



# Denver Parks and Recreation 2017 Game Plan Update

Existing Conditions Report

March 2017



# Executive Summary

The Existing Conditions Report culminates the first phase of the 2017 Game Plan Update for Denver Parks and Recreation. Its purpose is to document the existing state of the system as a whole in order to uncover the key issues that the Game Plan will want to address.

Denver's Park and Recreation system is incredibly diverse, spanning from the mountains to the prairie and encompassing more than 20,000 acres of parkland full of amenities and 27 recreation centers offering a wide range of programming. The analysis falls into three major categories: environment and climate, equity and access, and economic and organizational health. Key findings in each of the categories are summarized at right.

Understanding the current state of the system provides a launchpoint to envision the future of the Denver Parks and Recreation.

## Environment and Climate

Positioned at the juncture between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, Denver boasts a rich geology, ecology and climate that both inform and affect the system.

Key environmental and climate issues related to the plan include:

- Climate change and the need to adapt to drought, flooding and other extreme weather
- Urban heat island issues and stormwater runoff issues, especially in the downtown area
- Balancing conservation vs access (including education and recreation) in both mountain parks and urban natural areas
- The impacts of population growth and increasing urban density on our system
- Management/maintenance of natural areas and non-traditional areas
- Managing threats of invasive species, like the Emerald Ash Borer

## Equity and Access

Denver's population is growing and diversifying. How can we ensure that our parks, recreation centers and programming are welcoming and accessible to all Denverites?

Key issues related to the equity and access include:

- Denver's overall public health is ailing with an obesity and chronic disease epidemic
- High public interest and priority on fitness trails, paths and connectivity between parks
- Increasing access to parks and recreation centers
- Opportunity to improve programming to heighten customer usage and satisfaction – highest priority on arts/culture, aquatics and fitness programs suggested

## Economic and Organizational Health

Denver's resources are limited to maintain and staff a large and dynamic system.

Key issues related to economic and organizational health include:

- The existing reliance on tax dollars underlies a need to diversify revenues
- Improve training programs for all staff positions and levels
- Targeting water conservation and energy efficiency
- Use of data in decision-making, the value of meaningful metrics to measure progress
- The need to renovate and renew an aging facility base
- Balancing staffing levels, program needs and business management

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# Introduction

# Project Overview

## Background

In a city as active and diverse as Denver, a great park and recreation system is essential to quality of life. There is no question that Denverites love their parks; and, they have one of the most diverse, expansive, and historic park and recreation systems in the West. The City and County's urban park system encompasses over 250 urban parks totaling over 5,000 acres, as well as 5 designated natural areas. Highlights of the system include 24 lakes, 80,000 trees, more than 80 miles of trails, 34 designated parkways, 10 off-leash dog parks, 29 pools, 27 recreation centers, 150 playgrounds, 300 athletic fields, and 8 public golf courses. Beyond the city and county limits of Denver, residents also have access to an extensive system of 22 accessible Mountain Parks. In addition to 24 less-accessible or inaccessible conservation areas, these lands total more than 14,000 acres in Clear Creek, Douglas, Grand and Jefferson Counties.

The mandate for a city-wide parks and recreation plan was reflected in Denver's Comprehensive Plan 2000. The original Game Plan was adopted by City Council in 2003 as an official amendment to Comprehensive Plan 2000. It has since served as a strategic citywide framework of principles that guide recommendations on policy, management, resource allocation, partnerships, financing and sustainability as it relates to the larger park system.

## Project Overview

While the 2003 Game Plan has been considered a successful plan, it is now almost 14 years old. In the last decade, Denver Parks and Recreation (DPR) has made significant strides towards achieving the vision of the plan by implementing and putting into use many of the recommended policies and goals. At the same time, Denver has experienced unprecedented growth and redevelopment which, along with a changing climate, have exerted new pressures and challenges on the system. The plan needs to be updated to provide DPR with sound guidance to move forward and grow in the coming decades.

The intent of the 2017 Game Plan Update is to:

- Comprehensively evaluate the current state of Denver's parks and recreation system;
- Reconfirm, refresh and rearticulate the vision, core values and guiding principles of the Game Plan;
- Provide updated quantitative and qualitative goals related to the different aspects of the DPR system;
- Provide clear and implementable recommendations to deliver an identified level of service for targeted aspects of the DPR system;
- Provide an assessment of current funding and recommend policies to the future financial security of Denver Parks and Recreation;
- Assess the community's needs and identify opportunities to harness the benefits of evolving recreational trends.

“Denver can be made one of the ordinary cities of the country, or she can be the Paris of America”.

–Mayor Robert Speer, 1907

# The Game Plan in Context

Denver's significant legacy in planning sets the stage for the current planning efforts. Beginning with the Comprehensive Plan in 2000, extending through the policy plans of Blueprint 2002 and Game Plan 2003, diving deeply into DPR's implementation-level plans and landing at the current Denverright planning effort, Denver is committed to planning for its future. This section describes that context and how it sets the stage for the 2017 Game Plan Update.

## Denver's Policy Level Planning at the Turn of the Century

### The Comprehensive Plan 2000

The Comprehensive Plan, with its broad focus on planning for all aspects of Denver's future, is the city's highest-level policy document. The plan established four guiding principles - economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, equity and engagement - under an overall vision for a livable city.

The Comprehensive Plan set the stage for the Game Plan by calling for the an update to the 1986 Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan and specifically recommending that this new Master Plan be adopted as an amendment to the 2000 Comprehensive Plan. It also addressed improvements to the Mountain Parks system, strengthening connections between parks and neighborhoods, diversifying recreational resources and promoting environmental stewardship throughout the city.

### Blueprint Denver 2002

Blueprint Denver was adopted by the Denver City Council in 2002. Similar to Game Plan, Blueprint Denver 2002 was adopted as an amendment to the Comprehensive Plan 2000. The Comprehensive Plan 2000 called for the development of a land use and transportation plan that would identify and map desired future land uses, a preferred transportation system, and an overarching strategy for how the city should grow. It also called for an update to Denver's 1950's era zoning code, which was inconsistent with the city's vision for the future.

Blueprint identified several important principles including directing growth to Areas of Change while preserving the character of Areas of Stability; establishing that streets are a means to move people and not just cars; and emphasizing multi-modal streets and mixed-use development. The accompanying Blueprint Denver map created an explicit depiction of what Denver should look like in 2020 and became the basis for updating Denver's zoning to a context- and form-based code.

### Game Plan 2003

Adopted as a supplement to the Denver Comprehensive Plan 2000, the 2003 Game Plan is a strategic, policy-level plan to guide the Department of Parks and Recreation budget, capital development and policy decisions, as well as providing a framework for collaboration with other city agencies,

organizations and businesses. The plan established a key vision for Denver as a "City in a Park" with streets, buildings, parks and people as integral elements of a rich and varied landscape extending from our front doors to the mountains.

Using an extensive public process, the Game Plan clarified four core values that the people of Denver expressed as important for their parks and recreation system: a sustainable environment, equity, sound economics and community engagement. These values echo those articulated in the Comprehensive Plan 2000 and were used as the determining criteria for recommendations around allocating resources, DPR management and accountability, improving DPR's partnership with Denver residents and protecting Denver's open spaces for the future.

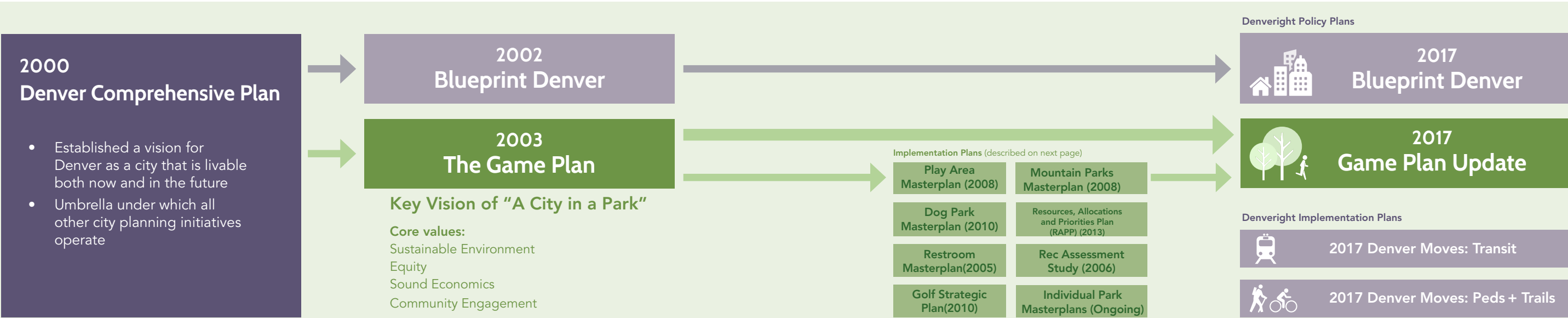
### The Denverright Effort

The Denver community is undertaking an effort that builds upon its successes and proud traditions to shape the future of Denver. Encompassing four distinct citywide plans and guided by input from the community, Denverright will establish a vision for Denver for the next 20 years.

Denverright will shape Denver's future in the areas of land use, mobility, parks and recreational resources, by coordinating, for the first time, the planning processes for:

- The update of Blueprint Denver; an integrated Land Use and Transportation Plan
- The update of The Game Plan, the 2003 citywide parks and recreation master plan;
- The development of Denver Moves: Transit, a new mobility plan for transit in Denver; and
- The development of Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails, a new mobility plan for sidewalks, crossings and trails.

Completing four major city-wide plans concurrently presents incredible opportunities for collaboration and amplification of great ideas across multiple planning platforms. Through the Denverright process, the city has coordinated community engagement to occur both across all plans and in unique and specific ways to each topic. Planning teams for the four individual plans are working closely together to identify issues that cross between plans and ensure that each plan includes language that supports the goals of the others. Denverright will provide a guiding vision that each plan will carry forward into guiding principles, goals and objectives. To understand more about how this citywide collaboration is unfolding, see Chapter 4, Next Steps.





## Support of Key Implementation Level Plans

The 2003 Game Plan set policy for parks and recreation citywide. The plan has been supported by several key implementation level plans, which focused on providing specific guidance for particular elements of the system. In conjunction with these plans, the city has been working on Master Plans for individual parks throughout the system, typically focused on larger community and regional parks.

### Denver Play Area Master Plan (2008)

The Denver Play Area Master Plan established a vision for the City to design a system of play areas that would provide diverse and site-specific play experiences distributed equitably throughout the City in order to meet the play and learning needs of the community. It has since served as a guide for City staff in the

planning, design, construction and management of play areas by identifying opportunities and outlining the basic requirements for different types of play areas. The plan defined "play areas" more broadly than playgrounds, to include all features of a site that support play activities for all ages and abilities and/or features that encourage community members to gather and socialize around play.

### Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan (2008)

The Denver Mountain Parks Master Plan examined the value of the mountain parks to the people of Denver, and provided specific strategies designed to improve the system as a national benchmark to reflect the national level of quality throughout the system. The plan tackled the chronic underfunding of the system and called for a responsible mix of short and long-term funding strategies including allocating a larger share of city resources, building capacity and

partnerships and identifying new revenue producing opportunities like ticket surcharges at the Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre. The Denver Mountain Parks were recognized as a value to the people and a significant natural resource that cannot be replaced.

### Dog Park Master Plan (2010)

The overarching goal of the Dog Park Master Plan was to create a balanced solution for an increasing dog population within the city, recognizing the need for off-leash areas while addressing the many illegal and negative impacts of off-leash dogs in many Denver Parks. The plan examined 9 existing DPR dog parks and provided recommendations including upgrading existing facilities, improving enforcement and education of the public around rules for leash and off-leash areas, adding new facilities based on a library of exemplary design standards, and developing partnerships to help maintain and monitor the system.

### Restroom Master Plan (2005)

The Restroom Master Plan provided an in-depth review of existing restrooms within DPR parks and recreation facilities and set strategies and priorities for both upgrades to existing facilities as well as new restroom construction, with a focus towards implementation of a new cost-effective restroom prototype.

### Resources, Allocations and Priorities Plan (RAPP) (2013)

The RAPP identified core services, pointed out duplication in services, recommended service provision strategies and guided resources allocation and pricing strategies. Its main goal is the introduction and implementation of strong "best-practice" business tools to the department. The RAPP differentiates between "core services", which benefit all community members and are supported by tax dollars,

compared to services and activities which benefit individuals and are supported by fees and charges. The detailed implementation plan outlines goals, objectives and action steps for each of the 6 main themes: policy strategies, service provision and maintenance, cost-savings, cost recover alignment, revenue enhancement and future growth.

### Golf Strategic Plan (2010)

The Golf Strategic Plan set a vision for a Denver Golf Enterprise Fund to provide golf programs and facilities consistent with standards set by leading municipalities that would maximize revenue, increase operational efficiency, and ensure optimum customer service. Key recommendations included DPR taking over all operations and management from concessionaires, making capital investments to upgrade the courses, tiering the courses by accepted quality standards, and marketing the Golf Division as a unique brand.

### Recreation Center Assessment Study (2006)

The Recreation Center Assessment Study conducted a detailed inventory of all 29 (at the time) recreation centers as well as a statistically-valid survey and a public and stakeholder outreach process. The study identified key areas of improvement for the system and set goals and action steps specifically regarding marketing, capital improvements/ expansion and cost recovery. Today's tiering of recreation centers stems from this plan.

### Individual Park Master Plans (ongoing)

In addition to city-wide planning efforts, DPR develops master plans for individual urban and mountain parks in collaboration with public interests and user groups. These plans provide a common vision and organizational framework for implementing improved park services, programs, and new facilities.

# Parks and Recreation Planning Epochs

Denver’s legacy of Parks and Recreation resources is the result of visionary planning efforts spanning a full century and a half

Denver’s park and recreation system has been built and stewarded through multiple eras of innovative and intentional planning, design and policy. These earlier plans and projects have built a strong foundation which the 2017 Game Plan builds on. Just a decade after founding the mining town of Denver City in 1858, Denverites dedicated their first park: Mestizo-Curtis Park (originally known as Curtis

Park). Since that critical moment, a series of visionary planning efforts, acted upon by industrious citizens and far-sighted leadership, have shaped an incredibly rich legacy of parks and open space for the city. The Game Plan update will shape the next big vision for the future of parks and recreation in our city.

“In the end, the city became a work of urban landscape art, a garden city if you will. And the subsequent mountain extension of the system was promptly recognized as a unique tourist attraction and a gateway to the Rocky Mountains.”

-- Don and Carolyn Etter, former co-Managers of Denver Parks and Recreation, c2014



## Park and Boulevard System of Denver (1882)

*Ribbons of parkways to connect neighborhoods with cultural destinations*

Growing out of the City Beautiful movement, this monumental plan gave birth to the parks and boulevards that form the backbone of our city today. Parkway like Speer Blvd and Williams Street Parkway as well as parks like Berkeley Lake Park, Cheesman Park and Washington Park are examples from this era.

## Mountain Parks Preliminary Plan (1912)

*Scenic and recreational “pleasure grounds” in the mountains and prairies west of the urban core*

This visionary plan originally identified more than 40,000 mountain acres that could become a coherent and complementary park system for the city’s urban residents. It took an act of Congress as well as state legislation to purchase the first park, Genesee in 1912, and mountain park acquisitions continued until Newton Park joined the system in 1962. Today’s mountain parks system is over 14,000 acres.

## Social Welfare and the Recreation Center System (1950s)

*Equal access to quality recreational facilities and programs*

On the heels of the second World War, as the American suburban dream drew residents out of traditional neighborhoods, inner city communities suffered. Denver’s urban core was no exception, and the social welfare movement rose up to help connect communities, especially youth, with opportunities. Beginning in the 1950’s and extending through the 1970’s, Denver built an incredible legacy of recreation centers and laid the groundwork for the programming we see today.

## Reclamation of Waterways (1970s)

*Revitalization of Denver’s post-industrial river corridors to improve environmental health and promote environmental growth*

As the Clean Water Act became national law in 1972, Denver turned an eye to cleaning up its urban waterways. Today, greenways like the ones along the South Platte River and Cherry Creek are popular recreational destinations and also provide critical ecological and stormwater protection for the city’s neighborhoods. To date, improvements to the South Platte River have attracted over \$2 billion in investment to adjacent communities.



**The Game Plan (2003, 2017...and beyond!)**  
*An inspired vision for the future of Denver's parks and recreation system*

The 2003 plan envisioned a “City in a Park” and charted a course forward with the four key values of a sustainability, equity, sound economics and engagement. The 2017 Game Plan Update is our collective opportunity to refresh and enrich this vision to create a lasting legacy for Denver’s park and recreation system. The voices and experiences of Denverites from all quadrants of the city and all walks of life will be critical in shaping what we can imagine and what we can collectively accomplish over the next decades.

# The Game Plan Analysis Process: Means and Methods

## Phase 1 Overview: Understand and Analyze

Overall, the planning process to create the 2017 Game Plan update will take about 16 months; the timeline has been set to align with other Denverright processes. The effort is broken down into three main phases:

- **Phase 1: Understand and Analyze**, in which data and opinions about the city's existing park and recreation system are gathered and reviewed, painting a picture of how these facilities are used today, and where strengths and opportunities lie.
- **Phase 2: Envision and Goal-setting**, which is about building a collective vision for the future of Denver's park and recreation system. Together with the public, this phase will explore different scenarios and directions the park and recreation system could take and vet guiding principles and goals. The phase will culminate in a draft plan.
- **Phase 3: Draft and Adopt**, in which the community will review the draft plan and build the steps towards achieving the plan. These steps will include implementation, funding and revenue strategies as well as metrics for monitoring success.

This Existing Conditions report represents the culmination of Phase 1. For more information on phases 2 and 3 as well as the project schedule, please refer to Chapter 5, Next Steps for Game Plan.

Understanding and analyzing the current state of Denver's park and recreation system requires looking at three different types of information. First, past planning efforts are reviewed to understand what goals have previously inspired the department and what challenges have been persistent. Second, a wide variety of data and numbers are examined - ranging from current and future demographics to spatial (GIS) datasets to financial and organizational metrics. Third, but equally important, diverse stakeholders are engaged to gain important perspectives and opinions about the system. The following is a summary of the many methods this Game Plan update has employed to understand and analyze the system. For more information on the results of the analysis, please turn to Chapter 3.

## Isochrones vs. Walk Circles

When the 2003 Game Plan was created, proximity analysis consisted of drawing "walk circles" around each park. A walk circle was defined as a certain distance (usually ¼ mile) from the center point of the park - residences within that walk circle were considered close enough to the park to walk there easily. The limitation of walk circles is that they do not account for major barriers, such as a river. A standard walk circle from a park or recreation center might overestimate access by including a neighborhood on the opposite side of a highway, train tracks or an inaccessible industrial parcel.

Proximity analysis today incorporates "isochrones" in place of walk circles. An isochrone is calculated using the road network and a certain increment of time. For Game Plan, we have used 10 minute walks with 10 minute drives and 20 minute bike rides. The isochrone takes into account how a person would walk, drive or bike between two places, and creates a shape around a park or recreation center showing all places that are actually accessible within the allotted travel time. Barriers like highways, train tracks and rivers are taken into account and the system even includes crosswalks and the timing of walk lights. Combined with detailed neighborhood demographic information, isochrones paint a much more accurate picture of who can access certain types of resources.



## Data and Numbers

### Demographic Analysis

Demography is the study of population. For the purposes of Game Plan, it is important to understand how many residents the city houses, as well as how these residents break down in terms of age, race, gender, income, education levels, primary language, health, and car use, among others. This data comes primarily from the 10-year US census and associated annual American Community Survey. The Game Plan relies on the Denverright partnership with Blueprint Denver for all projections of demographic data into the future.

### Spatial (GIS) Analysis

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) help to manage and visualize spatial (map-based) datasets. The City and County of Denver maintains and makes available a significant amount of detailed spatial data about the city through its Open Data Catalog (<https://www.denvergov.org/opendata>). These datasets allow Game Plan to explore the relationships between neighborhood demographics and park or recreation resources as well as perform proximity analysis to understand how accessible parks and recreation resources are to each resident. See the sidebar on proximity analysis.

### Recreation and Programming

Denver Parks and Recreation keeps records of programs and services offered at each of its recreation centers, as well as numbers of people registered for classes and general usage of the recreation center. Known as "dashboards", these datasets have been mined to understand trends in recreation.

Additional demographic data were obtained from Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc (ESRI), the largest research and development organization dedicated to GIS and specializing in population projections and market trends.

### Financial Review and Budget Analysis

Using the Department's General Fund Operations budget, the analysis examines two years of actual numbers (2014 and 2015) and two years of budgeted numbers (2016 and 2017). Both the high-level of expenses versus revenue and a more detailed exploration of individual cost centers within the department reveal trends.

### Operations Analysis

Themes pulled from past reports as well as conversations with staff focus groups were aggregated into high-level assessment of the state of the organization.

# Comparing Denver to Peer Cities

## The competitive landscape of parks and recreation systems in the United States

Understanding how Denver stacks up against other cities of similar population size, demographics, land areas and characters can help paint an overall picture of Denver's relative strengths and weaknesses. Blueprint Denver selected Austin, Seattle, Portland, Minneapolis and Salt Lake City as peer cities against which to compare Denver's growth. For the purposes of Game Plan, we kept all of these cities except Salt Lake City, and added Raliegh, Boston and Charlotte to the mix because of their range in size, key attributes of their park systems and similarities in historical growth and development patterns.

The bulk of data for peer cities comparisons for Game Plan comes from the Trust for Public Land's 2016 City Park Facts database, which contains 97 cities across the United States. Game Plan analysis charts Denver and its peer cities in relation to the median of these 97 cities in a wide range of categories.



### Minneapolis, MN

**Population: 410,939**  
Heavily connected to its surrounding environment, Minneapolis sits on the banks of the Mississippi River. Rich in water; 13 lakes, wetlands and waterfalls are commonly found connected by a system of parkways.

### Raleigh, NC

**Population: 451,066**  
Known as the "City of Oaks", Raleigh's fast growing population make it a rich cultural and educational hub attracting many businesses and universities.

### Portland, OR

**Population: 632,800**  
Often regarded as one of the world's most environmentally conscious cities, Portland is known for its park land, natural spaces, bikeable streets and walkability.

### Boston, MA

**Population: 667,137**  
One of the oldest cities in the United States, and now home to prominent tech companies, universities and a growing population, the city prides itself in Olmsted's "Emerald Necklace" network of parks and its historic oceanfront landscapes.

### Seattle, WA

**Population: 684,451**  
Known as the "Gateway to Alaska" the "Emerald City" and its frequent rainy weather, Seattle sits at the foot of Mount Rainier. It is home to a thriving cultural scene and growing tech economy including companies like Boeing and Amazon.

### Charlotte, NC

**Population: 827,097**  
The flat, land-locked landscape of Charlotte has contributed to its growth as a highway, rail and transportation hub. It is now known as a major banking center.

### Austin, TX

**Population: 931,830**  
Home to a diverse population, Austin recently adopted the term "Keep Austin Weird" in an effort to support local businesses and the uniqueness of the city from large corporations. The city's park system takes its form around the region's many lakes and rivers.

# Public Outreach: Denverright Workshops

In October of 2016, the four Denverright teams combined to successfully complete 5 public workshops. Dispersed throughout the city, meetings were held at the McNichols Building, New Hope Baptist Church, North High School, the Jewish Community Center and College View Elementary. Chosen based on their location in all quadrants of the city, the team aimed to reach all walks of life with an equal demographic dispersion.

Each meeting included an overview of the Denverright planning process, an opportunity for participants to learn about each of the four plans and a listening session. The Game Plan breakout session focused on providing a compelling introduction to the Denver parks and recreation system today as well as the challenges facing the system in the future. Public participants weighed in on topics that are interesting to them through 18 different input cards organized in 3 main categories: environment, equity and access, and organizational resources. In total 598 feedback cards were received from over 375 attendees. In an effort to encourage participation, comment cards were also accompanied with an interesting statistic about the parks and recreation system; focused on the past present and the future.

 **598**  
Feedback Cards

 **375+**  
Attendees

 **5**  
Neighborhoods  
Across the City



# Public Outreach: Community Events

During the summer and fall of 2016, Game Plan had a presence at six different existing events throughout the city. With outreach tents, fun facts about Game Plan, engaging activities and plenty of free popsicles, we spoke to more than 240 people. Events were chosen to represent a diversity of voices throughout the city, especially those who are typically under-represented in the planning process.

**Feria del Verano:** A block party during August's "Denver Days" in the traditionally hispanic neighborhoods of Globeville and Elyria-Swansea. The event was sponsored by Growhaus, a nonprofit indoor farm, marketplace and educational center.

**West Colfax Neighborhood Festival:** A cultural festival during August's "Denver Days" in the traditionally hispanic neighborhood of West Colfax.

**Montbello:** This event was to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Montbello neighborhood. It included a parade through the community and

a range of festivities in the park near Montbello Recreation Center including live music, a kid's carnival, and a vendor fair.

**Seniors in September:** Hosted at the Denver Art Museum by the Denver Commission on Aging and the Denver Office on Aging, this event focused on free workshops regarding health, fitness and legal issues for Denver's older adults.

**Mayor's Youth Commission:** The Mayor's Youth Commission is a group of talented high school students who are given an opportunity to cultivate leadership skills while advising the Office of Children's Affairs on issues affecting today's youth.

**Red Rocks "Run the Rocks":** This annual event held at Red Rocks (a Denver Mountain Park) offers participants the opportunity at a 5k run/walk as well as a 10k run through the famous park. Bringing communities together, the event aims to promote good health and air quality.

Event	# Responses	Date
Feria del Verano	44	Aug. 6, 2016
West Colfax Neighborhood Festival	78	Aug. 6, 2016
Montbello	30	Sept. 24, 2016
Seniors in September	40	Sept. 15, 2016
Mayor's Youth Commission	21	Sept. 21, 2016
Run the Rocks	37	Oct. 9, 2016



# Public Outreach: Statistically-valid Survey

**Respondents**

**36%** of respondents were over the age of 55

**75%** of respondents identified as white Caucasian

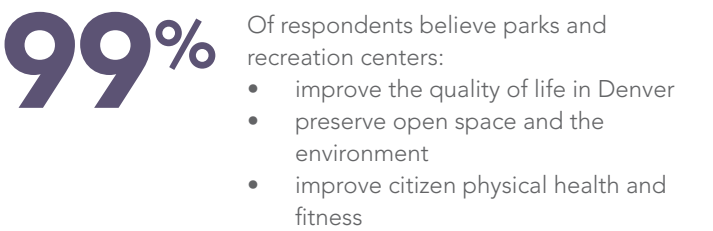
**68%** of respondents own their current residence

**27%** of respondents identified as having a Hispanic or Latino member of their household

**52%** of respondents identified as female

In the fall of 2016, the ETC Institute administered a needs assessment survey for Denver. The Survey focused on the city's efforts to plan for the future of parks and recreation opportunities.

ETC mailed the survey to a random sample of households in Denver in an effort to represent all demographics. Each survey contained a cover letter, copy of the survey and a postage-paid return envelope. The goal was to obtain responses from 800 residents; this goal was accomplished with 817 residents completing the survey. Respondents were spread fairly evenly in relation to age and gender, while three out of four identified as Caucasian. More than a quarter of respondents identified as Hispanic or Latino. Demographics of respondents are comparable to overall demographics for the city and country of Denver.



# Public Outreach: Maptionaire Survey

**Respondents**

**65%** of respondents had 0 children in their household

**87%** of respondents (461) identified themselves as Caucasian

**0.1%** of respondents were 18-24 years old

**58%** of respondents identified as female

The Denveright website played host to two online surveys throughout summer and fall 2016. The first was an overall introduction to the planning process with general questions and prompts where participants could drop pins on a digital map of the city and write comments about what strengths and challenges that area had. The second Maptionaire survey was a much more detailed effort with overall questions related to Denveright as a whole and then the opportunity to click on each plan to answer more detailed questions. Demographic information was captured related to the Denveright questions and divided based on who answered which specific survey.

- Main survey categories focused on:
- Overall Facility Use and Condition
  - Program Participation and Ratings
  - Barriers to Park, Facility and Program Use
  - Facility Needs and Priorities
  - Programming Needs and Priorities

The Game Plan portion of the survey contained six multiple choice questions related to park and recreation center use and priorities and two map-based questions asking respondents to identify successful areas of parks and recreation and areas of challenge. Overall 540 people responded to the Game Plan questions. Respondents were spread fairly evenly related to age and gender, but were overwhelmingly Caucasian and upper-middle income. More than 65% of the respondents did not have children, so results and comments are skewed away from youth and families.

## HOW TO READ What We've Heard

Throughout the report you will see sidebars similar to this one. These represent what we have heard. Direct quotes, insights and stastics into what you have said throughout the process.

100%

Key statistics offer broad insight into various topics

“Direct quotes showcase what you said” [SOURCE]

SOURCES:

[PF]	PUBLIC FORUMS
[EE]	EXISTING EVENTS
[MYC]	MAYOR'S YOUTH COMMISSION
[MS]	MAPTIONAIRE SURVEY
[SVS]	STASTISTICALLY VALID SURVEY
[DPR]	DPR ALL-STAFF OR FOCUS GROUPS
[TF]	TASK FORCE MEMBERS

HERE YOU WILL FIND KEY TAKEAWAYS AND GENERAL THOUGHTS FROM THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS.

