

## 78 Parks and Recreation Element

### 7.18.1 Introduction

This Parks and Recreation element, including parks and recreation goals and policies (see Section 2.9) and the County's Parks Plan ~~(adopted by reference) (Appendix I)~~ are the long-range policy and planning documents for Benton County parks and recreation facilities and properties and future opportunities. The Parks Plan ~~included in Appendix I~~ is ~~incorporated by reference as a~~ part of the County's Comprehensive Plan and will guide future decisions related to the County's parks system and parks facilities, with input from the Benton County Park Board. The Park Board advises the County Commissioners on matters of policy, programs, and projects for the development and operation of Benton County's park system.

This Plan Element applies to a 20-year planning horizon, with major review for possible revisions occurring every ~~8-10~~ years as part of the overall review of the Comprehensive Plan. Review of the Parks Plan ~~(Appendix I)~~ occurs every 6 years.



Two Rivers Park

#### 7.18.1.1 Park Planning, Management, and Maintenance

Park maintenance is the responsibility of the County Parks Department. Park planning, capital facilities, and operations and maintenance are overseen by the Sustainable Development Manager,

who provides administrative support to the seven-member Benton County Park Board that advises the Benton County Board of Commissioners.

After coordination with appropriate County departments, consultation user groups, partnering organizations, and the public, the Park Board submits its planning and capital projects to the County Board of Commissioners for adoption. Park budgets are the responsibility of the Board of Commissioners.

### 7.28.1.2 *Washington State Requirements for Recreation Planning*

The Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office is the state agency that manages grant programs for outdoor recreation opportunities. The County's Parks Plan (2014) was prepared in accordance with the requirements specified in the GMA (RCW 36.70A). Additionally, the Parks Plan must be updated every 6 years to remain eligible for funds requested through the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office.

## 7.28.2 **Existing Conditions**

### 7.28.2.1 *Inventory of County Park Facilities*

Benton County currently owns, or operates under lease, ten park facilities on 2,384 acres providing outdoor recreational opportunities and amenities such as lawn activities and picnicking, water and swimming, natural open space and habitat conservation, boat launches, a model airplane facility, a recreational vehicle campground, an equestrian camp, developed shooting facility, and a pioneer cemetery. Benton County subleases all or portions of two parks to non-profit entities (see Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 15 – Parks and Recreation Map). The parks and recreation facilities are organized into the following:

- **Regional Parks** are intended for more diffuse and passive outdoor uses and serve a large region including rural county residents. These parks are meant to preserve large areas of natural open space and support types of recreation that require large areas or uncommon amenities, such as horse riding or miniature aircraft flying.
- **Natural Parks (Preserves) and Trails** are undeveloped areas mostly in their natural conditions that are managed for educational or recreational purposes. These trails preserve native plant and wildlife habitat and promote passive recreation, with established low-intensity use trails developed on many of these properties and future opportunities to promote trails between existing holdings.
- **Special Use** areas include sites that are either smaller and have focused uses or are managed for specific uses and may be subleased and managed by other organizations.

### 7.2.1.18.2.1.1 Regional Parks

The County owns or operates two regional parks.

**Horn Rapids Park** is located 6 miles north of Benton City and along over 5 miles of the north shore of the Yakima River, with about 565 acres of transitional river-to-upland shrub-steppe habitat nestled among other adjoining public lands. The park has an improved campground with full recreational vehicle hookups, showers, restrooms, a horse camp, a model airplane facility, a boat launch, and several miles of multi-use trails. Horn Rapids Park is also used as an outdoor educational center by area schools and [scouting-community](#) organizations. Via trails that continue off-site, visitors can travel up-and-down the Yakima River and hike or ride up onto the Rattlesnake Slope. The park may also become a key location for a future potential recreational trail through the Hanford Site.

