



MADISON COUNTY, NC  
PARKS AND RECREATION COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2015





## MADISON COUNTY APPROVAL RESOLUTION

Madison County has completed a county-wide Comprehensive Recreation Plan (Plan) under the direction of the Madison County Commissioners and Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The priorities and recommendations identified herein are the direct result of public input from a county-wide community survey and series of public meetings. The Plan was presented to the Madison County Commissioners during their December 9, 2014 meeting. After review and the public presentation, the Plan was approved by the Madison County Board of Commissioners on \_\_\_\_\_.





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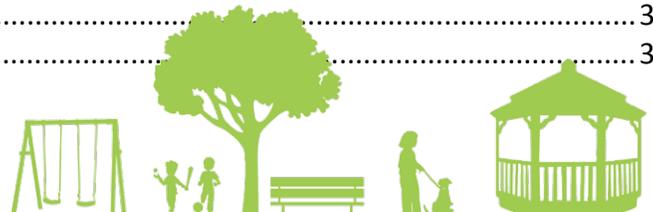
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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Why Complete a Parks and Recreation Plan?

In January of 2014, Madison County Parks and Recreation Department (MCPRD), under the direction of the Madison County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board and the Madison County Board of Commissioners, was advised to undertake the task of obtaining a community directed, county-wide Comprehensive Plan for Parks and Recreation (Plan) within Madison County. This Plan will help create a vision for a sustainable, interconnected system of parks, recreation facilities, recreational programming, open space, and trails to meet the needs of the communities within Madison County. These are vital elements of livable, thriving communities.

Going through a county-wide planning process is important for several reasons. The process provides a forum for residents and communities to share:

1. Their vision and priorities for their community and county;
2. Updates on current projects underway or needs for upcoming efforts;
3. Recommendations for county-level programming and facilities.

The Plan also describes key factors and issues that may play a role in the development of the Madison County parks and recreation system, such as facility condition or how frequently a site is used. This information will provide the foundation for the analysis of the existing parks system and assessment of future community needs.

Finally, the Plan should not function as a static guide – it should be revisited annually to ensure priorities are still consistent with the needs and desires of the community.

The Plan will include all of these elements and provide clear recommendations for implementation. The Plan has identified several areas where the county and towns may work together to fulfill the priorities identified in the Plan – this is highly recommended as financial and personnel resources are often limited.

### Project Overview

The MCPRD began the planning process in March 2014 with the creation of a Citizen’s Survey. The Survey was distributed in April to gain broad county input. The results were analyzed and formatted for a presentation. In August of 2014, Land of Sky Regional Council was asked to assist facilitate public meetings and develop the plan.

The Parks and Recreation Advisory Board meeting was held on September 25, 2014. This kicked off the open public input meetings. Each meeting included a presentation of survey results and opportunity for attendees to share their priorities and recommendations for the county as well as their own community. Subsequent meetings were held in:

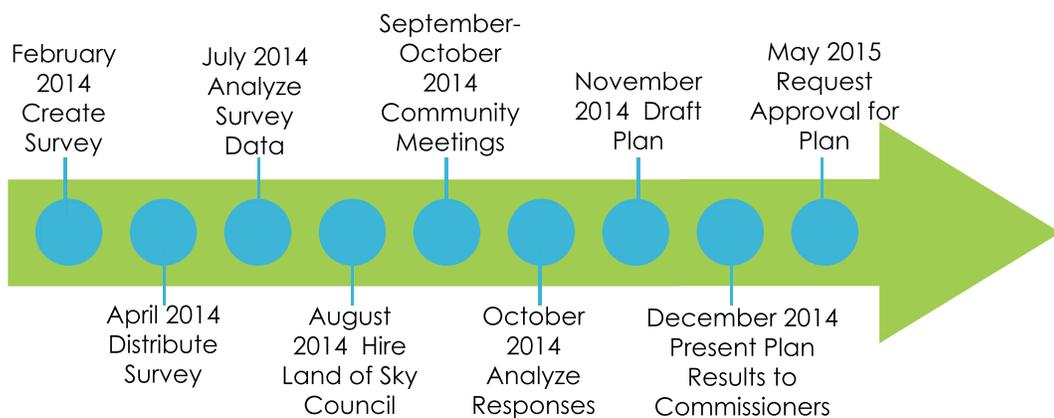
- Hot Springs – Sept. 29, 6:00pm
- Laurel – Sept. 30, 6:00pm
- Brush Creek (Marshall) – Oct. 6, 6:00pm
- Mars Hill – Oct. 7, 6:00pm

A Plan update was presented to the Board of Commissioners on November 18 (Appendix D), and final draft plan was presented on December 9, 2014. Following is a summary of the planning steps:



- Collected and evaluated information related to the existing county-owned and operated recreational facilities and programs.
- Developed and distributed a community survey to assess public input about desired recreational facilities and programs.
- Collected and evaluated information related to recreational facilities and programs owned and operated by the towns, nonprofits, churches, and private entities.
- Conducted an inventory of recreational facilities in the county that includes type, location, condition, and owner.
- Identified and evaluated the adequacy of existing facility programs and uses.
- Developed 5 presentations specific to the county and each district based on community survey results and the facility inventory.
- Collected and evaluated county historical and projected demographic data.
- Researched state and national standards for facilities and prepared a summary of existing county recreational facilities based on existing condition and use.
- Prepared recommendations for expansion and refurbishment of existing facilities and potential new facilities and programs.

## Timeline



## MADISON COUNTY HISTORY AND DEMOGRAPHICS

### Geography

Formed in 1851, Madison County is a rural, mountainous county in western North Carolina. Located in the heart of the Appalachian Mountains, the county is 452 square miles of scenic mountains, beautiful rivers, and rich cultural heritage.

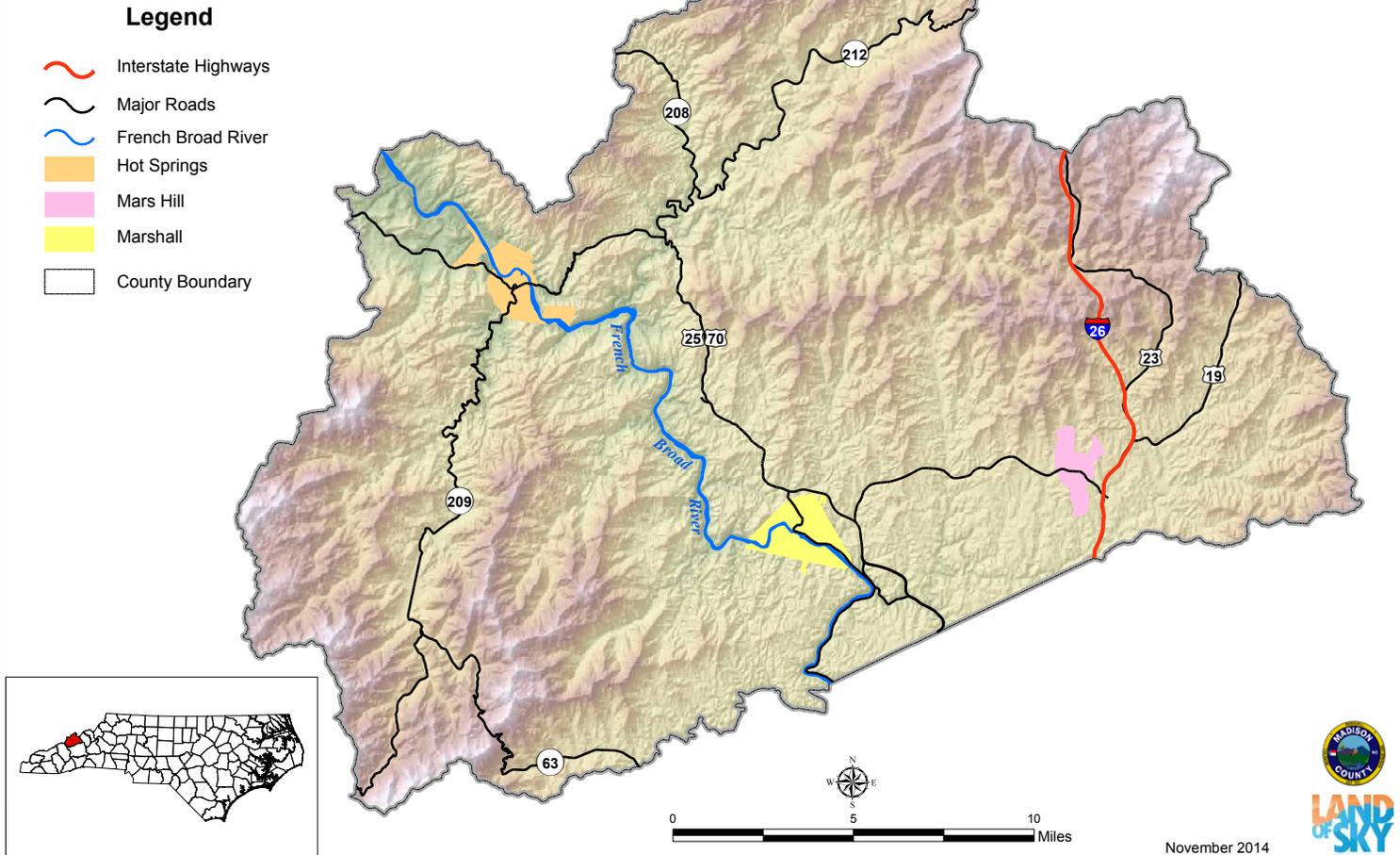
Residents live in small mountain communities or in one of the three unique small towns – Marshall, Mars Hill and Hot Springs. Considered a rural county, in 2012 the population was estimated at 20,742.<sup>1</sup> The county's culture is rooted in its heritage and residents have a strong desire to preserve the history and rural culture of the county as it grows and develops. See Map 1 for orientation of the county in western North Carolina and the locations of the towns.

