

GREATER PHOENIX FORWARD

*Sustaining and Enhancing the
Human-Services Infrastructure*

PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN AN ERA OF GROWTH

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CHAPTER 12



PARKS AND RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES IN AN ERA OF GROWTH

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The demand for recreation opportunities and facilities in Greater Phoenix has undergone tremendous growth and diversification in recent years. Recreation opportunity demand can be measured in terms of desired activities, desired experiences, desired settings/resources and desired benefits. Recently, Arizona State Parks¹ commissioned a study to assess the recreation activities, settings, and benefits most desired by Arizonans. In addition to a statewide sample, the researchers segmented resident populations by county and ethnicity (i.e. Hispanic/Non-Hispanic). The current participation rates for 20 recreation activities are presented in [Table 1](#). In terms of overall participation (user days), the top five activities in Maricopa County were 1) play a sport, 2) outside foot activity (walking, hiking, jogging), 3) ride a bicycle, mountain bike, or horse, 4) drive for pleasure, and 5) visit a park, natural, or cultural feature. Other high-use activities were attending an outdoor event, visiting a wilderness area or preserve, picnicking, and swimming.

While ethnic/racial breakdowns were not available for Maricopa County, Hispanic/Non-Hispanic participation data were available for the statewide sample. For example, Hispanics statewide are more likely to drive for pleasure, attend an outdoor event, picnic, and tent camp than non-Hispanics. Non-Hispanics are more likely to play a sport, ride a bicycle, drive off-road, fish, or go RV camping than Hispanics. While such differences do exist, however, a much greater proportion of the overall recreation participation is common across the two groups.

Recently, there has been a growing national interest by both recreation practitioners and researchers² about the benefits associated with leisure behavior. At the simplest level, leisure benefits refer to all value added from leisure participation or experiences. A benefit can be thought of as a change that is viewed to be advantageous—an improvement in condition, or gain to an individual, a group, to society, or to another entity. Benefits are important because they identify the values and outcomes that underlie recreation behavior.

The 2008 Arizona Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) studied the perceived benefits provided by parks, recreation, and open space. Thirteen benefits were assessed from both statewide and county resident samples. The results are presented in [Table 2](#). Importance was measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. In the eyes of Maricopa County residents, the top two parks and recreation benefits were tied: promotes a healthy lifestyle/physical activity and provides opportunities for family interaction. The other strongly perceived benefits include making the city/region a better place to live, providing constructive activities for youth, promoting mental health, and increasing community pride. The statewide sample indicated that Hispanic residents valued the economic benefits of parks, recreation, and open space more than non-Hispanics.

Another approach to understanding recreation demand is to examine the types of recreation programs and services most consumed by the public. In terms of organized programs,

youth and adult sports (classes, teams, leagues, and tournaments) are likely the most participated-in form of organized recreation. Sport opportunities and facilities are offered by both public and nonprofit youth agencies (e.g. Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and the Youth Sports Foundation). Unfortunately, there is not a reliable source of available data on how many adults or youth participate in sports programs in Greater Phoenix. Data do exist for swimming and golf lessons and for rounds of golf played on public courses.

After-school programs for youth are extremely popular and serve an important social need, especially for single- or dual-working parent families. The data presented below (Table 3) indicate that public parks and recreation and non-profit agencies served more than 138,000 youth in after-school programs last year (it should be noted that several agencies do not track this data). Another 85,812 youth registered for classes or programs in community centers; a total of 121,519 adults did the same. In addition to the 71 municipal community centers, the Valley of the Sun YMCA and local Boys & Girls Clubs provide another 44 community centers for recreation programs and social services. While the cities often provide centers to address the needs of adults and seniors, the Boys & Girls Clubs more often focus on youth programs in low-income or older parts of the cities. In fact, several nonprofit organizations (Valley of the Sun YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Phoenix, Phoenix Zoo, Desert Botanical Gardens, ABIL, and Salvation Army) have developed partnerships with Phoenix that included using city bond funds for constructing facilities and providing recreation and social services. The YMCA focuses more on recreation programs for families and youth, and has its strongest participation in suburban locations. The YMCA also partners with local parks and recreation agencies and with schools to provide youth recreation and sport opportunities throughout the Phoenix area.