**Two Rivers Park** lies on property leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about 2 miles east of Kennewick near the community of Finley. The developed portion of the park is centered around two [large-sheltered](#)[large-sheltered](#) lagoons on the west end, while the east end of the park features the 100-acre Rockwell Woods Natural Area consisting of beaver ponds, riparian woodlands, and marshes



Two Rivers Park Playground

and bisected by a nearly mile-long nature trail. Two Rivers is home to the last downstream developed boat launch in the Tri-Cities area and is used heavily throughout the year. First developed in the late 1960s after the McNary Dam Project levees were built, the west end of the park features a playground, extensive picnicking areas, [and](#) a disc golf course that was added in 2009, [and recently upgraded restroom facilities](#).

### 7.2.1.28.2.1.2 Natural Parks and Trails

The County owns three preserves, with its most recent acquisition of Candy Mountain Preserve in June 2016. [The County is pursuing a fourth preserve opportunity for state-owned land in Badger Canyon through the Washington State Department of Natural Resources Trust Land Transfer Program, as discussed further in Section 8.4.1.](#)

**Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve** is located on the upper ridges and slopes of Badger Mountain in the south Richland area. Shrub-steppe vegetation, primitive trails, expansive views of the Columbia River Basin, and steep slopes characterize the property. The preserve was purchased in partnership with public, private, and state funds with the goals to preserve views, protect upland habitat, and provide for hiking, biking, and horse riding opportunities. Per Resolution 05-27 that created the preserve in 2005, the acreage is also “banked” by Benton County for possible use as

mitigation for shrub-steppe disturbances that may occur elsewhere in the County. Additionally, there is opportunity to potentially connect the Badger Mountain Preserve with the Candy Mountain Preserve.

**Candy Mountain Preserve** is located north of Badger Mountain in the Goose Gap and upper slopes of the Candy Mountain. Added to the park system in 2016, the preserve includes a 1.7-mile trail to the summit with a parking area at the trailhead.



Candy Mountain Preserve

**Wallula Gap Preserve** is located in eastern Benton County above Lake Wallula and across from the 'Twin Sisters' feature in Walla Walla County. The park unit consists of three disconnected parcels that are approximately 110 acres that have remained unchanged since the properties were deeded over to the County in 1984 by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The parcels are remote and generally inaccessible, with one parcel consisting primarily of sheer basalt cliffs. Current legal access to the property is by water only, although the railroad corridor limits that access. In order to access the property by land, an easement would have to cross about 5 miles of privately owned property. The properties are managed as part of the National Natural Landmarks program of the National Park Service, and Benton County provides regular reports to the Park Service on the status and condition of the site.

### **7.2.1.38.2.1.3 Special Use Parks**

The County owns or operates five special use parks, including two vista parks and a shooting facility.

**Horse Heaven Cemetery** was developed south of Benton City in the Horse Heaven Hills as a private pioneer cemetery beginning in 1893. The last burials were in the 1940s, and Benton County took possession of the parcel through a property foreclosure in 1954. Recent improvements include a perimeter driveway and fence, an interpretive sign, and some sitting benches.

**Horse Heaven Vista**, first developed in 1964, is located southeast of Prosser along State Route 221 on the crest of the Horse Heaven Hills overlooking the Lower Yakima Valley. The site offers a sheltered view point, paved parking area, and restrooms.

**Vista Park** is located in the Tri-City Heights neighborhood of northwest Kennewick. It is a small neighborhood park with picnic tables and swing sets that was originally developed by the local Vista Junior Women's Club in 1970. County staff maintains the park including general repair of play equipment, irrigation, and general care of the park. It is the only small park owned by the County in an urban environment.

**Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility (RMSF)** is located approximately 6 miles north of Benton City adjacent to Horn Road. RMSF is the County's largest park unit at about 740 acres. A portion of the property is owned by the State of Washington and used through an agreement with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The remainder of the property was formerly leased from the Bureau of Land Management but was purchased by the County in 2010. Benton County subleases the entire property to its concessionaire—the Tri-Cities Shooting Association (TCSA)—who has overseen maintenance, administration, and operations of the facility since the late 1980s. TCSA is responsible for all capital improvements, though the County occasionally assists financially with certain projects at the advisement of the Park Board. The RMSF is large enough to contain several discrete ranges designed and managed for different shooting disciplines. The facility is open to the public several days per week.

