

Appendix 9.7:

Existing Park Recommendations

This Appendix contains a summary of public feedback and future recommendations for each of the existing Bergen County Parks.

9.7 EXISTING PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

The park inventory completed in 2016, the public comments received in 2017, and subsequent design explorations and analyses resulted in recommendations to enhance existing Bergen County parklands. These recommendations are grouped below by Park Type.

ANCHOR PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

Anchor Park Conceptual Plans should be developed in collaboration with potential partners and key stakeholders. Anchor Parks must be supported with a significant digital marketing presence that consistently informs residents of unique Anchor Park programs and events.

VAN SAUN ANCHOR PARK

Van Saun Park is a 130-acre Anchor Park that provides a diverse range of activities, from sports fields to the nationally accredited Bergen County Zoological Park to the historically designated Washington Spring Gardens. The northern half of the park offers primarily for-fee activities, including the zoo, tennis courts, carousel, and pony rides. The southern portion of the park is primarily a passive recreation area, with a dog park, lake, and ecological area (Fig. 1). For a detailed Van Saun

Park inventory see Section I, Chapter 3.1.3. The properties immediately surrounding the park are all residential, primarily built as single-family homes.

Public Comments

The most frequently cited reason for Van Saun's popularity was the great variety of child-centered activities (Figs. 2 - 3). Many people mentioned how "special" a place it was with its "beautiful" zoo, "wonderful" carousel, train ride, and playground. The pond, walk/bike paths, picnic area, open land, and pony rides were also mentioned as favorite amenities. People also noted the high standard of maintenance at Van Saun, commenting specifically on the paths where visitors can go walking the same day as a storm. Respondents mentioned their appreciation for the field space at Van Saun, and felt it is well worth the effort to travel to this park. Residents liked the fact that the park was spacious enough that they could enjoy great peace, privacy, particularly on weekends, and relaxation while walking or biking, or enjoy socializing with other community members.

The landscape in particular contributes to the enjoyment of Van Saun. Several people cherished fond memories of Walden Pond, while others enjoyed the irises or the quiet beauty of Washington Spring Garden when flowers bloom in the spring.



Figure 1. View of Walden Pond at Van Saun County Park. The southern portion of the park offers more passive recreation while the northern half provides more for-fee activities such as the Bergen County Zoo (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 2. The playground, zoo, carousel and other child-friendly amenities make Van Saun County Park an especially beloved family-oriented park in Bergen County (Courtesy of CUES).

Respondents said simply driving through the park from Continental Avenue to Howland Avenue was a mini-break on days when they couldn't stop, although they sometimes paused for a short time to enjoy the pond, ducks, and paths.

Two predominant issues that emerged from public comments about Van Saun were inadequate parking and the Van Saun Zoo expansion. Parking is difficult/impossible during peak times (e.g. weekends), especially if there is a popular event. One person said they have a handicapped tag, but sometimes cannot find parking. Another person expressed frustration that there is not enough parking near core activities.

Many respondents felt the zoo should not be expanded for four main reasons: loss of open space, more crowding, loss

of ambiance, and financial considerations. However, others felt the zoo was far beneath the standards set by Turtle Back Zoo. They think the zoo is dated and needs an expansion to accommodate more animals (see Appendix 9.8).

Van Saun, the most popular and most visited County Park identified in the online public survey, was called a "little gem of land in the middle of Paramus." Along with the Duck Pond at Saddle River County Park, Van Saun was one of two County Parks that many people have a very deep childhood attachment to, as well as a desire to share their experiences with children and grandchildren. One respondent wrote, "Van Saun holds special meaning to most Bergen County residents as we have fond childhood memories here and enjoy taking our own children now." Other residents whose



Figure 3. The popular train ride at Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 4. The 2016 Winter Wonderland event showed the potential Van Saun has as a regional destination when programming special events. (Courtesy of CUES).

children are now grown mention that they visited the park regularly to enjoy the zoo and other child-friendly activities when their children were young, and they still return because “it was and still is wonderful to have open spaces to play, experience nature, be outside away from traffic, and to participate in educational events.” Some seniors reported bonding at the park with grandchildren, and one person noted that visiting Van Saun has been a family tradition for many years with different generations. The importance of the park in the public’s memory and the deep love for the park as a recreational destination makes Van Saun County Park a critical family-oriented, child-friendly Anchor Park.

Recommendations

The Bergen County park with the most popular fee-based amenities (zoo, carousel, train, pony rides, and Winter Wonderland), Van Saun has the potential to expand programs, activities and amenities.

The majority of visitors (85%) travel to the park by automobile. Traffic that affects area residents is a concern and finding available parking in the park during weekends and peak use days is problematic for park visitors. We recommend the County explore low cost, low maintenance parking management options for use during high traffic weekends and events. Pedestrians and cyclists should not pay any fee, which encourages physical activity in getting to the park. Another parking option the County should explore is addition of a Valet Parking Service concession. This approach would allow visitor drop off at high traffic locations without needing an adjacent parking space.

Transportation

In order to alleviate traffic issues that affect Van Saun’s local neighborhoods, proposed motor vehicle improvements include:

- Realign the Forest Avenue entrance and exit to create a standard signalized intersection.
- Concurrent with the realignment, improve signage at the park entrance.
- Narrow the width of the Continental Avenue entrance to improve pedestrian safety.
- Consider making the southern half of the interior roadway bidirectional.

The residential neighborhoods surrounding Van Saun Park have many attractive low-volume streets with sidewalks. There is a pedestrian intersection with a crosswalk on Continental Avenue, but the vehicular entrance is very wide and does not have a painted crosswalk. Howland Avenue provides the most access points for pedestrians. Forest Avenue hosts NJ TRANSIT bus service on the 168 and 752 lines. Buses stop directly in front of the Forest Avenue entrance, although there is no pedestrian walkway into the park (see Appendix 9.5C for local transportation recommendations).

There is no dedicated bicycle infrastructure in or around the park, although the interior trail is well suited for bicycle use. Additionally, the surrounding neighborhoods feature plenty of low-volume residential roadways that are suitable for bicycling.

Events

Although limited parking, especially during hours the zoo is open, presents a challenge at Van Saun, the 2016-2017 Winter Wonderland programs (Fig. 4) demonstrated the park's potential to be a regional destination for special events.

The problem is not too few parking spaces, but underutilization of the existing parking area. This lot could be maximized by creating a valet parking system. Three separate large field areas spanning the northern and southern portions of the park can accommodate events. However, proximity to parking from the northernmost field makes programming in that area problematic. The field in the middle section of the park accommodated Winter Wonderland and summer movie screenings well. This area is centrally located, easily accessible and close to parking lots. The southern field is smaller and bordered by baseball/ softball fields, but is still in close proximity to the bulk of overall parking and would be a workable event space depending on the event content.

Because Van Saun is a regional park in a highly populated area of the County, with open field space and desirable walking paths (Fig. 5), this venue would be a good candidate for not-for-profit fundraising run/walks. The Events Department should reach out to local and regional non-profits and begin to raise the profile of the park for this use.

Concessions

This park could support a restaurant concession that would be able to serve visitors to the zoo and other park users. This could be accomplished by having two separate dining areas with a kitchen that serves both.

Ecology

There are numerous opportunities to increase the contributions that Van Saun Park can make to the overall ecologic health of Bergen County. Impervious surfaces cover thirteen percent of the park. Opportunities should be explored that provide an opportunity to remove portions of this impervious cover. Shallow concentrated stormwater flows contribute to isolated ponding and sedimentation and create erosion gullies (Fig. 6 & 7). Constricted natural edge conditions along the river limit flood protection; the lack of roots increases destabilization of the soils, and both contribute to the potential for erosion (Fig. 8 & 9). Efforts to restore healthy waterway buffers and to address stormwater along impervious surfaces and areas where erosion gullies have formed are recommended (see Chapter 6.2 for stormwater management Best Practices).



Figure 5. Public comments often mentioned walking paths within Van Saun as an appreciated park feature. Enhancing pedestrian crossings at key entrances to the park could improve safe pedestrian access (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 6A-D. Curb cut and concentrated sheet flows contribute to isolated ponding and sedimentation in Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 7A & B. Erosion gullies degrade the natural resources in Van Saun County Park (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 9. Parts of Van Saun County Park are in the floodplain and susceptible to flooding. Blue indicates the floodplain (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 8A & B. Non-natural edges adjacent to waterways in Van Saun County Park limit flood protection and lack of roots increases soil destabilization (Courtesy of Biohabitats).



Figure 10. Originally envisioned as the “Central Park of New Jersey,” Overpeck County Park is a heavily-used regional destination that offers a wide range of passive and active recreation (Courtesy of CUES).

OVERPECK ANCHOR PARK

Originally envisioned as the “Central Park of New Jersey,” Overpeck Park is the destination for a wide range of passive and active recreation, as well as large events. Overpeck is the existing Anchor Park in closest proximity to the densely populated southern portion of Bergen County. It fills the role of an urban-style heavily used diverse park, with vibrant social interactions, cultural events, sport attractions, and nature recreation opportunities.

Overpeck County Park is a major regional park that is located in the southeastern corner of Bergen County. Comprising almost 800 acres of land bisected by Overpeck Creek, the park is divided into eight unique activity areas that span almost three miles. The park is located less than four miles from the northern portion of Manhattan, and is easily accessible from the George Washington Bridge (GWB). Given its central location, the park attracts visitors from both New Jersey and New York. Regional access is made easier by the immediate proximity of two major interstate highways, I-95 (New Jersey Turnpike), and I-80. Overpeck boasts a wide range of attractions and amenities, such as walking trails, a large golf course, an equestrian area, a 3,000-person amphitheater, a boat launch, and various sports fields and courts. For detailed Overpeck Park descriptions, see Section I, Chapter 3.1.2.

Although Overpeck has the potential to achieve the vision of a Central Park-like institution, there is still much work to be done. The landfills in Areas I, II, and IV must be

permanently closed. Connectivity for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles between the four areas and the local surrounding communities remains a large and pressing issue to be resolved in the Conceptual Master Plan. Enhancing transportation connections and linkages to the proposed future light rail stops need to be iconsidered, and naming conventions for the various areas must focus on unifying the park into one cohesive unit.

Public Comments

Overpeck is visited on a regular basis for running, dog walking, passive and active recreation. Several visitors praised the park’s well maintained fields, facilities, and clean, well-placed restrooms. A number of responses also mentioned that there were activities for all ages, interests, and cultures. Overpeck emerged as a popular location for rowing, and the Bergen County Rowing Academy was commended as a “terrific program.” Other comments praised events/festivals, fresh air and exercise, the cycling lane, sports facilities, especially the tennis courts, the “great” playground at Overpeck, and access to the water.

The Teaneck Creek Area I was most frequently cited as a favorite place to enjoy “undisturbed” nature and observe wildlife. Many respondents said that watching a wide variety of birds (especially bald eagles) was a favorite activity. The circuit walks at Teaneck Creek provide “marvelous” opportunities for wildlife observation, quiet relaxation, and nature enjoyment.

