

SECTION 1

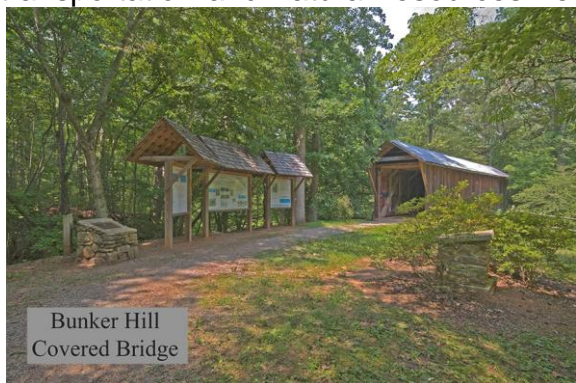
INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The mission of Catawba County Parks is to preserve Catawba County’s unique and diverse natural heritage through education and conservation, while providing quality passive recreation and wellness opportunities.

Catawba County is located in the western portion of North Carolina in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Established in 1842, the County adjoins 1) Iredell County to the east, 2) Lincoln County to the south, 3) Burke County to the west, 4) Caldwell County to the northwest, and 5) Alexander County to the north. The total land area is approximately 405 square miles and the topography varies from rugged terrain to gentle rolling areas. The County’s main water feature is the Catawba River, which feeds Lake Hickory, Lookout Shoals Lake, and Lake Norman, along with several tributaries throughout the County. Lake Norman is the largest manmade lake located solely in North Carolina. The municipalities in Catawba County are located throughout the County and include Hickory, Long View, Newton, Conover, Maiden, Claremont, Brookford, and Catawba.

Agriculture and hydroelectricity provided by the Catawba River set Catawba County on a path to significant growth and development. Over the last century, transportation and natural resources helped maintain this progress. The natural



environment has played a major role in the lives and heritage of the citizens and helped enrich the visitor’s experience to the area. With growth comes responsibility; and like generations before, we must protect Catawba County’s valuable natural assets and meet the recreational needs of the area.

Along with protecting our physical environment, an increase in obesity and rising health care costs signal the importance of safeguarding the public’s health. Prior generations made their livelihood in physically demanding occupations. With technological advances in machinery and household equipment, and the transition from a manufacturing based economy to a service oriented workplace, many are not getting the necessary amount of physical activity. Coupled with stress which comes with the fast pace of today’s world, society realizes the requirement for physical activity and relief of stress.

Catawba County, City of Hickory, and City of Newton provide the majority of parks, recreation, and public open space for the County and surrounding communities. Park/open space needs are directly influenced by the expectations of the residents of Catawba County and related to the 'quality of life' to which they aspire. This Master Plan addresses the parks and recreation facility needs envisioned appropriate to all residents of Catawba County.

The Catawba County Parks Division was created in 1999 with the opening of Riverbend Park, preserving 450 acres for passive recreation. Bakers Mountain Park was opened in 2002, preserving 189 acres on Catawba County's most prominent elevation and the location of the County's largest mature forest. Both parks were created using matching fund grants from the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF). The grants essentially provide recreation development using a 50% grant match; reducing the financial burden to the local tax base.



Prior to the formation of the Catawba County Parks Division, St. Stephens Recreational Corporation requested assistance from Catawba County to serve as a grant recipient for a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant, which was awarded in 1979 in the amount of \$75,000. Upon approval of the grant, the 9.1 acre tract was deeded to Catawba County. A pool, bathhouse and picnic shelter were constructed, and St. Stephens Recreational Corporation continued to operate and maintain the pool and park. At that time the County did not have a parks division nor did it operate active or passive parks. In 1985, St. Stephens Recreational Corporation was dissolved and the City of Hickory assumed responsibility for park operations until the summer of 2005. The swimming pool was obsolete and replacement costs were prohibitive. Since Catawba County Parks Division's goal is to provide passive recreation and natural preservation, the County submitted conversion documents to the state - in order to declare the pool obsolete - and renovate and operate the park as a community passive park. The St. Stephens Park has been operated by Catawba County and open to the public since 2008.



These three parks have cumulatively received over a million visitors (1,058,067) since July 4, 1999 when Catawba County Parks opened to the public. As of fiscal year 2013-2014, the park system serves approximately 110,000 patrons a

year. The next ten years should produce significant recreational development and enhanced programming that will reach more of the County's population.

