

WILLIAMSON COUNTY

COMPREHENSIVE PARKS MASTER PLAN

2018



DRAFT

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2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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The following individuals are recognized for their significant contributions to the preparation of this Parks Master Plan:

COMMISSIONERS COURT

The Honorable Dan Gattis, County Judge

The Honorable Terry Cook, Commissioner Precinct One

The Honorable Cynthia Long, Commissioner Precinct Two

The Honorable Valerie Covey, Commissioner Precinct Three

The Honorable Larry Madsen, Commissioner Precinct Four

COUNTY STAFF

Randy Bell, Parks Director

Michael Young, Assistant Parks Director and Volunteer Coordinator

USER GROUPS

Good Water Master Naturalists

Sun City Hiking Club

Native Plant Society of Texas, Williamson County Chapter

Georgetown Running Club

Austin Ridge Riders

Williamson County Conservation Foundation

HALFF STAFF

Matt Bucchin, AICP, LEED Green Associate, Principal in Charge

Jordan Maddox, AICP, Project Manager

Jill Baumgartner, PLA, ASLA

Tim Bargainer, PLA, ASLA, CLARB

Jim Rodgers

Cade Novak

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	
CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION	1
Plan Purpose	2
Master Plan Process	2
Planning Time Frame	3
Importance of Park Planning	4
Study Area	6
Demographics	10
Previous Studies and Plans	15
CHAPTER 2, EXISTING PARK SYSTEM	19
Introduction	20
History of Williamson County Parks System	20
Overview of Existing Parks System	22
Park Classifications	22
Park Profiles	25
Existing Trail Facilities	40
Aquifer Zones	44
Endangered Species	46
Cultural Landmarks	48
CHAPTER 3, NEEDS ASSESSMENT	51
Needs Assessment	52
CHAPTER 4, RECOMMENDATIONS	63
Vision Statement	64
Guiding Principles	64
CHAPTER 5, IMPLEMENTATION	97
Introduction	98
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Compliance	98
Implementation Program	100
Master Plan Updates	109
Potential Funding Sources	110

FIGURES

CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION.....	1
Figure 1.1, Project Process.....	3
Figure 1.2, Williamson County’s History.....	8
Figure 1.3, Historic Population Growth.....	10
Figure 1.4, Future Population Growth.....	11
Figure 1.5, Williamson County Age Distribution.....	12
Figure 1.6, Household and Family Income.....	13
Figure 1.7, Educational Attainment.....	13
Figure 1.8, Individuals Below Poverty Level.....	13
Figure 1.9, Families Below Poverty Level.....	13
Figure 1.10, Occupation by Industry.....	14
Figure 1.11, Commute Time.....	14
CHAPTER 2, EXISTING PARK SYSTEM.....	19
Figure 2.1, Park Classifications.....	22
Figure 2.2, River Ranch County Park - Preliminary Site Plan.....	22
Figure 2.3, Blackland Heritage County Park - Conceptual Master Plan.....	38
Figure 2.4, Endangered and Threatened Species.....	46
CHAPTER 3, NEEDS ASSESSMENT.....	51
Figure 3.1, Amenities Most Important to Households.....	56
Figure 3.2, Should Williamson County Expand the Trail System Linking Communities and Neighborhoods (Regional Trails, Greenways, Etc.)?.....	57
Figure 3.3, Should Williamson County Provide Additional Opportunities for Passive Outdoor Recreation (Walking Trails, Fishing, Picnicking, Etc.)?.....	58
Figure 3.4, What Type of Other Experiences or Activities Would You Like to Have in Williamson County Parks That Have Not Been Mentioned in This Survey?.....	58
CHAPTER 4, RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
Figure 4.1, Example Trail Cross-Sections.....	73
CHAPTER 5, IMPLEMENTATION.....	97
Figure 5.1, Implementation Action Types.....	103
Figure 5.2, Priority Action Timeframe.....	105

MAPS

CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION.....	1
Map 1.1, Regional Context - State.....	6
Map 1.2, Planning Area.....	7
CHAPTER 2, EXISTING PARK SYSTEM.....	19
Map 2.1, Existing Parks and Trails.....	23
Map 2.2, Aquifer Zones.....	45
Map 2.3, Endangered Species.....	47
Map 2.4, Cultural Landmarks (Texas Historical Commission).....	49
CHAPTER 3, NEEDS ASSESSMENT.....	51
Map 3.1, Water Resources.....	61
CHAPTER 4, RECOMMENDATIONS.....	63
Map 4.1, Proposed Trail System.....	67

TABLES

CHAPTER 1, INTRODUCTION.....	1
Table 1.1, Age Comparisons.....	10
Table 1.2, Future Growth Percentage.....	11
Table 1.3, Race & Ethnicity.....	12
CHAPTER 2, EXISTING PARK SYSTEM.....	19
Table 2.1, Williamson County Parks and Recreation System.....	24
CHAPTER 5, IMPLEMENTATION.....	97
Table 5.1, Summary of High Priority Facilities Needs in Williamson County.....	101
Table 5.2, Prioritized Implementation Action Plan.....	106

FOREWORD

The Comprehensive Parks Master Plan is a living document that provides an assessment of past actions, existing conditions, and future steps towards the achievement of long-range goals. Williamson County has a strong heritage, rich natural resources, and a burgeoning population seeking enjoyment of parks and open spaces. Chapters one and two examine the places, people, and parks that make the County what it is today. It is in that thread that this parks master plan carries forward the vision of Williamson County residents for quality trails, parks, and preserves for future generations.

This update to the County's continuing master planning efforts was built on public input and stakeholder contributions, found in *Chapter 3* and *Appendix A*. A citizen survey and series of public open houses were held where participants expressed a variety of desires for the parks and trails system. Community interest groups and City representatives participated to find a common ground and pool resources in order to efficiently achieve common goals. The feedback from citizens created the foundation on which a future vision and implementation actions could be established.

The plan focuses on four key implementation focus areas:

1. Regional Trail Plan
2. Park System Expansion
3. Parkland Improvements
4. Operations and Maintenance

Within these focus areas are 10 goals that encompass over 50 recommended actions that the County can take over the next 10 years to meet the needs of the population. These actions, described in *Chapter 4*, include steps to connect a regional trail system, considering the next County park location, centering park facilities and programs around conservation and educational themes, and ensuring sound and cost-effective maintenance of park facilities.

The goals and actions in the parks master plan are designed to provide a 10-year roadmap for the Commissioner's Court and Parks Department. The plan implementation steps, expressed in *Chapter 5*, includes a prioritization of needs that serves as guide for budget allocations, additional study, and annual operational requirements for the Court and the Staff. The planning efforts completed during this process will allow for cost-sharing opportunities, partnerships, and cross-collaboration with local communities. In time, the plan will need to be monitored and re-assessed as a long-term outlook should include continued public engagement to ensure relevance and citizen support.

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CHAPTER
ONE
INTRODUCTION



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PLAN PURPOSE

The Williamson County Comprehensive Parks Master Plan establishes a planning framework for recreational opportunities within the parks and open space system of Williamson County. A system of parks, trails, and preserves creates places for citizens to congregate, learn about, and enjoy these natural and cultural resources.

The purpose of this plan is to identify steps that can be taken to account for the growth, development, and operations of the park and trails system and identify opportunities for partnerships with other entities. A parks master plan also identifies the priorities of the public and positions the County to apply to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) for grant funding for priority actions. This citizen-supported vision document becomes a guide for elected officials and staff to make decisions regarding land acquisition, park and trail improvements, and maintenance of existing and future recreation amenities.

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

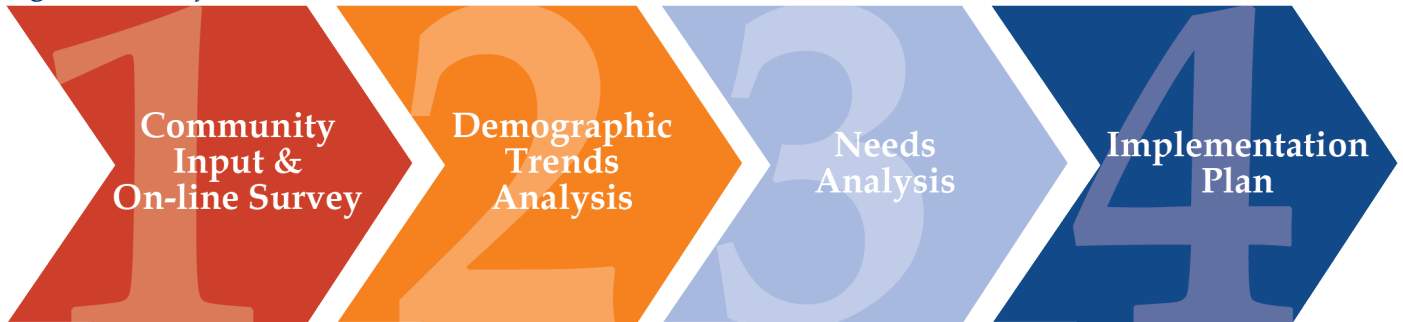
Williamson County partnered with Halff Associates Inc. to create an update to the County's Comprehensive Park Master Plan in June 2017. Figure 1.1, *Project Process*, describes the steps taken in this master planning process.

During the public engagement component of the planning effort, public input from community members, visitors, staff, and elected/appointed officials help determine the needs, vision, and general direction of the plan. This process gives citizens the opportunity to express their needs, desires, and priorities regarding the future of the park system.

The engagement period results in recommendations that are compiled during stakeholder meetings, the public survey, and open house public meetings. *Appendix A, Public Engagement*, provides a complete record of the public engagement process, including meeting advertisements and minutes, sign-in sheets, the original survey copy and completed survey results.

The plan recommendations are broken down into priorities and organized by short-term and long-term time frames. These recommendations will include the near-term desires of the community, or are actions that could be taken addressing current facilities. Long-range improvements are included in the second category that are big-picture items addressing population growth, improving and expanding the parks system, and anticipating future needs.

Figure 1.1, Project Process



PLANNING TIME FRAME

The Williamson County Comprehensive Parks Master Plan is an update to the County's 2008 Comprehensive Park Master Plan. The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) recommends that parks master plans retain validity for 10 years and should include a five-year update. While the plan covers an implementation period of 10 years, the planning horizon reaches farther into the future.



IMPORTANCE OF PARK PLANNING

Parks and trails offer many benefits to community members, including social, health, environmental and economic. Proximity to open space is important for residents to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

The health benefits of parks and trails provide opportunities for physical, intellectual, social and emotional health for community members. Communities can be improved by the addition of green space/open space, trail connectivity and educational health and fitness events. Residents can take part in physical activities in parks and along trails to improve their overall health, including lowering obesity rates.

A place for children to be outside is important for them to properly develop. Hand eye coordination is improved when children play and their ability to focus is increased as they play in nature. Outdoor play also affects children's mental health and happiness with more time spent nature. Children have a chance to make new friends in parks as well as bond with their parents.

Proximity to greenspace benefits community members mentally by reducing stress and increase their overall happiness. Residents can experience a calm feeling when they are in nature while improving their overall quality of life. The center of a community can be created with parks to allow spaces for community events. Residents are given opportunities to socialize in these spaces by interacting with other residents and meeting new people.

The overall safety of communities is increased by the creation of parks. Youth crime rates are reduced since they are kept out of trouble with the activities that parks provide. The safety of neighborhoods is improved with trails and parks since more eyes are in the area.

Sustainability is offered in parks through the conservation of natural resources, energy efficiency promotion, and the reduction of the environmental footprint. Each park can





Brushy Creek Trail

have a “Zero Waste” program to decrease the amount of trash that is generated by park users.

In addition, storm water collection is important to consider as the County grows and further develops. Parks and trail corridors provide pervious cover that helps to mitigate flooding in the area. Pervious surfaces allow water to pass through such as turf, a wildflower area, or permeable pavement. In contrast, materials such as concrete and asphalt force water to rapidly shear off these surfaces and do not allow water to slowly penetrate the soil. As a result, flooding in the area significantly increases as more development occurs.

Similarly, tree cover also significantly reduces storm water runoff. Trees also improve air quality by filtering out pollutants that are harmful to residents. The urban heat island effect is created by impervious surfacing in urban areas. Parks decrease the air temperature by reducing the amount of dark surfacing such as asphalt and concrete.

Parks and trail corridors also provide habitat for local animals. As development continues in the County, the significance of open spaces becomes increasingly important for wildlife. Urban development can threaten habitats of many species while parks and preserves help to preserve ecosystems and habitats.

The economic benefit of parks and trails includes the increased property values of the land near this amenity. Home values near parks and trails increase since this land is preserved and enjoyed. Businesses may also want to be located near parks and trails since they are activity centers for the community and have high pedestrian and bicycle use.

STUDY AREA

Williamson County is located in central Texas, northeast of Austin (see Map 1.1, *Regional Context - State*, below). The County covers around 1,134 square miles and contains 17 cities. The majority of the County's population is located in the south part of the jurisdiction within the incorporated cities of Austin, Cedar Park, Leander, and Round Rock. (see Map 1.2, *Planning Area* on page seven). In the central part of the County, the incorporated city of Georgetown makes up the majority of the population and is the County seat.

Map 1.1, Regional Context - State



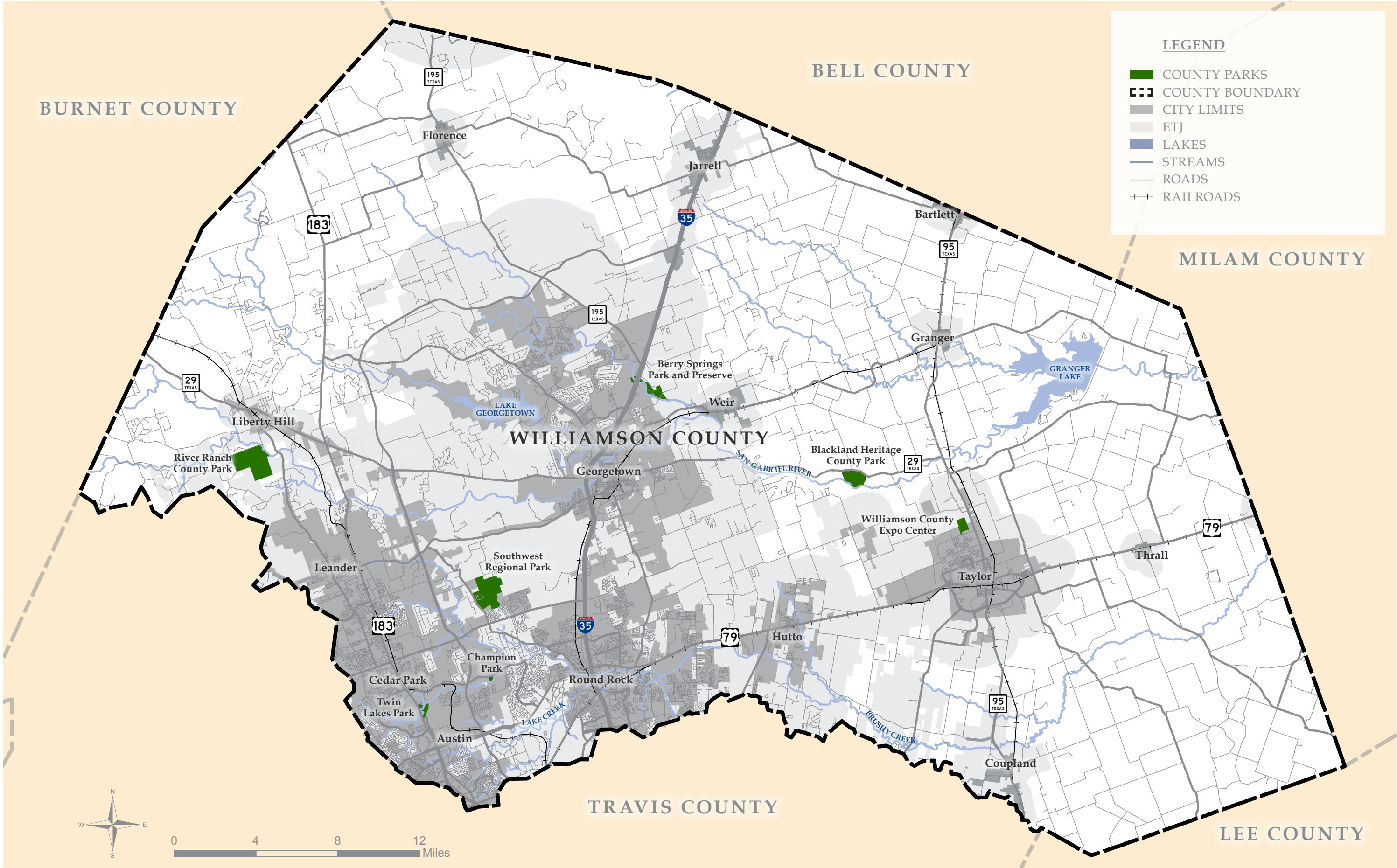


Figure 1.2, Williamson County's History

1835

In what would become Williamson County, a military post was constructed along the headwaters of Brushy Creek in an attempt to strengthen the frontier from Indian attack. The post was named for Capt. John J. Tumlinson, Jr. the commander of the group of Texas Rangers who garrisoned the post.

1838

Parts of the territory of Williamson County were occupied by Comanches from the eighteenth century until 1838.

1842

Continuous Indian raids prevented white settlement and many early pioneers were killed by Indians although several sites on Brushy Creek were settled. Governor Sam Houston wanted settlers to leave the frontier and at this time many of the early farms were abandoned.

1848

At the time, the Williamson County area was called western Milam County and was occupied by 250 settlers. In the beginning of the year 1848, 107 of these settlers signed a petition to create a new county. The Texas legislature created Williamson County on March 13, 1848 and it was named after Robert M. Williamson, who was a prominent judge and soldier.

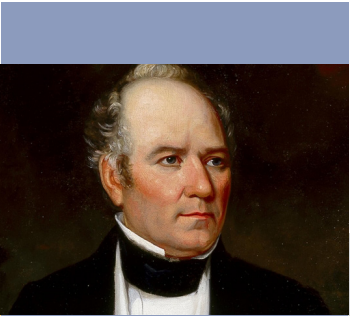


Image Source: <http://www.history.com/news/history-lists/7-things-you-may-not-know-about-sam-houston>



Image Source: <https://www.warpaths2peacepipes.com/indian-tribes/comanche-tribe.htm>



Image Source: http://www.georgetown-texas.org/Three_Legged_Willie.htm



Image Source: <https://truewestmagazine.com/traveling-the-chisholm-trail/>

1865

Near Georgetown, along the San Gabriel River, a large gathering of the community members of Williamson County took place. At this meeting, the Reconstruction period in Williamson County set an overall tone of reconciliation, which concluded with the return of County government to conservative Democratic control.

1878

The Great Round Rock Shootout took place on July 19, 1878. Sam Bass, a legendary train robber, and his gang were planning to rob a bank in Round Rock when they were confronted by Williamson County Sheriff Grimes. Bass along with many others were killed during the shootout which took place on the streets of downtown Round Rock.

1969

Many cattle drives occurred through Williamson County since several feeder routes bisected the area. From the 1860s to the early 1880s, various cattle drives went through or started in Williamson County. Railroads were constructed in the area and Taylor became a hub for cattle trade as well as a rail center in the 1870s. In 1969 ranchers had a record total number of 65,093 cattle after cattle raising become popular again from a decline in the early twentieth century.

2010

In "The Best of Georgetown" contest, Berry Springs Park and Preserve was voted "The Best Kept Secret."

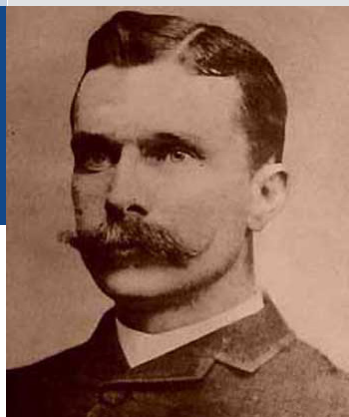


Image Source: <http://www.franksrealm.com/Indians/Outlaws/pages/outlaw-sambass.htm>

DEMOGRAPHICS

HISTORIC POPULATION GROWTH

Williamson County has experienced a 1,317-percent increase in its population since 1970. The periods with greatest population growth were between 1970 and 1980, and 1980 and 1990 with 105 and 82 percent increases, respectively. Between 2010 and 2016 the population continued to increase, but at a slower amount of 25 percent. See Figure 1.3, *Historic Population Growth*.

AGE COMPARISONS

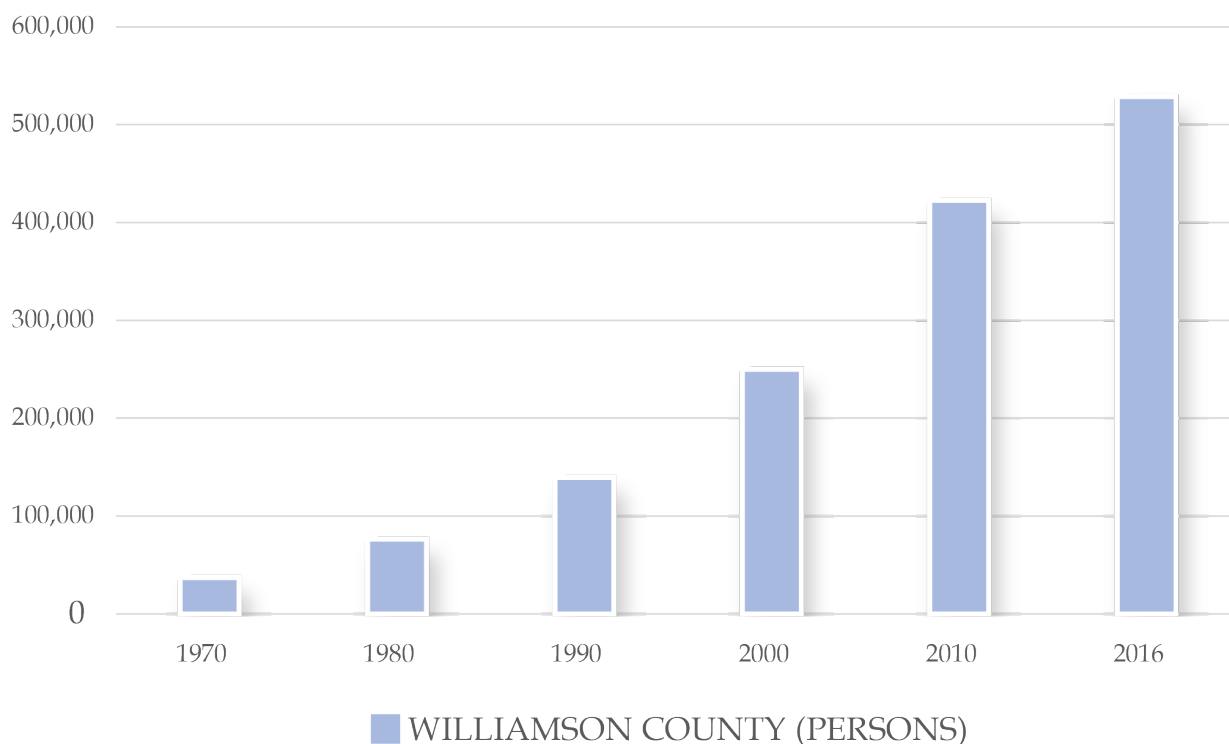
In 2015, the greatest portion of the County's population included men and women between 35 to 39 years old (8.3%) followed by both children between 5 and 9 years old and men and women between 40 to 44 years (8.0%). (See Table 1.1, *Age Comparisons*). The state of Texas has a highest percentage of the population between 5 and 9 years old. Children between 10 and 14 years old are the second highest age range in the state of Texas. Williamson County has a less even population distribution than the state of Texas. The median age for Williamson County (35.6) is a little higher than the State of Texas (34.2).

