



Kosciusko

■ C O U N T Y ■

PARKS MASTER PLAN

2023-2027



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Kosciusko County 2023-2027 Parks Master Plan would not have been possible without the guidance, direction, and input from residents, visitors, the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board, and the Steering Committee.

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Troy Turley, Vice-President
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose	2
Definition of the Planning Area	2
Vision Statement.....	3
Mission Statement.....	3
Parks and recreation Board.....	3
Supporting Plans & Organizations	4
EXISTING CONDITIONS	8
Natural Features and Landscape.....	8
Man-Made, Historical, and Cultural Features	10
Community Facilities	11
Socioeconomic Factors.....	13
Housing	15
Employment Trends.....	17
EXISTING PARKS & RECREATION FACILITIES	19
Community Parks & Recreational Facilities	19
Trails	27
Existing Parks and Recreation Amenities Map.....	31
ADA COMPLIANCE & ACCESSIBILITY	32
Overview	32
Statement of Accessibility	32
Accessibility Review and Proposed Accessibility.....	33
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.....	34
Prior Public Engagement Activities	38
NEEDS & GAP ANALYSIS	42
Acreage & Parklands Level of Service Metrics	42
Gap Analysis	43
Major Needs.....	45
Needs of Improvement & Gap Analysis Map	49
PRIORITY ACTION PROGRAM	52
Priority Action Schedule	54
Other Supporting Strategies.....	62
Implementation and Funding	63
Grant Programs.....	63
Other Funding Sources	64
APPENDIX - PUBLIC INPUT	65
Stakeholder Interviews	65
Public Open Houses	67
Public Input Survey Summary	68
Public Review Form Summary	73
Press Releases for Public Input	82

1



INTRODUCTION

Located in North Central Indiana, Kosciusko County is comprised of 13 outstanding and unique towns and cities. Each community has its distinct identity, but they are all connected together by a collective vision to create healthy, livable, resilient, and vibrant communities that provide residents and visitors of all backgrounds the highest quality of life.

Kosciusko County celebrates its rich history, offering events and activities to invite residents and visitors to interact with the County's history, and managing and preserving numerous historical sites including the Old Jail Museum and the John Pound Store. Kosciusko County has a growing economy with several large manufacturing industries headquartered in the county and strong support for entrepreneurs to get their businesses growing and thriving. Kosciusko County's bustling arts and culture sector invites artists, residents, and visitors to share in the creation and enjoyment of art in galleries, art studios, and performing arts centers. Additionally, there are numerous festivals and events for residents and visitors to enjoy including the Lakes Festival, the Kosciusko County Fair, and the Heirloom Tomato Festival.

Kosciusko County offers picturesque sceneries, breath-taking natural landscapes, and entertaining recreational amenities. Residents and visitors can utilize the County's beautiful waterways for kayaking and other water recreation. They can also enjoy the County's alluring scenery and natural resources utilizing the many miles of walking paths and trails within the County. Additionally they can enjoy the amenities offered in the numerous parks accessible within local communities and nature preserves.

In Kosciusko County, residents have the same access to high quality services and amenities as residents in urbanized areas, but can simultaneously enjoy the peace and natural beauty of this rural county including its unique natural landscapes. Kosciusko County is already home to many quality assets and features that appeal to prospective residents and businesses, but it remains imperative that the County continues to value and invest in providing these important quality of life amenities such as parks, trails, and recreation facilities to attract and retain Kosciusko County's populations.

PURPOSE

Kosciusko County established its first Parks and Recreation Board in August 2022 following the adoption of Forward Kosciusko in May 2022 (the County's updated comprehensive plan) and receiving the Hoosiers for Enduring Legacy Program (HELP) grant award in November 2021. These initiatives were catalysts in the formation of the Parks and Recreation Board as following the numerous public engagement efforts for these initiatives, residents continually expressed the value and need to expand recreational opportunities into the unincorporated areas of the County and create a trail network system linking to the communities' parks and recreational facilities. These goals were continually indicated as top priorities by county residents and visitors during the community engagement activities outlined in chapter 5. Additionally, as the County government was evaluating the creation of the Parks and Recreation Board, the Land and Water Conservation Fund routinely popped up in conversations, furthering the need to establish a Parks Board and have a 5-year parks master plan to be grant eligible. The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board reached out to the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG) to guide and facilitate the planning process to create its first five-year parks master plan.

This master plan is the County's first five-year parks master plan with the purpose to provide direction for the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board and establish priority goals and strategies that links communities in and outside the County through linear park systems, expand promotional efforts, and establish annual budget and maintenance schedule. The Parks Master Plan should be used to guide the Parks and Recreation Board to plan and program for high-quality parks and recreational services. This plan analyzes the County's existing conditions, including socioeconomic data, natural and cultural features, historical assets, and man-made features that affect the usage and need for parks in Kosciusko County. Public engagement was a vital component to identify the needs and creation of the action program. Chapter 5 outlines the community engagement efforts used for the development of this plan.