Prior to the formation of the Catawba County Parks Division, the Mountain View Recreation Association requested assistance from Catawba County to serve as a grant recipient for a LWCF grant to obtain 5.05 acres of land, and to develop the site into an active recreation park. This 5.05 acre area is part of a larger complex which is owned and operated by the Mountain View Recreation Association, making a combined park area of approximately 15 acres. It is the intent of this plan that the County's portion of the park will continue to be operated by Mountain View Recreation Association since Catawba County Parks Division's goal is to provide passive - as opposed to active - recreation. However, to remain in compliance with the requirements of the LWCF grant, the County must maintain its portion of park.

Catawba County is a foothills community, holding strong to the traditions and values that have developed over time. Cultural resources such as Murray's Mill and Bunker Hill Covered Bridge are recognized, not only within the State of North Carolina, but also attract visitors from across the United States. These resources, among others have made Catawba County a destination, not only for vacationers, but also as a place to reside. The County has acknowledged the increase of population and development by ensuring that growth is planned for the future. The Unified Development Ordinance (UDO), adopted in early 2007, promotes higher development standards, encouraging smart growth and protects the environment and natural aesthetic qualities of the area.

Catawba County, the central county of North Carolina's seventh largest Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), has recognized the need to diversify and balance its traditional manufacturing base with other types of businesses and services. With the recent shift to a global economy, the County and region have made a concentrated effort to identify and recruit new businesses. The quality of life in Catawba County, which includes recreation, is important to the citizens who have lived here for many years and is viewed as an asset in attracting new businesses and planned residential growth that is essential to a healthy local economy. Catawba County's economic diversity, ideal climate, and natural scenic beauty naturally create a favorable destination.

1.2 PURPOSES AND GOALS

In 2006, the Catawba County Board of Commissioners, County Staff, and the Parks Division recognized the need to prepare the County's first Comprehensive Parks Master Plan. McGill Associates, P.A., was selected by Catawba County to evaluate its existing park and passive facilities and develop a Master Plan as a guideline for implementation of recommendations for meeting the needs of the

population. In preparing the original Master Plan, McGill Associates, P.A., worked closely with Catawba County's Parks Division, Planning Staff, and the Focus Group (which was comprised of citizens from Catawba County representing each of the seven Small Area Plan vicinities). The original Catawba County Parks Master Plan was adopted on December 17, 2007.

There have been changes in recreation amenities and the accepted method of facility and program operation since Catawba County Parks was created in 1999 and the adoption of the first Parks Master Plan. Because Catawba County Parks is still in its infancy and in a state of rapid growth and change, a 10-year plan, with another update in six to ten years was considered appropriate.

Catawba County Parks Comprehensive Master Plan 2007-2017 guides the Board of Commissioners and staff in both its current evaluation of, and long-range planning for the Parks. The framework for this 2015-2025 Master Plan update is based upon public input and an inventory of the existing park system. Analysis will help identify immediate facility needs in the given communities, and predict the future needs of residents.

Another purpose of the Master Plan is to recommend the addition/renovation of parks and recreational facilities as needed. Not only does the Master Plan include recommendations; it prioritizes specific projects, such as recommended park upgrades, expansion and land acquisition. Taking into consideration the identification of user population and the development of recreation standards, the Master Plan is action-oriented and designed to provide Catawba County with a practical guide for the Parks for the next ten years.

A critical aspect of the development of this updated Master Plan was the solicitation of community input identifying additional needs for the Parks, such as renovation, construction, land purchase, development and operational policies for both now and in the future. Community input obtained through hard copy and online surveys, along with community input meetings served as the foundation for the Master Plan process. Surveys and public forum flyers were distributed by Parks Advisory Committee members in their local neighborhoods, churches, workplaces, libraries, civic organizations and businesses. A total of 655 surveys were received. Four community open house drop-in sessions were held to gather input, with one additional final forum to relay survey and input session results and give the public additional opportunity for comment.