Table 1.1, Age Comparisons

AGE RANGE	TEXAS	WILLIAMSON COUNTY
Median Age	34.2	35.6
Under 5 years	7.3%	7.0%
5 to 9 years	7.5%	8.0%
10 to 14 years	7.4%	7.7%
15 to 19 years	7.1%	6.8%
20 to 24 years	7.3%	5.5%
25 to 29 years	7.3%	6.3%
30 to 34 years	7.2%	7.7%
35 to 39 years	6.8%	8.3%
40 to 44 years	6.7%	8.0%
45 to 49 years	6.4%	7.1%
50 to 54 years	6.5%	6.5%
55 to 59 years	5.9%	5.4%
60 to 64 years	5.0%	4.7%
65 to 69 years	4.0%	3.9%
70 to 74 years	2.8%	2.8%
75 to 79 years	2.0%	1.8%
80 to 84 years	1.4%	1.2%
85 years and over	1.3%	1.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, Table S0101: Age and Sex

Figure 1.3, Historic Population Growth



Source: Williamson County; Annual Estimates of the Resident Population: April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2016, U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division

FUTURE POPULATION GROWTH

Williamson County is the 5th fastest growing county in the state of Texas and grew 12.9 percent from the year 2010 to 2015 (see Table 1.2, *Future Growth Percentage*). This growth is predicted to be fairly steady and Williamson County will inhabit almost a million people by the year 2050. This large increase in population will need to be carefully planned for when allocating resources for future infrastructure (see Figure 1.4, *Future Population Growth*).

Table 1.2, Future Growth Percentage

YEAR	POPULATION	PERCENT INCREASE
2010	422,679	-
2015	477,329	12.9%
2020	534,882	12.1%
2025	597,892	11.8%
2030	664,844	11.2%
2035	744,423	12%
2040	825,127	10.8%
2045	908,070	10.1%
2050	992,814	9.3%

Source: Texas Demographic Center



Figure 1.4, Future Population Growth



Source: Texas Demographic Center

AGE DISTRIBUTION

As seen in Figure 1.5, *Williamson County Age Distribution*, the dominate female age group is from 35 to 39 years of age while the dominate male age group is from 5 to 9 years of age and 40 to 44 years of age. When compared to the United States, Williamson County has a significantly lower percentage of the population in the 50 and over age group. It is important for the County to continue to monitor the population demographics to determine what percentage of these young people remain in the County long term and how many new residents in this age category arrive over the years.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

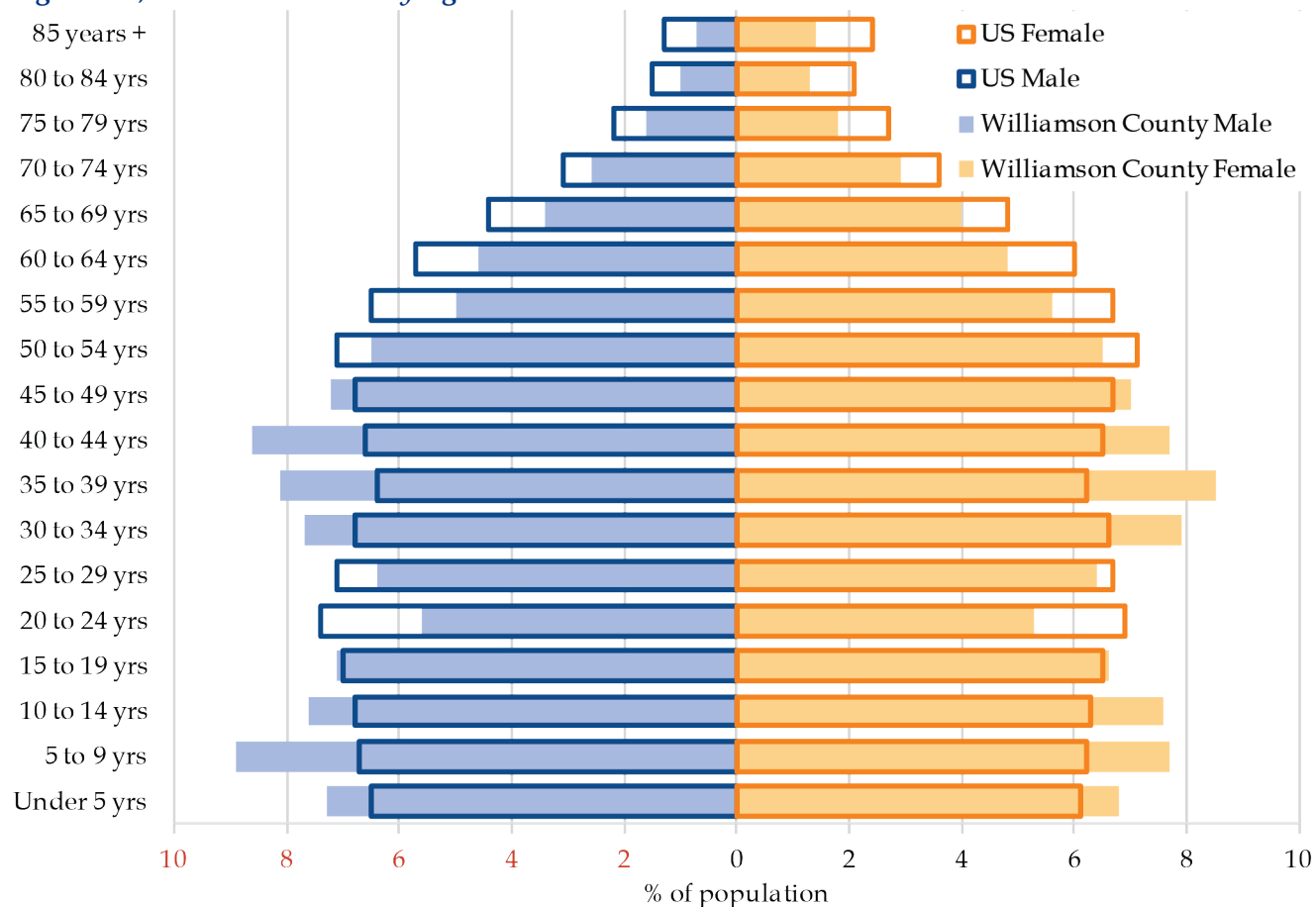
Williamson County has a very diverse population (see Table 1.3, *Race & Ethnicity*). In comparison to the state of Texas, Williamson County is less diverse. While the greatest percentage (82.1%) of the population in the County is white, there is also a significant percentage (23.8%) that has Hispanic or Latino heritage.

Table 1.3, Race & Ethnicity

RACE & ETHNICITY	TEXAS	WILLIAMSON COUNTY
White	74.9%	82.1%
Black or African American	11.9%	6.4%
American Indian & Alaska Native	0.5%	0.3%
Asian	4.2%	5.5%
Native Hawaiian & Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%
Other	6.0%	2.5%
Two or More Races	2.5%	3.2%
Hispanic or Latino Descent	38.4%	23.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, Table DP05: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates

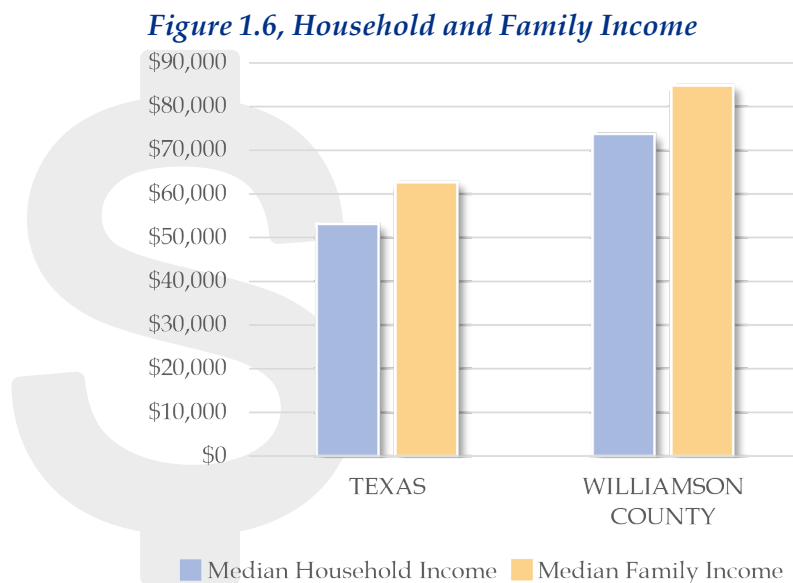
Figure 1.5, Williamson County Age Distribution



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, Table S0101: Age and Sex

HOUSEHOLD & FAMILY INCOME

Family income includes income from two or more individuals related by birth, marriage, or adoption who are living together. Williamson County has a significantly higher median household income and median family income compared to the state of Texas (see Figure 1.6, *Household and Family Income*).



EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Over 90 percent of Williamson County residents have a high school education or higher. This is over 10 percent greater than the state of Texas. Similarly, even though Williamson County had less than 40 percent of its population with Bachelors degrees, this is still 10 percent higher than the state. (see Figure 1.7, *Educational Attainment*)

POVERTY LEVEL

When compared to the state (17.3%), Williamson County (7.5%) has a significantly lower number of individuals below the poverty level (see Figure 1.8, *Individuals Below Poverty Level*). This discrepancy is also true for families below the poverty level between Williamson County and the state (see Figure 1.9, *Families Below Poverty Level*).

Figure 1.7, Educational Attainment

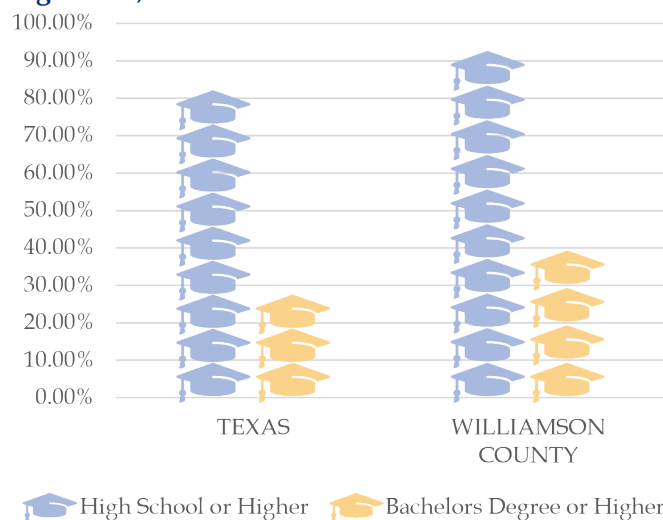
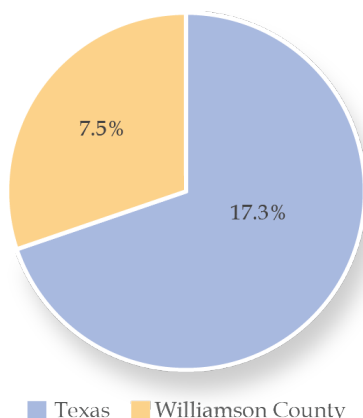
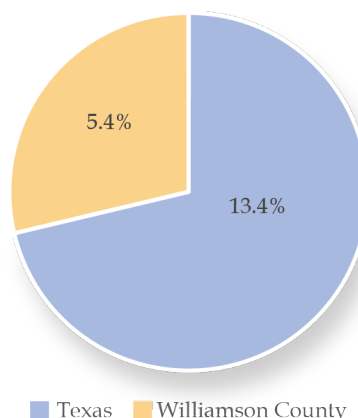


Figure 1.8, Individuals Below Poverty Level



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics

Figure 1.9, Families Below Poverty Level



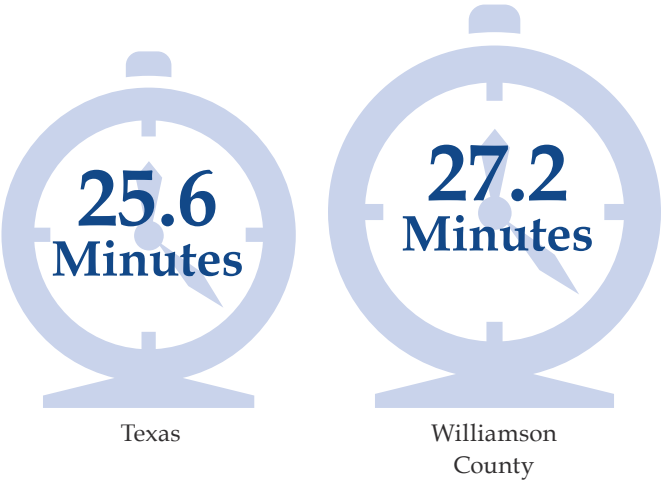
OCCUPATION BY INDUSTRY

The largest employers in Williamson County are the educational services, and health care and social assistance (21.1%); professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services (14.3%); retail trade (12.1%); and manufacturing industries (10.8%). See Figure 1.10, *Occupation by Industry*. This is due to the many Independent School Districts in the County as well as several hospitals. Because the county is in the Austin metro area, it benefits from a concentration of retail trade and professional services jobs.

COMMUTE TIME

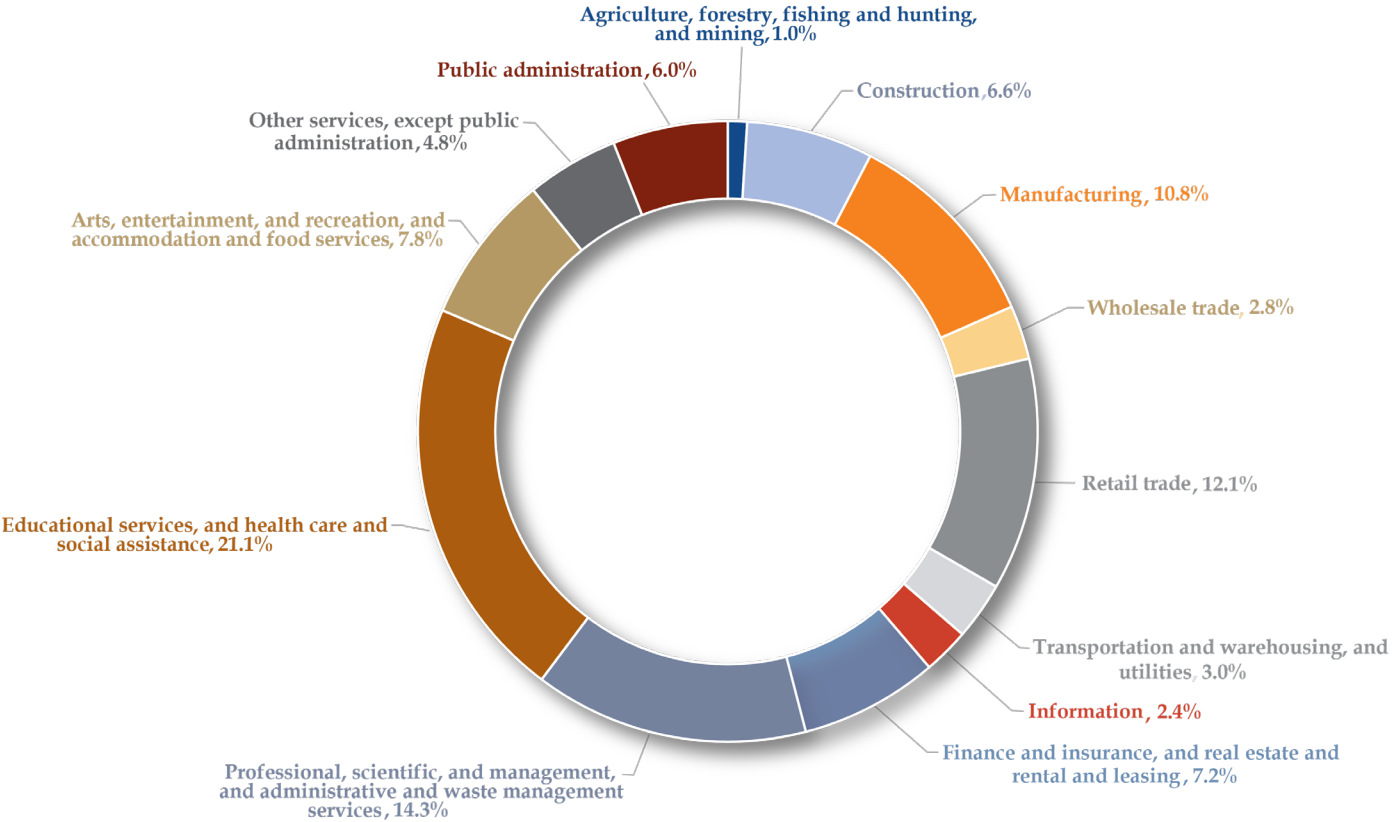
The mean commute time in Williamson County is about 27 minutes (see Figure 1.11, *Commute Time*). This commute time is similar to the state of Texas. Of the residents who commute in Williamson County, over 80 percent drive alone, while just about nine percent carpool. Traffic congestion will continue to be a problem as the population continues to grow. The addition of safe bicycle and pedestrian connections to important destinations can help to decrease the use of automobiles for nearby daily trips.

Figure 1.11, Commute Time



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, Table S0801: Commuting Characteristics By Sex

Figure 1.10, Occupation by Industry



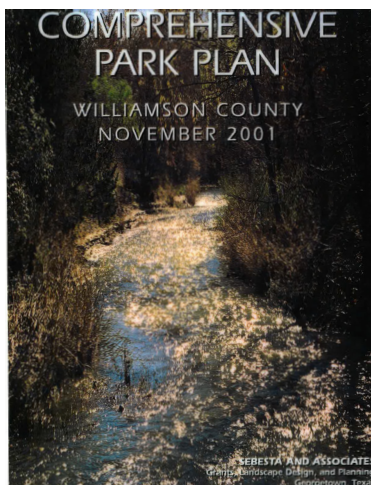
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate, Table DP03: Selected Economic Characteristics

PREVIOUS STUDIES AND PLANS

COUNTY PLANS



Williamson County, Texas
Comprehensive Park Master Plan



Williamson County, Texas
Comprehensive Park Plan

Williamson County, Texas Comprehensive Park Master Plan (2008)

The 2008 Comprehensive Park Master Plan is Williamson County's most recent park plan. In this plan, one of the goals is to improve the quality of life for the residents and visitors of the County. Other goals include providing developed parks, passive parks, trails, greenways and appropriate active recreation facilities which will be sustainable for a long time while meeting the needs and desires of the community. Demographics, citizen and key stakeholder preferences and guidelines were used in the Master Plan to create an implementation plan. A prioritized recommendation list was developed including the year that each project should be completed.

Key issues facing the County include:

- Rapid growth
- The need to define the role of the Department of Parks and Recreation to either directly provide or facilitate the delivery of programs, services, and recreation facilities
- The urgent need to evaluate the guidelines used by the County to acquire and develop park land, and to understand its role relative to active recreation facilities
- The value of trails and greenways which link trails, parks, schools, points of interest and the environment
- The need for targeted new facilities which are aligned with the County's Vision
- The need for land acquisition for a variety of park types
- The importance of funding the Small Cities Assistance Program

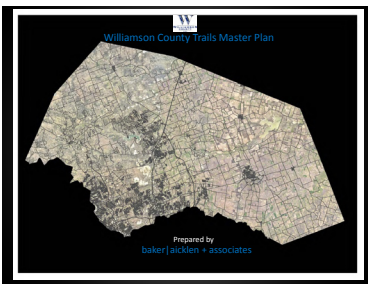
Williamson County Comprehensive Park Plan (2001)

This 2001 Parks Plan was the County's first parks master plan, before a Parks Department had even been created or a single park opened to the public. The purpose of this plan was to organize a strategy to planning recently obtained park land, apply for grant funding, and consider improvement of amenities so that parks could be enjoyed by the public.

This plan explored many parks and open spaces provided by other entities, since the County had not yet created a public park at the time. One of the critical elements of a plan for a governmental entity that had not yet built parks was a determination of what the County's role should be in providing parks. It was clear from public

responses that the County should provide park facilities and preserve natural areas and historic sites. The public also supported large, passive lands, joint park facilities with other entities, indoor recreation and regional facilities for sports.

As in the 2008 Plan, the priorities of the plan were focused on hike/bike/walk trails and acquisition/preservation of natural areas.



Williamson County Trails Master Plan



Williamson County Long-Range Transportation Plan

[Williamson County Trails Master Plan \(2014\)](#)

The goal of the 2014 Williamson County Trails Master Plan is to recommend important trail segments that connect existing trails and increase pedestrian and bicycle transportation and connectivity within the county. The purpose of this plan is to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to identify gaps in the existing and proposed trail systems within the county. This master plan was developed to assist in the direction of future opportunities for the County to explore a county-wide trail system that improves transportation and addresses the needs of the community.

[Williamson County Long-Range Transportation Plan \(2016\)](#)

In 2016, the County adopted updates to its Long-Range Transportation Plan. To address future growth in the county, this plan concentrates on the need for road and transit updates within the next 25 years. Capital improvements will be determined in this plan. Base information, roadway and transit network update, overall approach, recommendations and system performance are included in this plan. Recommendations in this plan are included for transit, bicycle/pedestrian/trails, roadway projects and bottleneck projects shown below:

- **Transit:** Transit options are now being considered between Round Rock, Cedar Park and Georgetown and Capital Metro and the Austin-San Antonio Commuter Rail District.
- **Bicycle/Pedestrian/Trails:** In November 2008, the County adopted a comprehensive park master plan. The goal is to continue the execution of the master plan and complete the construction of the Brush Creek Regional Trail and the Heritage Trail System.
- **Roadway Projects:** Figures in this plan show the location of selected projects in the 2015 and 2035 networks.
- **Bottleneck Projects:** Future bottleneck and construction-relief projects have been selected for consideration.

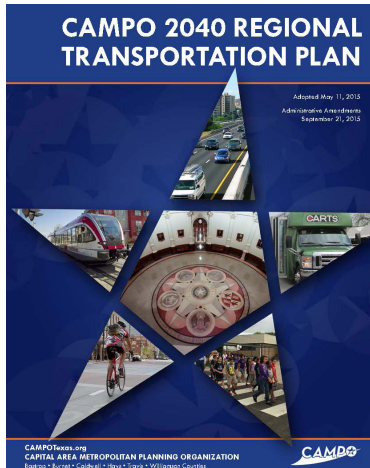
REGIONAL PLANS

CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan

The most important goal of the CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan is to generate a plan that improves the overall livability of the area by balancing the need to move traffic with the need to form quality communities.

Additional goals of the CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan include:

- **Safety:** Increase the safety of the transportation system.
- **Mobility and Access:** Continue and improve mobility and access of goods and people within the region.
- **Connectivity:** Enhance connectivity within and between the numerous transportation types for goods and for people of all ages and abilities.
- **Efficiency:** Enhance the efficiency and performance of the transportation system.
- **System Preservation:** Ensure that the transportation system can be maintained and operated over time.
- **Economy:** Maximize the economic competitiveness of the region.
- **Land Use and Economic Development:** Support economic growth and efficient use of land.
- **Cost Effectiveness:** Maximize the affordability of the transportation system.
- **Air Quality, Climate Protection, and Energy:** Reduce air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption associated with the transportation system.
- **Environment, Noise, and Neighborhood Character:** Reduce undesirable effects on environmental resources, noise, and community character.
- **Social Equity:** Ensure that the benefits and impacts of the transportation system are equitably dispersed regardless of income, age, race, or ethnicity.
- **Security:** Increase the security of the transportation system and the region.
- **Alternative Transportation:** (e.g., bikes, trails) (TAP) Transportation Alternatives Program.



CAMPO 2040 Regional Transportation Plan

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CHAPTER
TWO
EXISTING PARK SYSTEM



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INTRODUCTION

It is essential to have an understanding of the existing park system in order to determine the approach for new planning efforts. The current conditions of the parks and trails provides important context to determining future need. The County's existing park system is examined in this chapter, including the types of use; facility and site conditions; and public accessibility. Once the current conditions are inventoried and analyzed, this information is paired with citizen and stakeholder input to determine the priority actions in this plan.

HISTORY OF WILLIAMSON COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM

Historically, parks have not been considered a traditional primary function of counties in Texas. Over the last 20 years, however, Williamson County stepped forward to provide recreational amenities that either were not being provided by cities, or fulfilled a need for people in unincorporated areas that were under-served.

In 1997, a bond package was approved by voters to create a County park system. That led to the creation of the first parks master plan in 2001, where one of the primary questions was determining the role that the County would serve in conjunction with cities. During that timeframe, the County acquired, developed plans for, and constructed Southwest Region Park, followed soon after by Berry Springs Park and Preserve, Champion Park, Brushy Creek Trail, and the rest of the system. In 2003, the Commissioner's Court created the County's first Parks Department.