Madison County is 15 miles north of Asheville, NC and bordered by Tennessee to the west. The county is rich in natural resources with many opportunities for whitewater rafting, hiking, snow skiing, and natural mineral springs. Over 70 percent of the county is forested, and nearly 23 percent is publicly managed by the Smoky Mountains National Park, Pisgah National Forest or in conservation for the Appalachian Trail that follows the western border

Map 1: Towns

**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Municipalities**



of the county.<sup>2</sup> County elevations are from 1,280 feet along the French Broad River to 5,516 feet at Big Bald. There are several peaks over 5,000 feet in elevation, providing spectacular scenic vistas.

The Madison County school system had 3,696 students enrolled in 2012-2013 among the four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school.<sup>3</sup> Continuing education opportunities can be found at the Madison Campus of Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College, located in Marshall, and Mars Hill University.

There are three incorporated towns in Madison County. A brief overview for each town is provided below.

**Town of Mars Hill (population 2,189)**

The largest town in the county, Mars Hill is home to Mars Hill University, a small liberal arts university. The town has an historic town center that is one mile from Future Interstate 26, the north/south connector into Tennessee and only interstate that runs through Madison County. Due to the presence of the University and Interstate, the town is poised for growth.

<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Division, released in March 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Land of Sky Regional Council Regional Data Center, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> AccessNC, North Carolina Department of Commerce, Economic Data and Site Information, November 2014.

### Town of Hot Springs (population 560)

Hot Springs is the home of natural hot springs that were historically used for therapy. Today, the town is the heart of outdoor recreation in the county since the Hot Springs Resort, French Broad River, Appalachian Trail, and Pisgah National Forest, all converge in town. Hot Springs is located on the western side of the county near the Tennessee border.

### Town of Marshall (population 876)

Marshall is the county seat and most centrally located in the county. The town center is located in the narrow valley between the French Broad River and steep mountains, which has caused significant flooding in years past. The town has an emerging arts-based economy that is contributing to revitalization efforts. The middle and high schools, businesses and some county services are located above the town center off the 'by-pass'.

### History

Although there is no evidence of Indian towns or settlements in Madison County, Cherokee Indians lived in communities throughout the southern Appalachians and moved around in Madison to hunt and fish. The County's first settlers came in the mid- to late-1700s. There was a great wave of land speculation following the end of the Revolutionary War that continued into the early 19th century. Fertile land along the river valleys, good quality timber and cheap land prices also contributed to the rapid population growth in Madison County throughout the 1800s. However, the biggest factor that brought people into and through Madison County was the French Broad River and the trail along its banks that was used first by the Cherokee, then later by traders and settlers.

In 1824, the NC General Assembly created the Buncombe Turnpike Corporation and the trail along the French Broad River became a more formal transportation route and toll road, from the Tennessee line to the South Carolina state line. This turned into a major trade route, especially for drovers of hogs and other stock, and settlements (including the early towns which would become Marshall and Hot Springs) grew up along it where people could stop for the night, eat and rest.

The railroad brought an abrupt end to the turnpike traffic in the late 1800s, but was a major factor in the prosperity of Marshall in the first quarter of the 20th century. Marshall became a large trading center and businesses and industries flourished. This, along with the big wave of lumbering that swept through the region in the early 20th century, provided many jobs to local residents and brought more people to live in the county.

The Town of Warm Springs (what is now known as Hot Springs) was discovered early and was nationally known as a health and tourist center since the early 1800s. The Warm Springs Hotel brought many visitors to the Town – up to 1,000 at a time for special events – and also brought prosperity to the town. Businesses and other guesthouses served the many and regular visitors. The hotel burned and was rebuilt a few times over the years, but the site is still a place where visitors come to enjoy the natural hot springs and natural beauty.

Mars Hill began as a farming community and grew up around the school that eventually became Mars Hill College (now Mars Hill University). The school was established in the mid-1800s and the town was incorporated in 1893. Both the town and school have grown over the years and Mars Hill University remains a prominent part of the Town.

The automobile and its popularity, in parallel with the decline of the railroad, brought a great amount of change to Madison County and caused a downturn in the economic prosperity it had enjoyed. No national or regional thoroughfare connected the county to areas with which it was formerly connected until the mid-1950s. Due to its

challenging terrain and lack of adequate access to transportation, retail and manufacturing businesses tended not to locate in the county and residents either commuted to other counties or left the county to find work elsewhere. In recent years, there has been renewed interest in development and rehabilitation projects in the three towns and Mars Hill University has continued to expand. Interstate 26 was completed through the county in 2003, and a beautiful Welcome Center was built north of Mars Hill that offers visitors a wealth of information about things to do in and around Madison County. However the county has remained predominantly rural, with a strong agricultural base and strong communities.

## Population

Growth patterns and trends will help determine county needs and trends for parks and recreation. The population is projected to continue growing at an annual rate of 0.6% overall in Madison County with a 2019 anticipated population of just over 22,000. Tables 1-3 are from the AccessNC, North Carolina Department of Commerce, Madison County Profile (November 2014) .

Table 1: Current Population (2010)

Location	Total Population	# Male	% Male	# Female	% Female	% Growth	% Urban	% Rural
Madison County	20,764	10,273	49.5	10,491	50.5	0.6	9.4	90.6

Table 2: Median Age and Population Distribution (2010)

Location	Median Age	# Under 5 years old	% Under 5 years old	# 5-19 years old	% 5-19 years old	# 20-64 years old	% 20-64 years old	# 65 years and older	% 65 years and older
Madison County	49.5	939	4.5	3,890	18.7	12,269	59.1	3,666	17.7

Table 3: Population Age 65 and Older (2010 through 2030)

Location	2010 Census Data			2020 (Projected)			(2030 Projected)		
	Total % Age 65+	% Age 65-74	% Age 75+	% Age 65+	% Age 65-74	% Age 75+	Total % Age 65+	% Age 65-74	% Age 75+
Madison County	17.7	10.0	7.7	23.4	14.1	9.3	27.1	14.3	12.8

The age 65 and older segment of the population is projected to nearly double by the year 2030. This reflects the overall trend in the region, which will be important to plan for through parks and recreation as well as other county services and facilities. For example, a specific recommendation will be to make existing facilities accessible for all ages and abilities.

The 2012 Madison County Community Health Assessment provides an overview about the average family composition. Table 4 shows that households headed by a married couple are 17 percent, lower than the state average of 20 percent. Tables 4 and 5, (including the details in asterisk below), are from the referenced Community Health Assessment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup>Madison County Community Health Assessment, 2012. Madison County Health Department, <http://www.madisoncountypublichealthnow.com/home/assessment/>

Table 4: Families with Children

Location	Family Composition						
	# Total Households*	Family Household** Headed by Married Couple (children under 18 years)		Family Household Headed by Male (with children under 18 years)		Family Household Headed by Female (with children under 18 years)	
		Est. #	%	Est. #	%	Est. #	%
Madison County	8,002	1,361	17.0	111	1.4	432	5.4

\*A household includes all the people who occupy a housing unit. The occupants may be a single family, one person living alone, two or more families living together, or any other group of related or unrelated people who share living arrangements.

\*\*A family consists of a householder and one or more other people living in the same household who are related to the householder by birth, marriage, or adoption. All people in a household who are related to the householder are regarded as members of his or her family. A family household may contain people not related to the householder, but those people are not included as part of the householder's family in tabulations.

\*\*\*Family composition percentages are based on total number of households. Numerator is number of family households (headed by male, female or married couple) with children under 18 years, denominator is total number of households.

As the table below shows, 76 percent of grandparents living with their minor grandchildren are also responsible for their care. This is significantly higher than the state and regional averages of about 51 percent. This may affect recreational programming needs, (in addition to facility) in the coming years.

Table 5: Grandparents Responsible for Grandchildren

Location	# Grandparents Living with Own Grandchildren (under 18 years)*	Grandparent Responsible for Grandchildren (under 18 years)	
		Est. #	%
	Madison County	437	332

\*Grandparents responsible for grandchildren – data on grandparents as caregivers were derived from American Community Survey questions. Data were collected on whether a grandchild lives with a grandparent in the household, whether the grandparent has responsibility for the basic needs of the grandchild and the duration of that responsibility. Responsibility of basic needs determines if the grandparent is financially responsible for food, shelter, clothing, day care, etc., for any or all grandchildren living in the household. Percent is derived with the number of grandparents responsible for grandchildren (under 18 years) as the numerator and number of grandparents living with own grandchildren (under 18 years) as the denominator.

Population density has been consistently low compared to other counties in North Carolina and the region. In 1990 there were 37.7 people per square mile in Madison County. This rose slightly to 43.7 in 2000 and to 46 people per square mile in 2010. Even with the projected growth for Madison County, the density is only expected to rise to 54.3 by the year 2030. This low density is partly due to the steep terrain in much of the county and the significant amount of protected land (23% of County's land area) in federal/state ownership. Map 2 illustrates the current population density in the county.