**Hover Park** is located approximately 10 miles southeast of Kennewick along the Columbia River and downstream of Two Rivers Park on property leased from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Presently undeveloped, this park has good potential for future use. It has a pleasant beach area in a protected lagoon. The Burlington Northern Railroad bisects the property. The area also has historical significance. The first wagon train to the area, the Longmire Wagon Train, crossed the Columbia River on rafts near the park in 1853. The first major ferry crossing from Wallula was in the vicinity, and the park is in proximity of the original Hover town site, established in 1898.

### 7.2.28.2.2 *Other Park and Recreation Opportunities*

In addition to County provided parks facilities, there are other facilities provided by state and local agencies such as Crow Butte and Plymouth arks. Also, some park facilities are provided by the cities,

but serve regionally, such as the Columbia Park located in Kennewick and Howard Amon Park in Richland.

**Crow Butte Park** is owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and operated by the Port of Benton. The park is located 15 miles west of Paterson on the historic Lewis & Clark Trail. It is also adjacent to the McNary National Wildlife Refuge, a wintering grounds for hundreds of thousands of migratory waterfowl each year. The 275-acre park provides camping areas, recreational vehicle sites, a marina, boat ramps, swimming, fishing, a bath house, and hiking trails, among other amenities.

**Plymouth Park** is located 1.2 miles west of the Umatilla Bridge on a near-shore in the Columbia River near the Town of Plymouth. The park is owned and operated by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers. The campground offers 32 sites with electric hookups. Amenities include flush and pit toilets, showers, drinking water, a dump station, and playground. The day use area has a swim beach, boat ramp, flush toilets, vault toilet, and courtesy dock (Recreation.gov 2017).

**Other Public Lands** Many of the County's rural residents recreate in natural areas suitable for hunting, fishing, and hiking. In the more remote planning areas of the County, such as Paterson, Plymouth, and Finley, recreational opportunities are often provided by the federally owned waterfront lands that lie along the hydroelectric pools behind each dam.

### 7.2.38.2.3 *Greenway Connections*

Improved public recreational trails are lacking throughout most of the rural County; however, the Tapteal Greenway currently offers connections as discussed below.

**Tapteal Greenway** is a 35-mile corridor along and including the Yakima River extending from Kiona Bend at Benton City to the mouth of the river at Bateman Island in Richland. Recognizing that the Yakima River provides an entirely different kind of recreational experience than the Columbia, the Greenway corridor features a mixture of ecological landscape types and a relatively high percentage of public lands and public river access locations (Table 8-1).

**Table 8-1  
Public Rivershore Land Ownership**

Agency	Acres	Linear miles
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	292	13.5
Richland	236	2
West Richland	N/A	1
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife	10	25
Benton County	784	5.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,322</b>	<b>21.85</b>

The Tapteal Greenway Plan seeks to link these ownerships with a system of river and shoreline trails and paths over the 30-mile stretch of river and to use or improve each public property according to an overall plan. The plan aims to connect public spaces in Benton City, West Richland, and Richland via a network of trails and parklands anchored by the Yakima River.

The Tapteal Greenway Plan was developed jointly during the mid-1990s through a planning effort involving local, state, and federal interests; and implementation of the Tapteal Greenway Plan is the primary mission of the Tapteal Greenway Association<sup>26</sup>.

### 7.3.18.3 Current Trends

#### 7.3.18.3.1 Recreational Demand

Demand for public recreational opportunities and facilities is increasing and will continue to increase as both the urban and rural populations of the County grow and as the growth in overall state population results in "out of area" visitors looking for recreational opportunities (Washington population growth is 100,000 per year).

Based on Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office's 2013 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, walking and hiking continue to be popular activities in Washington. Outdoor team and individual sports (which includes fitness activities like jogging), nature activities, and picnicking and barbequing are also popular in the State.