As the County parks and trails system has grown with the population, the Commissioner's Court has maintained the approach that County parks should complement, not substitute, for local community parks and amenities.



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OVERVIEW OF EXISTING PARKS SYSTEM

Williamson County's existing parks system totals 2,862 acres as of 2018 (see Map 2.1, *Existing Parks and Trails*, on page 23). This acreage includes existing and undeveloped parkland, trails (linear parks), and special use facilities. Geographically, there is at least one park located in each Commissioner Precinct and the locations are distributed amongst the current population centers. The northern and eastern portions of the County are not yet served by County parks but are also far less populated than other areas and are not in the immediate path of growth.

The current park system has a balance between active and passive facilities (see Table 2.1, *Williamson County Parks and Recreation System*, on page 24). Active facilities include elements such as disc golf, sports fields, and splash pads, whereas passive facilities include un-programmed open space, fishing, birding, picnic facilities, and multi-use trails.

PARK CLASSIFICATIONS

Williamson County parks typically function as regional although some in the current system are of a size that might be referred to as a community park. Figure 2.1, *Parks Classifications*, below describes the function of each park classification.

Figure 2.1, Park Classifications

REGIONAL PARKS/TRAILS	COMMUNITY PARKS
Regional Parks are intended to be used by multiple communities in a greater geographic region. Traditionally, regional park land was dedicated as such due to regional, state or national significance. Recently, regional and community parks have become significant economic development drivers. Often, they vary in size from 50 acres to 1,000s of acres. Berry Springs Park and Preserve and Southwest Regional Park are currently the two regional parks in Williamson County.	Community parks are parks that typically serve a smaller geographic area. Both active and passive uses make up this type of park, although higher intensity recreational uses traditionally may be prominent. Passive recreational uses (e.g., picnicking, trails) are also predominate in community parks. The size of community parks can vary from 10 to 50 acres. Champion Park and Twin Lakes Park are two examples of community parks in Williamson County.

Source: This Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan includes the guidelines for park classification established by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) as included in the 1990 printing of *Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines* and the 1995 printing of *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*. The NRPA guidelines have generally been the most widely accepted and used guidelines of their type.

Map 2.1, Existing Parks and Trails

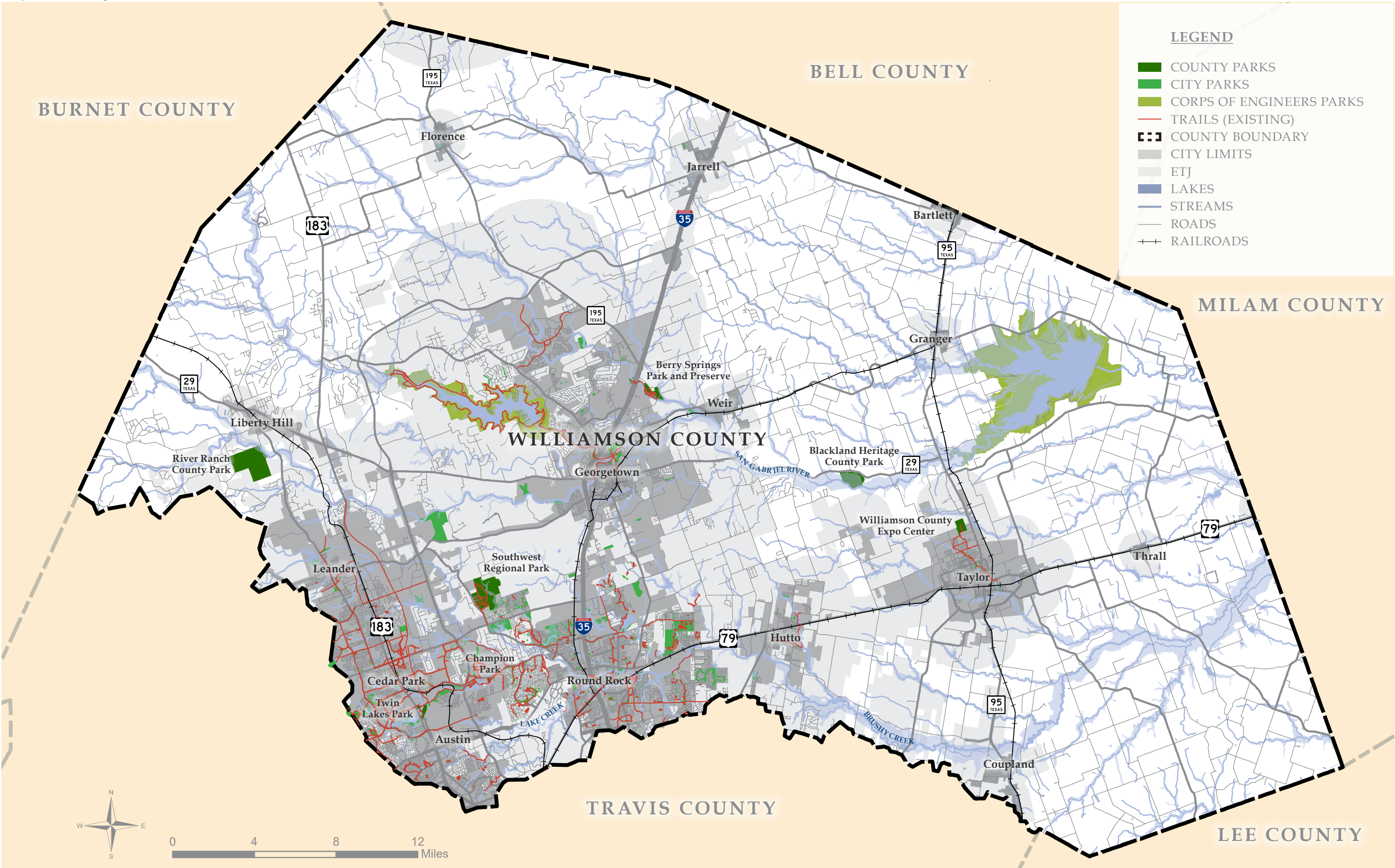


Table 2.1, Williamson County Parks and Recreation System

Park Name	County Map Quadrant	Acreage	Trail Miles	Parking Spaces	Amphitheater (Small)	Picnic Tables (Non-Pavilion)	Picnic Tables (Pavilions)	Pavilion(s)	Benches	BBQ Grills (Picnic)	Drinking Fountain(s)	Playscape(s)	Body of Water	Fishing Pier	Splash Pad	Outdoor Shower	Disc Golf	Exercise Station(s)	Equestrian Trail	Historic Cemetery	Mini Train	Covered Arena	Camping (Primitive)	Camping (Tent Only) ⁶	Camping (RV) ⁶	Restroom(s) w/ Showers	Restroom(s) w/o Showers
Linear Parks/Trails																											
Brushy Creek Regional Trail	SW	165.0	7.0	10 Trailheads					12		6		1					1									5
Brushy Singletrack Trails	SW	10.0	7.5										1														
Lake Creek Trail	SW	1.5	1.5	22		4			2				1														
Sub-total		189	16.0	32.0	0.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	14.0	0.0	6.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.0
Parks																											
Berry Springs Park & Preserve	Central	300.0	4.3	133	1	11	13	2	16	7	2	1	1	1					1	1			10	17		1	1
Blackland Heritage County Park ¹	E	348.0																									
Champion Park	SW	33.0	0.3	84		11	16	2	6	2	2	4	1		1	1		1		1							1
Expo Center	E	93.5		600																		1					3
Quarry Splash Pad ⁵	SW			95		9	24	4	2	2	2				1	2											1
River Ranch County Park ¹	W	1011.0																									
Southwest Regional Park	SW	850.0	3.7	983		6	16	3	30	5	6	1	1				1				1					1	2
Twin Lakes Park (YMCA-Managed & Operated)	SW	50.0		479	1	36	43	4	14		3	5	1	4	1												3
Sub-total		2685.5	8.2	2301.0	2.0	77.0	112.0	15.0	82.0	16.0	21.0	11.0	7.0	5.0	3.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	10.0	17.0	0.0	2.0	17.0
Totals		2,862.0	24.2	2,333.0	2.0	81.0	112.0	15.0	96.0	16.0	27.0	11.0	10.0	5.0	3.0	3.0	1.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	10.0	17.0	0.0	2.0	22.0

¹ Undeveloped.
² Sports Fields: Soccer (10), Tennis (8), Basketball (6), Softball (2), Track (1), Football (1) & Cricket (1)
³ Located in the Southwest Williamson County Regional Park.

PARK PROFILES

The subsequent pages present an overview of the Williamson County park system. These parks and trails offer patrons an accessible array of active and passive activities and amenities. See table 2.1, *Williamson County Parks and Recreation System*, on page 24 for an inventory of existing facilities and amenities as of 2018.

There are presently two County parks linked along the Brushy Creek Regional Trail - Champion Park and Twin Lakes Park. The Brushy Creek Trail also connects to parks managed by City of Cedar Park, Brushy Creek Municipal Utility District and Fern Bluff Municipal Utility District. Lake Creek Trail in southern Williamson County serves local neighborhoods and two adjacent parks. Southwest Regional is the largest and most diverse in terms of amenities, while Berry Springs Park and Preserve offers passive beauty and history. The Williamson County Expo Center, located in Taylor, is more of a special-use park and events facility .

Blackland Heritage County Park east of Georgetown, and River Ranch County Park near Liberty Hill are owned by the County but are not yet developed for the public and are in various phases of planning and development.



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BERRY SPRINGS PARK AND PRESERVE

Description

Berry Springs Park and Preserve is a 300-acre regional park established in 2005. Currently, this park is used for both passive and active recreation. Passive recreation opportunities include picnicking, overnight camping and fishing. Active recreation opportunities include a playscape, horseback riding and over four miles of concrete and crushed granite hike and bike trails with several loops. An amphitheater, bird viewing area, wildflower meadow, and historic pecan tree grove are additional amenities found in this park.

Renovations that have been made in the past 10 years include the development of a nature trail, horseback trail and a concrete trail extended through the prairie to the west side of Interstate 35. Along the concrete trail, mile markers were donated and installed by volunteers. In addition, a home office and residence were added in 2008 and the old dam was replaced in 2014. A park host site was constructed in 2016, and wildflower prairies have also been established.

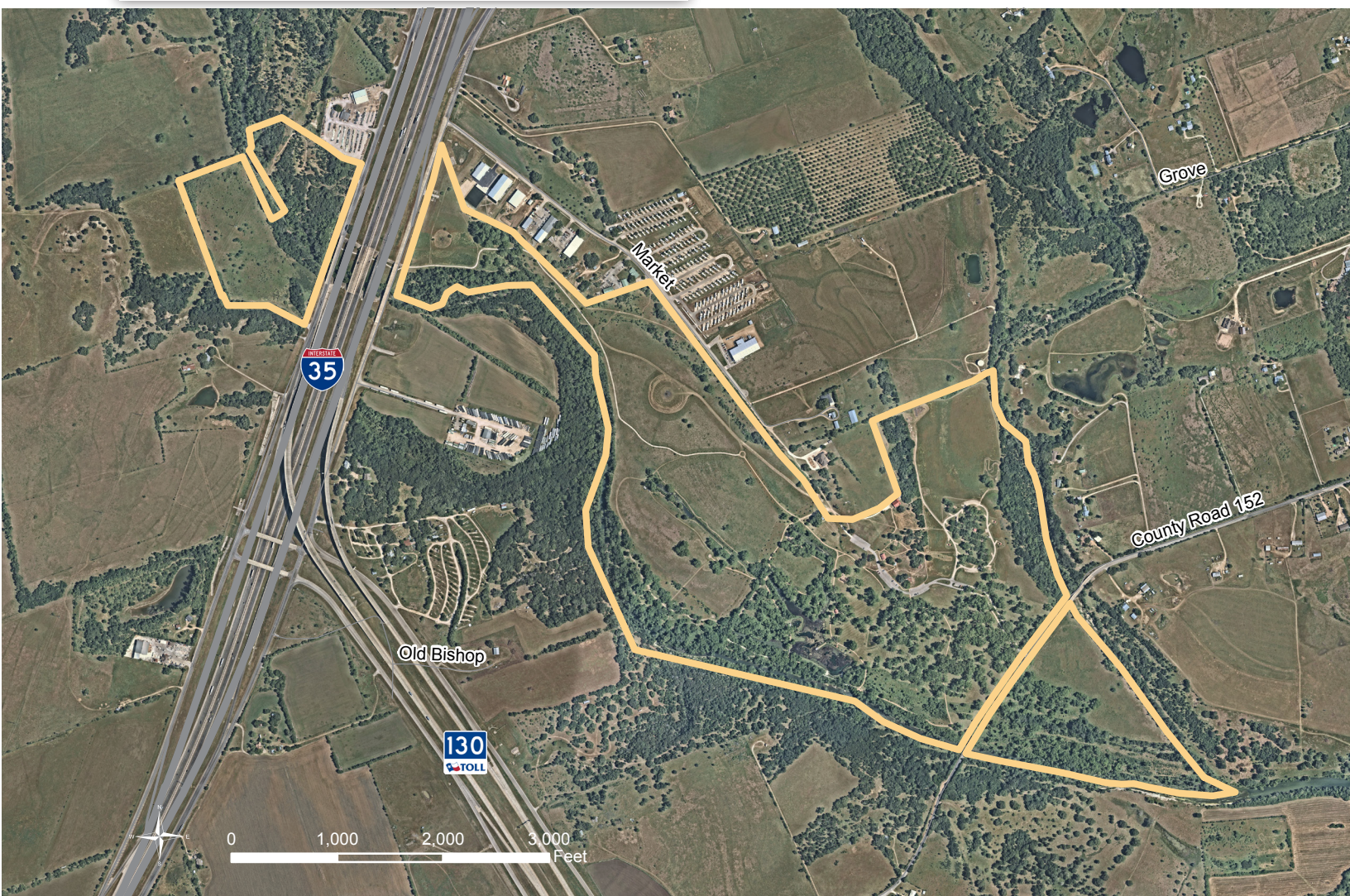
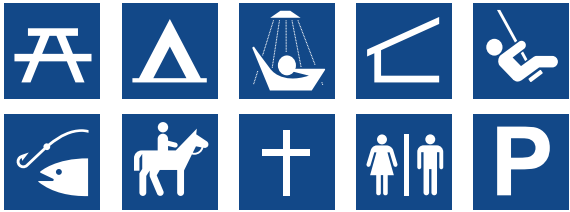
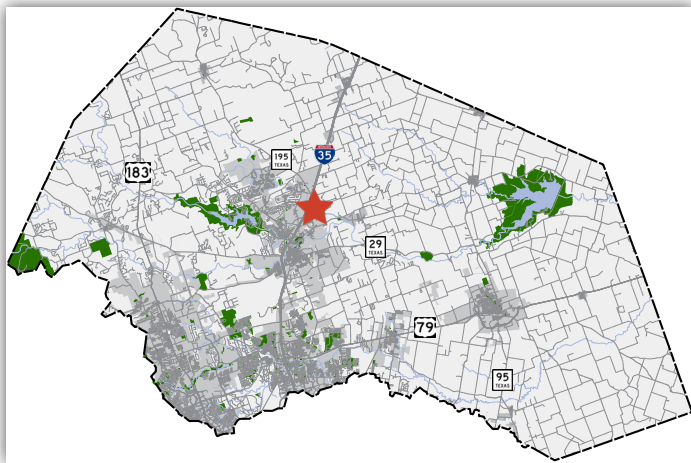
Access

The main entrance to Berry Springs Park and Preserve is located off of County Road 152, on the east side of the park. Interstate 35 clips the northwest edge of the site. Berry Creek runs along the south and west side of the park.



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BERRY SPRINGS PARK AND PRESERVE



SOUTHWEST REGIONAL PARK

Description

Southwest Regional Park is an 850-acre regional park, including approximately 200 acres of karst preserve known as the Millennium Preserve and Wilco Preserve. It is currently the largest of the parks system that is open to the public.

This park offers both passive and active recreation opportunities. Active recreation opportunities include a playscape, organized sports, and disc golf. An 8,500-square-foot Quarry Splash Pad is also located at this park with a variety of water features, water cannons and water jets. In addition, the Cedar Rock Railroad, a miniature railroad for passengers of all ages, is located along the south side of the park and travels a circular route around the park. Several other active recreation opportunities are part of this park including ten sports fields, two softball fields, eight tennis courts, six basketball courts and one cricket field. A stadium with a sports field is also located at this park circled by a 400-meter track with bleachers, restrooms and concessions. Passive recreation includes four miles of nature trails, fishing, picnicking and birding.

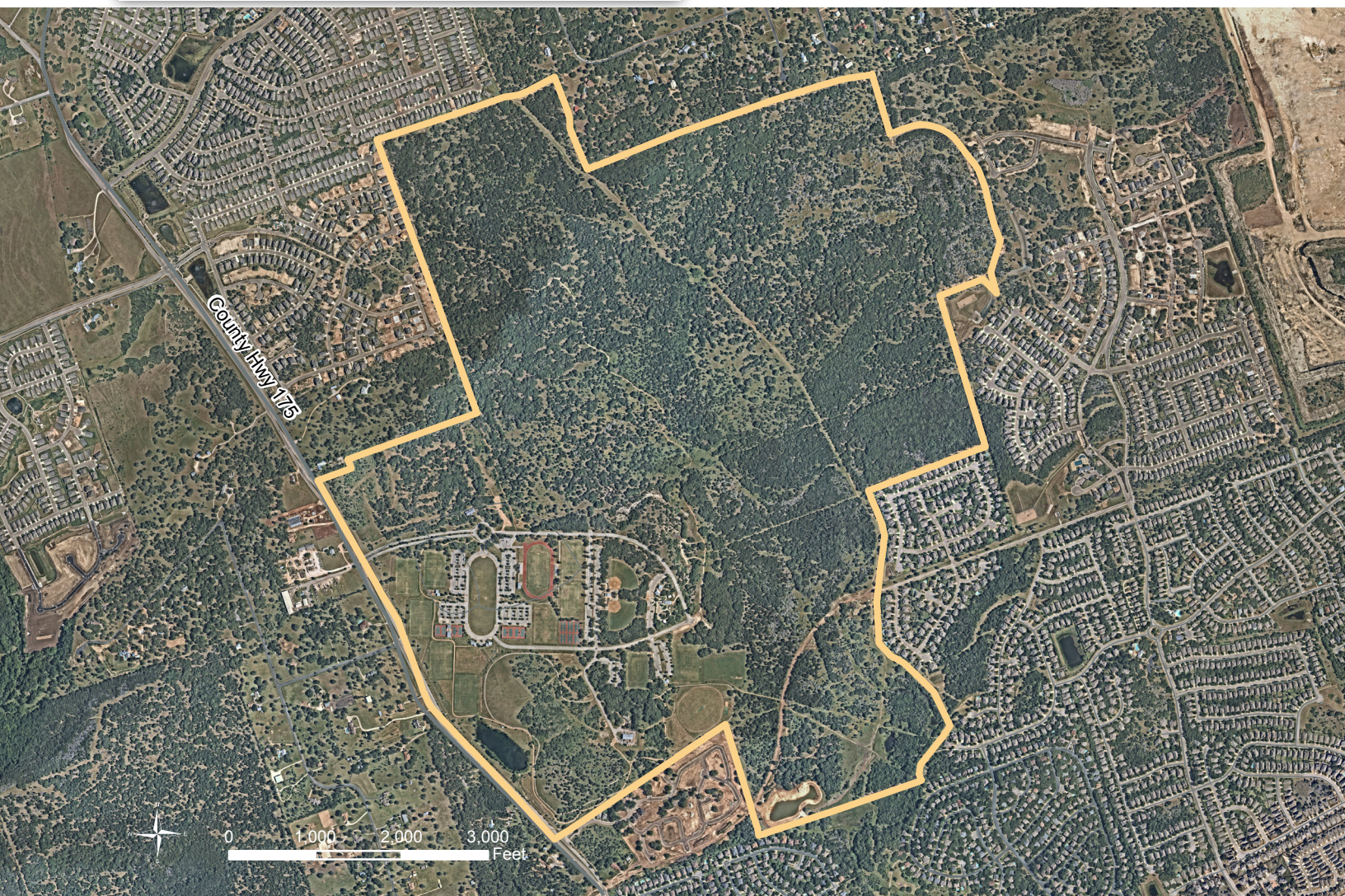
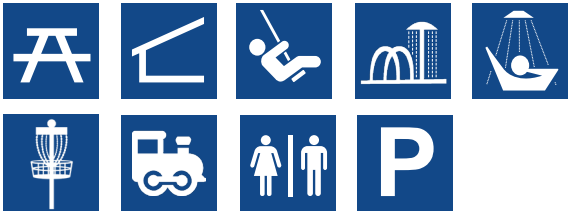
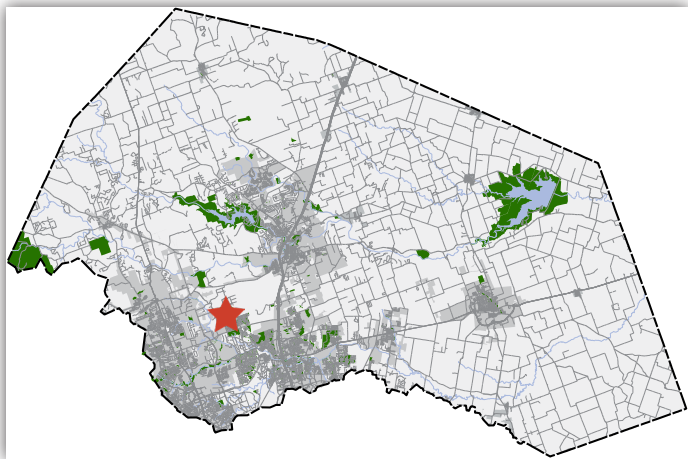
Past park upgrades include the construction of the maintenance building in 2009, the installation of the Quarry Splash Pad in 2010 and the construction of the Parks Department Headquarters Building in 2011. In 2014, all lighting along the roads in the park and in the parking area were replaced with LED fixtures. Additionally, the track, four tennis courts and all basketball courts were resurfaced in 2016. The following year, four more tennis courts were resurfaced and the playground slides were replaced. Overall, the park facilities are in good condition. Planned improvements include: two additional small restrooms, and a building to shelter parks maintenance equipment from the elements.

Access

The entrance to Southwest Regional Park can be accessed from County Road 175. Pedestrians can access the park from its north and west side along the Jim Rodgers Trail and from its east side via other trail connections.



SOUTHWEST REGIONAL PARK



CHAMPION PARK

Description

Champion Park is a 33-acre community park established in 2008 and is named after the Champion family cemetery that is located in the park. This park is used for both passive and active recreation. Passive recreation opportunities include picnicking and trails. Active recreation opportunities include a large covered playscape with climbing rocks, dino bones in a sand pit, a splash pad, whale's tail, and exercise stations. Climbing boulders, fishing area, fossil discovery area and wildflower fields are additional amenities found in this park. Restrooms with outdoor showers for sand removal are also included as a park amenity.

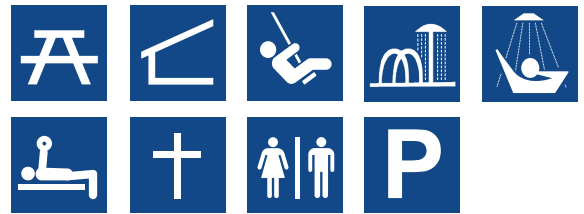
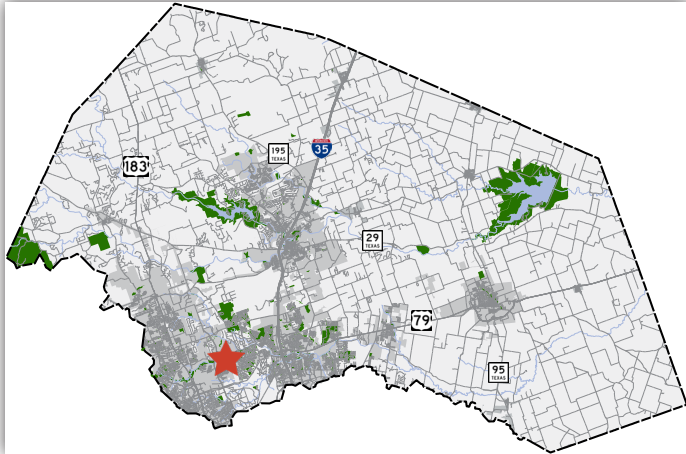
The park has recently needed care due to heavy concentrated use that is accelerating wear and tear on its facilities. To address this issue, new renovations to the park have been made including upgrades to the exercise area and fall protection surfacing, which were both replaced in 2016. In 2017, the restrooms and two pavilions were painted. The fabric for two shade shelters is planned for replacement in 2018.