DEFINITION OF THE PLANNING AREA

The planning area represents the service area of the Parks and Recreation Board, which is the unincorporated areas of Kosciusko County. The County has many assets like its bountiful natural resources (lakes, waterways, wetlands, etc), trails (in local communities and nature preserves), and recreational areas (nature preserves, beaches, and parks) that serves as a major attraction for tourism. Tourism is important to the local economy being one of three economic drivers for the County. While the local municipalities have their own parks or recreation assets and are

“outside” of the Board’s service area, the County Parks and Recreation Board and the local communities and organizations understand the value of these assets and the tourism opportunities they have, and that the only way to achieve the vision of creating a system that is enjoyable and accessible for its residents and visitors is to foster collaborative partnerships.

VISION STATEMENT

Kosciusko County will be a leader in creating an interconnected network of communities, resources, and experiences focused on vibrant recreational opportunities, intentional growth, and environmental stewardship.

MISSION STATEMENT

To promote and assist in establishing county-wide connectivity between existing resources and provide recreational opportunities to enhance the quality of life in Kosciusko County while conserving and caring for its natural areas.

PARKS AND RECREATION BOARD

The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board was established in August 2022, to create and manage a County parks system, to expand recreational opportunities for residents and visitors enjoyment, and increase access to communities’ facilities and destinations through the provision of trails and blueways. Currently, the County does not have a Parks and Recreation Department, parks or recreation facilities, or a budget. It is a long-term goal of the Parks and Recreation Board to have dedicated staff and an operating budget as the park and recreational system grows.

The Parks and Recreation Board typically meets on the third Thursday of every month at 1 PM in the Courtroom of the Old County Courthouse, 100 W. Center St., Warsaw, IN 46580. The Board can be reached at parksboard@kcgov.com. The Parks and Recreation Board consists of five members, appointed by the County Commissioners and County Council.

Parks and Recreation Board Members:

Rob Bishop, President (4-year term)
Troy Turley, Vice-President (1-year term)
Mike Cusick, Member (4-year term)
Matt Metzger, Member (2-year term)
Aggie Sweeney, Member (2-year term)
Rhonda Helser, Secretary (non-voting member)

