CHAPTER 1
Introduction

From sea to summit, Lane County covers almost 4,800 square miles of diverse Oregon landscape. Stretching from the Pacific Ocean through the Coastal Range, the Willamette Valley to the Cascade Mountains, Lane County is home to approximately 366,000 people. The county’s communities are as varied as its landscape, including agricultural, rural, suburban, and a few urban areas. Many of these communities grew around Oregon’s thriving logging industry in the first half of the 20th century. Booming timber sales from Federal lands provided income to local and regional governments and funding for high quality public services, including roads, schools, and parks. Low tax rates were standard in communities with healthy timber sales, and Lane County was no exception.

In this context, Lane County Parks acquired 4,364 acres of rich natural, recreational and cultural assets. County parks and open space provide a variety of outdoor recreation experiences and important ecosystems that support wildlife habitat, biodiversity and clean air and water. The parks also provide residents and visitors access to fishable rivers, navigable and swimmable lakes, ocean beaches, historic covered bridges, old growth forests, and mountain trails.
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However, nowadays, timber harvest revenues are at historic lows. When Statewide Ballot Measure 50 made the low tax rates permanent in 1997, and limited the annual growth of assessed values, Lane County lost much of its funding base for services. Federal and local revenues have not been replaced, and the County cannot provide desired service levels. Local revenues are also constrained, with nearly 90 percent of property taxes in Lane County going to fund services provided by schools, cities and other municipal services—not County services.

Although the County has started rebuilding its economy and balancing its budget, Lane County’s per capita tax revenue is the third lowest in the State of Oregon (Figure 1). A greater investment in its parks and open space is needed, but General Fund dollars are not currently available to support County parks. Still, the resources and assets owned by Lane County are vast.

Opportunities exist to re-invest in County parks in a way that contributes to the local economy and protects the community’s heritage. This re-investment requires a new vision and a new management strategy for Lane County parks. It also requires the collaboration of staff, stakeholders, partners and other agencies who must work together to leverage the resources needed to support parks and open space.

Purpose of the Master Plan

The Lane County Parks & Open Space Master Plan (the Master Plan) will guide the County in navigating its funding challenges to provide well-maintained parks and open spaces. With strategic investments and collaborations with community members and partners, County Parks will be better positioned to support outdoor recreation and contribute to a sustainable and vibrant local economy. This Master Plan provides strategic and high-level guidance the County park system. For future park-specific capital investments or operational changes, community members will be engaged in a project-specific planning process.

Planning Process

Lane County last completed a Parks and Open Space Master Plan in 1980. To provide direction for park system management and development, Lane County Parks initiated a Master Plan update in the early 2000’s. This internal effort proceeded as staff had...
availability, continuing off and on for over a decade as staff faced the same budget and resource constraints that they also encountered in providing other park services.

In 2014, County staff pulled together years of past work to create a 2015 Preliminary Draft Master Plan. The Preliminary Draft was posted online and taken out to public meetings. County residents noted that the Preliminary Draft Master Plan, although detailed and technical, lacked overarching strategic guidance for park system management consistent with current funding realities. It also included some assumptions about future park development that were inconsistent with community preferences.

In 2016, the County Administrator committed to relaunching the planning effort, building on the foundation of information collected in past planning efforts. Bringing together Park staff, members of the Lane County’s Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) and added consultant support, the Project Management Team (PMT) created a new Task Force to guide the Master Plan process and ensure it reflected community priorities and the County’s fiscal realities. Figure 2 illustrates this renewed planning process.

**FIGURE 2: PLANNING PROCESS**

Ongoing Master Plan Task Force and PAC Guidance
The planning process was guided by a Task Force of 23-members who were selected through an application process. The Task Force was structured to ensure that diverse geographies and interests were represented. Two Task Force members were selected from each of the County’s six regions including: Coast (Florence), Siuslaw (Mapleton),
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North Valley (Eugene, Springfield, Fern Ridge, Veneta), McKenzie River/East Lane (Vida and South Valley (Cottage Grove). Other Task Force members were added to represent County-wide interests. Members included City representatives, directors or board members of relevant nonprofits, community groups and broad-based recreation groups, as well as other representatives with recreation and natural resource knowledge.

Members attended multiple meetings and reviewed technical documents and community input to develop the Master Plan vision, mission, goals and strategies. The PAC was also actively involved in the master plan process, participating in joint meetings with the Task Force and reviewing key documents.

Three-Phased Planning Process

The Task Force, supported by the PAC, provided overarching guidance through three project phases. In Phase 1, the Task Force, PAC and PMT reviewed and distilled previous planning data and collaborated to identify issues, assets, and opportunities within the County’s parks and open space system. In Phase 2, the assets and opportunities were refined into three service provision scenarios. Members of the public considered the scenarios and provided input on their priorities through an online questionnaire, at a series of community workshops held across Lane County, and during interactive activities at the 2017 County Fair. The Task Force and Project Team incorporated these priorities into the Master Plan vision and goals. In Phase 3, this information was refined further into a series of strategies to enhance the park and open space system.

Guiding Plans

Several relevant plans were consulted during Master Plan development. The Master Plan reflects the direction provided by the 2014-2017 Lane County Strategic Plan, which was updated in 2018 (see Figure 3). The Strategic Plan called on the County to focus on:

- Providing services that positively impact health, safety and quality of life;
- Stewarding Lane County’s environmental and cultural resources and building; and
- Maintaining smart and resilient infrastructure for today and future generations.

The Master Plan also supports the County in fulfilling Oregon’s Statewide Planning Goal 8: To satisfy the recreational needs of the citizens of the state and visitors and, where appropriate, to provide for the siting of necessary recreational facilities.

FIGURE 3: LANE COUNTY STRATEGIC PLAN 2018-2021, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
Other local and statewide plans and projects that were reviewed include, but are not limited to, the 2015 Findings and Recommendations of the Lane County Large Events Task Force, Oregon’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan 2013-2017 (SCORP), park master plans and strategic plans for the City of Eugene and Willamalane Park and Recreation District, the 2003 Rivers to Ridges Metropolitan Regional Parks and Open Space Study, Travel Oregon’s tourism data and bicycle tourism initiative.

Looking Forward

Now, almost 40 years after the County’s first adopted parks plan, this Master Plan sets forth a new path toward the future of Lane County parks. The Master Plan addresses the needs of the County’s evolving communities, the realities of the current local economy, the County’s current fiscal challenges, and the opportunities available to enhance the County’s park system.

This Master Plan describes County park assets, issues and opportunities in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 summarizes the community’s priorities and needs for parks and open space. These priorities inform strategic directions for the future parks system, as presented in Chapter 4, and for specific park sites, as noted in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides a plan for implementing the Master Plan goals and strategies.

Change is inevitable, and this Master Plan is well positioned to usher in a new age for Lane County parks, with greater financial support and alignment with the varied needs of residents across the County. However, it will take a collaborative effort—involving County staff, partners, stakeholders, other agencies, cities and communities—to maximize the benefits of Lane County parks and preserve these resources for future generations.

PHOTO: MOUNT PISGAH ARBORETUM IN THE HOWARD BUFORD RECREATION AREA