# The Game Plan Taskforce

The Game Plan Task Force is a group of 38 diverse stakeholders from all parts of the city. The group includes community members from different neighborhoods and quadrants throughout the city as well as representatives from the Denver Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, many branches of city and county government - including the Mayor's office, city council, the offices of sustainability, aging, public health and finance and Denver Public Schools - and local non-profit organizations that are affiliated with Parks and Recreation, such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, Mountain Parks Foundation, the Park People and the Trust for Public Land.

The Game Plan Task Force meets quarterly throughout the planning process and serves as the main public steering committee for the plan. Meetings focus on two main goals: (1) providing information regarding the plan for Task Force members to disseminate to the community and (2) engaging members in meaningful activities and dialogue to shape plan direction. Task Force members interact with the plan between meetings via email and assigned tasks to share more about the plan with their communities and gather more feedback from their networks.



Task Force Breakout Sessions - October 2016

# Staff Outreach: Workshops + Groups

## The Game Plan Ambassador Group

The Game Plan Ambassadors are a group of 20 staff representatives of all divisions and levels of the Denver Parks and Recreation. This group gathers once per month to hear updates on the planning process from the internal planning team and to provide input to the process. Ambassadors then report back to their colleagues and disseminate information about the Game Plan among their work networks. They are one significant conduit for questions and comments from all staff to reach the planning team.

## DPR All-Staff Meetings

Denver Parks and Recreation meets as an entire staff approximately bi-annually. During an all-staff picnic in August as well as a fall meeting, the internal planning team provided an update on the Game Plan progress. The fall meeting included an interactive polling activity where each staff member used their cell phones to text responses to on-screen questions. This live poll resulted in more than 350 staff responses to questions regarding challenges facing

the department as well as the department's future goals.

## 11 Staff Focus Groups

As part of the Game Plan's organizational and recreational assessments, eleven separate focus groups met to discuss challenges and opportunities within the department. These focus groups provided a valuable opportunity to gain perspectives from employees on all levels and in all divisions regarding what operational and support processes are needed to successfully deploy a plan. Focus groups were each between 10 and 15 people, and included groups from Planning, Operations, Finance/Administration/Permitting, Forestry, Parks, Mountain Parks and Recreation. Additional focus groups were convened with division directors and department leadership. Approximately 80 employees participated in the meetings overall, and were asked a series of questions related to organizational strengths, challenges, staffing and structure, internal support processes, resources and technology.



DPR Staff Picnic

# The Context of Denver

## Denver’s Identity and Spirit

There is no question that Denver is a great place to live, work and play. With close proximity to the mountains and a reported 300 days of sunshine per year, the city has become well-known for supporting an active, outdoor lifestyle. Denverites bike, hike, run, ski, swim, practice yoga and participate in just about every sport one can imagine. A vibrant cultural scene rounds out the city's enthusiasm for health and fitness, including everything from spectacular restaurants to museums and theater to special events in the city's diverse neighborhoods.

## Denver is Growing

Since its founding as the mining town of Denver City in 1858, Denver's population has grown steadily. Since the 2003 Game Plan was written, the city has grown by nearly 121,000 residents, and 65% of this growth (78,000 people) has occurred in the last 5 years (2010-2015). In fact, Denver was the 5th fastest-growing city in the nation in 2014. Despite this significant population growth, Denver's urban core (downtown) is actually less dense now than it was in 1950. Though the urban core today is less dense than it was in the 1950's, since around 1990 downtown has seen a steady rise in population density. As population has grown, Denver being a "landlocked" city has continued to densify. Areas such as Lowry and Stapleton have been converted to residential and commercial lands, but with a significant addition of parks and open spaces.

## Denver is Diversifying

Denver is currently predominantly white (78%), with 9% of residents being African American, 4% Asian and 1% American Indian. Thirty-four percent of residents are of Hispanic or Latino origin, and this population is expected to continue growing. The city's population overall is young and educated, with a median age of 34 and 44% of residents having a bachelor's degree or higher. The city's job economy and character are attracting the Millennial generation in significant numbers, while at the same time, more families are choosing to remain in the city rather than moving to suburbs and more older adults are choosing to age in place.



682,545

Population of the City & County of Denver (2015)

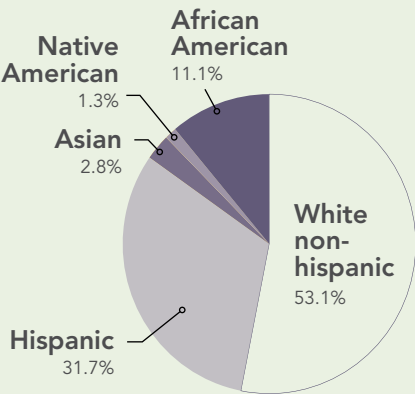
+11%

Denver is the 5th fastest growing large-city in the nation in 2014

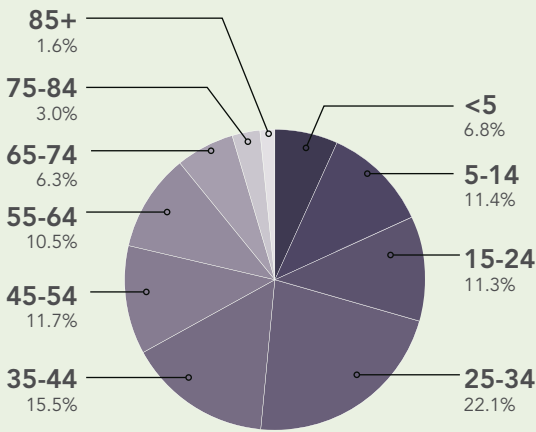
857,054

DRCOG Predicted Population of the City & County of Denver (2040)

## Race/Ethnicity



## Age Distribution



DATA FROM BLUEPRINT COMMUNITY PROFILE

# Denver Parks and Recreation Today

## A Diverse System, Spanning from the Mountains and the Plains.

The depth and breadth of Denver's park and recreation system is truly remarkable. With a total acreage of more than 19,000 acres, 270 park properties and 28 Recreation Centers, the system is one of the largest in the country. At the same time, few park systems could boast spanning landscapes so diverse - from the snowy mountain peaks of Colorado's Front Range down through Sand Prairie and highly developed urban parkland.

At more than 14,000 acres, the Mountain Parks system is a unique resource for Denverites, offering 22 accessible parks and 24 more conservation areas

that protect wildlife habitat and viewsheds. The system holds immense value to Denver residents. Here, Denver residents have access to 47 miles of trails, forested hiking, mountain biking and fishing, picnic sites with stunning views of both downtown and the Rocky Mountains, and extensive wildlife viewing, including birds, bison, elk and mountain goats. Two unique sites within the Mountain Parks are cultural as well as recreational destinations: the Buffalo Bill Museum and Gravesite, which offers visitors a view into the history of the region, and the Red Rocks Amphitheatre, a premier outdoor concert venue nestled into a stunning 300 million-year-old geologic formation.

Denver's urban parks and recreation include 224 parks totaling more than 5,000 acres as well as 27 recreation centers. Urban parkland ranges in size from large regional parks, like the iconic City Park at 300 acres to much smaller neighborhood and pocket parks which can be less than a quarter of an acre. The system includes linear parks and trails along the city's urban waterways, like the South Platte River, Cherry Creek and the High Line Canal. Park character varies tremendously, from historic landscapes like City Park, Mestizo Curtis Park and Washington Park to more modern and specialized landscapes like Babi Yar Park, which uses native prairie and cast concrete

in a memorial to genocide in World War II. Urban parks and recreation centers provide a vast array of amenities and things to do - everything from passive walking and relaxing in a park setting to skateparks, dog parks, bike BMX courses, community gardens, swimming pools, playgrounds, music venues, water recreation and more is available to residents. Programming in recreation centers reaches all demographics, from fitness classes to arts and culture programming to active older adult activities.



72%

of Denver park land is in the Mountains, more than 14,000 acres

22 + 24

Accessible parks

Conservation tracts

>5,000

acres of urban parkland

262

Urban parks & Open Spaces



CITY PARK

10

Regional Parks



SANDERSON GULCH

43

Linear Parks/ Trails



BABI-YAR PARK

45

Community + Special Use Parks



MESTIZO-CURTIS PARK

137

Neighborhood Parks + Pocket Parks



28

Recreation Centers

10

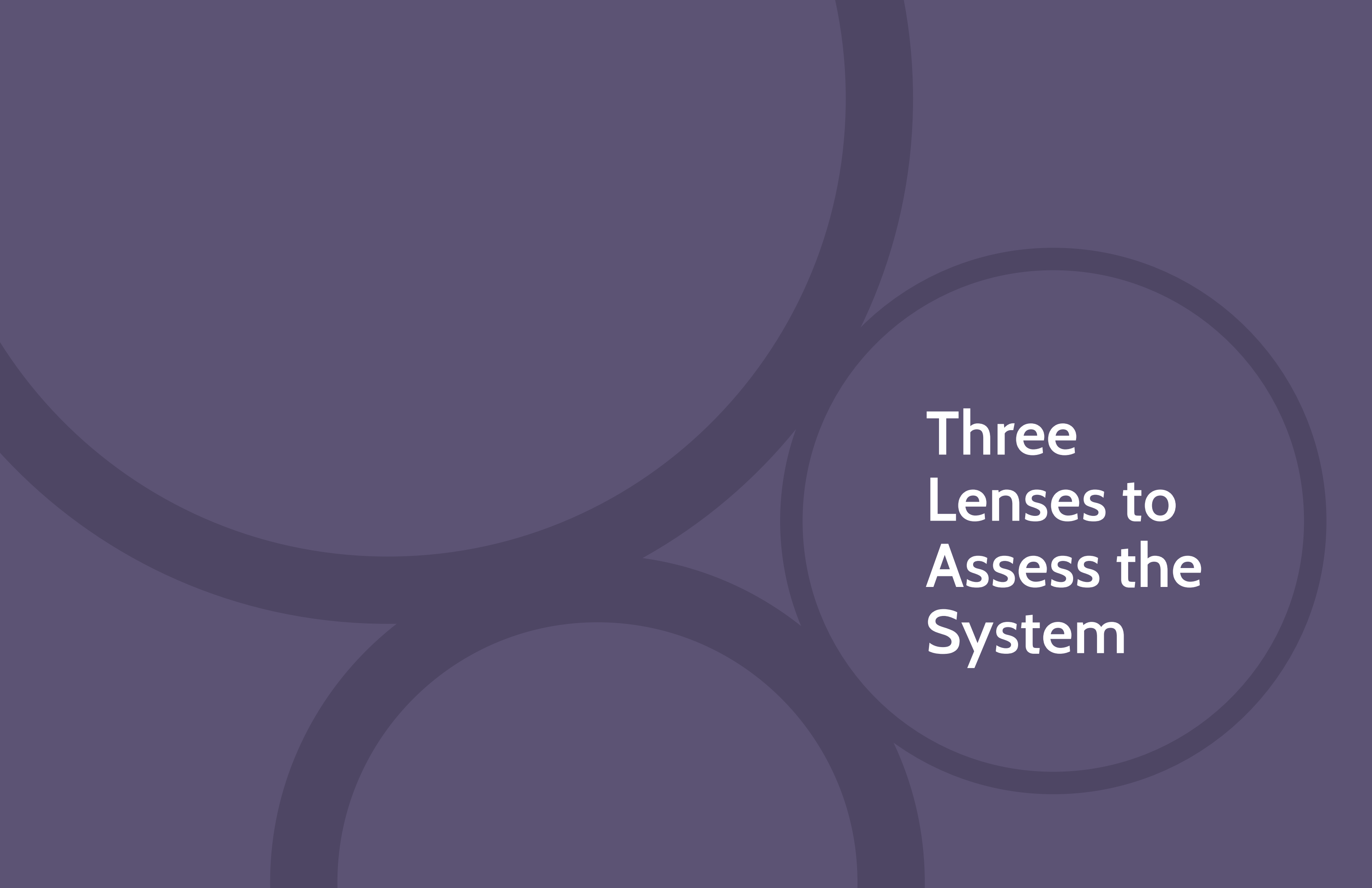
Athletic Complexes

17

Urban Open Spaces

Mountain Parks

Urban Parks and Recreation

The background consists of several overlapping circles in various shades of purple and blue. A prominent circle on the right side contains the text. The overall aesthetic is modern and minimalist.

# Three Lenses to Assess the System

# Big Questions for Our Future

Looking to the future, the Denver park and recreation system must be understood both on its own and within the context of a changing community and environment. Beyond Denver's physical resources there is tremendous complexity in how the community's needs and preferences interact with park and recreation provisions, the role that our environment and climate play in our system's health and the opportunities and constraints of public budgeting on the organizational health and management. Understanding this background, the department faces three primary questions as it plans for the future regarding our climate and environment, our population and our financial resources. These three questions form the lenses, or categories, within which to understand the nuances of Denver's park and recreation system today.

## Denver's natural resources are challenged

How does Denver's environment and climate affect our parks and urban forest? How do our parks affect our environment?

With projected rising air temperatures and increased winter storm events, Denver's climate is changing and the park system must adapt to these evolving conditions. Details of the ecology and environment of the system today will help frame solutions to keep Denver's parks, urban forest and overall city healthy in the coming decades.

The **environment and climate lens** explores how Denver's unique geologic history, landscape ecology and climate have shaped our parks as well as the role humans have played in transforming these native landscapes. Look in this section to understand:

- The underlying geologic and ecologic structure
- Park landscape typologies
- Urban forest
- Climate change, and its potential effects
- Hydrology and stormwater

## Denver's population is growing and diversifying

How do we ensure that all Denver residents can enjoy our park and recreation system equally?

Denver has experienced unprecedented levels of growth in the last decade, and is predicted to grow by another ~174,000 residents before 2040. Understanding how equitable and accessible the current system and services are across the city will help ensure that the park and recreation system can adapt to meet future demands and needs.

The **equity and access lens** explores how well the system serves the diverse needs of Denver's growing population. Look in this section to understand:

- Density of parks relative to peer cities
- An assessment of neighborhoods in high need of park and recreation services
- Access to parks
- Density and diversity of amenities, including emerging trends as well as playgrounds, dog parks, aquatics and golf
- Recreation centers and programming
- Parkways

## Limited Budgets and Resources

How can we fund and manage our park and recreation facilities long term?

The demands of a growing population and changing environmental needs will put increasing pressure on already straining capital and human resources. Understanding the current fiscal and organizational health of the department will give a baseline for sensible recommendations to create a sustainable future for the organization.

The **economic and organizational health lens** focuses on DPR's budget and spending, including sources of revenue as well as the operational side of running the department. Look in this section to understand:

- Overall operating budget for the department
- Water and irrigation
- Safety and maintenance
- Organizational structure
- Partnerships

# Environment and Climate

The **environment and climate lens** explores how Denver's unique geologic history, landscape ecology and climate have shaped our parks as well as the role humans have played in transforming these native landscapes. Look in this section to understand:

- The underlying geologic and ecologic structure
- Park landscape typologies
- Urban forest
- Climate change, and its potential effects
- Hydrology and stormwater



# Underlying Geological Structure

## Hundreds of millions of years of geologic activity have shaped Denver's place at the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

Sited where the Great Plains meets the Rockies, the Denver metropolitan region has a unique geological history; events spanning hundreds of millions of years have carved and deposited the iconic geographic characteristics we see today.

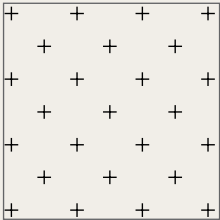
Between 300 and 500 Million years ago (MYO), Denver's **great plains** were innundated by a giant inland ocean. Sandstones and limestones formed at the ocean floor, and still sit at the bedrock of most of our prairie today. This period of ocean flux continued for millions of years, as the state of Colorado slowly positioned itself in its current geographic location.

About 68 MYO, after the inland ocean had receded, a period of tectonic activity forced some of these sandstones to tip up, exposing their layers and forming the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. The iconic red striated rocks of **Red Rocks Park** and Amphitheatre were pushed to the surface during this time, and slowly started to erode, giving way to the striking vertical formations around the amphitheater. Nearby Dinosaur Ridge (not a Denver Mountain Park) exposes similar sedimentary sandstone that was once a beach at the edge of the ocean, where dinosaurs left ancient footprints.

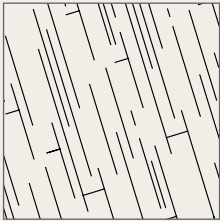
Between 10 and 40 MYO, another period of tectonic shifting and uplift brought about intense volcanic activity that raised the present-day Rocky Mountains. Lava flows petrified giant redwood trees in thriving forests, the evidence of which is visible about 100 miles south of Denver at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. As the volcanic activity subsided, magma (molten rock) cooled slowly in the heart of the volcanoes, forming giant granite plugs.

More recently, in the last million years, glacial activity scoured the region, along with the rest of North America. Glaciers scoured away the surface of the volcanoes, and left exposed large portions of the much harder granite plugs. These granite formations are evident in many of Colorado's highest peaks, as well as the peaks and rolling hills of **Denver's Mountain Parks**.

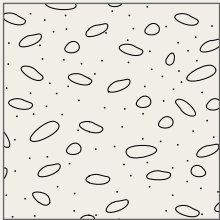
Although glaciers have long since receded from the Denver region, forces of wind and rain continue to erode both the granite of the mountain peaks and the sandstone at the foothills. Over hundreds of thousands of years, these sediments have been carried downhill and deposited in our **Great Plains**, forming the backbone of the soils that support Denver's prairie landscapes. The high sand, or silica, content of prairie soils make it well-drained and dry which attracts drought-tolerant native grasses to colonize.



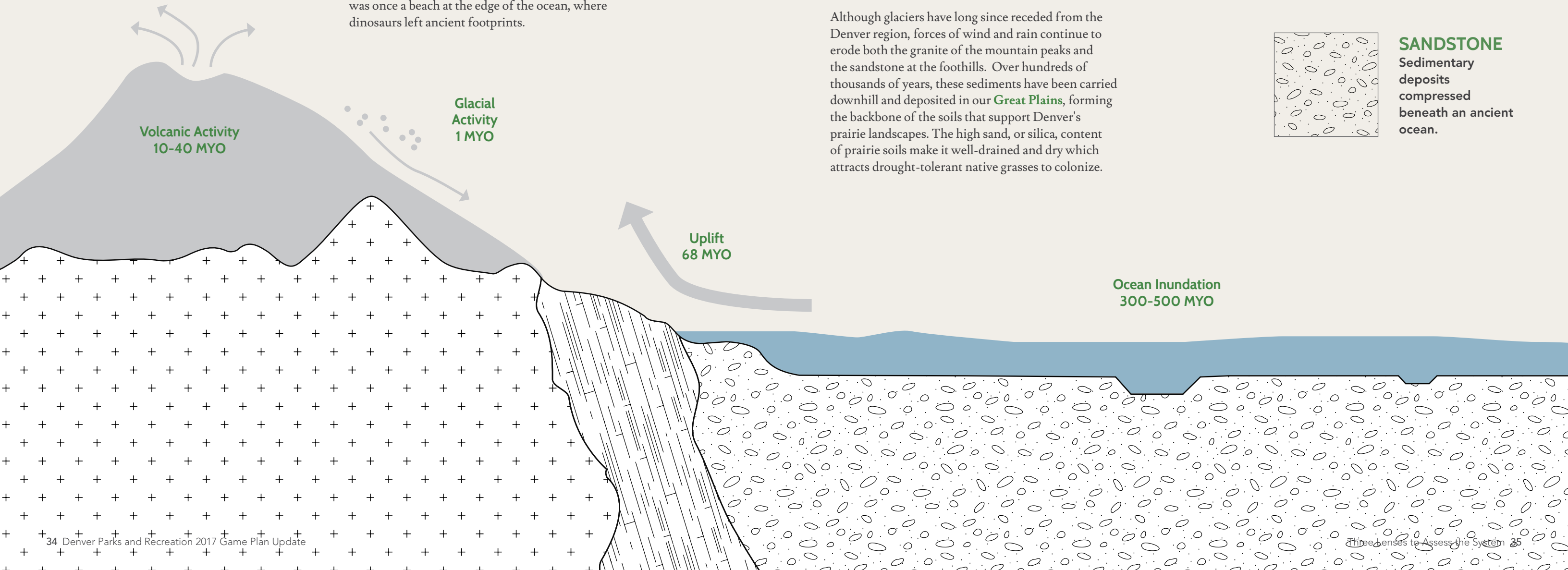
**GRANITE**  
Formed at the heart of ancient volcanoes, and exposed by glacial erosion



**RED ROCKS**  
Sedimentary sandstone once at the edge of an ancient ocean has been uplifted and exposed



**SANDSTONE**  
Sedimentary deposits compressed beneath an ancient ocean.



# Ecological Communities

**Built upon bedrock geology and soils, our region’s plant communities are diverse and unique.**

Located at the transition between the Great Plains and the Rocky Mountains, the Denver parks system encompasses a broad range of native ecological communities. These communities represent the landscape that existed prior to development and the natural areas that currently exist in undeveloped parts of the city, dedicated natural areas, and in the mountain parks.

Most of the city was historically dominated by prairie ecosystems, typically shortgrass prairie or Great Plains sand prairie. In its natural condition, these

prairie ecosystems support wildlife species such as prairie dog and other small mammals, coyote, fox, a variety of bird species, and mule deer. Along the stream corridors, plains riparian communities – characterized by cottonwood and willow forests, shrubs, and wetlands – are still the ecological backbone of these prairie (and now urban) systems, providing habitat and movement corridors for a wide variety of wildlife.

Larger landscapes on the western margins of the city and in the mountain parks include foothills

transitional ecosystems that are typical of Colorado's Front Range. As the landscape gains elevation, shortgrass prairie ecosystems transition into Foothills Piedmont grassland, Lower Montane-Foothill shrubland, and Ponderosa Pine/Mixed conifer forest and woodlands. Incorporating elements of both the prairie and mountain zones, these largely intact ecosystems support habitat for a broad range of wildlife species, including mule deer, elk, coyote, and a wider range of native bird species. Black bear and mountain lion also live in these areas, but are rarely seen.

In addition, some of the higher elevation mountain parks incorporate mixed conifer forests, meadows and wetlands (as is found in Echo Lake Park), and alpine tundra, found at Summit Lake on Mount Evans.

From the Great Plains to alpine tundra, the expansive Denver parks system contains a full cross-section of Front Range ecosystems. Whether they are remnant prairies in an otherwise urban environment or the expansive forests of a mountain park, these natural ecosystems provide important opportunities to enjoy, learn from, and preserve our natural history.



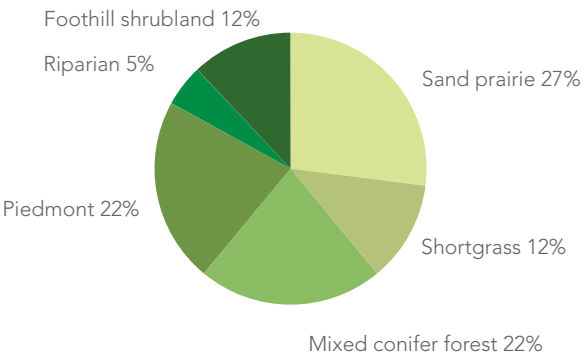
# Mountain Parks Landscapes

**Diverse and inspiring expanses outside the urban core**  
Denver’s Mountain Parks are a truly unique asset for residents of the city and region. Proposed by the Olmsted brothers in 1912 as a method for preserving the magnificent beauty of the Rocky Mountains within the city’s viewshed, the system now includes 22 accessible parks and 24 conservation areas that extend across four counties, range in altitude from 6,000 to 13,000 feet and encompass more than 14,000 acres. These diverse landscapes are home to 6 main plant communities, and abundant wildlife; including two healthy bison herds, elk, and mountain goats.

The Denver Mountain Parks system is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and preserves a significant cultural as well as ecological legacy for Denverites. The rustic log and stone structures, scenic drives and campsites are the work of prominent architects and landscape architects, and continue to be popular destinations today. Important historic sites, like the final resting place of Buffalo Bill and the 300 million year old geologic formations of red rocks, are preserved within the system.

The 2008 Mountain Parks Master Plan made a clear case for reinvesting in this historic legacy for the people of Denver. Since then, significant effort has been made to improve structures, trails and drives, particularly in the most heavily-used parks. The addition of rustic fences have helped clarify public access points and preserve sensitive landscapes.

## Ecological Zones in the Mountain Parks



**Summit Lake:** En route to Mount Evans on one of America’s highest auto roads, you will stumble upon Summit Lake; the highest mountain park. This alpine region is home to an overlook, a shelter, picnic area and rare arctic plants in the alpine tundra. Although the seasons change quickly at such a high altitude, Summit Lake is enjoyed today by tens of thousands of visitors annually.



**Bison:** Established in 1914 as an effort to help maintain the species, which was then nearing extinction, the Denver Park pure bred bison herds are now managed at about 24 adults per herd. The herds reside in two groups, at Genesee and Daniel’s Parks, and continue to be a major interest to park visitors, especially during calving season in the spring. Denver Mountain Parks occasionally collaborates with other Bison reserves to increase the genetic diversity of the species by trading animals and inter-breeding.



**Red Rocks Park and Amphitheatre:** The towering rocks that make Red Rocks one of the only acoustically perfect amphitheatres in the world, are just a part of the park and are an insight into the region’s past geological history. Slowly rising from the prehistoric ocean floor, Red Rocks is an open book to see first hand geologic history, wildlife, and plants of the region’s past. The visitor’s center includes fossils from the region as well as cultural history of past performances.

## MOUNTAIN PARKS What We’ve Heard

**45%**  
of respondents believe conservation vs. public access + amenities should be balanced [PF]

**86%**  
of respondents have visited a mountain park at least a few times this year [SVS]

“Better marketing is needed to make people aware of the mountain parks” [DPR]

“Most people don’t know about them” [PF]

“We need public transportation up to the parks” [PF]

MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS VISIT A MOUNTAIN PARK “A FEW TIMES” PER YEAR

# Urban Park Landscapes

Modern-day urban parkland has transformed prairie to turf and trees with irrigation.

Denver’s urban park system encompasses more than 250 parks that are the social and recreational hubs of the Denver community. Totalling over 5,000 acres, these green oases provide places to relax, enjoy nature and recreate in the heart of Downtown and Denver’s neighborhoods. Urban parks range in size from the smallest pocket parks at less than one tenth of an acre to the largest, City Park, at more than 300 acres and exhibit a broad diversity of characters and amenities.

Although the vast majority of Denver’s land area were prairie lands prior to the city’s development, Denver’s urban parkland represents very little native prairie today. The City Beautiful movement of the late 19th century established an aesthetic of verdant green lawns and lush, shade-providing trees borrowed from wetter climates in the Midwest and eastern United States. These traditional green landscapes contribute to Denver’s identity, sense of beauty and livability as a city; however, maintaining such lush vegetation in an environment that would naturally support dry prairie comes at a cost. Today over half of Denver’s urban parkscapes are irrigated: 2,900 acres.

For more information on irrigation in the system, see the Economic and Organizational Health lens.



**Babi Yar Park: Prairie Meets Lawn**  
Nowhere is the divide between natural prairie and manicured landscapes more evident than at Babi Yar Park in the SE quadrant of the city. Completed in 1982 and renovated in 2011, Babi Yar was designed as a memorial to the victims of the 1941-42 Nazi massacre of Ukrainian Jews and others in Kiev. The design inscribes a perfectly rendered circle of manicured parkscape and memorial into a native prairie meant to inspire reflection and ecological aesthetic. Willow, Cottonwood and native prairies make up the majority of the park eliminating the need for heavily irrigated lawns.

## URBAN ENVIRONMENTS

### What We’ve Heard

91%

of respondents believe prairie landscapes are beautiful and appropriate for our parks [PF]

51%

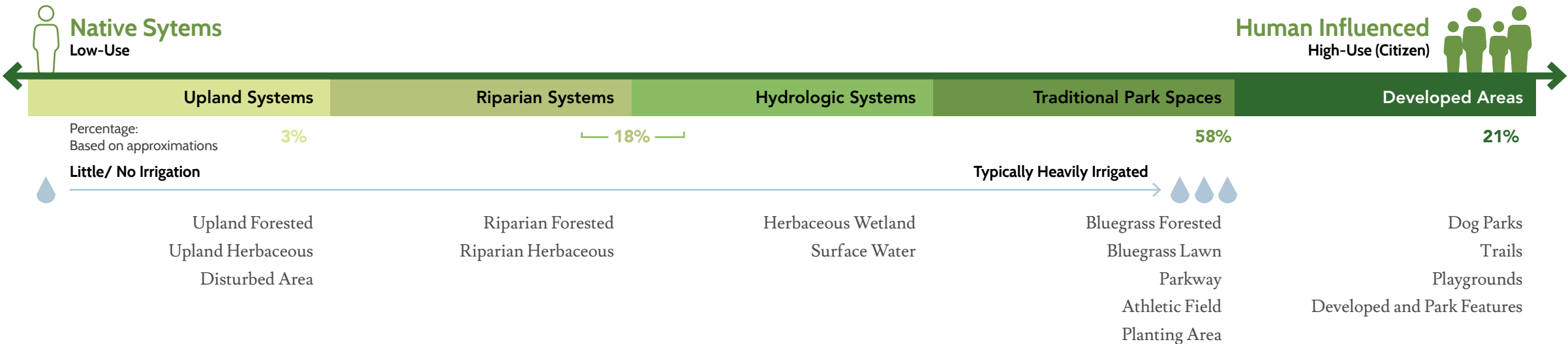
of respondents visit an urban park weekly [SVS]

“We need to evolve our parks to meet the changing times” [PF]

“a more natural landscape is more resilient, connects us to nature and probably lower in maintenance costs” [PF]

## Landscape Typology Spectrum

Denver Parks and Recreation is in the process of quantifying data in relation to parks and landscape typology classification. The data below is a broad overview based on work completed thus far.