SUPPORTING PLANS & ORGANIZATIONS

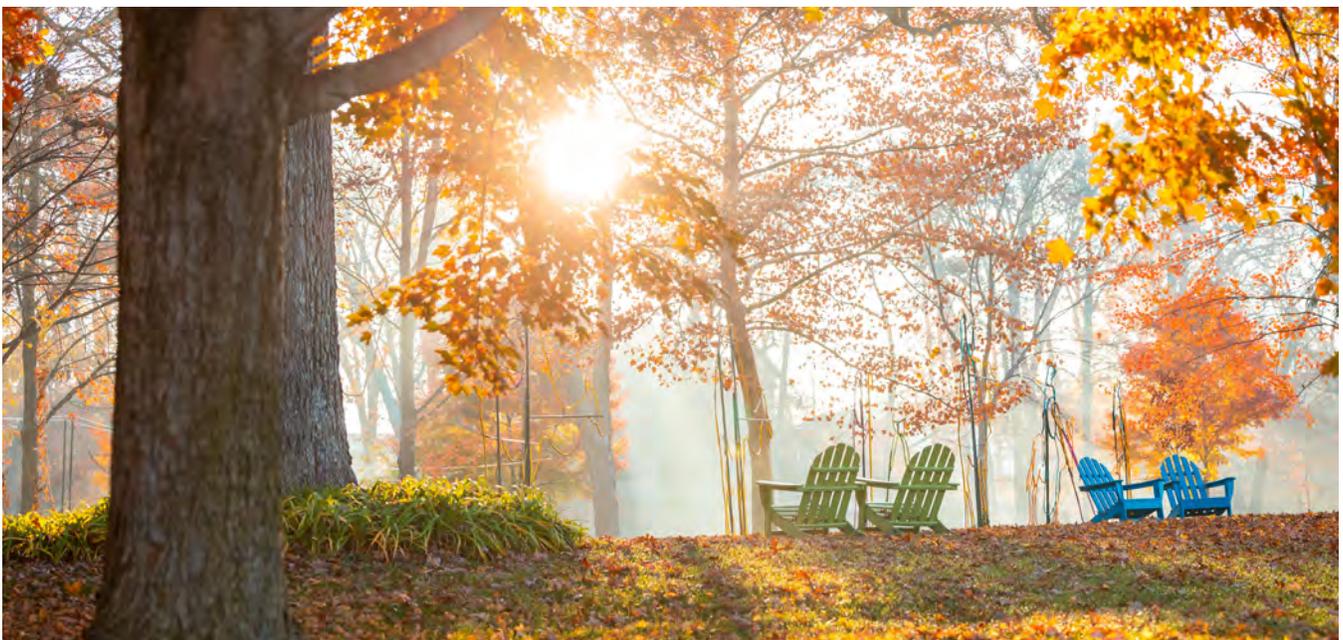
- **Forward Kosciusko** – Forward Kosciusko presented a unique opportunity for the County, its incorporated communities, and partnering organizations to join together to create a multi-jurisdictional updated comprehensive plan for the County with a unified-cohesive vision to guide future development, provide a framework for zoning regulations, and promote each other's wealth of resources and opportunities to expand the quality of life and success of its residents and visitors. Forward Kosciusko guides the growth and development within the municipal boundaries and provides recommendations on how incorporated and unincorporated land should be developed in ways that benefit both the County and its communities. Participating communities included the City of Warsaw, and the Towns of Claypool, Etna Green, Leesburg, Mentone, Milford, North Webster, Pierceton, Silver Lake, Syracuse, and Winona Lake.
- **Hoosiers Enduring Legacy Program (HELP)** – The Hoosier Enduring Legacy Program is a 52-week process through the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs that culminates in a dynamic Strategic Investment Plan (SIP) that seeks to build long-term capacity, develop attainable projects, and leave a legacy in the community. Some of the project ideas coming out of this process include park improvements and development which indicates there is interest in the County to further develop outdoor recreational opportunities. This Parks Master Plan will be able to plan for the further development of outdoor recreational opportunities and can help to address the proposed projects if the projects are not implemented through the HELP program.
- **MACOG Active Transportation Plan** – MACOG prepared a regional active transportation plan in 2016 that identified community needs and strategies to improve the walking and bicycling experience in Elkhart, Kosciusko, Marshall, and St. Joseph Counties. This plan serves as part of the Michiana on the Move: 2045 Transportation Plan and builds on the support of its local municipalities.
- **Local Comprehensive Plans** – In addition to Forward Kosciusko (the County's updated comprehensive plan), participating communities had never gone through the process to have their own individual comprehensive plan and as a part of the county-wide effort, these communities adopted a comprehensive plan based on their own unique features, conditions, and aspirations. The local comprehensive plans support the county-wide vision and goals outlined as a part of the FORWARD Kosciusko County comprehensive plan. Prior to Forward Kosciusko, the communities of Warsaw, Winona Lake, and Syracuse had developed and implemented their own individual comprehensive plan. These local comprehensive plans provide a framework or a road map to guide future investments and development decisions for the next 10 to 20 years.

The Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams – Support for the Parks Master Plan comes from the Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams as a research and education center based in Winona Lake at Grace College. The organization recommends lake-focused strategies and best practices and helps local families and businesses adopt these recommendations to keep the waterways in the county healthy. The Lilly Center approaches its goal of making freshwater lakes and streams in Kosciusko County clean, healthy, safe, and beautiful by conducting research, providing resources to the community while engaging and educating them, and collaborating with other local organizations.

