

SECTION 4

EXISTING PARK FACILITIES

4.1 INTRODUCTION

An inventory of the Catawba County Parks system was performed to compile a brief analysis of each recreation facility. This study is a 'guide' for Catawba County to develop a plan for present and future needs.

Catawba County residents and visitors have many of their recreation needs met through a variety of amenities offered within the County. The Catawba County Park & Recreation Facilities Inventory, which identifies countywide public parks, is shown on *Map 2 – Countywide Public Parks and Recreation Facilities* along with the following spreadsheet in the Appendix. In addition to the facilities owned by the County, local municipalities provide opportunities for recreation within the County. School recreation facilities, owned and operated by the Catawba County or city school systems, and several area churches also provide recreational resources that may be used by the public. In addition, many private resources are available in the area, such as Optimist parks, YMCAs and golf course facilities. Please refer to the church facility sites identified by the public during the Parks Master Plan open house sessions. These locations were known and used by attendees; however, the sites do not comprise a comprehensive listing of all the church recreation facilities that might be available. See *Map 3 Schools and Non-profit Facilities*.

4.2 FACILITY INVENTORY

County-Owned and Operated Parks and Facilities

Riverbend Park

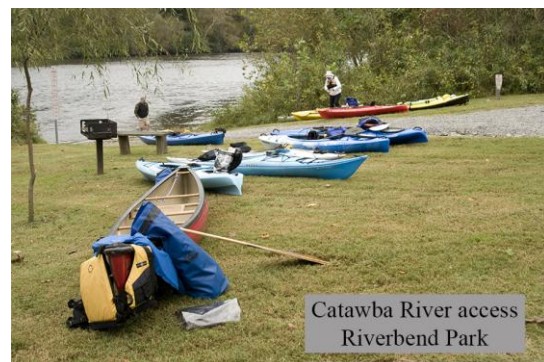
Riverbend Park is located east of Oxford Dam along the Catawba River, and was opened in 1998. The 450-acre park not only provides a wealth of recreation



resources for the County, but also protects the watershed for the Catawba River. The park takes advantage of its proximity to the river by offering canoeing, fishing, and hiking trails adjacent to the river. Passive in nature, Riverbend Park's recreational opportunities include hiking trails, picnic areas, mountain bike trails, and a dog park. The trail system forms a network throughout the entire park allowing visitors to explore natural resources such as woodlands, flora and fauna. The park office, with restrooms and ADA accessible amenities, is located at the entrance to the park. A maintenance/storage facility is adjacent to the office.

Recreation Amenities

- Fishing;
- Canoe/Kayak access;
- Picnic areas/grills;
- Meeting/Educational facility;
- Educational programming;
- Picnic shelter;
- Wildlife habitat viewing areas;
- Dog Park;
- ADA Accessible observation platform;
- Hiking/Walking trails (12 miles); and
- Mountain biking trails (7.8 miles).



Bakers Mountain Park

Bakers Mountain Park is a regional park, located off Old Shelby Road and developed in 2001. Situated in the southwest portion of the County, Bakers Mountain has the highest elevation in Catawba County (1780 feet). The 189-



acre preserve offers recreational opportunities similar to Riverbend Park within a different setting. The vegetation and terrain is very similar to that of the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains, with diverse vegetation and pristine streams. This park and the surrounding acreage is the largest mature forest remaining in the County. The trail system offers a wide range of difficulty with a one-quarter mile long ADA trail that offers visitors a paved

surface for a casual walk and other trails that are more strenuous. Nearly six miles of trail traverse the park, allowing visitors to observe the natural beauty of the forest. An observation platform and gazebo are located near the peak of Bakers Mountain, offering tremendous views of the Catawba Valley.



Other amenities include office and restroom facilities and two picnic shelters. There are also several picnic areas throughout the park, which offer opportunities for small families or large groups.



Recreation Amenities

- Hiking trails (6 miles);
- ADA trail (¼ mile);
- Observation platform;
- Gazebo;
- Picnic areas & grills;
- Two picnic shelters;
- Educational programming; and
- Park office and restroom facilities.

