

# ***Cowlitz County Comprehensive Parks, Habitat and Recreation Update***

Prepared By  
Cowlitz County Park and Recreation Advisory Board



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December 2016

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## **VISION**

Cowlitz County Parks Department is recognized for collaboration among public and private partnerships that build a healthy community, protect the natural environment and support high quality of place for all residents, now and into the future.

## **MISSION**

Meeting community and visitor needs by providing a safe unified system of parks, trails, recreation facilities and natural areas that maintains environmental stewardship and provides diverse recreational programs and opportunities.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

- ❖ Offer open space and park infrastructure that facilitates active and healthy lifestyles
- ❖ Provide an environment that allows a variety of positive social interactions
- ❖ Develop parks that accentuate and become a portal to the scenic beauty and natural environment of Cowlitz County
- ❖ Practice, promote and preserve the historic and cultural heritage of Cowlitz County resources while being effective stewards of the land and water
- ❖ Identify, and plan for future sustainable stewardship recreational stewardship.

## **GOALS**

### **Provide diverse recreational opportunities for community members and visitors**

- ✓ Assess changing priorities regularly to keep the comprehensive plan abreast of current needs
- ✓ Provide recreational opportunities for of all residents
- ✓ Promote tourism by development of viewpoints, picnic sites, trails, interpretative information and other services to enhance a visitor's experience
- ✓ Support program development through utilization of county, port, city, tribal, and private facilities
- ✓ Seeking out private and public partnerships to provide program goals
- ✓ Assure facilities are open and accessible to underserved populations
- ✓ Increase the ability of key underserved populations (disabled, seniors and people over 46 years old, minorities, women, and low income individuals) to access recreation areas. New opportunities groups will address federal, state, local and regional health initiatives and improve health outcomes.
- ✓ Assure adequate recreation opportunities for underprivileged children.
- ✓ Recommend to the Board of Cowlitz County Commissioners that outdoor recreation and open space policies be updated to reflect current best practices, address emerging trends, and maximize public recreation opportunities.

Maintain and enhance existing parks, trails and waterways

- ✓ Develop capital improvement plan that is updated annually.
- ✓ Regularly review public use of all trail, waterways and park facilities to identify potential future improvements, key acquisitions and operation efficiency.
- ✓ Provide routine preventative maintenance
- ✓ Utilize efficient maintenance practices and labor
- ✓ Promote the creative collaboration of volunteers to build, maintain and improve parks
- ✓ Seek out private and public partnerships to maintain infrastructure.
- ✓ Assure recreational opportunities are either free and or low cost to all citizens of Cowlitz County

Acquire adequate funding to implement the comprehensive park plan

- ✓ Recommend voter approved funding – any combination thereof to include bonds, levies and taxing district(s) to finance development, acquisition and improvements.
- ✓ Develop a matching grant program to support community groups and expand fiscal resources.
- ✓ Develop guidelines and policies for managing donations and grants.
- ✓ Create a Habitat & Recreation foundation to expand capabilities.
- ✓ Maintain general fund support of parks and recreation programs and operations.
- ✓ Explore a “Conservation Futures Fund” to finance habitat, park, and recreation land acquisitions.
- ✓ Develop more rental facilities such as meeting spaces, wedding sites and reservable group picnic areas which can generate additional revenue and while providing an important service to communities.
- ✓ Create a county code requiring land developers to land bank and/or make a set monetary investment for future parks development.
- ✓ Periodically update all fees and charges to reflect market changes.
- ✓ Explore funding avenues available for acquisition of public access to waterways per the shoreline master plan.

Create and maintain comprehensive unified parks, trails, open spaces and shoreline accessibility

- ✓ Ensure equitable distribution of parks throughout Cowlitz County.
- ✓ Create connections between parks and key destinations through the development of pedestrian, bike and water trails and habitat corridors.
- ✓ Create, maintain and enhance shoreline accessibility.
- ✓ Land bank sites for future generations.
- ✓ Provide additional public access to the banks of local rivers and lakes.
- ✓ Support the development of Comprehensive County trails systems.

- ✓ Support and encourage public transportation to parks, trails and recreational lands.

*Build diverse partnerships to provide services*

- ✓ Pursue and maintain effective partnerships with governmental, public, private and non-profit organizations to maintain and expand parks and recreation facilities.
- ✓ Work with economic development council, chambers of commerce, businesses, cities and ports to promote tourist, and parks and recreation activities.
- ✓ Partner with local school districts in the development of joint facilities and ensure access to play areas, athletic fields, gardens, and indoor facilities
- ✓ Coordinate planning with other regional agencies, such as Cowlitz on the Move and the Council of Governments (COG), Pathways 2020, Forest Service, Healthy Living Collaborative of SW Washington, fish enhancement groups.

**TARGET PROJECTS**

**2016- 2024**

- Create kayak/canoeing/sculling opportunities at Coal Creek Slough including improved launch facilities, restrooms, parking, and other required facilities.
- Create kayak/canoeing/sculling opportunities at Silver Lake including improved launch, restrooms, parking, and other needed facilities.
- Acquisition or development of properties to support Frisbee golf (2017), off leash dog park (2018), remote control cars (2019), remote control airplanes (2020), ultimate Frisbee (2021), BMX park (2022), mountain biking park – beginner to extreme (2024).
- Winter park development to include snow shoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding/tubing, snow mobile usage with a warming house and supporting infrastructure.
- ATV & Bouldering site at LT-1 property.
- Technology for reservation system.
- Harry Gardner Park Phase III.
- Development of an east county rural park at Coweeman Ranch site.
- Conduct a Facility Needs Assessment of all Park Property & Buildings.
- Develop and display a County Wide Recreation event calendar.
- Headquarters to Mint Farm rail to trail.
- Purchase property to develop a park in the south portion of Cowlitz County that would provide river access (including boat launch), walking trails, playground equipment and sports fields and an outdoor venue/amphitheater (possible gazebo).
- Silver Lake Community Forest

- Hoffstadt trailhead to Mudflow Trail.
- Explore opportunities for shoreline acquisition.
- Complete the Lexington Bridge to Castle Rock trail loop with supporting infrastructure including an equestrian trail/infrastructure development and implementation.
- Hoffstadt Hills WDFW acquisition.
- Snow Park located on Highway # 504.
- Toutle community rail to trail.
- Merrill Lake WDFW acquisition.
- Scott Hill park and sport complex I Woodland.
- SW Washington YMCA pool in South County.
- LCFE Group-support plans for Toutle confluence upstream.