Access

The entrance to Champion Park is located off of Brushy Creek Road. The Brushy Creek Regional Trail runs through the park from the southwest to the northeast corners. A pedestrian bridge to the Avery Ranch subdivision crosses over South Brushy Creek which runs along the south east side of the park. Currently, pedestrians have easy access to all areas of the park.



CHAMPION PARK



TWIN LAKES PARK

Description

Twin Lakes Park is a 50-acre community park established in 1994. Williamson County has a partnership with the YMCA of greater Williamson County, for the operations and maintenance of the park. Both passive and active recreation opportunities currently exist. Picnicking and fishing are some of the passive recreation opportunities that exist at this park. Active recreation opportunities include a playscape, splash pad, multi-purpose sports fields, an archery range and a swimming area. Other recreational opportunities exist including sand volleyball courts, a ropes course, outdoor education area, restrooms and parking.

New upgrades to the park include the installation of a splash pad funded by the YMCA. With financial assistance from the County, the YMCA also partially funded the conversion of the open air pavilion into an enclosed dining hall with a kitchen and restrooms. Additionally, the County extended utilities to six new overnight lodging cabins and assisted the YMCA with the construction of a new vehicular access road to these cabins.

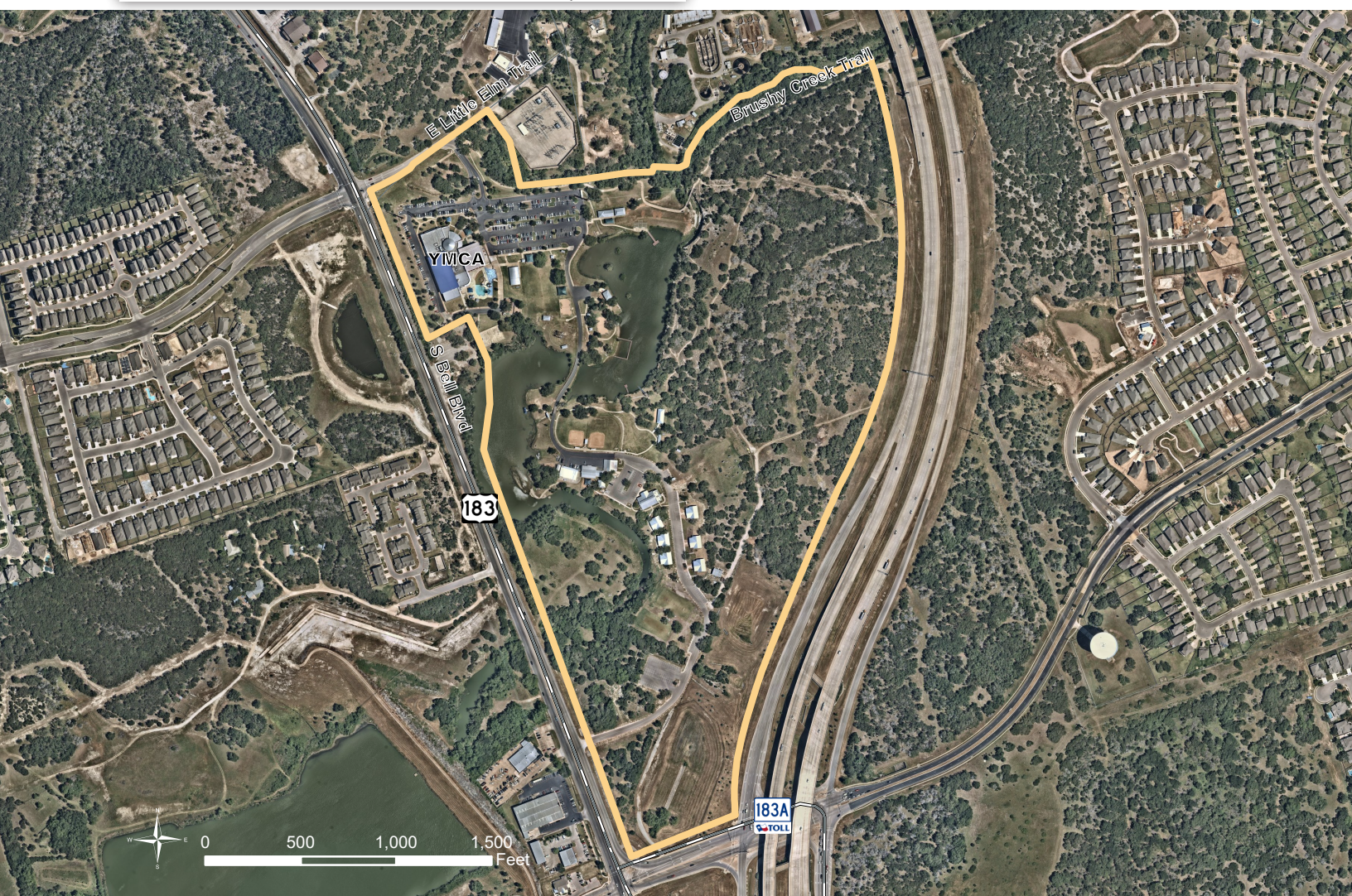
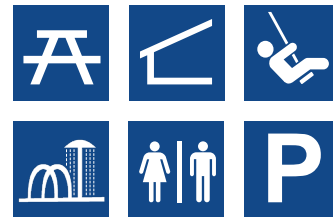
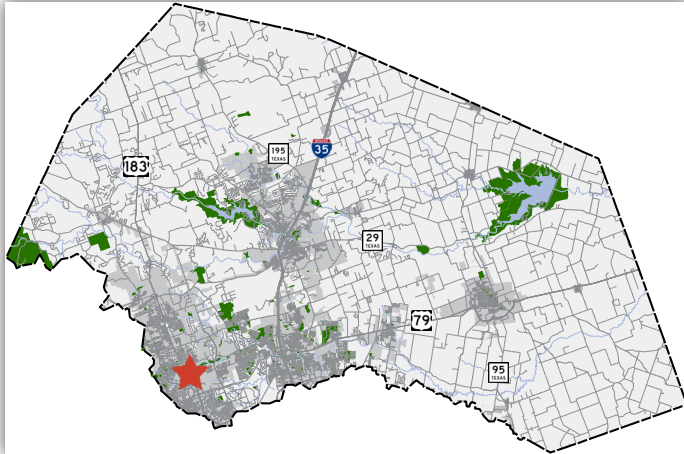
Access

The entrance to Twin Lakes Park can be accessed off of South Bell Boulevard at the intersection of East Little Elm Trail in Cedar Park. Toll Road 183A runs along the entire east side of the park. Pedestrians can access this park from the north side on the Brushy Creek Regional Trail, which begins in this park.

Image Source: <https://cedarparktxliving.com/recreation/cedar-park-recreation-facilities/>



TWIN LAKES PARK



WILLIAMSON COUNTY EXPOSITION CENTER

Located in the City of Taylor, the 93.5-acre Williamson County Exposition Center was established in 2004 as a special-use facility. The Expo Center is a unique park offering in that it is a traditional function of many rural counties, but is not generally considered to be a park. Since opening, the Expo Center is rapidly becoming a destination for the County, particularly the east side, with numerous special events, rodeos, showcases, and conferences.

The Expo Center is adjacent to the Taylor Regional Park and Sports Complex and the two entities share parking when necessary. 2016 renovations to the Expo Center expanded the facility with numerous upgrades, including the addition of air conditioning to the 15,000 square-foot Expo Hall, upgrades to the administration offices, 1,000 square foot meeting room, and a catering kitchen. The concessions building, storage area, covered warm-up area, and livestock wash rack area have also been updated. Other recent improvements have been added including new LED lighting in the arena and parking area, P/A system, arena footing, new television monitors, roof gutters and downspouts.

Planned improvements to the Exposition Center include the additions of a stall barn, 50 amp RV sites, additional concessions with restrooms, and a wind block for the south end of the covered exposition area. Large event area fans, site signage, a new access road, and an uncovered arena area will also be added.

The Expo Center is a revenue-generator for the County and is unique amongst the County park system in that it is a recreation destination beyond the residents of the County. As the Expo Center grows and adds further amenities, it will continue to be a strong economic engine for the City of Taylor and the region as a whole.



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RIVER RANCH COUNTY PARK (FUTURE)

In 2008, Williamson County bought over 1,000 acres of rolling hills in western Williamson County for a future public park. The future River Ranch County Park will include miles of nature trails connecting educational, recreational and leisure opportunities, with frontage on the South San Gabriel River. The park is planned to be an expansive nature-based outdoor recreational space including education, picnicking, hiking, fishing, camping, and trail amenities with limited active facilities such as playgrounds. An equestrian component is also planned for this park.

Future primary access will be taken off of Bagdad Road to the east, with emergency access from County Road 282. The land includes scenic views through breaks in the ranch's many live oak stands. The park will provide an educational opportunity to share the site's ranching and agricultural past.

Figure 2.2, *River Ranch County Park - Preliminary Site Plan*, is the most recent concept plan showing some of the potential features of the park, which were still being refined as of the date of this plan. The first phase of construction is to begin in 2018.

Figure 2.2, River Ranch County Park - Preliminary Site Plan

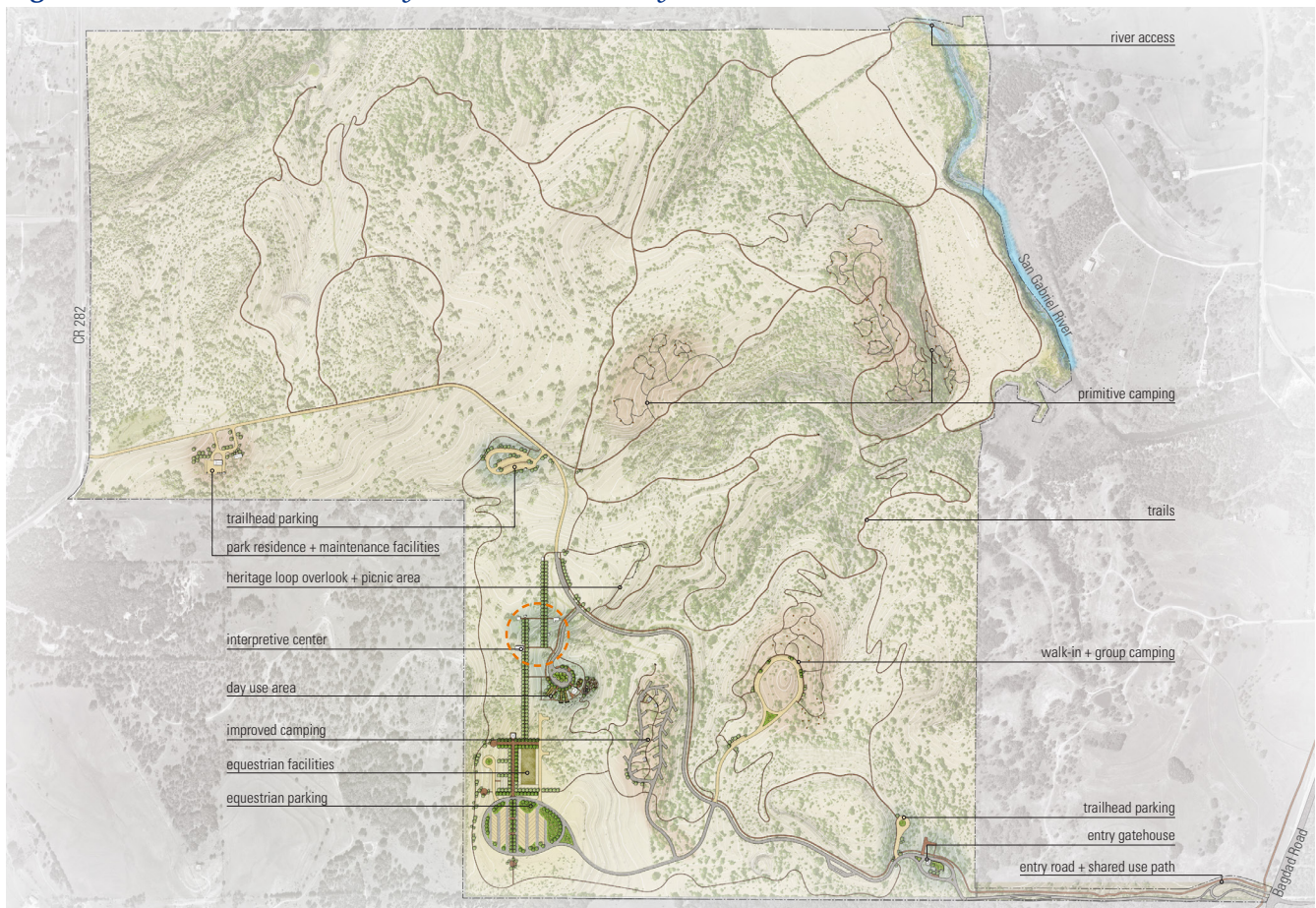


Image Source: Design Workshop



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BLACKLAND HERITAGE COUNTY PARK (FUTURE)

Williamson County bought 348 acres from the Byers family in 2008 in the eastern part of the County on State Highway 29 abutting the San Gabriel River. This park is planned as a nature-based regional park to serve the eastern quadrant of the County, as recognized in the Comprehensive Park Master Plan of 2008.

Williamson County generally consists of two important eco-regions. A substantial fault line called the Balcones Escarpment runs north-south along Interstate 35, which separates these two distinct eco-regions with the limestone Hill Country to the west and the rich lowland soils of the blackland prairie to the east.

The land in this future park contains dozens of stately pecan trees along the river, yet the property is predominantly cleared and currently operated for agricultural use. As much of the land is within the 100-year floodplain, passive recreation and a minimal footprint will be the hallmark of future plans. The “Riverlands” area acts as a natural buffer for the large floods that occur in the San Gabriel River watershed.

Figure 2.3, *Blackland Heritage County Park - Conceptual Master Plan*, is the concept plan for the Blacklands Heritage County Park. There is currently no scheduled date to begin construction on this park.

Figure 2.3, Blackland Heritage County Park - Conceptual Master Plan





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EXISTING TRAIL FACILITIES

At the county level, trails are a significant component of the parks and recreation system. Trails provide access to and connectivity between parks and other important destinations and also provide recreation, fitness and socialization opportunities for users. The desire for trails has continued to grow nationwide in recent years and the Williamson County Trails Master Plan was created in 2014 to plan for future regional connections. In the two previous parks master plans, trails have been a number one citizen priority.

On-street bike lanes, off-street trails, sidepaths and sidewalks are all currently found in the County as pedestrian and bicycle options. Currently, the existing trail network is located only in highly populated areas and not throughout the entire county (see Map 2.1, *Existing Parks and Trails*, on page 23). Some of these trails can be found in parks and in open space, while others are located along transportation corridors.



LAKE CREEK TRAIL

In December 2007, Lake Creek Trail opened in southwest Williamson County. Pedestrians can use this trail which connects the Forest North Estates neighborhood, the Town and Country Optimist fields, and Forest North Elementary School. The concrete trail runs along Lake Creek connecting Parmer Lane to Broadmeade Avenue, and is about one-and-one-half miles long. The trail includes one free-span pedestrian bridge and two low-water crossings. The trailhead in the neighborhood has 20 parking spaces and park benches.

The trail is currently in good condition due to routine maintenance, and was renovated in 2015, 2016 and 2017. In 2015 along the western portion of the trail, interpretive signage was installed and one damaged bench was replaced. At the west end of the trail in 2016, four picnic sites were installed with concrete pads, tables and trash cans. In May 2015, there were flooding events that created erosion at six locations along the trail. Improvements were made at these locations in 2017.

One location that will need repair is at the concrete foot bridge between Parmer Village and Town and Country Optimist fields. The bridge is showing signs of settling and has cracks in the concrete approach aprons.



Lake Creek Trail
Williamson County, TX



0 100 200 300 400
Feet

This map is a schematic intended only for casual purposes; do not rely on the accuracy of any details without independently confirming them.

MAP DATE: 8/7/2012
MAP CONTACT:
Williamson County GIS Staff
301 SE Inner Loop Suite 107
Georgetown, TX 78626
gis@wilco.org

BRUSHY CREEK REGIONAL TRAIL

The Brushy Creek Regional Trail opened its first phase in the spring of 2003. The initial development and future phases of the trail have been successful through partnerships with the cities of Austin, Round Rock, and Cedar Park, and the Fern Bluff and Brushy Creek MUDs. The trail is primarily located in a natural setting with opportunities to explore the history of the region. The trail is heavily used by hikers, bikers, runners, and walkers. Along the trail, several parks managed by a variety of entities offer trailheads and additional amenities. These amenities include splash pads, swimming areas, fishing docks, canoeing and kayaking, restrooms and multiple picnic and pavilion areas.

Brushy Creek Trail currently is made up of various surfaces including approximately one and three-quarters of a mile of crushed decomposed granite, intermittent boardwalks, and close to five miles of concrete, for a total of approximately seven miles in length. The trail extends from Twin Lakes Park/YMCA on S. Bell Boulevard to one mile east of Great Oaks Drive, crossing over Brushy Creek at several locations. The trail is connected to the 183A shared-use path by a 120-foot long bridge. The National Parks Service designated the trail to be a National Recreational Trail in June 2004.



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Additional phases of the Brushy Creek Trail were built in 2006 and 2009. In 2015, Phase Four was completed, and then portions of trail were further renovated in 2016 and 2017. The renovations included cleaning out and repairing masonry for numerous trail culverts, trail erosion damage repairs and the repair of the trail boardwalk near Cedar Park's Brushy Creek Sports Park. Due to these past and ongoing improvements and maintenance efforts, the trail is in good condition considering its popularity and traffic volume.

In 2018, trail improvements were completed in conjunction with the Brushy Creek Lake Dam improvements by the Water Control and Improvement District. While the dam work was underway, an alternative trail route was used to keep the trail at full functionality from Champion Park to Brushy Creek Lake Park. Efforts are currently underway on the design of the trail extension eastward (Phase Five) for a future connection to the City of Round Rock trail system.



AQUIFER ZONES

Williamson County includes the following aquifer zones:

- Edwards Aquifer
- Trinity Aquifer
- Carrizo Aquifer

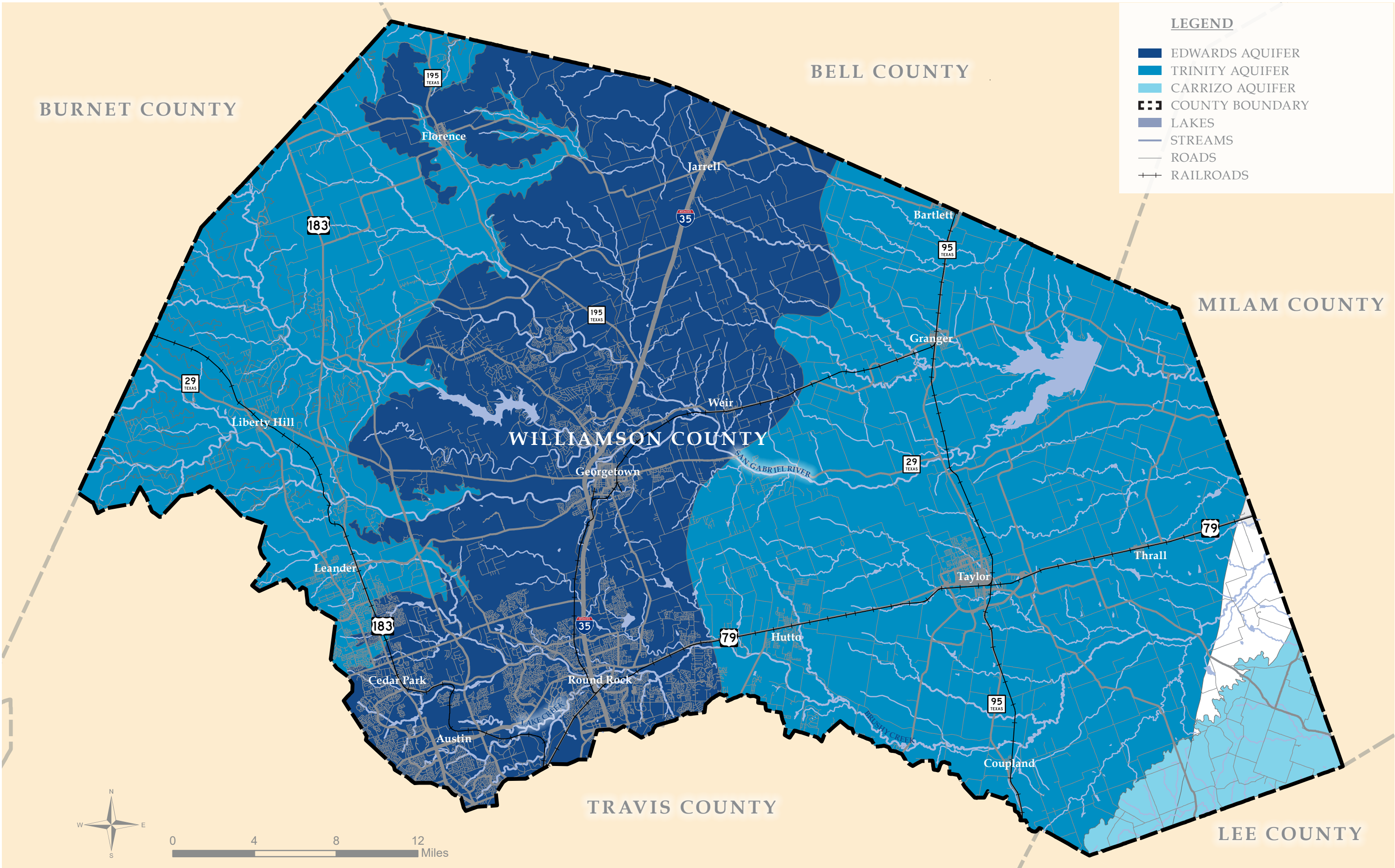
As a result, TCEQ Edwards Aquifer Rules may apply in designated areas. Map 2.2, *Aquifer Zones*, on page 45, shows the locations of these aquifers within the County. The aquifers are a significant feature of the landscape because their existence is integral to the landscape above and the type of development that can occur in the region. The aquifers are a source of clean water and also home to a variety of species, some of which have been designated as threatened or endangered by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. The honeycomb type limestone formations (including caves, sinkholes and fissures) that are usually in limestone geology are called karst.

These species' habitats are highly regulated by the federal government and the Williamson County Conservation Foundation (WCCF) helps manage the protection of caves and other sensitive environmental features during development. These features become part of the preserve system which is often an integral part of County parks.

Image source: <https://blog.pinsource.com/tag/innerspace-caverns/>



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ENDANGERED SPECIES

Williamson County has five designated endangered species. Three of the endangered species are karst invertebrates that live in karst areas (see map 2.3, *Endangered Species*, on page 47).

In Williamson County, the endangered species that are invertebrates include the following:

- The Bone Cave Harvestman (*Texella reyesi*) is found mainly in Williamson County.
- The Tooth Cave Ground Beetle (*Rhadine persephone*) is a small, reddish-brown beetle that spends its whole life underground.
- The Coffin Cave Mold Beetle (*Batrisodes texanus*) is a tiny, long-legged beetle that lives in complete darkness and does not have eyes.

The endangered birds in Williamson County include the following:

- The Golden-Cheeked Warbler (*Dendroica chrysoparia*) is a migratory songbird that builds nests from Ashe Juniper bark in areas with mixed hardwoods.
- The Black-Capped Vireo (*Vireo atricapillus*) is a migratory songbird that builds its nests just a few feet from the ground in brushy, transitional habitat.