# Urban Natural Areas

## Natural Areas Program

The DPR Natural Resources Division has managed the Natural Areas Program since 1999. Since 2015 the program has been focused on the management of the five formally Designated Natural Areas. Management of the remaining native landscapes is accomplished in cooperation with the park operations districts. The management of the five designated natural areas is coordinated by the Office of the City Naturalist.

- Coordinate the management of the five designated Natural Areas (Heron Pond, Parkfield, Hentzell, Inspiration Point, and Camp Rollandet)
- Manage special natural resource projects for the department

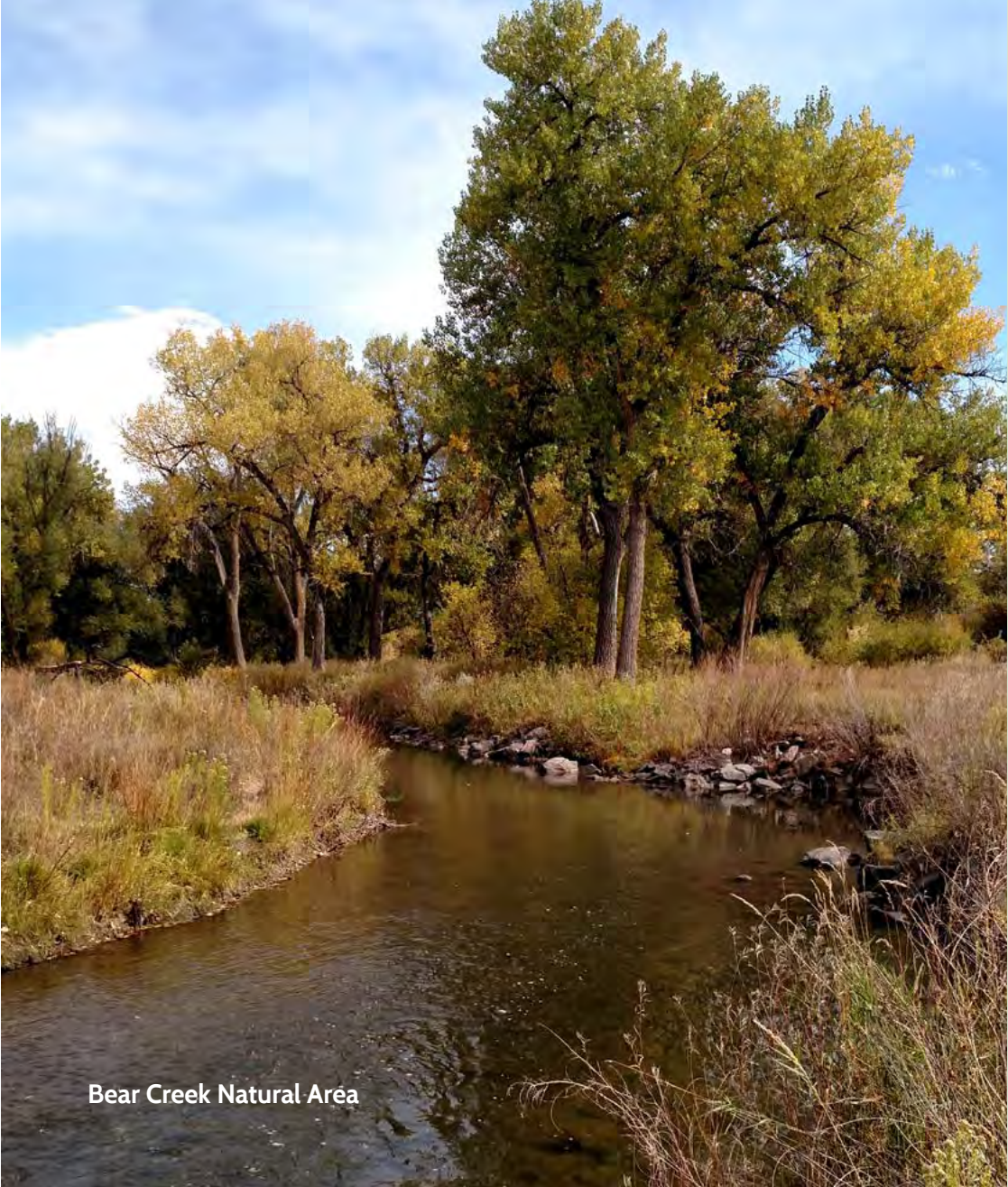
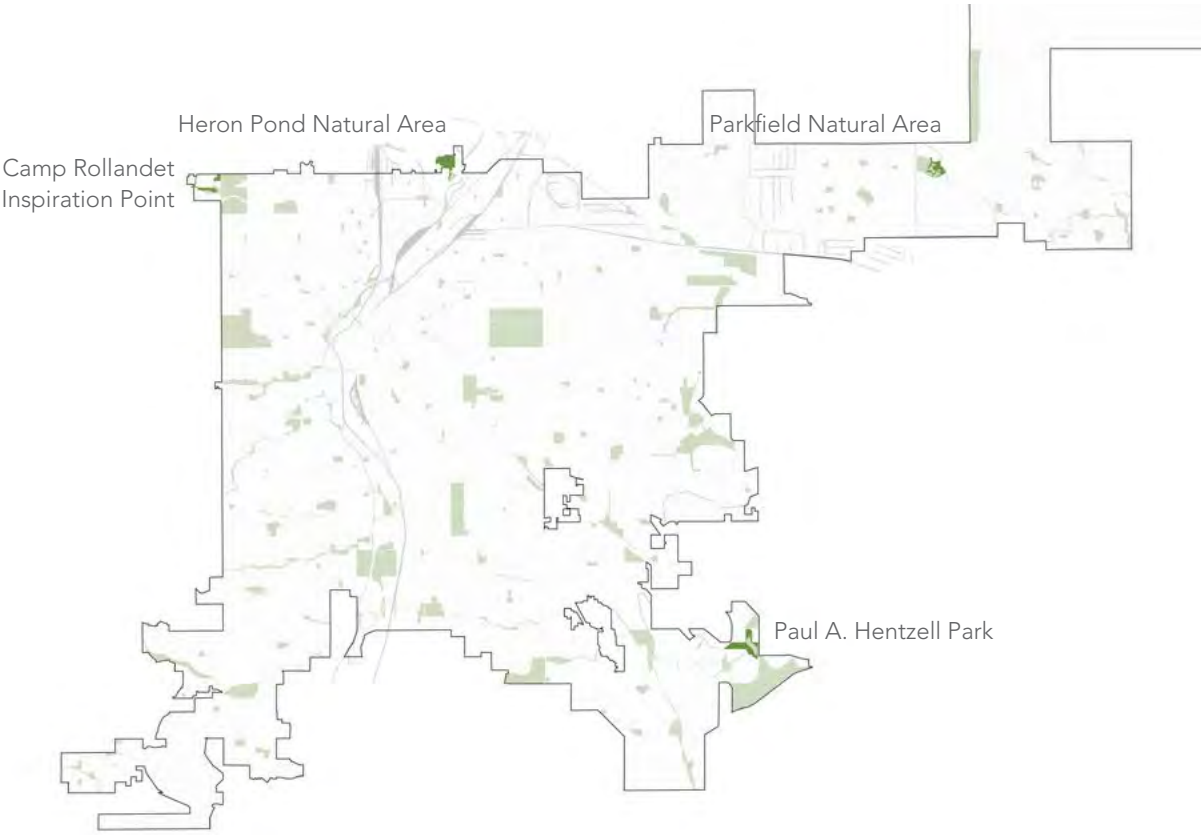
## Natural Resource Planning

Since 2014, expertise in natural resource planning has been provided by the DPR Planning Division. This involves coordination between planning staff, agency partners, park operation districts, and the Natural Resources Division. The Natural Resources Planner coordinates stormwater and other multi-agency projects for the benefit of the department. In cooperation with the Office of the City Naturalist, this position leads lake management and water quality projects. In addition, this position manages the capital improvement program for the Natural Resources Division.

## The Office of the City Naturalist

The Office of the City Naturalist has five primary responsibilities:

- Provide expertise in the management in native plant communities and ecological restoration within urban and mountain parks;
- Comply with the Colorado Noxious Weed Act (C.R.S 35-5.5-101-119);
- Provide wildlife management expertise and education on a citywide basis;



Bear Creek Natural Area

## DEFINITION OF PARK TYPES

Park terminology has often confused both residents and staff. This guide clarifies what it meant by different terms often used to describe urban park types.

### Designated Park

A park that has been formally designated by City Charter and ordinance

### Designated Natural Area

City owned land that has been designated by the DPR Executive Director based on ecological function and condition, outdoor education potential, and connection to the community.

### Open Space

Land that is managed by an agreement by DPR based on native ecology, but is not a formally Designated Park or Natural Area.

### Greenway

An area along a defined stream corridor with multiple ownerships and jurisdictional interests, within which DPR may enforce park regulations and cooperate on management efforts.



Inspiration Point

# Denver's Urban Forest

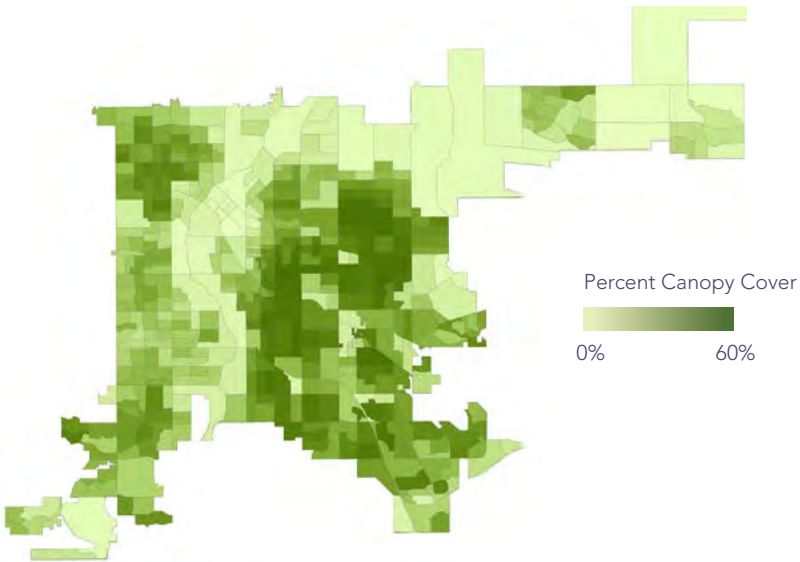
## Tree Canopy Cover

Urban tree canopy cover (UTC) is the layer of tree branches, stems and leaves that cover the ground when viewed from above. Denver's urban forest currently shades 19.7% of the city with over 2.2 million trees citywide. Denver's parks and rights-of-way are home to over 242,155 (11%) of these trees, overseen by DPR's Forestry division. Tree canopy is greatest in the older, suburban SE quadrant of the city, and least along the industrial corridor of the South Platte River and in the downtown core. The areas in the northeast, where prairie is developing into new residential neighborhoods, have relatively low tree canopy cover as well.

Urban tree canopy cover is an important metric for three key reasons: first, the shade that trees provide helps keep urban environments cooler; second, trees help reduce air and water pollution by sequestering carbon dioxide and stabilizing soils; and third, trees filter out harmful chemicals and other pollutants from the air. American Forests estimates

that Denver's urban tree canopy saves Denverites \$6.7 million in cooling costs annually and removes 290 pounds of air pollution each year. Beyond the monetary values Denver's trees provide, the urban forest is an important cultural and aesthetic part of the city's identity.

Changing climate conditions, the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) and future development pose a significant threat to the Denver urban tree canopy. Many tree species planted in Denver cannot easily adapt to a drier or warmer climate, especially without significant irrigation, and EAB has the potential to devastate the Ash tree population when it arrives in Denver. The Office of the City Forester has been proactive about outreach and education regarding general tree maintenance, water issues and the threat of EAB with the robust "Be a Smart Ash" campaign, and has gone to extra lengths to treat ash trees in the street right-of-way. Continued protection and enhancement of the city's urban forest is a major component of the city's climate adaption plan.



**260,321**  
Trees in Urban Parks + Rights-of-way  
\*2.2 million trees in Denver overall

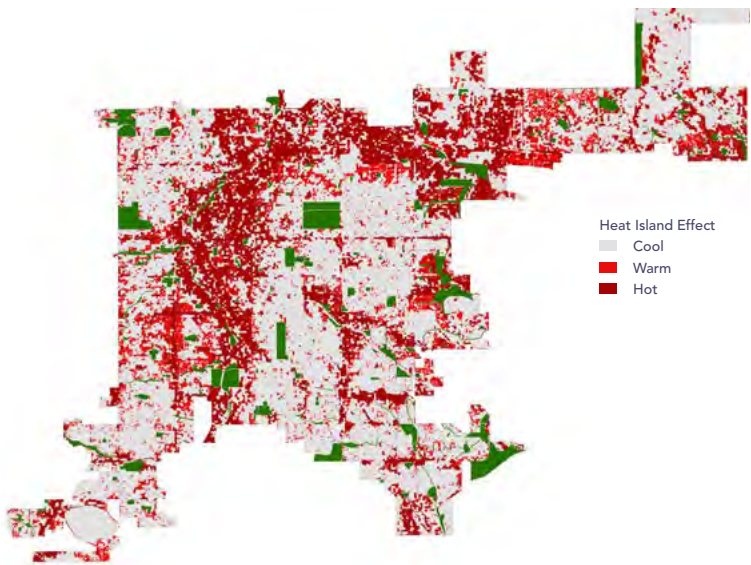
**19.7%**  
Average Tree Canopy Coverage in Denver

**\$129,000**  
Annual reduction in air pollution through tree and shrub absorption in Denver's Parks

## Heat Island

Due to human influence, many surfaces that were once moist and permeable have now become dry and impermeable. These surfaces are often dark, like asphalt roads and parking lots or rooftops - they absorb the sun's energy efficiently and trap heat. Over the scale of a city, this extra absorption of energy causes urban landscapes and air temperatures to become hotter than their surrounding rural counterparts. Locally hotter temperatures cause discomfort for residents, increase cooling costs and stress local plants.

Comparing tree canopy cover to the city's hottest zones reveals an obvious inverse relationship. Denver's tree canopy provides shade which reduces the effects of heat island. It is no accident that 88% of the city's parks are within a cool zone - the trees and vegetation within the parks actively cool the city.



**88%**  
of park acres are in the cool zone

**\$6.7 million**  
Annual Savings in cooling costs due to the city's tree canopy

## URBAN FOREST

## What We've Heard

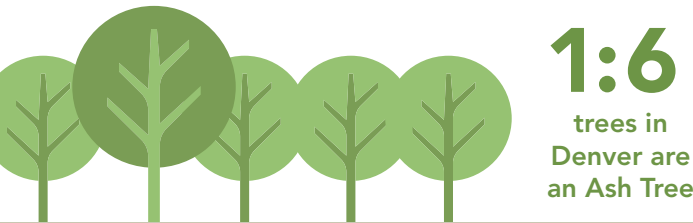
**98%**  
of public meeting respondents said city trees are of high importance to them [PF]

“Frightened by the deforestation that happens with developers” [DPR]

“75% of the year we are reactionary rather than doing routine pruning and maintenance” [DPR]

Need to treat for EAB, and diversify new tree plantings [PF]

SHADE TREES ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT PARK AMENITY AMONG MAPIIONAIRE RESPONDENTS [MS]



# Climate Change

## Climate Change 101

Climate change is a shift in climate patterns largely attributed to rising levels of man-made carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Effects of climate change include rising global temperatures, and more extreme weather patterns such as drought, flood, storms and heat waves. Climate change also has an impact on the planet’s water bodies, causing oceans to warm and become more acidic, ice caps to melt and sea levels to rise.

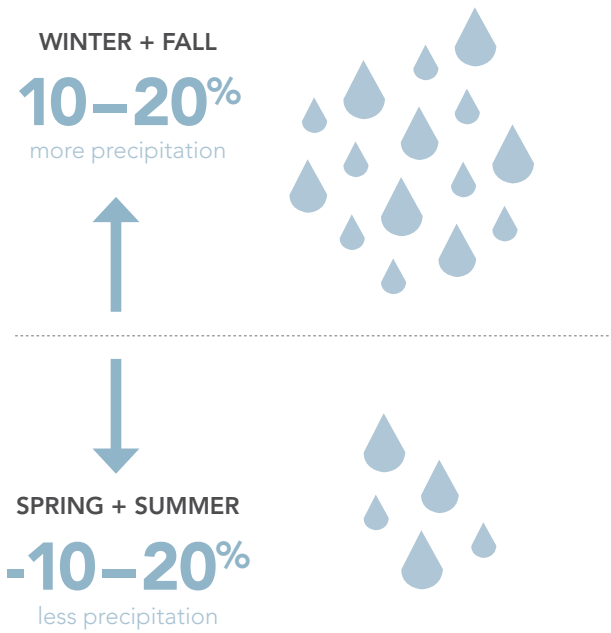
Localized climate change impacts in Denver include:

### Hotter, drier summers

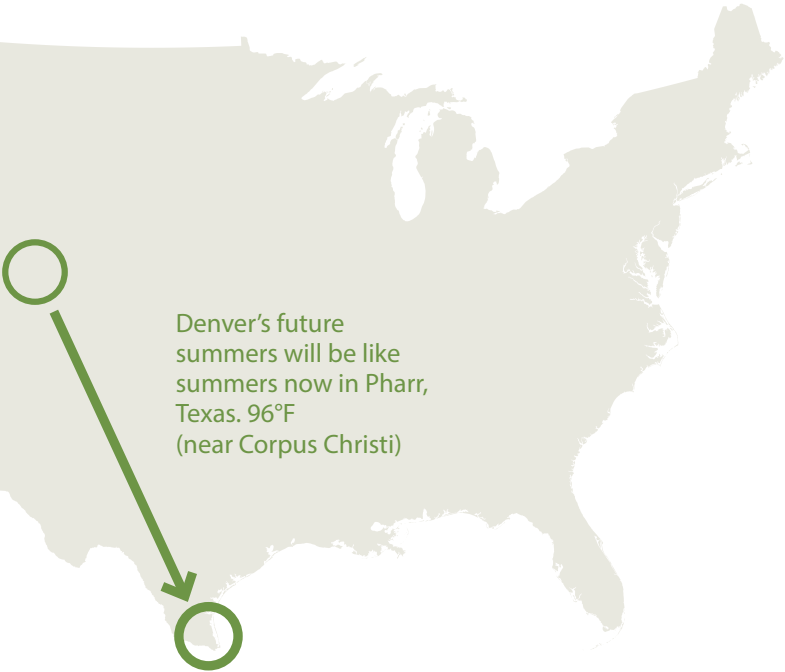
Future summers in Denver are predicted to be hotter with an average high of 96°F, a full ten degrees warmer than today's average high or similar to summers in Pharr, Texas, today (climatecentral.org). By mid-century Denver will regularly experience 7 days above 100 °F compared to our current average of 2 days. Extreme summers could see as many 25 days above 100°F, something Denver has never experienced (RockyMountainClimate.org). Summertime periods of drought are also expected to lengthen. Warmer temperatures and less precipitation in the summer present new challenges for Denver’s park and recreation system. Planning, construction and maintenance teams need to understand what species of plants will continue to thrive as conditions change, and what species will need to be reconsidered or replaced as they die out. Water for irrigation may become scarcer, requiring greater reliance on recycled water or native low-water plant varieties. Spring drought will begin to affect plant growth / survival rate. Cooling loads on recreation centers and other buildings will increase, and the system will want to consider efficiencies to save energy costs.

### More intense winter storms

An additional challenge of more droughts in the spring and summer is that there will likely be more precipitation in the fall and winter. Most climate scientists agree that storms may happen less frequently, but will be generally more intense when they come. When a large amount of rain falls quickly on a drought-hardened landscape, it cannot soak easily into the thirsty ground, and it runs off, quickly swelling waterways with floodwaters. DPR manages significant park and trail assets along Denver's urban waterways, and needs to consider long term how this park land can mitigate the effects of flooding for surrounding communities, communities downstream and on the parks themselves. More intense winter storms increases risk of power failure, damage to trees and other amenities.



- Denver’s climate is changing.
- Hotter, drier summers.
- More intense storms



Native prairie landscapes like Babi Yar adapt well to drought conditions

Trails on Denver’s urban waterways are prone to flooding

Snowier winters mean more maintenance of existing facilities

## What We’ve Heard

>90%

of respondents see parks as important for improving water and air quality (96%) as well as reducing flooding and cooling the environment (90%) [SVS]

“Lack of water is real” [PF]

“We should have beautiful green spaces that deal with stormwater instead of spending massive amounts of money on only piped infrastructure” [PF]

“STOP building concrete neighborhoods” [MYC]

A MAJORITY OF CITIZENS ARE HIGHLY CONCERNED OVER THE EFFECTS THAT CLIMATE CHANGE WILL HAVE ON DENVER’S PARK LAND [PF]

# Hydrology and Stormwater

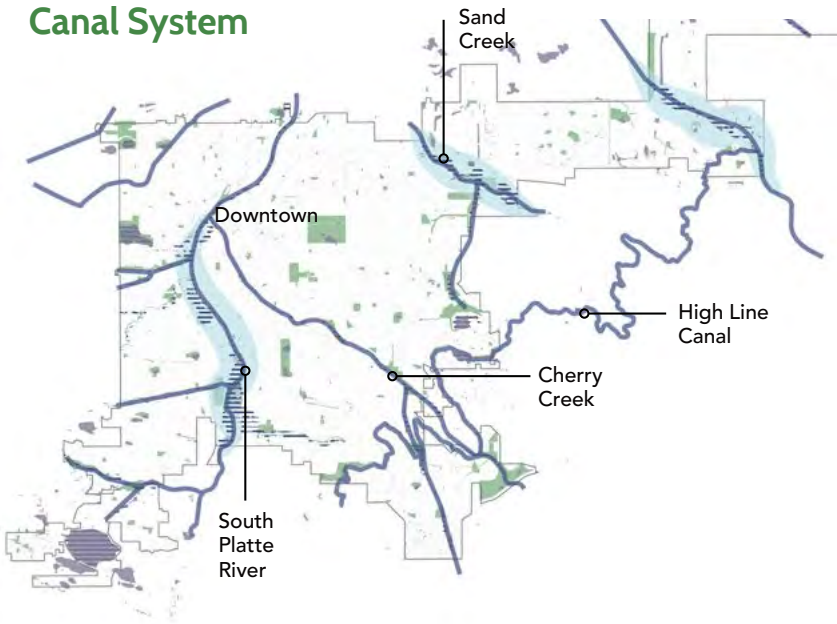
Denver has made great strides toward re-discovering its natural waterways and water bodies such as the South Platte River, Cherry Creek and the High Line Canal. Once primarily used for agriculture, industry and landfills, Denver has remediated and converted miles of rivers and creeks into ecological and recreational resources. In coordinate with the Urban Drainage and Flood Control District, the waterways and parks serve component in floodwater control during storm events. The establishment of native vegetation along the river edges, increased green infrastructure, and stormwater basins in the park system has contributed to improved water quality by reducing the amount of sediments and inorganics entering the natural waterways

**South Platte River:** A natural retreat within the city, this 40 mile bicycle and pedestrian trail runs alongside the South Platte River from 104th Avenue in Adams County to the Chatfield Reservoir. Downtown, at Confluence Park, the South Platte River meets Cherry Creek River, a place where you commonly see kayakers training in the man-made rapids and ecological restoration zone.

**Cherry Creek River Trail:** Beginning where Denver was first founded, the cherry creek trail runs from downtown Denver for 40 miles to Franktown. A natural oasis, the river is predominantly sunken through the city with flanking vegetation and a pedestrian/ bicycle trail.

**High Line Canal:** A 71-mile engineered irrigation canal that traverses through the southeast corner of Denver is currently undergoing a planning effort to become a leader in stormwater management and urban recreation.

## Denver's Creek and Canal System



**\$804,000**

water pollution reduction/  
cost of treating stormwater in  
Denver Parks

**833,228,000**

gallons of storm water managed  
annually by urban forest

**18%** of urban parkland (85 parks)  
are in a floodplain



South Platte River



South Platte River



Sanderson Gulch



**Parks in the Floodplain: Johnson Habitat Park**

Renovated and reopened in 2015, Johnson Habitat Park is part of a revitalization commitment of \$25 million by the city and its partners focused on river improvement projects. Considered Denver’s first true environmental education and nature play park, the space is designed with human interaction, nature and environmental best practices in mind. Construction included 1,000 linear feet of bank stabilization and riparian habitat restoration as well as removal of invasive exotic plant species, and cultivation of native wetlands. The design allows a large portion of park to act as a floodplain in heavy storm events, slowing floodwaters and reducing damage to nearby homes and businesses.



# Park Density Relative to Peer Cities

Understanding how Denver compares to its peer cities in terms of basic park and population density is a critical first step to gaining a holistic picture of equity and access to the park and recreation system. For more information on Denver's peer cities, how they were chosen and what data sources are being used in these comparisons, see page 22-23.

Overall 86% of Denver's residents have access to a park within a half mile, placing Denver about 20% above the national median. At 5,957 acres of urban parkland, Denver sits just above the national median in terms of overall park acreage; however, Denver is below the median in terms of parkland per capita, at 8.97 acres per 1,000 residents. This is due primarily to two factors: first, Denver's urban park acreage does not include its extensive Mountain Parks system, and second, Denver's population continues to grow without park acquisition being able to match the city's rate of growth and densification. Parkland per capita cannot include the Mountain Parks system because, although it is an incredible resource for the people of Denver, it is not accessible to all residents. Currently public transit is limited to a few mountain parks along major routes, so one must have access to a car or group bus trip to visit most of the mountain parks. Given Blueprint Denver's prediction that the city will continue to grow at a similar rate over the coming decade, Denver's park acres per capita will be an important metric to monitor. It will continue to decline unless the city can find ways to carve out additional parkland in densifying neighborhoods.

## Denver's peer cities and populations

\*Data compiled from the Trust for Public Land's 2016 City Park Facts database

- D

**Denver**  
682,545
- B

**Boston**  
646,000
- M

**Minneapolis**  
400,700
- S

**Seattle**  
652,405
- R

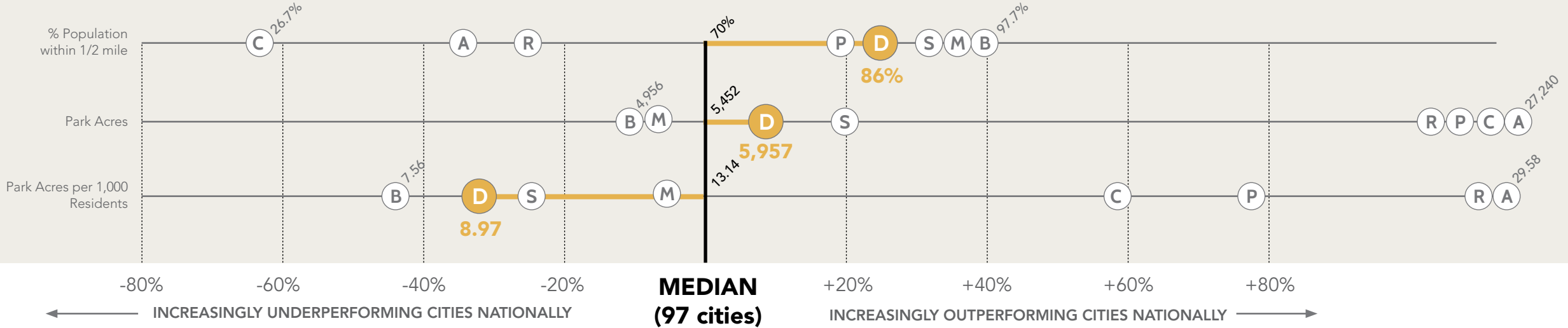
**Raleigh**  
431,746
- C

**Charlotte**  
792,800
- P

**Portland**  
609,000
- A

**Austin**  
885,400

For data source and peer city description see pages 22-23.