### **2025**

- Create a multipurpose indoor sports complex (baseball, soccer, basketball, Pickle ball, climbing walls etc.)
- Castle Rock to Sequest Park trail.

### **2030**

- Swimming pool located in North County area.
- Six Rivers Trail uniting Lewis, Cowlitz and Clark Counties.
- Joint DNR & WDFW recreation plan for Toutle Mountain to Toutle River Valley.

## **Introduction and Case Statement**

Cowlitz County instituted its parks and recreation program in 1965 by establishing a citizen's Park and Recreation Board. From that time forward, the Park and Recreation Board has actively provided direction in establishing park and recreation resources throughout the County. This update of the Comprehensive Park Plan for Cowlitz County continues a tradition of recognizing the importance of a park system in providing the quality of life desired by our residents.

Cowlitz County has demonstrated its commitment to park and recreation goals by accomplishing and participating in many park and recreation developments. Between 1986 and 2015 Cowlitz County invested \$5,457,000 into parks and tourism facilities along with an additional \$1,811,825 in state and federal grants and private gifts. Additionally, during the economic downturn instead of idling or shutting down Cowlitz County Parks, we partnered with other agencies to assure Willow Grove Park / Boat Launch and County Line remained open to the public as required under agreements signed with grantors.

Cowlitz County is located in Southwest Washington and is comprised of 1,146 square miles. The Columbia River forms its southwestern boundary. Coast Range Mountains border the County on the west with the Cascade Mountains on the east. Principal rivers include the Cowlitz River which bisects the County and the Kalama, Coweeman, Lewis and Toutle Rivers which originate in the Mount St. Helens drainage. The County's varied topography ranges from sea level to approximately 4,000 feet on the flanks of Mount St. Helens and includes three distinctive physiographic regions: the Cascade Mountain Province, Puget Sound Basin Province and the Willapa Hills Province.

This comprehensive park plan update is prepared following guidelines established by the Washington State Recreation Conservation Office (RCO). The plan's purpose is to qualify Cowlitz County to receive grant-in-aid funding for county park projects. It is not the intention of this plan to fulfill any requirements of the Growth Management Act or other land use policies. At such time as the county does enter into planning under the Growth Management Act, this plan can be amended, supplemented or replaced as appropriate.

The RCO required components for a comprehensive park and recreation plan include: Goals and Objectives, Description of Planning Area, Evaluation of Existing Facilities, Public involvement, Demand and Needs, Action Program and a Capital Improvement Program. We have additionally recognized the importance of privately owned recreation facilities in meeting the demands of the public.

This report also reflects the current national standards for recreational parks and facilities as provided by the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA).

Recommendations for future action steps are based on the current status of these facilities, accepted standards, population/demographic growth and changes.

While Cowlitz County currently faces challenges in ensuring its financial stability so that it can move forward in planning for its continued growth, it also has the opportunity to position quality of life issues such as adequate and well maintained parks, sufficient recreational facilities, youth and senior programs, community special events (which bring residents together as a community) to the forefront of community priorities. The level that residents feel connected to their community is most often reflected in their access to quality parks, recreation programs, human services, and community events.



### **Historical Overview**

Archaeologists believe that people have lived in what is now Cowlitz County for at least 12,000 years. Indian tribe settlements were located along the Columbia River and its tributaries. Indigenous tribes subsisted by hunting/gathering, fishing and trading with tribes of Eastern Washington, Oregon and Idaho. Lewis and Clark expedition traveled the Columbia River through Cowlitz County to now, Astoria Oregon to their second winter encampment. The Hudson's Bay Company was located in the County area and engaged primarily in fur animal trapping prior to the 1840's. Beginning in the early 1850's the "Donation Land Law" authorized the deeding of land to American citizens if those citizens agreed to productively farm and live on the land. The Cowlitz River Valley was the only level route from Oregon, the destination of most early migrations to the northwest. The Cowlitz River Valley served as a transportation corridor and provided settlers with flat arable floodplain land.

In 1848, the first lumber mill on the lower Columbia River was established at Oak Point and exploitation of the area's vast timber resources began. In 1870, the Northern Pacific Railroad began construction of a line linking Portland with the Puget Sound. The town of Kalama was established at the point where the railroad met the Columbia River. The construction of the railroad shifted the focus of settlement in the County. Previously, settlements had been located primarily on the west side of the Cowlitz River, i.e. Freeport and Monticello. With the completion of the railroad on the east side of the river several small settlements sprang up around railroad stops.

Prior to 1920, basic economic activity was centered on agriculture and logging with no other significant industries. A small number of sawmills were dispersed throughout the County. In the early 1920's, the Long Bell Company moved a major portion of its operations to the west coast, constructing the largest sawmill in the world and establishing a new town, Longview, to house its employees. In 1929, two other large timber companies, Weyerhaeuser and Longview Fibre (Capstone), established mills in Longview. As a result of this rapid industrialization, the County's population increased almost three-fold between 1920 and 1930, growing from 11,700 to 32,000. The County's economy continued to be dominated by the wood products industries until economic recessions in the late 1970's and early 1990's resulted in some economic diversification. Additionally, access to private lands has been limited to fee entry since 2016.

Tourism became a larger factor when in late March 1980 new geologic activity began under the 123-year dormant Mount St. Helens. On May 18, 1980, Mount St. Helens exploded and the upper north flank of the mountain gave way in an immense landslide, instantaneously relieving the pressure of gas-charged magma exploding outwardly devastating over 150,000 acres of surrounding timber land and sending millions of cubic yards of mud and debris surging down the Toutle and Cowlitz River valleys.