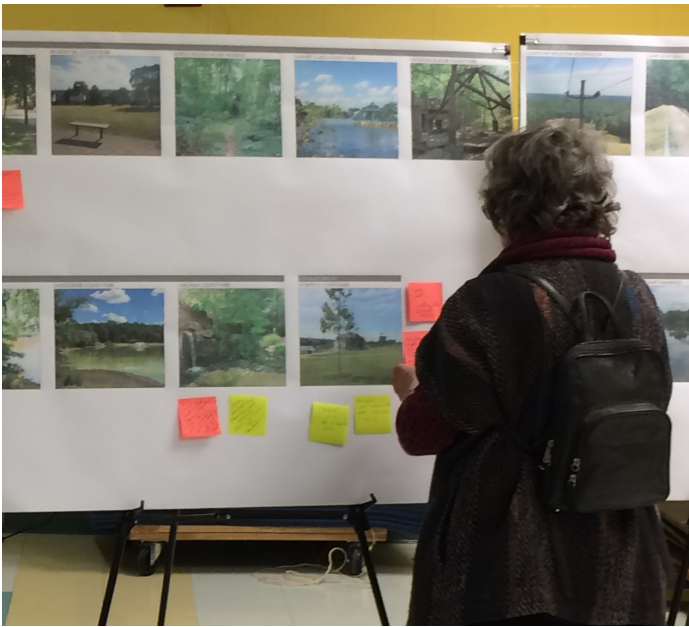


Figure 11. One of residents' favorite County parks, Overpeck received extensive feedback during the community outreach process (Courtesy of CUES).

The Bergen Equestrian Center was noted for its instructors and opportunities to ride through beautiful scenery. As one respondent pointed out, Overpeck is one of the only places where residents can ride on a beautiful property with eagles and hawks flying overhead, meditation and Audubon gardens nearby, all just minutes from the GWB.

Three overriding concerns, related to Overpeck's tremendous popularity, were commonly raised by the public. Traffic, large events, and loss of naturalized areas were issues of concern.

Impacts of Events on Surrounding Communities

A prevalent issue was the impact large events have on surrounding communities in the form of crippling traffic jams. Many comments were related to major transportation and logistical problems associated with events in the park. Overly loud sound from events at the amphitheater were described as having a very negative impact on resident quality of life —“Sometimes, sitting out in the yard during an event at the Amphitheater is just impossible due to the sound.”

Transportation and Logistical Problems Within the Park

Traffic jams prevent people from accessing the park and finding parking is impossible. Some park users wanted to attend Overpeck events, but the park was too crowded to access. There are not enough security personnel available to direct traffic. These problems caused some visitors to not return for similar events. Overcrowding (especially in the parking lots) associated with large events precludes other park users from accessing Overpeck for non-event activities. The need for safe and convenient circulation within and between park areas was raised, as was the need to eliminate vehicular traffic cutting through the park to avoid traffic problems (GPS actually re-routes vehicles through Overpeck when there are traffic jams on nearby highways). Apparently, vehicles speed through the park, using it as a cut-through alternative to the GWB and Route 95 traffic congestion.

Issues Accessing the Park

Transportation to the park is challenging, even when large events are not scheduled. Five municipalities border Overpeck Park. The park's proximity to major highways makes it easy to access by car, but those same highways also act as a barrier



Figures 12 A-D. Residents particularly value the wide spectrum of recreational activities that Overpeck County Park supports, from playing team

to access from nearby municipalities that border the park, especially for pedestrians and bicyclists. Major highways also make it difficult to travel between different areas within the park. With limited access points, park visitors use cars to arrive at and travel within the park. Additionally, limited access points contribute to congestion during times of high use.

Heavy traffic on surrounding roads, lack of sidewalks (or sidewalks in disrepair), and Route 95 exit ramps make safely walking or biking to the park virtually impossible. There are no sidewalks crossing Route 80, and so residents near Overpeck Creek are forced to drive to the park. Sidewalks are also needed along sections of Fort Lee Road and DeGraw Avenue. Grand Ave is difficult to cross, even at traffic lights. There is also concern over the impact the proposed light rail stops will have on parking and traffic congestion on Fort Lee Road, especially during peak rush hours.

Ecology

Many respondents expressed concern that “overdevelopment” of recreational facilities at Overpeck would destroy natural resources or diminish public enjoyment of them. Some felt that habitat values should be a priority to support wildlife and provide residents with opportunities to learn about and enjoy nature. As one response said, “I spotted bald eagles at Overpeck Creek—if the park is not done right, those eagles may not be there the next year or the year after that.” The topic of the Dinosaur Park relocation to Overpeck Area II surfaced repeatedly, with residents sharing a number of reasons why they think this location is not a good idea.



Figure 13. Enjoyment of nature, particularly birdwatching, emerged from public outreach as an educational opportunity at Overpeck (Courtesy of CUES).



sports or enjoying a challenge on the playground to riding a horse or enjoying an afternoon on the water (Courtesy of CUES).



Recommendations

In order to fully realize the enormous potential of the largest urban open space in Bergen County, a number of improvements are needed. A first step is completing design concepts for Areas II and IV, and then linking these amenities and programs to the currently accessible Areas I and III. We recommend that Area IV be evaluated as a potential location for an expanded Bergen County Botanical and Zoological Park (see Appendix 9.8), and that an appropriate conceptual design, which complements and integrates with the other three areas, be developed for Area II.

See Appendix 9.5C for specific transportation recommendations for each section of Overpeck Park.

Events

Usage of the amphitheater venue should be programmed and permitted in a way that increases its prestige and status as a performance venue. A venue name and brand identity should be created specifically for this space, thus creating distinctiveness of the venue. The potential for receiving revenues from sponsorship opportunities should be explored. An exterior boundary around the amphitheater should be created to delineate the event space from the wider park area and to provide opportunities for exclusive and ticketed events in the space. This boundary may provide sponsor and signage opportunities along the interior of the boundary.

It also will help reduce noise bleed from the venue to the surrounding neighborhood with the installation of sound attenuation panels or blankets.

The net sum of these improvements will be securing increased sponsorship of the space, while raising the visibility of the venue among event planners. This increased visibility will result in more programming and revenue, while reducing the noise issues from the venue that affect the surrounding communities.

In addition to the outside bookings, Bergen County should endeavor to program (or partner with an organization to operate and program) the amphitheater space similarly to SummerStage at Rumsey Playfield in Central Park, NYC. The cornerstone of the programming would be a yearly, season-long performing arts festival, with a wide array of disciplines, reflecting the arts and cultural richness of those that use the Bergen County Parks System. This type of series has the potential to be very attractive to both local and wider area sponsors. Having the cost of the series offset by sponsorship dollars would be a feasible goal.

The large field immediately to the south of the amphitheater in Area III is an attractive space where large scale events could take place. The amount of overall parking within the park limits the scope of events at this location. However, there is

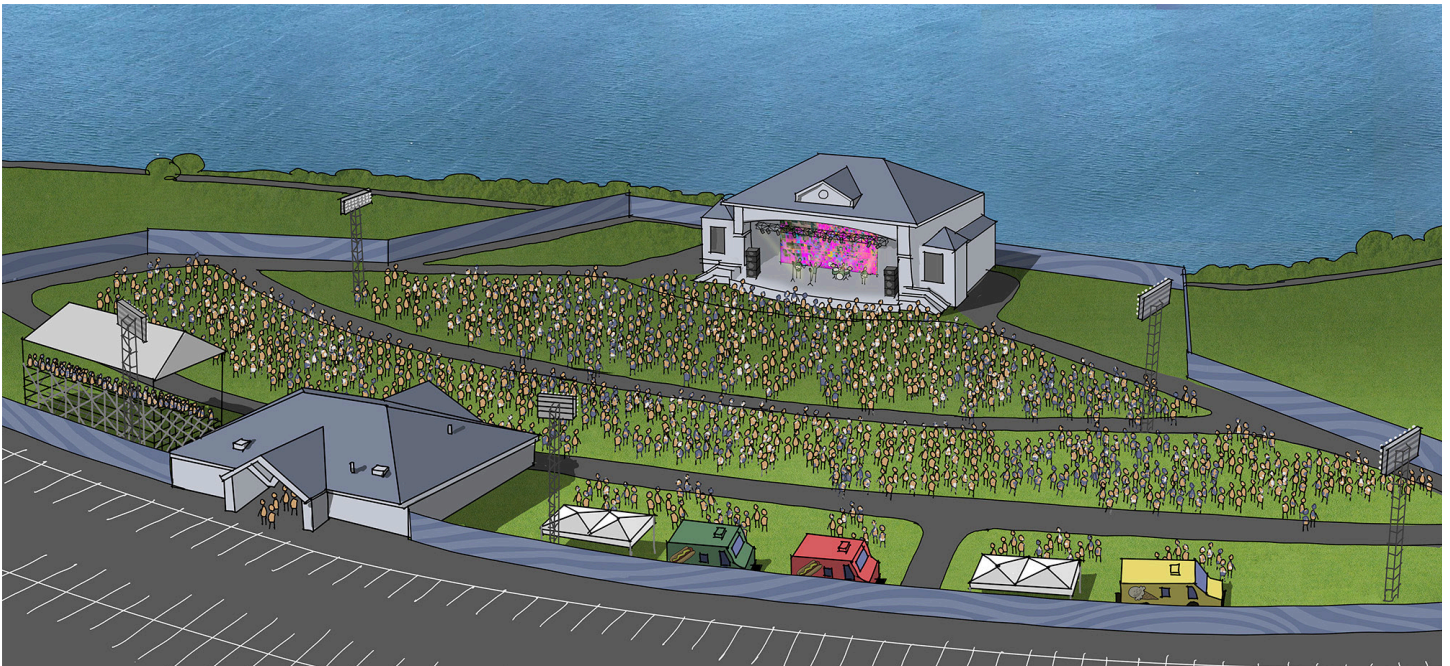


Figure 14. Usage of the amphitheater venue should be programmed and permitted in a way to increase its prestige and status as a performance venue. Providing a sound buffer to reduce noise bleed into the surrounding neighborhoods is recommended (Courtesy of Eventage).

the potential for weekend events to make use of the corporate parking lots on Challenger Road just beyond the southern entrance to the park, or to utilize shuttle service from local Park & Ride facilities. Any large-scale events would require the creation of a customized and comprehensive transportation plan with shuttles from strategic mass transit locations & NYC. The lack of any infrastructure or existing services in this field area is attractive to event producers as it provides a “blank canvas” for creating an event. Conversely, it would also sharply raise production costs as all event equipment and services would need to be brought to the site for an event. This would also increase the number of production vehicles that would need to access the site and drive on the lawn for load-in/out.

Because of the operational challenges and the potential for detrimental impacts from events, it is advisable that the Parks Department have a detailed review process for any events that apply for use of this site. This plan should include selective guidelines for the activities that would be considered for allowable usage of the space. The County Parks Department should also have a very involved role with producers that are issued permits for the venue throughout the event preproduction process.

Concessions

There are many possibilities for adding new and exciting concessions to Overpeck Park:

- A Food Truck program to introduce a variety of food offerings to regular park users and to enhance planned events.
- A Sport Pilot Program to test user demand for new sport offerings. Pickleball markings were recently added to existing tennis courts at Overpeck. Another request at the public meetings was for a Cricket venue. Overpeck test programs could gauge public demand and provide insight into new sport program amenities.
- A Winter Bubble to cover the existing tennis and pickleball courts, making these sports available on a year-round basis. The courts can then become a site for child and adult clinics, USTA team matches, and yearly tournaments.