# Community Demand for Parks and Recreation

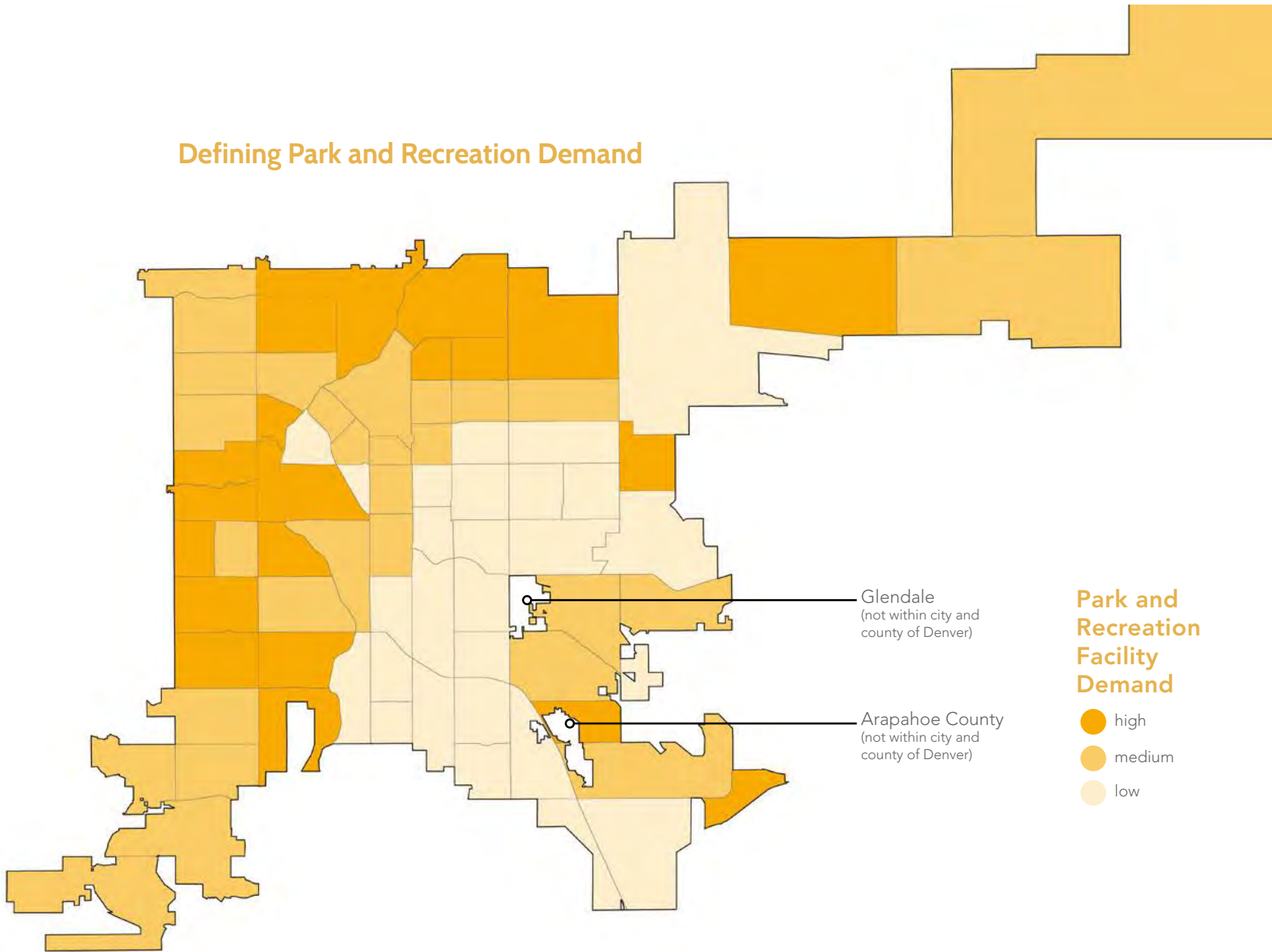
## Demand is concentrated in Denver’s North and West sides.

Neighborhood overall demand for park and recreation facilities is determined by overlaying a series of population demographic metrics, taken from the 2010 US Census as well as recent aggregated estimates from the American Community Survey (2011-2015). Ethnic and racial diversity is concentrated in the city's northern and western neighborhoods. Lack of car access is concentrated in the urban core, and extending both west and north. Population density is concentrated downtown in the urban core. The city's lowest incomes are again concentrated in the city's northern and western neighborhoods. Finally, the city's highest levels of obesity and chronic disease are found in the northern and western neighborhoods. Combining these individual data points yields a picture of overall park and recreation demand in the northern and western

parts of the city. It is assumed that neighborhoods in the inner southeast with their relatively higher incomes, whiter and healthier populations, more cars and less density have more available resources to meet their park and recreation needs.

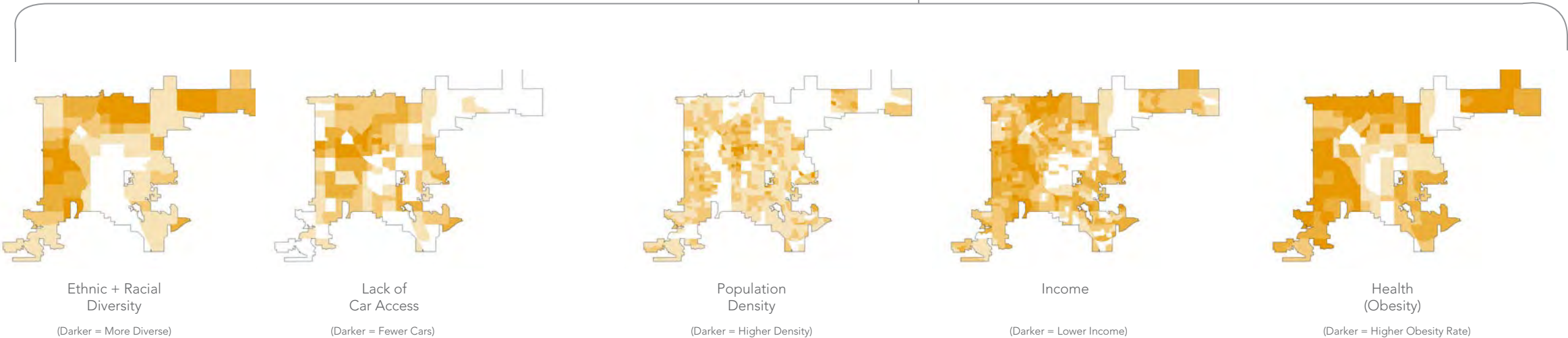
It is important to note that this map describes park demand based on need and demographics only, not whether these populations are already being served by an abundance of park and recreation center facilities. Community demand provides an important first lens for viewing all other spatial data around access to facilities within the city.

## Defining Park and Recreation Demand



## High Need Neighborhoods

- |                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Barnum West    | Lincoln Park        |
| Chaffe Park    | Mar Lee             |
| Clayton        | Montbello           |
| Cole           | Northeast Park Hill |
| College View   | Ruby Hill           |
| East Colfax    | Sunnyside           |
| Elyria Swansea | Sun Valley          |
| Globeville     | Valverde            |
| Goldsmith      | Villa Park          |
| Jefferson Park | West Colfax         |
| Kennedy        | Westwood            |



# Access to Parks

## A majority of Denverites can walk to a park within 10 minutes of their home.

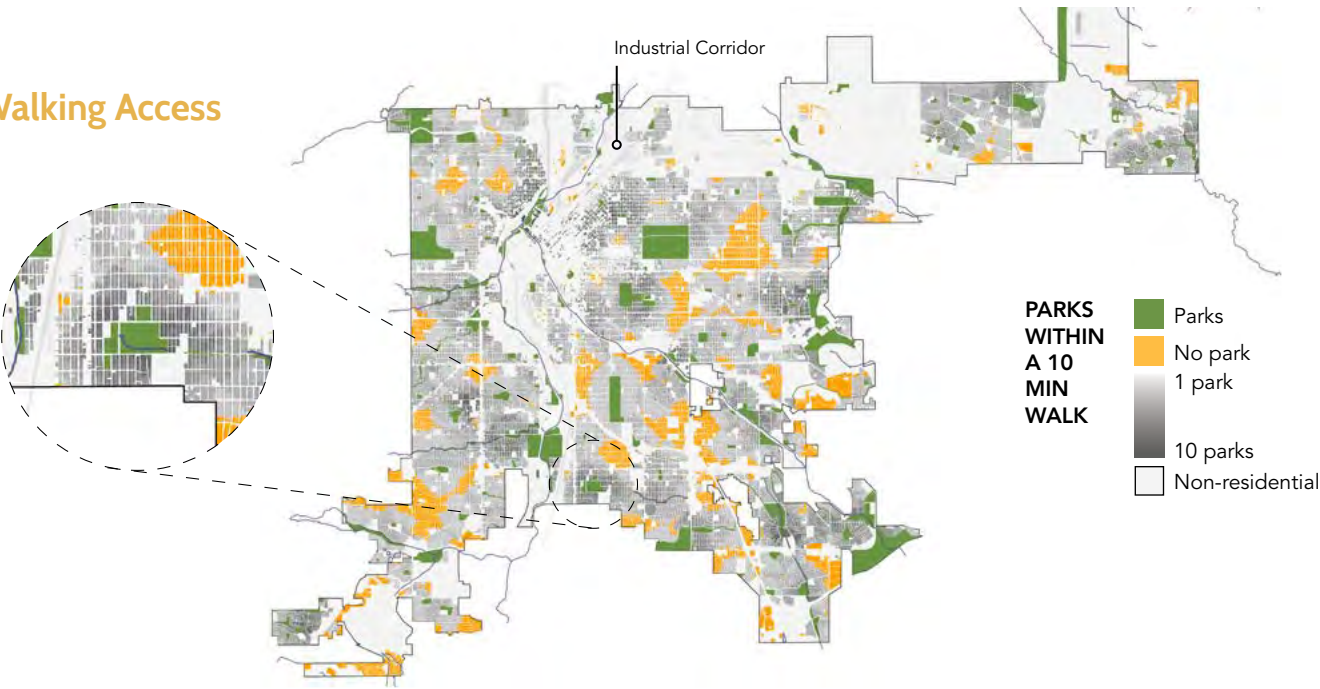
Spatial analysis of isochrones (see page 13) from each residential parcel within the city and county of Denver reveal that 85% of residents can walk to at least one park within 10 minutes. Residents in many areas can reach more than one park within that same 10 minutes, depending on the direction in which they walk. Areas shown in orange on the map represent the residential parcels from which a resident cannot walk to any park within 10 minutes. Fifteen percent of the population lives within these non-accessible parcels. Small areas of inaccessibility are dispersed throughout the city, but are more aggregated in the inner southeastern portions of the city where population density is less and parks are more distributed.

## The Demographics of Access

The lack of park access within Denver is substantially the same across all income levels. In the Lower Income bracket (people living on less than \$35k) 15.7% of people do not have direct access to a local park, median income (\$35k-\$75k annually) 16.7% of people do not have access and higher income (greater than \$75k annually) 16.8% of residents do not have access. A similar situation applies to race and ethnicity. White residents (16.2% residents lack park access) are slightly more likely to lack park access than non-white residents (13.4% residents lack park access).

These numbers show that while areas of Denver may lack amenities and park access, across the board certain demographic groups are not suffering the lack of service more than others.

## Walking Access



## Demographics of Access

### Income

Lack of park access is substantially the same across all income levels

15.7%

Lower income  
People living in households with income <\$35K

16.7%

Lower income  
People living in households with income between \$35K and \$75K

16.8%

Higher income  
People living in households with income >\$75K

### Race/Ethnicity

White residents are slightly more likely to lack park access than non-white residents

16.2%

White residents only

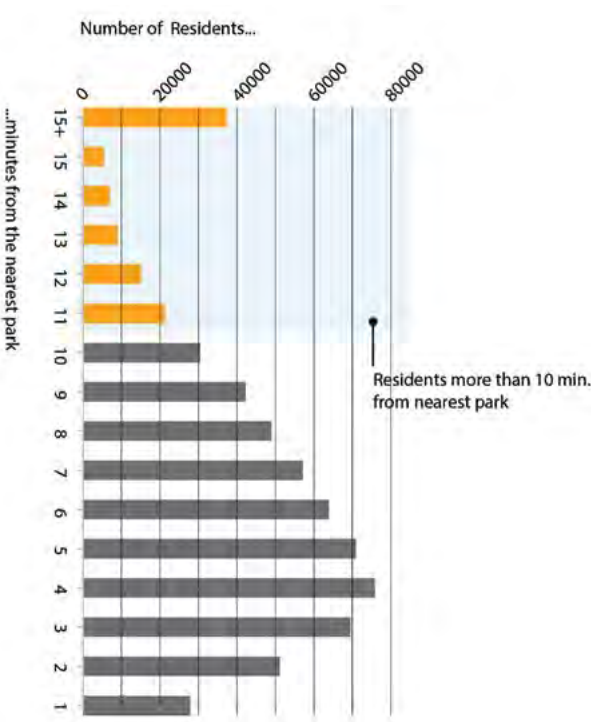
13.4%

Non-white residents

## Accessing the Mountain Parks

While most residents have many options for how to get to urban parks - by foot, by bike, by public transit - Mountain Parks are outside the city and county boundaries and geographically dispersed. Public transportation (RTD) currently serves only a very limited number of mountain parks on major routes, so residents must have access to private transportation in order to visit the majority of mountain parks. Throughout the outreach efforts, residents have expressed interest in diversifying access to mountain parks and increasing options for public transit in the region. This is an important area for collaboration with Denver Moves.

## 10 min. park access



## PARK ACCESS

## What We've Heard

74%

of respondents indicated they feel there are sufficient parks, trails and open space within a 10-minute walk of their home [SVS]

Geographic location is challenging...all over the place (Mountain Parks) [DPR]

99% of residents felt parks improve the quality of life in Denver! [SVS]

“The ability to access open space conveniently helps overall wellness of all citizens” [PF]

ALL RESPONDENTS FEEL THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO LIVE CLOSE TO A PARK OR RECREATION CENTER

# Overall Diversity of Amenities

Denver maintains a wide range of opportunities for recreation, and has been proactive about responding to emerging trends

As Denver continues to grow, so does the population's reliance on park and recreation amenities. In 2003, at the time of the first Game Plan, the city was meeting or exceeding most of the National Park and Recreation Association's (NRPA) benchmarks for amenity types per capita. Despite population growth, Denver continues to meet most of the recommended levels for basic amenity types - tennis courts, baseball and softball diamonds, and multi-purpose sports fields among others. Meeting the NRPA guidelines does not always mean that residents are satisfied with the number of fields and courts available. Permits to use fields and courts, specifically those that are synthetic turf or have lights, are always in high demand, and each season the department turns away a significant number of user groups, particularly adult recreation groups that are not affiliated with the city. In fact, the number of permits issued for use of almost all categories of amenity permitted went up between 2015 and 2016.

Beyond traditional fields and courts, the 2003 Game Plan made clear recommendations about the need to respond to emerging trends in recreation, which at the time included in-line skating and dog parks. The department has since kept pace by diversifying with new amenity types that were hardly on the radar at the turn of the century: bike skills courses, skate parks, pickleball, community gardens, disc golf, cricket and more.

**Ruby Hill Bike Skills Course:** Opened in the summer of 2016, Ruby Hill Park became home to a world-class mountain bike park. Designed for all skill levels, the bike park is designed to teach riders various

mountain biking skills from jumping, handling/control, ramps and more.

**Downtown Denver Skate Park:** Sited along the South Platte River, the Denver Skate Park boasts 60,000 square feet of skateable concrete terrain. Open 7 days a week, this bring your own equipment space is designed for bikers, skaters and rollerbladers of all ages and skill levels.

**Disc Golf:** A newer emerging trend, the city now boasts 3 disc golf courses. Integrated within existing park and open spaces, the game challenges players to throw a flying disc at a target. The fewer throws throughout the course the higher your score.

**Community Gardens:** Today Denver's Parks are home to 8 community gardens. These plots allow residents a plot in which they can grow fresh fruits and vegetables of their choosing.

The Statistically-Valid Survey points to a number of amenity areas that should be a high or medium priority for investment moving forward. Among the highest priorities are dog parks, outdoor cafes/concessions for food and beverages and indoor swimming pools. On the higher end of medium priority for investment were nature-based playgrounds, outdoor pools, outdoor exercise equipment, outdoor amphitheaters and community gardens. In general the community desires more socially-recreation based amenities than recreation-specific amenities: atheletic fields, sports courts, golf, disc golf, pickleball and other sport-specific amenities ranked in the lower half of priority investment desired.



Ruby Hill Bike Park

## Diversifying with new emerging trends in amenity types



Bike Skills Courses



Skateparks



Dog Parks



Disc Golf Courses



Cricket Field



Nature Play

## Diversity of Amenities

156

Playgrounds

10

Dog Parks

103

Basketball Courts

148

Tennis Courts

29

Swimming Pools

8

Golf Courses

191

Sports Fields: Soccer, Frisbee, Lacrosse

137

Baseball + Softball Fields

85

Miles of Regional Multi-Use Trails

8

Community Gardens

Unique Amenities

Skate Parks, BMX bike course, disc golf, horse shoes, outdoor fitness zones, racquetball, pickle ball

# Relative Amenities Per Capita

In general, Denver outperforms the median of American cities in most measures of basic recreation amenities per capita. Denver particularly shines relative to its peer cities when it comes to baseball/softball diamonds and pools, offering 2.14 per 10,000 residents and 4.37 per 100,000 residents respectively.

When it comes to playgrounds, Denver is doing better than most of its peer cities, but only marginally better than the national median. Basketball hoops per capita is the amenity area with the most room for improvement: at 1.57 hoops per 10,000 residents, Denver is performing at more than 30% below the national median. As population growth continues, Denver will need to pay particular attention to increasing basketball courts and playgrounds per capita.



Denver Skate Park

## Denver's peer cities and populations

\*Data compiled from the Trust for Public Land's 2016 City Park Facts database

- D

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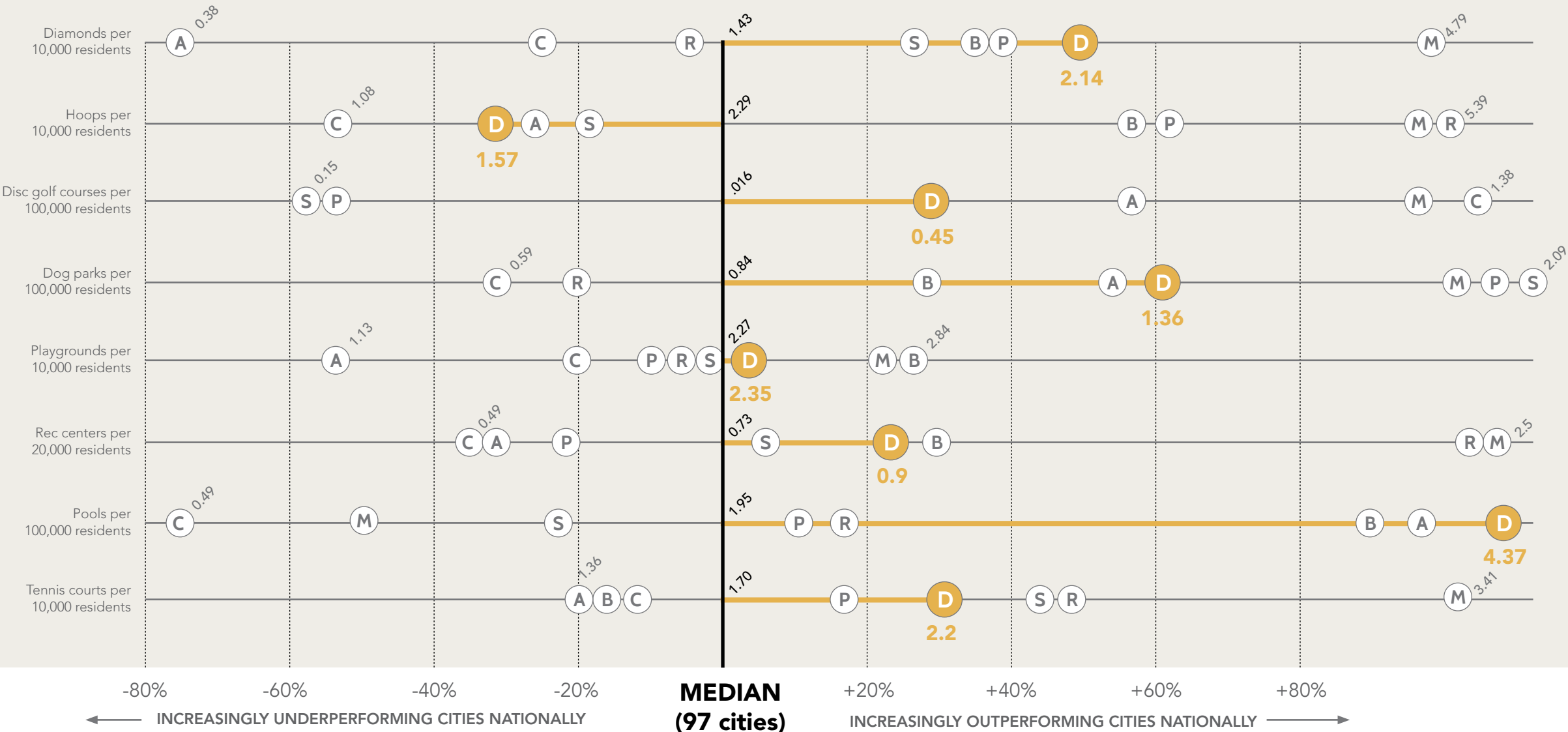
**Raleigh**  
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- C

**Charlotte**  
792,800
- P

**Portland**  
609,000
- A

**Austin**  
885,400

For data source and peer city description see pages 22-23.



# Playgrounds

Completed in 2008, Denver's Play Area Master Plan serves as a guide for city staff in the planning, design, construction and management of diverse play areas, and it helps the public understand the vision behind Denver's "System of Play". Today, Denver's playgrounds play a vital role in the park system and act as a core service for all park sizes, from pocket to regional.

DPR maintains 156 playgrounds within the park system, and, considering that 18% of Denverites are under 18 years old, the service is in high need. Unfortunately, even with 156 playgrounds dispersed throughout the city, 52% of residential parcels

continue to have no access to a playground within a 10 minute walk. The map below shows parcels that lack walking access to a playground in orange and highlights that the less dense SE neighborhoods of the city have the least access. Interestingly, even homes bordering parks like Washington Park and City Park often are outside of a 10 minute walk zone to the playground based on where it is located within the park.

Taking into account school playgrounds and learning landscapes (which are neither owned nor maintained by DPR), 20% more Denver parcels enjoy walking access to a dedicated playspace, leaving approximately

30% unwalkable. Partnerships with other entities that offer playspace will be important as the city works to offer every child the opportunity to walk to a playground.

Despite access challenges, Denver is committed to broadening the traditional definition of play with new urban playspaces. Initiatives geared toward nature play have taken shape at First Creek Park, Westwood, Johnson Habitat and Pasquinel's Landing. These parks eliminate the standard plastic play structure in order to challenge kids to experience nature, interact with one another and build life skills.

18%

of Denverites are under 18 years old

52%

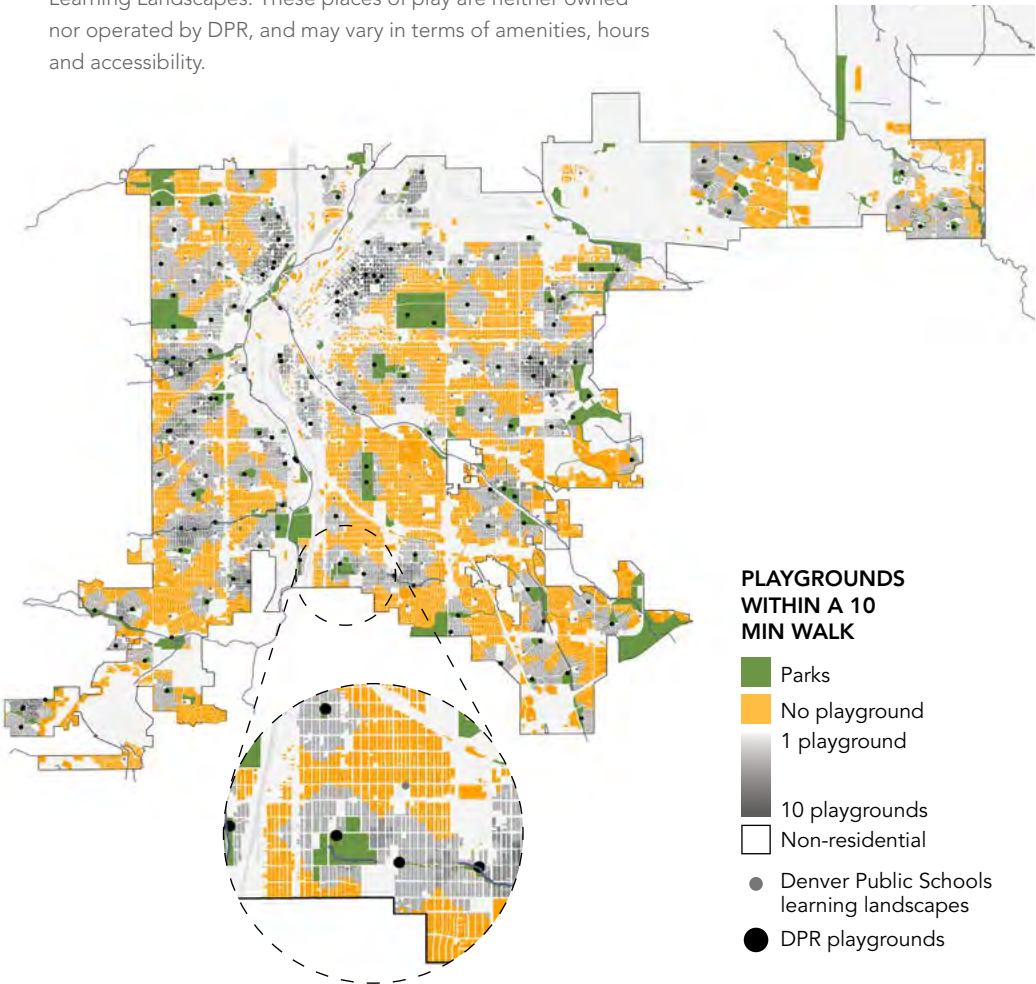
of Denver residential parcels cannot access a playground within 10 minutes

156

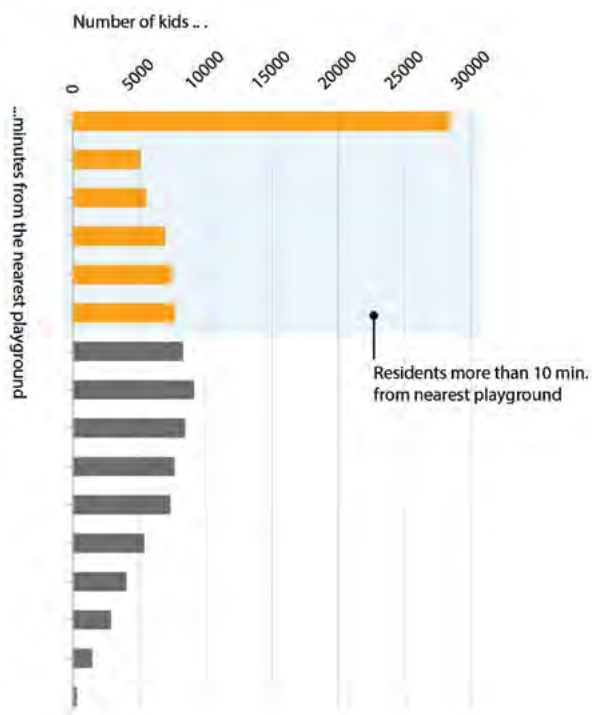
playgrounds in Denver

## Playground Access

While areas of Denver show limited access to DPR playgrounds, these areas are potentially served by Denver Public Schools Learning Landscapes. These places of play are neither owned nor operated by DPR, and may vary in terms of amenities, hours and accessibility.



## 10min. Youth Playground Access



## PLAYGROUNDS

### What We've Heard

40%

of respondents state they can easily get to a playground from their home [PF]

“More playgrounds and updated playgrounds for adults and kids alike” [PF]

“Commit to maintenance” [PF]

Need to move away from “classic” playgrounds to “fun” and “innovative” playgrounds [PF]

MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS SEE DENVER'S PLAYGROUNDS AS LOW QUALITY OR NOT ENGAGING TO CHILDREN [PF]



### Responding to Emerging Trends in Play: Paco Sanchez Park

Originally conceived as part of a design competition for the aging playground at City Park, the “Loop” play concept has been transferred to Paco Sanchez Park in the NW quadrant of the city. The design re-imagines play as an intergenerational and inclusive activity: rather than carving out a single place for play within a larger park, the Loop will bring adventurous play and active recreation for all ages to many nodes along a path through the hillside park. This revolutionary project is now beginning the first of a multi-phase construction process.