**Background on Habitat & Recreation in Cowlitz County**

Parks and recreation services in Cowlitz County are provided by the Board of County Commissioners and overseen by the Facilities Services and Maintenance Department.

During the past few years, there has been a significant economic downturn that is now affecting the ability of the County to provide park enhancements as well as the temporary reduction of department staffing.

The County has 858 acres set aside for parks, 596 acres are developed, leaving 262 acres available future development. Additional park sites are still to be determined but should include at least one park in the southern portion of the County near Woodland. The County has a mixture of mini (pocket) parks, neighborhood parks and community parks as defined by the National Recreation & Parks Association. Mini and neighborhood parks are generally more passive in use, and community parks are active parks with several recreational elements (sports courts, sports fields, etc.) The following is a summary of the existing County owned parks:

<b>Park Name</b>	<b>Acreege</b>	<b>Amenities</b>
Riverside Park	58	3 youth baseball fields including the primary Cal Ripkin baseball fields, 3 soccer fields, 4 restroom buildings, trails and walking pathways, playground equipment, open space, picnic shelter and tables, basketball, tennis courts
Woodbrook Park	5	Neighborhood park, playground equipment, open space. Locate off of Ostrander Road.
Harry Gardner Park	17	2 large fire pits, swings, picnic tables, bench sand volleyball court, and Toutle River access. Tent & RV sites, covered pavilion, water and electricity provided. Located off of South Toutle Road.
Coal Creek Boat Launch	2	Boat launch with concrete single lane ramp on Coal Creek Slough, parking and undeveloped areas
Catlin Cemetery	2	Historical cemetery and natural area located on Columbia Heights Road between Longview and Kelso
Finn Hall Wayside	4	Wayside with picnic area and open space managed as a cultural and historic area near Woodland on SR 503
Cougar Wayside	.2	Rest area with picnic tables and restroom.
Cook Ferry Trail	25	Located 9.2 miles North on Westside Hwy. Currently a dredge spoil depository. A new 2.5 mile trail runs along the Cowlitz River with three trail heads & parking lots. The center parking area provides restroom facilities. Three rest areas are included in the trail, featuring interpretive signs picnic tables and barbecues.

Public Shooting Range	50	Located on Park property known as LT-1 the range consist provides for rifle, pistol, archery, shotgun ranges. A training and education building. The range is operated by Cowlitz Game & Anglers.
Coweeman Ranch Site	12	Coweeman River at Rose Valley, undeveloped property. Located 11.4 miles on Rose Valley Road.
Total	175.2	

Comparison of Park Space Levels of Service: The national standard for the ratio of park space to residents is 6.25 acres per 1,000 residents. This standard is based on a recommendation by the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) and is generally accepted nationally for park planning purposes. Based on 2015 estimates of population, the County has insufficient acres (48) of developed park land.

Public Habitat & Recreation and Community Facilities:

In addition to the existing park space, the larger cities operate facilities used for alternative recreation purposes and are not included in the total Park Space calculation. These are identified by indicating not included.

<b>Facility</b>	<b>Use</b>
Cowlitz County Expo Center	Community building that is used for the county fair, community gardens, and various county community meetings. Maximum capacity in building is 2500.
Longview Senior Center	Located in Longview, the senior center has a membership of approximately 350 serving seniors from Longview, Kelso and surrounding County areas.
Castle Rock Senior Center	Located in Castle Rock, this center has a membership of approximately 400 serving seniors from Castle Rock and surrounding County areas.
Kelso Senior Center	Located in West Kelso, this senior center (Catlin building) has a membership of approximately 120 serving seniors from Kelso, Longview and surrounding County areas.
Public Library	There are three separate libraries located in Longview, Kelso and Castle Rock. Future plans may include consolidation of library services into a metropolitan library district. Note: Woodland Library is a member of Clark County Library District.

Port of Kalama	Marine Park is a day use offering pedestrian/bicycle pathway, playgrounds, covered picnic shelter, largest totem pole in the Pacific Northwest	5 acres
Port of Kalama	HYDRA Recreational & Sport Complex, day use offering baseball, soccer fields. Basketball, tennis courts. Trails to the Kalama River, horseback riding, Restrooms.	24 acres
Tam O'Shanter Park	Operated by the City of Kelso this park is a community park adjoining the Coweeman River. There are three girls fast pitch softball fields, one Babe Ruth field, five bambino fields, two restrooms, a basketball court, horseshoe pits, and large playground equipment and picnic areas.	38 acres
7 <sup>th</sup> Avenue Park	Operated by the City of Longview this community park offers playground equipment, picnic tables, covered picnic area, restrooms, and soccer and softball fields and is ADA accessible.	29 acres
Archie Anderson Park	Operated by the City of Longview this park offers baseball field, basketball courts, a playground, and picnic tables and is ADA accessible.	6.38 acres
Bailey Park	Operated by the City of Longview this park has a basketball court, playground, covered picnic area and is ADA accessible.	.75 acres
Cloney Park	Operated by the City of Longview, this neighborhood park has a playground, walking paths/trails, picnic tables, a covered picnic area, restrooms and a skateboard park and is ADA accessible.	5.35 acres
Elks Memorial Building	Located in Lake Sacajawea Park and operated by the City of Longview, this building may be used for community classes and there is a fenced playground area.	Already included
Gerhart Gardens Park	This community park is operated by the City of Longview and includes a boat launch, basketball courts, dog park, fishing, horseshoe pits, playground, picnic tables, restrooms, volleyball courts and is ADA accessible.	14 acres
John Null Park	This lighted community park is operated by the City of Longview and offers baseball fields, playground, picnic tables, restrooms, and is ADA accessible.	12 acres
Kellogg Park	This mini park operated by the City of Longview offers a playground, picnic table and is ADA accessible	.50 acres
Lads & Lassies Park	This mini park is operated by the City of Longview and located in City of Kelso offers a playground and picnic tables.	.50 acres
Lake Sacajawea Park	This large community park is operated by the City of Longview and offers fishing, playground, walking paths/trails, picnic tables, and is ADA accessible, it also has restrooms.	120 acres
Mark Hoehne Park	This partially developed neighborhood park is operated by the City of Longview and offers a playground.	4.1 acres
Kress Lake	This lake is located outside Kalama, Wa and is owned by the State of Washington. The lake offers non-motorized boat fishing, and includes a	18 acres