The two largest employers in Madison County are the county school system and Mars Hill University. The rural nature of the county leads many to commute to their workplace. Nearly 55 percent of residents commute outside the county for work while 3.7 percent commute outside the state.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Madison County, NC, US Census QuickFacts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37115.html>

<sup>6</sup> AccessNC, North Carolina Department of Commerce, Madison County Profile (November 2014)

<sup>7</sup> US Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts, <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37/37021.html>

Map 2: Population Density

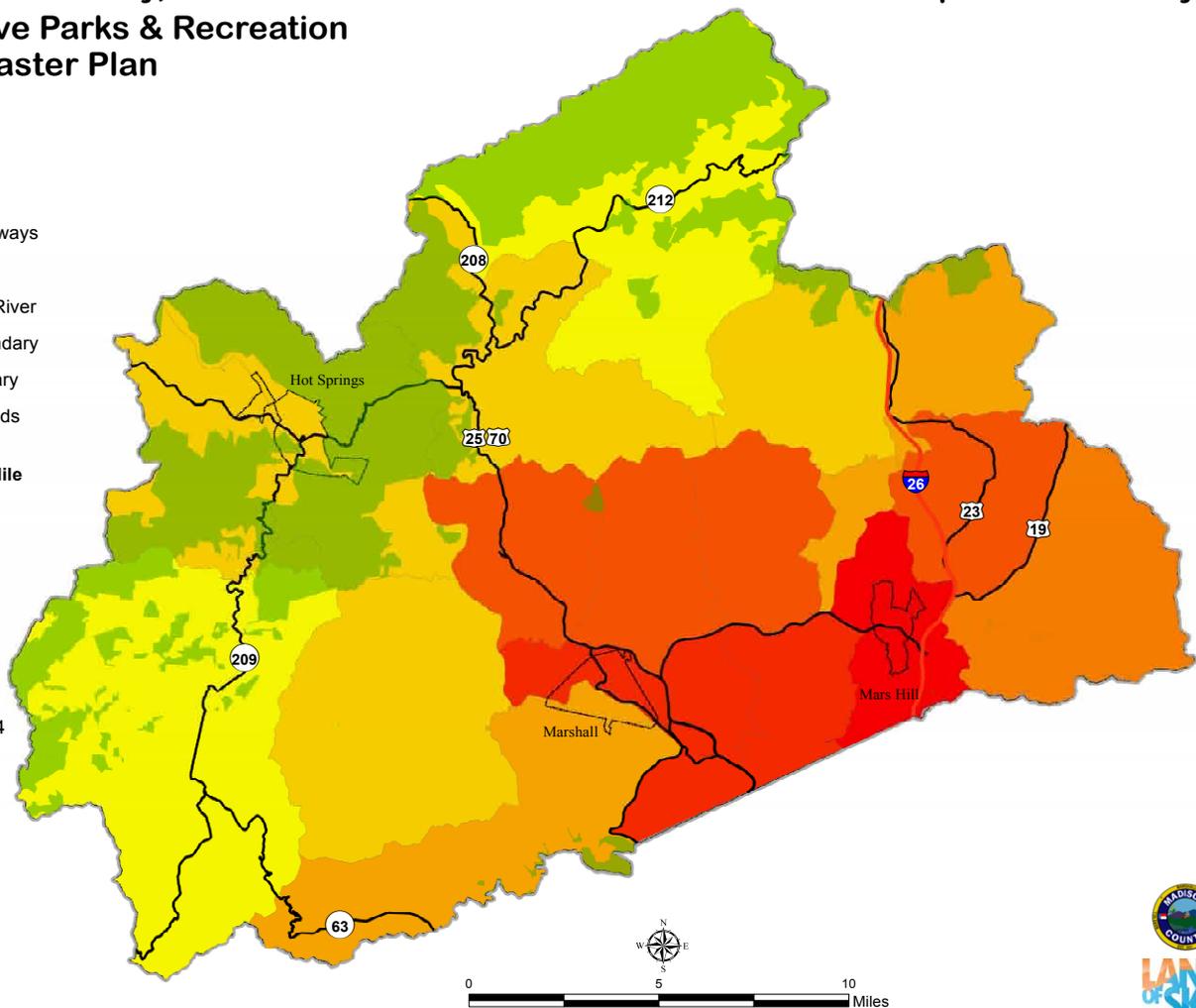
**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Population Density**

- Legend**
-  Interstate Highways
  -  Major Roads
  -  French Broad River
  -  Municipal Boundary
  -  County Boundary
  -  Conserved Lands

**Persons per Square Mile**

-  13.5 - 14.5
-  14.6 - 29.5
-  29.6 - 46.5
-  46.6 - 55.5
-  55.6 - 81.5
-  81.6 - 158.5
-  158.6 - 337.4



November 2014



**Income and Economic Status**

The table below includes data for adjacent counties as well as North Carolina as a whole. In general terms, incomes in Madison County tend to be less than incomes in the surrounding counties and in North Carolina. Madison County is similar to Yancey County in terms of Median Household Income and Per Capita Income and both of these are much lower than the other counties and state figures. The poverty rates may correlate with the lower income levels.

Table 6: Income Levels<sup>7</sup>

Location	Median Household Income 2008-2012	Per Capita Income 2008-2012	Persons below poverty level 2008-2012
Madison County	\$38,658	\$19,953	17.4%
Buncombe County	\$44,206	\$26,219	16.8%
Haywood County	\$42,089	\$24,624	14.2%
Yancey County	\$38,766	\$19,404	18.9%
North Carolina	\$46,450	\$25,285	16.6%



Beech Glen Outfield

## CHAPTER TWO: INVENTORY AND RESOURCES

### Madison County Parks and Recreation Planning Area

The planning area for the Parks and Recreation Master Plan includes all of Madison County, North Carolina. Map 3 shows how the county was divided into the four service areas designated by the MCPRD. The service areas were used to identify trends; facility needs, programming needs, and other recreational desires of the citizens. The service areas are based on townships and described below.

#### MARSHALL SERVICE AREA

The Marshall Service Area consists of three townships; Sandy Mush, Walnut, and Marshall, which is broken up into North Marshall and South Marshall. The County Seat, the Town of Marshall, is located in this service area and is the largest municipality in Madison County, incorporating 3.8 square miles. The town population was 876 in 2012.<sup>8</sup>

#### MARS HILL SERVICE AREA

The Mars Hill Service Area consists of four townships: Ebbs Chapel, Beech Glen, Mars Hill and Grapevine. The Town of Mars Hill is located in this service area and is home to the Mars Hill University Campus which is the second largest employer in the county behind the county school system. Mars Hill has the largest population with 2,189 as of the 2012 census.

#### HOT SPRINGS SERVICE AREA

The Hot Springs Service Area consists of the townships of Hot Springs and Spring Creek. The Town of Hot Springs is located in this service area and has the distinction of housing the Appalachian Trail running down the main street through town. Hot Springs is the smallest incorporated town in the County with a population of 560 that has had no population growth between 2010-2012.<sup>9</sup>

#### LAUREL SERVICE AREA

The Laurel Service Area consists of two townships: Laurel and Revere-Rice Cove. This service area does not contain an incorporated town, however the community identity is strong – as is the case for all the communities in the county.



Bright Hope Laurel Methodist Church Playground

<sup>8</sup> NC Office of Budget & Management, State Demographer, 2012 estimates released in Sept. 2013.

<sup>9</sup> NC Office of Budget & Management, State Demographer, 2012 estimates released in Sept. 2013. 2010 data is from the US Census Bureau, 2010 adjusted counts.



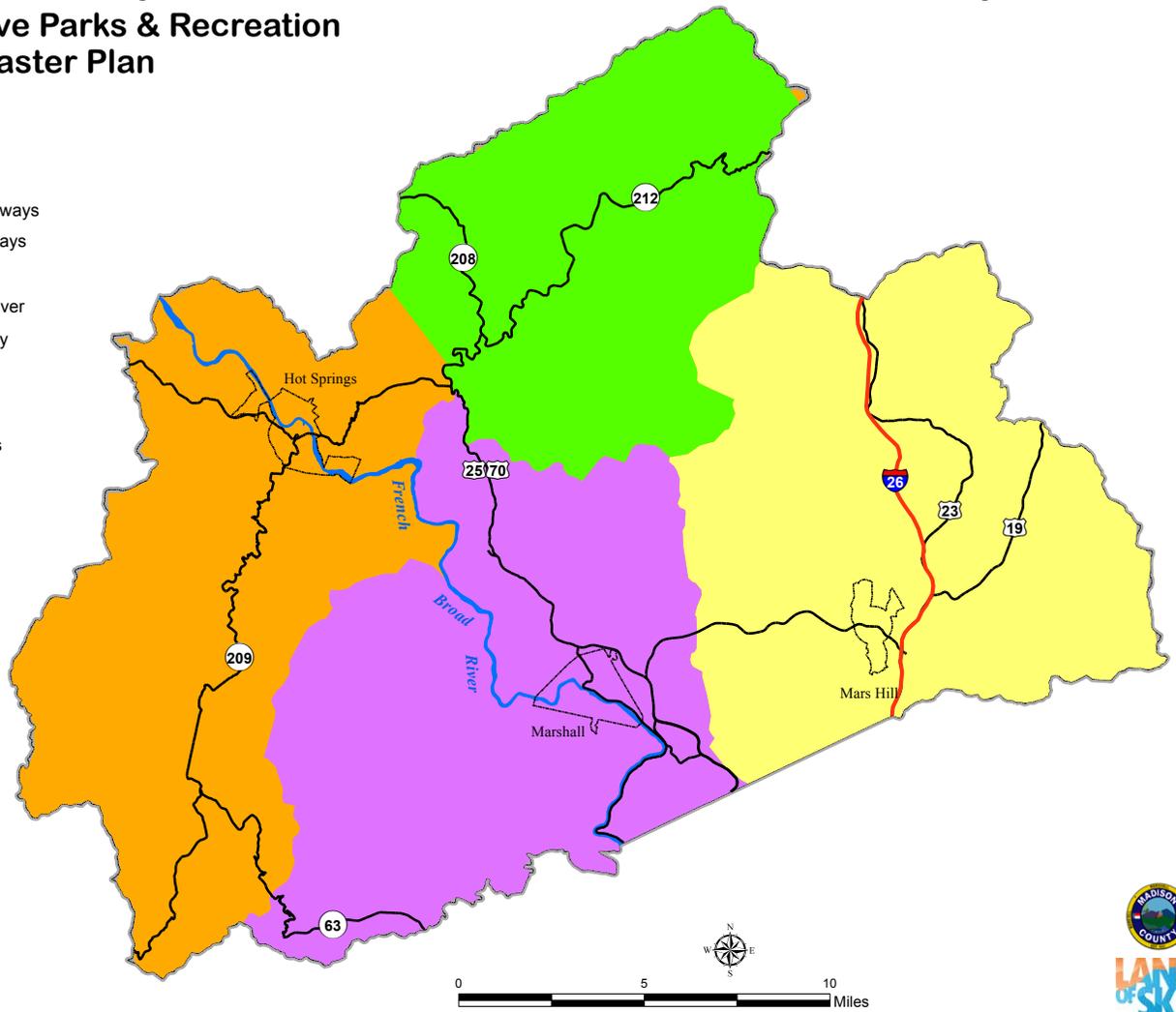
Map 3: Madison County Service Areas

**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Survey Districts**

- Legend**
- Proposed Greenways
  - Interstate Highways
  - Major Roads
  - French Broad River
  - County Boundary

- Districts**
- Hot Springs
  - Marshall
  - Mars Hill
  - Laurel



November 2014



Barnard Park

## Madison County Public Recreational Spaces

Madison County Parks and Recreation currently manages a variety of recreational facilities, described below.