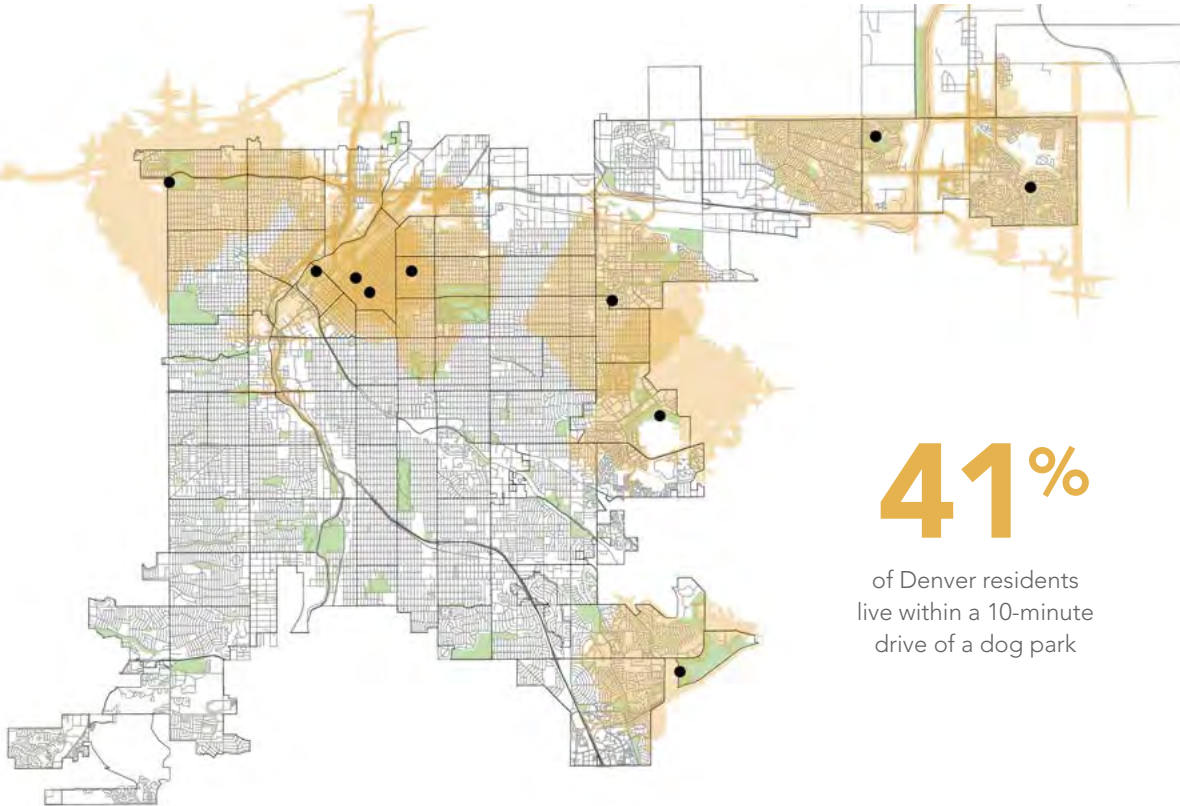
# Dog Parks

Denver has a growing urban population; along with this growth comes a demand for urban dog parks. Today the city is home to 10 dog parks.

As noted in comparisons to peer cities, Denver exceeds the national median with 2.14 dog parks per 100,000 residents. In 2010 the city embarked on a dog park master plan which focused on evaluating the current need for open off-leash dog spaces. Since the 2010 plan, 3 additional dog parks have been added. Four of the city's ten dog parks are located in the downtown core, where high-density residential development and minimal open space has underscored the need for dedicated and safe places for dogs to exercise, socialize and toilet.

Today, major gaps in dog parks exist in the South and West areas of Denver. Although these areas are of lower density compared to downtown, residents should provide input regarding needs and interest for open off-leash dog spaces.

Dog parks also pose environmental problems for the city. Due to dog waste and lawn erosion, these spaces are often in need of repair, constant maintenance and have high level of waste in stormwater run-off. Future planning should examine how these spaces are designed and maintained to meet environmental and residents needs.



41%

of Denver residents live within a 10-minute drive of a dog park



Railyard Dog Park



Skyline Dog Park

## DOG PARKS

### What We've Heard

48%

Of respondents have a dog in their household [SVS]

7%

Of respondents counted dog parks in their top 3 most important park amenities [PF]

Interest in Off-leash dog certification programs such as the one in Boulder...[PF]

Request for more dog parks with varied landscape typologies including water for drinking and play [PF]

DOG PARKS CONSTANTLY RANK HIGH IN IMPORTANCE ESPECIALLY TO RESIDENTS WHERE HOUSING IS DENSE.

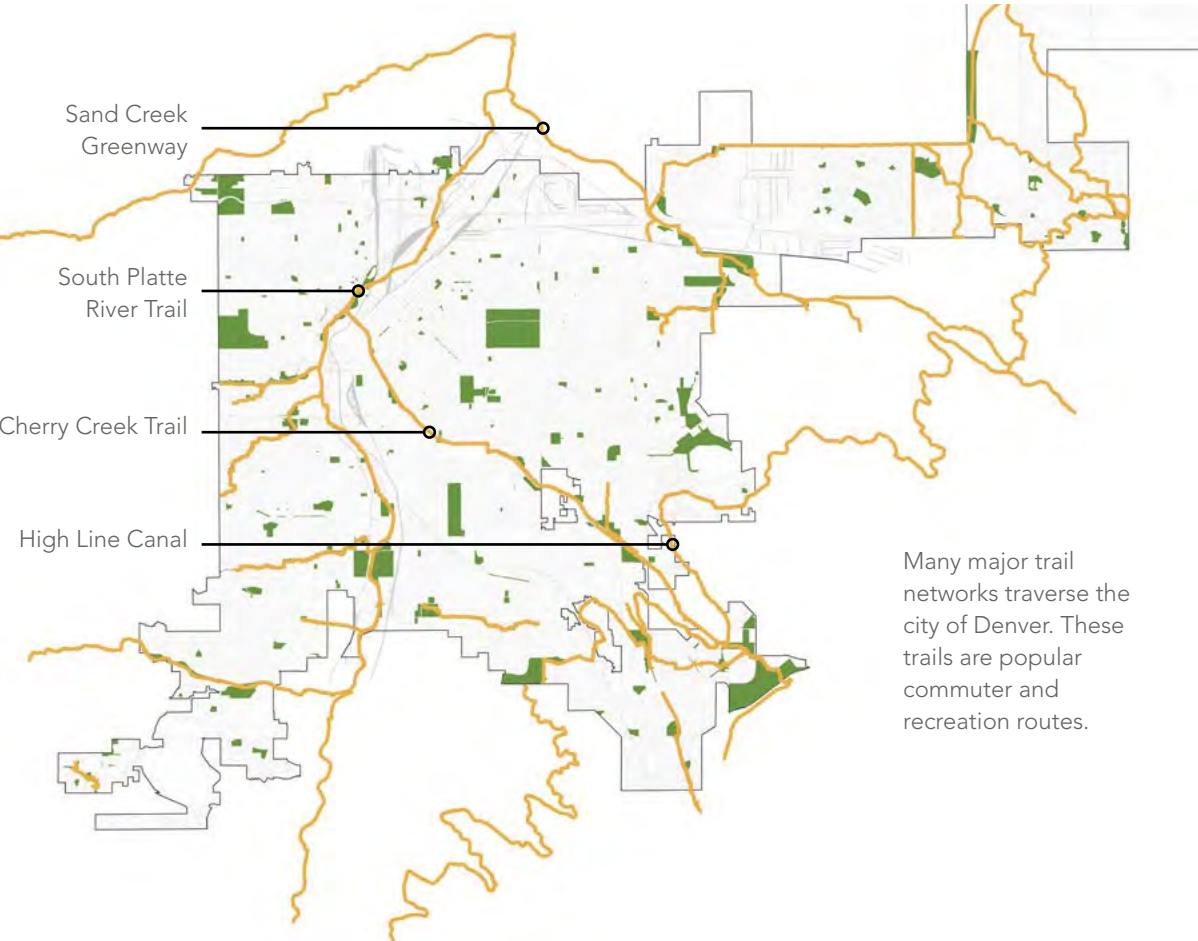
Trails

Denver offers more than 80 miles of off-street trails for use within the City. Predominantly sited along Denver's urban waterways, these trails provide recreational opportunities for cycling, running, walking and in-line skating. Beyond recreation, Denver's off-street trails are popular commuter routes, connecting residential neighborhoods to downtown. Some of the more notable trails are the Cherry Creek and South Platte River Trails.

Most of Denver's off-street trails make connections beyond the city's limits, linking Denverites to a regional network of recreational opportunity. Regional trails, like the High Line Canal, are managed under multiple jurisdictions, including Denver Parks and Recreation, and require significant collaboration to ensure standards of maintenance, signage and amenities along the length of the trail. The Denver Mountain Parks are also home to 45 miles of trails,

with regional connections. Most of the trails in the Denver Mountain Parks are soft-surface hiking trails, with only about 4 miles of trail paved for road biking access.

In the recent Statistically Valid Survey, walking paths and regional trails topped the list of amenities people want in the city. Although the current off-street trail network has many access points, more study is needed to determine how well these trailheads link to neighborhood sidewalk networks and the city's bike lanes. The Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails plan will be examining pedestrian and bike connectivity between neighborhoods, parks, trails and other destinations in depth, and this will be a significant crossover theme between the two plans.



Sanderson Gulch Trail



Cherry Creek Trail

DOGPARKS AND TRAILS

What We've Heard

77% of respondents indicated a high need for regional and multi-use trails [SVS]

225,644 Estimated number of households who have a need for regional/ multi-use trails [SVS]

Nearly half of respondents use Denver's trails daily, weekly or monthly [SVS]

WALKING PATHS AS WELL AS REGIONAL AND MULTI-USE TRAILS TOPPED THE LIST OF HIGH PRIORITY INVESTMENTS [SVS]

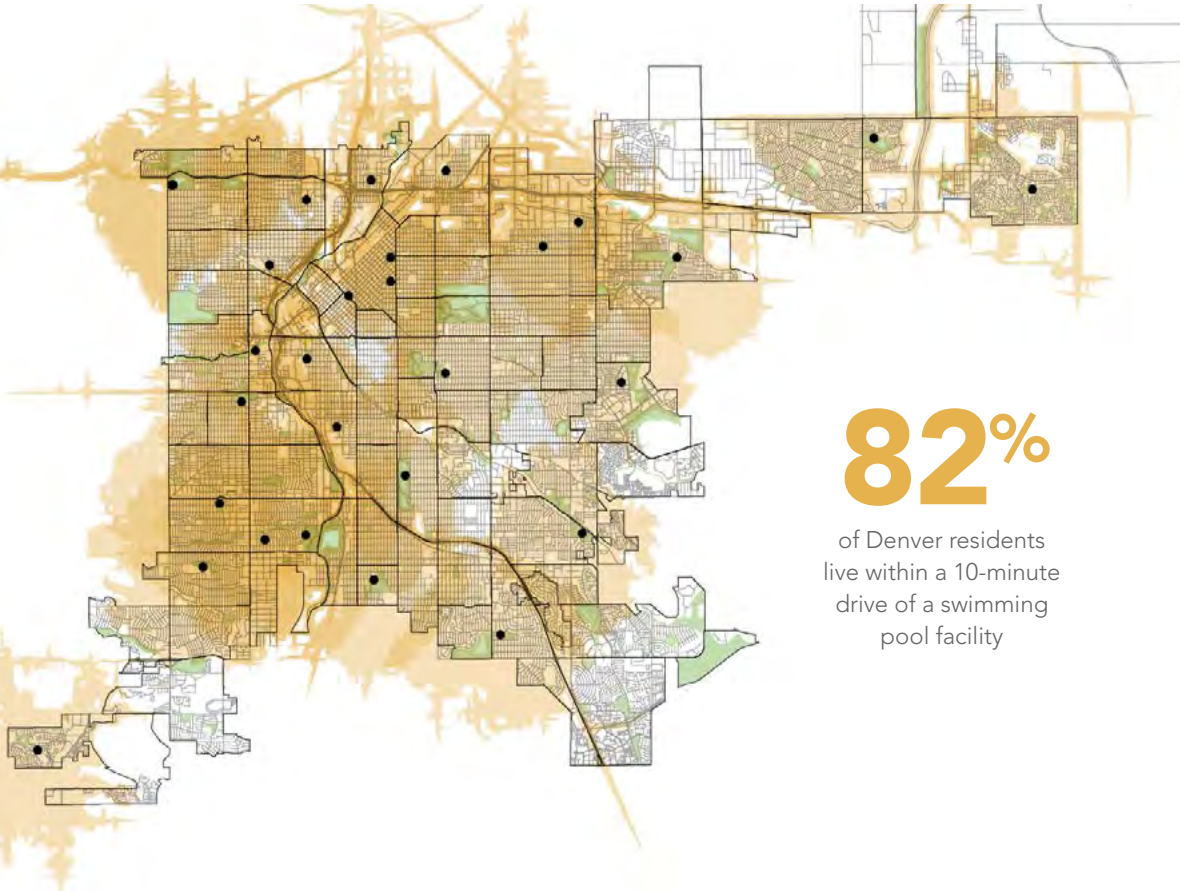
# Aquatics

As of 2016, the Denver Department of Parks and Recreation owns and operates a total of 29 swimming pools. Predominantly sited within or near recreation centers, these pools offer residents an affordable place to recreate and learn to swim. Thirteen of these pools are indoor and open year-round while 16 are outdoor for seasonal use. Eighty-two percent of Denver residents live within a 10 minute drive or a 20 minute bike-ride of a DPR aquatic facility. Like recreation centers, most aquatic facilities are programmed - classes focus on aqua-fitness, swim lessons and private instruction for all ages and abilities.

Some pool facilities, like Barnum Park pool, boast splash pads in addition to traditional pools. These playground-type amenities are trending nationally as a way to keep residents cool without some of the operating expenses and liability of traditional pool facilities.

The Statistically-Valid Survey revealed a significant emphasis on Aquatics among residents. Both indoor swimming pool facilities and aquatics programming ranked among the top priorities for investment and were among the top choices for most important amenities and programs.

Although some pool facilities are new and state-of-the-art, like the Barnum Park pool or the new pool at Carla Madison Recreation Center, many facilities are aging or in need of updates to comply with code. A 2016 internal staff report identified almost \$5.5M in maintenance needs and accessibility upgrades to existing aquatics facilities. Given the popularity of pools and associated programming identified by the survey, DPR will need a strategy for investments in necessary maintenance and upgrades.



Congress Park Pool



Barnum Park Splash Pad



Adult Swim Class

## AQUATICS

### What We've Heard

52%

Of respondents stated that indoor pool facilities fully or partly met the needs of their household. [SVS]

Aquatics facilities placed in the top 3 choices for most important programs

[SVS]

“Teach people to swim. It’s something they can do their whole lives” [PF]

Interest in no/low cost learn to swim options [PF]

BOTH INDOOR SWIMMING POOLS AND AQUATICS PROGRAMMING RANKED AMONG THE TOP PRIORITIES FOR INVESTMENT [SVS]

Golf

Denver Parks and Recreation owns and operates 8 municipal golf facilities within the city and county limits. Seven of the facilities are full 18-hole golf courses, and one facility offers an aqua driving range and mini-golf rather than a traditional course. The courses are managed as an independent enterprise fund by Denver Golf - profits from sales are reinvested directly into golf facilities and services and the division maintains its own website and communications arm, separate from DPR.

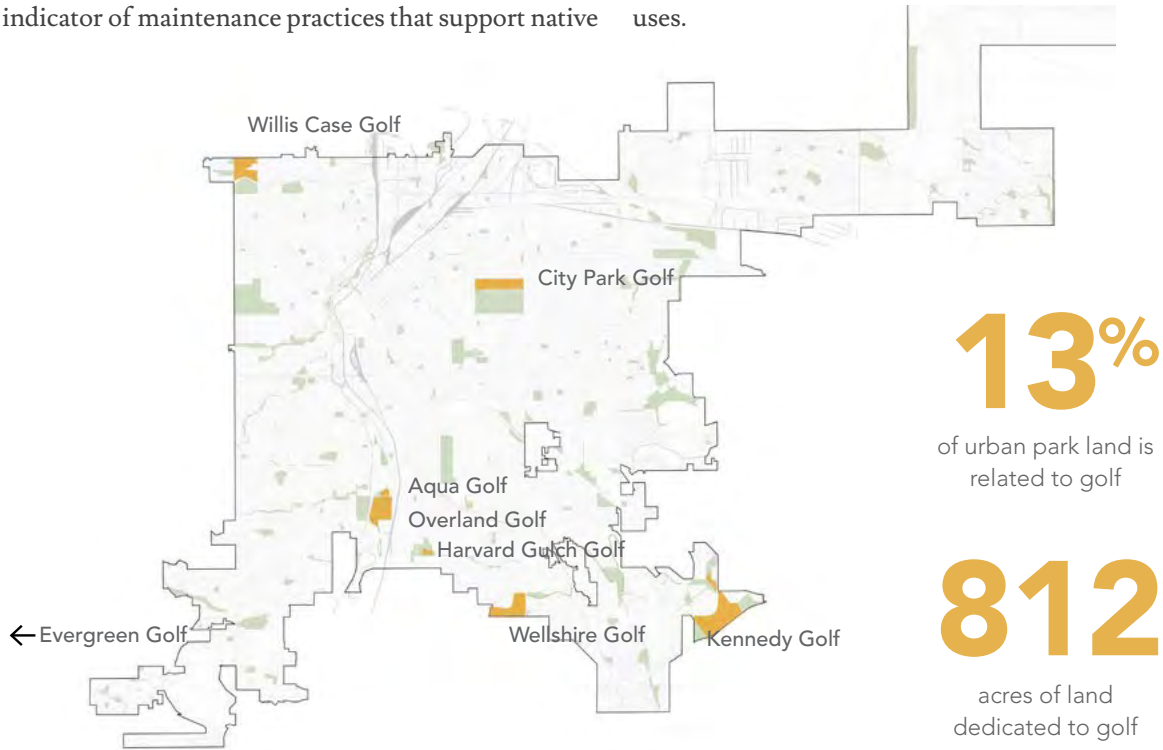
The 2011 Golf Strategic Plan analyzed current conditions and financial responsibilities, and envisioned a sustainable future so that these resources would continue to be available and a profitable commodity for Denverites. As of 2010, total assets in Denver Golf totaled \$14.238 million, while the Golf Enterprise Fund generated over \$8.744 million in revenue, with a net operating income of \$1.131 million.

Significant investment has been made in the last five years in two key program areas: golf education and course sustainability. Denver Golf has partnered with First Tee of Denver to provide affordable lessons for youth as young as four. Six of Denver's courses have recently become certified Audubon habitats, an indicator of maintenance practices that support native

bird species as well as aquatic health and water quality. The last course, Evergreen, is scheduled to be certified within the next 4 years.

Although the Golf Enterprise Fund reports a slight increase in annual rounds on Denver's courses for the past two years, nationwide the sport of golf is in decline. The National Golf Foundation reports that golf has lost five million players in the last decade, with 20 percent of the existing 25 million golfers apt to quit in the next few years. People under 35, as well as women and minorities, have especially spurned the game, saying it takes too long to play, is too difficult to learn, and has too many tiresome rules. The number of young people, aged 18 to 30, playing the game has sagged nearly 35 percent over the last decade.

Golf courses around the country have closed (at the rate of 130+ courses/year nationwide, according to the National Golf Foundation) or adapted their use patterns to accomodate changing trends. Some courses now offer six- or nine-hole options, which requires less time commitment, or have converted to disc or foot golf, which tend to appeal to younger clientele. Denver's golf programs will have to keep a close eye on trends, especially related to city demographics, and remain ready to adapt to alternate uses.



13%

of urban park land is related to golf

812

acres of land dedicated to golf



City Park Golf Course



Aqua Golf Denver

GOLF

What We've Heard

13%

of residents use Denver's golf facilities regularly (at least monthly)

[SVS]

3 out of 4 Denverites rank Denver's golf courses as in excellent or good condition.

[SVS]

Golf course facilities ranked low priority for investment, but golf programs (leagues + lessons) ranked medium priority.

[SVS]

GOLF'S ROLE AS A SUSTAINABLE AND EQUITABLE PART OF THE DENVER LANDSCAPE WERE DEBATED AT THE PUBLIC FORUMS AND IN STAFF FOCUS GROUPS

# Recreation Centers: Facilities

Denver provides 27 recreational centers throughout the city for resident use today. The centers are vital cultural and recreational destinations within the city -- places to get fit, build relationships, learn new skills and play team sports. Recreation centers are particularly popular among Denver's youth, who have access to the MY Denver Card through the city, which enables unlimited free access to recreation centers, pools and cultural facilities. In 2016, 93% of the city's youth, ages 5-18, had an active MyDenver Card.

Denver's recreation centers are currently classified into three categories, or tiers: neighborhood, local or regional.

- Neighborhood Centers (10) are physically the smallest, with limited hours and limited services.

- Local Centers (10) are the most diverse in terms of size range and space types, and offer service 6 days per week.
- Regional Centers (7) are physically the largest, with the highest level and widest range of services and facility types. They are open 7 days per week, except major holidays.

In general, neighborhood centers are the oldest facilities. Many of these buildings were constructed as part of the community-building era of parks and recreation in the 1950's and 1960's. They are beloved by local neighborhoods and receive high satisfaction scores from the "secret shopper" evaluations, but the aging facilities are a maintenance burden on DPR. A recent staff report estimated that recreation center building deficiencies total more than \$10 million. Among all categories of parks and recreation center

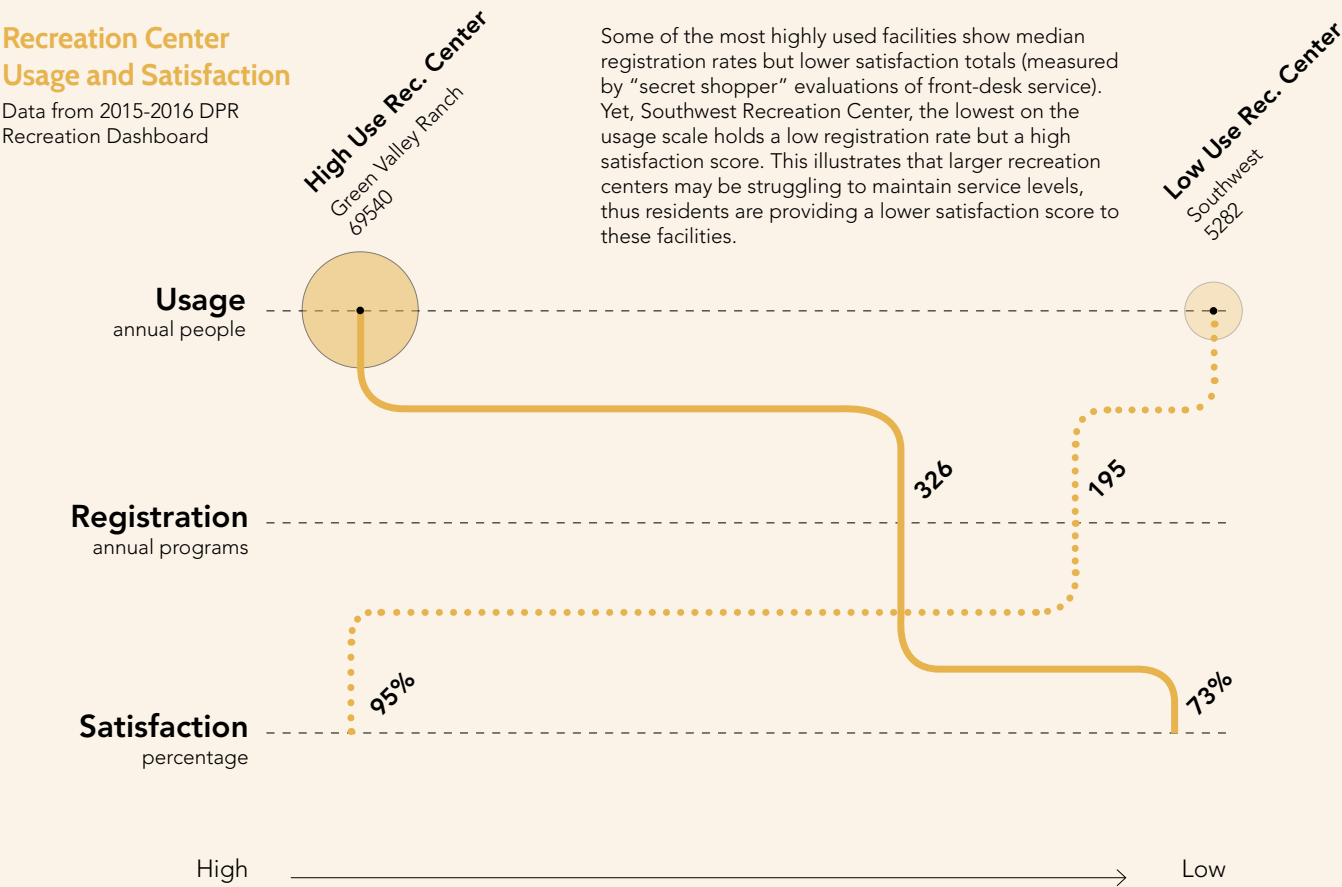
facilities, recreation centers scored the lowest in terms of level of maintenance, according to the statistically-valid survey.

In contrast, regional centers tend to be the newer facilities that pull a wide user-base from around the city. In the past decade, DPR has built (or is in the process of building) two new facilities - Central Park Center in Stapleton and Carla Madison Center near City Park. Both are large state-of-the-art regional centers, offering more than 58,000 sf and 69,000 sf of space respectively. Both helped to fill service gaps within the city. A few service gaps remain in the system, most notably the central west, central southeast, outer southeast and outer southwest. According to the statistically-valid survey, 88% of residents are supportive of the city taking action to build new recreation centers.

The 2006 Recreation Assessment Study made a number of key recommendations for improvements, including physical, operational and programming recommendations. At the time, 45% of residents did not use the centers. The statistically-valid survey results indicate that today 43% of residents do not use the centers. This static usage indicates that despite system expansion (with new centers), tiering and other operational changes, Denver's recreation centers have not been able to attract and augment new clientele. Significant competition exists in the market, with private gyms and fitness programs as well as YMCA and Boys + Girls Club facilities offering similar amenities, sometimes for less fee. Residents noted inconvenient opening hours, high fees and facilities being too far away as some of the primary barriers to using DPR recreation centers more often.

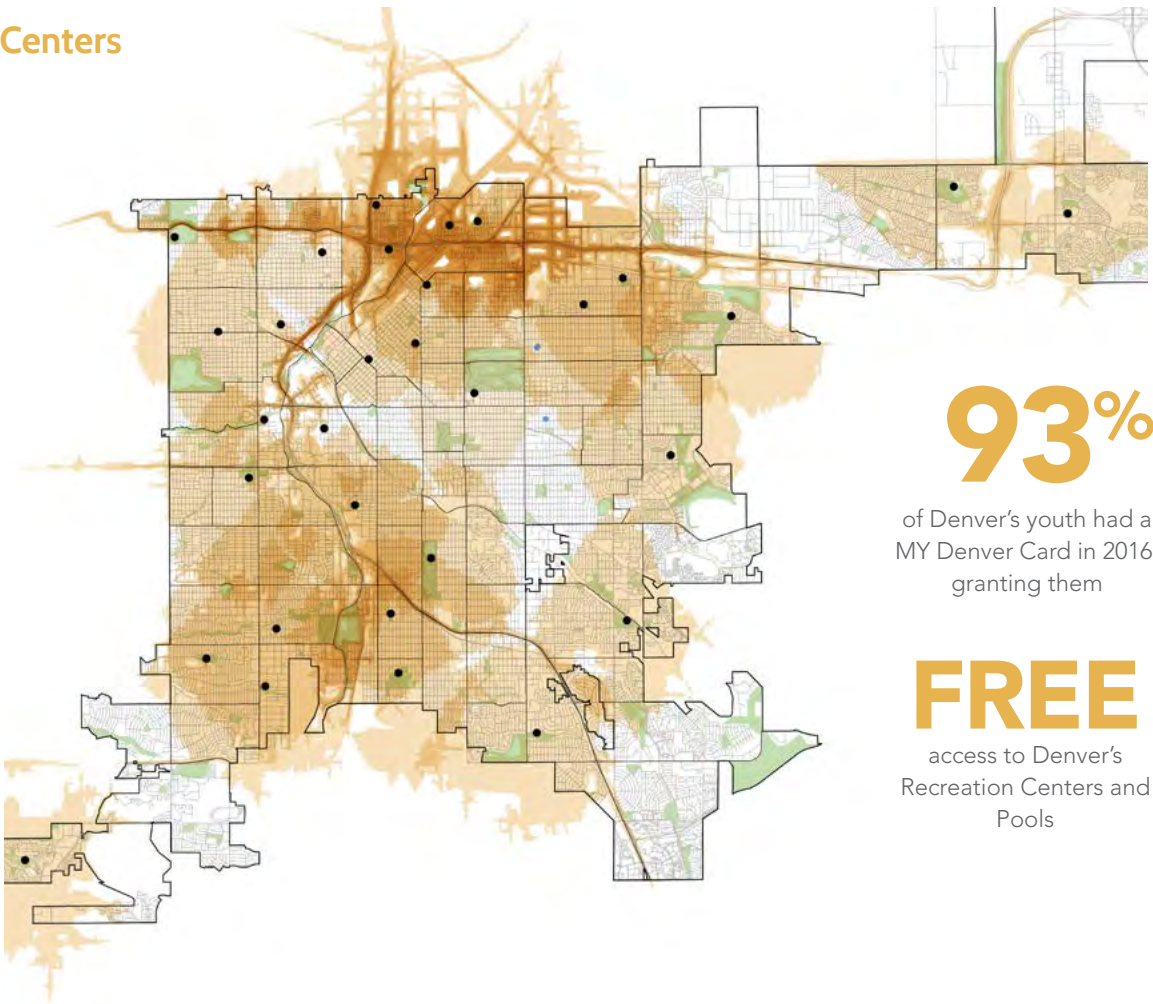
## Recreation Center Usage and Satisfaction

Data from 2015-2016 DPR Recreation Dashboard



## Access to Recreation Centers

- 20 min bikeride
- 10 min drive



# Recreation Programming

Looking at other recreational system assessments from across the country for comparison, Denver's recreational programs are offered in areas largely consistent with its national peers. The department has identified eleven core program areas. The three major program areas in Denver are Aquatics (36%), Sports (22%), and Events & Trips (14%), which account for 72% of all programming in the year reviewed. Most programs show seasonal steadiness, with noticeable increases in only sports (spring), aquatics (summer and fall), and trips and events (winter).