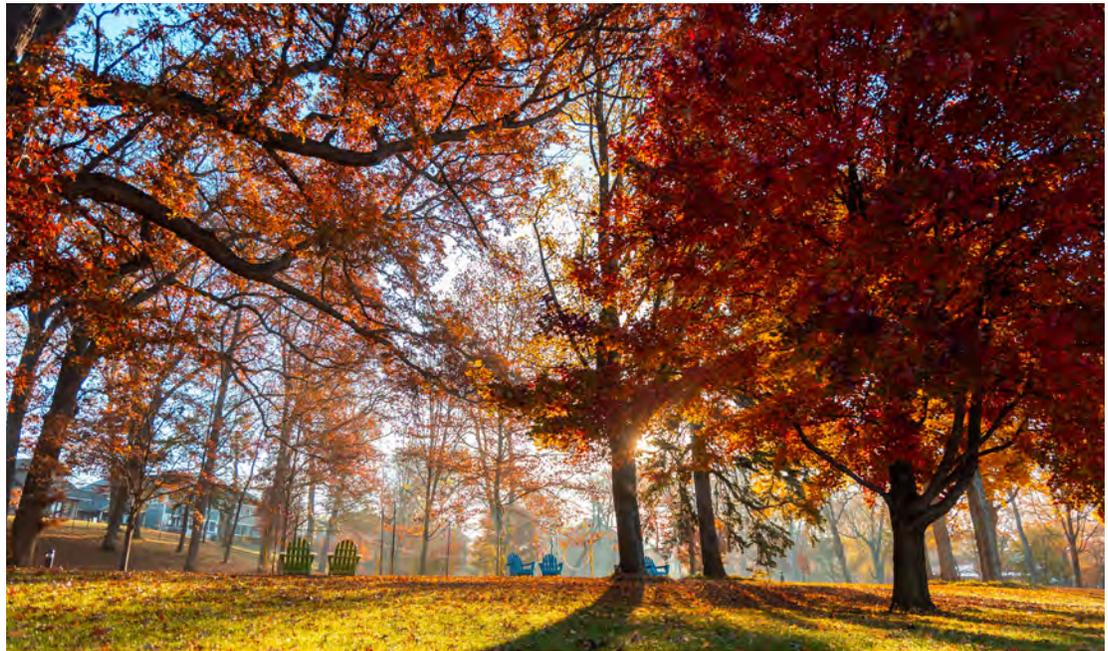
- **The Watershed Foundation** – Another component this Plan addresses is The Watershed Foundation (TWF) which focuses on the health of the watershed whose natural resources this Plan will concern itself with. TWF was founded in 1997, with an original focus on the health of Tippecanoe Lake. The founding members then realized that in order to reach their initial goal, the protection and enhancement of the Lake and waterways in their community, they needed to expand their focus of the Tippecanoe River watershed from its headwaters through the City of Warsaw. Today, The Watershed Foundation is taking action to preserve the watershed by completing projects that stop water pollution at its source on the land, educating youth and adults on stewardship of the lakes, and leading partnerships throughout the watershed.
- **Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation** – The Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation (WACF) was established in 1991 as a 501(c)(3) and is another supporting organization whose mission is to protect, preserve, and enhance the Wawasee Area Watershed for current and future generations to enjoy. Since its inception, WACF has focused on land acquisition, land management, and education. WACF has protected over 800 acres of property within the watershed and over 10 miles of shoreline. WACF also owns properties and has reconstructed wetlands, and designed and implemented sediment control measures. WACF also has an education center, the Levinson-LaBrosse Lakes and Wetlands Education Center, located on 40 acres one mile south of Syracuse off SR 13.
- **Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District** – The Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD), founded in 1957, is responsible for the conservation and development of local soil, water, and related natural resources. In order to promote responsible land use decisions that conserve, protect, and improve soil and water resources, this organization provides information assistance through effective partnering, technical guidance, and education. Similarly, the Parks Master Plan concerns itself with identifying responsible land use decisions related to parks and recreation opportunities in the county.

- **Kosciusko County Historical Society** – The mission of the Kosciusko County Historical Society is to preserve, protect, and promote all of Kosciusko County’s history for future generations to come. This plan concerns the Historical Society as the land the Parks Master Plan will help to manage is rich with local history that the Historical Society promotes. The Historical Society hosts weekly, monthly, and special events for the public and also offers membership tiers that will unlock access to historical amenities, a quarterly publication of the Historical Society called “The Thaddeus”, and other special membership benefits.
- **K21 Health Foundation** – The K21 Health Foundation strives to improve the health and wellness of the residents of Kosciusko County. The K21 Health Foundation works to identify health needs in the community and maintains an endowment to provide investments and grants that meet the health needs and opportunities of the community. One of the priorities of this plan is to utilize some of the natural resources the county has to offer to allow residents to have more opportunities to get active– including planning for trails and parks– so as to improve the health and wellness of residents.
- **Kosciusko County Community Foundation** – The Kosciusko County Community Foundation is a public foundation established in 1968 in order to bring caring people and charitable endeavors together to inspire generosity and strengthen communities. The Foundation works towards this goal by serving as a vehicle for donors’ with charitable motivations, awarding grants to projects and organizations, and addressing community needs as a catalyst and convener. As the Community Foundation supports local projects and organizations that address community needs, the implementation of this plan may be aided by the Foundation.
- **Kosciusko County Velo (KCV) Cycling** – The KCV is a nonprofit, volunteer-based organization focused on promoting county residents to live healthy lifestyles, encourage social engagement, and provide economic development opportunities through bicycling. KCV organizes the popular “Fat & Skinny Tire Festival”, partners with the Ride Walk Advisory Committee to implement the 2013 Ride Walk Master Plan, and is responsible for managing and maintaining the off-road trails in Winona Lake.
- **Ride Walk Advisory Committee** – The governments of Winona Lake and Warsaw have partnered to create the “Ride Walk” Advisory Committee; a biking and walking initiative that plans for the future development of trails and bicycle facilities. This group is an advisory body to the City of Warsaw, the Town of Winona Lake, Kosciusko County, and any other related entity. Their responsibility is to promote the inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities for land development projects, promote the American League of Bicyclists’ 5 E’s (engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement, and evaluation/planning), and implement the Ride Walk Master Plan.