Figure 15. Changing County demographics have increased demands for certain sports. Initiating a Sport Pilot Program at Overpeck could help test the demand for various sport offerings (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 16. County parklands in the Ramapo Mountains offer diverse passive and active recreation experiences in a setting that to many residents feel is untouched by human development (Courtesy of CUES).

RAMAPO VALLEY ANCHOR PARK

The proposed Ramapo Mountain Anchor Park includes the Ramapo Valley Reservation, Campgaw, Camp Glen Gray, Camp Tamarack and Camp Todd. These parklands currently account for over half of the entire Bergen County park acreage (approximately 4,500 acres). In addition, we are recommending that Darlington Park, located at the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains, be included within the Ramapo Mountain Anchor Park complex. The inclusion of the Darlington venue, which has boating and swimming facilities, helps create a diverse offering of active recreation experiences, ranging from skiing, to hiking, to camping, to boating/swimming in beautiful natural settings. These venues should be connected via a multiuse Ramapo Mountain Parks Trail. This approach and the recommendations below for additional programming and amenities, position the Ramapo parklands to be the mountain sport recreation destination for the region.

Appropriate naming conventions for the various components of the Ramapo Mountain Anchor Park venues need to be determined. Like Overpeck Park, there are currently sections that should be connected and treated as one large Nature Anchor Park, but that are currently treated as individual Parks.

To complete this Anchor Park, strong collaborations with

the State of New Jersey park system must be developed. The ultimate goal is to create a unified nature experience for visitors on all County and State properties in the Ramapo Mountains (Fig. I6).

Ramapo Valley County Reservation Management Plan Summary

Contributed by Master Consulting

Maser Consulting was tasked by Bergen County (2008) to develop a management plan for the Ramapo Valley County Reservation (RVCR), including Camps Glen Gray, Tamarack and Todd. The four properties are characterized by extensive natural landscapes, including wetlands, vernal pools, forest, rock outcrops, rare plant and animal habitats. A Natural Resource Inventory, cultural and historic data, and transportation information were gathered and developed into reports. Meetings were held with stakeholder groups and the general public to gather information and ideas for the management plan, including current experiences, desired uses/enhancements, and level of park activity. Current efforts on the RVCR Management Plan include preparing recommendations related to management and maintenance of facilities, suggestions pertaining to appropriate levels of park activity, and types of potential programming. The purpose of RVCR is to protect and maintain the wilderness experience,

interpret and learn from this dynamic natural resource, and facilitate sensible and sustainable human use of the Ramapo Mountains.

Three Park Significance Statements guiding planning and management decisions define what is most important about the park's natural and cultural resources and values:

- The Ramapo Valley County Reservation offers exceptional opportunities for nature based recreation and enjoyment, cultural and historical related activities.
- The Ramapo Valley County Reservation lies at the northwest limits of the New York – New Jersey Highlands and is a component of the Appalachian Mountain chain, contributing to significant biological diversity including habitat for a unique assemblage of plants and animals unparalleled in the region.
- The Ramapo Valley County Reservation contains the most rugged and dramatically beautiful mountain scenery in all of Bergen County.

Programming concepts under consideration for RVCR are both educational and recreational. Educational programming may include science-based learning, and cultural and historic opportunities. Recreational programming may enable visitors to experience outdoor activities such as fishing, a guided hike, plant identification, birdwatching or photography.

RAMAPO VALLEY COUNTRY RESERVATION

Public Comments

The Ramapo Reservation was frequently named as a regional destination for enjoying nature, hiking, walking, fishing, biking, swimming, and dog walking (Fig. 17-18). A profound appreciation for the wildlife, water and natural beauty of the Ramapos ran deeply through many comments and conversations with residents and stakeholders such as Friends of Glen Gray (FOGG). The Ramapo Mountains are a destination for a wide variety of visitors and the site of many cherished memories with friends and family. The vistas were frequently described as “breathtaking,” and many visitors noted the variety of trails, which allow for a different experience on each visit. As one respondent wrote, “Having access to the beauty of our County parks has enhanced the well-being of our entire family. Our grandchildren. . .love our hikes in the woods. They never tire of climbing up the Ramapo trails. . .to the top for the views. . .The oldest is only six!”

Only a handful of public comments mentioned Camps Glen Gray and Tamarack specifically. Some requested that Camp Glen Gray public camping be extended to more than just Friday and Saturday nights, while others wondered whether the public actually is able to access this site. In addition, some trail biking advocates recommended that the County partner with local biking organizations (e.g. JORBA) to add sustainable bike trails connecting Camp Glen Gray and Campgaw as a pilot project.



Figure 17. Ramapo Valley County Reservation is a beloved regional destination for hiking, fishing, and other outdoor activities (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 18. Visitors camping at Camp Glen Gray can hike along trails through the woods at this former boyscout property (Courtesy of CUES).

Three main areas of strong concern emerged about Ramapo Reservation parks during the Master Plan public outreach. These include degradation and destruction of natural resources, trail user conflicts, and traffic and parking access.

Natural Resource Impacts

Public feedback reflected a very strong desire for the Ramapo Reservation to “remain natural” since it is “the last bit that we have” in the County. Numerous residents spoke out against prior and potential future pipelines that destroy the natural resources. There are deep concerns that encouraging more use of the park will destroy what makes the Ramapos so special. ATVs and motorcycles reportedly already destroy paths and natural areas. A previous forest fire that started from a camp bonfire remains a vivid memory. The concern is: that these issues will escalate if higher park visitation is encouraged; that overuse will destroy the fragile natural resources; and that the sense of enjoying private wonder in “untouched” nature will be lost.

Use Conflicts

As one respondent put it, “The Ramapo Reservation, while typically considered a nature experience, is actually a dog-walking experience.” Dogs that run loose off-leash make some visitors feel unsafe. In addition, many owners do not clean up their dogs’ refuse on paths, and this lack of following park rules results in unpleasant smells and a diminished visitor experience for others. A number of Mahwah residents suggested that a dog park could potentially alleviate the problems.

Swimming in the reservoir and sunning on the boulders are popular activities at the Reservation (Fig. 19). However, swimming at the Ramapo Reserve is prohibited, although this rule is being ignored, and a number of comments requested that swimming be allowed as a park activity. Rock climbing is also prohibited but is apparently happening in the Ramapo/Campgaw area. One proponent lamented that they have to drive to Harriman to climb legally and “parking isn’t always the best there.” Another comment noted that climbing is “a great way for people to explore and be challenged,” and suggested the County simply post a statement onsite that climbing is undertaken at an individual’s own risk.

Similarly, trail biking is also occurring in the Reservation even though it is not allowed. As many trail riding enthusiasts put it, “Since a lot of people are already doing it, why not make it legal and have it be done in a sustainable way on sustainably built trails?” One respondent suggested a bike or multi-use trail along the Ramapo River from Suffern/ Mahwah to Oakland. This would allow access to large unused sections of the park and provide a new major access point from Stag Hill. This would simultaneously relieve overcrowding at the Reservation’s main entrance and potentially help curtail illegal and destructive activities that occur around the Stag Hill area. Illegal dumping (Fig. 20), pollution, poaching, and logging reportedly occur in the Stag Hill section — more than community organizations can address alone — and the County is perceived as turning a blind eye to the problems, lacking either the resources or determination to enforce



Figure 19. Use conflicts emerged from public comments as a significant issue at Ramapo Valley County Reservation—in particular the issue of dogs (running off leash, dog refuse on paths, etc.) and popular but unsanctioned activities such as swimming and trail riding (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 20. Illegal dumping, off-roading, and other human activities have degraded the natural resources at Ramapo Valley County Reservation (Courtesy of CUES).

Several residents expressed deep concern over the amount of off-roading by 4-wheelers, Jeep excursions coming down from Hillburn, and dirt bikers that destroy the natural resources and contribute to a lawless, “Wild West” atmosphere. This situation is challenging for a number of reasons. Many off-roaders reportedly feel an ownership and inter-generational tie to particular sections of the area (“My father rode here, I ride here, and my kids are going to ride here”). One resident reported having a gun pointed at him and being told to leave the area by a territorial 4-wheeler driver. Some residents requested action before these problems grow larger and more difficult to mediate. It was acknowledged that enforcing no off-roading policies requires resources to monitor such a large area as well as logistics to address impounding and removing offending vehicles.

Traffic, Parking & Access

Lack of adequate parking was the most common complaint about the Reservation, especially on weekends (Fig. 21). A variety of park users noted that if they don’t arrive well before noon on weekends, the Reservation is packed, and they can’t find a parking space in the lot or along Skyline Drive. Some respondents called it a “nightmare” on weekends and stated that they go elsewhere because of the inadequate parking. While many called for additional parking spaces that are spread out for convenience and adequacy, others expressed concern that additional spaces would lead to even more visitors, resulting in more overcrowding and wear-and-tear on the trails. An overabundance of people is already reported as diminishing the experience of the park. Some visitors stated that once they got

away from the crowds about a mile into the Reserve, they were able to still experience the “private” enjoyment of nature.

A number of respondents mentioned unsafe traffic conditions at the Reservation parking lot because no left turn is allowed from the northbound side of Route 202. As a result, many people reportedly make illegal left turns or slam on their brakes to stop and turn without warning, creating dangerous situations for other motorists. Comments state that the situation needs to be addressed, whether by making a left turn safe and legal, or by enforcing the no turn rule more effectively. Emergency service responders requested that paths be widened to allow emergency vehicle access to the top of mountains. Currently, an ambulance has limited access and has to wait for a 4-wheeler to arrive in order to continue farther up the mountain. This is problematic given that time is of the essence in a number of medical emergencies.



Figure 21. While many residents called for additional parking spaces at Ramapo Valley County Reservation, others expressed concern that this would lead to more visitors, resulting in more overcrowding (Courtesy of CUES).

Safe and convenient bike access to the Reservation also arose as an important consideration. Cycling would also relieve some of the parking and vehicular traffic issues at the Reservation. Apparently, the Mahwah municipal government has started looking into the possibility of bike trails and would like to promote them as a way for Ramapo College students to access the park and experience nature. It was suggested that such a trail should connect to the train station as well as to the park in order to make non-vehicular transportation more feasible now that the Reservation has become a regional destination. Appropriate infrastructure is needed because presently Route 202 is not configured for riding a bike.



Figure 22. Hiking in Ramapo Valley County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

A variety of comments mentioned access issues in the Bear Swamp area. One commenter indicated that a locked gate and no parking near the Bear Swamp entrance was a problem. Another park visitor mentioned that on some days, there are too many cars along Bear Swamp Road to safely walk there with a child. Also, an increasing number of quads have been driving in that area very fast and very loudly. Another person said they would like to see hunting allowed in the Bear Swamp area.

Recommendations

In addition to considering important concerns and suggestions raised in the Bergen County Parks Master Plan public outreach and the RVCRR Management Plan process, the following issues should be explored and integrated into the Ramapo Anchor Park Master Plan.

