



RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT

GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

Levy County's recreation and open space system is closely tied to the County's natural environment, rural character, coastal resources, rivers, springs, forests, conservation lands, and working landscapes. The County's parks, boat ramps, fishing areas, paddling routes, trails, open spaces, and public access points provide residents and visitors with opportunities for both active and resource-based recreation while supporting the quality of life that defines Levy County.

The County's location along the Gulf of Mexico and its relationship to the Suwannee River, Waccasassa River, Withlacoochee River, springs, freshwater lakes, wetlands, floodplains, and conservation areas create a diverse recreation network that includes boating, fishing, paddling, hiking, wildlife observation, camping, hunting, picnicking, shoreline access, and nature-based tourism. These resources also support eco-tourism and outdoor recreation as important components of the local economy by attracting visitors, supporting small businesses, outfitters, lodging, restaurants, marinas, guides, heritage tourism, and other recreation-related services. Protecting and enhancing these assets reinforces the County's rural economy while recognizing the importance of water quality, wildlife habitat, floodplain functions, coastal resources, and environmentally sensitive lands.

As Levy County plans for growth through the 2050 planning horizon, the Recreation and Open Space Element is intended to guide the maintenance, improvement, expansion, and coordination of recreation facilities and open space areas in a fiscally responsible and environmentally sensitive manner. Future recreation planning should balance public access with resource protection, support safe and accessible facilities, coordinate with municipalities and public land managers, and prioritize investments that enhance community recreation, coastal and river access, resilience, eco-tourism, and long-term stewardship of the County's natural assets.

This Element also recognizes that recreation and open space planning is interconnected with the County's Future Land Use, Conservation, Coastal Management, Springs Protection, Transportation, Infrastructure, Economic Development, and Capital Improvements Elements. Parks, open spaces, trails, boat ramps, and natural areas should be planned and managed as part of a broader system that supports rural character, public health, environmental protection, emergency resilience, sustainable growth, and compatible nature-based economic development.

**Element Guide:**

Objective 1	Public Park and Recreation Park and Recreation Level of Service Standards Public Boat Ramps Public Fishing Piers Canoe <u>and Paddling</u> Trail System <u>Recreation Access, Maintenance and Resilience</u>
Objective 2	Public and Private Recreation Recreational Development Guidelines Community and Neighborhood Park Development
Objective 3	Open Space Open Space Level of Service Natural Resource Protection Flood-prone Areas Mitigation

Goal:

~~Maintain and improve activity and resource based recreation facilities and open space systems to meet the future needs of residents in Levy County.~~

Maintain, improve, and expand activity-based and resource-based recreation facilities, public access, blueways, trails, parks, boat ramps, shoreline access, and open space systems to meet the future needs of Levy County residents and visitors while protecting the County's rural character, natural resources, coastal resources, springs, rivers, wildlife habitat, and environmentally sensitive lands.

Objective 1: Public Park and Recreation

~~Ensure that park and recreational opportunities are adequately provided and available to the public including, access to beaches, shoreline, and other waterways, at the adopted level of service to accommodate the County's population growth~~ springs, rivers, boat ramps, fishing areas, trails, blueways, conservation lands, and other waterways, at the adopted level of service to accommodate the County's population growth through the 2050 planning horizon.

Park and Recreation Level of Service Standards

Policy 1.1 The level of service will be measured by summing the total County and publicly owned acreage by park type and dividing by the current estimates of County population in the unincorporated areas.

Policy 1.2 The level of service standard for public parks and recreation shall be two (2) acres per one thousand (1,000) persons. The County shall incorporate adopted level of service standards in the land development regulations to ensure that no development will lower the level of service below adopted standards.

~~**Policy 1.3** Roadways, parking and other facilities will be properly maintained and improved based on recreational demands and Transportation Circulation Element scheduling and development~~



guidelines. Roadways, parking areas, sidewalks, trails, boat ramp access, signage, stormwater facilities, and other support facilities serving parks and recreation areas should be properly maintained and improved based on recreational demand, accessibility needs, public safety, capital improvements programming, and Transportation Element scheduling and development guidelines.

Policy 1.4 ~~Construction and improvement plans to existing freshwater and saltwater beaches and in vegetative areas adjacent to rivers, springs and freshwater lakes will be coordinated with appropriate regulatory agencies during the permitting process to ensure the protection of the County's natural resources.~~ Construction, expansion, maintenance, and improvement plans for existing freshwater and saltwater beaches, boat ramps, shoreline access areas, paddling access points, fishing areas, and vegetated areas adjacent to rivers, springs, wetlands, freshwater lakes, estuaries, and the Gulf of Mexico shall be coordinated with appropriate regulatory agencies during the permitting process to ensure protection of the County's natural resources, water quality, shoreline stability, habitat, and public access.