- **Visit Kosciusko (Convention and Visitors Bureau)** – Visit Kosciusko (CVB) promotes events and facilities in the county on multiple platforms to increase the knowledge for residents and expand the draw to visitors. Efforts include publishing the Annual Visitor Guide, website listings, social media, videos, Passport Program, and advertising. Visit Kosciusko also issue grants to event organizers in the county for marketing purposes and distribute a monthly e-newsletter on upcoming events to those who opt-in. In 2018, Visit Kosciusko created a series of brochures called “Spaces,” available at <https://visitkosciuskocounty.org/digital-guides/>, that maps public access locations for parks, trails, beaches, blueways, etc. The CVB has also partnered with Clearly Kosciusko in the fall of 2022 to create a unified marketing message and is currently developing a marketing plan.
- **Clearly Kosciusko** – Clearly Kosciusko is a county-wide voice created through a partnership between the Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams, the Kosciusko County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce, and the Kosciusko Economic Development Corporation. Clearly Kosciusko pulls together all corners of the county to encourage residents and visitors alike to participate in the story of Kosciusko County and stay and enjoy the resources the county has to offer.
- **Municipal Park Departments & Park Boards** – Additional support for the direction of this plan comes from the municipal park departments or park boards. The following County communities have a parks department and/or a parks board to manage the operations and maintenance of their parks system, local trails, and recreational facilities: the City of Warsaw and the Towns of Syracuse, Winona Lake, Pierceton, Mentone, Claypool, and Milford.



2



EXISTING CONDITIONS

Kosciusko County - with 12 incorporated towns and one (1) city - is nestled near the center of Northern Indiana. It is known for its numerous lakes, which attract thousands of visitors and seasonal residents each year, and has a strong history of agriculture and manufacturing, with being recognized as the orthopedic capital of the world. The County is divided in half by US 30 which provides easy access with Ft. Wayne to the east and South Bend to the west. Through analyzing the existing conditions, we can better understand what is happening today and what can be expected in the future.

NATURAL FEATURES AND LANDSCAPE

Soils – Kosciusko County contains 554 square miles or 354,560 acres. Approximately 531 square miles are land and the other 23 square miles are water. It extends approximately 27 miles from north to south and about 21 miles from east to west. The elevation of the county ranges from 757 feet above sea level to 1,054 feet above sea level, with an average elevation of 853 feet above sea level.

According to the USDA Soil Survey of Kosciusko County, the most common soil classification in the county is the Wawasee-Crosier-Miami Association, which accounts for 28% of the soils in Kosciusko County. The remaining soil types are listed from most to least coverage of Kosciusko County: Ormas-Kosciusko Association (19%), Riddles Wawasee Association (10%), Houghton-Palms Association (9%), Crosier-Barry Association (8%), Sebewa-Gilford Association (8%), Riddles-Ormas-Kosciusko Association (6%), Rensselaer-Whitaker Association (5%), Morley-Blount Association (4%), and Shipshe-Carmi Association (3%).

The Ormas-Kosciusko and Shipshe-Carmi Associations are fairly well suited for urban and recreational uses. The Riddles-Ormas-Kosciusko, Riddles-Wawasee, Wawasee-Crosier-Miami, and Morley-Blount associations are well suited to most uses, but the slope is a major limitation affecting urban and recreational uses. The Crosier-Barry, Rensselaer-Whitaker, and Sebawa-Gilford Associations are poorly suited to urban uses but are well suited to cultivated crops. Finally, the Houghton-Palms Association is fairly well suited to cultivated crops but is poorly suited to urban or recreational uses due to wetness, ponding, and the poor stability of the organic material.



Water Resources – Kosciusko County has several key water resources that play a large role in parks and recreation potential. The Tippecanoe River, the Eel River (a Wabash River tributary), and the St. Joseph River all flow through Kosciusko County. There is also a multitude of creeks flowing through the county including Clear Creek (an Eel River tributary), Swank Creek, and Wheeler Creek (another Eel River tributary). Parts of Western Kosciusko County are in the Kankakee River Basin, while North Eastern Kosciusko County is in the St. Joseph River Basin.

The Tippecanoe River is known as the “river of lakes” due to its flowing through many bodies of water. The Tippecanoe River means “buffalo fish” and received its name from the Miami Indians for having an abundance of this fish. The river flows nearly 200 miles from its headwaters (east of Kosciusko County) to northern Lafayette where it joins the Wabash River. The river hosts a wide variety of fish (several of which are endangered), crustaceans, nearly 50 distinct mussel species, and other aquatic life. Endangered species include “stream darters” like blue-breasted, gilt, rainbow darters, spotted and Tippecanoe darters, and mudpuppy. Given the river’s central location and flow through the county, it was identified in the community engagement activities in Chapter 5 on page 34 and during the “Needs & Gap Analysis,” discussed in Chapter 6 on page 42, that the Tippecanoe River corridor plays a vital role in linking communities together as a linear park system (trails and blueways) and became one of the top priorities the Board would like to explore implementing in the next five (5) years.



