

INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This updated Parks and Trails Master Plan for the west slope area of El Dorado County has been developed to address parks, trails, and recreation at a countywide level. Pursuant to the Parks and Recreation Element of the General Plan, Policy 9.1.1.8, the County must prepare and implement a Parks and Trails Master Plan. The current Parks and Trails Master Plan, finalized in 2012, was developed to provide a long-term vision and direction for the planning, implementation, and management of the west slope park and trail resources provided by the County. Given changes in El Dorado County over the last ten years, including implementation of many of the priorities in the Master Plan, the Master Plan is now outdated. The Board of Supervisors also included the completion of the Master Plan update in the 2024 Countywide Strategic Plan.

Update Process

This plan is a result of a multiple-year effort performed almost entirely in-house, allowing Parks Division staff to conduct our own research, think through issues on an individualized, local level, and to thoroughly review our own program. The public, County staff, consultants, and policymakers started this effort by forming a team to examine the County’s existing park and trails system, and identify its strengths and challenges. The goals for this effort were to:

1. Conduct a robust public engagement process.
2. Consider other public and private recreation providers’ current inventory and future plans.
3. Assess needs based on current population, public comments, and emerging trends.
4. Analyze the County’s current organizational structure for planning, building, improving, operating, and maintaining park and recreation facilities.
5. Consider all current and possible internal and external funding sources for one-time and ongoing expenses.
6. Provide a strategy for future operations, amenities and new facilities.

Throughout the process the team discovered how park and recreation needs have changed based on population trends and input from stakeholders and the overall community. Based on the current recreation facility inventory, anticipated needs and popular trends, we identified key needs for the program, improvements and partnerships to forge in order to implement the

plan.

The result is an updated roadmap for how the overall system of parks and trails will be developed and managed to reflect the fiscal constraints, relative priorities, and needs, drawn from our own understanding of our unique County. We intend to reference this document often, and because we put it together ourselves we believe that the direction it contains will be achieved.

Purpose

The purpose of the El Dorado County Parks and Trails Master Plan is to provide direction and implementation strategies to guide the acquisition, development, and operation of County-owned parks and trails in the Plan Area. This plan:

- Addresses parks and trails currently owned and/or operated by the County; the provision of parks and trails to serve areas not otherwise served by local park and trail providers; and opportunities to collaborate with and assist other regional providers to enhance the availability and recreational value of parks, open spaces, and trails for residents and visitors.
- Reflects the community's priorities for recreation opportunities.
- Provides direction for acquisition, planning, operating and maintaining parks, open space, and trails so that current and future management of these resources is consistent with and advances this vision.
- Identifies and recommends specific tasks to achieve our goals.

The final Plan provides a roadmap for how the overall system of parks and trails will be developed and managed while staying mindful of the public's needs and priorities, and the County's fiscal constraints currently, and into the future.

Plan Organization

An important objective of this Master Plan is to document the existing state of public park and trail resources in El Dorado County and to clarify the role of the County in planning, implementing, and managing those resources. The plan includes an extensive Existing Conditions Chapter that serves as a review of current County assets, processes, and relationships to provide an understanding of the framework we work within to provide service

to the public. There are many other public and private recreation providers in El Dorado County, and the County's objective is to efficiently coordinate with these partners to meet the park and trail needs of residents and visitors alike. To this end, this Master Plan has a special focus on acknowledging the collaborative opportunities with special districts, local government, private businesses, state, and federal recreation providers. Working in cooperation with these regional partners, there is tremendous potential to achieve our collective overall goals. This Chapter also includes a review of existing County guiding documents, including the General Plan, as well as a review of County demographic data.

The process for development of this plan focused heavily on community outreach and stakeholder feedback. The plan analyzes the outcomes of our robust outreach and public engagement effort and compiles and relays the variation in needs for parks facilities in the County. Staff has involved the Parks and Recreation Commission for community engagement and for direction on project priorities, and completed a countywide survey, which will serve as the baseline from which to build the Plan.

Outreach objectives focused on building community awareness of the project and the process for Plan development, coming to a shared understanding of the County's goals and constraints, and obtaining community input to inform and guide our final product. Stakeholder meetings were held in October and November 2022, and a series of five public workshops were conducted in the Winter and Spring of 2023. Staff also assembled a Master Plan Advisory Committee in February 2024, composed of representatives from other agencies, and engaged the public in other more informal ways, all to gain insight into the parks and trail system needs. The parks needs expressed by County residents vary significantly depending on where they live and the types of recreational activities they prefer. During the public engagement process several needs related to neighborhood, community, and regional parks were consistently identified throughout the process of gathering public input. Participants expressed an appreciation for the role of recreation to provide and maintain recreational opportunities that support healthy lifestyles, build community, and accommodate tourism along with its associated economic development. As seen from the community input, the parks needs expressed by County residents vary significantly depending on where they live and the types of recreational activities they prefer. However, overall several themes emerged from these efforts.