Rules & Regulations

The County has enacted rules that particularly apply to the current Ramapo parks – no swimming, no biking, no climbing, no dumping, no dogs off leash. However, these rules are obviously not being followed, and lack of enforcement is contributing to park user conflicts. Existing rules should be evaluated by the County. If the decision is made to keep a rule, then there must be a mechanism included for enforcement. Knowing that there is non-compliance and “looking the other way” is not an acceptable option. At one time, the County employed park rangers in the Ramapo Reservation, and during peak use summer months this position may be necessary to enforce park rules.

If there is indecision about whether a rule should remain, then controlled pilot test projects should be conducted to determine the best outcome for Bergen County and park users. These tests should involve local stakeholders (NGOs, municipalities, outside experts) working with the County to determine the best solutions to reduce user conflicts while meeting the needs of park visitors.

Transportation

To address the parking issue at the Ramapo Reserve lot, we recommend the County investigate various parking management options. Pedestrians and cyclists should be encouraged and supported, thus encouraging physical activity in getting to the park.

Development of appropriate decentralized parking at other access points can help to relieve parking constraints at the Ramapo Reservation lot and encourage access to less heavily visited portions of the Ramapo parks (Fig. 22). These locations should be developed in collaboration with local park users and stakeholders. The hiking and biking communities, in particular, could be great resources working with the County to determine the possibility of multi-use trails built so users will not be in conflict. Partners are also an important part of this effort because new access points must be connected to an existing (or an expanded) trail system, as well as safe parking areas with sufficient capacity.



Figure 23. Darlington County Park offers a number of amenities including water activities on three lakes, picnic areas, multi-use pathways, and a bird and wildlife observation area (Courtesy of CUES).

Concessions

The heavily used Ramapo Reservation hosts people seeking the water of the MacMillan Reservoir and the Oak Pond walking trail. Suggestions for expanding concessions include a new structure that would be a combined comfort station/food concession/store, catering to campers and day trippers to Ramapo.

DARLINGTON COUNTY PARK

Darlington is a 178-acre recreation area situated along Interstate 287; the Darlington Golf Course is located just south of the park. This active recreation park is surrounded by a diverse array of open space about one mile from Ramapo College. Darlington Park is different from other Bergen County parks because access is restricted by fencing, and entrance fees are charged in the summer months. The park offers a number of amenities including water activities on three lakes (Fig. 23), picnic areas, multi-use pathways, and a bird and wildlife observation area. Additionally, the YMCA operates a summer camp in the park.

Public comments

According to public feedback, favorite aspects of Darlington included swimming opportunities, running trails, and “really decent restrooms.” Concerns about the park centered primarily around the lack of adequate parking and heavy use on weekends. One resident noted that the park used

to be wonderful, but there are no longer food and drink concessions. Suggested improvements included: more boating opportunities; additional parking, food/beverage concessions; restrooms; and extending the season the park is open.

Recommendations

Events

In many ways, Darlington is the venue with the most potential for significant enhancements. The best way to begin this process is to examine and re-imagine the food and beverage operation, primarily at the main pavilion building (Fig. 24).

The existing building is worn and in need of renovation, but walking inside is like walking through a time machine into an early sixties family resort. The aged log frame, high ceiling, long ballroom-like design and camp-style windows all add to the charm of the space. A full-service catering facility for special events coupled with a quality quick service food and drink outlet for seasonal operating hours should be created. From dance lessons to swing bands, sweet sixteens to bat mitzvahs, corporate lunches to kids’ “camping” sleepovers, the space could be used for many types of functions. It would need significant investment, but a quality food and beverage operator could reap great rewards from that investment.

We understand the challenges of bringing Darlington back as a significant family destination, but with a long-term plan, significant progress can be made. Here are some thoughts on what the future of Darlington could be:

The main swimming/beach areas are unique. They offer a great deal of opportunity for not only swimming, but also fountain installations, aquatic demonstrations and even a landing area for professional aerial athletes. The area around the main lake can be made into a movie venue where people can watch films from either land or from the water. The lakes are a great place for learn to swim programs.

Investing in a quality sound system for the main areas of the site would enable the County to create an environment welcoming to all — and to create themes for certain events or nights. Creating a permanent or seasonal stage near the main lake would enable programming over the course of the season that targets various demographics. The picnic and playground areas could use sprucing up, but don't need to be fancy or ornate. They just need to be a place where families and friends can gather to get away from the stresses of daily life.

As mentioned above, this is a multi-step process that will take several years to accomplish. But if the first step of upgrading the main building and finding a quality concessionaire is taken in the near term, Darlington will become an important component of a Ramapo Anchor Park complex.

Concessions

Darlington has terrific summer seasonal potential with simultaneous activities on three separate lakes within a naturalized forest. This former country club has the potential to expand programming beyond current offerings. Amenities that can support Darlington activities include:

- A Bike/Surrey/Pedal Car Concession that allows visitors to explore the park
- A Paddle Board Concession for increased water-based activities
- Food Trucks and Kiosks selling cooked food, snacks, drinks, and a few merchandise items related to park activities (goggles, floats, etc.)
- Addition of a catering facility housed in the existing log cabin (after refurbishment)
- Family Drive-In Movie Nights that extend the hours the park is open
- A Bathroom Contribution Program that asks for a small donation to help keep up the quality of the restrooms at the park

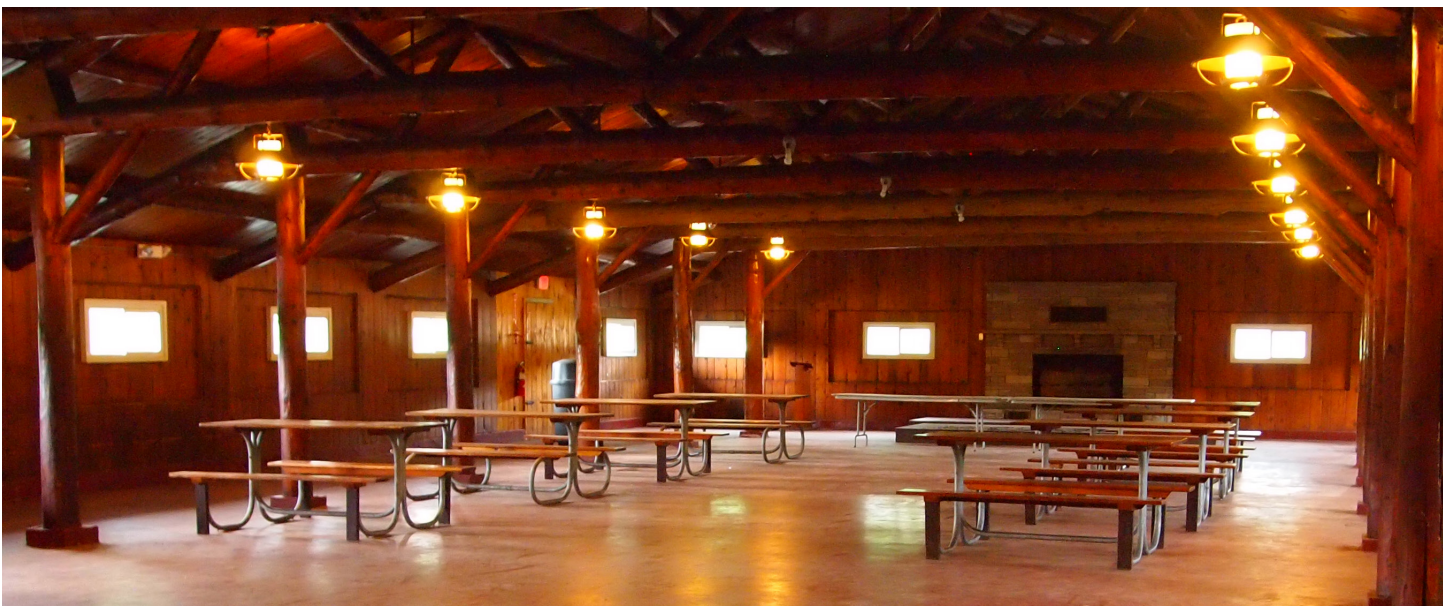


Figure 24. The main building at Darlington County Park has a vintage resort charm and tremendous potential as a vibrant events venue (Courtesy of CUES).

CAMPGAW MOUNTAIN RESERVATION

Although currently treated as its own park, due to its close proximity and complementary nature, Campgaw Mountain should be combined with the Ramapo Valley Reservation as part of the Ramapo Anchor Park complex. Existing Campgaw infrastructure provides a venue for more active recreational activities and events. The County should explore pathway connections between the main Ramapo Reservation areas and Campgaw.

Recommendations

Events

A great opportunity exists at Campgaw for programming to take place during the non-ski season summer months (Fig. 25). The physical layout of the space provides for a natural amphitheater that lends itself to being a concert or festival venue. Ample on-site parking and the ability to shuttle to/from the venue from neighboring park areas (Darlington County Park and Darlington County Golf Course) would support large-scale programming at the site. The lack of a residential population in the immediate vicinity, in addition to some of the existing infrastructure from the seasonal ski operation, makes the space attractive for larger-scale musical festival usage.

The Parks Department should explore outreach to event producers with the goal of partnering on larger-scale public events during the summer months. The track record of similar skiing sites hosting music festivals has been very positive with

noteworthy events taking place at Holiday Valley (Ellicottville Summer Music Festival) in New York, Snowmass (Jazz Aspen Snowmass) in Colorado, and Wanderlust Festival, a traveling event that takes place at Stratton in Vermont, Copper Mountain in Colorado, and Squaw Valley in California.

Concessions

This is a full-scale mountain and forest property that is already home to a popular winter ski and tubing concession and some summer activities such as archery and two disc golf courses. Additional programs at Campgaw can include:

- A Zipline/Treetop Adventure Concession that would include repelling, tree climbing and tree top adventures, rope trails, ziplines, slides, etc. (like The Adventure Park at Long Island (<https://longislandadventurepark.org/>))
- A Trapeze School/tryout facility
- A summer outdoor rock climbing and repelling concession
- A Giant Maze that can excite (and perplex) families and groups of all ages

Other Amenities

Some park users would like a dog park constructed at Campgaw to provide an area where dogs can legally be off leash.



Figure 25. Existing infrastructure at Campgaw Mountain Reservation could provide a venue for more year-round active recreation and events (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 26. In addition to addressing necessary infrastructure improvements, a glamping concession could appeal to a wider public audience (Courtesy of CUES).

CAMP GLEN GRAY

This attractive wilderness with existing camping facilities is the last accessible section of Ramapo State Forest. Friends of Glen Gray (FOGG), the non-profit organization that manages Camp Glen Gray for the County. It is critical that the County consider future management of the Camp Glen Gray property in the event that the relationship with FOGG changes or ends. Capital improvements are needed to maintain and modernize the existing rustic cabins (Fig. 26).

The website asks potential campers to submit a “request” form to reserve a campsite. However, there are no calendars that detail campsite availability. We recommend that the website be modernized to reflect a typical reservation/booking system.

CAMP TAMARACK

This property, currently closed to the public, is indistinguishable from the surrounding State forest. If this park were opened to the public and trails maintained it could be utilized for swimming and a beach in the summer, as well as for day camping.