Additionally, Kosciusko County is home to more than 100 lakes, including the largest natural lake in Indiana, Lake Wawasee. Lake Wawasee is 81 feet at its deepest point and has a surface area of approximately 3,006 acres. Other large and notable lakes include Lake Tippecanoe (122 feet deep, 786-acre surface area), Webster Lake (52 feet deep, 653-acre surface area), Winona Lake (79 feet deep, 571-acre surface area), Dewart Lake (82 feet deep, 554-acre surface area), and many more.

Climate – Kosciusko County’s climate, much like the rest of Indiana, varies greatly by season. Hot summers and cold winters are typical. The rainiest month on average is June, with an average of 4.1 inches of rainfall over the duration of the month. The

snowiest month tends to be January, with an average of 7.2 inches of snow over the duration of the month. The hottest month on average is July, with an average high of 83 degrees Fahrenheit. The coldest month on average is January, with an average low of 19 degrees Fahrenheit.

Invasive Species – Kosciusko County is aware of several invasive species within the county and is monitored by organizations like the Kosciusko Water & Woodland Invasive Partnership (KWWIP) and the Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams.

A few terrestrial and aquatic invasive species found in Kosciusko County include Starry Stonewort, Eurasian Watermilfoil, Asian Bush Honeysuckle, Winged Burning Bush, and Multiflora Rose.

MAN-MADE, HISTORICAL, AND CULTURAL FEATURES

Historical Background – Kosciusko County’s story begins with the indigenous population who inhabited the area prior to the settlers. At the time that Europeans discovered the area, it was claimed and possessed by the Miami Confederacy of Indians. At this time, the Miami nation was composed of four tribes (Twightwees/Miamis, Weas or Ouatienons, Piankeshaws, and Shockeys), and at various times allowed Pottawatomies, Shawnees, Delawares, and Kickapoos to enter and reside in various places of the claimed territory.

On October 27, 1832, US Commissioners and the Chiefs of the Pottawatomies of Indiana and Michigan signed a treaty in which the land within the boundaries of Kosciusko County was ceded to the United States. The county boundary was established on February 7, 1835, and the county was organized in April 1836.

Kosciusko County was named by John B. Chapman in honor of Polish General Tadeusz Kościuszko, who served in the American Revolutionary War and was a personal friend of both Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. The county seat, Warsaw, was also named by John B. Chapman who named it in honor of Warsaw, Poland.

The first settlement in what is now known as Wayne Township in the county was during the summer of 1834. The first store opened in the township and made its first sale (half a pound of Cavendish tobacco) on July 2nd, 1835. From there, the county has seen a considerable amount of growth. Now the county is divided into 17 townships, and businesses and the population have expanded greatly. Kosciusko County’s population is now over 80,000 people and is known as the Orthopedic Capital of the World.

Historic Sites – Kosciusko County is home to 6 historic districts. These designated districts highlight the history and special nature of their jurisdiction and help provide guidance on appropriate development in the

area. These 6 historic districts are East Fort Wayne Street Historic District, Leesburg Historic District, Pierceton Historic District, Silver Lake Historic District, Warsaw Courthouse Square Historic District, and Winona Lake Historic District.

Some Historic Sites on the National Register of Historic Places include:

- **Justin Zimmer House** – The Justin Zimmer House is a residence built in Warsaw in 1934, designed by Alvin M. Strauss. This house was home to the founder of Zimmer Biomet, one of the largest employers in the county. This remarkable Tudor Revival house is now the White Hill Manor Bed and Breakfast.
- **John Pound Store (Pound Store Museum)** – The John Pound Store is a two-story historic commercial building located in Oswego, an unincorporated community in Kosciusko County. The Pound Store sits on land previously owned by Potawatomi Chief Musquawbuck and was built in 1838. The store that once sold items like salt, sugar, lard, tobacco, and other goods has been converted into a historical museum, with the first floor recreating the atmosphere and appearance of the original Pound General Store.
- **Old Jail Museum (Kosciusko County Historical Society Headquarters)** – The Old Jail Museum is a Gothic Revival building from 1870 that once served as the Kosciusko County Jail and the Sheriff’s home. It now serves as the headquarters of the Kosciusko County Historical Society. Historical displays, a small gift shop, and free daytime tours are available. The building also allows for paranormal tours to be scheduled.

Other Historic Sites in Kosciusko County include:

- North-South Continental Divide (2 miles north of North Webster on SR 13)
- Etna Green Museum
- Lawrence D. Bell Aircraft Museum
- Syracuse-Wawasee Historical Museum
- Winona History Center
- Billy Sunday Home Museum
- Hall Farm
- Robert Orr Polygonal Barn
- Warsaw Cut Glass Company
- Chinworth Bridge

One opportunity that was identified by the Parks & Recreation Board and Steering Committee in the “Needs & Gap Analysis” discussed in Chapter 6 that the Chinworth Bridge, part of the Chinworth Bridge Trail serves as a vital connection linking residents and visitors to the City-County Athletic Complex and regional communities that the Board should explore extending the

Chinworth Bridge Trail to Etna Green, adjacent underserved residential areas, and be part of the Tippecanoe River linear park system.