A review of the distribution of program offerings according to the age segments – i.e. youths, young adults, older adults, etc. – serviced is an important element in a Recreation Program and Services Assessment. A review of Denver's programs shows that more than half (61%) of its programming effort service people under the age of 18. While park and recreation systems nationwide focus programs on the youth market, with Denver's aging population, it is imperative to grow programs for older residents. Only two of the current program areas (Fitness & Wellness and Arts & Culture) appeal across all population segments.

A Lifecycle Analysis assesses the effectiveness of program offerings, highlighting where changes may be needed to innovate, diversify or reposition programming to better meet needs. In Denver, currently aquatics is experiencing the greatest rates of decline, where city-wide sports are performing higher than the national average. Active adults are engaging

with trips and events more than traditionally passive programming while programming in social enrichments is growing rapidly.

Website presence and marketing are key to growing awareness of and access to recreational programming. The department's website is user-friendly with a consistent look and feel. Simplified navigation, easy search options and quick links are minor modifications that could help streamline access to offerings and provide a higher level of customer satisfaction. Similarly, the program guides are attractive and clear but could be enhanced with clearer, more definitive and more consistent provision of information.

Results from the statistically-valid survey indicated that use of recreation center programming in Denver (30%) aligned closely with national averages (34%). However, assessments of the quality of recreation programming in Denver vary dramatically from national averages, with 80% of Denver residents considering programs "fair" or "poor" in comparison with 10% similar ratings nationwide. These results indicate that improving program quality could be a significant area of focus for DPR. Residents prioritize arts and culture programming, aquatics programming and fitness programming, and state the highest levels of unmet need for these types of programs.

What prevents you from using Denver Parks and Recreation Facilities more often? (top 4) [SVS]

30%

Not knowing what is offered

22%

Times are not convenient

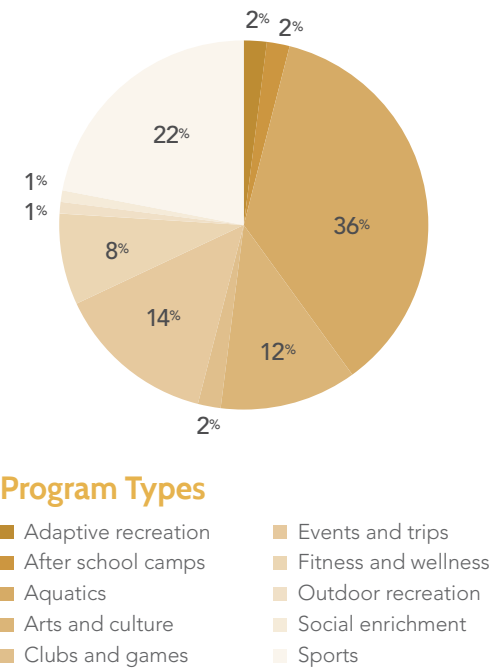
17%

Facilities and Programs are too far from residents

14%

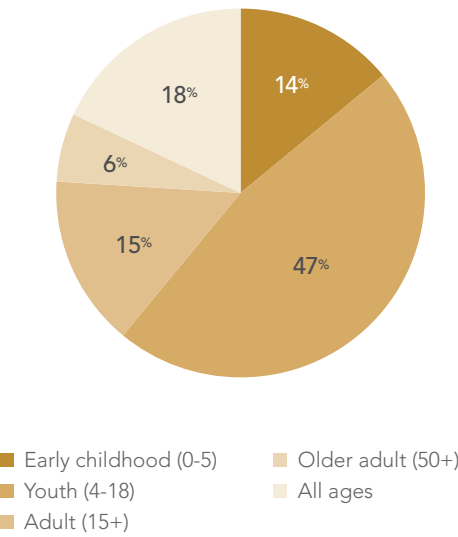
Fees are too high

## Diverse Programming at Recreation Centers



## Age Segment Distribution

Percent of programming targeted to specific ages



## PROGRAMMING

## What We've Heard

30%

of respondents have participated in recreation programs offered by DPR in the past year [SVS]

80%

of respondents indicated the programs they participated in were either "fair" or "poor" [SVS]

Longer hours needed for working students and families [MYC]

"Youth need places to build community appreciation of nature, safe spaces, recreation..." [PF]

At Rude, Planet fitness nearby is \$10 per month, we can't compete with that [DPR]

ARTS AND CULTURE PROGRAMS, AQUATICS PROGRAMS AND FITNESS PROGRAMS RANKED AS THE HIGHEST PRIORITY FOR RESPONDENTS [SVS]

# Economic and Organizational Health

The **economic and organizational health lens** focuses on DPR's budget and spending, including sources of revenue as well as the operational side of running the department. Look in this section to understand:

- Overall operating budget for the department
- Water and irrigation
- Safety and maintenance
- Organizational structure
- Partnerships

# Spending

Financial sustainability was a goal of the 2003 Game Plan; likewise, the 2017 update begins with a fresh assessment of the Department's funding structures and gaps. Ultimately, this analysis will inform an understanding of current challenges, deficiencies and how capital improvements are funded. For the purposes of this early analysis, the Department of Parks and Recreation's financial information (obtained from the Department's Accounting and Finance staff) was reviewed, including the Department's General Fund Operations. The data represents two years of actual numbers in 2014 and 2015 and budgeted numbers for 2016 and 2017.

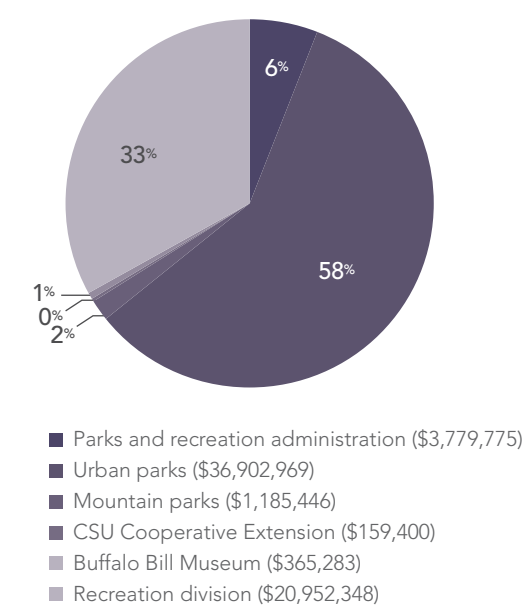
According to the Mayor's 2016 recommended budget, the department is funded 73.9% by the City's General Fund. This is consistent nationally; general fund support averages between 70-75% for city park and

recreation agencies. For the Denver Department of Parks and Recreation, the analysis showed that expenses have increased by 29% from 2014 Actuals to 2017 Budget. Revenues have increased 15% during the same time period. As a result, expense growth is outpacing revenues by a nearly two to one ratio. During this time period, there has been a 30.1% increase in personnel services and a 260.5% increase for services and supplies.

The Department encompasses six individual cost centers within the General Fund: Administration, Parks and Planning, Mountain Parks, Recreation Operations, Colorado State University Extension and the Buffalo Bill Museum. Recreation Operations produces the greatest revenue, followed by Parks and Planning and Administration.

	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2016 Original Budget	2017 Total Budget
Total Revenue	\$8,102,449	\$8,455,322	\$8,342,013	\$9,320,713
Expenses				
Personnel Services	\$39,645,778	\$42,286,967	\$45,668,724	Total Expenses
Services and Supplies	\$10,205,342	\$11,140,271	\$16,214,664	\$17,173,856
Capital Equipment	\$475,423	\$729,405	\$1,235,733	\$1,092,500
Internal Services and Misc.	\$3,171,043	\$241,104	\$225,807	\$278,209
Total Expenses	\$53,497,586	\$54,397,748	\$63,344,928	\$68,995,661
Revenue less Expenses	(\$45,395,137)	(\$45,942,426)	(\$55,002,915)	(\$59,674,948)
Revenue as a % of Expenses	15.15%	15.54%	13.17%	13.51%

DPR Operational Expenses



## FUNDING AND PRIORITIES

### What We've Heard

18%

of respondents identify lack of sufficient funding as one of the greatest challenges for parks and recreation [MS]

Which initiatives would you most likely be “very supportive” or “somewhat supportive” of pursuing with or without tax dollars? [SVS]

- 97% Developing new walking and biking trails and connect existing trails
- 95% Purchase land to preserve open space
- 91% Purchase land for new urban parks

What do you think should be Denver Parks and Recreation priorities (choose up to 3) [MS]

- 20.6% Existing park maintenance
- 13.3% Increased park land
- 12.4% Natural resource protection and rehabilitation
- 10.5% Access to park and recreation opportunities

DENVER RESIDENTS PLACE A HIGH PRIORITY ON MAINTENANCE FOR EXISTING PARKS AND FACILITIES

\$452,000,000

cost savings to the community by having access to public facilities, according to the Trust for Public Land's Economic Value of Denver's Parks Report

+32%

increase in parks planning spending from 2014–2016

+40%

increase in Mountain Parks spending from 2014–2016

# Spending Compared to Peer Cities

Denver outspends the national median, but generally spends less than its peer cities

In terms of total annual spending, Denver and its peer cities are all significantly above the national median, outperforming that median by more than 80%. Total spending tells only part of the story however, as the 97 cities in the sample vary considerably in terms of population. Looking at operating spending per resident, spending almost \$92 annually per resident mean that Denver still spends more than the national median, but underperforms all its peer cities except Boston and Charlotte. At more than \$30 per resident, capital spending is closer to peer cities, indicating that Denver has recently made significant investments in its physical assets or perhaps that other peer cities have recently spent less than usual. Overall spending per resident reflects Denver's lower ranking regarding operating spending per resident.

Charlotte, which consistently underspends the other peer cities, is on the high end of both population and park acreage. Boston and Minneapolis both have significant legacy park systems and a historic commitment to spending more on parks than average.



Ash Trees at University Boulevard, Denver

## Denver's peer cities and populations

\*Data compiled from the Trust for Public Land's 2016 City Park Facts database

- D

**Denver**  
682,545
- B

**Boston**  
646,000
- M

**Minneapolis**  
400,700
- S

**Seattle**  
652,405
- R

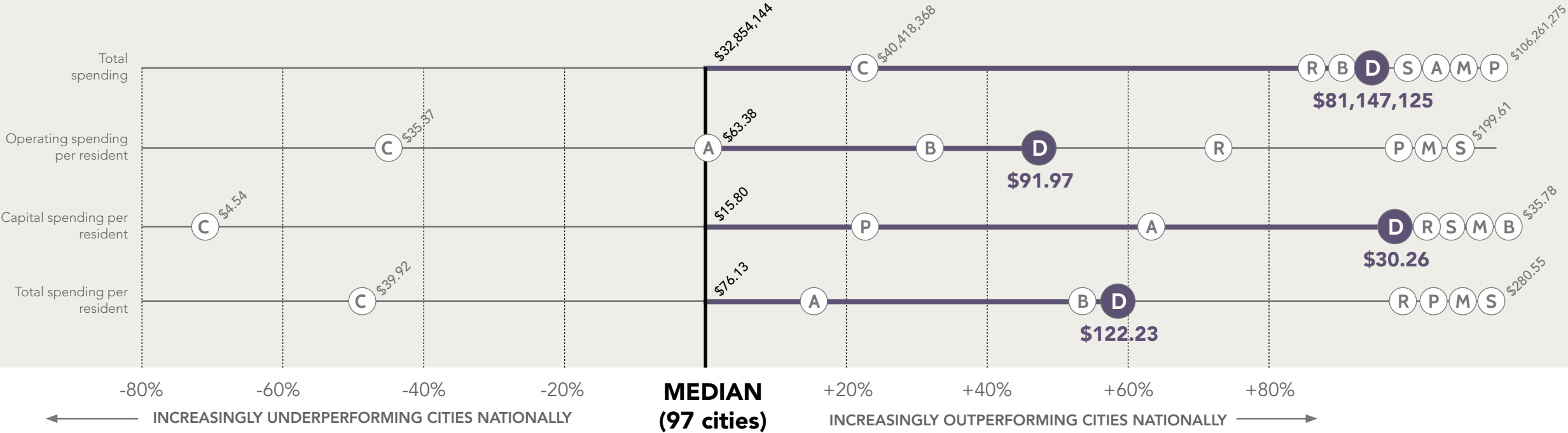
**Raleigh**  
431,746
- C

**Charlotte**  
792,800
- P

**Portland**  
609,000
- A

**Austin**  
885,400

For data source and peer city description see pages 22-23.



# Water and Irrigation

The City and County of Denver encompasses a land area that was predominantly prairie prior to development. Prairies, by nature, are relatively dry and drought-tolerant landscapes and adapted here naturally because of the area's relatively low levels of precipitation. Denver's park and boulevard system planning effort of the late 19th century borrowed a "city beautiful" aesthetic from more water-rich cities in the northeast and midwest, and prioritized plantings lawn and trees that needed water to survive in the arid region. There is no question that the iconic parkways and grand parks that emerged from this era have defined the character of Denver, but they have also saddled the city's park and recreation system with immense water needs.

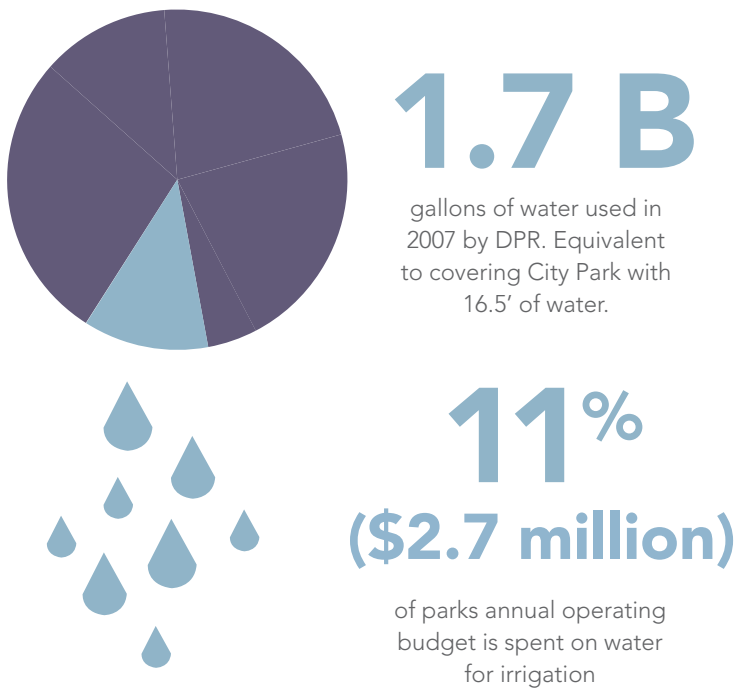
Today, 58% of Denver's urban parkland consists of irrigated landscapes. The remaining 42% is split between hardscapes (pavement and buildings), riparian zones along rivers, canals and ponds that supply vegetation with water naturally and native, low-water prairie landscapes that don't require irrigation. Aside from personnel/labor, water for irrigation is DPR's largest annual expense, budgeted at \$4.7M. The actual amount DPR spends on water varies from year to year depending on weather

conditions.

The 2003 Game Plan made a number of recommendations for water conservation, and the Department has since made great strides. Although 700 acres of urban parkland have been added to the system since 2003, the department now uses 850 million gallons less water to irrigate urban parks. Over 75 parks now use controlled irrigation systems providing automatic watering resulting in lower water use, and hundreds of acres of bluegrass have been replaced with lower-water-use varieties. In addition, 581 park acres have been converted from potable water irrigation to treated recycled water irrigation. Using recycled water is not without its complications: salt content must be carefully controlled to prevent tree mortality, such as occurred during one of the pilot programs in the Washington Park conifer grove.

Despite significant efficiencies over the last decades, water remains a significant expense for the department. In the future periods of drought are expected to lengthen and water shortages to intensify, ensuring that the department's conversations around water conservation are just at their beginning.

## Water and Irrigation



**Conifer Grove At Washington Park**  
Recycled water used for irrigation, but salts must be managed.

## WATER AND IRRIGATION

### What We've Heard

**71%**  
of respondents believe water conservation in parks is a high priority [PF]

Perception issue with low water landscapes – we need to educate people on what healthy native landscapes look like and why this is important [TF]

“Continue using grey water AND use plant species that require less water” [PF]

Denver is in a dry climate, “vegetation should reflect the natural habitat and changing climate of the region.” [TF]

MOST RESPONDENTS SEE PARKS AS VERY IMPORTANT TO STORMWATER MANAGEMENT AND GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE [PF]

# Safety

## The Park Ranger Program

With a mission to maximize public safety, protect park resources and provide services to visitors, the Denver Park Rangers have become an integral part of the Denver Park system. Overseen by the Natural Resources Division, park rangers patrol both mountain and urban parks by foot, bicycle and vehicle. Records from 2015 show that park rangers officially interacted with over 100,000 park visitors around issues relating to code enforcement, like alcohol, fires and leash laws as well as rescue and first-aid operations and educational activities like teaching people to fly fish. Park rangers have the ability to issue citations for park rule violations and collaborate with local law enforcement on larger issues.

## Homelessness

Like most cities of its size, Denver has a significant homeless population that uses park amenities for daily needs like restrooms and sleeping. DPR staff work alongside local social service agencies to keep this population safe and to direct people in need to shelters and food pantries. A recent city program called Denver Day Works is piloting temporary jobs for Denver's homeless population, offering an opportunity to work on a day-to-day basis for DPR or Denver Public Works. Participants in the DPR program help maintenance crews with general park maintenance, including cleaning and monitoring restrooms, planting trees, raking, trash collection, clearing flower beds and other routine tasks. Although small, the program has been widely considered a success.

## Staff Team Safety

Although incidents are rare, Denver Parks and Recreation staff all receive training in how to protect themselves and their colleagues while on the job. Safety for staff has two major dimensions - operational safety regarding tools and tasks as well as social-emotional and physical safety regarding interactions with the public. Staff in focus groups agreed that emphasizing working in teams, especially in remote areas, more training in self-protection techniques for field-staff as well as emphasis on lighting and other measure common for visitor safety would be good investments for the department.



SAFETY

## What We've Heard

10%

Of respondents stated that safety concerns prevented them from using Denver Parks and Recreation Facilities [SVS]

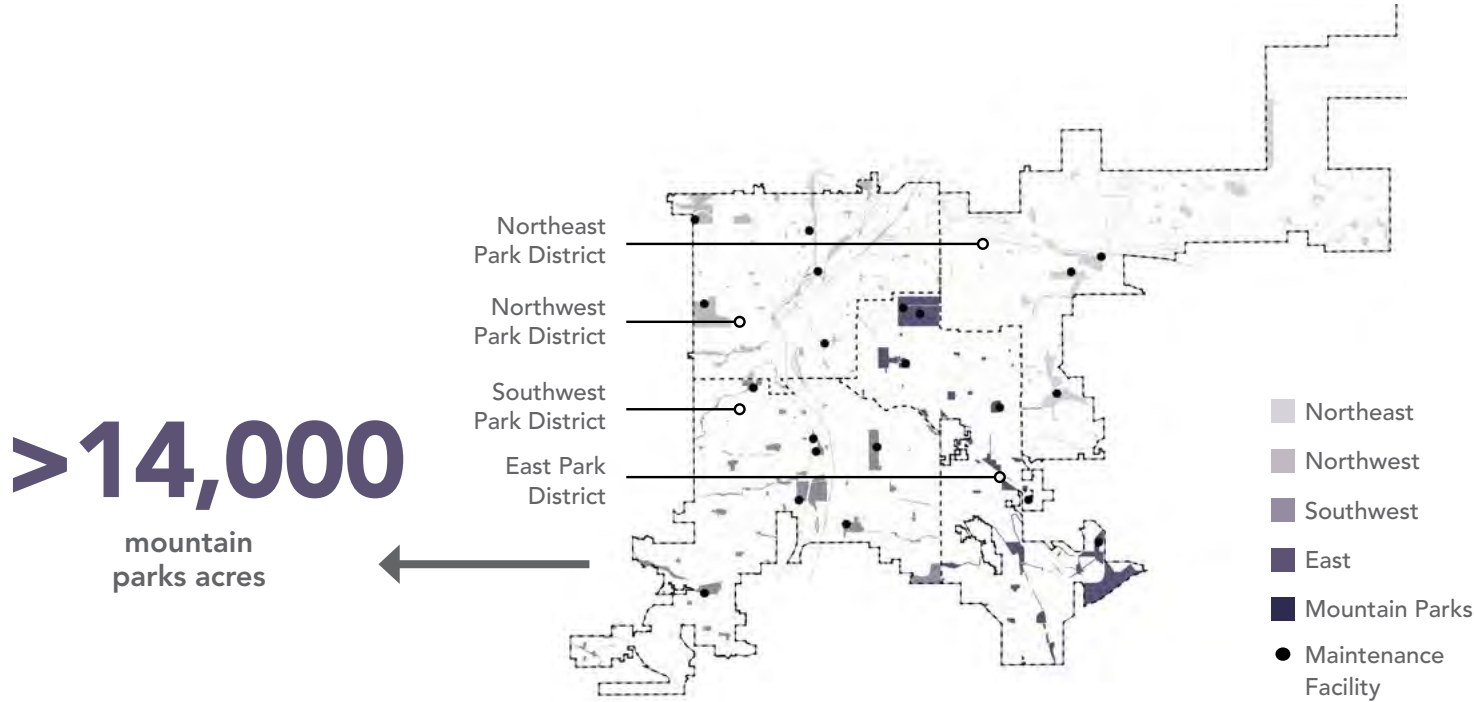
Increased lighting and programming in parks will help bring crowds and help zones that feel unsafe [PF]

“Everyone deserves park access but I often see homeless folks outnumber families in many parks near downtown” [PF]

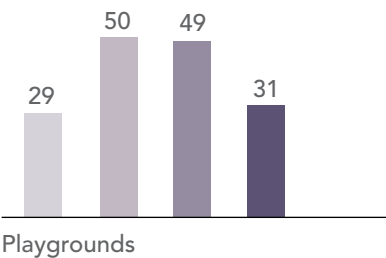
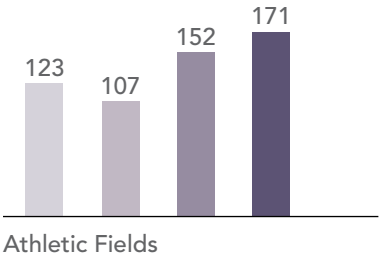
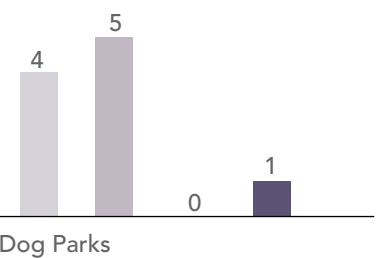
“There is a lack of messaging to staff on safety in the field - how to respond to emergencies and threats” [DPR]

MANY PUBLIC RESPONDENTS BELIEVE SAFETY IS LARGELY FOCUSED ON PARK DESIGN/ LIGHTING, HOMELESSNESS AND PARK ENFORCEMENT [PF]

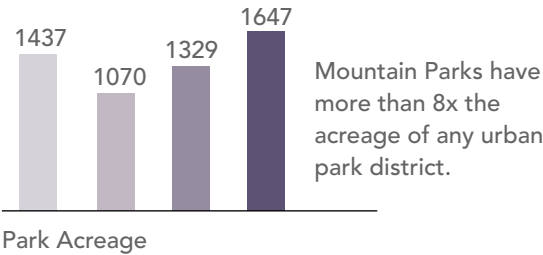
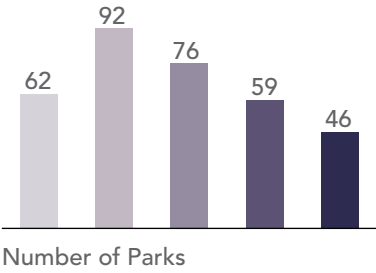
# Maintenance



## Urban Parks



## Urban and Mountain Parks



Maintenance is divided into several categories within DPR. General urban park maintenance, including mowing, flower beds, trash collection, cleaning of bathrooms and other tasks, occurs in teams dedicated to specific quadrants of the city: northeast, northwest, southwest, east. A map of these districts appears on this page along with information on different kinds of assets each team maintains. The northwest quadrant, which includes downtown, has the largest number of parks, but the smallest acreage overall. The northwest district also has the most dogparks and playgrounds, which each require a specific type of dedicated maintenance. The southeast has the most athletic fields. In the winter these teams are responsible for plowing trails, paths and roads within parks in addition to regular maintenance tasks.

Mountain parks have a dedicated maintenance staff under the Natural Resources division that focuses on mitigating threats from forest fires, caring for the bison herds, snow plowing mountain park roads, keeping trails and picnic areas clearly maintained and historic structures. The mountain parks division has the fewest actual parks to take care of, but by far the most acreage and the largest geographic dispersion.

Forestry, also under the Natural Resources division, operates 3 citywide teams of arborists to maintain trees within parks and urban rights-of-way. Finally, the Natural Areas Program has a dedicated team of experts focused on designated urban natural areas and priority management zones. This team under the direction of the city naturalist, also has a specific focus on noxious weed management and wildlife pest management.

Recreation centers and other built facilities have a team of maintenance personnel skilled in buildings, HVAC systems, pool plumbing and electrical work. This team moves fluidly throughout the 27 recreation centers and aquatic facilities.

Maintenance facilities, which serve as a hub for employees to clock in-and-out, check email, manage assignments and gather tools or materials for work, are distributed throughout the city. Staff describe many of these facilities as in need of upgrades, particularly in terms of energy efficiency and technology. Recent innovations include mobile tablets for certain maintenance teams to better track areas where work is needed and progress on task orders. Staff touted how efficient these new systems were and advocated for their rollout more generally.

## MAINTENANCE

### What We've Heard

**74%**

of respondents rated the condition of park and recreation facilities as "excellent" or "good" [SVS]

Where would you be willing to contribute additional maintenance resources [SVS]

**96%**  
Restrooms

**95%**  
Paths and Walkways

**92%**  
Recreation Centers

Replacement and better maintenance of existing trees within parks [PF]

Maintenance/upgrades to existing parks and facilities is needed [PF]

STAFF PLACE A PRIORITY ON INCREASING FUNDING FOR MAINTENANCE AND INVESTING IN NEW TECHNOLOGIES TO IMPROVE MAINTENANCE EFFICIENCY [DPR]

# Historical Resources: Parkway System

## Designated parkways concentrated on the east side of the city

Much of Denver's urban character can be attributed to its system of parkways. In the 1870's as part of urban growth, Denver began a process that transformed the dry prairie into a lush green urban oasis. The "Park and Boulevard System of Denver" plan in 1882, was described as "a foundational vision and planning framework that was woven through neighborhoods with destination neighborhood parks and cultural destinations connected by ribbons of parkways".

Combining front yards, tree lawn, right-of-way and median, the parkway allows for a typical urban street to be transformed into a green urban park. In some cases the median is so wide that the zone acts as a linear park for recreation such as dog walking and jogging. These green zones not only offer recreational opportunities but environmental benefits as well. Acting as stormwater buffers and infiltration zones, they are and can be designed to reduce the impact stormwater has on the surrounding water supplies and natural rivers.

## Not all Parkway are the same

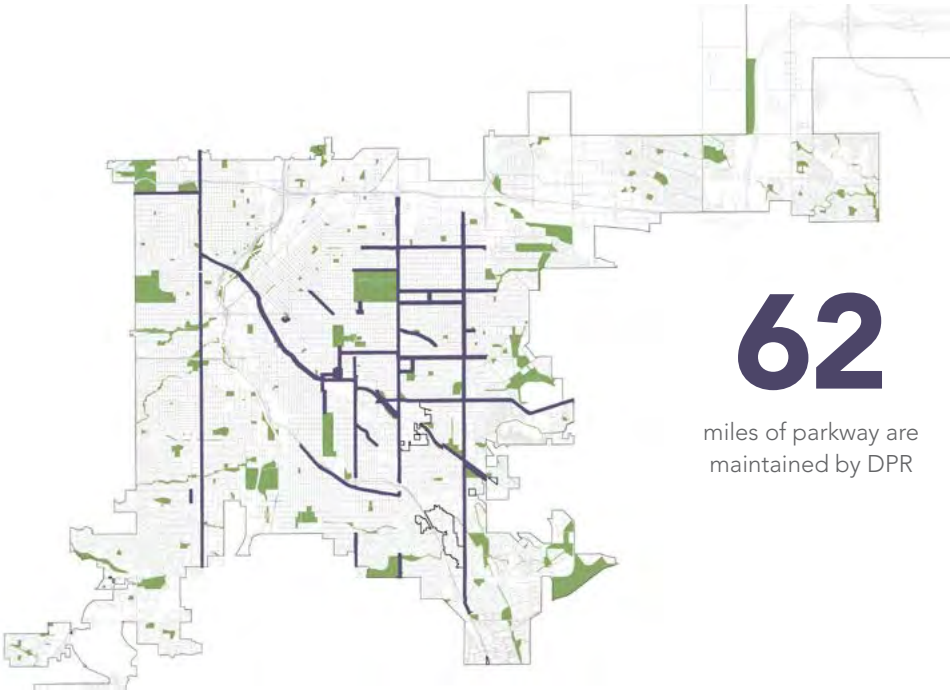
Denver Parks and Recreation maintains 62 miles of urban parkways, concentrated on the eastern side of the city. Although designated parkways are historic corridors through the city, not all parkways are

considered equal. The examples below and images to the right illustrate the many characters of Denver's parkways today.