TABLE 1 | Arizona Hispanic/Non-Hispanic Participation and Maricopa County Recreation Participation

Activity	Hispanic Days/Yr*	Non-Hispanic Days/Yr*	% Overall** Participation	Total Recreation User Days/Year**
Play a Sport	29.4	35.2	75.5	151,268,676
Foot Activity (Walking, Hiking, Jogging)	26.0	27.5	76.3	91,250,110
Ride a Bicycle, Mountain Bike or Horse	14.8	18.1	54.9	66,658,917
Drive for Pleasure	26.5	21.7	83.2	60,894,216
Visit a Park, Natural or Cultural Feature	12.9	12.5	86.2	43,709,669
Attend an Outdoor Event	13.0	10.8	77.4	39,623,199
Visit a Wilderness Area/Nature Preserve	13.0	12.5	70.9	28,239,738
Picnicking	10.3	9.3	73.7	26,306,009
Swim, Canoe, Kayak in Natural Setting	7.2	7.3	45.0	20,504,823
Go to a Dog Park	3.9	3.9	23.5	17,585,987
Fishing	4.7	6.7	27.8	18,607,579
Off-road Driving: ATV, Dirt Bike, 4-wheel	7.9	9.2	23.5	14,667,151
Boat, Jet Ski, Water Ski	2.5	5.9	25.4	12,514,509
Tent Camping	3.5	3.0	26.9	8,792,993
Nature Study or Educational Activity	1.3	3.5	28.7	7,917,343
RV Camping	1.1	2.3	22.9	6,311,983
Target Shooting	3.1	3.4	15.0	4,414,739
Rock or Wall Climbing	1.2	1.5	11.0	3,210,719
Hunting	1.6	1.6	7.0	2,663,438
Extreme Sport: BMX, Snowboarding	1.2	1.4	7.0	2,517,496

* AZ per capita/rates.

** Maricopa County (MAG) Totals.

Source: Arizona State Parks Board, 2007.

TABLE 2 | Importance of Parks and Recreation Benefits for Arizona and Maricopa County Residents

Perceived Benefit from Parks and Recreation	All Arizona Residents		Maricopa County Residents (rank)
	Hispanic	Non-Hispanic	
Attracts New Businesses (to Area)	3.49	2.97	3.00 (13)
Educates People About the Environment	3.88	3.60	3.61 (9)
Attracts Tourists to the Region	3.91	3.60	3.44 (11)
Increases Property Value	4.11	3.89	4.06 (7)
Provides Constructive Activities for Youth	4.20	4.14	4.22 (4)
Promotes a Healthy Lifestyle/Physical Activity	4.48	4.42	4.50 (1)
Promotes Mental Health	4.12	4.08	4.19 (5)
Protects Natural and Cultural Resources	4.10	4.00	3.96 (8)
Increases Community Pride	4.19	4.10	4.17 (6)
Makes Cities and Regions Better Places to Live	4.30	4.38	4.44 (3)
Provides Opportunities for Family Interaction	4.46	4.42	4.50 (1)
Helps Local/Regional Economic Development	3.83	3.56	3.54 (10)
Increases Understanding/Tolerance of Others	3.75	3.38	3.43 (12)

Source: Arizona State Parks Board, 2007.

The Challenge

At the core of the challenge to provide parks, open space, and recreation opportunities in Greater Phoenix is the area's dynamic population growth. Maricopa County has grown from less than a

million residents in 1970 to 3.77 million in 2006. Between 2000 and 2006, Maricopa County grew by 696,000 residents, the largest net increase of any county in the United States. Already containing the fourth-largest county

TABLE 3 | Participation in Greater Phoenix Municipal and Nonprofit Recreation Programs

Program Participation	City of Phoenix	Other Municipal Agencies	Nonprofit Agencies	Greater Phoenix Total
City Park Visits	NA	NA	NA	44,241,669*
Youth After School Programs	18,971	64,727	54,449	138,147
Youth Classes/Centers	13,402	42,084	30,326	85,812
Adult Classes/Centers	10,370	56,109	55,040	121,519
Golf Lessons	5,500	2,816		8,316
Outdoor Education Programs	2,319	2,768	12,000	17,087
Golf Rounds Played	320,000	550,531	NA	870,531

* Virden 2006.