Table 7: County Facility Inventory

Facility	Programs	Location	# Ball Fields	Property Owner/ Manager	Acreage
Blannahassett Island Gym	Gym and Outdoor Recreation	Blannahassett Island Marshall, NC		County	5.02
Blannahassett Island	Open Space Volleyball Picnic Area Multipurpose Room	Blannahassett Island Marshall, NC		County <i>Leased by Marshall Community Center</i>	N/A
Beech Glen Community Center	Ball Field Playground Walking Trail Gym	2936 Beech Glen Road Mars Hill, NC	1	County	6.57
Ebbs Chapel Ball Field	Ball Field	Puncheon Fork Rd Mars Hill, NC	1	County	2.52
Rock Building	Gym	Bailey Street Mars Hill, NC		County	N/A
Barnard Park	River access	Barnard Road Marshall, NC		County	3.46

### BLANNAHASSET ISLAND GYM

The Island Gymnasium is located in the Town of Marshall on Blannahassett Island in the middle of the French Broad River. The facility is owned by the County, which also operates the gymnasium, located on the second floor. It has been widely used by residents of Madison County for basketball, softball, baseball, soccer, roller derby, party rentals, dances, etc. The community room space and some outdoor recreational space are leased and managed by the Marshall Community Center, other outdoor recreational space is managed by the Town of Marshall, and a private entity owns an artist studio building also located on the island.

### BEECH GLEN COMMUNITY CENTER

Beech Glen Community Center is also located in the Mars Hill Service Area. This community center consists of a gymnasium, playground, and ball field with batting cages. The center is bordered by Little Ivy River and Beech Glen Baptist Church. A picnic pavilion and outdoor basketball courts can be found on the church property. The community room is used by the senior nutrition site during the day and is available for rentals at other times. Regularly scheduled programs at the facility include open gym play for adults, a quilting group, Kith and Kin play date, special Olympics practices, and youth league practices. The community association holds regular social events including country breakfasts and dinners supporting local charities.

### EBBS CHAPEL BALL FIELD

Ebbs Chapel, found in the Mars Hill Service Area, was traditionally used as a baseball/softball field for the youth league system. The field is currently in disrepair and is only used occasionally for practices and other local events such as festivals and turkey shoots. The space has a recently completed concession stand, restrooms, and storage building that can serve any type of recreational use at the facility. The space is surrounded by the Ebbs Chapel Community Center which is currently leased by a local community association. The building includes an

auditorium that is used for concerts, speakers, and other entertainment needs. The building also hosts the senior nutrition site for the area, managed by the Madison County Department of Community Services. The site has been used for small party rentals as needed in the community. Bright Hope Laurel Methodist Church also borders the Ebbs Chapel Community Center. The congregation has built a covered pavilion, gazebo, and playground next to their church. These areas serve the entire community at large.

### ROCK BUILDING

The Rock Building (Old Mars Hill School) is located within the Town of Mars Hill limits. The building was given to the county government by the Board of Education in 2004. At the time of reversion the facility was not capable of continuing as a school facility without expensive renovations. The gymnasium continued to be used by youth leagues for practices for a number of years, but the current state of the building renders the facility unusable. The facility is bordered by the Madison County Early College and Mars Hill Elementary School.

### BARNARD PARK

Barnard Park is located in the Marshall Service Area. The park is the main river access point in Madison County. A large number of river outfitters utilize the park as a put-in location for their customers. Local and regional residents also use this area as a river access, walking path and picnic area. The park area was expanded in 2010 to include a large open space with a walking trail for users to enjoy the river beauty. Current improvement projects include resurfacing the five ramps and installing a trailer-accessible ramp. Funds have been obtained for these projects and they are scheduled for completion in 2015.

Other Madison County properties that are used for recreational purposes yet managed/leased by other parties are shown in Table 8. Map 4 illustrates the locations of current Public Facilities.

Table 8: Public Recreation Facilities

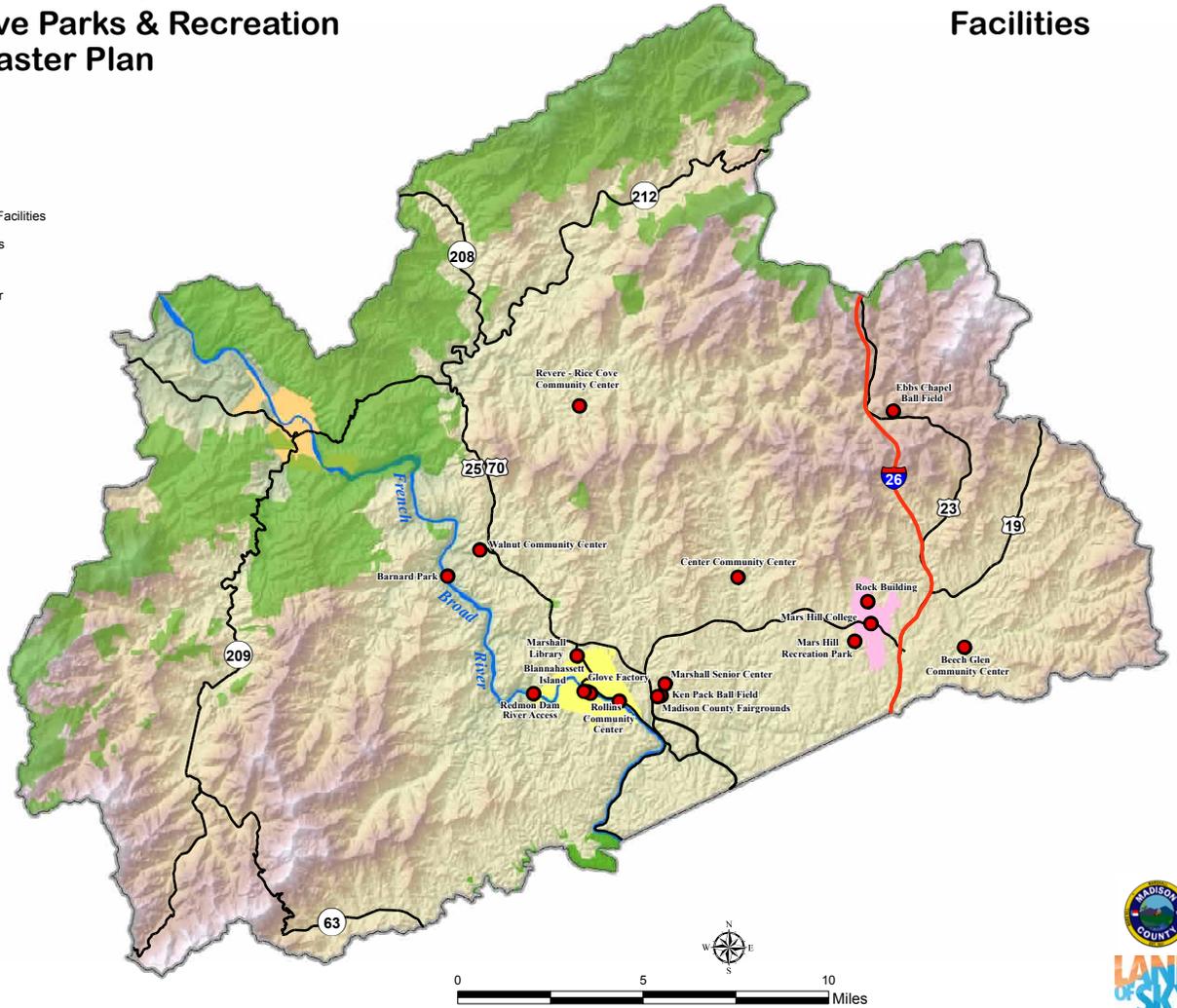
Facility	Programs	Location	# Ball Fields	Property Owner or Manager	Acreage
Walnut Community Center	Ball Field Basketball Court Community Center Track	School Road, Marshall, NC	1	Leased by Walnut Community Center	6.38
Revere - Rice Cove Community Center	Walking Trails	Rice Cove		Community	
Redmon Community	Proposed River Access	Marshall, NC		County	
Libraries					
Madison County Library	Playground	1335 N. Main Street Marshall, NC		County	3.51
Mars Hill Public Library		25 Library Street Mars Hill, NC		Town of Mars Hill	
Madison County Library - Hot Springs Branch		88 Bridge Street Hot Springs, NC		Leased by County	

Map 4: Public Recreation Facilities

**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Public Recreation  
Facilities**

- Legend**
- Public Recreation Facilities
  - ~ Interstate Highways
  - ~ Major Roads
  - ~ French Broad River
  - Hot Springs
  - Mars Hill
  - Marshall
  - Conserved Lands
  - County Boundary



November 2014



Walnut Community Center Ballfield

Table 9: Senior Centers and Nutrition Sites

Facility	Programs	Location	Property Owner or Manager
Marshall Senior Center & Nutrition Site	Walking Trails	462 Long Branch Road Marshall, NC	Madison County
Center Community Center	Walking Trails	2 East Fork Road Marshall, NC	Madison County
Hot Springs Senior Center & Nutrition Site		356 NW Hwy 25-70 Hot Springs, NC	Madison County
Beech Glen Nutrition Site		2936 Beech Glen Road Mars Hill, NC	Madison County
Mars Hill Nutrition Site		Mars Hill Baptist Church 67 North Main Street Mars Hill, NC	Madison County
Upper Laurel Nutrition Site		281 Laurel Valley Road Mars Hill, NC	Madison County
Spring Creek Nutrition Site		13077 NC Hwy 209 Hot Springs, NC	Madison County
Shelton Laurel Nutrition Site		4100 Hwy 212 Marshall, NC	Madison County

## OTHER PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND COMMUNITY FACILITIES

### Town of Mars Hill

The Town of Mars Hill owns and manages a recreational park within the town limits (Table 10). The park includes: an outdoor pool, playground, covered pavilions, ball field with concession area, batting cages, tennis courts, and outdoor basketball courts. In addition, the Town built a walking trail on the Mars Hill University campus and will be expanding along that greenway in 2016 along Gabriel's Creek with DOT funds. The Town maintains 38,292 feet of sidewalks that connect businesses, homes, and schools. Within the town limits, there are routinely held festivals, cycling and running races, parades, and other special events for the residents to enjoy.