#### 7.3.28.3.2 Levels of Service and Park Management

The County's Parks Plan has adopted LOS standards that are meant to be used as guidelines, ~~not absolutes only~~. The LOS identified in Table 8-2 is based on the four park types described above:

**Table 8-2**  
**Level of Service Standards**

Park Type	Service Area	Level of Service
Regional	15-mile radius and within an hour drive	5 acres per 1,000 population
Natural	20-mile service radius	5 acres per 1,000 population
Trails	N/A	1.37 miles per 1,000 populations
Special Use	N/A	Case by Case

<sup>26</sup> Tapteal Greenway Association mission available from www.tapteal.org.

In addition to LOS designations, Benton County organizes its ten parks by "level of management," resulting in a two-tiered system.

- **Tier One** parks have daily operational oversight, either by an assigned County park ranger or by concessionaires or volunteers.
- **Tier Two** parks are smaller, have significantly less use overall, and do not have daily active management.

Table 8-3 provides specific information on ownership/lease, size, type, and level of management at each park. [See Appendix A: Map Folio, Figure 15 – Parks and Recreation Map.](#)

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**Table 8-3**  
**Types and Level of Management at Benton County Parks**

Sites	Owner	Acres	Level of Management
<b>Regional</b>			
Horn Rapids Parks	County	564.5	Tier 1
Two Rivers Park	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	159.0	Tier 1
<b>Natural</b>			
Badger Mountain Preserve	County	627.1	Tier 1
Candy Mountain Preserve	County	186.0	Tier 1
Wallula Gap Preserve	County	110.0	Tier 2
<b>Special</b>			
Horse Heaven Cemetery	County	2.0	Tier 2
Horse Heaven Vista	County	6.3	Tier 2
Hover Park	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	175.0	Tier 2
Rattlesnake Mountain Shooting Facility	State and County	740.0	Tier 1
Vista Park	County	0.3	Tier 2

As mentioned, the LOS standards for parks are meant to be used as guidelines, not absolutes. The Parks Plan develops standards to fit with the current population and feedback during the workshop sessions and questionnaire.

According to the Parks Plan, the current park system is not meeting the LOS standards by 374 acres and will need a total of 900 more acres of land to meet those standards 20 years from now (Table 8-4). This acreage analysis does not include special use parks, trail connections, or community

desire for preservation of open space lands in certain sensitive and view corridors. Local citizen requests and interest for improvements, whether they be federal- or County-owned lands, generally focus on improved vehicular and boat access. However, "natural area" recreation is only one type of opportunity. There is also an unmet demand for recreational opportunities that rely upon a higher level of facilities and improvements in more developed parks.

**Table 8-4  
County Parks Level of Service Requirement by 2035**

Park Type	2014 Level of Service (Population 183,400)	2035 Level of Service (Population 236,007)
Regional	917 acres	1,180 acres
Natural	917 acres +	1,180 acres +
Special Use	Case by Case	Case by Case
<b>Total Parkland to meet Level of Service</b>	<b>1,834 acres</b>	<b>2,360 acres</b>
Trails	253 miles	323 miles

Source: Benton County (2014)

## 7.48.4 Future Considerations

### 8.4.1 Open Space Preservation

In accordance with Benton County's 2026 Comprehensive Plan and the GMA's requirement to identify open space corridors within and between urban growth areas, the Open Space Preservation memorandum was created to uphold the focus of safeguarding open space land. The Open Space Preservation memorandum details the County priorities for of the county regarding the protecting of open space lands and corridors, and more specifically those "naturally vegetated steep slopes and elevated ridges" and the lands surrounding these areas (AC Geo 2025). It also reviews how the county currently meets these state mandates and evaluates the corridors' environmental and recreational uses. It recommends strategies that promote open space protection while working with county policies around recreation, wildlife habitat, and natural resource conservation.