Public Boat Ramps

Policy 1.5 ~~County owned and/or maintained boat ramps will be continually monitored by the Parks Department to evaluate the efficiency of existing facilities, and identify needed improvements and modifications.~~ County-owned and/or County-maintained boat ramps shall be monitored by the Parks Department to evaluate facility condition, access, parking, safety, resiliency, user demand, ADA accessibility where feasible, environmental impacts, and needed improvements or modifications.

Policy 1.6 ~~The County shall pursue Florida Boating Improvement Program (FBIP) funds and other grant programs for the development of boat ramps. Priorities and future expenditures of those monies will be based on the recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Department. The County shall pursue Florida Boating Improvement Program funds, Florida Recreation Development Assistance Program funds, Resilient Florida funds, FDEP and FWC programs, federal and state grants, legislative appropriations, and other available funding sources for the construction, repair, resilience, maintenance, dredging, access management, and improvement of boat ramps and related public access facilities. Priorities and future expenditures of those funds should be based on recommendations from the Parks and Recreation Department, adopted capital improvements programming, public safety needs, environmental permitting requirements, and demonstrated public access demand.~~

Policy 1.7 ~~New boat ramp locations will be evaluated and selected based on the environmental suitability of the site. Selection criteria will include, but is not limited to, rating the potential level of environmental disturbance and the adverse impacts to the manatees.~~ New boat ramp locations and major improvements to existing boat ramps will be evaluated based on environmental suitability, water depth and navigability, shoreline stability, access, parking, public safety, resilience, emergency response needs, compatibility with surrounding land uses, and potential impacts to manatees, seagrasses, wetlands, water quality, fisheries, and other natural resources.

Public Fishing Piers

Policy 1.8 The County will investigate the feasibility of constructing and maintaining public fishing piers and boat docks and identifying alternative facility locations. The Parks Department will



evaluate funding sources, needs and options, in coordination with appropriate municipalities, state and federal permitting agencies, the Grants Coordinator and the County Engineer. To promote self-supporting facilities, the leasing and rental of the facilities may be considered. To promote fiscally sustainable facilities, user fees, leases, rentals, concessions, partnerships, or other lawful funding mechanisms may be considered.

Canoe and Paddling Trail System

Policy 1.9 The County supports the development and promotion of the Big Bend Paddling Trail, a system of inter-connected freshwater and saltwater canoe trails, utilizing the Suwannee, Wekiva and Withlacoochee Rivers and the Gulf of Mexico. This effort will be coordinated with the various agencies maintaining public ownerships which might own land to be utilized as primitive or improved camping and/or rest areas. The County supports the development, maintenance, and promotion of the Big Bend Paddling Trail and other interconnected freshwater and saltwater paddling, canoeing, kayaking, and blueway systems utilizing the Suwannee River, Waccasassa River, Withlacoochee River, Gulf of Mexico, coastal waters, springs, and other appropriate waterways. This effort should be coordinated with municipalities, state and federal agencies, water management districts, land managers, conservation partners, and agencies maintaining public ownership that may provide land or facilities for primitive camping, improved camping, rest areas, shoreline access, interpretive signage, or trailhead facilities.

Recreation Access, Maintenance, and Resilience

Policy 1.10 The County should coordinate recreation planning with the Transportation Element, Coastal Management Element, Conservation Element, Infrastructure Element, Capital Improvements Element, and Local Mitigation Strategy to improve safe access, parking, drainage, emergency response, shoreline protection, storm recovery, and resilience of parks, boat ramps, trails, and public access facilities.

Policy 1.11 The County should consider accessibility, universal design, ADA compliance where feasible, public safety, lighting, signage, maintenance, and long-term operating costs when planning, designing, renovating, or prioritizing public park and recreation facilities.

Policy 1.12 The County should continue to evaluate opportunities to improve public access to resource-based recreation areas while managing visitor impacts on sensitive natural resources, including springs, wetlands, seagrasses, shorelines, wildlife habitat, conservation lands, and flood-prone areas.

Objective 2: Public and Private Recreation

Coordinate public and private resources to meet the County's recreational needs based on population growth and the demands generated by new development. Coordinate public, private, nonprofit, school district, municipal, state, and federal resources to meet the County's recreational needs based on population growth, visitor demand, capital improvements programming, resource-based recreation opportunities, and the demands generated by new development.

Policy 2.1 The County shall develop and adopt incentives in local ordinances for developers to provide recreation facilities and buffers for open space in their developments. The County will maintain, develop, or adopt incentives in local ordinances for developers to provide recreation facilities, trails, usable open space, conservation areas, buffers, and connections to existing or planned public recreation facilities within or adjacent to their developments, where appropriate.