Table 10: Town of Mars Hill Facilities

Facility	Programs	Property Owner or Manager	Acreage
Town of Mars Hill	Outdoor Pool Playground Ball Field Picnic Area Basketball Courts Tennis Court Walking Trail	Town of Mars Hill	11.28

### Town of Marshall

The Town of Marshall owns and maintains a number of recreational facilities (Table 11). Blannahassett Island is situated downtown in the French Broad River. The Town manages two ball fields, picnic areas, playground, outdoor basketball courts, walking trail, fishing pier, outdoor restrooms, and a stage area. Additional activities

on the island include disc golf baskets, volleyball area, and open space maintained by the Marshall Community Center. Many festivals, concerts, special events are held on the island each year. The French Broad Cycling Classic utilizes the island during its large cycling race each year and the collegiate championships will be coming to the area in the spring of 2015. The Town also maintains Pocket park which is located on Main Street. This area has beautiful landscaping and benches for residents to enjoy. Currently, there are 6,558 feet of sidewalks in the town center. The Rollins community has a playground and picnic area along the river. The playground is fenced and provides a safe location for children to play. The Town owns property on Skyline Drive that could be developed into a number of recreational opportunities.

Table 11: Town of Marshall Facilities

Facility	Programs	Location	# Ball Fields	Property Owner or Manager	Acreage
Blannahasset Island	Ball Field T-Ball Field Picnic Area Playground Outdoor Basketball Stage Fishing Pier Trail	Blannahasset Island Marshall, NC	2	Town of Marshall	5.06
Rollins Community	Picnic Area and Playground	Rollins Road Marshall, NC		Town of Marshall	0.44

### Town of Hot Springs

The Town of Hot Springs does not currently own an outdoor park space. The Town hosts a community center room that is available for rentals and hosts special events. The county maintains a senior center within the town limits that holds a number of instructional classes such as ceramics within it. Many different types of festivals are held within Hot Springs each year and the town is a prime location for hikers and motorcyclists. The town center is nestled in the river valley and considered fairly walkable, maintaining 17,133 feet of sidewalks.

### Madison County Public Schools

The Madison County Board of Education consists of seven schools (one high school, one early college, one middle school, and four elementary schools) and two early childhood education centers (Table 12). The school system holds a vital role in the recreational opportunities for county families. The majority of youth league games/practices are held on school property. In some of the outlying areas of the community, the school provides the only playgrounds and field spaces available. Madison County Parks and Recreation and the Madison County Board of Education have a facility use agreement with the youth leagues to utilize their facilities. Map 5 illustrates the location of the public schools in the county.

Table 12: County School System and University Recreation Facilities

Facility	Programs	Location	# Ball Fields	Property Owner or Manager	Acreage
County School System Facilities					
Hot Springs Elementary	Gym, and Ball Fields, Playground	63 N Serpentine Ave. Hot Springs, NC	2	Board of Education	4.94
Laurel Elementary	Gym and Ball Field, Playground	4100 HWY 212 Marshall, NC	1	Board of Education	5.85

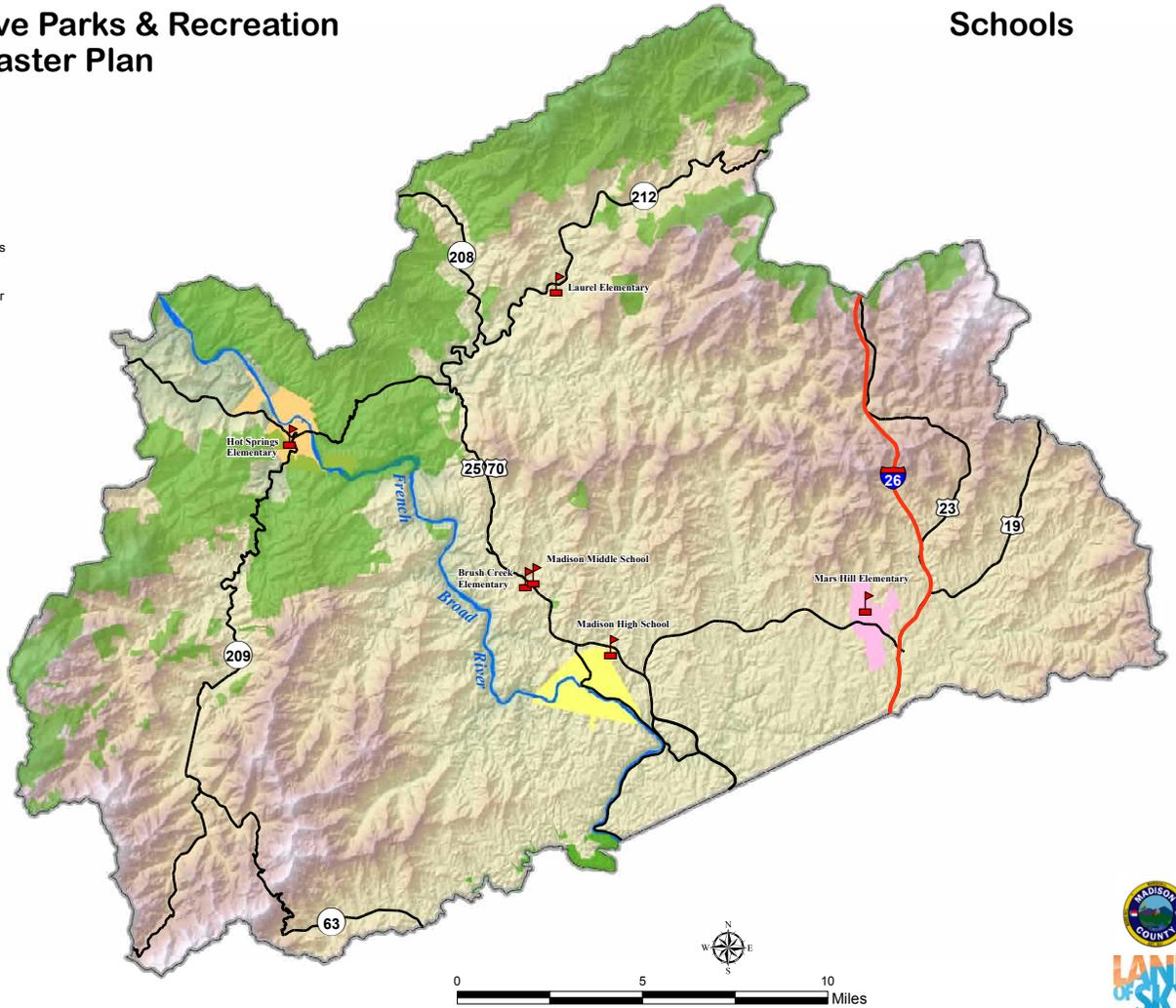
Brush Creek Elementary School	Gym, walking trail, and playground	265 Upper Brush Creek Rd Marshall, NC	0	Board of Education	16.57
Madison Middle School	Gym and, football field and ball fields	95 Upper Brush Creek Rd, Marshall, NC	2	Board of Education	10.8
Madison High School	Football Field, Track, Walking Trail, and 2 Gyms	5740 Hwy 25/70 Marshall, NC	0	Board of Education	56.31
Mars Hill Elementary	Gym, Walking Trail, and Ball Fields, football field, playgrounds	200 School House LN Mars Hill, NC	2	Board of Education	10.6
High School Ball Fields at Fairgrounds	Ball Fields	Elderberry Lane Marshall, NC	3	County	6.67
Fair Grounds		Elderberry Lane Marshall, NC		County	7.85
University Facilities					
Mars Hill University	Tennis Court, in door pool, and disc golf, workout facility, auxiliary gym	100 Athletic St Mars Hill, NC		University	68.68

Map 5: Public and Private Schools

**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Public & Private  
Schools**

- Legend**
-  Schools
  -  Interstate Highways
  -  Major Roads
  -  French Broad River
  -  Hot Springs
  -  Mars Hill
  -  Marshall
  -  Conserved Lands
  -  County Boundary



November 2014



## Private Recreational Facilities

Madison County has a wealth of outdoor recreation opportunities for residents and visitors alike. The facilities draw tourists from all over the world. The Madison County Tourism Development Authority has a robust listing of private facilities for recreation opportunities (<http://www.visitmadisoncounty.com/>). In the 'What to Do in Madison County' listing there are businesses for hiking, whitewater rafting, horseback riding, fishing, skiing, snowboarding, tubing, camping, etc. Table 13 lists those most pertinent for Parks and Recreation, also shown in Map 6.

