golf (9 hole)	1 course per 25,000 persons	0	1	1
Golf (18 hole)	1 course per 50,000 persons	0	0	0
Racquetball/Handball	1 court per 10,000 persons	0	4	4
Shuffleboard	1 court per 6,000 persons	0	6	6
Volleyball	1 court per 6,000 persons	2	6	4
Table 2A. Recreation Standards for Resource-Based Facilities				
Bicycle Riding	1 linear mile of trail per 5,000 persons	2	7	5
Camping (RV, trailer and tent)	1 acre of camp area per 6,750 persons	0	5	5
Freshwater and saltwater beach activities	1 mile of freshwater or saltwater sandy beach shoreline per 25,000 persons	1.3	1	0
Freshwater and saltwater fishing (non-boat)	800 feet of pier, catwalk, or jetty per 5,600 persons	4	6	2
Hiking	1 linear mile of trail per 6,750 persons	0	5	5
Horseback Riding	1 linear mile of trail per	0	7	7

	5,000 persons			
Nature Study	1 linear mile of trail per 6,750 persons	1	5	4
Picnicking	1 picnic area per 6,000 persons	7	6	0
Hunting Lands	8.6 square miles per 10,000 persons	882	30.788	0
Boat Ramps	1 ramp per 5,000 persons	8	7	0

The data for Table 2 was obtained from the Statewide 2000 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) maintained by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. This document provides guidance to local governments when determining recreation needs and specifications for developing recreation facilities and park lands. The SCORP is cited by local governments when seeking grants for recreation facilities and forms the baseline for how local government should implement recreation facilities. Wakulla County's ability to remain competitive for state or federal grants depends on the County's Comprehensive Plan being consistent and compliant with the most current edition of the SCORP. This document is being updated and the revised guidelines are expected to be published in late 2008 or early 2009.

Current projects in the planning and development stage include the Wakulla Equestrian Center, the Wakulla Heritage Project, and the Wakulla Wildlife Sanctuary. The County manages four parks owned by the State of Florida through a 99 year management lease through Florida Communities Trust (Shell Point Beach, Purify Creek, and Panacea Mineral Springs) and the Board of Trustees for the Internal Improvement Fund TIF (Mashes Sands Park). These parks are governed by a management plan implemented as part of the lease agreement between the state and county. It is imperative that the facilities required under the terms of these agreements, as well as other management functions, be developed to comply with state requirements. Priority should be considered for these parks when scheduling grant applications.

**Comment [aw1]:** ORC- Moved from CIE data and Analysis to address ORC item #19.