Source: Virden, 2007b.

TABLE 4 | Historic and Projected Population Growth
PHOENIX AND MARICOPA COUNTY, 1990-2012

	1990	2005	2012 (projected)
Phoenix			
Population	983,403*	1,377,980*	1,806,584
Percent Hispanic	20.0**	41.8**	49.5
Percent White	71.8**	48.3**	40.8
Maricopa County			
Population	2,122,101*	3,648,545*	4,499,336
Percent Hispanic	16.3**	29.2**	33.6
Percent White	77.1**	61.2**	56.2

Source: * U.S. Census Bureau, 2007. ** Tom Rex, ASU.



population in the nation, Greater Phoenix is now expanding into Yavapai and Pinal counties, as well.

A historically conservative 3% annual increase of the Phoenix and Maricopa County population between 2007 and

2012 would still yield over 618,169 new residents (a 16% increase) over the next five years. Table 4 presents both historical population growth and projected growth through 2012. Meeting the parks, open space, and leisure needs of

4.4 million residents will indeed provide many new challenges for all parks and recreation providers. Much of the growth is occurring in newer and less dense suburban communities. Among their most critical needs is finding the capital resources to purchase land for parks, public swimming pools and community centers, and other recreation facilities, and the long-term operation of these facilities.

The challenge of providing parks, open space, and recreation opportunities is also driven by changes in population composition. The Greater Phoenix population is growing more diverse in terms of age, income, and ethnic/racial make-up. The mean age for Maricopa County residents is 33.4 years, nearly three years younger than the U.S. average. While the baby boomers and retirement-aged population are large segments, the youth and young-adult age cohorts are the areas of greatest growth—the 0-34 age cohorts are all larger (proportionally) than the national average. The median earnings of Maricopa County residents are slightly lower than the national average. The poverty rate in Phoenix is slightly higher than the U.S. average, while the rate for Maricopa County is slightly lower. U.S. census data suggest that senior citizens enjoy less poverty than their U.S. counterparts, while the poverty rate for children (and households with children) is considerably higher than the U.S. average. One implication of these demographics is an increased need for after-school youth recreation programs, youth centers, and sport fields/facilities, particularly in lower-income urban areas.

Perhaps the most pronounced demographic shift has been in the ethnicity/racial make up. Hispanics are moving toward a majority population in the City of Phoenix in the next 10 years. Table 4 also shows the historic and projected ethnic/racial changes for Hispanics and Whites in Phoenix and Maricopa County. The percentage changes occurring between 2000 and 2005 were projected for the next seven

years (2005 to 2012) to provide an estimate of what the ethnic/racial composition might look like in 2012. Clearly, parks and recreation services will be expected to address the needs of the growing Hispanic population segment, particularly in the older areas of Phoenix and the established suburbs.

All of the above forces—continued population growth, a more diverse population, and growing competition for land—place demands on parks and recreation agencies. Additional parks, open space, and recreation facilities are needed, particularly in the growing suburbs and outlying areas where open space is still available. A less visible challenge emerges from the older areas of Phoenix, Glendale, Scottsdale, Tempe, Mesa, and Chandler, where aging park systems, community centers, and public swimming pools need maintenance and infrastructure improvements. These same areas are home to an increasing Hispanic population with needs that present new challenges and opportunities to recreation professionals. Municipal parks and recreation agencies and nonprofit recreation/social-service agencies together must partner to provide services in the urban core. These challenges are growing and will also drive the need for additional trained recreation professionals over the next five years.

Public Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Facilities

Phoenix-area residents have a strong relationship with their public parks, mountain preserves, trails, and other recreation facilities. Indeed, for many, the Arizona outdoor lifestyle was a primary reason for moving to Greater Phoenix. But as the demand for new parks and leisure opportunities increase, urban development continues to devour thousands of acres of natural desert lands each year. A major challenge is to plan, finance, and develop new park, open-space, and recreation facilities in an environment of rapid growth. Urban-growth models at ASU project that most agricultural lands and state lands will

convert to residential and industrial purposes by 2030.³ The state and federally owned lands in Maricopa, Pinal, and Yavapai counties will become an important source for new parklands and desert preserves over the next 20 years. There's a critical need for state land reform and a reexamination of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act to address future open space needs. The Recreation and Public Purposes Act was used (in partnership with the USDI Bureau of Land Management) in the 1950s and 1960s to obtain federal lands for the Maricopa County Parks system.