Table 13: Private Recreational Facilities

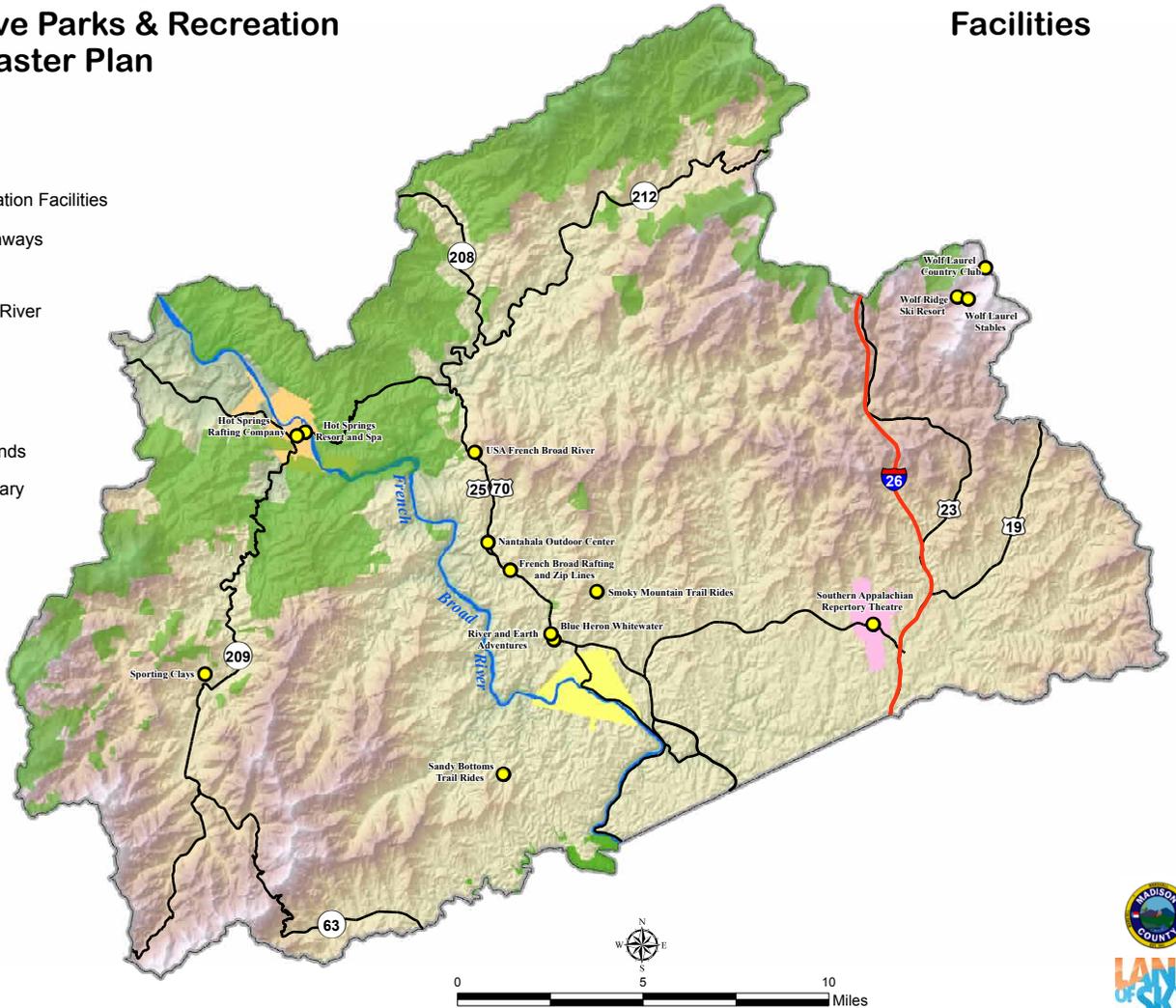
Facility	Program	Location
Wolf Ridge Ski Resort	Skiing, Snow Boarding, Snow Tubing	578 Valley View Cir, Mars Hill, NC
Wolf Laurel County Club	Golf	2607 Wolf Laurel Road, Mars Hill, NC
River Outfitters	Blue Heron Whitewater	35 Little Pine Road, Marshall, NC
	French Broad Rafting & Ziplines	9800 US Highway 25-70, Marshall, NC
	Hot Springs Rafting Company	22 NW Highway 25-70, Hot Springs, NC
	Nantahala Outdoor Center	9825 US Highway 25-70, Hot Springs, NC
	River and Earth Adventures	7529 US Highway 25-70, Marshall, NC
	USA French Broad River	13490 Highway 25-70, Marshall, NC
	Zen Tubing	158 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, NC
Horseback Riding	Sandy Bottoms Trail Rides	1459 Caney Fork Road, Marshall, NC
	Smoky Mountain Trail Rides	450 Lee Ramsy Road, Marshall, NC
	Wolf Laurel Stables	91 Village Lane, Mars Hill, NC
Clay Shooting	Fowler Farms Sporting Clays and Game Preserve	253 Fowler Farm Road, Hot Springs, NC
Zip Lining	French Broad Rafting & Ziplines	9800 US Highway 25-70, Marshall, NC
Gem Mining	Sandy Bottoms Trail Rides	1459 Caney Fork Road, Marshall, NC
US FS Trails	Pisgah National Forest	Throughout the County
AT Parking	Sams Gap and Hot Springs	Throughout the County
Campgrounds	Hot Springs Resort & Spa	315 Bridge Street, Hot Springs, NC
	Meadow Fork Store & Campground	5995 Meadow Fork Road, Hot Springs, NC
	Creek Ridge Camping	600 Henderson Drive, Hot Springs, NC
	Laughing Heart Lodge Hostel	289 NW Highway 25/70, Hot Springs, NC
	Pisgah National Forest	<a href="http://www.ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Pisgah/fbroad.html">www.ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Pisgah/fbroad.html</a>
	Rocky Bluff Campground	USFS – Hot Springs, NC
	Silvermine Campground	USFS – Hot Springs, NC
Recreation Site	Bailey Mountain – Trails and Scenic views	Mars Hill, NC
Private Soccer Field	Soccer Program	Marshall, NC

Map 6: Private Recreation Facilities

**Madison County, NC  
Comprehensive Parks & Recreation  
Master Plan**

**Private Recreation  
Facilities**

- Legend**
-  Private Recreation Facilities
  -  Interstate Highways
  -  Major Roads
  -  French Broad River
  -  Hot Springs
  -  Mars Hill
  -  Marshall
  -  Conserved Lands
  -  County Boundary



November 2014



Horse Track

SPRING CREEK  
COMMUNITY CENTER

THE GARDENER'S  
HARVEST

PRODUCE FROM LOCAL  
FARMERS

MWF 6<sup>PM</sup> - 8<sup>PM</sup>  
SAT 7<sup>AM</sup> - 6<sup>PM</sup>



Spring Creek Community Center

## CHAPTER THREE: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

### CITIZEN SURVEY RESULTS

#### Methodology

The Madison County Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey was developed by staff members as well as members of the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board. The survey consisted of questions about facilities, programming, transportation, maintenance, and desires of the residents. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

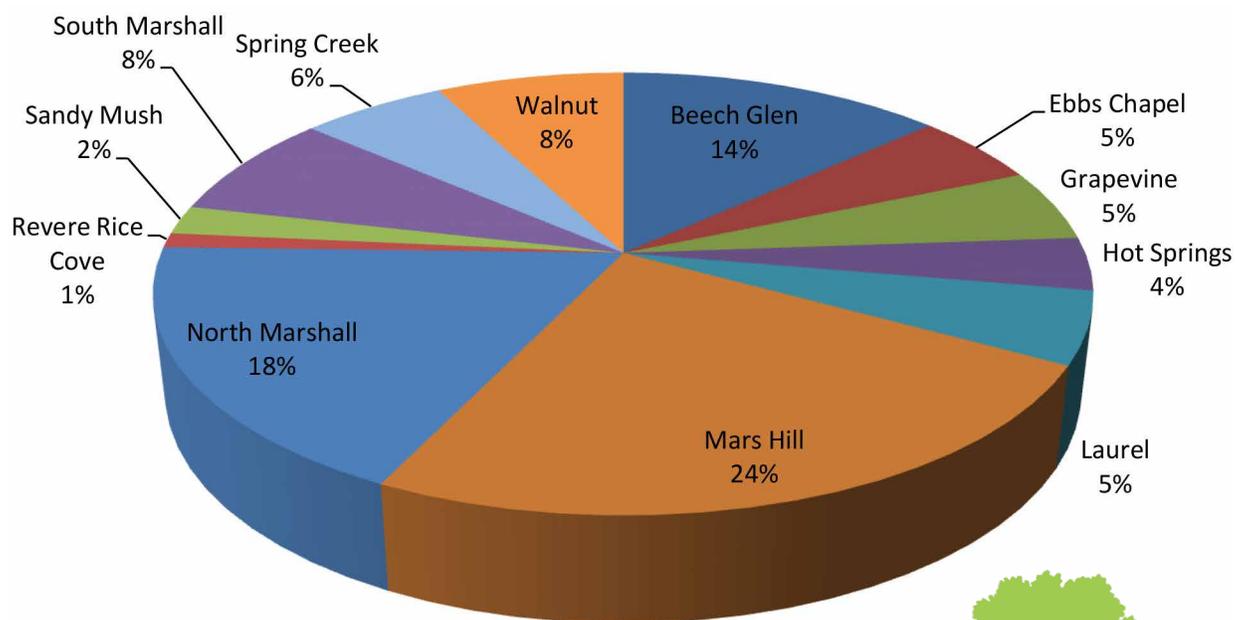
A random sample of households throughout Madison County was obtained by utilizing the tax parcels from the Madison County Tax Assessors office. The number nine was randomly drawn and then every ninth address was sent a survey with a stamped return envelope inside. A total of 534 surveys were sent to households in Madison County and 90 were returned, representing a nearly 17% return rate.

Surveys were also made available to the public through various methods. Copies were placed in the libraries and other county offices. The link to an online version was distributed to all school age families through the school system. Emails, social media, and listserves sent out the link as well. The opportunity for feedback was also announced to the public via the local weekly newspaper, *The News Record and Sentinel*. Surveys were collected throughout the spring of 2014.