Recommendations

The County should explore ways to encourage residents to try a camping weekend that could bring new visitors to the wilderness areas of the Ramapos. Hiking clubs such as AMC are now offering guided weekend camping adventures (see <https://www.outdoors.org/outdoor-activities/families/family-adventure-camp>). NY State instituted a “First-time Camper Weekend” in 2017. All available slots sold out and their wait list was filled (see <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/109909.html>).

Camps Tamarack or Todd should also be explored as possible sites for a future Glamping Concession, run by an outside vendor. Glamping provides an “upscale” camping adventure with permanent tent cabins, a communal fire pit/cooking area, and scheduled nighttime activities.



Figure 27. Saddle River County Park is one of the most heavily used Bergen County parks and a favorite among neighborhood residents of all ages, who enjoy it as an extension of their backyards (Courtesy of CUES).

LINEAR PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

The original Bergen County Park Commission's (BCPC) vision for the County park system focused on rivers as linear connectors. Portions of the Saddle River Park were some of the first parks constructed by BCPC. Saddle River County Park, one of the most heavily used County parks, emerged during the Master Plan public outreach efforts as a favorite of residents. This park is a very popular example of a linear suburban park. The success of Saddle River Park challenges us to identify other locations within the County where Linear Parks can be developed. Like Anchor Parks, Linear Parks spanning multiple municipalities, need individually developed Conceptual Master Plans.

SADDLE RIVER COUNTY PARK

Saddle River Park functions as a linear greenway, encompassing nearly 600 acres of land alongside more than five miles of the Saddle River. The mixed use pathway running through a natural and scenic environment is surrounded by residential properties. This greenway system is composed of eight areas interconnected with a multi-use pathway for pedestrians and cyclists. The pathway traverses the diverse towns of Saddle Brook Township, Rochelle Park, Fair Lawn, Paramus, Glen Rock, and Ridgewood. Adjacent to the park is Orchard Hills County Golf Course. The park is largely bordered by single-family housing. In some locations the trail system directly connects with neighborhood sidewalk networks.

The Saddle River Park pathway itself is more than ten miles long, looping down both sides of the Saddle River.

Along the trail, bridges cross the Saddle River connecting its eastern and western banks. Tunnels safely connect areas of the park bisected by major highways and local roadways.

Based on data collected during the VTC in-park intercept survey, a significant majority (75%) of Saddle River Park users travel less than five miles to visit the park, and 6% of park users ride a bicycle to the park. This is twice the proportion of visitors cycling to other Bergen County parks. Saddle River Park users are also more likely to access the park by walking than visitors to other parks. The park attracts regular users who visit at least once a week (81%), and most of these visitors use the park for exercise (75%). Bike users consider the trail their favorite aspect of the park with one respondent stating, "We love that our favorite parks are connected by a safe biking trail. We hope more parks are linked to this Saddle River biking trail."

The park is a favorite of Bergen County residents, and offers activities for people of all ages (Fig. 27). Gradually rising and falling, the slope of the multi-use path is never extreme, and benches line the path at close intervals. Joggers, walkers, bikers, and rollerbladers are constantly using the pathway. Some visitors use the lakes for fishing, model boating, and in the winter, ice skating. There are several well maintained playgrounds for young children. Ice cream trucks are commonly found in several of the parking lots during the summer. There are areas for grilling, several pavilions with seating, and restrooms. Heavy usage and public appreciation of the park gives support for continuing the expansion of park access into the surrounding communities.

Public Comment

Many residents mentioned the safe pathway for walking, running and biking (Fig. 28). The miles of continuous path were noted as a positive amenity that allows for outdoor experiences in a varied landscape without vehicular traffic conflicts. The opportunity to enjoy nature, views of the water and birds in the park is very popular. The park was praised as being peaceful and calming—a place to escape—and a wonderful place to enjoy picnics and family time. The Saddle Brook section was noted for having such “pristine” and “delightful” qualities that it has become a destination for visitors from Passaic County.

The cricket field was described as an excellent facility. A number of respondents were happy that the park doesn’t feel overcrowded; conversely, others claimed that the park was too crowded. Several people praised the park and its paths as “incredibly” clean and very well maintained, allowing residents to go walking on the same day after a storm.

In addition to crowded pathways, challenges related to parking accessibility, particularly on the weekends, were commonly mentioned. Many people said there is not enough parking, particularly on weekends in lots at Glen Rock, Otto Pehle, and Rochelle Park. Parking issues could be lessened by addressing other comments, such as one respondent who noted that Saddle River Park provides “a great place for a long walk or bike ride without car traffic/conflicts, but I have to drive to get to that experience.” Saddle River Park bikers don’t like to bike on the streets because of car conflicts. Many young families do not feel safe cycling to the park, so they put bikes on the car and then drive to the park. Several commenters requested safe bicycle connections between the parks and local downtowns (see Appendix 9.5C for specific traffic recommendations for the various sections of the park).

By far the most expressed Saddle River Park concern was the disrepair of the Ridgewood Duck Pond. Many people mentioned the Duck Pond as their favorite park. With a sense of nostalgia, these respondents shared happy childhood memories and the hope to pass this experience on to their own children. However, recurring concerns were raised about this popular destination. The deep sentimental attachments to this site are mixed with sadness at the Duck Pond’s present condition. Descriptions of the pond’s current state included terms like “unattractive,” “unsightly,” and a space in need of immediate attention. The water levels have dropped, and the resulting pond is dirty, smells, and experiences algal blooms

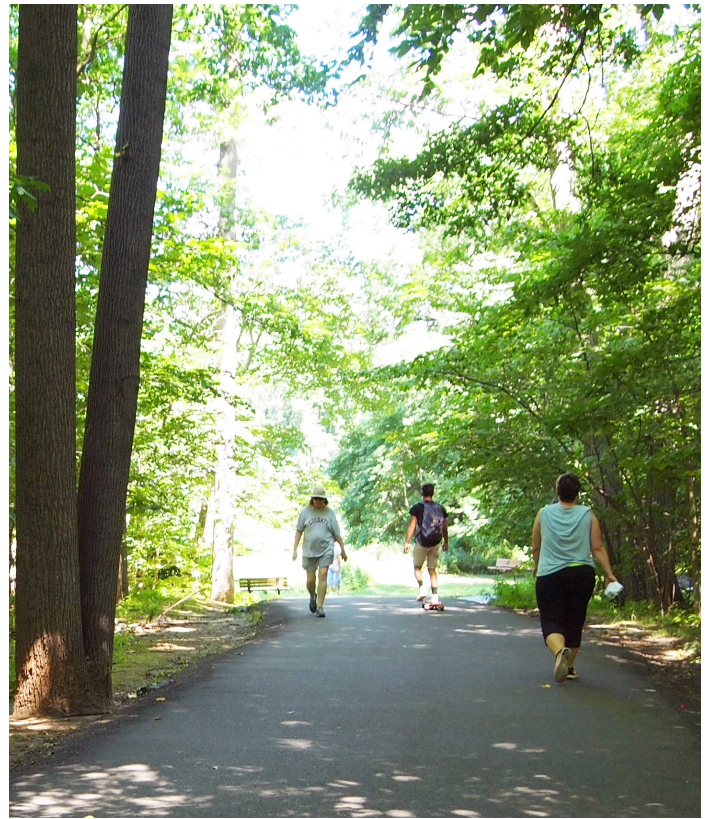


Figure 28. Many residents mentioned the value of continuous paths in Saddle River County Park that allow them to walk, bike, jog and rollerblade through a pleasant outdoor environment (Courtesy of CUES).

and fish kills. There is little to no grass left around the pond, so the park is dusty in summer and muddy after rainstorms. The addition of the dog park has apparently created “a smelly, dirty mess.” Some called the park an “eyesore” for people entering the town of Ridgewood. Many noted how many years the poor condition of the Duck Pond has dragged on, to the point that many people have stopped visiting. The County is perceived as botching a pond re-lining years ago and doing essentially nothing to resolve the problems since this initiative. The perceptions of neglect came across as a strong factor that negatively affects the public perception of County competence in maintaining parks.

Once in the park, the challenge is how to accommodate cyclists and pedestrians on the same pathway. In some sections the pathway narrows to eight feet. This width creates problems as bikers and walkers compete for space (Fig. 29-30). Some cyclists speed, endangering pedestrians in their path, while not all pedestrians respond to warnings from cyclists that they are passing on the left.

There is a desire to see the existing amenities better maintained. For example, one resident related happy memories of walking all the way around the lake in the Otto C. Pehle section. Now, “all the charm is gone,” because no one can get near the riverbanks and the wonderful views of the water, formerly the backdrop of many wedding pictures. Also, the benches are blocked by overgrown vegetation.

Several individuals suggested incorporating the old Paterson to Suffern trolley line (now a PSE&G right-of-way) into the park system to connect downtown Glen Rock and other towns to the bike path system. This would allow more families to access the park without using a car. This unused trolley line is reportedly already used by many pedestrians and dog walkers. Connecting bike paths to other parks and areas (e.g. to the center of Glen Rock) would allow people to bike and walk from the park to town for dining, shopping, etc.

Recommendations

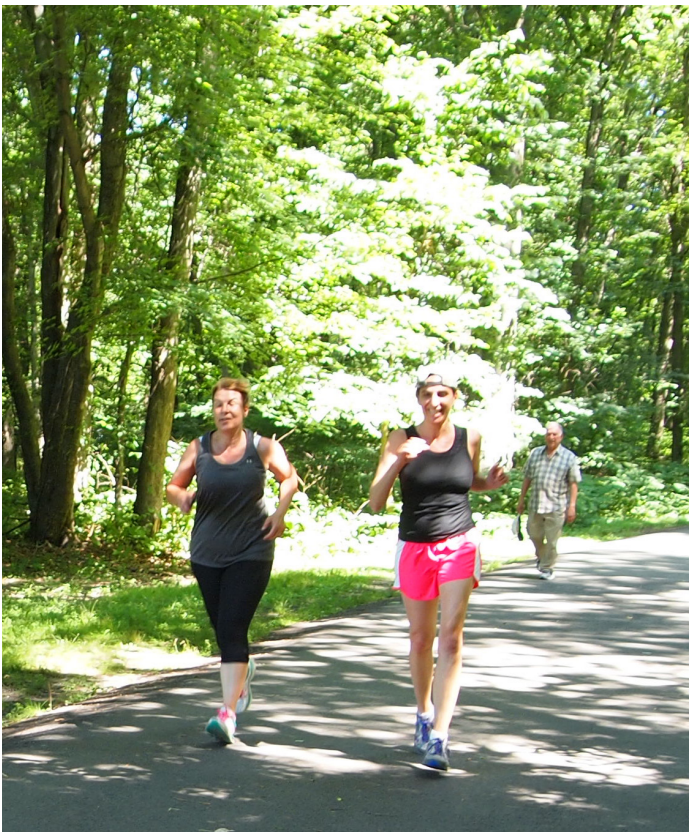
It is imperative that the County address the problems at high profile venues such as the Ridgewood Duck Pond (Fig. 31). When a very visible property is not maintained at the highest level, the community perception of County competence

is negatively affected. A solution needs to be devised that will return the higher water levels, and a system(s) must be installed that will minimize eutrophication in the pond. Geese control is also needed and native vegetation needs to be replanted.