St. Stephens Community Park

St. Stephens Community Park was an active recreation park, created through land donation and a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant obtained by Catawba County at the request of the St. Stephens Recreational Corporation. While owned by Catawba County, it was operated by the City of Hickory until the park was closed in 2005 when the swimming pool fell into disrepair. With the swimming pool being functionally obsolete, its replacement cost prohibitive, and declining usage due to the existence of parks in close proximity, the City no longer desired to operate the park. Since Catawba County Parks goal is to provide passive recreation and natural preservation, the County submitted conversion documents to the state and was approved to declare the pool

obsolete. The park was renovated and operated as a community passive park by Catawba County since 2008.

Recreation Amenities

- 1-acre dog park;
- 1/3 mile gravel surfaced walking trail;
- Educational landscaping;
- Playground;
- Horseshoe pits;
- Picnic shelter;
- Meeting room; and
- Bird feeding station.

County-Owned Land for Future Park and Facilities

Mountain Creek Park

Future Mountain Creek parkland is located in the southeastern portion of the County. Currently, there are no regional County parks operating in this area; however, a need has been identified. (See Appendix Map 1 *Small Area Plans & Existing County Parks*, and Map 4 – *Service Area Proposals and Recommendations*).

Understanding this need, the County negotiated with Duke Energy to obtain the park property through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicensing process, a Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) grant and the Key Harbor Crescent Agreement. These negotiations have resulted in obtaining a 598-acre parcel of land located adjacent to Lake Norman which will be used by the County as a park.

The site is proposed to be improved with a meeting/educational building and a variety of outdoor facilities including picnic areas, trails, interpretive signage, open lawn areas, camping, parking lots, restrooms and utilities. Where provided, these amenities should create a balance between the need for public access and the protection of shoreline environments. A boat house may be considered for boat storage by boating organizations and to provide a facility for boat rentals, lessons, and/or tours for canoes, kayaks, and other small hand-carry boats. Like all County parks, Mountain Creek Park would offer multiple opportunities for schools, environmental groups, and other organizations. (See Appendix Map 8 – *Proposed Conceptual Mountain Creek Park*)

County-Owned, Privately Operated Park, Open to the Public

Mountain View Recreation Center

Prior to the formation of the Catawba County Parks Division, Mountain View Recreation Association requested the County obtain 5.05 acres of land through a Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant in order to develop the Mountain View Recreation Association site into an active recreation park. This 5.05 acre area is part of a larger complex that is owned and operated by the Mountain View Recreation Association, making a combined center of approximately 15 acres. The entire park is open to the public.

It is the intent of this plan that the County's portion of the facility will be operated by Mountain View Recreation Association since Catawba County Parks Division's goal is to provide passive, as opposed to active recreation.

Recreation Amenities

- Ball field;
- Grandstand with restrooms;
- Large picnic shelter;
- Small picnic shelter;
- Tennis court; and
- Parking.



Tennis court at Mountain View Recreation Center

Municipal – Owned and Operated Parks and Facilities

Town of Brookford Facilities

- Brookford Park

Town of Catawba Facilities

- Hunsucker Park

Town of Claremont Facilities

- Claremont Park
- Francis R. Sigman Recreation Park

City of Conover Facilities

- Downtown Park
- Gateway Park
- Hines Park
- Hunsucker Park
- Majestic Park
- Southwest Park
- Travis Park

City of Hickory Facilities

- Civitan Park
- Cliff Teague Park
- Fairbrook Park
- Glenn Hilton Memorial Park
- Henry Fork River Regional Rec. Park
- Hickory City Park
- Hickory Optimist Park
- Highland Recreation Center
- Jaycee Park
- John 'Bud' Geitner - Rotary Park
- Kiwanis Park
- Neill Clark, Jr. Park
- Southside Heights Park
- Stanford Park
- Taft Broome Park
- Westmont Center
- Winkler Park
- West Hickory Park