#### RESULTS

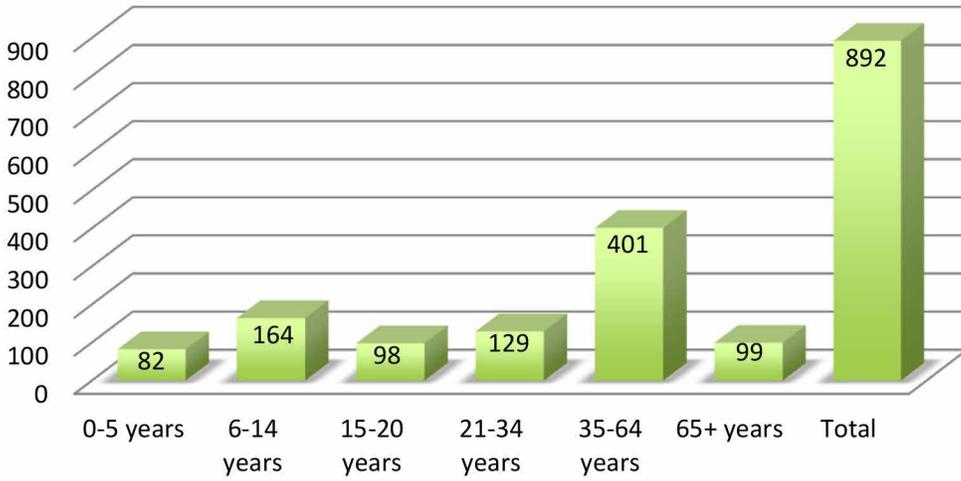
A total of 323 surveys were completed representing nearly 900 people throughout the county. Respondents were asked to indicate their voting district to ensure an appropriate distribution of results based on the county's current population.

Figure 1: Survey Respondents by District (Percent)



The 323 surveys were collected and tabulated. Figure 2 highlights the demographic distribution of the respondents. The following figures and summaries list the major survey findings.

Figure 2: Survey Respondents by Age Group



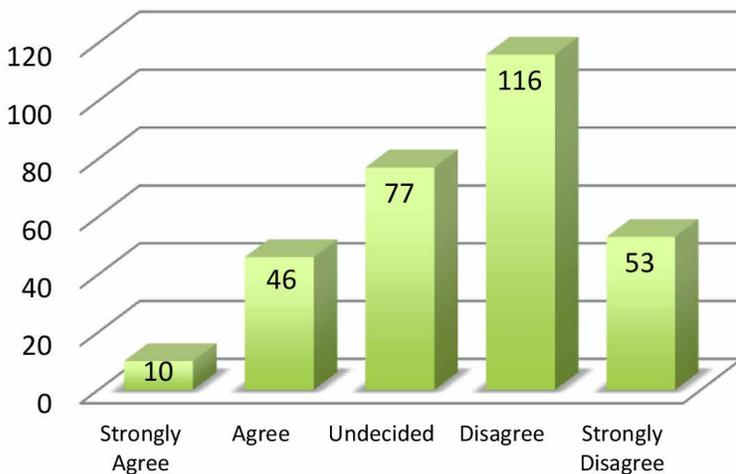
### Parks and Recreation Facilities Usage

There are currently four county-operated facilities where programming or activities take place. (The Rock Building in Mars Hill is closed due to the current condition of the structure.) The sites used most often in Madison County are: Blannahasset Island Gymnasium (30%); Beech Glen Community Center (29%); and Barnard Park (17%).

### Existing and Future Facilities

Most respondents did *not agree* that the existing facilities and programs were adequate and met the needs of the community. This was reinforced in the public meetings. Respondents also strongly agreed that school facilities should be made available to the public during non-school use. The vast majority of respondents perceive a need for new and improved recreation facilities and programs as important (92%).

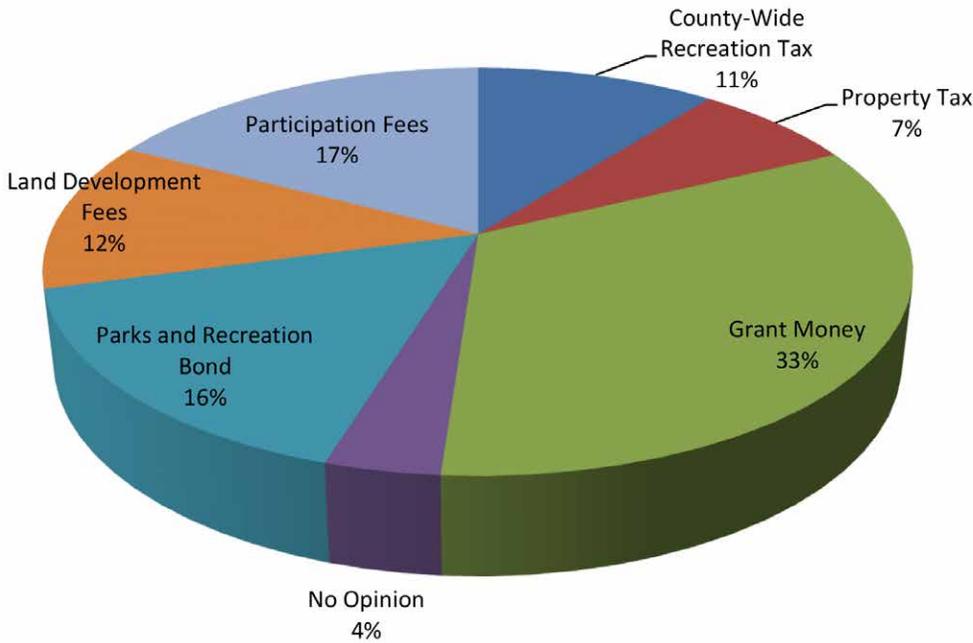
Figure 3: Are Existing Facilities Adequate and Meet the Needs of the Community?



### Support for Actions to Improve the Parks and Recreation System

Over 85 percent of respondents would be in favor of finding new funding sources or increasing existing funding sources to expand Madison County Parks and Recreation Facilities. Figure 4 illustrates the types of potential funding sources that respondents may support.

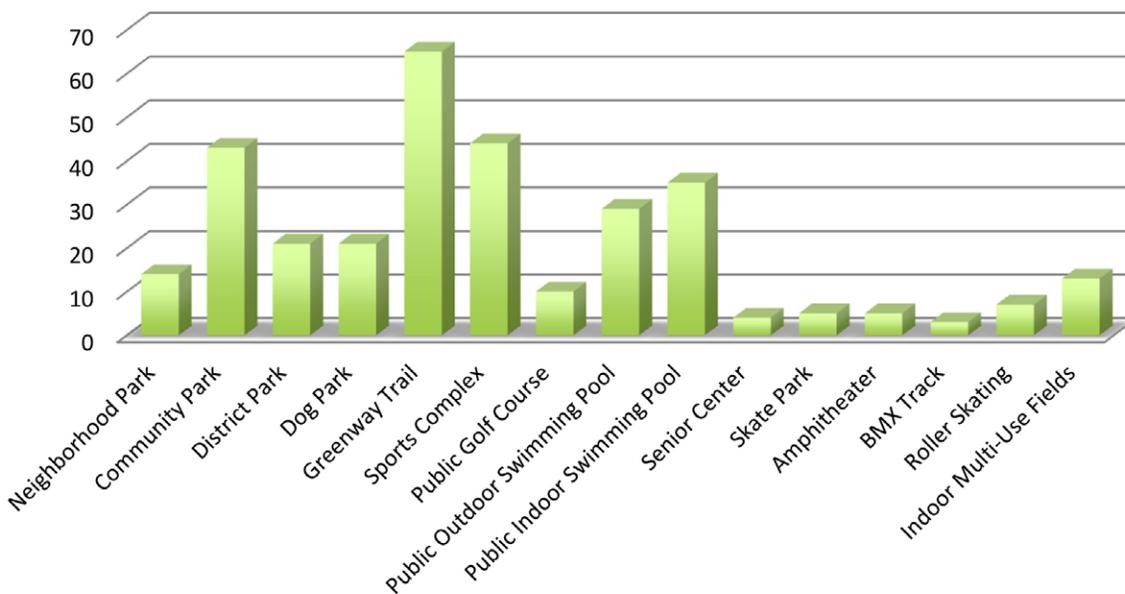
Figure 4: What methods for financing recreation facilities should Madison County Parks and Recreation use?



### Desired Improvements to the Parks and Recreation System

Participants were asked to prioritize facilities they would use if available in Madison County. The highest priorities were a Greenway Trail (20%); Sports Complex (14%); Community Park (13%); and an Indoor Pool (11%).

Figure 5: Which of the facilities has the highest priority for you and your family?



## Programming for the Parks and Recreation System

Over 83% of respondents agreed that the following activities and services are important for public parks and recreation agencies to provide:

- Accessible places to enjoy nature
- Improved physical and mental health
- Structure and supervision for children and youth
- Improve Quality of life
- Increase in Community Pride
- Fun for participants and observers
- Positive alternatives to unfavorable behavior
- Positive change in personal attitude

Respondents reported on the survey that they like to participate in the following activities (in no particular order):

Basketball	Hiking	Road Biking	Canoe/Kayak
Swimming	Football	Tennis	Horseback Riding
Soccer	Hunting	Fishing	Youth Leagues
Dance	Mountain Biking	Rafting	Summer Day Camp
Batting Cages	Run/Jog/Walk	Camping	After School Programs

Many respondents also noted a desire to see the M CPRD increase programming opportunities for many ages. Each response also noted a preferred time for the activities to occur. The following lists the category and most preferred time for the activity to take place.