	rural trail around its circumference.	
North County Sports Facility	This fully developed sport field complex is owned by the Castle Rock School District. Maintenance and operation of the facility is shared between the school district and North County Recreation Association.	65 acres
Seaquest Park	This overnight camping venue is located on Spirit Lake Highway and operated by the State of Washington. Directly across from Silver Lake, and the Silver Lake Mt. St. Helens Visitor Center, provides ample tent and RV sites.	68-Not included in acreage
Horseshoe Lake Park	Located in Woodland, this park offers a boat launch, covered picnic areas, fishing, skatepark and playground	9 acres
Al Helenberg Memorial Boat Launch	Located in Castle Rock, this boat launch offers access to the Cowlitz River.	2 acres
Willow Grove Park & Boat Launch	Located on the Columbia River the park provides beach access, picnicking, trails, Boat Launch facility, three restrooms and is operated by the Port of Longview	60 acres
Skate Parks	There are three skate parks, one in Longview, Kelso, and Woodland.	6 acres
BMX and Mountain Bike Park	Castle Rock operates a BMX and mountain bike skill development and challenge course.	2
Roy Morris Park	Baseball and softball fields, trails and restrooms.	2

### **Identified Public Habitat Areas**

#### **Toutle River Valley**

##### **Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (USFS)**

Set aside in 1982 for research, recreation, and conservation approximately 26,000 acres of the Monument lie in Cowlitz County. Cowlitz County contains the western edge of the Monument stretching from the Lewis County border south toward Clark County. Adjacent Forest Service land is primarily managed as late successional reserve. An area of lava tubes providing unique bat habitat exists in and around the southern portions of the Monument

##### **Mount Saint Helens and Hoffstadt Units (WDFW)**

This 6589-acres in two units is located in Cowlitz County along the North Fork Toutle River lying just west of and adjacent to the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The Mount St. Helens unit was established in 1990 to protect elk winter range on the North Fork Toutle River mudflow that resulted from the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens. Extensive efforts have been made to improve elk winter forage, including erosion control, weed control, fertilization and vegetation plantings. Additional acreage was transferred to the WDFW from the DOT, but much of that land is slated for sediment containment projects managed by the US Army Corps of Engineers.

##### **Gardner Unit (WDFW)**

The 43-acre Gardner unit is managed for riparian habitat and fishing access on the South Toutle River. It is located northeast of Silver Lake, adjacent to Cowlitz County's Harry Gardner Park.

#### **Silver Lake**

##### **Canal Road (WDFW)**

The 121-acre Canal Road unit is managed for wetland/waterfowl habitat. It is located on the east end of Silver Lake.

##### **Hall Road Unit (WDFW)**

The Hall Road unit is 132 acres managed for wetland habitat and upland forest. It is located north of Silver Lake.

##### **Seaquest State Park (Wa. State Parks)**

475 acres with wetlands along Silver Lake and uplands being managed for recreation and habitat.

## **Columbia River**

### **Nelson Unit (WDFW)**

The 20-acre Nelson unit lies within the Columbia River floodplain and is managed for waterfowl habitat. It is located south of Kelso.

### **Abernathy Creek (WDFW)**

The Abernathy Creek unit is 138 acres managed for riparian and upland forest habitat and fishing access. It is located on Abernathy Creek near the Columbia River.

### **Fisher Island Unit (WDFW)**

The Fisher Island unit is 257 acres primarily maintained as forested floodplain. Columbian white-tailed deer reside on this small island in the Columbia River.

**Willow Grove** (Columbia Land Trust) 284 acres of riparian habitat along the Columbia River

**Germany Creek** (Columbia Land Trust) 157 acres of riparian habitat on Germany Creek near where it intersects the Columbia River.

## **Lewis River and Reservoirs**

### **Eagle Island Wildlife area (WDFW)**

Recently added 270 acres of WDFW property on the Lewis River east of Woodland that provides key riparian habitat and water access. Extensive rehabilitation of habitat is underway. Part of **Pacificorp**

As part of hydropower relicensing agreements, Pacificorp enacted the Lewis River Wildlife Habitat Management Plan that encompasses 10,300 acres in three counties mostly along the shores of Yale, Merwin, and Swift Reservoirs.

## **Merrill Lake Area**

### **Merrill Lake Wildlife Area (WDFW)**

WDFW is in the process of purchasing additional land adjacent to Merrill Lake

### **Merrill Lake Natural Resources Conservation Area (DNR)**

114-acre site consists of a forest cover of mixed conifers and hardwoods along a lake at the 1,550-foot elevation. Merrill Lake NRCA is prime habitat for birds of prey, including osprey and bald eagles, and is also home to waterfowl such as bufflehead, common goldeneye, and hooded merganser. A regionally popular catch-and-release fly fishing spot, Merrill Lake has a boat launch for small craft (non-gasoline powered) and a nine-site campground. –

**Goat Marsh Research natural Area** 1195 acres sits within the National Monument and protects

rare habitat and plant communities.

### **Additional Habitat Areas**

#### **Coweeman River Mitigation Bank**

320 Acres along the Coweeman River, a mostly city of Kelso city owned, approved wetland mitigation bank

#### Non-County Habitat and Recreation Facilities & Programs:

There are additional non-County agencies that provide recreational programs directly or that provide space for recreation programs, on a limited basis.

- R. A. Long High School: Offers soccer fields and baseball fields
- Mark Morris High School: Offers soccer fields, baseball fields, and a swimming pool.
- Kelso High School: Offers soccer fields, baseball fields and a swimming pool
- YMCA of Longview: Heated swimming pool.
- Middle and Elementary schools in Longview, Kelso, Woodland, Castle Rock, Kalama, and Toutle offer access to their sports fields on a limited basis.
  