Table 1.1 – Dates, Locations, and Attendance for Public Forums

Date	Location	Attendance
2/18/14	• Mountain View Southwest Library	46
2/25/14	• Catawba County Gov. Center, Newton	41
2/27/14	• Highland Recreation Center, Hickory	27
3/5/14	• Sherrills Ford-Terrell Fire & Rescue	34
4/22/14	• Catawba County Gov. Center, Newton – Review of results	13
	Total Attendance	161

(See Attachment 1 – Press Releases and Community Flyer)

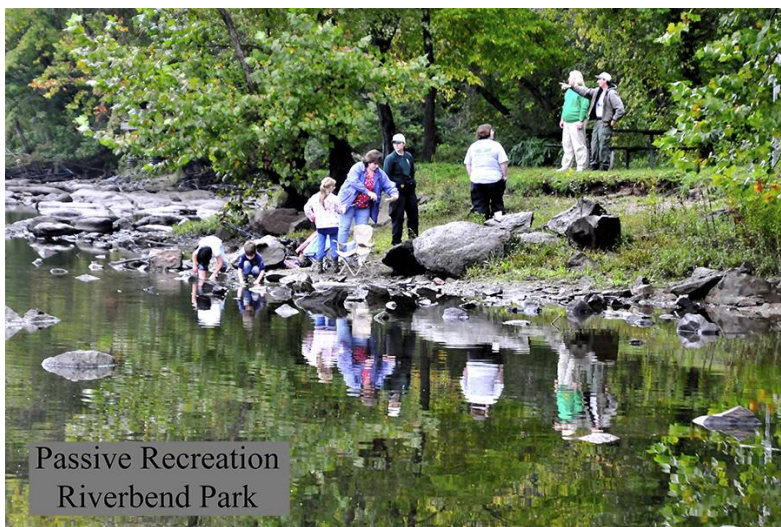
State and National Parks and Recreation Standards were used as a guide to support the acreage recommendations made for the parks and recreational facilities for Catawba County.



The Master Plan encourages “connectivity” of proposed projects to existing sites, such as other parks, schools, and government-owned properties. It is not designed to be exclusive, but rather to enhance recreational opportunities in the communities, the County, the Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA), and the entire region.

The Master Plan reflects the mission of Catawba County Parks:

- *Promoting wellness through recreation options that encourage good physical and mental health;*
- *Providing educational environmental experiences;*
- *Sustaining the natural character and aesthetics of the County, realizing its importance for economic development and continuing to uphold Catawba County's high quality of life;*
- *Enhancing air and water quality by protecting native vegetation and habitats/buffers;*
- *Preserving Catawba County's unique and diverse natural and historical heritage; and*
- *Providing quality passive recreation opportunities that are convenient/accessible.*



Passive recreation is defined as the type of recreation that occurs in a natural setting, with minimal facilities and impacts on the natural integrity of the area. Examples of such facilities include greenways, bike trails, fishing areas, non-motorized canoe/kayak access, hiking, dog parks, environmental education and quality

open space. The quality of the environment plays a tremendous role in passive recreation – providing refreshment of the mind and body. Most importantly, passive recreation can be enjoyed by all ages and promotes positive social interaction among communities, family and friends.

The Master Plan's purpose is to maintain the type of venue in Catawba County that fosters wellness, community spirit, activism, and bonding among citizens, while preserving the rural and natural character of the landscape. The demographic profiles of County residents (population and ages) along with public

opinion are key factors in making specific recommendations and projecting levels of service. The Catawba County Parks Master Plan makes recommendations for a ten-year period of time (2015 – 2025) and also suggests the means by which the identified objectives will be achieved. Opportunities for grants, partnerships, and outside funding are recommended as aids in the establishment of a Capital Improvement Plan and an operating budget. The need for and location of land acquisition(s) are explained in detail.

This Master Plan focuses on providing Catawba County with an accurate, usable guide for decision-making as the County begins to implement items, such as the following:

- *Park renovations, acquisitions, and developments;*
- *Facility renovations, acquisitions, and developments;*
- *Passive recreation programming strategies; and*
- *Implementation of improvements.*

The Master Plan is divided into seven major component sections listed below, plus an appendix:

- Section 1 Introduction – States Catawba County Parks mission and briefly outlines the goals of the Parks system.
 - Section 2 Population Trends and Projections – Looks at the County in its entirety, and breaks down these statistics by Small Area Plan.
 - Section 3 Existing Plans and Documents – Ties existing documents to goals in the Parks Master Plan.
 - Section 4 Existing Park Facilities – Identifies existing recreational facilities and programming opportunities countywide.
 - Section 5 Recreation Needs Assessment – Contains results of the survey conducted during plan creation, and input from public forum participants.
 - Section 6 Goals and Recommendations – Sites studies indicating the benefits of parks. Outlines steps that should be taken to provide Catawba County citizens with optimal park service.
 - Section 7 Action Implementation Plan – Provides funding possibilities to realize plan goals.
- Appendix

-End of Section-