COMMUNITY FACILITIES

Libraries – Kosciusko County has a total of six public libraries that serve residents living in their specific jurisdictions. Libraries are often meeting spaces and provide access to free information to residents in the community. These libraries are:

- Bell Memorial Public Library in Mentone, IN
- Milford Public Library in Milford, IN
- North Webster Community Public Library in North Webster, IN
- Pierceton Public Library in Pierceton, IN
- Syracuse Public Library in Syracuse, IN
- Warsaw Community Public Library in Warsaw, IN

Arts and Culture – The arts and culture sector of Kosciusko County is alive and well with performing arts centers and art studios and galleries. These special groups and venues enrich the lives of the residents and visitors of Kosciusko County. These arts and culture assets include:

- Lakeland Art Center and Gallery in Warsaw, IN
- Warsaw City Hall Rotating Art Gallery in Warsaw, IN
- Gallery at Rua, in Warsaw, IN
- Wagon Wheel Center for the Arts in Warsaw, IN
- Mount Memorial Hall Art Gallery in Winona Lake, IN
- Artista Art Gallery at The Village at Winona in Winona Lake, IN
- Water Lily Art Gallery in Syracuse, IN
- Chautauqua Wawasee in Syracuse, IN

Festivals and Events

- Music in the Park in North Webster, IN
- Summer Concert Series in Warsaw, IN
- Fat & Skinny Tire Fest in Winona Lake & Warsaw, IN
- Milford Family Fun Fest in Milford, IN
- Mentone Egg Festival in Mentone, IN
- Village Art Fair in Winona Lake, IN
- Mermaid Festival in North Webster, IN
- Lakes Festival in Warsaw, IN
- Kosciusko County Fair in Warsaw, IN
- Tour Des Lakes in Syracuse, IN

- Village Jazz Festival in Winona Lake, IN
- Dixie Day Festival in North Webster, IN
- Heirloom Tomato Festival in Pierceton, IN
- Syracuse Fall Festival in Syracuse, IN
- Chautauqua Wawasee in Syracuse, IN
- Holiday Tree Lighting Ceremonies and Light Displays in various communities

SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS

The purpose of the Parks Master Plan is to allow communities to assess current and future recreational needs as well as to evaluate feasible options, develop strategic plans, and budget to meet those needs. Understanding the current socioeconomic conditions and trends can help to anticipate future recreational needs.

Population – Determining a community’s population trend can present Kosciusko County with data that can inform the direction of necessary services and real estate demand based on a growing or declining population.

Table 1: Population Trend

Community	Decennial Census			Annual Estimates								
	1990	2000	2010	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Kosciusko County	65,294	74,057	76,982	77,328	77,527	77,790	77,983	78,461	78,720	78,806	79,035	80,240
Warsaw (City)	10,968	12,284	13,381	13,620	13,907	14,179	14,385	14,640	14,797	15,062	15,458	15,804

Between 1990 and 2000, Kosciusko County had a 13.4% increase in population. Between 2000 and 2010, Kosciusko County experienced a 3.9% increase in population. Between 2010 and 2020, Kosciusko County saw a 4.2% increase in population. In this same time period the City of Warsaw, the County Seat of Kosciusko County, saw a 12.0% increase in population between 1990-2000, an 8.9% increase between 2000-2010, and an 18.1% increase between 2010-2020.

Population Projection – Analyzing Kosciusko County’s population trend over the last nine years as shown in Table 1, shows an average population increase of about 362 persons annually. If the county continues to grow at this rate, by 2025 the population will increase by approximately 1,810 persons (82,050 total population), and by 2030 the population will increase by approximately 3,620 persons (83,860 total population). If population trends continue for the City of Warsaw, it can be expected to grow by 1,346 persons by 2025 (17,150 total population) and by 2,692 persons by 2030 (18,496 total population).

The County’s growth presents an important opportunity for Kosciusko County to expand its services and facilities, and create a high-quality park and recreation system to increase the quality of life for this growing

community and encourage even more growth to follow.

Age and Sex – The success of parks can be based on several factors including the amount of users attracted, the quality of places and facilities, and how inclusive park facilities are. For this reason, it is imperative for Kosciusko County to understand the age demographics of its population to ensure the success of future parks and recreation initiatives.

The median age in Kosciusko County has increased by 10.5% from 35.2 years in 2000 to 38.9 years in 2020. In this same time period, Warsaw saw a 2.6% decrease in median age (34.4 years in 2000 to 33.5 years in 2020).