- Soccer: Both youth and adult soccer are available and play at park sites in Longview and Kelso and North County sports facility.
- Baseball: There are four Cal Ripkin facilities – Western / Central, Cowlitz, and Kelso.
- Additional Programs: A variety of programs are offered through Longview and Kelso Parks and Recreation Departments on an ongoing basis.
- Woodland volunteers are in process of developing a 26 acre sport and park complex know as Scott Hill Park & Sport Complex

Issues That Need Addressing: In reviewing County-owned facilities, other public facilities, and existing programs, there are several issues that need to be addressed:



- Closing the current gap in developed park acreage.
- Improve service area radius of park and recreational facilities.
- The Longview senior center while currently meeting basic needs, requires refurbishing and will likely need to be expanded to accommodate aging population.
- Given the popularity of youth and adult soccer, additional fields are required.
- Lack of swimming pools to services citizens.
- Lack of winter recreation facilities.
- Lack of trail connectivity and limited number of trails in Cowlitz County.
- Lack of free or low cost recreational opportunities to low income residence and visitors.
- Lack of ATV or motorized trails and courses.
- Lack of rock bouldering areas.
- Recreation programs & community events.
- Managing ongoing vandalism of recreational equipment, buildings and trails.

**Population Trends**

Over three quarters of the County’s population lives in or within five miles of the Longview/Kelso area. The 2010 census recorded a county population of 102,410 with projections of growth to 109,000 by 2020. Since the 2010 census, Cowlitz County has experienced a growth rate of approximately 3%. It is estimated that cities in the southern section of the County will experience a more rapid growth rate as more people move north from Vancouver and Portland for lower land and housing costs. As the chart below indicates, both Woodland and Kalama have experienced a growth rate of approximately 26% since the 2000 census.

<b>Year</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Total County	102,410	102,700	130,050	103,300	103,700	104,280
Unincorporated County	44,085	44,225	44,180	44,345	44,515	44,765
Incorporated County	58,325	58,475	58,870	58,955	59,185	59,515
Longview	36,648	36,730	36,910	36,940	37,040	37,130
Kelso	11,925	11,920	11,930	11,940	11,960	11,950
Woodland (Cowlitz)	5,426	5,465	5,505	5,540	5,610	5,750
Castle Rock	1,982	1,995	2,135	2,135	2,145	2,175
Kalama	2,344	2,365	2,390	2,400	2,430	2,500

*\*Intercensal Estimate of total population 2010-2040*

Population projections indicate a continuing growth rate as noted in the chart below. The bottom line is that the county will likely maintain a steady growth rate through the next 10-20 years.

<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>	<b>2030</b>	<b>2035</b>	<b>2040</b>
109,000	112,000	114,000	116,000	117,000

**Population Co-horts**

Age Group Breakout: The median age for Cowlitz County was 40.2 in the 2010 census, compared to the U.S. median age of 37.2. The census reported that approximately 26.80% of the population was age 19 or younger (27,475 persons), a lower percentage than for the U.S. as a whole (26.90%). The census reported that the 60 and over population was 22.1% (22,618 persons), compared to 18.5% for the U.S. as a whole.

In the 2010 census, the 19 and under population were 27,475 or 26.80% of the total population and the 60 and over population were 22,618 or 22.1% of the population. This demonstrates the youth population is continuing to grow slowly while the senior population is fairly static.

Key Issues:

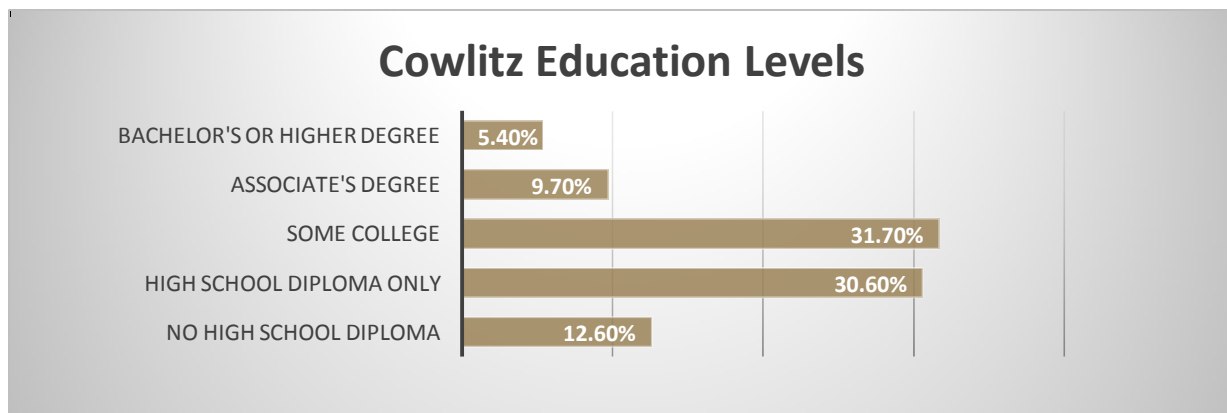
- The senior population is growing and its percentage of the total population is steadily increasing.
- Senior services will be impacted by the baby boomer bulge.
- There will be a continuing need for youth services such as day care, family friendly parks, and youth sports opportunities.

Ethnicity: Cowlitz County has had consistency in its demographic make-up. The 2014 census estimate reported the following ethnicity breakdown:

<b>Population Group</b>	<b>2014 Percentage</b>
White	90.9
Hispanic	2.9
Black	0.6
Asian/Pac.Isl.	0.2
Native American	1.2
Two or More Races	4.2

Economic & Social Characteristics: The 2000 census reported that the median household income was \$41,500 based on 1999 dollars. The 2014 Census income estimate for Cowlitz County was \$47,596. The median income has increased slowly, but may not be keeping up with inflation.

The 2014 census estimate reported that 17.6% of Cowlitz County families were below the federal poverty level. The census also reported that 7.8% of adults 65 and over were below the poverty level. The average household size was 2.55 and the average family size was 3.01.