In 2015, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed as a Threatened Species the Georgetown Salamander (*Eurycea naufragia*), the Jollyville Plateau Salamander (*Eurycea tonkawae*) and the Salado Salamander (*Eurycea chisholmensis*). Figure 2.3, *Endangered and Threatened Species*, depicts the County’s endangered and threatened species.

The Williamson County Conservation Foundation, part of the County Parks Department, manages the Regional Habitat Conservation Plan to ensure a habitat mitigation bank that allows construction projects to proceed under a collective federal permit. Endangered Species are a significant factor in the development and growth of the County and also offer opportunity for preserved open spaces and parks.



Jollyville Plateau Salamander



Salado Salamander

Figure 2.3, *Endangered and Threatened Species*



Bone Cave harvestman



Tooth Cave ground beetle



Coffin Cave mold beetle



Golden-cheeked warbler

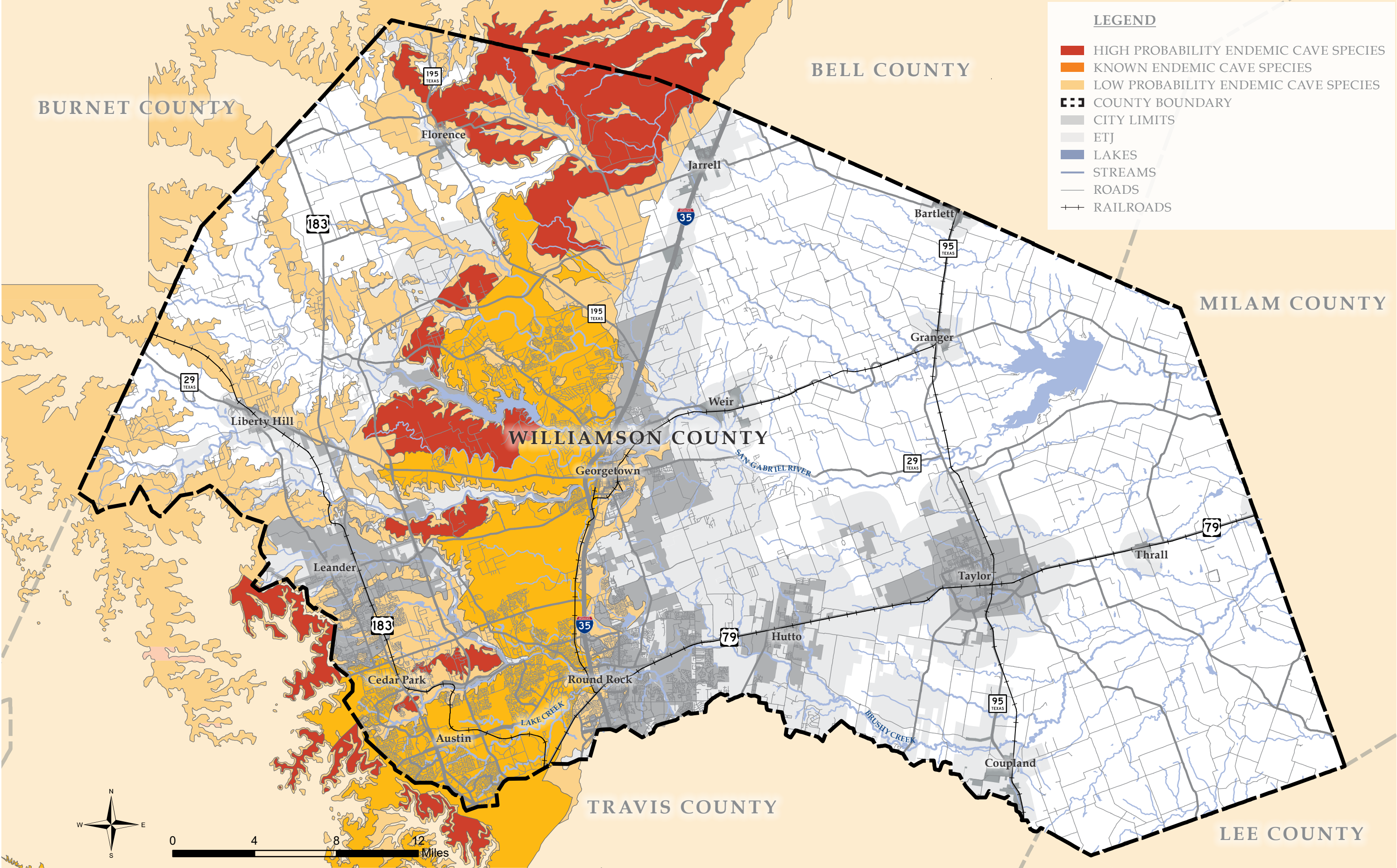


Black-capped vireo



Georgetown Salamander

Map 2.3, Endangered Species



CULTURAL LANDMARKS

Set out on Map 2.4, *Cultural Landmarks*, on page 49, are the historical markers and cemeteries identified by the Texas Historical Commision (THC) for Williamson County. These cultural resources, while not located on land owned by the County, are important historical elements of a heritage-rich area. Much like the hydrological and ecological resources have an effect on where parks could be located, cultural and historical elements are integral to the story of the County and the people who have lived in this place before. Some of the more prominent cemeteries found in the County include the following:

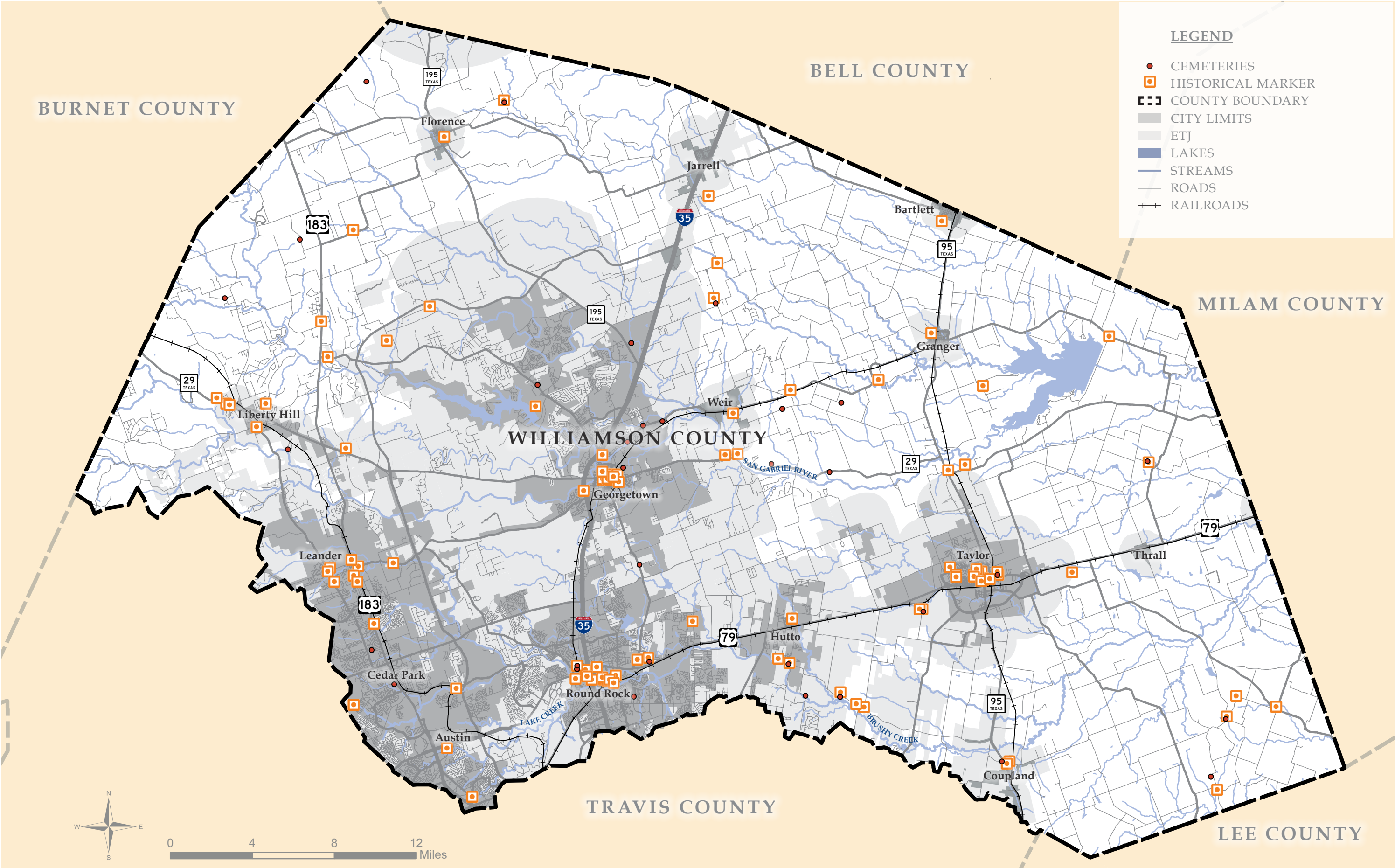
- Cedar Park Cemetery
- Georgetown Memorial Cemetery
- Hutto City Cemetery
- Round Rock City Cemetery
- Taylor City Cemetery

In addition, some of the more prominent historical markers in the County are listed below:

- Georgetown High School Building
- Granger High School
- Hutto Baptist Church
- Leander Presbyterian Church
- Liberty Hill Masonic Hall
- Round Rock Volunteer Fire Department
- Taylor National Bank

Image Source: https://www.williamson-county-historical-commission.orgHuttoMcNutt-Allen_Cemetery_Williamson_County_Hutto_Texas.html





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CHAPTER
THREE
NEEDS ASSESSMENT



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NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The needs assessment is one of the most important parts of a parks planning process. As it relates to demand, diversity, distribution and quality, a needs assessment is a comprehensive analysis of the existing parks and recreation system. Deficiencies in the existing system are identified in the needs assessment so that a direct connection can be made to the plan's recommendations for the future.

Three types of analyses are accepted by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department for local master plans. Two assessments are included in this plan due to a traditional standards assessment not being the optimal indicator for a county-level park system. Standards determining park location, size and amenities based on population are appropriate assessments for a city or community-level planning effort rather than a County-wide assessment. A county recreation plan, much like the state and federal level, serves to fill gaps, at times, but also charts a course much its own to provide activities and open spaces unique to its geographic area.

Two types of need assessments support this plan, as described in this section:

- **Demand-Based Assessment.** Citizen input used to determine the types of activities and/or facilities they would like to see in the park system are analyzed by demand-base assessment.
- **Resource-Based Assessment.** The usefulness of the local physical and natural features that could be integrated into the park and recreation system are analyzed in the resource-based assessment.



DEMAND-BASED ASSESSMENT

A significant part of the planning process, particularly for quality-of-life services like parks, is understanding the needs and expectations of park patrons and those who make decisions on parks. The demand assessment for this plan was completed through several public engagement efforts conducted as part of the master planning process. These efforts included a public survey, community open houses, meetings with community stakeholders and valuable input from staff and elected officials.

Stakeholder Meetings

In September, three community stakeholder meetings were held to engage community interest groups and representatives from the municipalities within the county. Appendix A, *Public Engagement*, contains information from the meeting attendees. These large, round-table listening sessions included:

- City parks and recreation officials;
- City planning and transportation officials; and
- Community interest groups and volunteer organizations.

The project team heard from city parks and planning officials about existing and future city efforts regarding parks and trails. Due to the population growth in each of these communities, many were undergoing or anticipating long-range planning efforts for streets, parks, and trails. There was a clear sense of support from the city officials to work collaboratively to create more regional trail connections between the various communities and destinations. Also discussed were opportunities to pool resources, suggestions as to where the County could provide assistance, and how a coordinated effort would serve in the best interest of all communities.

Community interest groups voiced their desire to assist by volunteering, spreading the word and aiding educational efforts for park patrons. There was also a strong citizen desire for the County to protectively plan for the next acquisition of land even if the park wouldn't develop until much later.

Overall, the input received from these well-attended round-table discussions helped generate ideas for strategic actions that could be taken and potential partnerships the County could rely on during the implementation of this plan.

Elected Officials

It is imperative to learn about local parks from the entity that makes daily decisions regarding the operation and management of the park system. As such, the elected officials of Williamson County, the Commissioner's Court, were interviewed to assist in identifying issues and opportunities for both existing and future facilities.

On two separate occasions, each elected County Commissioner and the County Judge offered their individual perspectives based on their experiences planning for and allocating resources to the park system and shared the feedback they had received from their constituents while in office. Their perspective provided context regarding their opinions on the role of the County when it comes to parks and trails, and also to understand their priorities for future actions.

Generally, the direction received from the Commissioners indicated strong support for trails and trail connections, an emphasis on passive recreation and an understanding of population growth pressure on parks. The input received from these discussions helped provide direction on this plan's ultimate focus areas, operations and maintenance, and plan implementation.

County Staff

Williamson County's Parks Department consists of professional staff that manage the day-to-day operations and maintenance of the system, plan for future needs, and provide technical recommendations to the Commissioner's Court regarding parks, trails and open space preserves. The staff also includes management of the Williamson County Conservation Foundation, which is a key operation for land development in the County amidst endangered spaces habitats.

In addition to staff interviews, park and trails tours were conducted with the staff on multiple occasions to hear their direct perspective on the maintenance, operations and general management of the existing park facilities, use guidelines, and some of the typical feedback they receive from park patrons.



Community Open Houses

In April, four open houses were held to gauge additional public input regarding preliminary goals and actions and the regional trails concept. Over a two-week period, a public meeting was held in each Commissioner precinct advertised as open to all members of the public regardless of location of residency. Preliminary draft goals and actions statements were provided for attendees to offer comments, prioritize and ask questions. Attendees were encouraged to comment on the goal statements, write down their responses and desires on the draft action statements and interact with the project team to dive further into details.

Attendees at the open houses also reviewed citizen survey responses, draft renderings of recommended trail cross-sections, and the preliminary regional trails concept map, where many offered input on trail locations and destinations. Appendix A, *Public Engagement*, contains the open house boards with public input.

The feedback provided at the four open houses indicated support for the plan recommendations, and also yielded some very important comments that led to refinement of the goals/actions and priorities. Further, the open house input helped reiterate the priorities that the public answered in the survey by noting their preferences on the boards. References to feedback providing at these events are found throughout Chapter 4, *Recommendations*.

Citizen Survey

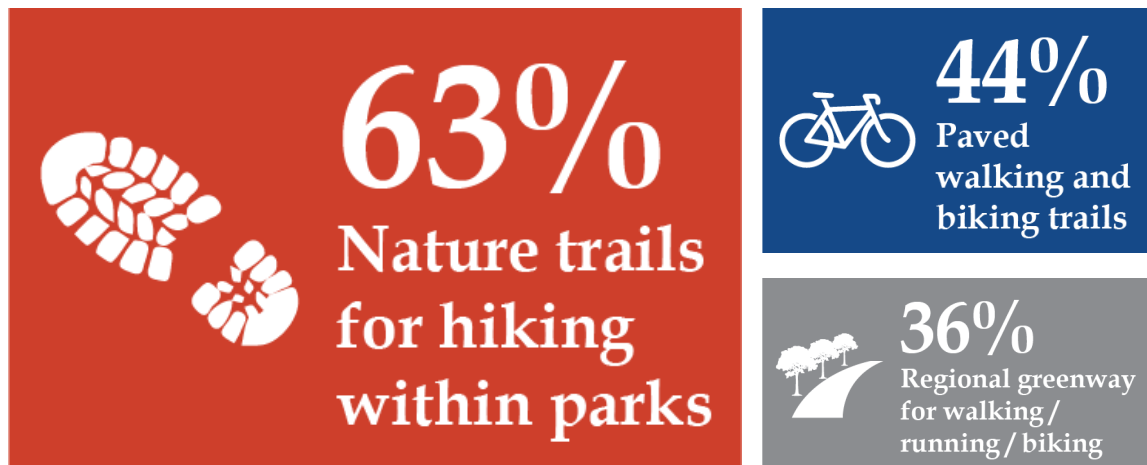
To better understand the opinions, perceptions and desires of community members, an online public survey was conducted. There were 526 respondents that participated between November 10, 2017 and January 4, 2018. The survey was open to all members of the public.

Of these respondents, 42.8 percent were male and 57.2 percent were female. The two largest age groups of respondents were between the ages of 34-44 years-old (22.7%) and 65 years-old or older (23.2%). The next largest age group was between the ages of 45-54 years-old (20.6%). Respondents were asked to provide feedback on two topics, one on general parks and recreation information and the other on the future County parks and recreation facilities.

Over the next several pages, a sample of the results received from the 2017 survey are shown to portray some of the typical responses received. See Appendix A, *Public Engagement*, for the complete survey with responses from the community.

Survey respondents were asked to select their top three amenities from the list shown in Figure 3.1, *Amenities Most Important to Households*, on page 57. Of these choices, the top three selections were nature trails for hiking within parks, paved walking and biking trails and a regional greenway for walking/running/biking.

Figure 3.1, Amenities Most Important to Households



In Figure 3.2, *Should Williamson County Expand the Trail System Linking Communities and Neighborhoods (Regional Trails, Greenways, Etc.)* on page 57, survey respondents were asked if Williamson County should expand the trail system linking communities and neighborhoods. Over 90 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Figure 3.2, *Should Williamson County Expand the Trail System Linking Communities and Neighborhoods (Regional Trails, Greenways, Etc.)?*

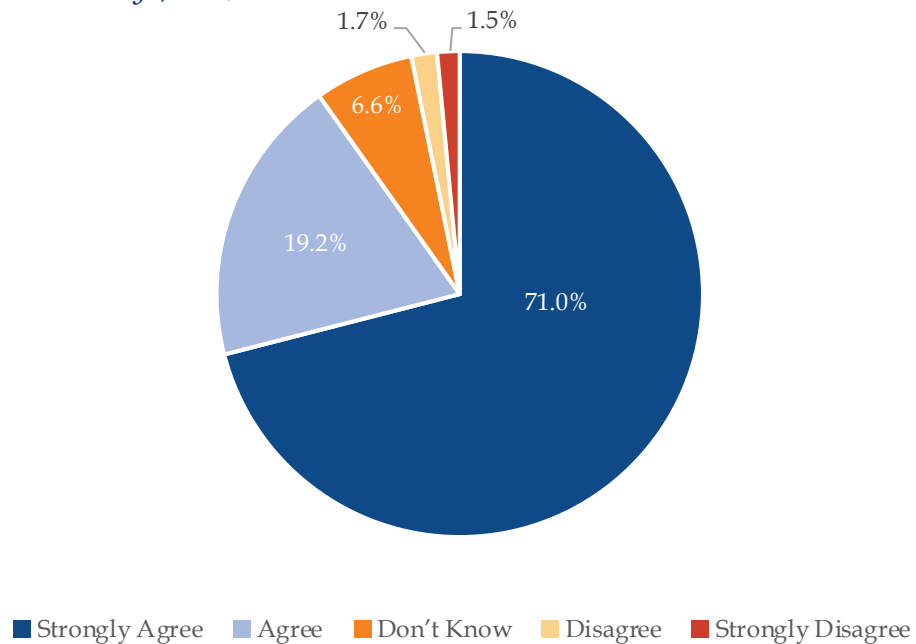


Figure 3.3, Should Williamson County Provide Additional Opportunities for Passive Outdoor Recreation (Walking Trails, Fishing, Picnicking, Etc.)?

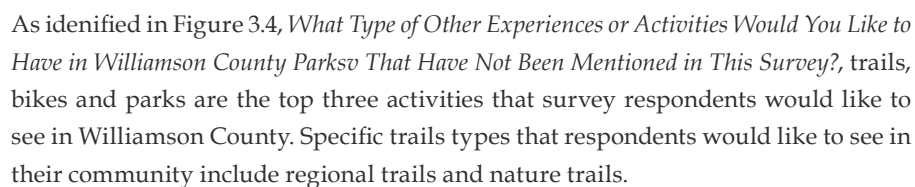


Figure 3.4, What Type of Other Experiences or Activities Would You Like to Have in Williamson County Parks That Have Not Been Mentioned in This Survey?



Comparison to 2008 Citizen Survey

An analysis of the results of the 2017 citizen survey compared to the 2008 Comprehensive Parks Master Plan survey responses reveals consistency and familiar desires from the public.

Although survey questions vary slightly between the two surveys, current needs as stated by the respondents parallel the responses from the previous plan in most regards. Trails remain a strong desire, with nature trails suggested as the most favored amenity. Additionally, the desire in the 2008 survey for larger parks and for further natural areas showed an increase in desire in the 2017 survey as the county's population continues to grow. These results appear to be a continuation forward of 2008 desires and consistent with national benchmarking comparisons.

Significant findings from the 2008 survey are as follows:

- Citizens want the County to maintain its park system
- Open space should be acquired to improve for passive usage (46%)
- Open space should be acquired for both active/passive usage (42%)
- The County should partner with Cities to provide parks and recreation programs and facilities (65%)
- Trails (56%) and other passive uses are citizen preferences for the County to provide in the park system





RESOURCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

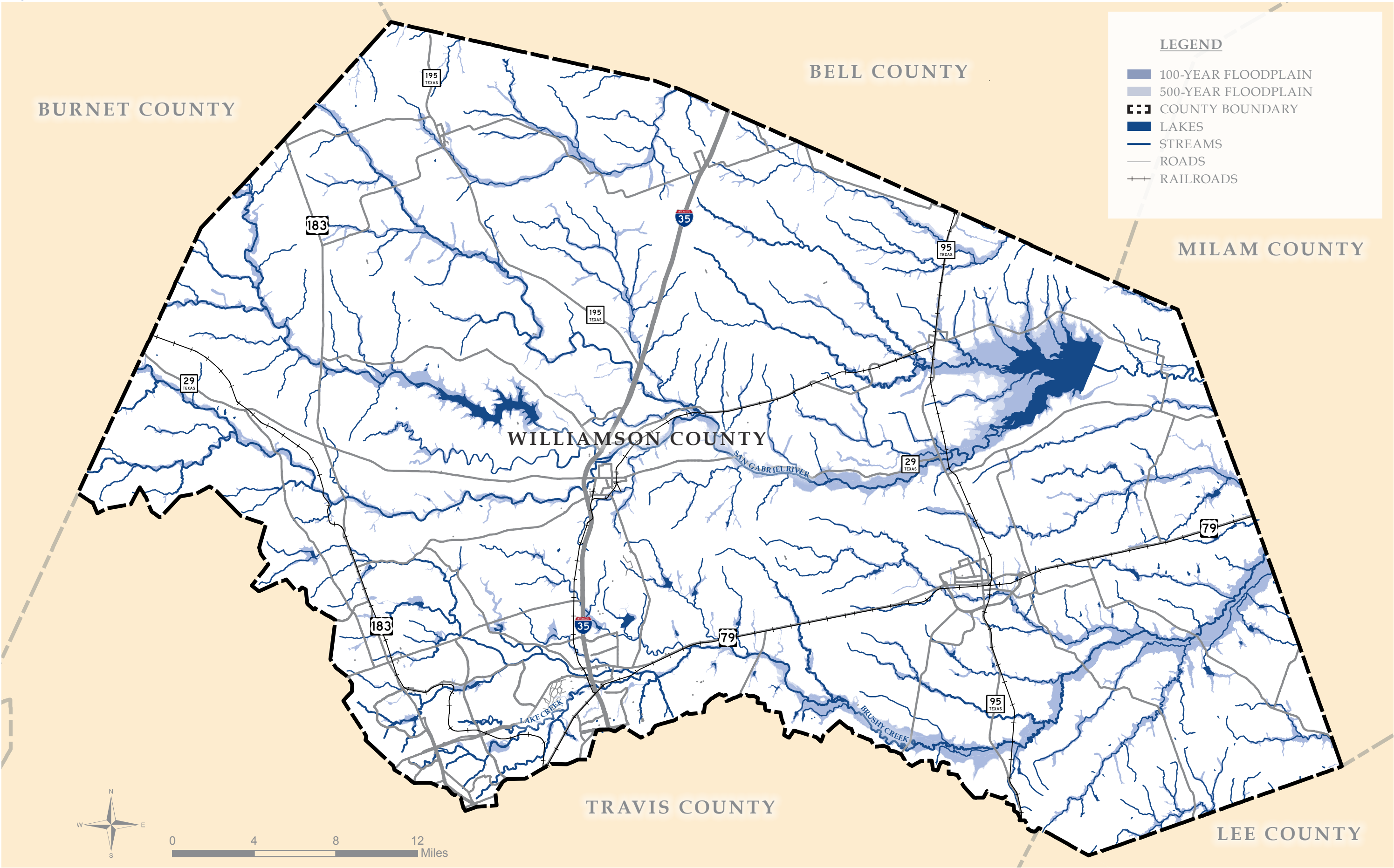
Key physical features within Williamson County are identified in the resource-based assessment. Over time, these features may create possible recreational opportunities, including both natural resources and man-made opportunities.