**Colorado Boulevard:** Originally a traditional green boulevard, Colorado was transformed in the 1940s and 1950s from a low volume street to a main thoroughfare. The street was widened, trees were lost and commercial businesses started emerging along its length.

**East Sixth Avenue and Monaco Avenue:** These two are classic examples of the Denver double-drive residential parkway. Both provide ample space for motorized circulation as well as a broad tree canopy and median large enough for recreational use.

**Federal Boulevard:** The second busiest RTD corridor within the city, Federal Boulevard is a critical urban street connection. Regulated by CDOT, Federal Boulevard spans many commercial district's, diverse neighborhoods and some of the most accident prone street intersections in the city. Today, Federal Boulevard resembles a strip mall boulevard, with a large number of travel lanes in each direction, generous development setbacks and typical concrete dominated medians. Like Colorado Boulevard it has lost its original character.



62

miles of parkway are maintained by DPR



East Sixth Avenue



Monaco Avenue



Federal Boulevard



Colorado Boulevard

## PARKWAYS

## What We've Heard

87%

of respondents see parkways as a beautiful asset to the city [PF]

“Making sure there are trails along parkways for bikes and pedestrians” [PF]

More parkways, especially in the west/northwest [PF]

Parkways should be managed and designed for the vehicle, pedestrian and cyclist... [PF]

THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THAT PARKWAYS HELP ABSORB STORMWATER AND PROVIDE ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

# Organizational Structure

One of the elements of the Game Plan is an organizational assessment, an overview of the Department's operations. The organizational narrative is intended to strengthen and affirm the operations of the Department and its ability to successfully deploy the Game Plan. This section of the Plan includes information related to:

- Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles
- Staff Focus Group Summary
- Employee Engagement Survey
- Desired Organizational Culture
- Staffing and Structure

The starting point of the Assessment starts with the Department's vision, mission, and guiding principles which are as follows:

**Vision:** To be a nationally recognized leader in providing model programs and dynamic public spaces.

**Mission:** As stewards of Denver's legacy, DPR is dedicated to customer satisfaction and enhancing lives by providing innovative programs and safe, beautiful sustainable places.

**Guiding Principles:**

- Equity
- Quality and Safety
- Community
- Sustainability
- Health & Wellbeing
- Employees
- Youth

It is worth noting the definition of Employees as part of the Guiding Principles states: "Be the employer of choice by investing in a high performing, diverse, and engaged workforce."

The Organizational Assessment is aligned with the mission, vision, and guiding principles and contributes to the Department's ability to be the employer of choice.

The assessment also includes discussion about the desired organizational culture. Based on comments from the staff involved in the focus groups, some of the desired cultural attributes include:

- Innovative
- Employee engagement
- Passion
- Change management
- Team based approaches
- Continuous improvement
- Entrepreneurial
- Service orientation

The operational assessment will provide detail about these elements and how the Department can best operationalize them. Currently, there is an intentional and purposeful effort in promoting employee engagement.

Before speaking to the issues and challenges, it is important to note the extremely spirited nature of the employees of the organization. Some of the words employees used to describe the organization included: pride, innovative, positive, diverse, passionate about their work, visionary and collaborative. They felt they are able to accomplish a lot with very few resources, a shoestring budget, even though in some areas their budget had doubled recently. They touted their great leadership, the broadness of their department, their community engagement, their efforts to balance the needs of the community and their youth programming. They felt there was a good balance between the old guard employees and the new, and they worked well together. In fact, everyone is willing to help one another.

Some of the major challenges and issues facing the Department include:

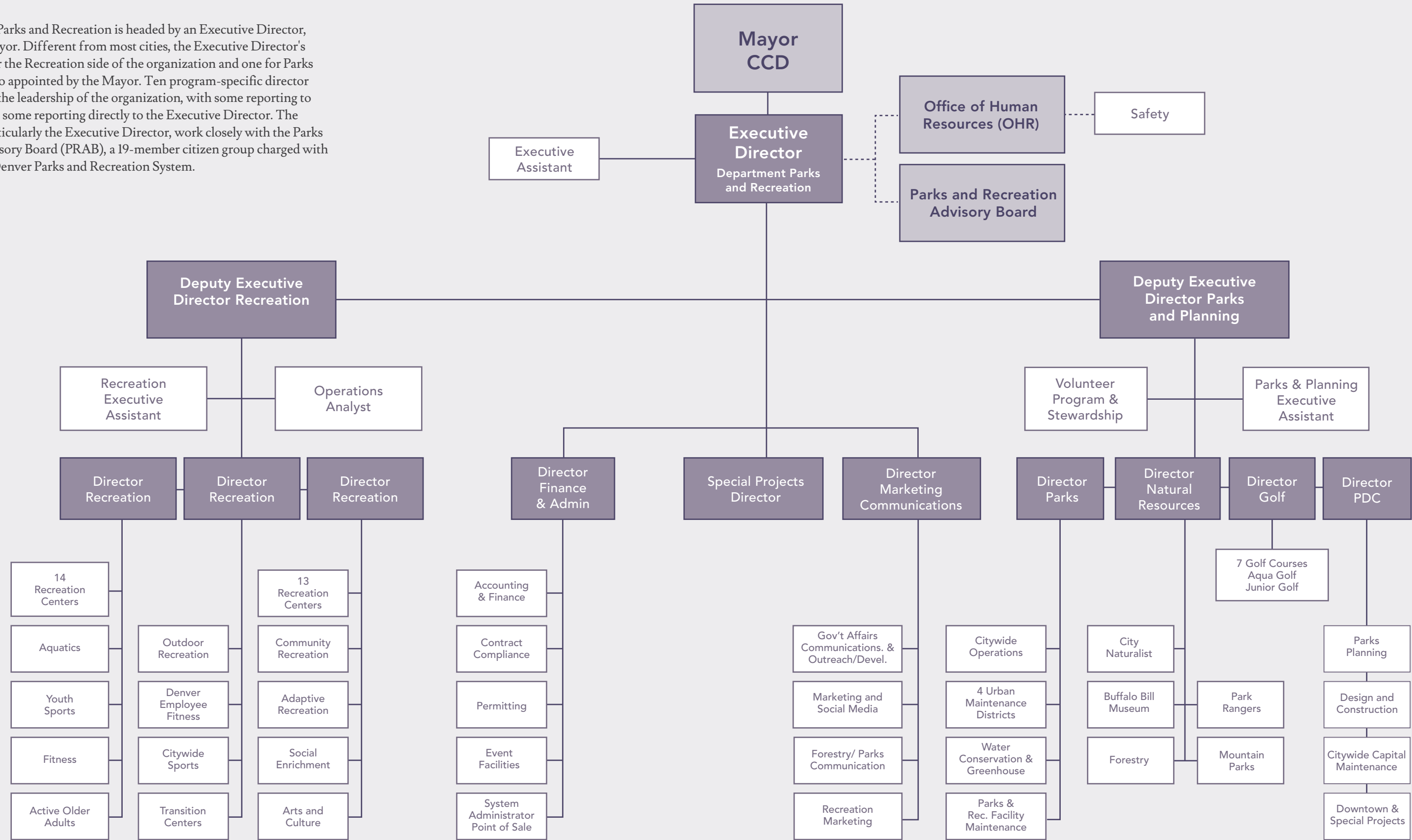
1. **Breaking down silos.** Because the Department is so large and physically dispersed, it is a challenge for leadership to embed a cohesive, unified vision for staff. During the focus groups, many employees identified with their functional work group and were unknowing about the organization's overall system. It is important for the Department to develop a strong communication process, ensuring that employees throughout the entire organization receive frequent, regular communication.
2. **Staffing levels.** This was noted as an area of concern, particularly in light of continued growth of the City and the need to keep up with the demands for services. New parks and facilities come on line without a corresponding increase in staffing levels.
3. **Leadership development and workforce capability.** There is a particular imperative to develop leaders and potential leaders as well as building organizational capacity among employees. Skills necessary for today's times include driving innovation, leveraging technology, use of data for decision making, management of change, sustainable practices, and strategic thinking. The Department should identify core competencies for Department leadership and employees and provide

development for these programs. Along with this is the need for a knowledge management program to ensure the transfer of knowledge, as well as succession planning for impending retirements and ensuring a good pipeline of in-house leaders.

4. **Annual work plans based on strategic direction.** The Department is in the beginning stages of organizational, divisional, and individual annual work plans, aligned with organizational strategic direction. The Department needs to ensure these endeavors occur across all areas of the Department, including goals and objectives.
5. **Use of data.** The Department is in the early stages of using data for decision making. This should occur system wide and at the organizational and divisional level of the Department. In addition, the use of data should result in key performance indicators for the Department. It's important for employees to understand how the agency is performing, not only organizationally, but in their respective divisions.

# Organizational Structure

The Department of Parks and Recreation is headed by an Executive Director, appointed by the Mayor. Different from most cities, the Executive Director's two deputies, one for the Recreation side of the organization and one for Parks and Planning, are also appointed by the Mayor. Ten program-specific director positions round out the leadership of the organization, with some reporting to the two deputies and some reporting directly to the Executive Director. The department, and particularly the Executive Director, work closely with the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board (PRAB), a 19-member citizen group charged with stewardship of the Denver Parks and Recreation System.



# Partnerships

The Department of Parks and Recreation maintains partnership agreements with over 200 organizations, businesses, schools, individuals, and governmental entities within the city. Recently DPR created a new staff position to oversee and manage the wide variety of partnership contracts in place. Partnerships generally fall into four main categories: Institutional, Operational (including Funding), Programmatic and Volunteer.

## Institutional Partners

The Department of Parks and Recreation partners with four main institutions who each have significant facilities on DPR land: Four Mile Historic Park, the Denver Botanical Gardens, the Denver Museum of Nature and Science and the Denver Zoo. Each of these organizations has a robust non-profit board that fundraises independently of DPR and each has a longstanding legacy within the parks.

Together these organizations draw a significant resident and tourist population into Denver's urban parks, particularly Four Mile, Cheesman and City Park. Crossover issues between DPR and its institutional partners revolve around roads and parking. Each institution's individual goals include bringing more people over their thresholds, and doing so often places additional maintenance burden on DPR staff or requires capital upgrades to existing park roads or parking.

## Four Mile Historic Park

A 12-acre historic oasis, Four Mile Historic Park is home to Denver's oldest house and dedicated to allowing visitors to experience preservation, interpretation and enjoyment of Denver's western heritage. The museum offers programming, special events and guided tours throughout the year, helping to promote this important part of the system s heritage.

## Museum of Nature and Science

Located in the heart of City Park, the Denver Museum of Nature & Science "envisions an empowered community that loves, understands, and protects our natural world". Officially formed in December of 1900 as the Colorado Museum of Natural History, the museum sought to protect the collections of Edwin Carter. These collections would become a world renowned museum where visitors not only view exhibits but view science taking place daily.

## Botanical Gardens

Though only 23 acres in size, sited in the heart of Denver at Cheesman Park, the Denver Botanical Gardens displays more than 15,000 plant species from around the globe. The focus of the garden is to immerse and connect visitors with the flora and fauna of the Rocky Mountain Region. Visitors can experience an array of events, lifelong learning opportunities and research to preserve the local natural resources.

## Zoo

A simple gift from the mayor of Denver in 1896, started one of the top ten zoos in the country. Billy the black bear cub fascinated viewers and welcomed a revolution in zoo exhibits in 1918 with the opening of Bear Mountain. This exhibit brought viewers close to animals in their natural habitat (without bars or fences) and now sits on the National Register of Historic places. Today, the zoo is home to more than 4,000 animals representing more than 700 species.



Botanical Gardens



Zoo



Four Mile Historic Park



Museum of Nature and Science

## Programmatic Partners

Programmatic partners differ from institutional partners in that they do not have significant physical facilities on DPR land; rather, they operate programs and activities on DPR land or within DPR facilities. Programmatic partners are the most diverse partnerships, and allow DPR to enrich and expand the variety of program opportunities the system can offer within its facilities without placing additional burden on existing staff.

Examples of Programmatic Partners: (not an exhaustive list)

- Denver Urban Gardens - cultivating food to nourish the community
- The Boys and Girls Club - recreational activities, camps and field trips for youth
- The YMCA - full operation of a former DPR recreation center, and programs at others
- Colorado Miners - occupation and programming of Johnson Rec Center
- 4H - STEM and nutrition/ cooking programs for youth
- UPLIFT - recreation, team-building and leadership training for youth
- Revolution Foods - provides snacks and meals for youth and seniors
- Cooking Matters - healthy cooking classes for all
- The AARP - driving and tax-assistance classes for seniors

# Partnerships (continued)

## Operational and Funding Partners

Operational and funding partners provide functional and financial support to the Department of Parks and Recreation through a variety of structures.

Some of these partners are foundations and non-profits with a specific mission to support DPR, like the Mountain Parks Foundation, the Park People and the Greenway Foundation. In addition to these over-arching entities, there are a number of organizations that support specific parks and facilities, for example the Civic Center Conservancy, the Friends of Levitt Pavillion, the Friends of Little Cheeseman and the City Park Alliance.

DPR also partners with larger conservation organizations, like the Trust for Public Land and Colorado Open Lands to help fund purchases, conservation easements or improvements to park land and open spaces.

Rather than funds, a number of partner organizations contribute in-kind goods or services. Christy Sports, for example, provides free winter sports equipment to youth participating in programming at Ruby Hill Rail Yard.

Finally, a number of organizations provide operational support and improvements to DPR facilities. These include a variety of agreements with Denver Public Schools to maintain and improve sports fields, parking lots, trails and playgrounds that are adjacent to school properties and used by students but owned by DPR. Four Mile Historic Park Inc, is a non-profit created specifically to manage and operate functions at Four Mile Historic Park.

Although DPR's current operational and funding partners currently provide significant support to the department, the opportunity to both deepen and broaden these partnerships cannot be overlooked. In a climate of limited city budgets, public-private partnerships will become increasingly important as a means of financial and operational support for park and recreation facilities.



## Volunteer Programs

The Department of Parks and Recreation's volunteer programs and partnerships have grown significantly in the past 5 years. In 2016 more than 11,000 volunteers spent more than 46,000 hours working to maintain parks, playgrounds, trails, tree-lawns and other critical facilities, more than double the number of volunteer hours logged in 2010. The department estimates that these service hours brought over \$830,000 in benefit to the department in 2016.

Although many of these volunteers are recruited and managed directly by DPR's park stewardship program, a significant number also come through partner organizations. In particular, the Park People and Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado offer significant support to maintenance efforts.

Through its park stewardship program, DPR runs a number of "adopt" programs where individuals, families, businesses and organizations can commit to the maintenance of a specific facility. In 2016, more than 5,500 volunteer hours were spent by individuals adopting a local park, trail, flowerbed or dog park.

Trends show a clear growth in DPR's volunteer programs and document a significant value to the department. Managing volunteers and associated partnerships is a significant effort for DPR staff. If volunteerism continues to rise, as is the national trend, then DPR can expect to see increased value provided by volunteers and increased staff hour allocated to managing and training volunteers.

>200%

growth in volunteer hours  
between 2010 and 2016

\$830K

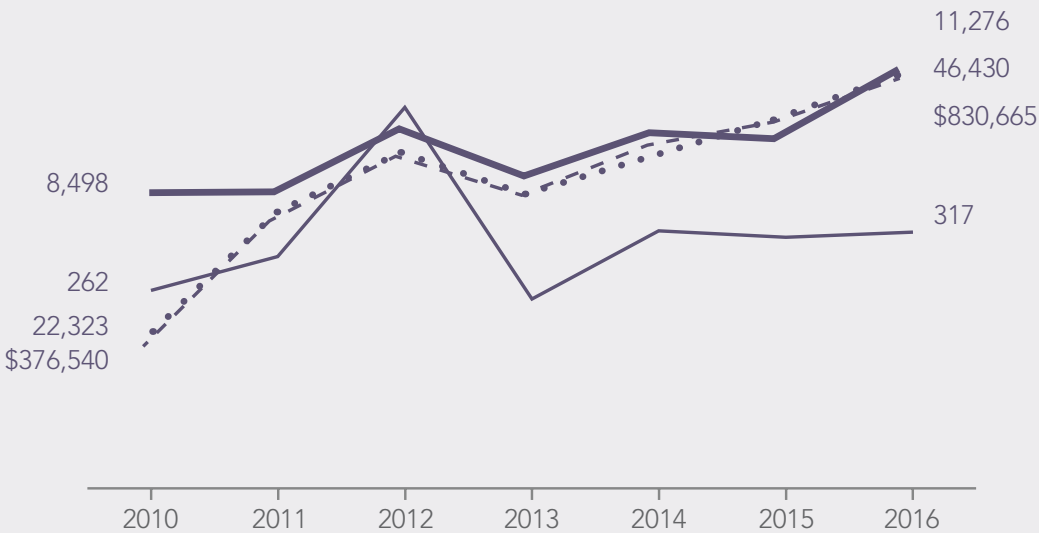
total benefit of volunteer  
service hours to DPR in 2016

## Volunteer Program Participation and Benefits (2010-2016)

### Trend Lines

Note: Graphs are not to scale on the y-axis in relation to each other, but are accurate relative to themselves.

- Total benefit to DPR (\$)
- .... Volunteer hours
- People
- Projects





# Measuring Past Successes and Challenges

# 2003 Game Plan Diagnostic Tool Introduction

The 2003 Game Plan was a significant document for the department. Over a year's worth of coordination, strategy, leadership, public outreach and staff engagement culminated in a 130 page document meant to guide the Department of Parks and Recreation for a 20 year period. The final 2003 Game Plan is organized into ten chapters which outline both physical and policy strategies for the department. In general, each main section of the plan has performance goals, a description of the conditions in 2003 and a list of specific recommendations for achieving the overarching goal.

As we look towards the next steps in creating the 2017 Game Plan, it is important to understand how well the 2003 plan functioned as a road map for the department. Which goals did the department focus on? Which have been achieved? Which have been neglected or have room for improvement? These questions have been answered in the 2003 Game Plan Diagnostic tool, a system of grades for each main goal area of the plan.

For the purposes of the diagnostic, the goals of the 2003 Plan have been divided into four main categories:

- 1. Green Neighborhoods
- 2. The Connected City
- 3. Natural and Sustainable Systems
- 4. Aspirational and Values-based Goals

Each of these sections has a number of different goal categories and specific goals within that category. Each category has been given an overall letter grade based on the descriptions of achievements and challenges for each individual goal.

The diagnostic culminates by pulling out key lessons for the 2017 plan as we look ahead to setting clear goals and recommendations to guide the department for the next 20 years.

## 1. Green Neighborhoods and Beyond

RATING  
C

### Public Open Space/ Breathing Space



#### Goal #1

Provide at least one-half acre of public open space within one-half mile of every resident's home that can be reached without crossing a major barrier

#### Current State

Today, 85% of residents can walk to a park within 10 minutes of their home, but many walkable parks are pocket and neighborhood parks sized less than 0.5 acres. Of the 15% of residents that cannot walk to a park within 10 minutes, there is no significant demographic group specifically affected.

#### Challenges

Certain neighborhoods, especially downtown, have continued to densify. Creating space for parks where land value is high remains challenging.

#### Goal #2

Introduce a comprehensive basic program for breathing space in neighborhoods that includes: a loop walking trail; shade, seating, and a drinking fountain; an open play area; a picnic area; plantings; and a focal element, such as public art, a gazebo, or a plaza

#### Current State

Since 2003, numerous individual park master plans have been implemented to address specific city-wide needs. Introducing a "comprehensive basic program for breathing space" was never prioritized by DPR, partially because it was determined that each park and each neighborhood needs and desires different types of amenities, and these should be evaluated individually.

#### Challenges

Water quality standards governing long utility lines of potable water make adding drinking fountains everywhere challenging. The new DPR standard is to co-locate drinking fountains with restrooms.

RATING  
C

### Natural Areas



#### Goal #1

Provide significant natural areas acreage in each quadrant of the city

#### Current State

Each quadrant contains large natural areas, except for NW, where the only substantial natural area is inaccessible to most communities. There is also very little natural area in the central neighborhood portion of the East quadrant.

#### Challenges

Carving out new natural areas in an already built-out city is challenging. DPR is currently working on Heron Pond Restoration, which, if successful, could become the significant natural area for that part of the community.

#### Goal #2

Encourage more natural open space in the design of new parks and the retrofitting of established parks

#### Current State

This trend is growing as parks are designed and upgraded, except for legacy parks in established neighborhoods.

#### Challenges

Specialized staff are needed to manage native landscapes and since 2003 the Natural Areas Program was re-organized and largely defunded.

#### Goal #3

Restore and protect existing natural open space

#### Current State

Some existing efforts have been successful, for example site specific resource management and turf conversion. However the scale of implementation appears small compared to what was envisioned in 2003. DPR is currently developing landscape typologies overlay, which will help restore and protect areas going forward.

#### Challenges

Public perception of natural spaces as "unmaintained" sometimes conflicts with restoration efforts.

# 1. Green Neighborhoods and Beyond

RATING

B

Canopy/  
Street Trees



**Goal**  
Provide a tree-canopy cover of 15 percent to 18 percent in urban residential areas and 10 percent in the central business district by 2025.

**Current State**  
Today Denver’s city-wide tree canopy sits at ~19.7%. Since 2003 tree canopy in residential areas has increased from 18% to 20%. In 2006, the Mile-High Million Tree Initiative was launched as an effort to increase tree canopy coverage: although the goal was not achieved, 250,000+ trees have been planted to date.

**Challenges**  
Downtown tree canopy is low: according to the Outdoor Downtown plan, when comparing to 20 cities across the country Denver ranked lowest in terms of downtown urban tree canopy cover with only 4%.

RATING

A

Playing  
Fields



**Goal #1**  
Provide one baseball or softball field for every 5,000 residents

**Current State**  
Denver currently provides 137 baseball or softball fields, or 1.14 fields per 5,000 residents. In 2003 there were 118 fields, or 1.4 fields per 5,000 residents. There has been a moderate decline in service, but still meeting the performance goal.

**Challenges**  
Population growth is almost solely responsible for the moderate decline in service.

**Goal #2**  
Provide one soccer or multi-use field for every 5,000 residents

**Current State**  
Denver currently provides 191 multi-use fields, or 1.59 fields per 5,000 residents. In 2003, there were 135 fields, just barely meeting the goal. Denver has added significant fields and is well above the goal.

**Challenges**  
Population growth is almost solely responsible for the moderate decline in service.

RATING

C

Recreation Programs  
and Facilities



**Goal #1**  
City recreation centers should provide the foundation services at the following levels: (1) aerobic dance: one per center, (2) cardio/weight room: one per center, (3) indoor pool: one for every 15,000 residents, (4) gymnasium: one for every 12,000 residents, (5) multi-purpose or “drop-in” space

**Current State**  
In 2003, the city did not meet the standard for number of recreation centers recommended. Since then, 3 facilities have been converted to independent operation and 2 additonal facilities have been built. Only two recreation centers lack a gymnasium or a cardio/weight-room, and both of these facilities are senior centers. Thirteen centers provide indoor pools, with two more opening at the new City Park recreation center in 2017.

**Challenges**  
Pool and gym population numbers quoted by the 2003 Game Plan were not realistic for DPR: according to this standard the department would need 45 indoor pools and 56 indoor gyms. These benchmarks should have been balanced against indoor recreation facilities provided by other similar organizations for Denver residents, such as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Club and private gym and fitness facilities.

**Goal #2**  
Recreation centers should average 2.4 square feet per person, although this standard cannot be met in every city center given site and facility constraints. Between 10 and 25 percent of recreation center space should be flexible multi-purpose or support space

**Current State**  
Recreation centers will average 1.1 square feet per capita when the new Carla Madison Center comes online early in 2017, up from 0.7 sf per capita in 2003. The average center size is now 25,858 square feet, an increase in nearly 10,000 square feet since 2003. Denver is still not meeting the performance goal, but has made significant strides, despite population growth.

**Challenges**  
Again, goals set for DPR should balance other organizations that also meet fitness and recreation needs - it is unlikely that DPR alone will ever be able to meet a goal of 2.4 square feet per person. Most recreation centers are also neighborhood-based, and should be measured against their neighborhood populations and catchment areas rather than the city as a whole.

**Goal #3**  
At least 75 percent of Denver residents should have safe pedestrian or transit access to a recreation center

**Current State**  
More than 75% of Denver residents can access a recreation center within a 10 minute drive or a 20 minute bike ride from their house. See Denver Moves: Pedestrains and Trails plan for more information on the safety of these connections.

**Challenges**  
DPR does not have control over bike, pedestrian and transit routes through the city, so this goal requires collaboation with DPW to achieve.

# 1. Green Neighborhoods and Beyond

RATING

B

Park Acreage



**Goal**  
Provide 8-10 acres of parkland for every 1,000 residents, assuming 8 acres as a “lower bound” and 10 acres as most desirable

**Current State**  
Denver currently provides 8.97 acres of parkland per 1,000 residents, while the 2003 Game Plan states a total acreage of 9.3 acres per 1,000 residents. Park acreage is still within the bounds of the performance goal, but there has been a moderate decline in service since 2003.

**Challenges**  
Population growth is a major contributing factor into the decline in accessible park space per 1,000 residents. Since 2003, Denver has grown in population by nearly 121,000 residents. The Downtown core in particular is densifying, and parkland there currently stands at 5.7 acres per 1,000 people according to Outdoor Downtown.

RATING

D

Community Scale Recreation



**Goal #1**  
Produce yearly recreation trend report for the department

**Current State**  
The Recreation Center Assessment study, completed in 2006 contained a recreation trend report, however the department has not completed these yearly. New in 2015 DPR has compiled a monthly “dashboard” of information on recreation centers - memberships, attendance in classes, etc - that is beginning to provide this level of information.

**Challenges**  
The department doesn’t have resources to commit to an annual in-depth study of this nature. Better digital record keeping recently will make the information easier to compile when needed.

**Goal #2**  
Conduct regular community needs assessments

**Current State**  
Not done.

**Challenges**  
Not enough resources to meet goal.

RATING

C

Denver Municipal Golf Courses



**Goal #1**  
Ensure continued quality and repair

**Current State**  
The municipal golf courses developed and implemented the 2012 drought management plan. Investments have been made to improve the courses and clubhouses. Golf has become a self-sustaining enterprise fund.

**Challenges**  
Competing with the facilities and maintenance of private courses is a challenge.

**Goal #2**  
Stengthen the services offered

**Current State**  
The department has placed significant emphasis on establishing and developing First Tee of Denver, a program providing lessons to Denver’s youth. Major upgrades on tee-time reservations were recommended and implemented based on an independent marketing specialist. Today, special promotions and events help Denver Golf reach their target audience.

**Challenges**  
Nationally, the sport of golf is in decline, with fewer people each year playing at least once. This trend is particularly prevalent among Millenials, Denver’s fastest growing population.

**Goal #3**  
Implement a comprehensive natural resources program plan

**Current State**  
Since 2003, all municipal golf courses have been certified as Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary golf courses, a designation which shows that they enhance natural areas and habitats while providing golf amenities. While it is a step in the right direction, the certification is not “comprehensive” in terms of it coverage of natural resources issues.

**Challenges**  
By nature, the specialized turf needed for golf requires significant water, fertilizers and pesticides to stay green.

## 2. The Connected City

RATING  
C

### Citywide and Regional Trail Connections



#### Goal #1

Provide safe access to off-street trails, ideally no more than one half mile to one mile from major residential areas

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

#### Goal #2

Complete “missing links” in the off-street trail system to improve connections

#### Current State

Many missing links to the off-street trail system have been added since 2003: Westerly Creek trail, Extend Wagon Trail, Connecting Lakewood Gulch to Martinez Park, Sand Creek- Stapleton to Commerce City

#### Goal #3

Ensure that links are strengthened to major regional and metrowide trail systems

#### Current State

Today, 85 Total miles of Paved Trails exist in the regional and metrowide network. Since 2003, 34 additional miles have been added.

#### Challenges

Significant partnerships are needed, with both regional agencies and non-profits who oversee different parts of the regional trail network.

RATING  
C

### A System of Green Street Connections

#### Goal #1

Provide continuous, safe connections on at least one side of each “green street,” connecting parks to schools, recreation centers, and neighborhood centers. A green street has an adequate sidewalk and street tree canopy

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

#### Goal #2

Improve the safety of pedestrian crossings at arterials and other heavily trafficked streets

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.