Access & Transportation

Heavy usage and public appreciation of the park supports enhancing park access to the surrounding communities. There are a number of opportunities to increase pedestrian and cyclist entrances into the park (see Saddle River exploration in this chapter). A particularly exciting addition would be on Paramus Road, where a small pocket park entrance could be located next to an existing public bus stop across the street from a historic property.

There is very strong resident support for adding bike lanes to increase local bike connectivity into the park. However, increased cyclist use of the park requires a pathway that can accommodate both bikers and walkers safely. The entire length of the Saddle River Park pathway needs to be a minimum of twelve feet wide. In sections where it is now narrower (eight to ten feet), the path needs to be widened with the same asphalt material. If this is not feasible due to proximity to the Saddle



Figures 29 & 30. Public comments indicate that there are safety concerns about cyclists and pedestrians sharing paths within the park, particularly in areas where the path narrows (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 31. Residents' dismay at the current state of the cherished Ridgewood Duck Pond was palpable in public comments, and needs to be addressed (Courtesy of CUES).

River, crushed stone might be installed on one or both edges for use by walkers. The pathway needs visible designations that define specific lanes for cyclists and for walkers (Fig. 32).

Events & Concessions

From an events standpoint, Saddle River County Park is most suitable for smaller community events (i.e., movie series, exercise stations, art installations, etc.) that provide local user experiences. Amenities potentially include:

- a bike/surrey/pedal car concession that allows visitors to explore the parks without having to bring their own bikes
- a bike repair facility that also provides a cold and hot beverage station
- permanent and/or rotating giant sculpture installations
- a food kiosk with terrace and view of the river

- food trucks and kiosks selling cooked food, snacks, drinks, and a few merchandise items that support park activities. Different locations should be tested to determine optimal placement

- fitness events and organized races

Ecology

The ecological health of the river needs to be addressed to protect and enhance this key feature of the park. In particular, the conceptual Master Plan should include an Adaptive Habitat and Stormwater Management Plan (in collaboration with the municipalities) that addresses: reduction of direct discharges into the river; discouraging further development along the river; and decreasing the amount of impermeable surfaces in the floodplain. In addition, efforts should be made to increase the size and ecological connectivity of the park, including developing a program to develop aquatic resource buffers. Finally, steps to improve the health of wooded areas would involve: increasing the age and species diversity of trees; developing the understory in appropriate areas; determining where mowing could be reduced or

eliminated around trees; developing a deer management program to allow for forest regeneration; removing invasive species; and protecting and enhancing vernal pools.

EXPLORATIONS: SADDLE RIVER CONNECTIVITY

These suggested improvements would continue to modernize one of the original Bergen County Park properties. This exploration evaluates the current accessibility of the park and creates a vision for the future (Fig. 33).

Interventions

Due to the heavy traffic on the multi-use pathway, bikers and walkers are often in competition for space, particularly on the eight foot wide sections. To remedy this potentially dangerous situation, four feet should be added to increase the width of the path. Should other Linear Parks be designed, the bike and pedestrian path should be a minimum of twelve feet wide with designated separate lanes for walkers and cyclists (Fig. 32).

Many entrances are located at the end of residential streets, and have pedestrian-created walking paths that connect to Saddle River Pathway. Short term solutions involve the addition of gravel to these worn desire paths in order to create a more visual connection, while increasing pedestrian safety under rain and snow conditions.

In general, Saddle River Park is well connected to several neighborhoods. Expanding accessibility of the park should include additional connectivity through the addition of new entrances and paths (Figs. 34-37) to the eastern side of

the park, which currently has fewer entrances. On Paramus Road, which runs parallel to Saddle River Park on the east, there may be areas to add entrances. There are locations adjacent to the park that are utility easements. These areas are forested and could be areas for small connecting trails to Saddle River Pathway.

A field survey of all entrances (formal and informal paths) into Saddle River Park were evaluated with respect to: connection to sidewalks, location of a nearby crosswalk, entrance and wayfarer signage. Entrances that met all these criteria were labeled “Adequate” (Fig. 33). Improvements needed are also indicated with the icons on this map.

There is an inconsistency in the language of Saddle River Park signs, and a complete void of any signage at many park entrances (Fig. 38-40). Simple interventions include adding new iconic signs that have visual uniformity to reinforce the park’s identity and welcome visitors at the entrances.

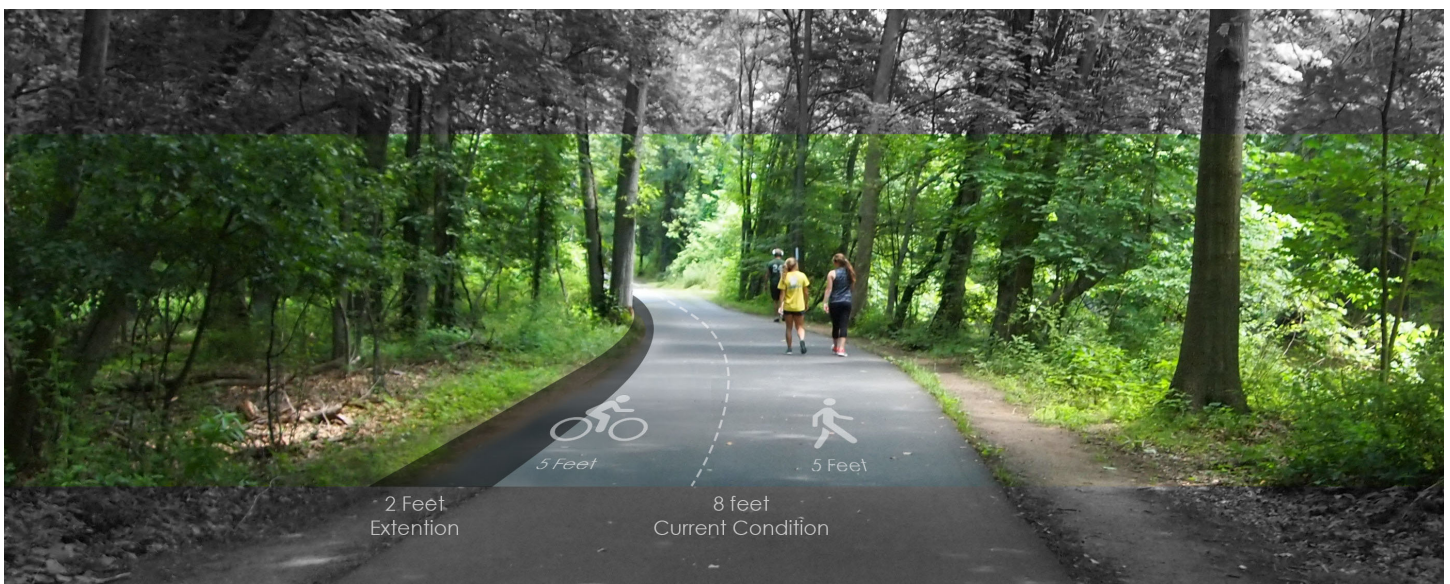


Figure 32. Expansion of Saddle River's paths, where appropriate, and separation of bikes and pedestrians (Courtesy of CUES).

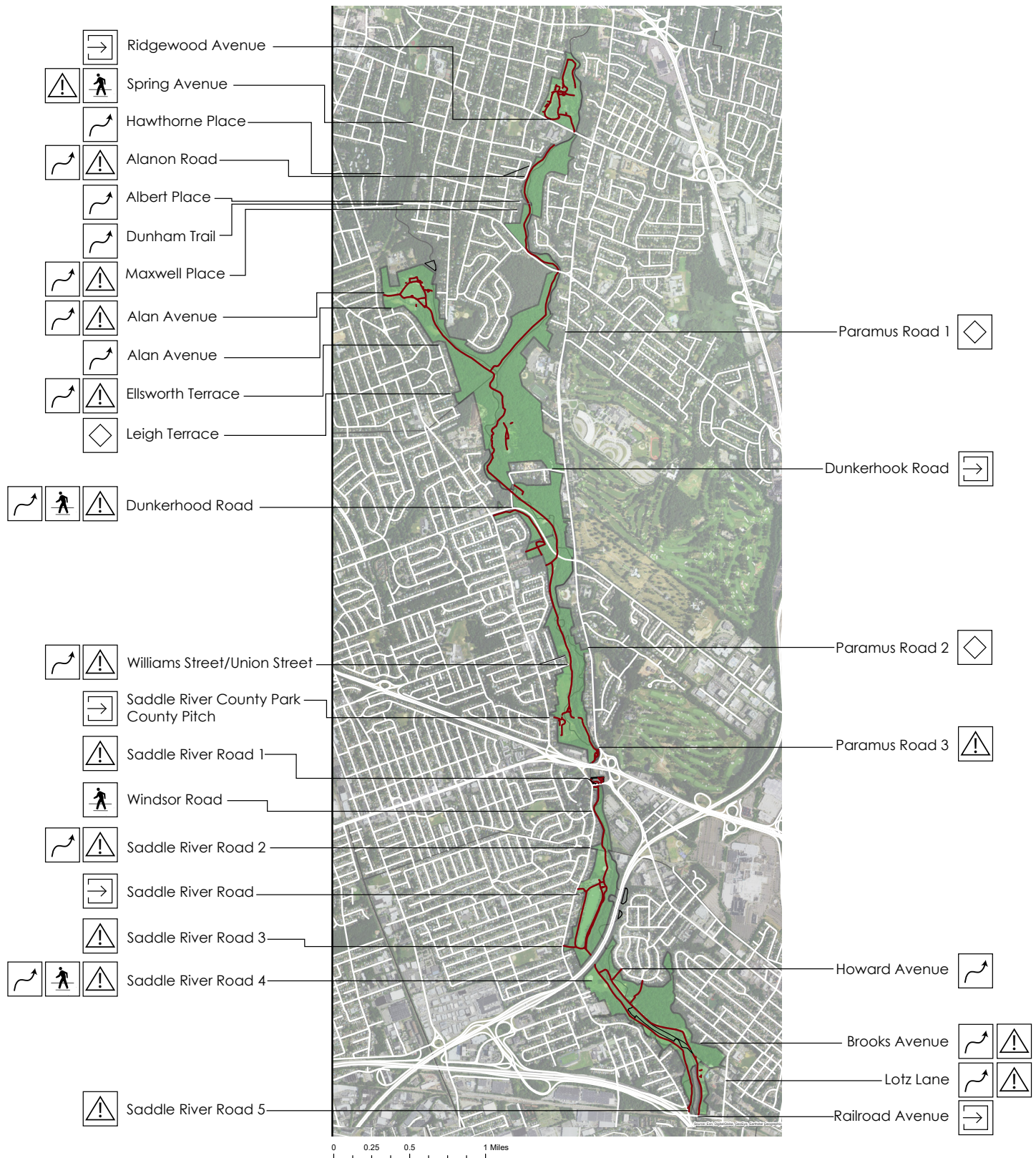


Figure 33. Increasing Saddle River Connectivity (Courtesy of CUES).