Participant Category	Preferred Times
Young Children	Weekends; 9:00am – 3:00pm weekdays
School Age Youth	Weekends; 3:00pm – 6:00pm weekdays
Youth	Weekends; 3:00pm – 6:00pm weekdays; after 6:00pm weekdays
Adults	Weekends; after 6:00pm weekdays
Seniors	Weekends; 9:00am – 3:00pm weekdays

## Public Meetings

Public meetings were held throughout the county to allow the residents to review the survey results and to add comments to the needs and desires of their communities. A meeting was held in the County Library to kick off the public meeting process, the geographical center of the county. Members of the public were invited to join the Madison County Parks and Recreation Advisory Board to hear cumulative results from the entire county. After this meeting, there was a public meeting held at each of the four elementary schools that focused more on the local district results. These meetings were advertised in the News Record and Sentinel (Appendix B) as well as on social media, emails, flyers home from school, all calls from the school system, and library distribution. At each meeting, the survey results from both the countywide perspective as well as the local district were presented (Appendix E) and then the attendees were invited to rank the top priorities and add comments to the overall plan (Appendix C).

- |  |         |
|--|---------|
| • Parks and Recreation Advisory Board – September 25, 2014 | 11:00am |
| • Hot Springs – Sept. 29, 2014                             | 6:00pm  |
| • Laurel – Sept. 30, 2014                                  | 6:00pm  |
| • Brush Creek (Marshall) – Oct. 6, 2014                    | 6:00pm  |
| • Mars Hill – Oct. 7, 2014                                 | 6:00pm  |

The agenda at each meeting included:

- Introduction to the planning team and process
- Overview of the citizen survey results (county-wide and town-specific)
- Review of existing facility inventory, condition of facilities, status of any existing projects
- Participant feedback on facilities and programming, including prioritization exercise

In total, there were 44 participants at the public meetings. Participant attendance was recorded on a sign-in sheet. During the discussion period, participant input was recorded on flip chart sheets and notes. The notes were then compiled (Appendix C) and compared to the Citizen Survey results.



Rollins Park



Private Soccer Field

## CHAPTER FOUR: IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### Recommendations

The planning process has resulted in recognition of two tiers of recommendations – those most suitable for the county and those applicable for individual towns. This chapter will outline the recommendations that were identified through the public meetings and attempt to categorize them based on the appropriate responsible entity.

### Recommendation #1: Facility and Program Accessibility

Parks and recreation facilities should strive to be accessible for all ages and abilities in both design and programming. New public facilities should be designed to meet current Americans with Disability Act (ADA) regulations, and existing facilities should be upgraded to become compliant. The first priority for Madison County facilities should be to upgrade existing facilities to meet ADA standards. A more detailed ADA accessibility study is recommended that will identify specific steps needed to become compliant. The study should be completed by a consultant intimately familiar with ADA regulations and how to upgrade a variety of facility types. Funding and an implementation schedule should be identified to ensure completion of this critical priority. Figures 6 and 7 illustrate examples of AOA compliant facilities.

#### Figure 6: Universally designed Family Recreation Facility in Cary, NC

Photo: Kids Together Playground, Source: NC State University, Natural Learning Initiative



Figure 7: Kids Together Playground, Courtesy Little and Little, Landscape Architects



### Recommendation #2: Maintenance Plan

A Maintenance Plan for all county facilities should be developed to ensure ongoing maintenance issues are addressed while maintaining cleanliness and proper care of the facility. This is critical to help prolong the life of the facility as well as defer expensive maintenance costs associated with misuse or disrepair.

### Recommendation #3: Site Design Plans

During this planning process, several facilities in the county have been identified as a priority for expansion or significant renovations. This is an opportunity to build on the momentum generated by the planning process and set a schedule to develop the site design plans. The facilities that were addressed during the public input sessions are:

1. Beech Glen Community Center and Ball fields – Expansion of the ball fields and walking trail.
2. Hot Springs Community Park – identify a location for a neighborhood multi-use park, including walking trail, playground, community space, picnic area, etc.
3. Marshall Gymnasium – Renovation of existing facility
4. Rock Gym (Historic Mars Hill School) – Determine if the structure should be renovated or removed so another facility can be built. Public input reflected a desire to keep the building due to its historic status, but not at the expense of a functioning recreational facility for residents to use.
5. Community/District Park – determine location for a large multi-use YMCA-type facility and multiple ball fields.
6. Hunter Creek Road Reservoir Site – A 600+ acre former watershed that is a high priority for conservation and outdoor recreation. The following activities are proposed at the site: picnic area, hiking, walking and mountain biking. No powered vehicles or hunting will be allowed on the site as it is currently proposed.

The site design plans should be completed prior to final budgeting for any new construction or renovation project. This will assist plan for contingencies, ADA compliance, and desired outcomes.

## Recommendation #4: Community Park and Greenways

The two types of parks or facilities that were identified as high priorities for the county are Community Parks and Greenways. The overall trend for recreation facilities is toward including multiple uses at each location that appeals to multi-generations. There is a high demand for safe locations to exercise, have youth and adult sport programs, and get together with friends and community. This, in part, reflects the demographic trends of a growing active retiree population and grandparents caring for their grandchildren. Figure 8 provides an example of a multi-use Community Park.

### COMMUNITY PARK

A Community Park typically serves several neighborhoods and can serve several small towns. The park can be designed to include a broad range of features such as natural areas, playground, trails, sports fields, ponds, or fountains. These parks could also include an indoor recreation center or other specialized recreation such as tennis courts, basketball, gymnasium, etc. A Neighborhood Park is a smaller version that typically serves a small town or area.

### GREENWAYS

Greenways are generally designed to allow for multiple transportation options such as walking, bicycling, and hiking. They can follow natural areas such as rivers and mountains and can be designed to fit in almost any space. Greenways can be included in a larger overall park system and function as loop trails or connectors between multiple parks.

### MADISON COUNTY PRIORITIES

Madison County residents have stated in the survey and at each public meeting the need for facilities such as walking trails with respite benches near more active pursuits such as ball fields, playgrounds, and basketball courts. The challenge to siting a new facility in the County is the topography. A consultant well-versed in mountain landscapes would be critical to the successful design and function of a Community Park. Specific greenway priorities include (but are not limited to):

- Hwy 25/70 between AB Tech and High School, continuing along to Middle School.
- Connections between bypass businesses and downtown Marshall.
- Connections in Mars Hill to Recreation Park and other destination points such as Bailey Mountain.
- Smaller loop trails at locations such as Ebbs Chapel, Laurel and Hot Springs.

Figure 8: Example Community Park – Down East Discovery Plan and Learning Park in Rocky Mount, NC<sup>10</sup>



### Recommendation #5: Partnerships

Madison County has many existing strong partnerships – the staff could not accomplish all that it does without them. The county should consider building on existing relationships as well as form new partnerships as new programming and activities are developed. Partnerships are important with other public, private and nonprofit entities in order to deliver services, procure sponsorships and funding for initiatives, and for user agreements for shared facilities.

### Recommendation #6: Marketing and Education

The MCPRD has a number of programs and recreation opportunities throughout the county. A comprehensive marketing plan should be developed and implemented to improve awareness about the existing programs and assess the need for future programming. A marketing plan can be a succinct guide that provides an outline for how to implement education and outreach. The plan should incorporate all mechanisms for outreach – website development, social media, print media, and through school and community outlets.

<sup>10</sup> NC State University, Natural Learning Initiative, <http://naturalearning.org/content/projects>

## IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

### MADISON COUNTY PARKS AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES AND PROGRAMMING

- Renovate and improve existing facilities to be accessible for all ages and abilities.
- Renovate and improve existing facilities to the best possible use.
- Develop and Implement a Maintenance Plan for all county facilities.
- Develop a lease/user agreement for all county facilities.
- Develop programming specific to the needs of each community. Identify who the responsible entities and coordinator can be if not county staff.
- Identify opportunities for playground improvements at existing sites and new locations.
- Identify and implement designated river access to improve safe access the French Broad River.
- Continue working with the US Forest Service to identify opportunities for improved facilities at trailheads and campsites to improve safety for residents and visitors.
- Identify financing options for Parks and Recreation facility improvements and development.
- Develop one new programming or recreational activity in each town by 2016.
- Develop marketing/outreach plan for recreation programs and activities.
- Update website with outreach materials for programs and activities.

### HOT SPRINGS SERVICE AREA

- Identify a location suitable for a Community Park (including playground, walking trail, and community space).
- Develop a user agreement for programming in the elementary school gym.
- Develop recreational programming for youth and adults suitable for the gym.
- Research funding and build a new playground at the school.
- Batting cages at the ball fields.

### LAUREL SERVICE AREA

- Develop a user agreement for community and/or elementary school facilities.
- Work with the elementary school to develop a use agreement for programming in the gym.
- Seek funding and partnerships to develop a site plan for a community picnic pavilion on the school grounds.
- Develop recreational programming for youth and adults that can occur in the school facilities and/or local church facilities.
- Mulch the school playground with rubber mulch.

### MARS HILL SERVICE AREA

- Determine a plan for the Rock Gym – either renovation and reuse or removal of the structure.
- Identify opportunities for additional indoor gym facilities since the demand is high.
- Develop additional after school programs for elementary school children.
- Develop a site plan to increase the recreational capacity at the Beech Glen Community Center and ball fields.

### MARSHALL SERVICE AREA

- Develop a user agreement for programming in the elementary school gym.
- Develop recreational programming (with an emphasis on exercise and movement) for youth and adults.
- Identify opportunities for additional indoor gym facilities since the demand is high.
- Renovate the existing Island gym and facilities to their best possible use.
- Develop a maintenance agreement between the Town of Marshall, County, and private entity.
- Work with Town of Marshall to develop site plan for a pool/community park.
- Safe bicycle facilities due to the avid road bicyclists in the region and the use of Marshall as a terminus.
- A safe playground centrally located.
- Develop an outdoor recreation facility at the Hunter Creek Road Reservoir Site.



Marshall Stage

## APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment Survey
- Appendix B: Marketing Methods for Surveys and Public Input Meetings
- Appendix C: Public Input Meetings Attendance Sheets and Minutes
- Appendix D: Commissioner Update Flyer
- Appendix E: Survey Results and Public Input Meeting Presentations:
  - Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
  - Hot Springs
  - Laurel
  - Marshall
  - Mars Hill