WATER RESOURCES

The drainage system is a critical part of protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the public. The drainage system's main purpose is to move and store stormwater. The main drainage system contains natural spaces and waterways such as creeks, rivers, tributaries, ponds, flood plains, etc. A significant amount of natural drainage ways currently exist in Williamson County that could provide corridors for trail connectivity. The San Gabriel River, Lake Creek, Brushy Creek run from east to west through the entire County. These creek and river corridors are perfect trail connection opportunities.

Along the San Gabriel River, two U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lakes are located in the northeast and western portions of the County. On the west side of the county, a trail and several campgrounds including day-use recreation are found around Lake Georgetown. On the east side, Lake Granger was created from a dam of the San Gabriel River and includes many water recreational opportunities and overnight camping. Additional opportunities for recreation may be possible in the future at these locations.

In addition to the primary rivers, numerous streams are dispersed throughout the County which could provide additional opportunities for trail corridors and connectivity (see Map 3.1, *Water Resources*, on the next page). Along these streams, either 100-year or 500-year floodplains create open space and recreation opportunity areas where development should not occur.



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CHAPTER
FOUR
RECOMMENDATIONS



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VISION STATEMENT

A vision statement that articulates the aspirational desires for the parks system is the foundation upon which a master plan's basic principles and goals are established. Based upon the results of feedback from the public and the County elected officials and staff on the desired direction of the parks system, the Williamson County Comprehensive Parks Master Plan vision statement is as follows:

Williamson County will continue to provide beautiful public parks, trails and preserves for the passive enjoyment of natural open spaces across the county. Conservation and education will remain at the forefront of recreational amenities within the parks system, and the County will partner with cities and other public parks systems to seek a regional, connected trail system.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The vision statement is further refined through six guiding principles that provide the basis for specific focus areas, plan goals and actions.

- County parks and recreation offerings should have separate goals and focus than neighborhood, city/community, state, and federal entities.
- The conservation of natural and sensitive lands should be the priority while also integrating recreation, activity, and access.
- New park offerings should be large, regional destinations focused on conservation, education, and passive recreation.
- The County should continue to partner with area municipalities to create a county-wide regional trail plan that connects population centers with regional destinations.
- Consistent level of amenities, operations and maintenance should be established and maintained across all existing and future County parks and trails.
- Increased public awareness and communication needed for all County parks, trails, education, and events.



PLAN FOCUS AREAS

Regional Trail Plan

Park System Expansion

Parkland Improvements

Operations and Maintenance

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Trails provide important benefits to communities such as access to nature, reduced stress levels, social opportunities, exercise and good health, and safe transportation routes.



FOCUS AREA

REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN



Access to a regional trail system is one of the growing demands of new homebuyers and the general public not just locally but throughout the country. An integrated regional trail system can be used to connect neighborhoods, schools, parks and regional destinations without requiring a vehicle.

Goal RTP-1.

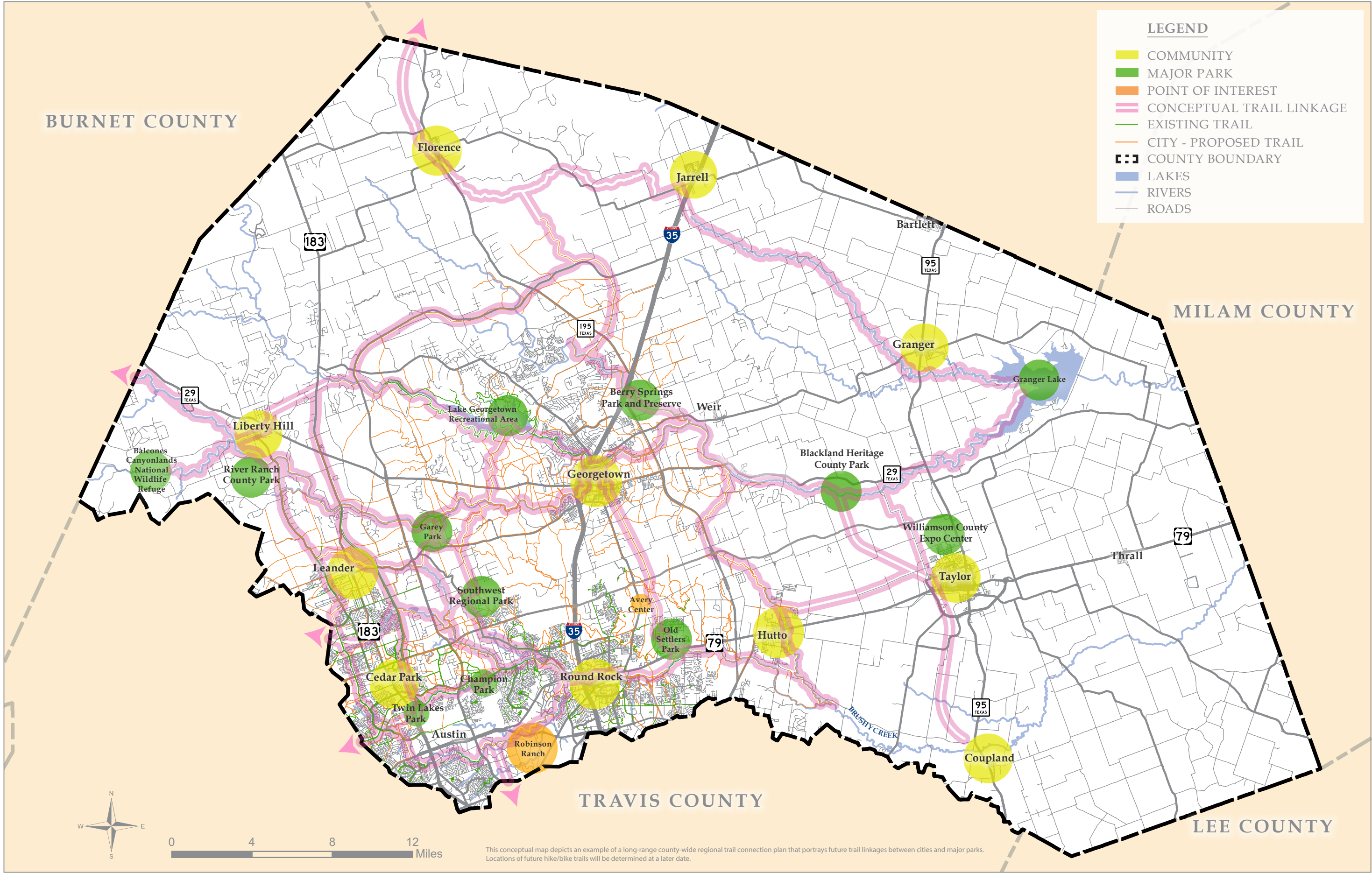
Facilitate and coordinate a county-wide regional trail plan

There have been recent efforts to build and connect trails in and around the population centers within the County. Cities and developers have successfully built and connected trails to the benefit of local residents. Beyond the regional Brushy Creek Trail, however, other regional trail efforts have not yet taken hold. Building such a network will not come from any individual governmental entity, developer or regional organization; instead, support of all entities will slowly and steadily build the network together. Williamson County is uniquely suited to be a leader in this effort to plan for and implement this regional trail system.

In Map 4.1, *Proposed Trail System*, on page 67, this conceptual plan depicts cities and destinations in Williamson County that could be linked by a network of primary trails. This regional system would connect points of interest, downtowns and existing parks, primarily through city trails but eventually would work outward.

90%
of survey
respondents
strongly agreed or
agreed that the trail
system should be
expanded to link
communities and
neighborhoods.

Map 4.1, Proposed Trail System



Many of the routes shown on the map were derived from proposed trail plans in various communities in the County including Austin, Cedar Park, Georgetown, Hutto, Leander, Taylor, and Round Rock. The intent of a future regional trail plan is to determine major connections from the north to the south and the east to the west portions of the County. It is the role of the County to ensure that each community has consistent trail standards. This will avoid gaps in the trail system.

The ideal role for the Williamson County government to play in this multi-layered effort is the regional point entity for fostering collaboration and relationships with local government partners, outward communication and marketing, grants coordination and targeted funding assistance. The County’s role will generally not be to construct and maintain trails, but to provide a guiding hand during planning and trail development, and fill in where necessary on gaps and regional improvements. Public input received at the open houses suggested a coalition of cities and other partners could produce a steering committee or key persons asked to track progress and lead implementation of the trail system. These are details that will be discussed with community partners following adoption of this plan.



Trails can offer alternative modes of transportation and reduce traffic congestion in the rapidly growing cities in the county and outlying areas.

79%

of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that parks, trails, and open space are a significant reason to live in Williamson County.

ACTION RTP-1.1

PARTNER WITH LOCAL CITIES TO INCORPORATE THE REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN CORRIDORS INTO THEIR TRANSPORTATION PLANS AND LONG-RANGE POLICIES.

To ensure that a regional trail plan is established at the local level, support is needed by local governmental entities. This support can be cemented by integrating the regional trail corridors into local cities' long-range comprehensive planning documents such as parks/trails master plans and transportation/land use plans. Regular meetings with the parks and recreation directors to discuss plans and details is recommended to ensure up-to-date consistent planning efforts and find partnership opportunities. Support at the local level, from long-range policy documents to ongoing collaborative efforts, is imperative to a successful, sustained trail system.

ACTION RTP-1.2

FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH REGIONAL MOBILITY ORGANIZATIONS TO LEVERAGE THE PLANNING, FUNDING AND COORDINATION OF THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM.

Trail efforts by regional organizations such as Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, Texas Department of Transportation and Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority are increasing to the point where alternative active transportation options have become priority improvements. Subsequently, there are federal, state, and regional dollars available for eligible, construction-ready trail projects. There are also possibilities to integrate bike/ped facilities in large transportation projects, upsizing or reclassification of a sidewalk/trail, in addition to crossings and bridges.

Applying for regional grants and priority project funding sources is a critical step for regional trails implementation. Partnering with local cities and other organizations promotes the strength-in-numbers approach to receiving outside funding assistance.

ACTION RTP-1.3

CONTINUE TO WORK CLOSELY WITH TRAVIS COUNTY TO INTEGRATE THEIR EXISTING AND FUTURE REGIONAL TRAILS.

By coordinating with Travis County, regional trail connectivity can be integrated into planning efforts beyond just Williamson County. A strong relationship with Travis County ensures that Williamson residents can connect into Austin, Lake Travis, and other destinations beyond the County line, and vice versa. Inter-county trail networks offer non-vehicular commuting opportunities from suburban and exurban locations to employment centers and livable centers, reducing congestion while promoting healthy lifestyle beyond local recreation.

Goal RTP-2.

Establish a consistent set of standards to ensure effective implementation of the regional trail plan

In order to effectively implement a trail system that extends through multiple jurisdictions, some general standards and development requirements should be in place to ensure consistency. These standards may include the size of the trail and needed right-of-way or easement to accommodate an adequate trail width, general procedures for acquisition and dedication/reservation, corridor preservation and access rights, maintenance and emergency access, and general safety/amenity guidelines such as lighting, relief areas, accessibility, etc.

ACTION RTP-2.1

REVIEW AMENDMENTS TO THE WILLIAMSON COUNTY SUBDIVISION REGULATIONS TO ACCOUNT FOR REGIONAL TRAIL CORRIDOR PRESERVATION AND TRAIL CONSTRUCTION DURING DEVELOPMENT.

To effectively implement this plan, the County should review the subdivision regulations to consider addressing trails during the development process. Amendments could include trail corridor preservation, trail construction, trail amenities, and/or potential fee-in-lieu payments when a subdivision development is located along a regional trail corridor. It is important to create regulations that are not one-size-fits-all, are appropriate to the specific area and timing, and focus primarily on protecting trail opportunities.

Amendments to the regulations would not override a municipal trail or parkland ordinance but seek to fill in gaps where municipal regulations are not addressed or do not apply. The County should seek to address transportation needs of the trail system, much like the philosophy behind the County's long-range Major Thoroughfare Plan.





HEALTH BENEFITS OF TRAILS

One of the broad benefits of a strong trail system are the health benefits gained from exercise, fresh air, and engagement with open space. Trails help to make our communities more livable and provide opportunities for physical activity to improve fitness and mental health.

An annual study by the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation ranked Williamson County as the second healthiest county in Texas in 2018. One of the criteria of the study was citizen access to hike-and-bike trails, among other elements, and Williamson County has ranked in the top 5 since the rankings were introduced in 2010.

The 238 miles of trails in the current County system, in addition to City and neighborhood open spaces, continue to be a reason people move to this area and contribute to their healthy lifestyles. Expansion of the trails and prioritizing connectivity of parks and trails will position the County well moving forward.

ACTION RTP-2.2

WORK WITH LOCAL CITY PARTNERS TO ENSURE THAT THE REGIONAL TRAIL CORRIDORS ARE PRIORITIZED IN LOCAL CODE AND DEVELOPMENT REQUIREMENTS.

Most Williamson County cities with significant population centers have park and trail dedication ordinances in their local development codes. Many of these provisions are reviewed and updated frequently to ensure adequate public facility needs keeps pace with growth. As with other recommended actions in this plan, it is imperative that the County and local city partners work collaboratively to ensure consistency of standards in support of a regional trail system. Certain regulatory tools will help achieve trail corridor preservation and construction will minimize challenges and public costs in the future.

ACTION RTP-2.3

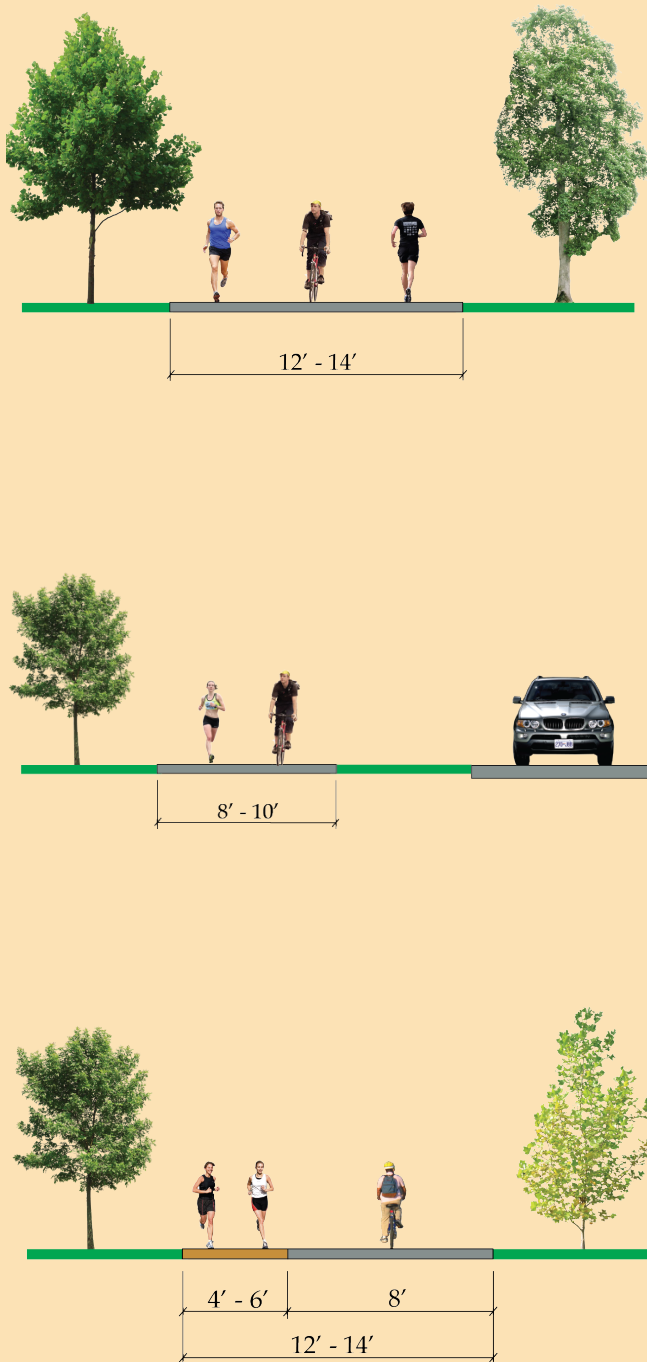
ENSURE THAT CITY AND COUNTY THOROUGHFARE PLANS HAVE ESTABLISHED STANDARDS FOR MULTI-USE SIDEPATHS WHEN TRAILS ARE NECESSARY ALONG PUBLIC STREETS.

Work with local city partners to adopt uniform regional trail construction standards. A common standard is ideal to ensure consistency, durability, and maximization of users. However, alternative standards such as sidepaths and dual-path design provide accommodations for differing trail users and locations. It is not feasible to construct the same trail standard in every terrain and circumstance, so width and material exceptions should be included for steep terrain, bridges, cantilevered walkways, sensitive terrain and tree preservation, etc.

The preferred section in Figure 4.1, *Example Alternative Cross-Sections* on the next page, shows a recommended standard between 12 and 14 feet of concrete. The middle section shows a sidepath of eight to 10 feet which can only be comfortably used by two pedestrians. The bottom section in this figure shows a dual path design that is 12 to 14 foot wide with eight feet of concrete for bicyclists and four to six feet of adjacent decomposed granite for pedestrians.

Each of these varying standards are appropriate in certain instances to accommodate land and cost constraints, and balanced user experiences. The preferred alternative is recommended for its broader benefits, long-range durability and low maintenance cost. A strong trail system will contain diversity of heavy-use, light-to-medium use, and single-track native trail offering options for user preference.

Figure 4.1, Example Trail Cross-Sections



PREFERRED TRAIL SECTION

The recommended preferred trail section is a 12' to 14' wide concrete trail. This trail section accommodates the most trail users and handles high non-vehicular traffic volumes. The wide section is ideal for a regional, shared-use trail while the concrete surface is preferred for durability and low maintenance costs. Appropriate in flood-prone areas and sloped terrain.

ALTERNATIVE SECTION (SIDEPATH)

A recommended alternative to the preferred section is an 8' to 10' wide concrete trail alongside a public street. These trails may be necessary as linkages between regional trails and also to regional destinations. The narrower width emphasizes lower travel speeds, particularly for cyclists. Sidepaths may also function as a street sidewalk, which means a greater volume of daily foot traffic. A generous buffer between the street and sidepath is desired on major streets.

ALTERNATIVE SECTION (DUAL SURFACE)

A second recommended alternative is a dual-surface trail that accommodates a variety of trail users on separate surfaces. This section would contain a 4 to 6' wide jogging/pedestrian lane with a surface of decomposed granite or similar material for the comfort of joggers and pedestrians. The remaining attached or detached trail is concrete, for all other users. This alternative is more expensive to maintain and is not appropriate within floodplains, along slopes, or along public streets.

ACTION RTP-2.4

PURSUE SAFETY AND CONVENIENCE AMENITY GUIDELINES FOR THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM.

Trail amenities include signage, lighting, water fountains, restrooms and benches, all of which augment the convenience and experience. Many of these improvements can be challenging to construct due to cost, accessibility, and utility needs. As part of the effort to establish preferred and alternative trail cross-sections with local jurisdictions, a master set of trail guidelines should be included that address common amenities and also an integrated signage wayfinding system.

Goal RTP-3.

Establish a funding strategy for the construction and maintenance of the regional trail system

With limited trail resources available at the County level, strategies can be put into place to help fund and maintain the existing and future trail system. This can be accomplished through many sources, such as partnerships with communities and philanthropists, business sponsorships, non-profit organizations, and volunteer user groups.



ACTION RTP-3.1

EARMARK BOND CAPITAL SPECIFICALLY FOR COST-SHARING TRAIL CONSTRUCTION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS.

Cities often have funding shortfalls for desirable trail improvements, particularly on challenging “gap” infrastructure between capital improvements projects and developer-driven trails. The County has a role to step in and provide bond capital that would be available as matching funds for which city partners can apply. These funds could help close the gaps for bridges, ramps, trailheads and road crossings, to name a few. Money should also be available to upsize trails of narrower width, provide gap closure where city jurisdiction stops, and to provide other trail amenities that are shared with others. The more the funding effort is seen as collective and shared, the more successful and connected it is likely to be.



All funding resources and partnerships should be explored for expensive trail improvements.

Open house attendees supported leveraging volunteers for park upkeep.

ACTION RTP-3.2

FOSTER COOPERATION WITH LOCAL VOLUNTEER GROUPS TO MAINTAIN AND ENHANCE THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM.

Continue to explore the opportunity to partner with local cities, developers and citizens to create an organization dedicated to operations and maintenance of the trail system (or portions thereof). These groups could include “friends of” groups or other user groups who want to participate in the maintenance of the trails. This type of partnership benefits the County by saving money in ongoing maintenance and creates an army of dedicated citizens heavily invested in their trails.

ACTION RTP-3.3

ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES FOR THE SAFE USE OF THE TRAILS COMMENSURATE WITH TRAIL EXPANSION.

Currently, trail system safety is monitored by the Williamson County Sheriff and local municipal law enforcement where applicable. It is important as the volume and demand for the trail system increases to maintain a safe environment for users. Good lighting, visibility, emergency access, cell phone service, “eyes on the street” presence of workers and citizens, leash law enforcement and other key safety features provide comfort to trail patrons and increase likelihood of usage.

Ensuring safe use as the system grows could also mean that the County should consider adopting some rules for trail behavior, including speed limit and other signage enforcement, dog waste and trash disposal, user-to-user conflict, respecting trail boundaries, etc. These rules and the consequences of failure to abide by them could be enforced by any number of groups, including police and sheriff’s office, volunteer trail patrol, part-time or full-time employees, designated on- or off-duty officers, or other arrangements with neighborhoods, cities, MUDs, etc.



ACTION RTP-3.4

CONSIDER A NON-PROFIT FOUNDATION TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM.

A non-profit foundation could pool resources and become a powerful representative for the parks in fund-raising, grant applications, sponsorships, etc. This foundation could be set up exclusively for the trails or in conjunction with a broader foundation for the parks. This vehicle could encourage local businesses to easily make donations for the creation, improvement and maintenance of regional trails. Public input from the open houses generally indicated strong support for a foundation type of system to augment public funding.

ACTION RTP-3.5

DISCUSS ALL TRAIL FINANCING OPTIONS WITH CITIES, INCLUDING INCORPORATING TRAILS INTO THEIR LISTS OF ELIGIBLE IMPROVEMENTS FOR TYPE B ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT SALES TAX REVENUE.

Another example of a funding source for trails includes local economic development dollars. Some local municipalities already make Type B sales tax revenue available for funding park/trail improvements, but others do not. Having conversations with these cities about expanding their economic development options to include trails provides yet another tool to help finance and construct the regional trail system. Such funds would apply within city jurisdictions only but is another example of a layer of trails that add to a connected regional system. This option can be suggested to the local city partners within the county as one of many considerations to fund trails.



Goal RTP-4.

Update the Williamson County Trails Master Plan

Updating the County's Trails Master Plan will create a useful strategic and tactical planning tool for the County as the trail system expands. Prioritization of trail segments can be determined in this plan to help guide the County in deciding which segments should be constructed first, evaluation of cost-sharing opportunities and seeking of grant funds. The next update should focus heavily on identifying gaps that are solely within the County's jurisdiction, the location of future trailheads and accessibility, deficient planned linkages that could be improved/upsized and the challenging regional connectors such as bridges and tunnels.

ACTION RTP-4.1

UPDATE THE COUNTY'S TRAILS MASTER PLAN TO IDENTIFY CHALLENGING REGIONAL IMPROVEMENTS (SUCH AS BRIDGES AND STREET CROSSINGS) AND IDENTIFY LINKAGE GAPS.