Maricopa County contains a large proportion of public lands that offer wonderful outdoor recreation opportunities. Table 5 provides an overview of county land ownership. Approximately 40% of the land is owned and managed by the federal government, either as national forest (USDA Forest Service) or public lands (USDI Bureau of Land Management). State lands comprise another 11%, serving both as an outdoor recreation resource and as a potential future desert preserve or public park. While some outdoor recreation occurs on the 4.6% of county lands that are Native American reservation, these primarily offer commercial recreation opportunities in the form of resorts, racing venues, golf courses, and casino gambling. Currently about 29% of Maricopa County is privately owned.

Just more than 209,000 acres of Greater Phoenix are protected as park or preserve (including several mountain preserves). In Phoenix, 12.8% of the land base is protected as parklands. However, only about 6,000 of the 37,637 acres of parkland in Phoenix are for developed flatland parks; most are in large mountain parks and desert preserves. A recent countywide telephone survey indicates that both parks and open space are very important to Maricopa County residents.⁴ Furthermore, Maricopa County residents reported 44,241,669 visits to city parks in 2006.⁵ The Maricopa County Parks system received an additional 1,255,733 visits the same year. Tourists are also an important segment of park visitors. Recent park research indicates about 19% of park visitors are tourists from out-of-state or are international visitors.⁶

TABLE 5

Maricopa County Land Ownership

County Land Owner	Percent
Federal Government (Tonto N.F.)	9
Federal Government (BLM)	31
Military	14
Native American	5
State Lands	11
Private Lands	29
Other	1
Total	100

Source: Maricopa County, 2001.

TABLE 6 | Greater Phoenix Parks and Recreation Facilities | 2006

	City of Phoenix	Maricopa County	Other Municipal Agencies	Greater Phoenix Total
Acres of Parklands	37,637	119,598	52,246	209,400
Neighborhood Parks	88	0	273	361
Playgrounds	143	14	285	442
Sport Fields	154	1	491	646
Regional Parks/Preserves	15	11	52	78
Developed Parks	174	0	362	536
Total parks	181	11	370	562
Community Centers	35	0	36	71
Golf Courses	8	3	5	16
Swimming Pools	29	0	44	73
Major League Training/Ballpark Facilities	2	1	7	10
Museums	2	0	8	10

Source: Virden, 2007b.

TABLE 7 | Human Resource and 2006 Operating Budgets:
Parks & Recreation and Nonprofit Agencies

Agency (Public Parks & Recreation or Nonprofit Youth/Family)	Volunteers	FTE Employees	Operating Budget (2006-07)
Apache Junction	NA	44	\$5,553,420
Arizona State Parks (Metro Area only employees)	NA	105	27,278,700
Avondale	NA	34	4,540,951
Buckeye	NA	30	2,240,627
Chandler	NA	223	30,807,763
Gilbert	NA	66	15,969,000
Glendale	917	99	14,404,403
Goodyear	400	21	13,748,492
Fountain Hills (Town of)	NA	11	1,512,071
Maricopa County Parks and Recreation	NA	90	6,340,310
Mesa	3,867	154	32,761,837
Phoenix	15,371	1,186	123,778,000
Peoria	64,972	110	21,735,732
Tempe	1,400	126	16,321,680
Scottsdale	NA	216	21,344,707
Surprise	NA	64	14,664,300
Valley of the Sun YMCA	3,309	268	49,000,000
Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale	736	59	9,800,000
Boys & Girls Clubs of East Valley	865	67	\$5,365,933
Boys & Girls Clubs of Metro Phoenix	213	87	8,500,000
Total	92,050	3,060	\$425,667,926

Source: Virden, 2007b.

Greater Phoenix offers several national award-winning park systems that include a variety of parks, ranging from smaller neighborhood parks to the 16,000-plus-acre South Mountain Park. In fact, the cities of Phoenix, Tempe, Mesa, and Scottsdale have earned multiple Gold Medal Awards from the National Recreation and Parks Association for excellence in parks and recreation management (Peoria was a finalist in 2006). Greater Phoenix boasts three of the 10 largest municipal parks in the country; South Mountain is the second-largest in the nation (Arizona State Parks Board, 2007). The 119,199-acre regional park system managed by the Maricopa County Parks is considered the largest county parks system in the nation with its 10 parks.