Key Issues:

- 17.6% or 18,208 families are below the federal poverty level.
- A smaller percentage of seniors are below the poverty level.
- The affordability of housing will continue to attract middle and low-middle income families who will want access to parks, community facilities and services.
- The County will need to provide disabled and elderly persons access to facilities, sidewalks, bus stops, etc.
- Children in poverty lack the ability to experience all recreational opportunities.
- Childhood and adult obesity has been increasing during the past 20 years. The latest supported numbers from 2012 indicate Cowlitz county citizens are 32% obese while 32% are overweight. Additionally 79% have adequate access to location for physical activity, but 22% of are physically inactive.

**Best Practices/Standards for Public Habitat and Recreation Facilities**

The accepted measurement to whether or not a community meets adequate park and recreation facilities standards are standards adopted by the National Recreation & Parks Association (NRPA) in 1996. While these standards are only a guideline, they do provide a good tracking system to determine acreage needs for planning purposes. As a part of their own park master planning efforts, some counties have made adjustments to the NRPA standards to take into account changing participation in certain recreational activities. These include things like the rapid growth of soccer, BMX biking, skate parks, public shooting ranges etc.

The NRPA descriptions of the kinds of parks and guidelines for park acreage that apply to Cowlitz County are as follows:

Type of Park	Site Characteristics	Service Area	Desirable Size	Density
Mini-Park	Close proximity to neighborhood	Serves persons within the immediate neighborhood	0.25 acres	.025 acres per 1,000 population
Neighborhood Park	Evenly distributed across the County with easy and safe access for nearby residents	Primarily services residents within a one-half mile of the park	Minimum of 5 acres	One acre per 1,000 residents

Community Park	Located to provide full access to the County	Serves the broad community and includes facilities for active and passive recreation	Minimum of 10 to 25 acres	5.0 acres per 1,000 residents
Linear Park	Available to all persons in the community	Typically follow a linear feature	Sufficient to accommodate expected use	No minimum standard
Special Use Facility	Available to all persons in the community	Special use such as a skate park or community center	No minimum standard	No minimum standard

The NRPA also has set standards for recreation facilities such as sports fields. Those that apply to Cowlitz County are as follows:

Facility	Recommended Size (Land Needed)	Units Per Population	Service Area Radius
Basketball Courts	5040-7,280 sq.ft. (high school size)	1 per 1,000 population	1/4-1/2 mile
Tennis Courts	7,200 sq. ft. per court	1 per 2,000 population	1/4-1/2 mile
Baseball Fields	1.2 ac. – 3.85 ac.	1 per 5,000 population	1/4 – 1/2 mile
Softball Fields	1.5 ac. – 2 ac.	1 per 5,000 population	1/4-1/2 mile
Soccer Fields	1.7 ac. -2.1 ac.	1 per 10,000 population	1 – 2 miles
Swimming Pool	1 ac. – 2 ac.	1 per 20,000 population (should have room for 3-5% of the population at one time)	15-30 minute travel time
Community Center	No NRPA standard		
Senior Center	No NRPA standard		

**Status of Habitat and Recreation Acreage**

The NRPA recommends that a core system of parks (mini, neighborhood, community parks, etc.) be at a minimum of 6.25 acres per 1,000 residents. Using the July 1, 2014 U.S. Census population estimate (103,468) as a guide, the County would need 644 acres of developed recreation and parkland. The current Recreation acreage is 596 acres, but only 175.2 is developed. Additionally the service area radius is not compliant with NRPA recommendations.

### **Summary of Findings and Conclusions**

In preparing this 2016 Comprehensive Habitat & Recreation update, it was determined that the following findings and conclusions summarize that analysis.

- Many of the past goals, objectives and policies are still valid and have been re-adopted.
- Habitat & Recreation developments must be facilities which can be maintained and operated within reasonable funding limits, can generate revenues to offset maintenance and operating costs or will promote development of tourism as an industry.
- During the summer season there can be extensive public use of shorelines along area rivers. Shoreline access is also important year-round for fishing. Wherever possible, undeveloped shoreline areas should be expanded for public use.
- Merwin, Yale and Swift reservoirs and parks operated by Pacific Power & Light Company (PP&L) are providing extensive and valuable recreation facilities to the Southwest Washington region. Cowlitz County should continue to work with PP&L to meet community needs.
- The Mount St. Helens-Spirit Lake-North Fork Toutle River area is a major recreation area in Washington State. The primary recreation activity is enjoyment of scenic views of the 1980 eruption impact area and natural recovery processes. Major visitor facilities along the corridor are serving as the main destination points including the Hoffstadt Bluffs Visitor Center which was upgraded in 2008 and includes a conference center, bookings for special events and weddings as well as an excellent restaurant. Planned improvements include adding an overnight camping area. It is anticipated that visitors will be requesting additional services, recreation opportunities and camping.
- Efforts to improve the water quality of Silver Lake will increase public use of the lake. Additional public shoreline access combined with needed recreational facilities serving local communities and tourist traffic along SR 504 is anticipated.
- Walking, jogging and biking trails should be expanded and additional trails should be added to accommodate a growing active population.
- While Cowlitz County faces many challenges including sustained growth, economic development, and economic stability, it also faces the opportunity to transform itself into a community that has a dynamic quality of life. Among the most important quality of life issues that most residents want are attractive, well maintained parks, good community facilities, and a sense of connection to the community, and good programs and services.

### **Summary of Research, Public Input & Background Materials**

The following materials were utilized as background research for this Habitat & Recreation comprehensive plan update:

- Cowlitz Regional Trails Plan (2009)
- Cowlitz County Comprehensive Park Plan (2010)
- U.S. Census (2015)
- Intercensal estimate of total population (2010-2015)
- Input obtained interviewing, Longview, Kelso, Woodland, Castle Rock and Kalama Park Board. (5) & Dates
- North County Public meeting (Date)
- Central County Public Meeting (Date)
- South County Public Meeting (Date)
- On-line survey (Date)
- Harry Gardner Park citizen operations board comments.
- Cowlitz County Shoreline Master Program visioning report, May 2012.
- Toutle Valley Community Action Plan and 2015 update public comments.
- US Forest Service Mount St. Helens National Monument Strategic Investment Plan.