- 1) Open Space Trails: The community wide survey, especially, showed the importance placed upon open space accessible for walking and enjoying nature, hiking, and unimproved, natural trails.

- 2) Volunteerism: Consistently throughout all forms of outreach, the community conveyed a willingness to volunteer to improve parks, maintain them, and organize themselves in support.
- 3) Sports Team Fields: Several concerns focused on the high costs for sports teams, field availability, travel time and lack of lighting at available fields, with a focus on the positive impact to youth as a result.
- 4) Accessibility: Common themes were ADA accessible spaces, including sports fields, water access points, and trails.
- 5) Trail Connectivity: Connectivity between existing trails, especially connections or expansion of the El Dorado Trail, including trails in other Counties or under other park providers, with an emphasis on open, maintained multi-use trails.
- 6) Water Recreation Access: Another theme was providing access to water, especially natural water resources including the Cosumnes and American River, for swimming, fishing, and other watersports.
- 7) Facility Amenities: Many survey results and outcomes from conversations concerned lighting, parking, drinking water, and access to restrooms.

Over the course of implementing this Master Plan, it is possible that additional park or trail projects will be identified that were not anticipated. It is important that the planning, implementation, and management of all County park and trail initiatives proceeds in a manner that consistently provides for public safety, efficient use of public resources, high quality user experience, and resource protection. For this reason, this Master Plan provides a Park Standards Chapter that includes guidelines for the physical design of new County parks and trails. This chapter also provides the process for evaluating feasibility of future projects so that valuable resources are expended only on projects that are first carefully examined and found to have a reasonable likelihood of success.

The Fiscal and Needs Analysis compares our current system of parks and trails with other similar agencies and provides comprehensive information and analysis of El Dorado County Parks Division's funding sources in order to identify the gaps and opportunities in the County's allocation of resources for recreational opportunities. Through this assessment, the County is better equipped to strategically plan for future park development and ensure that resource distribution aligns with community needs and regional best practices. This chapter also identifies service gaps and needs.

Last, this document provides Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives to guide us in pursuit of the long term vision and direction for the planning, implementation, and management of west slope

park, trail, and open space resources provided by El Dorado County for the benefit of residents and visitors. The Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives Chapter expands on the guidance found in the El Dorado County General Plan for parks and trails and were derived from stakeholder and community input and reflect needs based on best practices and regional trends. The goals provide the overall direction for County parks, trails, open space, and recreation. The objectives offer more specific direction to help accomplish the goals. Each initiative is an actionable step for the County to pursue over the life of the Master Plan to reach the objectives. The collective purpose of the chapter is to provide direction for how parks and trails should be planned, operated, and maintained so that current and future decisions about these resources are consistent with the County's long-range vision for parks and trails. The five goals are as follows:

- 1) Preserve and enhance access to natural areas and resource-based recreation, including rivers, trails, and open space.
- 2) Manage recreational opportunities within a regional context to accommodate public access, leverage funding, and provide interconnected trails.
- 3) Prioritize maintenance of public assets and improvements to existing parks and trails to continue to provide safe and diverse recreational experiences.
- 4) Engage the community to refine ongoing recreational needs, encourage participation, and promote volunteer support.
- 5) Invest in and support recreation features in recognition of the importance of recreation as a draw for tourism and quality of life for residents.

Implementation of the Goals, Objectives, and Initiatives recommended in this Master Plan will take place over an extended period of time depending on available financial and other resources. This Master Plan does not provide detailed planning or design for individual park or trail resources. Rather, it is concerned with how the overall system of parks and trails will be developed and managed to reflect the relative priorities and needs of the current and future County population. Notably, while the plan is meant to be a long-term document, it includes direction for the Parks Division to pursue the creation of a multi-year Capital Improvement Program, to be evaluated annually, to create a schedule for pursuing recreation opportunities based on anticipated resources. As a guiding document, the Plan itself is to be referenced when making future decisions on parks and will provide a roadmap for the Board of Supervisors and County staff. New ways of funding acquisition, development, and maintenance of parks and trails also need to be implemented, especially through our community partnerships.

While there will be many challenges associated with implementing this vision, there is also tremendous motivation on the part of residents and regional partners to work with the County

in making this vision a reality. This document endeavors to provide a framework for decision-making and guidance to the Parks Division of the El Dorado County Chief Administrative Office to ensure the County’s parks, trails, and open spaces reflect community values, current standards, funding and operational considerations.