Policy 2.2 The County shall develop and adopt incentives ~~and/or~~ require developers to provide recreation facilities in their developments, ~~before pursuing funds from state or federal sources to provide recreational facilities and infrastructure~~ open space, trail connections, or fee-in-lieu contributions in their developments, where such facilities are needed to serve the development and are consistent with adopted level of service standards, impact fee requirements, land development regulations, and applicable law. The County may also pursue state, federal, regional, nonprofit, and private funding sources to supplement local and development-based funding for recreational facilities and infrastructure.

Recreational Development Guidelines

Policy 2.3 ~~Standards in the land development regulations shall require developments of certain sizes and densities including, but not limited to, residential Planned Unit Developments and Developments of Regional Impacts to provide on-site recreational land dedications to serve the new residents. To the maximum extent possible, open space and recreation lands shall be designated in a manner that protects environmentally sensitive features of the land.~~ Standards in the land development regulations may require developments of certain sizes, densities, or intensities, including but not limited to residential planned developments, subdivisions, and other applicable residential developments, to provide on-site recreational land dedications, recreational facilities, open space, trail connections, or fee-in-lieu contributions to serve new residents, where legally supportable and proportionate to the impacts of development. To the maximum extent possible, open space and recreation lands should be designated in a manner that protects environmentally sensitive features, flood-prone areas, habitat corridors, tree canopy, wetlands, karst features, springs, and natural drainage systems.

Policy 2.4 The following park types and sizes shall be utilized as guidelines and may be the basis for the ~~providing~~ provision of recreational sites for public acquisitions and by proposed developments of a certain size, density and intensity.

Type of Park	Standard	Minimum Size
a. Neighborhood Park - <i>Description-</i> a park that serves the population of a neighborhood and is generally accessible by bicycle and pedestrian ways	Two (2) acres per one thousand (1,000) persons	five (5) acres
b. Community Park- <i>Description-</i> a park located near major roadways, and designed to serve the needs of more than one neighborhood	Three (3) acres per one thousand (1,000) persons	Twenty-five (25) acres

Neighborhood and community park guidelines may be applied flexibly based on rural development patterns, the availability of public land, opportunities for joint use, proximity to existing public parks or conservation lands, environmental constraints, public access needs, and adopted capital improvements priorities.

Policy 2.5 The County will consider ~~the adoption of~~ adopting alternative methods for new developments to meet recreational requirements. Options may include, but are not limited to, on-site dedication of land for neighborhood or community recreational facilities, construction of



recreational improvements, trail or sidewalk connections, conservation or open space dedication, payment of recreation impact fees, or fee in lieu of providing land dedication, and off-site acquisition and management of land for recreational purposes. Fees obtained in lieu of on-site development of recreational facilities shall be utilized for current or future community recreational site and facility improvement needs.

Community and Neighborhood Park Development

Policy 2.6 ~~The development of community and neighborhood parks will be encouraged in or around the most rapidly developing urban areas. Funding of recreation facilities will be allotted to each municipal recreation service area based on its population.~~ The development of community and neighborhood parks should be encouraged in or near municipalities, Municipal Service Districts, Municipal Service Areas where established, Rural Commercial Nodes, and other areas experiencing or planned for growth, where such facilities can efficiently serve existing and future residents. Funding of recreation facilities should consider population, adopted level of service standards, existing facility gaps, public access needs, grant opportunities, geographic distribution, and adopted capital improvements priorities.

Policy 2.7 ~~The site selection process for community and neighborhood parks will be coordinated through the Parks Department, Planning Department and Development Department. County, municipal and/or school sites will be utilized as the nucleus for these parks to reduce costs and maximize utilization.~~ County, municipal, school, conservation, or other publicly owned sites may be utilized as the nucleus for these parks where appropriate to reduce costs, maximize public benefit, support joint use, and improve access.

Policy 2.8 ~~The County will seek to establish an interlocal agreement with the Levy County School Board to provide the multiple use of school recreational facilities to meet the community need for playgrounds.~~ The County will continue to coordinate with the Levy County School Board regarding interlocal agreements or other arrangements for the joint use of school recreational facilities, playgrounds, athletic fields, parking, and related facilities where such use can help meet community recreation needs and is acceptable to the School District.

Policy 2.9 ~~The County will pursue agreements with the appropriate entity to provide for recreational uses of designated Natural Reservation on the Future Land Use map, consistent with park management plans.~~ The County will pursue agreements with appropriate public agencies, land managers, conservation organizations, or other entities to provide compatible recreational uses on lands designated Natural Reservation or Conservation on the Future Land Use Map, where such use is consistent with adopted management plans, conservation objectives, resource protection, public safety, and state or federal agency requirements.