The County's role as regional coordinator and facilitator sets up the next trails plan update as a key component to identifying and planning for regional trail challenges such as bridges, crossings, tunnels and trailhead locations. These identified improvements are vital because they may not be funded by developers or cities and often become missing links in the system. These efforts need to include coordination with TxDOT, CTRMA, CAMPO, cities and other regional transportation organizations to plan ahead and react to challenges with infrastructure financing and development.

Other focus areas in the master plan should include surface improvements, accessibility compliance, upsizing and cost-sharing, trail gaps, priority trail corridors and character zones. Specified priority segments and improvements can be targeted for state and regional grant matches, bond allocations, interim and alternative trails connection options and other funding source opportunities.

The master plan update should also reiterate the goals of minimizing vehicular conflicts and access points, minimizing trails in major street corridors, and prioritizing natural greenways and other open space networks.



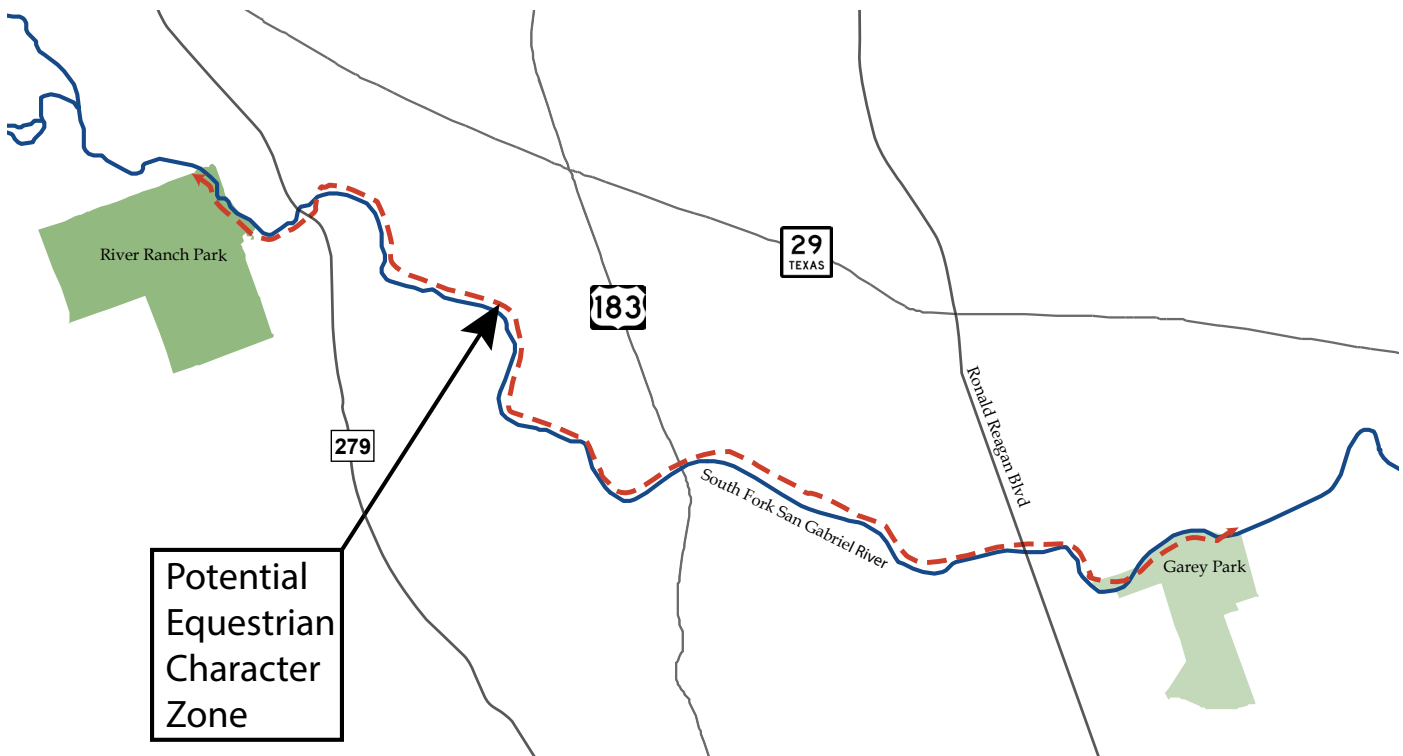
The Trails Master Plan can identify challenging improvements such as bridges and crossings.

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ACTION RTP-4.2

CREATE AND PROMOTE “CHARACTER ZONES” ALONG KEY SEGMENTS OF THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM SUCH AS AN EQUESTRIAN CORRIDOR OR A BLUEWAY AQUATIC ZONE.

Continue to plan for and further define “character zones” along the trail system. These zones can provide specific opportunities in certain sectors of the trails that may not be appropriate elsewhere. Such zones might accommodate water sports such as kayaking/canoeing/floating, etc.; equestrian travel, veloway tracks, heritage education and passive use, etc. Examples that could be explored in the master plan could include an equestrian path in the future section between River Ranch County park and Garey Park, or a kayak/canoe launch location near Mankins Crossing that could eventually connect Blackland Heritage County Park and Granger Lake.



Regional trailheads under overpasses, such as this one at 183A on Brushy Creek, provide easy vehicular access to trails using public right-of-way.



ACTION RTP-4.3

COLLABORATE WITH REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ORGANIZATIONS, CITIES, AND DEVELOPERS TO IDENTIFY REGIONAL AND COMMUNITY TRAILHEAD LOCATIONS.

As the regional trail system expands, periodic public access becomes increasingly more important. Many trail system users will stay relatively close to their homes, while others use it in extended lengths and for active transportation to destinations. The more access to the general public will increase the likelihood of trail use beyond their neighborhood's general area, and provide additional amenities like water, lighting, restrooms, parking, etc.

Public parks generally provide optimal locations for trailheads and support additional amenities simultaneously. The County, along with cities, should seek partnerships with TxDOT and CTRMA, etc. to consider trailheads within the right of way at river crossings, such as the Brushy Creek Trailhead under 183A. These types of locations offer public lands in key locations that often have good access, lighting capabilities, visibility and signage. They can also be included as a component of a larger construction project, saving construction costs, and potentially leveraging federal and state dollars.

ACTION RTP-4.4

STUDY CERTAIN UTILITY CORRIDORS FOR POTENTIAL PUBLIC TRAIL ACCESS.

There are many utility corridors of that create open space cuts across the County, including raw water, gas, electric, and other public/private utilities. Many of these corridors were not established for public access and are presently not available for that use. Reexamining these existing corridors and establishing some policies for future corridors could lead to additional public access for trails, where appropriate to do so. Local governments should be encouraged to work with utility providers to allow for public trail access where safe and appropriate to do so. While utility corridors are not always the optimal location for comfortable, aesthetically-pleasing trail corridors, they can play a key role in closing gaps in the system, making connections from community to regional networks, and remove conflicts from roadways where no other alternative exists.

ACTION RTP-4.5

PROMOTE THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM THROUGH MARKETING AND COMMUNICATION EFFORTS.

A regional trail system has positive marketing effects on potential homebuyers and local businesses. Once established, there are opportunities to brand and promote the system, or pieces of the larger system, to entice further investment and improvements. For example, developer partners might be more likely to contribute to, and tailor a project around, a regional trail such as Brushy Creek or San Gabriel to take advantage of the recreation and connectivity.

The County could consider a specific branding theme for each major trail corridor. Updating the website and other digital applications that identify trails, amenities, trailheads and other destinations are further efforts to market the system. Public input from the open houses indicated a desire for more of an online trail presence, with a suggestion for mobile applications indicating trailhead locations and trail routes. Some of these advanced technology applications could be created by third-party and commercial users, with the County helping forward the development of tools that encourage users to find and enjoy the trail system.

45%

of survey respondents learned about Williamson County parks and trails from the County's website, social media, or County newsletter.



FOCUS AREA

PARK SYSTEM EXPANSION

Goal PSE-1.

Evaluate opportunities for land acquisition

Tremendous growth in the County will continue to place demand for recreational open spaces and increase the need for additional parks. As the population is projected to soar towards one million residents in 2050, strong consideration should be given to locating and purchasing the next regional park property, even if development of the land is not imminent.

ACTION PSE-1.1

PROACTIVELY EVALUATE THE PURCHASE OF A LARGE PROPERTY FOR A FUTURE COUNTY PARK.

When evaluating the long-term need for property, careful consideration of taxpayer money should be a primary focus. Land values may fluctuate, but acquisition of property close to population centers will likely not be feasible when the demand arrives. The alternative is to consider buying land early and holding the property until the need for development is apparent. Public feedback from the open houses indicated support for buying land early and leasing all or part of the property until the land was ready for development.

As contemplated throughout this plan, recreation should not be the sole focus in the future for County parks, but rather one of several primary goals, including the land's conservation and educational attributes. As such, review of new land opportunities should consider multiple public benefits within the park before deciding on a property or properties.

91%

of survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the County should provide additional opportunities for passive outdoor recreation.

When reviewing new land areas, consider the following criteria in review of potential land acquisition:

- Proximity to future regional trail system
- Sensitive habitats related to Environmental Site Assessment
- Preserves and karst mitigation lands
- Existing conservation easements
- Large parcels of common ownership
- Existing rivers, streams, springs, etc. and flood-prone lands
- Lakes, ponds, etc. for regional stormwater, recreation, potable water, etc.
- Archaeological significance
- Environmental feature(s) that would allow for education, demonstration, etc.
- Location(s) from current population centers

There are potentially several areas within the County that offer unique land elements that may be undeserved by parks and public open spaces today. Some of these areas are within the path of growth and others may hold promise precisely because they aren't in the path of growth. Close proximity to population centers should not disqualify a land area and may be more desirable and attainable from a price perspective. Four or five geographic areas should be examined under the guidelines listed above to determine a location for the next park site.

The size of future County parks should be considerably larger than the average County park size in 2018. A suggested range to explore is 1,000 acres to 3,000 acres, with a myriad of variables determining the optimal size. The ideal property, at whatever amount of acreage, will contain multiple attributes listed in the above criteria and is able to support the long-term vision of this plan.

ACTION PSE-1.2

PRIORITIZE CONSERVATION, HERITAGE, AND PASSIVE RECREATION WHEN CONSIDERING FUTURE LAND ACQUISITION AND PARK PLANNING EFFORTS.

Future County parks should focus primarily on heritage and conservation efforts, with the intent of preserving natural areas for habitat, stormwater abatement, education, etc. Passive recreation in these open spaces is crucial for the general public to be able to experience large natural areas while learning more about local natural resources and habitats.



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ACTION PSE-1.3

EXPLORE POTENTIAL PARTNERSHIPS AND ARRANGEMENTS ON STATE AND FEDERAL LANDS, SUCH AS U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS PROPERTY.

The two largest lakes in the County are owned and managed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Lake Granger and Lake Georgetown. Due to growth and increasing demand, it is likely that these containment and recreation resources will face pressure to diversify and increase amenities to accommodate the demand, while managing tight resources. Accordingly, the County could explore shared use, shared funding, or even transfer of certain operations if such actions meet the criteria for future regional parks. All options should be considered to further the goals of this plan in a financially responsible manner.

ACTION PSE-1.4

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BOTH CONSERVATION AND RECREATION BY DOVETAILING EFFORTS WITH STATE, COUNTY, AND CITY FLOODPLAIN STUDIES.

As flooding continues to become more than a local concern and is the subject of regional and state-wide planning efforts, there exist opportunities to take a collaborative big-picture look at mitigation lands and open space. Passive recreation like hike/bike trails, bird-watching, and other light footprint improvements minimize risk and destruction during flood events, while taking advantage of critical community open spaces. Linear trail corridors with occasional parks, trailheads, and access are consistent with the mission of flood-control and dovetailing efforts with other entities would be a worthwhile strategy.

Goal PSE-2.

Emphasize education and conservation as primary themes in new parks

Educational programs focusing on conservation within the parks system are and will continue to be one of the primary goals of the Williamson County parks system. The County can ensure that residents and park users understand this goal through communication efforts, programs and volunteers that teach, and amenities that encourage an understanding of conservation.

ACTION PSE-2.1

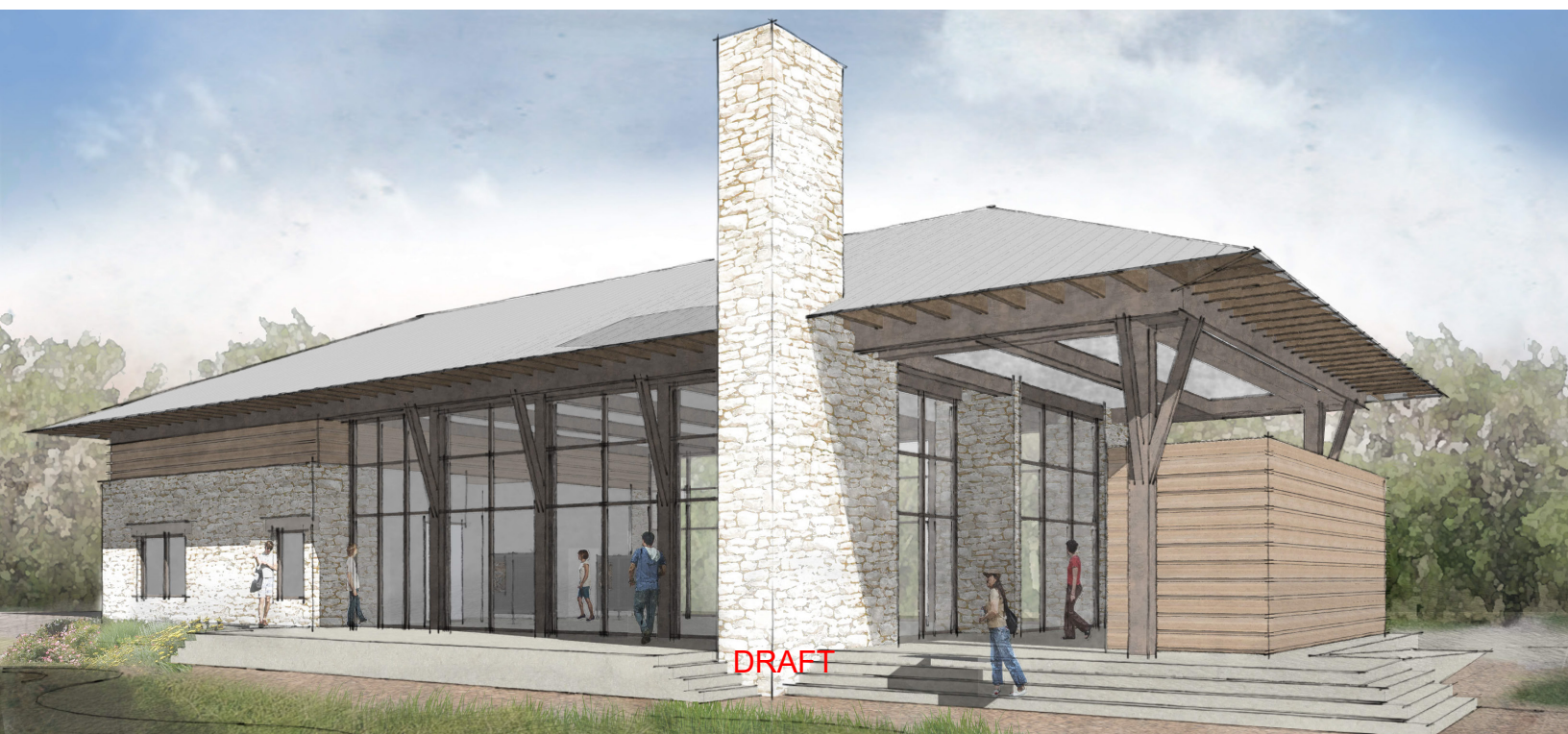
EXPAND EDUCATIONAL CONSERVATION PROGRAMS SUCH AS “LEAVE NO TRACE” THROUGH SIGNAGE, EVENTS, VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS.

Volunteer and friends groups such as the Master Naturalists, Native Plant Society, Boy Scouts, and other advocates help promote these goals by volunteering their time and expertise. These groups and other organizations, including universities, public schools, and other private research groups can assist the County by holding events, hands-on field experiences, constructing signage, enhancing trails, installing native plant species, removing invasive species, etc. Partnering with these groups augment Parks Department and Conservation Foundation efforts to educate patrons about the importance of conserving the County’s natural resources.

ACTION PSE-2.2

COMMUNICATE COUNTY CONSERVATION EFFORTS THROUGH EVENTS, ACTIVITIES, AMENITIES AND INTERPRETIVE EDUCATION CENTERS.

Promoting the conservation efforts to the general public should be a priority for the department. These efforts are made easier by encouraging people to visit the park for events and other activities through outreach. Once patrons visit the parks, they will be exposed to various educational experiences where they can learn about the land, ecology, and history. These experiences may be in the forms of education centers, signs, displays, and interactive amenities, among others. The goal is to provide teachable amenities beyond the recreational aspects of the parks and trails system.



ACTION PSE-2.3

PROMOTE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE COUNTY'S EXISTING NATURAL RESOURCES AND SENSITIVE ENVIRONMENTAL FEATURES SUCH AS CAVES AND HABITATS.

Another aspect of conservation education is communicating to the public about the sensitive natural resources and why they are important beyond the enjoyment and recreation of the County's residents. The County should prioritize informational resources to the public regarding the benefits and action of the Regional Habitat Conservation Plan (RHCP) and how endangered species habitat are being managed and protected under the plan.

ACTION PSE-2.4

INSTALL ADDITIONAL INFORMATIONAL, WAYFINDING AND INTERPRETIVE SIGNS THROUGHOUT THE PARKS AND TRAIL SYSTEM.

Public parks and trails have a story to tell with many different layers, all of which teach and inform the patrons of that land. Periodic wayfinding, informational kiosks, and occasional interpretive signs are a great way to inform and connect park and trail users to the spaces they are experiencing, as well as offering a place to stop and rest. This information can include descriptions of geographical location such as mile markers and amenity locations for trails, informative and pictorial representation of ecology, flora and fauna, and also historical references so that the reader can more fully absorb their surroundings.

Image Source: <https://havingfuninthetexasun.com/2015/03/16/southwest-nature-preserve-arlington/>



The Southwest Nature Preserve in Arlington, Texas has one example of interpretive signage.



FOCUS AREA

PARKLAND IMPROVEMENTS

As the population of the County increases, the park system will need to grow, adapt, and continue to make improvements to facilities that provide recreation and educational experiences. These improvements range from construction in new parks that are funded but not yet completed to new facilities within existing parks. Funding for these improvements can be obtained through public grants, taxpayer-supported bond issuances, revenue generated by usage of the parks, and sponsorships and business partnerships.

Goal PI-1.

Efficiently develop and enhance park facilities and amenities

As the County embarks on new construction in existing and future parks, it is crucial to look at what has worked well in the past, and what citizens desire in the future. New development and enhancements of park amenities should be constructed to improve user experiences, expand the number of visitors, and should consider long-term costs and return on investment.

ACTION PI-1.1

EXPAND AND DIVERSIFY COUNTY PARK OFFERINGS FOR OVERNIGHT RENTAL ACCOMMODATIONS.

Overnight accommodations are a passive recreational offering that is becoming more and more popular at the national and state level, where overnight accommodations and traditionally been offered. Options for the County include new and expanded campsites, RV hook-ups, individual or multi-unit cabins, and other lodging alternatives. These overnight opportunities could also be associated with event facilities. Consideration may be given to the creation of a partnership with a third-party event operator.



ACTION PI-1.2

CONSIDER FURTHER EXPANSION OF THE EXPO CENTER FACILITIES TO MEET CUSTOMER DEMAND AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL DESTINATION OPPORTUNITIES.

The Expo Center is a successful, revenue-generating destination that has further future potential. The County should complete the current expansion plans and consider new revenue opportunities and additional overnight destination through additional events and activities. The County could also partner with the City of Taylor for events using the adjacent public park.

ACTION PI-1.3

MONITOR THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL TEMPORARY AND PERMANENT PARKING AT TRAILHEADS AND PARKS ALONG THE REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM.

Cost-sharing options should be studied with local municipalities for additional trail parking at Champion Park. Champion Park, one of several parks along the Brushy Creek Trail, functions to many as a gateway to the regional trail and has many additional amenities that make it a logical trail head location.

At other trailhead locations, consider adding amenities such as water fountains, improved parking, restrooms and signage to increase the experience for trail users by extending their time on the trail. Public input from the open houses indicated that parking availability was lacking at trailhead locations and often was not designated. While this indicates popularity and strong usage of the trail system, under-parked trailheads will not be sustainable as population and demand increases.



Nature Trails can be inexpensive to install and maintain but are not best-suited as regional or high-usage trails.

Public open house comments were not in favor of delaying or abandoning plans for Blackland Heritage County Park.

96%
of survey respondents declared a need for nature trails within parks.

ACTION PI-1.4

EVALUATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE EXPANSION OF BLACKLAND HERITAGE COUNTY PARK ALONG THE SAN GABRIEL RIVER CORRIDOR.

Re-evaluate the timing of developing Blackland Heritage Park once expansion feasibility is determined. Seek an additional 500-700 acres of floodplain property on either side of river. Consider refocusing part of the park towards the San Gabriel River Corridor as conservation and stormwater protection property. Seek a future trail connection to the south, towards Taylor, as part of the regional trail system. Coordinate with floodplain studies to consider additional floodplain property to acquire land, preferably upstream towards Mankins Crossing.

ACTION PI-1.5

EXPAND THE NETWORK OF NATURE TRAILS WITHIN EXISTING AND FUTURE PARKS.

Nature trails, whether unpaved, or surfaced with rock/aggregate/mulch, are a very popular recreational amenity within the parks. Nature trails are supported as a priority in the citizen survey and can be easier to plan and install than the regional trails. Depending on the type and location of the trail, maintenance can be more limited and cost-effective, plus opportunities exist for trail users and other groups to take care of the trails as well. The nature trail network in existing parks and future parks should be a focus of expansion and improvement in the coming years. Unpaved nature trails are most appropriate within the contained parks and should be used as a regional trail only on an interim basis to promote connections.

Goal PI-2.

Seek financial partnerships through shared-use facilities and sponsorships

Instead of placing all of the financial burden for the creation and maintenance of parks on the County, sponsorships can alleviate some of this responsibility.

ACTION PI-2.1

EXAMINE THE POTENTIAL FOR CORPORATE, INDIVIDUAL AND NON-PROFIT SPONSORSHIPS TO ASSIST WITH PARK SYSTEM CAPITAL PROJECTS, EVENTS AND MAINTENANCE.

Exploring partnerships with other groups and individuals could reap financial benefits as well as increased interest and enthusiasm among patrons. Donations, voluntarism, capital construction, and other possibilities exist beyond the traditional funding sources. Interested groups can join into an agreement so that funds for a specific park project can be donated.

Image Source: [https:// legacyplaza.org/2017/01/lady-bird-johnson-wildflower-center-visits-botanical-gardens/](https://legacyplaza.org/2017/01/lady-bird-johnson-wildflower-center-visits-botanical-gardens/)



The Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center is located in Austin, Texas and is an example of a facility that provides quality indoor and outdoor event spaces.

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ACTION PI-2.2

CONTINUE TO EXPLORE REVENUE ENHANCEMENTS THROUGH SHARED ARRANGEMENTS OF PARKS AND PARK FACILITIES WITH PUBLIC AND COMPLEMENTING COMMERCIAL USERS.

Enhanced revenue to the parks department should be a bonus as opposed to a necessity. Destination locations, whether on park property or adjacent, help to create interest and activity in open spaces. Exploring partnerships with commercial and public users to use park facilities is an emerging trend for parks and trails. For example, brewpubs or food trucks create destination environments that could be located near trailheads that could contribute to parking improvements and restroom facilities.

While outside-of-the-box and the typical parks approach, the County should not hesitate to evaluate public-private partnerships for destination commercial activity adjacent to trails and parks. Public input at the open houses showed concern for the commercialization of the parks, particularly within natural open spaces, so great care should be taken when considering these types of partnerships.

ACTION PI-2.3

DESIGN AND BUILD INDOOR FACILITIES WITHIN THE PARKS THAT PROVIDE MULTI-USE FLEXIBLE SPACE FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EVENTS TO GENERATE REVENUE FOR THE DEPARTMENT.