## **EXISTING COWLITZ COUNTY HABITAT AND RECREATION FACILITIES**

### **PARKS**

#### **Riverside Park**

Acquired by the County in 1965, this is the “cornerstone” of the county park system. Located on the Cowlitz River in the unincorporated community of Lexington, this 58-acre park was extensively redeveloped in 1977. Facilities include youth baseball field’s soccer fields, open play areas, restrooms, picnic facilities, play equipment, basketball and tennis. Riverside Park is used extensively by groups and families for picnics, recreational activities for children from the Lexington area and people seeking a safe route for fitness walking. There is no river access for fishing or boat launching.

#### **Woodbrook Park**

This neighborhood park is located in the Woodbrook subdivision north of Kelso. It was dedicated to Cowlitz County by developers of Woodbrook Subdivision. The shape and topography of the parcel severely limit recreation potential. A Longview Fibre Company road easement traverses the southern portion of the property. Access to the park is limited with no on-site parking. A portion of the property is maintained for day use activities. Use is primarily by neighborhood residents.

#### **Harry Gardner Park**

This 75-acre park has been redeveloped through a partnership with the Friends of Harry Gardner Park. The 35 acres that are buildable includes two large fire pits, picnic tables, a sand volleyball court, swings, and barbecues. Large covered Pavilion, RV and Tent Camping sites with water and power hook ups. One centralized dump station. There is approximately 500 feet of Toutle River access. The Harry Gardner Park Advisory Committee, a subcommittee of the Cowlitz County Parks Advisory Board, has developed a long range plan that will add, basketball court, and a baseball/softball diamond.

### **HISTORICAL SITES**

#### **Catlin Cemetery**

The cemetery was deeded to Cowlitz County in 1864 and is now a County Historic Site located on the Longview/Kelso border. Some of the earliest graves date from 1863. Many early grave markers were made of wood and have since decayed. Catlin Cemetery is located on Goat Hill at the intersection of Lynnwood Drive and Columbia Heights Road and is approximately 2 acres.

#### **Finn Hall Historical Marker**

Located three miles east of Woodland on Lewis River Road and Finn Hall Road, this site commemorates the early Finnish settlers in Cowlitz County. A roadside picnic site has been established.



## **NON DEVELOPED FISHING ACCESS**

### **Coal Creek Site**

This 2-acre site is west of Longview where Ocean Beach Highway (SR4) crosses Coal Creek. A one-lane launch for small boats and gravel parking area allow access to Coal Creek Slough. The principle use is for bank fishing and small craft launching.

### **Hog Island Access**

This is a primitive Cowlitz River shoreline access site located six miles north of Castle Rock on West Side Highway. A small 3-acre upland area with parking, one-lane wood bridge to the island and several picnic tables are located here. This site is used primarily for bank fishing access and small boat launching.

### **Coweeman Ranch Site**

Located on the Coweeman River the 12 acre site in one of the few access points to the shorelines of the river. The property was transferred from the Roads when a realignment road project was completed to prevent flooding of the roadway. The site can be developed to provide access to the Coweeman River and help in meeting the Service Radius Area of local residence.

**Appendices A**

**PUBLIC INPUT**

## **APPENDICES B**

### **PARK PROJECTS COMPLETED OR ASSISTED BY COWLITZ COUNTY 1986 – 2015**

#### **1986**

##### **Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument Visitor Center – Silver Lake**

A U.S. Forest Service project with a partnership funding assistance from Cowlitz County, Washington State Parks, Washington State Department of transportation and F.E.M.A. The \$5 million facility received \$100,000 of funding assistance from Cowlitz County with an additional \$296,664 from F.E.M.A. disaster recovery assistance transferred from the County to help fund this project.

#### **1986**

##### **Expansion Seaquest State Park Camping and Picnic Facilities**

A state park expansion project with partnership funding from Cowlitz County and F.E.M.A. of \$491,861. Cowlitz County transferred its eligibility to receive F.E.M.A. disaster recovery aid from Harry Gardner Park to Seaquest State Park when it was determined that Harry Gardner Park could not be safely rebuilt in its old location. F.E.M.A. rules required that a replacement park be built in order to receive any aid.

#### **1986**

##### **County Line Park – Erosion Control**

A Cowlitz County project with funding assistance from Flood Control Assistance Account Program (F.C.A.A.P.) Department of Ecology. \$10,000 from the Department of Ecology and \$10,000 Cowlitz County Funding.

#### **1986**

##### **Coal Creek Boat Ramp Improvements**

A Cowlitz County project to renovate the boat launch. Total cost to the County was \$5,000.

#### **1987**

##### **Willow Grove Beach Acquisition**

Cowlitz County acquired the land for \$238,000

#### **1988**

##### **SRS Viewpoint**

Cowlitz County and the Corps of Engineers constructed parking area, trails, and safety fence and picnic sites at a cost of \$59,400. The land was leased at no cost.

**1988 – 1992**

**Willow Grove Beach Day Use Facilities**

A Cowlitz County phased project with funding assistance in 1991 from I.A. /C. (WWRP monies), County funds \$507,000 plus I.A.C. funds of \$211,900. Completed phase I day use facilities including restrooms, group shelter, family shelters, trails, roads and parking.

**1989**

**Hog Island – acquisition**

Cowlitz County acquired one acre of land adjacent to Hog Island for \$1,000.

**1990 – 1991**

**Gerhart Gardens – renovation**

A City of Longview project with partnership funding from Cowlitz County, City of Kelso and I.A.C. Cowlitz County contributed \$80,000 toward this \$750,000 project.

**1991**

**County Line Park**

Installation of an RV dump station, paving to provide RV turning radius around the restroom and water system modification, and “Park Host” trailer site. Twelve camp sites have been identified to bring County Line Park into compliance with Health District regulations (\$17,000).

**1992**

**Coldwater Lake**

Contributed \$500,000 to the U.S. Forest Service as a partnership to build boating and picnic facilities at Coldwater Lake.

**1992 – 1993**

**Hoffstadt Bluffs**

Acquired from the Washington State Department of Transportation (\$54,000). Initiated construction of a viewpoint facility with site grading, access road, utilities, and wells. (\$350,000) Federal ISTEA funding (\$486,000) for parking facilities.