Town of Long View Facilities

- Longview Recreation Center

Town of Maiden Facilities

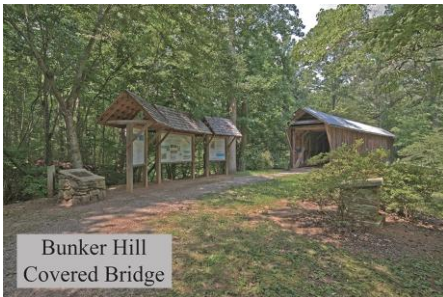
- Municipal Park
- Rosenwald Park
- Union Street Park

City of Newton Facilities

- East Park
- Jacob Fork Park
- Little Brook Park
- Northside Park
- Southside Park
- Westside/Jaycee Park

Other Privately Owned and Operated Special Facilities

Bunker Hill Covered Bridge



The Bunker Hill Covered Bridge is an important cultural resource not only for Catawba County and the State of North Carolina, but also for its designation as a National Civil Engineering Landmark in 2001. Bunker Hill Covered Bridge is the only remaining example of a wooden Improved Lattice Truss, patented by Civil War General Herman Haupt. It is included with the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse, the Blue Ridge Parkway, and Dorton Arena in representing North Carolina on this prestigious list. One of only two original remaining covered bridges in North Carolina, Bunker Hill Covered Bridge was built in 1895 by Andy L. Ramsour.

The bridge, owned by the Catawba County Historical Association, has significant associations, not only with the Civil War through Haupt, but also with the American Revolution. Prior to the construction of the bridge, the site was used as a ford crossing Lyle Creek during the Revolutionary War.

This historic landmark is a special resource for the County. It provides an educational venue for people of all ages and is a main landmark for the County and surrounding region. In addition to educational programming, the site offers leisure opportunities like picnicking and a walking trail to the bridge.

The bridge is currently being restored and several areas of the site need improvement. An existing footbridge requires continual maintenance and is not ADA compliant. The stream bank adjacent to the walking trail has eroded over the years creating unstable site conditions.

The State of NC has purchased 43.66 additional acres of land to enlarge Bunker Hill Covered Bridge Park with the understanding Catawba County and Catawba County Historical Association would work together to operate the park. The scope of this project includes a welcome center, new parking area, park office, restroom facility, grass presentation area, picnic facilities, a pedestrian bridge, and trails that will connect to the Carolina Thread Trail system. The additional land also protects a segment of the Lyle Creek corridor to the south and west of the covered bridge.

Murray's Mill Historic District

The Murray's Mill Historic District is located in eastern Catawba County along Balls Creek. Preserved intact are the 1913 mill itself; the 1890s Murray & Minges General Store; the 1880s Wheathouse, used as an exhibit gallery; the 1913 John Murray House, furnished to the period; and numerous outbuildings.

The structures and surrounding land form the last milling complex in the County, meticulously preserved, owned and interpreted by the Catawba County Historical Association since 1980 when restorations began.



The Mill offers two major annual events during the year. The Catawba County Storytelling Festival, scheduled in the spring, offers the entertaining art of storytelling. In addition, the Murray's Mill Harvest Folk Festival celebrates Catawba County's agricultural heritage with tractors, farm machinery, traditional food preparation and other exhibits. Music is also an important part of this popular festival offering Bluegrass, Country, and Gospel music for the visitors.

Murray's Mill

The centerpiece of the historic district is Murray's Mill, built by John Murray, whose father, William, had operated a mill on the site since 1883. In 1913, John replaced his father's mill with the current two-story structure, adding a 22-foot overshot waterwheel, replacing the former turbine. Making room for the mill's expansion, the Murrays moved the general store at that time to its present location. In 1938, John's son, Lloyd, raised the dam six feet and installed the 28-foot waterwheel.