Benton County has mapped and identified priority open space corridors by focusing on key habitats, wetlands and floodplains, and linkage routes providing connections along rivers and ridgetops, and between larger spaces. Rivers and ridges are essential characteristics of Benton County's landscape and are key elements of the open lands network. The Columbia, Yakima, and Snake rivers offer essential ecological functions along with the floodplains and wetlands which function for water

quality, food storage, and habitat connectivity. The plan gives guidance on important shoreline vegetation conservation that preserves ecological functions and reduces flood risks. It provides instructions for conserving habitats and scenic resources that provide trails and public access recreation areas, as well as preserving additional area along the Horse Heaven Hills and Red Mountain ridges, to complement the open space areas already protected along Rattlesnake, Badger and Candy mountains, and Red Mountain ridges. These ridges contribute to natural vistas and support the mostly undisturbed shrubsteppe habitat. Together with the above-mentioned rivers, they form the backbone of a connected open space network that connects urban growth areas and natural virtues.

The Open Space memorandum explains the interest of the county identifies an early opportunity to enhance open space in the County by in acquiring DNR lands from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources for in Badger Canyon for conservation purposes. The land is located north of the Kennewick Irrigation District canal and extends along the hillside. in the Badger Canyon area contains two parcels totaling 429 acres. This land contains valuable shrubsteppe habitat as well as opportunities for mountain biking, hiking and other low-intensity recreational activities. It is also next to federal land that could also be protected in the future as open space and support similar recreational activities.



DNR Land in Badger Canyon

#### 7.4.18.4.2 *Key Opportunities-Capital Improvements to Meet Demands*

Capital expenditures to enhance recreational use of County parklands are developed as part of the Capital Facilities element, Chapter 9, and should be prioritized to focus first on locations that have current facilities deficits and/or on park lands where the provision of additional recreational facilities can leverage other recreation related economic and visitor benefits beyond the park itself. Major improvements considered in the Parks Plan are mentioned below.

**Horn Rapids Park.** Within the unincorporated area, the land and water resources of the park are the central element of the Taptal Greenway Plan. Development of Horn Rapids Park according to its Master Plan would provide a regional destination point, as well as an activity center for the Greenway. The County ~~2025-2030~~<sup>2017-2022</sup> CIP identifies ~~four~~<sup>three</sup> projects for Horn Rapids Park: 1) addition of a new shop expansion of the maintenance shop; 2) paving of the driveway to the office/maintenance area; and 3) development of a new master plan for the park. A parking lot improvement plan, and 4) a gardens renovation project.

**Two Rivers Park.** Improvements are needed for the boat launch, dock, nature trail (boardwalk addition), restroom facilities, and signage. The County CIP considers ~~three~~<sup>two</sup> major capital projects for Two Rivers Park: 1) remodel of the boat launch, including replacement of all floating docks; ~~and~~ 2) complete replacement of the main restroom at the central part of the park, and 3) rapidly replace the swimming boundary.

**Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve Improvements.** Anticipated improvements include ~~trail connections to adjacent properties both to the east (Badger Butte/Little Badger Mountain) and to the west (Candy and Red mountains). The 2017-2022 CIP includes improvement to the Summit Road that connects Dallas Road to the summit area along the west ridgeline. This road follows a utility easement and is used numerous times daily by vendors who need access to the summit, as well as for park business. Improvements would include choosing a formal route, grading in some areas, removal of large cobbles, and placement of suitable coarse gravel.~~



Badger Mountain Preserve

**Improvements to Other Parks and Facilities.** In the special use parks, trail and access improvements and maintenance are important. These improvements are done as funding becomes available and are based the County's Parks Plan and as prioritized by the Park Board. Some facilities are operated by County partners who are responsible for maintenance and improvements (e.g., RMSF is operated by the TCSA).

Other improvements as indicated in the CIP are listed below:

- Horse Heaven Vista will have a large entrance sign and placement of two standard alert signs (one each direction) along the highway.
- Horse Heaven Cemetery will also have a large entrance sign as well as placement of a marker recognizing all known burials in the cemetery.
- Hover Park will add a dedicated, purpose-built parking area at the end of Hover Road, lined with barriers, and able to easily accommodate multiple horse trailers. The gravel lot will measure approximately 200 feet by 50 feet and will include appropriate vehicle access controls.
- If the County is successful in acquiring the DNR property in Badger Canyon then improvements for this property may also be included in the County's CIP.

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