#### Goal #3

Ensure universal access for all ages and abilities

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

#### Goal #4

Provide continuous sidewalks that conform to city standards

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

#### Goal #5

Install a detached sidewalk with tree lawn where feasible; tree lawns should be at least 8 feet wide

#### Current State

New development in now required to have an 8’ tree lawn and an 8’ sidewalk

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

#### Goal #6

Provide dedicated bike lanes where feasible

#### Current State

Between 2012-2015, 42 streets added a bike lane or sharrow. See Denver Moves: Pedestrains and Trails for a full evaluation.

#### Challenges

DPR only oversees street trees within the public realm, but doesn’t control sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes or accessibility issues. These goals were part of the 2003 Game Plan for lack of a better planning place, but really fall mostly under the purview of Denver Public Works, and should be coordinated with Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails moving forward.

## 2. The Connected City

RATING  
B

### Healthy and Accessible Urban Waterways

#### Goal #1

Ensure safe access to urban waterways from major residential areas

#### Current State

Trailheads along urban waterways are plentiful and frequent. However, many waterways have high speed roads on either side and crossings are not all as safe and plentiful as necessary.

#### Challenges

Industrial space and roadways are barriers to the river in many parts of the city. Coordination of safe access to the rivers falls outside of just DPR scope.

#### Goal #2

Expand natural open space along the Platte, Cherry Creek, and the gulches, improving habitat for urban wildlife

#### Current State

Johnson Habitat Park, which opened in 2015 focuses on natural space and is designed with flooding and stormwater in mind. Significant riverbank restoration occurred as part of the project, and wildlife specialists are on staff to improve water-based habitat for fish and riparian habitat for birds and other migratory animals.

#### Challenges

There are significant issues with invasive species and eroded banks along the urban waterways. Keeping these challenges in check while also improving habitat takes more resources than currently available.

#### Goal #3

Increase the number and range of parks along the waterways, including some larger parks that support active recreation

#### Current State

There is an on-going “River Vision” effort along the South Platte which has resulted in \$12 million in investment to date. Significant projects have included Johnson Habitat Park, renovations to Confluence Park and Wier Gulch, at the junction of the South Platte.

#### Challenges

Acquiring new land along riverways to increase the number of parks is challenging in an already-built-out city.

#### Goal #4

Ensure safe pedestrian and bicycle connections across these waterways to link major recreational areas with activity areas and transit stops

#### Current State

See Denver Moves: Pedestrians and Trails for evaluation.

#### Challenges

See Green Street Connections comments above.

#### Goal #5

Improve water quality and aquatic habitat

#### Current State

Since 2003, 2.5 miles of gulch waterway restoration has occurred. In addition, improvements within the mountain parks system, including trail and parking upgrades at Summit Lake, Red Rocks, Genessee, have helped limit erosion and protect the watersheds. The DPR Best Mangement Practices (BMP) for Water Quality was recently completed and provided standards and guidelines for implementing water quality facilities within parkland.

#### Challenges

Many industrial areas and parking lots still drain into urban waterways. DPR can only control the parkland, and must coordinate with public works, private landowners and urban drainage to ensure clean water flowing into the urban waterways.

#### Goal #6

Increase opportunities for water-based recreation

#### Current State

Park renovations carried out under the “River Vision” program have created significantly more access for water-based recreation, including boat ramps, steps and beaches as well as better riparian wildlife habitat which has opened up more opportunities for urban birding. The marina at Sloan’s lake, a popular hub for waterskiing underwent a significant renovation which included habitat and shoreline restoration. Fishing and concessions for rentals remain popular at Washington Park, City park and Berkeley Lake.

#### Challenges

Siltation issues at Sloan’s lake are challenging to keep up with. Maintaining water quality appropriate for water-based recreation can be challenging, especially along Cherry Creek.

#### Goal #7

Ensure continuous trail connections along major waterway trunk routes and branches

#### Current State

Westerly + Sand Creek Trails have been added since 2003, but there are still some significant gaps, especially along Weir Gulch, Clear Creek and Harvard Gulch.

#### Challenges

Some sections of gulches are culverted in pipes, and would need to be daylighted. Rights-of-way and private property issues make trails challenging in other areas.

## 2. The Connected City

RATING  
C

### Downtown Core



#### Goal #1

**Develop Downtown as a connected system of public open spaces, with strong physical links among activities**

#### Current State

Denver has recently invested in the Outdoor Downtown Plan, which specifically focuses on connectivity issues through a devoted section titled the “A Connected Downtown”.

#### Challenges

Downtown is already dense, and rapidly densifying. The density along with high land values make creating new space for well-connected parks difficult.

#### Goal #2

**Provide a wide range of public spaces that vary in character and scale, from grand traditional parks to urban hardscaped plazas**

#### Current State

Currently there are 152 acres of parks downtown. Open spaces range in size and character from Commons Park (large, landscaped) to Skyline Park (midrange, urban landscaped) to Wynkoop Plaza at Union Station (small, hardscaped).

#### Challenges

Providing new parks is difficult due to density issues. Historic considerations can make it difficult to adapt or diversify older and more traditional public spaces.

#### Goal #3

**Provide varied programming for Downtown spaces to attract patrons**

#### Current State

In 2004, the Civic Center conservancy was formed. The Civic Center moved, and BID and DDA programming was implemented at Skyline Park. Programming, for example food trucks, is largely focused around Civic Center Park.

#### Challenges

Programming spaces adds to maintenance costs and must be balanced with resources available to manage programming partnerships.

#### Goal #4

**Provide strong, accessible pedestrian connections among Downtown public spaces, and provide links to transit facilities**

#### Current State

The Denver bike share program (B-cycles) is at an all time high, and 18.5 miles of bike lanes and trails existed in Downtown Denver in 2015. 2016 welcomed a train connecting Union Station to Denver International Airport.

#### Challenges

DPR does not control all of the public realm, and questions of bike and pedestrian safety in the public right of way must be coordinated with Denver Public Works.

#### Goal #5

**Provide for parks and recreation amenities at the appropriate service levels described above, to meet the growing needs of Downtown residents**

#### Current State

In general, park expansion is not keeping pace with population growth in the downtown area. Downtown offers a host of iconic cultural events, yet lacks the amenities to encourage use on a daily basis. Events should be unique to Downtown and provide the area with a unique identity.

#### Challenges

Challenges exist providing programming that caters to all users - there is a growing resident population downtown, but also a growing and diversifying tourist population and commuter population.

# 3. Natural and Sustainable Systems

RATING

B

From Mountains to the Plains



**Goal #1**  
**Regional Connections: Strengthen regional planning and develop a comprehensive regional trail system**

**Current State**  
Significant progress has been made on Sand Creek as a regional trail corridor as well as major improvements along Bear Creek. A regional planning effort is currently underway along the entire length of the High Line Canal. Coordination with neighboring agencies around the Mountain Parks has improved, however the only new trail connection completed on DMP land has been the I-70 bike trail through Genessee Park.

**Challenges**  
Lack of regional public transit system makes Mountain Parks and trails largely inaccessible for parts of the urban population.

**Goal #2**  
**Regional Natural Systems and Wildlife: Develop and support a strategic plan for natural areas program. Provide a rich environment for wildlife**

**Current State**  
The recommendations of the 2003 Game Plan regarding incorporating the natural areas program under the umbrella of DPR were not implemented. Efforts to establish a stand-alone Natural Areas program were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. Lessons learned led to a restructured and more integrated team with significant expertise in vegetation and wildlife management to assist with both designated and non-designated habitat areas within the park system. The program has been restructured to focus on the five designated Natural Areas and assist the park operations staff as needed.

**Challenges**  
Efforts to manage native landscapes continues to be a challenge in Denver Parks. While the Office of the City Naturalist (formally the Natural Areas Program) has technical expertise but limited staffing has made it difficult to properly manage priority landscapes. For example, a staff of two full- time employees cannot manage all of the weed and wildlife issues across the city. Some maintenance staff still have limited training in specialty areas of weed and wildlife management.

**Goal #3**  
**A New Vision for Mountain Parks: The “overall objective for the Denver Mountain Parks is to keep and restore the historic system of scenic drives and parks”**

**Current State**  
The 2008 Mountain Parks master plan documented the historic legacy and importance of the system and was an important determinant for keeping the system intact. Unfortunately the 2008 plan wasn’t very forward-looking, leaving staff to chart their own path around what modern management of the system should look like. Since 2008, \$4 million has been invested in critial repairs and restoration of 35 MP facilities.

**Challenges**  
The original vision of the 2003 Game Plan regarding Mountain Parks was limited in terms of its focus on history. There has been a need to re-think that vision, embracing the historic legacy while also adapting to to modern recreation needs and sustainable resource management.

RATING

B

Sustainable Designed Environment



**Goal #1**  
**Establish a historic preservation ethic through education and public outreach**

**Current State**  
The 2008 Mountain Parks master plan was instrumental in raising awareness for the historic legacy of that system, and in galvanizing support for keeping it part of the Denver Parks and Recreation system. Proposed plans to renovate the playground in City park met with resistance from public concerned about the historic legacy of the park’s design.

**Challenges**  
Public outreach is a critical part of most DPR planning and construction projects, but other community issues often overshadow a focus on historic legacy.

**Goal #2**  
**Protect historic structures and design through management and regulatory practices**

**Current State**  
Many facilities have undergone rehabilitation efforts since 2003: the Civic Center, \$10M toward rehab of Voorhies Memorial and Green theatre, Cheesman-Pavillion, \$1M Wash Park Boat House Rehab, City Park Band Stand Improvement, \$2.5M City Park Rehab of Prismatic and Thatcher Fountains, Sullivan Gateway Restoration, as well as two designated historic landmarks.

**Challenges**  
Protecting historic landscapes and buildings beyond management or rehabilitation efforts requires significant coordination with legal entities and other city, state and federal agencies.

**Goal #3**  
**Continue our design legacy through high quality standards for planning, construction and maintenance**

**Current State**  
The planning and construction division has grown since 2003 and overseen a tremendous volume of implementation-level plans, individual park masterplans and construction projects on both the parks and recreation side. Design documentation and management has improved since 2003.

**Challenges**  
DPR has tremendous physical assets, but many are aging. Older facilities and infrastructure require more maintenance, and replacing these assets with more modern and efficient facilities requires significant investment.

# 3. Natural and Sustainable Systems

RATING

B

Sustainable  
Natural Resources



**Goal #1**  
Create performance standards and best management practices for water conservation

**Current State**  
Since 2003 a water conservation plan has been developed and implemented, and DPR hired a coordinator to manage water conservation.

**Challenges**  
DPR is not solely responsible for water conservation - it requires collaboration with Denver Water.

**Goal #2**  
Take a leadership role in changing the way people think and communicate re: environmental issues

**Current State**  
DPR’s Forestry division has made tremendous gains in outreach. Examples include the successful Smart Ash campaign, the Million Tree initiative, working with The Park People- Denver Digs Trees around volunteer tree-planting programs, and teaching schoolchildren about the role of urban trees in the environment.

**Challenges**  
Because the 2003 Game Plan focused so heavily on assets and physical infrastructure, the rest of the department (beyond Forestry) focused less on outreach and educational programming. This is a major area for improvement.

**Goal #3**  
Plan and build with the best sustainable practices

**Current State**  
Since 2003, hundreds of acres of bluegrass have been replaced with low water-use grass varieties. Over 75 parks now use controlled irrigation systems providing automatic watering resulting in lower water use. Since 2003, 581 park acres have been converted from potable water to treated recycled water irrigation. Today DPR uses 850 million gallons less of irrigation water than in 2003. Management of storm water has taken a priority with efforts to improve water quality throughout the city and use greywater as a resource. The Central Park and Carla Madison Rec Centers are LEED certified and per executive order all new city buildings must meet LEED silver requirements or higher; most actually achieve Gold.

**Challenges**  
Building with sustainable practices can often be more expensive than building with traditional methods, and requires more resources as well as commitment from staff around maintenance of new systems.

**Goal #4**  
Incorporate design standards (regarding environmental responsibility)

**Current State**  
Best Management Practices (BMPs) have been written and implemented for water quality. DPR has gotten behind the citywide commitment to LEED certification in new buildings. The department has performed energy audits for most buildings and recreation centers, which has resulted in decreased energy use and improved operations. Upgrades to pools, HVAC systems and other consumptive systems have been done with efficiency in mind.

**Challenges**  
Design standards are simple to incorporate into new construction of parks and recreation centers, but more challenging to apply to the significant already-built assets of the system.

**Goal #5**  
Change the way we manage (deliberately include conservation and natural resource quality)

**Current State**  
Through the Natural Areas program, DPR has hired more staff with technical expertise for conservation-related issues, like wildlife, invasive species, native plantings and water quality. Priority management zones in traditional parks have been established to cultivate healthy native ecosystems.

**Challenges**  
Managing for conservation has proved challenging for standard maintenance crews whom are unaware of specialized maintenance techniques needed on these native, low-water plants. Technical expertise of Natural Areas program is stretched too thin.

# 4. Aspirational Goals

Aspirational goals differ from the performance goals throughout the rest of the 2003 plan in that they are higher level and touch on many other goal areas. Equity, engagement and sound economics are really on the levels of core values for the department rather than physical or programmatic elements. As such, their aspirational goals aren't exactly "achievable" in the traditional sense: there isn't a box to check when these goals are met, because in many ways we are always striving to do more and do better in these categories.

Given the interrelationships between these aspirational goals and other performance goals in the plan, as well as the fact that these goals remain core values and focal areas for the department, the diagnostic has not given them letter grades, but kept with more general evaluations.

## Sound Economics–Financing Maintenance and Expansion

### Goals:

- **Strengthen DPRs internal abilities and efficiencies**
- **Strengthen business relationships and partnerships**
- **Increase and stabilize operations and capital revenues for recreation**
- **Assure adequate funding for capital maintenance and repairs and daily operations in parks**
- **Identify and secure funding for capital expansion**

### Notes

As a core value of the Department, providing equity in services underlies most of DPR's diverse actions and initiatives. The following are four examples of increasing equity while meeting other departmental goals: (1) Significant capital resources have been committed over the past decades to revitalizing and renovating parks and facilities in traditionally underserved neighborhoods. (2) A new initiative, the MyDenver Card now provides free access to recreation centers for all youth under the age of 18, and 92% of Denver youth take advantage of the card. (3) DPR's hiring and human resources policies support a diverse workforce. (4) The adaptive recreation program serving people with disabilities has gained traction throughout the recreation center system.

## Engagement and Partnering with the Public

### Goals:

- **Build DPRs organizational capacity to stregnthen existing programs and garner new resources**
- **Build neighborhoods through DPR parks and programs**
- **Research and respond to changing and diverse needs and trends**
- **Involve the Community in all aspects of park and recreation work**

### Notes

DPR's commitment to engaging and partnering with the public comes through at all levels and all services within the Department. From the successful education and volunteer programs run by the Forestry division, to the new recreation facilities for disc golf and BMX, to the public meetings run by the Planning and Construction division for all capital projects, to the focus on quality customer service at recreation centers, the Department has made it clear that it values the public's opinions and perspectives. At the same time, a partnership with the public is a two-way relationship: the public must be willing to be engaged for DPR's efforts to be fruitful in building the organization's capacity.

## Equity and Distribution of Resources

### Goals:

- **Provide more equitable funding**
- **Increase management practices that support equity**
- **Increase programming that supports equity**

### Notes

Balancing the Department's budget is a requirement of the Mayor's office, and sound economics are a core organizational and operational value. DPR has consistently tried to find ways to do more with less and stretch the General Fund dollars as far as they can go. Efforts to streamline maintenance and operational activities are ongoing, but at the same time needs are high and staff consistently request "more hands on deck" to help stay on top of workloads, particularly in maintenance and forestry. Identifying and securing dedicated funding for capital improvements and expansion is generally the most difficult piece of the puzzle, and requires the Department to get creative regarding grant applications and seeking private funding through foundations.

# Lessons Learned

Over the past 13 years, the department has made significant strides towards achieving the goals of the 2003 Game Plan and also met with significant challenges in implementing portions of the goals and vision of the plan. Out of challenge comes the opportunity to learn. As the department embarks on an update to the Game Plan, several key lessons from the 2003 plan will inform how we set goals and make plans to achieve our vision.

## LESSON 1 Metrics to Measure Goals Should be Measurable and Considered

As is evident throughout the diagnostic, the goals where we can most easily see our progress are the ones with clear, measurable benchmarks to meet. With these, we can measure where we were in 2003, where we are now and clearly see what has been achieved or missed in the intervening decade. Several goals include vague language, for example: “provide significant acreage,” which makes understanding where the benchmark might lie guesswork. Staff charged with implementing the plan have no way of knowing whether they are on track with a goal like this, or whether they have fallen behind.

At the same time, we want to be sure that metrics, when used, are thoughtfully considered, as future progress will surely be measured against them. Several of the 2003 goals around recreation across the city don’t represent a realistic picture of what could have been achieved by the Department. Looking ahead to the 2017 Game Plan, it will be important to create actions that are clearly stated, measurable and fully considered against what is feasible in Denver.

## LESSON 2 Consider Physical Resources and Programming Equally

The 2003 Game Plan placed huge emphasis on the physical assets of the system - parks, amenities and recreation center facilities - and focused very few goals on programming or operations. As such it has helped to motivate and spur capital investments in physical resources, but provided little guidance or benchmarking for recreation or operations staff. In general Parks and Recreation master plans tend to focus more on the parks side of the business than the recreation side, leaving recreation staff without clear roadmaps forward.

Looking ahead to the 2017 Game Plan, it will be important to provide goals and action steps particularly pertaining to the non-physical aspects of the department’s work, including recreation programming, educational and outreach efforts and operations.

## LESSON 3 Goals Set Should be Within DPR’s Jurisdiction to Achieve

A number of the goals set within the 2003 plan involve physical assets that are either entirely or partially outside of the Department’s control. This is particularly evident in goals around green street connections: changing sidewalks, crosswalks, bike lanes and other street infrastructure is governed by the Department of Public Works, while the Department of Parks and Recreation only has jurisdiction over tree lawns and trees. Although DPR is good at collaborating with other city entities, it cannot be held accountable for achieving goals over which it doesn’t control budget or other resources.

Looking ahead to the 2017 Game Plan, it will be important to set goals and actions for areas of DPR influence. Issues important to the department that require coordination with other departments or organizations should be considered as a different type of goal or action, given that the action is for DPR to collaborate and advocate for its interests, rather than actually effect the change itself.

## LESSON 4 Implementation Plans Should Ensure Resources are Available to Meet Stated Goals

Several of the goals in the 2003 plan are lofty, and might be achievable with infinite (or at least dramatically increased) financial resources. The 2003 plan never prioritized goals and recommendations for the department, so it was up to staff who were implementing the plan to determine how to spread the limited pool of resources across the many goals. Looking ahead to the 2017 plan, it will be important to understand the financial implications of the suggested goals and action steps, and to identify and prioritize funding mechanisms to ensure the success of implementation.

# Next Steps for Game Plan

# Next Steps for Game Plan

## Where we are in the process

The Game Plan process is at an exciting pivot point. This existing conditions is the culmination of our Phase 1 where we have been working to understand and analyze the current state of the Denver Parks and Recreation system. We are on the precipice of Phase 2, where we will be working collectively to set the guiding principles and actions that will guide the Department for the next 20 years and beyond.

## Many ways to share your voice

As the planning process continues there are many ways to share your voice. See below and reference the schedule for how you can stay involved in shaping the future of the Park and Recreation system in Denver.



### REPORTS

These printed documents will be available for you to read and offer your feedback. The final plan will be approved by the city council and will be available online as a reference.



### PUBLIC FORUMS

These city-wide events occur in multiple convenient locations and include information about where we are in the planning process and fun activities to help you share your feedback



### TASK FORCE MEETINGS

A key group of stakeholders assemble approximately every three months throughout the process to shape the plan and offer feedback. You can learn more about this group by visiting the Denveright website.



### EXISTING EVENTS

You may already have seen our tables this summer or fall at your local neighborhood event, farmer's market or road race. We've been visiting communities throughout the city and in the mountains to hear your opinions about parks and recreation.



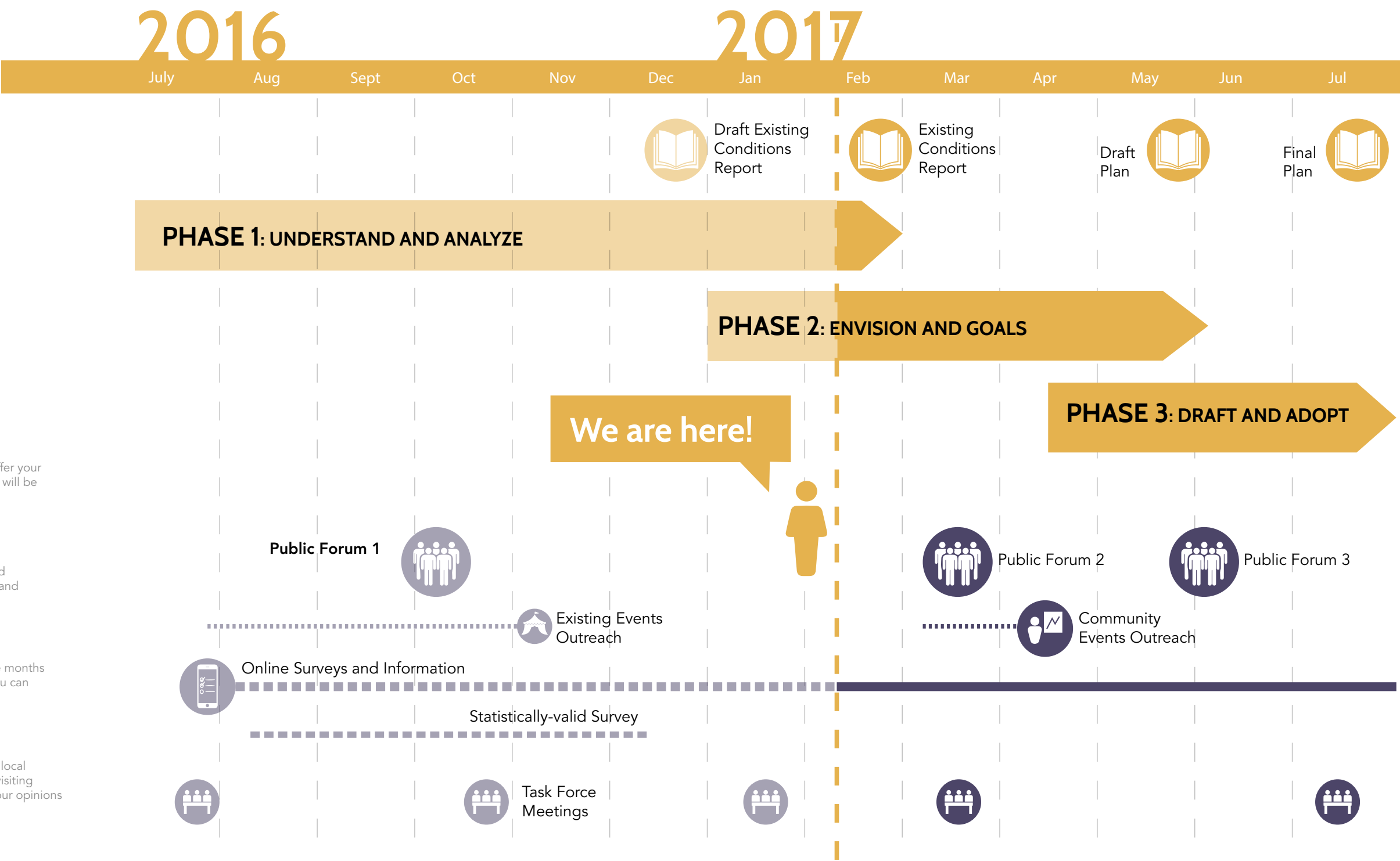
### COMMUNITY EVENTS

These smaller community open houses will bring the plan ideas to specific neighborhoods for feedback! Keep on the lookout for events near you.



### ONLINE SURVEYS AND INFORMATION

Visit the Denveright website at any time to find information about the planning process, and to share your ideas and feedback!



# Denveright Vision Elements

Denveright has identified six vision elements that resonate with Denver citizens and provide an opportunity to unify the plans around common City goals and priorities. These visions elements align with the feedback collected by Game Plan through various outreach initiatives; including an All Staff meeting, online survey, Youth Commission gathering, and city wide public kick-off meetings. What we heard from Denver citizens relative to these vision elements is summarized below.

## Denveright Vision Element: Equitable Affordable and Inclusive

Programming and physical conditions currently inhibit the perception of parks and recreation facilities as equitable, affordable and inclusive. Programming hours at recreation facilities as well as the affordability of programs was reported to limit the feeling of inclusivity for some Denver residents. There was also concern that the types of programs offered may not serve diverse populations and that keeping programming relevant to youth is a challenge. Historic patterns also challenge the equitable distribution of resources across neighborhoods. The location of parkways is a historic framework that heavily favors the east side of Denver. Similarly, tree canopy patterns are more dense and provide greater shade and environmental benefits in neighborhoods that are considered areas of stability than those that are classified as areas of change. Finally, physical barriers and distance exclude certain Denver citizens from enjoying all of Denver Parks and Recreation facilities. Access to the parks and recreation facilities can be frustrated by inequality in infrastructure connecting the facilities with neighborhoods. Links to transit stations, the planning of bus routes and repair of sidewalks were identified as opportunities to improve a citizen's ability to utilize Denver Parks and Recreation facilities. Beyond the city boundary, mountain parks are a valuable differentiator of the Denver Parks and Recreation system; however they are beyond the reach of public transportation and as such many Denver residents lack the means to visit them.

## Denveright Vision Element: Strong and Authentic Neighborhoods

Parks are a prominent feature of neighborhood identity and an important opportunity for gathering and community building within a neighborhood. Similarly, many Denver residents view parkways as a beautiful asset to the city and character defining element of neighborhoods such as east Denver. The type, number and density of parks in each neighborhood needs to be carefully evaluated to ensure that every neighborhood identity is reflected in and enhanced by Denver park and recreation facilities. Increased park use pressure from growing populations was identified as the greatest challenge facing Denver Parks and Recreation in the online survey. This pressure decreases the quality of park facilities which compromises its influence on neighborhood identity and diminishes the ability of parks to provide respite to neighborhood residents. Many survey respondents indicated that increasing park land should be a Denver Parks and Recreation priority.

## Denveright Vision Element: Well-connected, Safe and Accessible Places

Walkable access to neighborhood parks, trails and facilities as well as the perception of safety are key concerns of Denver residents regarding their neighborhood parks. The Youth Commission reported that a primary factor making it difficult to use a neighborhood recreation facility is if it is too far or too hard to get to. In particular, the location of a park within walking distance made respondents twice as likely to visit the park than if it were within biking distance or within a 5 minute driving distance. Trail designations and wayfinding improvements, great sidewalks connecting neighborhoods to parks, locating bike share stations at parks and connecting transit stops or hubs with parks were suggested measures to improve the accessibility of Denver's parks and recreation centers. Both the youth commission and the online survey identified safety in and around parks as a significant challenge facing Denver Parks and Recreation.

## Denveright Vision Element: Economically Diverse & Vibrant

The online survey reflected a heavy preference among respondents that existing park maintenance should be a priority for Denver Parks and Recreation. Similarly, lack of funding and aging infrastructure were viewed as two of the top three challenges facing Denver Parks and Recreation in the survey and the All Staff Meeting report perceived that the number one concern of residents is that facilities are well taken care of and safe. While funding is a challenge for Denver Parks and Recreation, quality neighborhood parks are also recognized as a value that drives development. As such, it was suggested that alternate sources of funding be explored, including development impact fees.

## Denveright Vision Element: Environmentally Resilient

Neighborhood parks in Denver are universally recognized as positive influences on the City environment. However, residents reported concern over the effects climate change will have on Denver's park land and expressed a desire to better leverage Denver's parks as part of city infrastructure. Citizens suggested that stormwater should be managed naturally and close to the source and that infill development should preserve intact open spaces. Shade trees were identified in the survey as the most important park amenity and street trees were valued where they provide pedestrian shade and reduce the heat island effect. Participants at the All Staff meeting distinguished the top two issues regarding environmental health to be balancing conservation with park access and maintaining parks in a semi-arid environment.

## Denver Vision Element: Healthy & Active

The online survey reported that most residents visit Denver parks weekly and many of the public meeting attendees estimated that they engage in physical activity in a Denver park or rec center several times per week. Safe sidewalks or bike routes to parks and recreation centers are influences on how often residents utilize those facilities; and once they are there, walking, running and multi-use paths are a favorite amenity. Within rec centers in particular, fitness facilities and programming were the most popular activity, seconded by aquatics. Increasing park land is a suggested Denver Parks and Recreation priority that would increase resident daily or weekly use of facilities as part of a healthy and active lifestyle.

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# Acknowledgements

Thank you to all community members, stakeholders, officials and passionate users of the Denver Park and Recreation System for your support and engagement thus far in planning for the future of the Denver's Park and Recreation System. Over the course of this first phase of understanding the system's existing conditions, we engaged with hundreds of members of the public through community forums and outreach events. The guidance and information provided by the Game Plan Task Force, DPR staff and Game Plan Ambassadors, as well as citywide staff from Community Planning and Development and Public Works, have proved invaluable in furthering our collective understanding of the depth and breadth of the system. We look forward to continued collaboration with these groups and beyond as we enter the next phases of the Game Plan process.

## The Game Plan Task Force

Special thanks to the members of a dedicated volunteer committee of residents, partner organizations, and advocates.

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