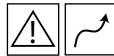
Potential Crosswalks, & Pathways

SPRING AVE. - RIDGEWOOD



- A crosswalk should be added to increase pedestrian safety.
- Signs should be closer to the street.

ALAN AVE. - GLEN ROCK

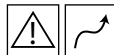


- The sidewalk leads to Saddle River Park.
- A gravel path and a sign at the entrance are needed.



DUNKER HOOK RD. - PARAMUS

- A crosswalk and sign are needed.
- The sidewalk ends and should continue to the park.



WILLIAMS/UNION ST. - FAIR LAWN

- A path is needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- Signs are needed.



WINDSOR RD. - PARAMUS

- A crosswalk and sign are needed.
- A path is needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- The entrance next to the car guard needs to be widened.



Figure 34. Worn paths made to connect to Saddle River Pathway (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 35. Potential for simple gravel paths connecting to Saddle River Pathway (Courtesy of CUES).

SADDLE RIVER RD. 2 - FAIR LAWN



- A path is needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- Signs are needed.

SADDLE RIVER RD. 4 - SADDLE BROOK



- A path is needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- Signs are needed.
- A sidewalk is needed.

ALANON RD. - RIDGEWOOD



- Paths are needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- Signs should be more visible from the street.

ALBERT/MAXWELL PLACE - RIDGEWOOD



- Albert Place ends with a gate that blocks the connection to Saddle River Pathway.
- Paths are needed to connect to Saddle River Pathway.
- Signs are needed.

HOWARD AVE. - ROCHELLE PARK



- Needs a walkway on the side of the parking lot that connects to Saddle River Pathway.



LOTZ LANE - ROCHELLE PARK

- Needs a sign and pedestrian path to connect to sidewalk.



Figure 36. Disconnected pathway at Dunker Hook Rd & Century Rd (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 37. Potential crosswalk to connect Saddle River Pathway (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 43. A new park entrance via a bridge from the eastern shore would begin the process of connecting both sides of the Hackensack River into a future Linear Park. (Courtesy of CUES).

HACKENSACK RIVER COUNTY PARK

Hackensack River County Park, located on the western banks of the Hackensack River next to Route 4 in the City of Hackensack is six miles from the George Washington Bridge. It comprises approximately thirty acres and is one half mile in length. The park does not directly border any residential properties, and shares its entire eastern border with the Hackensack River. Its southern border abuts Route 4 and its western border is a large shopping mall parking deck.

Public Comment

Positive comments about this park included “fabulous views of nature/wildlife,” and relaxing passive use along the handicapped-accessible path. Some noted the park’s importance as wildlife habitat and the sense of “solace and privacy” it affords. However, some comments identified it as “shamefully unkempt” and a great potential resource languishing in “gross disrepair.” Public suggestions for improvement beyond general maintenance centered on expansion of the trail network: longer and better bike paths and additional walking paths.

Recommendations

A bridge entrance from the eastern bank of the Hackensack River would re-orient this park (Fig. 43), placing the shopping center and its parking deck at the back of the site, rather than at the entrance. With an entrance from the eastern bank of the river, this park could become an important future Linear Park entrance and a part of a future Hackensack River Park expansion. This park has the potential for development as a Blueway Trail to access the reaches of the Hackensack River below the Oradell Dam.

HACKENSACK RIVER PATHWAY

Public Comment

Adopting environmentally friendly maintenance strategies was a main concern for this park. Another comment requested keeping paths as natural dirt instead of gravel.

Recommendations

Constrained by an active train line on one side and residential properties on the other, this site has little potential for programming or public events, but could become a connector to a future Hackensack River Linear Park.

HACKENSACK WATER WORKS/VAN BUSKIRK ISLAND

Public Comment

Many comments referred to the multiple decades that have elapsed without the County completing a redevelopment plan for the iconic Water Works (Fig. 44). Residents emphasized the desire for restoration and adaptive re-use of this historic property before it falls into greater and more expensive disrepair. Suggestions for potential uses include: adding a boat/ kayak launch; installing walking trails so visitors can experience nature; adding signage and historical interpretation; and adding biking trails.

Recommendations

Incorporating food/beverage amenities (café, brew pub, etc. within the industrial architecture) and other programs and concessions would allow use of the building as a community space. Start-up entrepreneurship opportunities were mentioned, with a recommendation that a portion of profits go towards property upkeep. However, local stormwater management concerns were also expressed. There is substantial support for improvements to this property and partnership with the County from members of the public as well as the Oradell municipal government. With this in mind, and earlier proposals for re-use already in existence, this site needs to be re-developed with the Water Works as the core element of the future Hackensack River linear park.



Figure 44. Many public comments emphasized adaptive re-use of the iconic Hackensack Waterworks. This property has tremendous potential as a vibrant core element in a linear Hackensack River park network (Courtesy of Michelle Lederer).

HISTORIC NEW BRIDGE LANDING

It is important to note that this State Park operates under a unique management agreement between Bergen County, which is responsible for maintaining the historic Campbell Christie building, the State of New Jersey, the Historic New Bridge Landing State Park Commission, and the Bergen County Historical Society (an NGO). Given the historical significance and ownership complexity of this site, collaborations between the State, County and NGO are an important aspect.

Public Comment

Public feedback related to Historic New Bridge Landing was positive, calling the site a historic gem (Fig. 45). It was frequently identified as an iconic element of Bergen County due to its historical significance. The historic sandstone buildings were also popular, and the efforts of the volunteers to save, and teach the public about, the County's historic treasures were commended.

Suggestions for improvements were related to the historic aspects, which the County does not control. Recommendations include providing funding for a museum, open access at all times (instead of curtailed open hours), construction of bathrooms, and expanding programs. The addition of bathrooms was requested, as was protection of the sandstone buildings on site as they are “one of the most unique American architectural styles.”



Figure 45. Historic New Bridge Landing architecture (Courtesy of CUES).

LOCAL PARK RECOMMENDATIONS

County-owned Local Parks have a wide variety of forms and provide a diversity of recreational opportunities and Open Space. These parks complement municipal holdings and help to expand the overall Bergen County Open Space network. Local parks are heavily used by residents living in the municipality(s) where these properties are located. An argument might be made that these smaller parks can be managed equally successfully by municipal governments, supported by funds from the Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund. Because these properties are important local amenities, it is important that municipal leaders and the Bergen County Parks Department work closely together to provide amenities and programs that complement both municipal and County park offerings.

Local parks draw visitors close to home, rather than on a regional scale, and do not have the capacity to host larger events. Many offer a range of passive and active recreational experiences, while others have a special use or a distinct place in the cultural and historic narrative of Bergen County. Specific comments from local residents about each park are included in Appendix 9.2.

ARTESIAN FIELDS

Significant County funds were invested in the park to create a public pathway. However, there exists the potential to consider other improvements for this Local Park. Located in close proximity to major highways and with three NJ Transit bus lines that go through the park, Artesian Fields has great potential for easy access by a wide variety of residents.

Public Comment

Public outreach revealed that, while residents are grateful this property has been preserved from development (Fig. 46), they would like to see better maintenance and enhancements to provide more amenities for local residents. Suggestions for enhancements generally revolved around making the park feel safer by reducing the sense of isolation and darkness, and having it function as a multi-use neighborhood park, especially with child-friendly recreation. Options mentioned included: providing a welcoming entrance, adding a water feature, adding soccer fields, making a community swim club, developing an outdoor education classroom, building a local dog park, and/or children's playground. The idea of lighted walking trails frequently arose.



Figure 46. Artesian Fields County Park has great potential for enhanced public enjoyment (Courtesy of CUES).

A reoccurring concern revolved around potholes in the parking lot next to Gilbert Avenue School. These were perceived as dangerous for driving and walking, particularly for children or those with visual impairments. Other maintenance issues included: addressing damaged fencing, removing downed/leaning trees that pose a danger to pedestrians, and putting a stop to Gilbert Avenue residents dumping garden waste on the premises.

Recommendations

Connections to existing ball fields would enhance the use and enjoyment of this local park. The opportunity to connect to school-owned property between the park and the Passaic River merits further investigation. This potential connector would create a contiguous, multi-use greenway through the borough that includes nature, passive, and active recreation opportunities. Designing and adding a public gathering space with seating and food concession amenities should also be explored.



Figure 47. Baylor Massacre Burial Site (Courtesy of CUES).

BAYLOR MASSACRE BURIAL SITE

Although many residents proposed a more robust celebration of Bergen County history in the parks, the only comment made specifically about Baylor Massacre Burial Site remarked on its “awesome Revolutionary War history” (Fig. 47). The site has great historic interest but offers no apparent potential for expanded amenities.

BELMONT HILL COUNTY PARK

Belmont Hill’s location and views make it a special place in Bergen County.

Public Comment

The sole public comment specifically about Belmont Hill indicated a desire for more food/beverage options than the ice cream trucks that stop by during summer, and perhaps an increase in monitoring to prevent/remediate graffiti.

Recommendations

The County should investigate partnerships with a non-profit (e.g. Master Gardeners, a garden club) to restore the historic rose gardens.

BORG’S WOODS

This local Nature Park consists of a forested area surrounded by residential housing.

Public Comment

There was not a lot of public input about this property, but comments about it were positive —“a lovely treasure,” “magical,” and “incredible.” It clearly provides a nature

experience in spite of being surrounded by residential development. This property gives suburban residents the rare feeling of exploring the woods that so many enjoyed as children. Some residents suggested environmentally friendly maintenance practices and light enhancements like a walking path.

Recommendations

Improved access (e.g. paths), signage at entrances, and waste management should be addressed, but the overall character of the naturalized woods retained.

CAMP MERRITT MEMORIAL MONUMENT

War memorial monument at the intersection of two County roadways.

Public Comment

Public comments about the memorial noted this site commemorates interesting history, but that it is underappreciated and needs enhancements (e.g. signage) that convey its significance and unique character. As one resident wrote, “Why the heck is Camp Merritt so bare? This was a MAJOR place and no one has any real sense of it.”

Recommendations

Given the site’s constraints (it currently functions as a roundabout connecting two major County roadways), the County needs to evaluate whether this site could be better maintained in collaboration with a historic non-profit group.

CHERRY BROOK WOODS

There was no specific public feedback about this property.

Recommendations

The site is an easement, given from Suez Water to Bergen County that protects drinking water sources. Providing better access at entrances and installing a path would facilitate greater public use.

DAHNERT'S LAKE COUNTY PARK

Public Comment

There was not a lot of public feedback about this park. Ice skating on the lake was a favorite activity in years past, and some people wished skating in winter could resume. One resident felt the park was losing its “natural” character to overdevelopment due to installation of bocce courts and rocks added around the lake (Fig. 48). Suggested amenities included food/ beverage opportunities (beyond ice cream trucks in the summer), boating, and a dog park potentially located by the roller rink.

Recommendations

Overall, Dahnert's Lake offers amenities appealing to children and the park is heavily used. With a number of cultural community services nearby (library, senior center), the park has opportunities for a vibrant role in the downtown area with more focus on child- and family-oriented amenities. Potential additions could include a paddleboat rental and a food concession, comfort station.