Table 6 offers summary totals of park and related recreation-facility resources based upon self-reported agency data and municipal budget information collected in the spring of 2007.⁷ There are 562 public parks in the Phoenix area. All major cities in Greater Phoenix are represented in the table; however, data could not be located for four small

municipalities (<20,000 population), so the table slightly underestimates the Greater Phoenix totals. The 361 smaller neighborhood parks are commonly found in residential areas and serve as the closest-to-home park resources for most Phoenixians. Sport fields, picnic areas, basketball courts, and playgrounds are commonly found in neighborhood parks (as well as community and district parks). The largest regional parks protect large tracts of natural desert as well as provide opportunities for hiking, camping, picnicking, biking, and group sites that can be reserved for larger recreation gatherings.

Public parks and recreation agencies also provide community centers with a variety of programs designed for youth, families, adults, and senior citizens. These agencies currently manage 71 community centers in Greater Phoenix. Another 44 community centers focusing on recreation opportunities for youth and families are provided by nonprofit recreation agencies such as YMCAs and Boys & Girls Clubs. There are 73 public swimming pools (another 16 provided by nonprofit agencies), and 16 public

golf courses that provided for 870,000 rounds of golf in 2006. In addition to providing sports fields, courts, and leagues for youth and adults, Phoenix-area parks and recreation agencies also provide sport stadiums for Major League Baseball spring training and Chase Field (the home of the Arizona Diamondbacks is managed by Maricopa County). Many of the Valley's popular museums (e.g. Pueblo Grande and Mesa Southwest Museum) are also operated by these public agencies.

While Greater Phoenix is home to high-quality parks and recreation facilities, the future will require the acquisition of new parks and open space as well as the renovation of older parks and facilities for the growing and aging metropolitan area. More creative funding mechanisms, such as the \$250 million Phoenix Parks and Preserves Initiative (PPPI), an excise tax revenue-driven initiative passed in 1999 by Phoenix residents, are needed to fund the acquisition of new park resources and to renovate parks and recreation facilities in older areas. It is important that the PPPI was renewed (as Proposition A) in May 2008, as its initial funding will end in the fall of 2009. Also, desert conditions require special design attention. Parks, sport fields, and golf courses will require innovative designs that incorporate water conservation for more efficient turf management and shading techniques. Finally, there is a critical need for more coordination between government jurisdictions for planning, constructing and managing our parks, open space, and multi-modal trail system.

Human-Resource Needs

The parks and recreation service professions are currently a \$425 million industry in the Greater Phoenix area.⁸ By 2012, they will be well over a half-billion-dollar industry, with significant new workforce demands in both the public and nonprofit sectors. Public park and recreation agencies that serve the urban area were included in the human-resource assessment that follows. Additionally, Boys & Girls Clubs and YMCA branches from Greater

Phoenix are also included as they are important providers of recreation services, particularly to youth and families. However, extra-urban public land (e.g. national parks, BLM public lands, state parks and national forests) management agencies, commercial recreation businesses, and clinical therapeutic recreation organizations were excluded from this assessment.

The parks and recreation profession is represented in Arizona by the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association (APRA). APRA provides professional development for its members and advocates for the advancement of parks and recreation issues statewide. The largest parks and recreation employer in Arizona (and Greater Phoenix) is the City of Phoenix Parks and Recreation Department, which employs 1,186 full-time employees (FTE) with a 2006-07 operating budget of \$123,778,000 (Table 7). In total, parks and recreation agencies account for 2,579 full-time positions. Approximately 35-40% of those are in the recreation-programming area, which can include sports, aquatics, community-center classes and programming, youth services, senior services, nature center managers, museum staff, after-school programs, special events, outdoor recreation programs, and community-based inclusion/therapeutic recreation programs. The other 60-65% are parks and maintenance staff that includes park rangers, park managers, park planners, landscape architects, turf specialists, parks maintenance staff, golf course managers, custodial staff, and groundskeepers.