Funding

Policy 2.10 Municipal, state and federal financial assistance for County recreational expenditures shall be pursued annually and incorporated in the County budget.

Policy 2.11 The County will investigate methods to fund infrastructure and services to encourage self-supporting recreational facilities, including users fees, leases and rentals.

Objective 3: Open Space

~~Promote efficient and attractive development patterns and preserve the environmentally sensitive features of the land through the adequate provision of open space by public agencies and private enterprise.~~ Promote efficient, attractive, and fiscally responsible development patterns and preserve



environmentally sensitive features of the land through the adequate provision, protection, and management of open space by public agencies, private landowners, conservation organizations, and private enterprise.

Open Space Level of Service

Policy 3.1 The level of service standard for Open Space is one hundred (100) acres per one thousand (1,000) persons.

Policy 3.2 ~~The dedication of open space shall be required in new subdivisions through land D development regulations. Standards for the provision of open space for new developments will be implemented through the Subdivision Regulations. Using the Greenbelt Law shall be a means of achieving the open space standard.~~ The dedication or preservation of open space may be required in new subdivisions and applicable developments through the Land Development Regulations, where legally supportable and proportionate to the impacts of development. Standards for the provision of open space for new developments should be implemented through the Land Development Regulations and subdivision standards. Agricultural classification under Florida's Greenbelt Law, conservation easements, clustering, common open space, public land acquisition, private conservation, and other voluntary or regulatory tools may be used, where appropriate, to help preserve agricultural lands, rural open space, and environmentally sensitive lands and to support the County's open space objectives.

Natural Resource Protection

Policy 3.3 ~~Promote the acquisition of open space by public agencies and private enterprise and the development of natural environmental areas with picnicking, camping, hiking, boating and other improvements.~~ Promote the acquisition, dedication, conservation, and management of open space by public agencies, private landowners, conservation organizations, and private enterprise, and support compatible public access to natural environmental areas through picnicking, camping, hiking, boating, paddling, wildlife observation, environmental education, and other low-impact improvements where appropriate.

Policy 3.4 ~~In coordination with appropriate state and federal agencies, identify areas of local interest for acquisition of open space and natural reservations and, promote the education of local landowners on potential tax and public relations benefits associated with land dedications and donations.~~ In coordination with appropriate state and federal agencies, water management districts, municipalities, conservation organizations, and willing landowners, identify areas of local interest for acquisition, conservation, or management as open space, conservation lands, greenways, blueways, wildlife corridors, natural reservations, and public access areas. The County should also promote education of local landowners regarding potential tax, estate planning, conservation, public relations, and community benefits associated with voluntary land dedications, conservation easements, donations, or other conservation tools.

Policy 3.5 ~~Natural Reservation areas, owned by state or federal entities, shall be designated on the Future Land Use map series and protected from incompatible land uses.~~ Natural Reservation, Conservation, and publicly owned conservation areas shall be designated on the Future Land Use Map series, where appropriate, and protected from incompatible land uses consistent with the Future Land Use, Conservation, Coastal Management, and Springs Protection Elements.

Policy 3.6 The County endorses the acquisition and development of natural areas that will continue to improve the quality of resource-based recreation opportunities throughout the County. The County is generally opposed to, and does not support, efforts to place large acreage in public



ownership with no plans for public utilization.

Flood-prone Areas

Policy 3.7 ~~Identify flood-prone areas on public and private lands and reserve those areas for open space, and/or appropriate recreational activities [ball fields, picnic areas, nature trails, open space, etc.]~~ Identify flood-prone areas on public and private lands and encourage the use of such areas for open space, conservation, stormwater management, floodplain protection, passive recreation, nature trails, picnic areas, athletic fields where appropriate, and other compatible recreational or open space activities that do not increase flood risk or create avoidable public safety concerns.

Mitigation

Policy 3.8 ~~Promote the reclamation of mined areas for recreational and other purposes.~~ Promote the reclamation of mined areas for recreation, open space, conservation, stormwater management, habitat restoration, agriculture, forestry, or other compatible post-mining uses where appropriate and consistent with applicable reclamation requirements.

Policy 3.9 ~~Prepare and consider for adoption local ordinances dealing with mine reclamation for recreation purposes. For pre-existing (prior to July, 1996) mines overburden will be leveled pursuant to LDR's upon closure and prior to the issuance of new permits. The County should maintain, update, or consider local ordinances and Land Development Regulation provisions addressing mine reclamation, including opportunities for recreation, open space, conservation, stormwater management, habitat restoration, or other compatible post-mining uses. For pre-existing mines (prior to July 1996), overburden and site reclamation shall be addressed pursuant to applicable Land Development Regulations, permit conditions, and state or federal requirements upon closure and prior to issuance of new permits, where applicable.~~