The Murray and Mingles General Store

Inside the General Store, visitors can enjoy the historic structure which serves as a gift shop and an exhibit gallery. The store is stocked with wooden toys, old-fashioned candy and clothing, which allows patrons to experience the general store as it would have functioned more than a century ago.



School Facilities

A recreational facilities inventory was performed for Catawba County Schools. This inventory was conducted to identify amenities within the school system that may offer potential opportunities for recreation programming. Most of the facilities are used primarily during school hours and may offer opportunities for local community athletic groups to use school facilities for athletic programming. In addition, many of the schools have playgrounds, which offer recreation opportunities.

Catawba County Board of Education Schools

Arndt Middle
Balls Creek Elementary
Bandys High
Banoak Elementary
Blackburn Elementary
Bunker Hill High
Catawba Elementary
Catawba Rosenwald High
Challenger High



River Bend Middle School

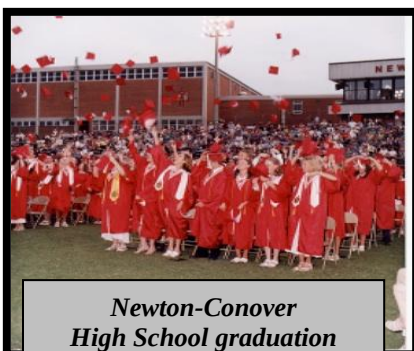
Claremont Elementary
Clyde Campbell Elementary
Fred T. Foard High
Jacobs Fork Middle
Lyle Creek Elementary
Maiden Elementary
Maiden Middle
Maiden High
Mill Creek Middle
Mountain View Elementary
Oxford Elementary
River Bend Middle
Sherrills Ford Elementary
Snow Creek Elementary
St. Stephens Elementary
St. Stephens High
Startown Elementary
Tuttle Elementary
Webb A. Murray Elementary

Hickory City Board of Education Schools

Grandview Middle
Hickory Career Arts & Magnet CVCC
Partnership
Hickory High
Jenkins Elementary

Longview Elementary
Northview Middle
Oakwood Elementary
Southwest Elementary
Viewmont Elementary

Newton-Conover City Board of Education Schools



*Newton-Conover
High School graduation*

Discovery High
Newton-Conover High
Newton-Conover Middle
North Newton Elementary
Shuford Elementary
South Newton Elementary
Thorton Elementary
Conover School – serves moderately to severely disabled students Countywide

State Schools

Catawba Valley Community College
Hickory Metro Higher Education Center
Appalachian State University (on CVCC Campus)



Private Educational Institutions

Chesterbrook Academy
Christian Family Academy



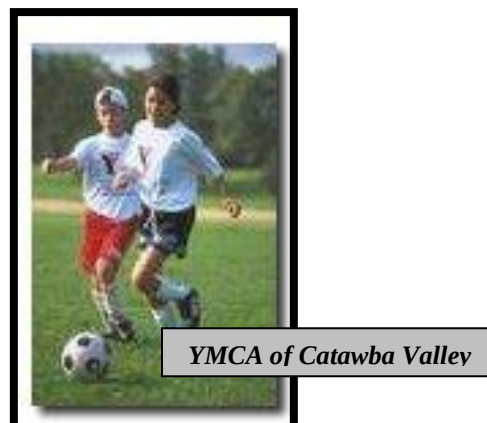
Concordia Christian Day
Hickory Christian Academy
Hickory Day School
Lenoir-Rhyne College
Montessori Children's House of Newton
St. Stephens Lutheran
Tabernacle Christian School
Tri-City Christian School
University Christian High School
Visions Charter School
WH Johnston Elementary

Privately-Owned and Operated Recreation Facilities

The following are private or semi-private recreation facilities that have been included in the inventory of recreation facilities and amenities offered in Catawba County.