The largest nonprofit agency delivering recreation programs and services is the Valley of the Sun YMCA, with 14 program branches throughout Greater Phoenix. The YMCA employs 268 full-time employees and has an operating budget of \$49 million. The Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Scottsdale, East Valley, and Metropolitan Phoenix employ a total of 213 full-time employees (FTEs) with a total operating budget of \$23,665,933. All of the public and nonprofit agencies utilize a significant number of part-time employees, but reliable data are not available for this number.

Over the next five years, there is a projected need for 402 new FTE positions (not including attrition or retirements) in the parks and recreation services professions in Greater Phoenix.⁹ The projected FTE increases are considerably higher for the nonprofit recreation sector than the public sector, based upon historical hiring trends. The YMCA and Boys & Girls Clubs have reported that they will open 15 new branches over the next five years and hire 169 new full-time employees (a 35% increase). A panel of parks and recreation experts projected that public parks and recreation agencies will increase staff only 9% over the next five years, adding 233 new full-time positions (Table 8). The 9% increase is in line with recent increases and reflects the inability of municipal and county parks and recreation agencies to keep up with population growth, which is projected at 16% for the same five-year period. The reality is that municipalities, especially those in growing suburban areas, are better equipped to generate new capital funding, often through impact fees, than generating new operational funds. The parks and recreation expert panel suggested that an increase of 20% (518 FTE positions) in full-

time employees is actually needed over the next five years, and would better position public agencies to meet the aspirational demand for parks and recreation services.

The Future: Critical Issues and Human-Services Challenges

In June 2007 a group of 10 parks and recreation experts from Greater Phoenix was invited to participate in a half-day facilitated focus group at ASU. The participants included a community-service director, parks and recreation directors and assistant directors from Phoenix, and several communities in the both the West Valley and East Valley. The purpose of the focus group was to assess the critical issues and challenges the parks and recreation profession will face over the next five years. The panel was also asked to project the level of human services needed to sustain the current level of service and recreation opportunity, as well as an aspirational level that would improve the level of service by 2012. While the focus group discussion identified many provocative issues and suggestions, what follows includes only the major issues that most participants prioritized as important.

Critical Issues: Parks, Open Space, and Recreation Facilities

Capital funding for parks, open space, and recreation facilities is inadequate and fails to keep up with new capital improvements and land acquisition needed by the growing Phoenix area.

TABLE 8 | Growth in Parks and Recreation Human-Services Workforce | THROUGH 2012

Sector	Current	Next 5 Years (2012)	Total
Public Parks and Recreation	2,589	233 (9%)	2,822
Nonprofit Recreation Agencies	471	169 (35%)	640
Grand Total	3,060	402 (13.1%)	3,462

Source: Virden, 2007b.



- When new parks and recreation facilities do come online, the operational funding to operate and maintain them is often inadequate and often overlooked by policymakers.
- There currently is very little capital improvement funding to rebuild, maintain or renovate older parks and recreation facilities in established suburbs and the urban core—particularly the renovation of older public pools, community centers, and parks. Finding funding for new projects in the urban core is also very challenging.
- A critical need exists for pedestrian, biking, and equestrian connectivity to/with trails, and public transportation routes from the urban core to areas further out.
- A growing disparity exists between the quality of parks and recreation facilities available to lower-income and older urban neighborhoods versus newer, growing parts of the Valley.
- Municipal agencies struggle with the most efficient way of maintaining parks, grounds, and facilities—some cities outsource and others employ park maintenance and turf employees.
- Meeting compliance with the Americans with Disability Act for full accessibility to parks, museums, outdoor areas, and recreation facilities is a constant challenge.

Critical Issues: Recreation Programs and Human Resources

- The health-related benefits of parks and recreation are currently central to a national campaign (National Recreation and Parks Association) to promote healthy lifestyles, families, and communities, and to help address the exploding national obesity problem.
- The current focus on health-physical activity/fitness increases the demand for sports, hiking, walking, swimming, biking, and active opportunities for youth—which in turn creates additional program and facility demands.
- Operating budgets for recreation programs and human resources are losing ground; per-capita spending for operating budgets and full-time employees are decreasing.
- Recruiting and retaining good employees are constant challenges. Workloads, salaries, and training are ongoing issues that must be addressed along with attrition from retiring employees. Many agencies are overly dependent on part-time employees.
- As the population grows, the demand for youth activities(after-school, summer, and youth sports), sports leagues, senior, and disability-sensitive programming continues to increase.
- Providing inclusive recreation services for all members of society regardless of income, gender, age, disability, or racial/ethnic background requires employees with inclusion-services training.
- Parks and recreation agencies require better data, information, and systems than in the past—more than ever, recreation agencies are being asked to track, report, and justify their social, political, and economic value.