GARRETSON FORGE AND FARM

This historic site offers both attractive indoor and outdoor space, as well as interesting exhibits. The farm building, barn, machines and gardens are picturesque and well suited to a variety of activities.

Public Comment

Garretson Farm comments call it a wonderful, but “neglected gem” of historical importance, with great potential. Efforts by the dedicated volunteers were frequently mentioned, and there was praise for the “wonderful historic details” and the value of the site's function as a living farm.

Public suggestions for improvement included assisting volunteers in undertaking repairs and maintenance (including repairing leaks in the greenhouse), more effective communications to make the public aware of the “amazing programs” and “nice festivals,” as well as adding improved signage more visible from the road. One comment suggested adding a farmer's market or healthy food options on weekends; another suggested that the County offer manure from the zoo to Garretson for re-use as garden fertilizer.

Recommendations

Garretson Farm has particular potential as an event venue for private celebrations (e.g. weddings) and for community gatherings. The gardens lend this site to Farm- to-Table events.



Figure 48. Dahnert's Lake County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

GETHSEMANE CEMETERY

The limited feedback about this park noted the “incredible African American culture” and suggested expansion of small public open spaces like Gethsemane.

Recommendations

Conditions observed during the inventory visit suggest there is soil erosion occurring and lawn maintenance is required (Fig. 49).

JAMES A. MCFaul ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER

The James A. McFaul Environmental Center is fondly remembered for its nature programs enjoyed by the children of Bergen County.

Public Comment

According to public feedback, favorite aspects of this site include children enjoying the animals, good birding/nature opportunities, boardwalk access, and good restrooms. Suggestions for improvement generally revolved around maintenance (Fig. 50): the main building is in need of renovation, some exhibits need updating, and trees and paths need maintenance. Other recommendations included extending summer open hours into the evening. There were questions about initiating a wildlife rescue and rehabilitation facility for residents who find injured wildlife.

Recommendations

This facility could potentially become the hub for Bergen County environmental education and outreach, similar to the Meadowlands Environmental Center or the Essex County Environment Center. To achieve a prominent status as a curriculum extension of classroom science initiatives, a partnership with an institution of higher education is recommended. With an experienced team of educators and the use of the McFaul Environmental Center as a classroom, awareness of Bergen County’s natural resources can be enhanced, and communities can be helped to recognize critical environmental issues that affect the region. Such a partnership would also position the County to apply for environmental education grants to fund extended environmental center activities and programs.



Figure 49. Possible soil erosion conditions should be addressed at the historic Gethsemane Cemetery (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 50. Bird enclosure at the James A. McFaul Environmental Center (Courtesy of CUES).



Figure 51. Fishing at Pascack Brook County Park (Courtesy of CUES).

OVERBROOK COUNTY PARK

This 3-acre strip of land in Westwood is currently a mowed space between Westwood Ave. and the Pascack Brook, which is stocked with trout by the State of NJ. This site has particular potential for incorporating a long-grass meadow and providing critical habitat for meadow species.

PASCACK BROOK COUNTY PARK

Pascack Brook County Park is centrally located in northern Bergen County, less than four miles from the New York State border. Pascack Brook runs through the center of the park, connecting Woodcliff Lake to the Oradell Reservoir south of the park. The northern part of Pascack Brook Park is located within River Vale Township and the southern part is located in the Borough of Westwood. The municipal Westvale Park makes up Pascack Brook's western border and is connected via a multiuse trail.

Public Comment

The public feedback indicates high use of the paths in this park for walking and enjoying nature, particularly the multi-purpose path between Pascack Brook and Westvale Park in Westwood. Walking through the woods, observing wildlife, and enjoying the view of the pond and brook are favorite activities (Fig. 51). One respondent praised the County's partnership with the town of Westwood. This partnership was held up as a model for Open Space collaboration between Bergen County and municipal governments to enhance public parkland and create more walkable communities.

Public suggestions for path enhancement included completing the second phase of the path, "better" and longer paths within the park, and expanding the walking path along the Hackensack River. Many commenters recommended fixing/updating the tennis courts before their condition deteriorates. Additional comments included a request for an outdoor fitness area, updating of bathrooms, adding lighting, and facilitating more use for cricket. Apparently, other athletic facilities at the park are underused (e.g. softball fields) due to drainage problems.

Recommendations

The County should explore concentrating parking at the entrance, removing excessive roadway, and developing a more pedestrian-oriented circulation. Future efforts should also include meadow maintenance. Given the similarity in layout, challenges and opportunities, and proximity of Pascack Brook County Park and Wood Dale County Park (a five minute car ride away, in the long run one park could

focus on a very child-friendly orientation, while the other could focus on adult recreation amenities.

Potential additional amenities could include: food trucks; seasonal festivals, such as summer dances, Halloween contests, a winter carnival, spring/summer festivals, and a skate park along with a small beverage concession.

RIVERSIDE COUNTY PARK NORTH & SOUTH

Riverside County Park—North is a thirty seven acre park located in Lyndhurst, NJ. Its eastern side is bounded by a relatively dense single-family residential area. The park is characterized by a large wooded area on its eastern edge and views of the Passaic to the west. Amenities include baseball fields, tennis courts, an exercise station, and several picnic areas.

Riverside County Park—South is a forty eight acre park located in Lyndhurst and North Arlington, NJ, just one half mile south of Riverside North. It is bounded in the east by relatively dense single- and multi-family housing, as well as a variety of commercial properties, including auto repair shops, restaurants and gyms. The Passaic River forms the western boundary. The park is characterized by several active recreation areas (Fig. 52) including a football and track field, five baseball fields, five tennis courts, and two soccer fields. It also offers multiple picnic tables, seating areas, and views of the Passaic River.

Public Comment

Riverside County Park was praised for its birding—neotropical migrants have been seen in the several stands of trees during the spring migration. On the negative side, one response noted that the restrooms are often locked and the concession is usually closed.

Recommendations

The proximity of these two parks presents the opportunity to explore linking parklands along the Passaic River. However, the one half mile separating the two properties is completely developed, with 100% impervious surfaces down to the river. An in depth exploration of connection options is needed (see Passaic River discussion in Chapter 7) to determine the future feasibility of creating a new Linear Park.

Due to the high urban density surrounding the park, crosswalks, entrances, and pathways that support walking and cycling should be encouraged/expanded (see Appendix 9.5C for



Figure 52. Riverside County Parks North and South offer many opportunities for athletic recreation (Courtesy of CUES).

specific transportation and traffic recommendations).

Concessions already located in the parks should be reviewed to determine if they are meeting the needs of the public. The Riverside County Parks could potentially support amenities such as: seasonal festivals, summer dances, Halloween contests, a winter carnival, spring/summer festivals; and a winter ice rink paired with a hot beverage vendor. A re-vamped/combined tennis facility that would create one large six court tennis facility on the south side of the park should be explored. After completion of the sediment environmental cleanup, a kayak/canoe/paddleboat vendor could be a desirable park amenity.

Ecology

Although the public must be protected from contact with contaminated river sediments, recommended actions to manage stormwater and construct green infrastructure buffers that protect the river (see Chapter 6.2) should be included in the Conceptual Master Plan for a Passaic River Linear County Park.

SADDLE RIDGE RIDING CENTER

One comment praised the Saddle Ridge Riding Center as an “awesome venue” to experience an “alternative sport” (Fig. 53). Another visitor suggested the County needs to better publicize horseback riding opportunities around the County. This site is operated as a private concession.



Figure 53. Horseback riding provides a pleasant outdoor “alternative sport” for many Bergen County residents (Courtesy of CUES).

SAMUEL NELKIN COUNTY PARK

Public Comment

Only three individuals specifically mentioned Samuel Nelkin County Park. The first suggested working on the natural springs on the hill to incorporate a water feature. The second mentioned that crossing Patterson Avenue to enter the park was difficult without a crosswalk. The third, after praising the value of parkland as a nature haven, particularly for children, in an “overbuilt” area, expressed deep concern that traffic from Jersey Development Street, LLC’s proposed condo complex might drive through the park, posing a potential safety issue for children at play.

Recommendations

The County should investigate any effects of the adjacent development on the park access. Ways for Samuel Nelkin to expand concession and program amenities include: a

community dance/picnic co-sponsored by the Bergen County Parks and the town of Wallington and food trucks (if successful, perhaps turning into a kiosk) selling cooked foods, snacks and drinks.

WOOD DALE COUNTY PARK

Wood Dale County Park comprises several distinct areas encompassing 118 acres of land across three municipalities. The main part of the park is divided between the municipalities of Park Ridge and Woodcliff Lake. This area contains a half-mile pathway, a pond, vehicular parking, a playground, and a dog park. The rest of the park is divided between the municipalities of Woodcliff Lake and Hillsdale. This part of the park includes some activity areas, but mainly consists of forested areas and wetlands. Centennial Field provides baseball and soccer fields as well as vehicular parking. There are no internal paths connecting the various areas of the park. A number of municipal parks are located just south of the park in the Borough of Hillsdale.

Public Comment

Wood Dale County Park was identified by a number of users as their favorite County park. The park serves as a safe and quiet place (particularly good for walking). The playground was mentioned as a preferred amenity.

Almost a third of the comments related to a need for improvements to the tennis courts. The courts are not adequately maintained and could benefit from updates such as repairing or replacing the lights (Fig. 54). Similar to those at Pascack Brook County Park, the tennis courts at Wood Dale are reportedly still fixable at this time if action is taken before they deteriorate any further.

Other suggestions for enhancements included: installing a running path so runners don’t have to use the road, adding updated restrooms (particularly near the playground), adding an updated play space, and providing better food concessions and food trucks. Wood Dale reportedly has no recycling containers for visitors to use, so one park user suggested either adding recycling containers or posting a sign by garbage cans to inform visitors to carry in/out.

One resident stated that lack of sidewalks make it impossible for them to bike, walk their dog, or push a baby stroller to the park even though they live nearby. Another noted that the “tremendous discrepancy” between the two parking areas at Wood Dale needs to be addressed: one area was repaved



Figure 54. Wood Dale County Park needs tennis court updates (e.g. replace lights) and improved maintenance. Players suggested that County park courts need repair now at lower expense, rather waiting until they require complete replacement at much higher cost (Courtesy of CUES).

and repainted, while the other has potholes and no lines to delineate parking spots.

Recommendations

The County should concentrate parking at the entrance, remove excessive paved road, and install a running path. Given the similarity in layout, challenges and opportunities, and proximity of Pascack Brook County Park and Wood Dale County Park (a five minute car ride apart), in the long run one park could focus on a more child-friendly orientation, while the other focuses on adult recreation.

WORTENDYKE BARN

Public Comment

This historic site was recommended by members of the public as a wonderful venue for music and culture that is unfortunately only open sporadically. Suggestions for improvement included more open hours and historic lectures. More concerts were also suggested that are appropriate with the low-key setting and in harmony with the historic atmosphere.

Recommendations

This picturesque site has potential for more public enjoyment. In addition to small events (bluegrass music series, children's movies in the park, etc.), Wortendyke could potentially provide: an event space that can be rented for private celebrations; an artisan market that attracts craftsmen and artists within the North Jersey/ New York region; and a community event space.