Athletic Recreation Park/Facilities

Balls Creek Optimist
Bunker Hill Optimist
Mountain View Recreation, Inc.
Ritchie Field
Sherrills Ford Optimist
Startown Optimist
St. Stephens Optimist
YMCA - Adrian L. Shuford, Jr.
YMCA - Hickory Foundation
YMCA - Valley Connection



Country Clubs and/or Golf Courses



Catawba Country Club – Private, 18-holes
Glen Oaks Golf Club – Semi-private, 18-holes
Hampton Heights Golf Club – Public, 18-holes and miniature golf
Lake Hickory Country Club and Catawba Springs Course – Private, 27-holes
Lake Hickory Country Club and Town Course – Private, 9-holes
River Crest Golf Club – Semi-private, 18-holes
Rock Bark Golf & Spa – Semi-private, 36-holes

4.3 Existing Programs and Special Events

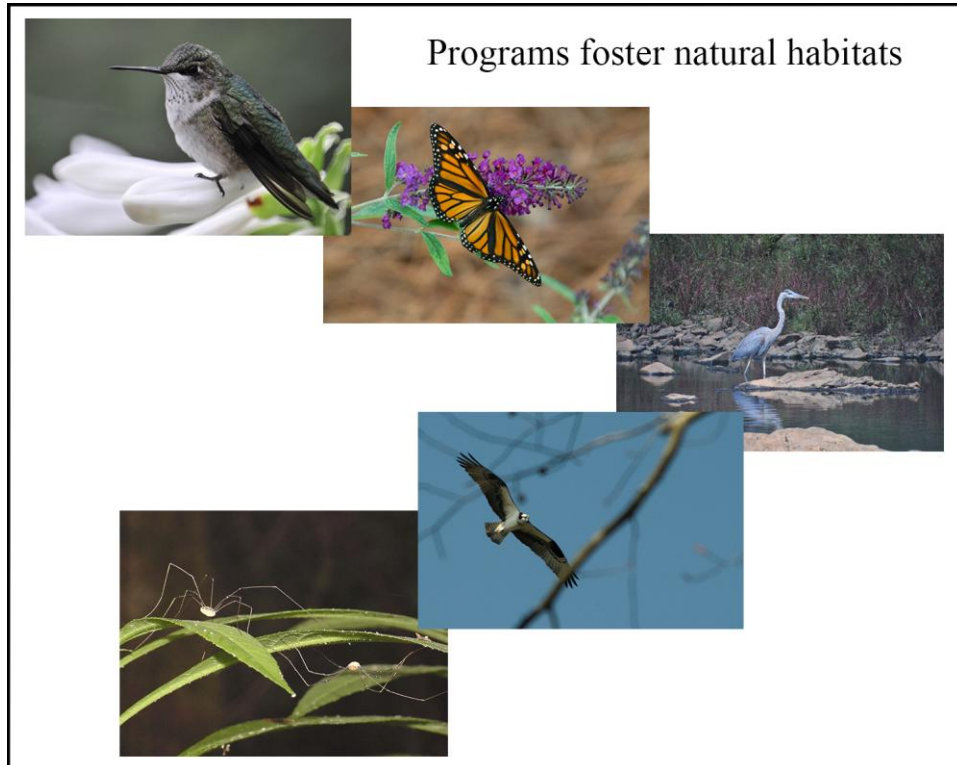
The Parks Division offers a wealth of programs and special events throughout the year. The activities and programs are very popular, not only with County residents, but also with tourists and with non-residents who live in the surrounding area.

The programs offered allow educational and recreational opportunities for people of all ages throughout the year. Included in the activities and events are recreation programs, special community events, education programs and other related activities. Programs continue to increase in attendance each year.

Parks Division Program Activities:

- Bird banding demonstrations – seasonal;
- Post Secondary and post graduate environmental research opportunities;
- Conservation programs;
- Cross-country track meets;
- Educational volunteer opportunities;
- Emergency response training courses;
- Environmental educational sessions (onsite/offsite);
- Geocaching activities;
- Guided bird walks – monthly;
- Guided wild flower walks – seasonal;

- Internship opportunities;
- North Carolina State Birding Trail;
- Responsible pet ownership/rabies clinics; and
- Scout and civic projects.



- End of Section-