**1994**

**Hoffstadt Bluffs**

Constructed public service building, water system, sewage system, site work, and paving RV lot (\$2,300,000).

**1998-1999**

**Willow Grove Boat Launch**

Before the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens, Columbia River boaters could launch at Gerhart Gardens near the mouth of the Cowlitz River. Since then, however, boat launchings have been hindered by volcanic silt in the Cowlitz River. The only other boat launch for Longview/Kelso residents has been at the Kalama Marina and the Weyerhaeuser Boat dock in Longview. Weyerhaeuser closed their launch on Sunday, August 1, 1999.

The Willow Grove Boat Launch has 4 lanes and a large parking lot. On Monday, August 2, 1999 there were already 10 trucks and trailers in the parking lot. The new launch will fill a much needed launch access to the Columbia River for Cowlitz County Residents. (\$2,000,000)

#### **2008 - 2009**

##### **Hoffstadt Bluffs**

Complete remodel of the exterior & interior of the building. (\$500,000)

#### **2009**

##### **Catlin Cemetery**

Installed granite monument identifying pioneers buried within the property. (\$4,900)

#### **2009-2010**

##### **Harry Gardner Park**

The Park was reactivated in 2009 and an additional 50 acres adjacent to the existing park was purchased for \$20,000. The Park Board agreed to the installation of swing set(s), picnic areas, toilets and a loop trail. (\$110,000)

#### **2011-2015**

##### **Harry Gardner Park Upgrades**

The park was upgrade to include RV and Tent sites. Additional restrooms have been added, along with a large covered pavilion. Both water, electrical, and RV dump station were added. The park has a year round full-time camp host. The County provided \$425,000, the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Department granted \$106,000, and hundreds of hours donated by the volunteers from the Friends Harry Gardner Park Committee.

#### **2009-2010**

##### **Cook Ferry Property**

The property supports a 2.5 mile pedestrian and equestrian trail along the Cowlitz River. The trail offers restrooms, 3-trail heads & parking, 3-rest areas,

with interpretative displays, picnic tables, benches and barbecue pits.  
(\$375,000)

#### **2011-2015**

##### **Public Shooting Range**

The Public Shooting Range located at the end of Toutle Park Road offers a 300 meter rifle range, 50 yard pistol range, shoot gun range, archery range and a club house that is used for training and large events. Cowlitz Game and Anglers built the range using thousands of hours donated labor from its members. Many local companies donated material and supplies. Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office granted Cowlitz Game and Anglers \$125,000, the NRA gifted \$25,000 and the County contributed \$450,000 to complete the range.

#### **2014-2015**

##### **County Line Park**

Due to budgetary constraints Cowlitz County Commissioners and the County Park Advisory Board collaborated with the Port District #2 of Wahkiakum County to transfer ownership and operation of County Line Park to the Port District # 2. The transfer was completed in late 2015.

#### **2014-2016**

##### **Willow Grove Park and Boat Launch.**

Due to budgetary constraints Cowlitz County Commissioners and the County Park Advisory Board collaborated with the Port of Longview to transfer ownership and operation of the Boat Launch and Park at Willow Grove to the Port of Longview. The transfer was completed in late April 2016

## **Appendices C**

### **PUBLIC PARKS PROVIDED BY PRIVATE INDUSTRY**

#### **Merwin Reservoir**

##### **Merwin Park (PP & L)**

Located at the west end of Merwin Reservoir, ten miles east of Woodland along Lewis River Road (SR 503), this park is the largest day use facility on the Lewis River. Developments include swimming beach, restrooms with showers, picnic and group picnic accommodations and ball fields.

##### **Speelyai Bay (PP & L)**

At the east end of Merwin Reservoir, 20 miles from Woodland along SR 504, this park includes facilities for swimming, picnicking, boating, fishing and restrooms.

##### **Cresep Bay (PP & L)**

Opened in 1992 the park provides day use, picnic, swimming, shoreline and boating access, marina and overnight camping facilities, trails and group shelters.

#### **Yale Reservoir**

##### **Saddle Dam (PP & L)**

This park is on the north wing of Saddle Dam which forms Yale Reservoir, 27 miles east of Woodland. Developed facilities at this day use park include picnicking, restrooms with showers, swimming, boating and fishing, and scenic views of Mount St. Helens.

##### **Yale Park (PP & L)**

Located on Yale Reservoir, 26 miles from Woodland and two miles from Cougar. This day use park has picnicking, boating, restrooms, swimming, fishing and a trailer dump station. Additionally, the U.S. Forest service has placed a visitor information booth at the park to provide information to people touring the Mount St. Helens area.

##### **Cougar Park and Cougar Camp (PP & L)**

Adjacent to the community of Cougar, 33 miles from Woodland on Yale Reservoir, these two parks provide day use and campground facilities including 45 campsites, picnic areas, boating, swimming, fishing, boat docks and restrooms with showers.

**Beaver Bay (PP & L)**

Located three miles east of Cougar, 35 miles from Woodland on Yale Reservoir. Providing camping and some day use facilities, this park includes 63 campsites, picnicking areas, boating, swimming, fishing and restroom with showers.

**Spirit Lake Highway (SR 504)**

**Mount St. Helens – Forest Learning Center at North Fork Ridge  
(Weyerhaeuser Company)**

Located at milepost 33 on Spirit Lake Highway. Providing an interpretive facility focused on forest impacts by the Mt. St. Helens eruption and regeneration of new forest, restrooms, playground and viewpoint. Cooperative effort with the Washington State department of Transportation and Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation.

Weyerhaeuser Company has implemented a lease and permit recreational access fee to all of its Saint Helens tree farm. The fee based system allows for access including overnight camping in selected areas. The fee for a family is \$300 per year and the number of permits is limited. Due to the fee based system many low income families no longer recreate on lands once free to the public.



**Appendices D**

**MAP IDENTIFYING ALL COWLITZ COUNTY RECREATION LOCATIONS**

**Appendices E**

**MAP OF COWLITZ COUNTY RURAL RECREATIONAL LOCATIONS**

**Appendices F**

**MAP OF COWLITZ COUNTY TRAILS.**