Aspirational Goals for 2012

- There is a critical need in growing areas for comprehensive planning (ahead of growth and across political boundaries) to identify new large parks, trails and open space, and for legal and financial mechanisms that allow for acquiring future federal and/or state lands for parks and open space at an affordable price.
- Partnerships—such as with schools and private developers—are key revenue enhancers. In addition, partnering with nonprofit organizations, private sponsors, volunteers, and schools increases efficiency in providing recreation programs.
- New and more diverse entrepreneurial ideas are needed from professionals and policymakers to identify new operational and capital improvement revenue streams.
- Parks and recreation agencies must do better at measuring and articulating the impact of their services on the community, perhaps through better partnerships with the academic community.
- More full-time employees are needed in the parks and recreation workforce to adequately address the demands of 4.4 million residents. In particular, more youth and senior programmers, inclusion and therapeutic recreation staff, park rangers and park police, and more bilingual staff—an increase of 518 full-time employees (20%) by 2012—would allow public agencies to keep pace with population growth and their nonprofit partners.



A GROWING DISPARITY EXISTS BETWEEN THE QUALITY OF PARKS AND RECREATION FACILITIES AVAILABLE TO LOWER-INCOME AND OLDER URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS VERSUS NEWER, GROWING PARTS OF THE VALLEY.

Parks and recreation human-service professionals are confronted with major leadership challenges as they seek to meet the future needs of Greater Phoenix residents. The parks and recreation profession must work together to mobilize community leaders, policymakers, and other residents in an effort to educate and advocate for increased community support to enhance public parks, open space, and recreation opportunities. Future planning requires that professionals think beyond their municipal or agency jurisdictions. The future will require local agencies to cooperate, plan, and think comprehensively about regional needs in Greater Phoenix.

We face a double-barreled problem: Population growth is requiring new parks and facilities while, at the same time, many of our older parks and recreation facilities in established areas are deteriorating. Several Valley cities are challenged for funding to redevelop downtown areas with new parks, public spaces, and pedestrian-friendly streetscapes. While developer impact fees are useful, they can not provide for large parks and open space or the renovation of older parks and facilities. Voter-approved initiatives, such as the Phoenix PPPI, and bond elections offer other useful funding tools which most municipalities can employ.

Our regional county parks system, built in the 1960s, is now too small to meet the future need for open space. State and federal lands surrounding Greater Phoenix offer the two most viable sources for future open space and large regional parks. Both the Recreation and Public Purposes Act (federal land) and state constitutional land reform need to be revisited and debated as potential avenues for acquiring new regional parks and open space. Other states have also successfully used "special parks districts," which allow for dedicated park financing across regional jurisdictions upon approval by voters living in the proposed district. Parks and recreation professionals need to be at the table in all these discussions.

New challenges also arise for inclusive programs and opportunities to meet the increasingly diverse needs of our youth, inner city residents, families, elderly, and special-needs populations. Park and recreation services can play an important role in alleviating obesity and other community health problems linked to physical inactivity. Recreation professionals must demonstrate that their programs keep kids and adults healthy, and contribute to community quality of life and the economy. They must find smarter ways to price services, partner with other municipalities, and the nonprofit and private sectors. Finally, a new generation of energetic, well-trained professionals is needed to tackle the growing challenges of the profession. The graying/retiring of existing professionals, many of who entered the parks and recreation profession in the 1970s and 1980s, is a growing concern. Universities, the Arizona Parks and Recreation Association, and local agencies need to join together to develop, train, and energize the next generation of professionals in tune with the future needs of Greater Phoenix. ■

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NOTES

- 1 Arizona State Parks, 2007.
- 2 Driver et al. 1991; Allen 1996; Moore and Driver, 2005.
- 3 Arizona State University Landscape Ecology and Modeling Laboratory, 2007.
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