Events that take place in shared-use facilities in public parks are becoming more and more prevalent. Meeting spaces for corporate retreats, conferences, parties, reunions, weddings, receptions, etc. present opportunities for the County to generate revenue. These spaces can, of course, be used for educational opportunities and daily-use space simultaneously. A successful local example of an educational center that has multi-purpose indoor and outdoor spaces for public and private events is the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin.

ACTION PI-2.4

ENCOURAGE THE USE OF COUNTY PARKS AND FACILITIES FOR PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPECIAL EVENTS TO GENERATE REVENUE AND PROMOTE THE PARKS.

Increased expenses come with more special event programming. Initial conversations can strategically plan how the sponsorship funding will be best used to improve future events. These recreational events could include activities such as running, biking or a triathlon.

FOCUS AREA

OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE



The operations and maintenance of the parks system is often overlooked but is a crucial planning component to ensure safe, cost-effective, and high-quality amenities and open spaces. As the park system grows and existing facilities age, constant review and evaluation are needed to determine the appropriate resources, staff, facility upgrades, etc. that best implement this plan.

Goal OM-1.

Ensure consistent, quality maintenance of park system facilities

Williamson County residents demonstrated in the survey that the County has done a great job maintaining the parks and trails system and they desire that this continues. Ensuring consistent maintenance reduces long-term expenses and allows for greater user experience throughout the lifespan of park facilities.

ACTION OM-1.1

CONTINUE TO MEET CITIZEN EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MAINTENANCE AND OPERATION OF PARK FACILITIES, AMENITIES AND SERVICES.

The public input received during the planning process clearly presented expectations of the County citizens of a high standard of maintenance. To continue to provide parks with a high quality of maintenance, thought should be paid to new improvements and the requirements for operations and maintenance of those improvements. This can extend to water needs, trimming and mowing, lighting, safety considerations, landscaping, etc.

90%
of survey
respondents
strongly agree
or **agree** that the
current County
parks system is
well-maintained.

Survey respondents scored “continue to improve and maintain existing parks” as the **highest** priority among potential County actions.

ACTION OM-1.2

MONITOR AND EVALUATE EXISTING FACILITIES AND RESOURCES FOR EFFICIENCIES AND MAINTENANCE STANDARDS.

Regular monitoring and management of assets to high standards for lasting strength and durability will mean lower long-term costs to the department. Efficiencies can be sought within open spaces by reducing areas with high maintenance needs and continued use of drought tolerant plant material could be used in these areas to ensure that the landscaping can survive through the hot summer months. In addition, more natural areas could be incorporated into the existing and future parks to decrease the amount to maintenance, diversify the ecosystem and improve sustainability of the parks.

ACTION OM-1.3

EXTEND THE LIFE-CYCLE OF COUNTY PARK FACILITIES THROUGH CONTINUAL REVIEW AND COMPLIANCE WITH FACILITY RESOURCE USE GUIDELINES.

The department has had resource use guidelines in place to help protect the long-term use of indoor and outdoor facilities that are used frequently within the parks system. These guidelines should be regularly reviewed for compliance with facility users, updated as necessary, and used to ensure that the parks system assets will be properly sustained. Adhering to these guidelines, for example limiting hours of use to 15 hours per week for recovery of sports fields will extend the life cycle of these facilities for the continued enjoyment of all users without costly replacement.

Public input at the open houses expressed desire to limit sports tournaments. Athletic fields do require heavy maintenance and have the potential for overuse; however, they are extremely popular and a major driver of park attendance and participation. It is recommended that the County maintain diligent usage guidelines for sports facilities, whether for tournaments or daily use.



Goal OM-2.

Identify the operational and resource needs necessary to implement this Parks Master Plan

For the parks master plan to be considered successful over the next 10 years and beyond, adequate resources should be carefully planned for the County to implement these actions. These include financial resources, staffing, and a coordinated communication effort to the general public.

ACTION OM-2.1

EVALUATE NEEDS FOR ADDITIONAL STAFF AND RESOURCES AS NECESSARY TO EFFECTIVELY MANAGE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GROWING PARKS, TRAILS AND OPEN SPACE, AND PRESERVE SYSTEMS.

As the County grows and enhances its park-related facilities and amenities, it becomes important to also consider how these new park resources affect current staffing levels and their ability to maintain the level of quality expected by the community. Staffing changes can consist of hiring new employees and operational and role changes within the current staff. As plans are made to add new parks, the budget for the operations and maintenance of these parks need to be considered.

The County is projected to grow from 422,679 to 644,844 residents from 2010 to 2030, an increase of

48%.

Williamson County is expected to reach **1 million people** in 2050.

15%

of survey respondents had **not** been to a County park or did not know they existed.

ACTION OM-2.2

DETERMINE THE FINANCIAL NEEDS FOR FUTURE LAND ACQUISITION AND REGIONAL TRAIL SYSTEM EXPANSION TO INCLUDE IN A SUBSEQUENT BOND PROPOSAL.

Some preliminary forecasting should be completed prior to a potential parks and trails bond proposal so that a reasonable estimate can be included in the package. This preliminary estimate could focus on a future park property acquisition only, as a first step, or consider a large target of both acquisition and some combination of design/construction. An estimate for trail corridor acquisition, some funding for improvements and amenities, and an allocation of funds for a city match program should also be included. The determination of these costs should be consistent with, and effectively implement, the goals of this plan.

ACTION OM-2.3

CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE AND UPDATE THE COUNTY'S DIGITAL COMMUNICATION EFFORTS TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND RESOURCES.

As the park system continues to evolve and expand, the resources that are available to the public need to be kept up to date. This includes information such as maps, events, educational resources, social media sites and volunteer opportunities. Keeping this information current will help citizens become and stay more active in their usage and enjoyment of the parks system. Where possible, consider including bilingual information for events.

ACTION OM-2.4

UPDATE THE PARKS MASTER PLAN AFTER 5 YEARS.

Following adoption and implementation of the priority actions set forth in this plan, a 5-year review of benchmarks and priorities should be completed in a public progress report on plan implementation. This 5-year benchmark is a recommended guideline of Texas Parks and Wildlife in their consideration of grant applications.

The 5-year revision should summarize plan accomplishments to date, updates to demographics, goals and objectives, standards, and maps, as necessary. The 5-year update should also include re-prioritizing of projects and improvements, justified by some measure of public input.

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CHAPTER
FIVE
IMPLEMENTATION



DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

Previous chapters of this plan describe community preferences for parks and trails, and provide an evaluation of needs based on current conditions and opportunities. Chapter 4, *Recommendations*, details specific actions that can be taken to achieve the desired community vision for the park system.

This chapter prioritizes the recommendations into an Implementation Action Plan that functions as a framework for the County to reach its long-term priorities and adapt to changing conditions over time. This chapter provides further recommendations for future plan updates to ensure the projected vision for the parks and recreation system remains aligned with community needs.

TEXAS PARKS AND WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT COMPLIANCE

As specified by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), one of the purposes of this plan is to function as a parks, recreation, and open space master plan. This is because “qualified” plans increase an entity’s competitiveness when applying for TPWD grant funding. To remain in compliance with the TPWD guidelines, a list of priorities for the next five and ten year period shall be maintained during implementation.

These priorities are determined by community input and existing conditions based on feedback from County staff. For purposes of grant applications, an effective set of actions, informed by recognized needs, have been recommended to increase the quality of life of residents.



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IMPLEMENTATION PROGRAM

The implementation program consists of three parts: a park facility prioritization, an action prioritization and an ongoing plan review/update task. The ability to address these elements should be used as a metric to measure the success of accomplishing the purpose of this plan. The criteria used to prioritize the park facility needs of Williamson County include level of need based on community input (on-line survey results, stakeholder interviews, open house meeting, etc.), and assessment of existing park facility inventory.

PARK FACILITIES PRIORITIZATION

The prioritization of park facilities/recreation programming is based on the results of the public engagement effort. The park facilities/recreation programming prioritization takes the individual components that make up the park system. The purpose of this exercise is to highlight priority recreation offerings for park system improvements. This prioritization should be used in a manner to allow the County to be flexible and opportunistic with the development and build out of its parks.

The main facility priorities are shown in Table 5.1, *Summary of High Priority Facilities Needs in Williamson County*.



Table 5.1, Summary of High Priority Facilities Needs in Williamson County

<u>NEW OR ADDITIONAL AMENITIES NEEDED BASED ON COMMUNITY INPUT</u> 1. Nature trails 2. Paved walking and biking trails 3. Regional greenways for walking/running/biking 4. Natural areas and wildlife habitat 5. Restrooms on trails
<u>NEW OR ADDITIONAL AMENITIES NEEDED BASED ON EXISTING CONDITION</u> 1. Improvements, replacements, painting, and repairs of park facilities required due to use and age 2. Heavy, concentrated use is accelerating wear and tear on infrastructure 3. Concrete foot bridge between Parmer Village and Town & County Optimist fields is showing signs of settling and cracks in concrete approach aprons. 4. More paved parking for special events and large parties 5. Pavilions
<u>TOP COLLECTIVE OUTDOOR FACILITY NEEDS BASED ON ABOVE SUMMARIES</u> 1. Nature trails 2. Paved walking and biking trails 3. Regional greenway for walking/running/biking 4. Natural areas and wildlife habitat 5. Restrooms on trails 6. Improvements, replacements, painting, and repairs of park facilities required due to use and age 7. Heavy, concentrated use is accelerating wear and tear on infrastructure 8. Concrete foot bridge between Parmer Village and Town & County Optimist fields is showing signs of settling and cracks in concrete approach aprons. 9. More paved parking for special events and large parties 10. Pavilions

PRIORITIZED ACTION PLAN

Recommended actions address a wide range of items from regional trails to park system expansion, parkland improvements and operations and maintenance. These recommended implementation actions are categorized by action types displayed in Figure 5.1, *Implementation Action Types*.

These action types include the following:

- Study;
- Operational Action;
- Regulation;
- Partnership;
- Policy; and
- Capital Investment.



Figure 5.1, Implementation Action Types



PRIORITIZATION TIMEFRAME

Set out in Figure 5.2, *Priority Action Timeframe*, are the actions of this Parks Master Plan that can be further defined into three stages of priority including the following:

- Short-Term Priorities;
- Moderate Priorities; and
- Long-Term Priorities.

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA

The prioritization presented in this plan is intended to guide staff and Commissioners Court in the timing of decision-making and actions. Timing of actions may change slightly due to funding capacity, unforeseen circumstances or new opportunities. Prioritization is derived using the following criteria:

- Level of need created from community feedback;
- Level of need based on the needs assessment;
- Capacity of the County to fund implementation;
- Capacity of the County to sustain operations.

Table 5.2, *Prioritized Implementation Action Plan*, establishes the ranked priorities of each of this plan's Focus Areas, listed by the title of each recommended action. For descriptions and further details of each action, see Chapter 4, *Recommendations*. These rankings inform the timing of the County's short, moderate and long-term priorities. While many of these actions are ongoing actions (carried out regularly over the life of the plan), some are one-time actions appropriate only within a defined priority timeframe.

Figure 5.2, Priority Action Timeframe

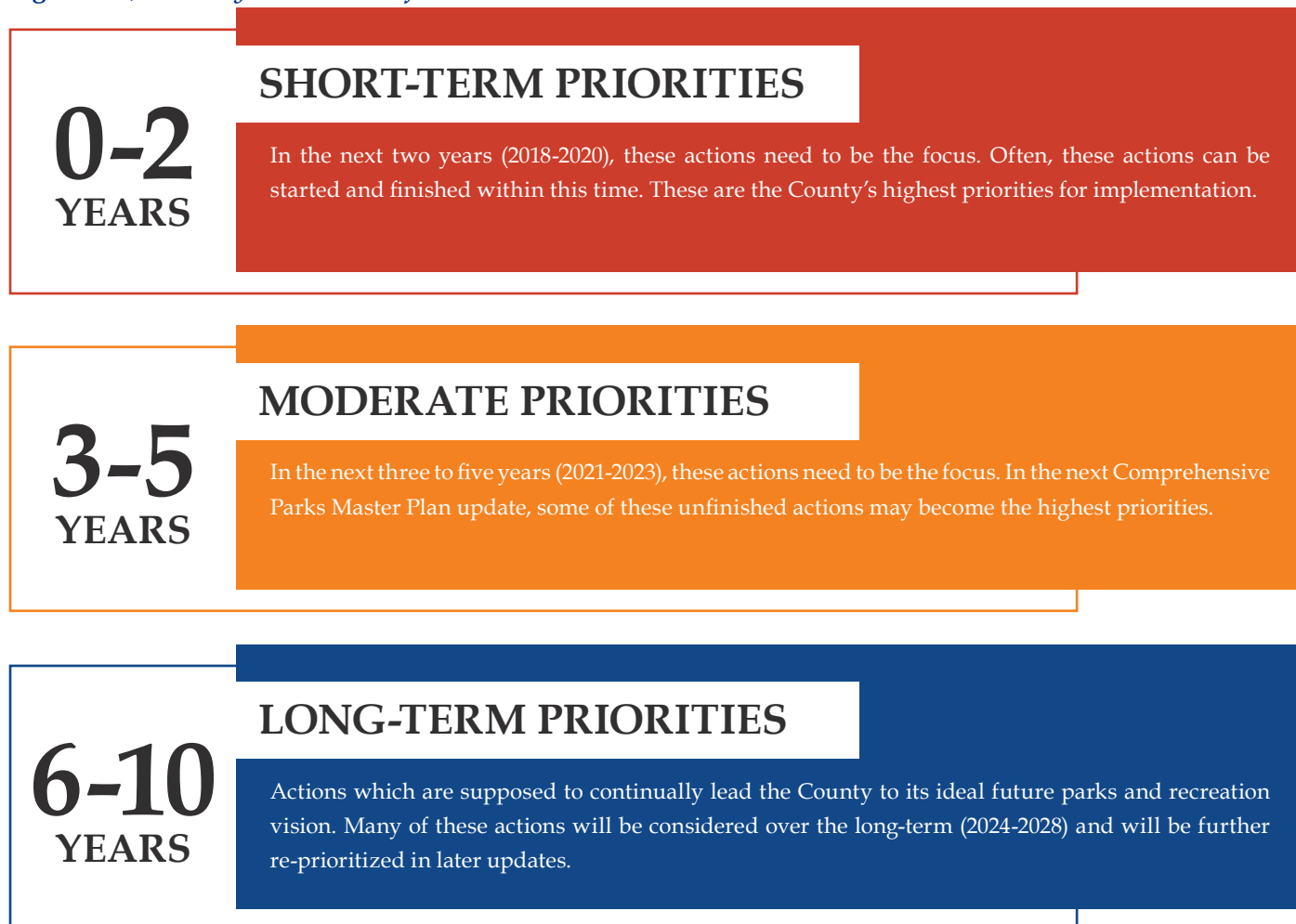


Table 5.2, Prioritized Implementation Action Plan

RANK	ACTION ID	ACTION	TIME FRAME			ACTION TYPE
			0-2	3-5	6-10+	
FOCUS AREA: REGIONAL TRAIL PLAN						
1	RTP-3.3	Allocate sufficient resources for the safe use of the trails commensurate with trail expansion.	■	■	■	Capital Investment
2	RTP-4.4	Study certain utility corridors for potential public trail access.	■	■	■	Study
3	RTP-1.1	Partner with local cities to incorporate the regional trail plan corridors into their transportation plans and long-range policies.	■	■	■	Partnership
4	RTP-1.2	Foster relationships with regional mobility organizations to leverage the planning, funding and coordination of the regional trail system.	■	■	■	Partnership
5	RTP-2.1	Review amendments to the Williamson County subdivision regulations to account for regional trail corridor preservation and trail construction during development.	■			Regulation
6	RTP-2.2	Work with local city partners to ensure that the regional trail corridors are prioritized in local code and development requirements.	■			Partnership
7	RTP-3.1	Earmark bond capital specifically for cost-sharing trail construction with local governments.	■			Capital Investment
8	RTP-4.3	Collaborate with regional transportation organizations, cities, and developers to identify regional and community trailhead locations.	■	■	■	Partnership
9	RTP-2.4	Pursue safety and convenience amenity guidelines for the regional trail system.	■			Policy
10	RTP-3.2	Foster cooperation with local volunteer groups to maintain and enhance the regional trail system.	■	■	■	Partnership
11	RTP-2.3	Ensure that city and County thoroughfare plans have established standards for multi-use sidepaths when trails are necessary along public streets.	■			Regulation
12	RTP-3.4	Consider a non-profit foundation to raise funds for the regional trail system.		■		Partnership
13	RTP-4.5	Promote the regional trail system through marketing and communication efforts.	■	■	■	Operational Action
14	RTP-4.2	Create and promote “character zones” along key segments of the regional trail system such as an equestrian corridor or a blueway aquatic zone.	■	■		Study
15	RTP-4.1	Update the County’s Trails Master Plan to identify challenging regional improvements (such as bridges and street crossings) and identify linkage gaps.	■			Study
16	RTP-3.5	Discuss all trail financing options with cities, including incorporating trails into their lists of eligible improvements for Type B economic development sales tax revenue.	■			Partnership
17	RTP-1.3	Continue to work closely with Travis County to integrate their existing and future regional trails.	■	■	■	Partnership

Table 5.2, Prioritized Implementation Action Plan (cont.)

RANK	ACTION ID	ACTION	TIME FRAME			ACTION TYPE
			0-2	3-5	6-10+	
FOCUS AREA: PARK SYSTEM EXPANSION						
1	PSE-1.1	Proactively evaluate the purchase of a large property for a future County park.	■			Study
2	PSE-1.2	Prioritize conservation, heritage, and passive recreation when considering future land acquisition and park planning efforts.	■			Policy
3	PSE-1.4	Create opportunities for both conservation and recreation by dovetailing efforts with state, county, and city floodplain studies.	■	■	■	Partnership
4	PSE-2.3	Promote an understanding of the County’s natural resources and sensitive environmental features such as caves and habitats.	■	■	■	Operational Action
5	PSE-2.1	Expand educational conservation programs such as “leave no trace” through signage, events, volunteers, and community organizations.	■	■	■	Operational Action
6	PSE-2.2	Communicate County conservation efforts through events, activities, amenities and interpretive education centers.	■	■	■	Operational Action
7	PSE-1.3	Explore potential partnerships and arrangements on state and federal lands, such as U.S. Army Corps of Engineers property.		■		Partnership
8	PSE-2.4	Install additional educational, informational and historical interpretive and wayfinding signs throughout the parks and trail system.	■	■	■	Operational Action
FOCUS AREA: PARKLAND IMPROVEMENTS						
1	PI-1.2	Consider further expansion of the Expo Center facilities to meet customer demand and provide additional destination opportunities.	■			Capital Investment
2	PI-1.3	Monitor the need for additional temporary and permanent parking at trailheads and parks along the regional trail system.	■	■	■	Study
3	PI-1.5	Expand the network of nature trails within existing and future parks.	■	■	■	Capital Investment
4	PI-2.4	Encourage the use of County parks and facilities for public and private special events to generate revenue and promote the parks.	■	■	■	Operational Action
5	PI-1.1	Expand and diversify County park offerings for overnight rental accommodations.	■			Capital Investment
6	PI-2.1	Examine the potential for corporate, individual and non-profit sponsorships to assist with park system capital projects, events and maintenance.	■	■	■	Partnership
7	PI-2.2	Continue to explore revenue enhancements through shared arrangements of parks and park facilities with public and complementing commercial users.	■	■	■	Partnership/ Policy/Capital Investment

Table 5.2, Prioritized Implementation Action Plan (cont.)

RANK	ACTION ID	ACTION	TIME FRAME			ACTION TYPE
			0-2	3-5	6-10+	
8	PI-1.4	Evaluate opportunities for the expansion of Blackland Heritage County Park along the San Gabriel River corridor.	■			Study
9	PI-2.3	Design and build indoor facilities within the parks that provide multi-use flexible space for public and private events to generate revenue for the department.		■	■	Capital Investment
FOCUS AREA: OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE						
1	OM-1.1	Continue to meet citizen expectations for the maintenance and operation of park facilities, amenities and services.	■	■	■	Operational Action
2	OM-2.1	Evaluate needs for additional staff and resources as necessary to effectively manage the responsibilities of growing parks, trails, and preserve systems.	■	■	■	Policy/ Operational Action/Capital Investment
3	OM-1.2	Monitor and evaluate existing facilities and resources for efficiencies and maintenance standards.	■	■	■	Study
4	OM-1.3	Extend the life-cycle of County park facilities through continual review and compliance with facility resource use guidelines.	■	■	■	Operational Action
5	OM-2.3	Continuously improve and update the County's digital communication efforts to provide additional information and resources.	■	■	■	Operational Action
6	OM-2.2	Determine the financial needs for future land acquisition and regional trail system expansion to include in a subsequent bond proposal.	■			Capital Investment
7	OM-2.4	Update the parks master plan after five years to review benchmarks and priorities, and provide a public progress report on plan implementation.			■	Study

MASTER PLAN UPDATES

A review of the plan should be conducted on an annual basis, and when significant changes occur. Four key focus areas subject to periodic review may include:

- **Facility Inventory.** An inventory of new or updated County-owned facilities should be recorded. This inventory should also mention any significant changes or improvements to the County’s park land, changes in partnerships with other public entities, or major private facilities that could influence recreation in Williamson County.
- **Public Involvement.** This plan reflects the attitudes expressed by Williamson County residents. Over time, however, attitudes and interests may vary as the County changes. Periodic surveys may be considered to provide an ongoing account of resident attitudes, and to provide additional direction from the public on issues that may arise (e.g., during the preparation of an update to the Williamson County Trails Master Plan). To make an accurate comparison of the changes in attitudes, it is recommended that future surveys include similar questions to those included in this plan.
- **Facility Use and Program Participation.** Facility use is a key factor in determining the need for additional facilities. Likewise, measures of program participation will assist in determining how to adjust its recreational program and event offerings over time to best meet community demand. The County should consider periodic “recreation and facility activity reports” and use the results to modify and re-prioritize recommendations as needed.
- **Implementation Program.** As actions from the park facilities/recreation, recommendations, and capital project lists (Table 5.2, *Prioritized Implementation Action Plan*) are implemented, updates should be made to maintain an up-to-date work program.

A long-term vision for the County, which includes prioritized implementation, was established through the public engagement, County staff direction, and elected officials. This, however, does not mean that the plan will serve every need and desire of the community in that timeframe. In this regard, the following recommendations are intended to keep this plan current and up to date:

- **Annual Progress Report.** County staff should prepare and present an annual progress report on the status of the actions identified in the Implementation Action Plan, preferably prior to the annual budget process. In addition, staff should work with the Commissioner’s Court to determine which recommendations should be prioritized.

- **Update Parks Master Plan.** At the end of the 10-year timeframe of this plan, a new update should be conducted. This update will review every aspect of the plan, including inventory, assessment of conditions, public engagement, and recommended actions. An update after five years to consider progress and re-evaluation of remaining priorities and actions from this plan will help the County remain competitive in a very competitive grant process as TPWD places a higher point value on an updated master plan.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

Since funding is required to implement the recommended actions, this plan identifies potential funding sources that may be helpful in achieving the recommended action items cost-effectively. It is recommended to pursue external sources when possible, (see Appendix B, Potential Funding Opportunities). External sources include grants, partnerships with public agencies and partnerships with private entities.

COUNTY GENERATED FUNDING SOURCES

General fund expenditures (i.e., non-capital expenditures) are mainly used for operations and maintenance, enhancements, or repairs to existing parks and amenities. Typical general fund expenditures are for smaller repair and replacement efforts.

Bond Funds

Debt financing through the issuance of bonds is the most traditional way to fund park and open space projects. This type of funding is a strategy wherein an entity issues a bond, receives capital to finance projects and must repay the bond with interest over a set period of time ranging from a few years to several decades. General obligation bonds are the most common bond type for park and open space projects.

Tax Increment Financing/Public Improvement Districts

These tools allow a development district to divert a portion of its property taxes to fund infrastructure improvements within its area. This can consist of plazas, pocket parks, linear parks and other kinds of facilities. Counties can utilize these financing districts, if desired.

Utility Partnerships

This kind of partnership can be established for the purpose of providing and improving linear parks and trails in utility easements. This partnership usually does not include monetary contributions. However, through use agreements and/or public access easements, it makes land for trail corridors accessible at little or no cost to the community.