While some incorporated communities are experiencing a decrease in median age, the county as a whole is experiencing an increase in median age. Looking at the age cohort data for the county, the most significant increase between 2000 and 2020 is the 60-64 year old cohort which saw a 91.6% increase. The age cohort with the highest population is 25-34 year olds, with 10,262 persons. However, the large and significant increase in the 60-64 year old cohort, as well as large and significant increases in age cohorts older than that, in combination with decreases in all age cohorts younger than 14 years old may signal that the median age in Kosciusko County's population will continue to grow older. For this reason, the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board should consider how to utilize its resources either to cater to this older population or to attract families with younger children to the area.

Race and Ethnicity – Kosciusko County as a whole is predominantly Caucasian or White. In 2020, 86.73% of the population identified as Caucasian or White. However, in the past 20 years, the county has been slowly diversifying. In 2000, only 0.1% of the population identified themselves as Black or African American. In 2020, now 0.9% of the population identifies as Black or African American. Over this same time, the share of the population that identifies themselves as Asian has grown from 0.2% to 1.7%, the population of persons that identify themselves as Some Other Race has grown from 1.5% to 4.7%, and the population of persons identifying as Two or More Races has increased from 0.6% to 5.7%.

The Hispanic population in Kosciusko County represents 8.1% of the population. This has grown from 4.9% in 2000, further showing the diversification of Kosciusko County. This represents an approximate 65% increase in the Hispanic Population in the county.

Disability – Approximately 27.2% of individuals in Kosciusko County have a disability as of 2020. Of the approximately 12,622 individuals with a disability, 4460, or 9.6%, are 65 years old or older.

Poverty – As of 2020, Kosciusko County as a whole has a 9.3% poverty rate. This shows an approximate 45% increase from the county's 2000 poverty rate which was 6.4%. The age group with the highest percentage

of impoverished persons is 18-64 years, with 15.7% of this population being below the poverty level. Considering poverty levels among racial and ethnic groups, the group with the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty line is American Indian and Alaska Native, which has a 76.2% poverty rate. Hispanic or Latino persons (of any race) experience a 21.6% poverty rate and persons identifying as Some Other Race experience a 28.1% poverty rate.

The City of Warsaw, the county seat of Kosciusko County and the only city in the county, has a higher poverty rate than the rest of the county. As of 2020, Warsaw's poverty rate was 14.8%. Between 2000 and 2020, Warsaw experienced a 61% increase in the poverty rate, increasing from 9.2% in 2000 to the aforementioned 14.8% in 2020. Like the rest of the county, the age group with the highest percentage of individuals below the poverty line is also the 18-64 years old population with 32.4% of this population existing below the poverty line. Considering poverty levels among racial and ethnic groups, like the county, the group with the highest percentage of individuals living below the poverty line is American Indian and Alaska Native, which has a 67.9% poverty rate. Hispanic or Latino persons (of any race) experience a 23.0% poverty rate and persons identifying as Some Other Race experience a 33.1% poverty rate.

Educational Attainment – Between 2000 and 2020, the percentage of Kosciusko County residents who are High School graduates (or higher) increased by 6% from 81.6% in 2000 to 86.8% in 2020. During this same time period, the percentage of residents with a Bachelor's Degree or higher increased by 63% from 14.9% in 2000 to 24.3% in 2020. These numbers are just slightly lower than the state average which is 89.3% High School graduates or higher, and 27.2% Bachelor's degree or higher.

HOUSING

As Kosciusko County experiences changes in demographics and growth, in both population and jobs, ensuring Kosciusko County has an adequate supply of housing for all types of residents will be crucial in maintaining its quality of life. Kosciusko County will have to consider where new housing should be located while maintaining a proper balance with current development, and how to preserve and maintain the existing housing stock. Housing is linked to other elements like population (identifying changes in households and establishing their needs), land use (evaluate its fiscal impacts to develop on undeveloped lands or infill on underutilized lands), and community facilities (does the neighborhood have access to appropriate utility systems and assets, like parks).

Housing Types – According to the 2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates, the majority of housing units (24,173 units, or 76.8%) are single-family, detached units. 1.7% of units are single-family, attached units. 12.4% of units are multi-family apartments, attached to 2+ other units. Finally, 9% of units are categorized as mobile homes or other.

Occupancy Rates and Tenure – The percentage of occupied housing

units in Kosciusko County has decreased over time from 84.8% in 2000 to 81.8% in 2020. The City of Warsaw also saw a decrease in the percentage of occupied housing from 93.9% in 2000 to 92.1% in 2020.

The vacancy rate in Kosciusko County has increased from 15.2% in 2000 to 18.2% in 2020. The City of Warsaw also saw a small increase in vacancy rates over this time period, changing from 6.1% in 2000 to 7.7% in 2020.

The percentage of owner-owned occupied housing units decreased from 79.0 % in 2000 to 74.7% in 2020. Conversely, the percentage of renter-occupied housing increased from 20.3% in 2000 to 25.3% in 2020. The City of Warsaw saw a similar trend in that its percentage of owner-occupied housing decreased from 56.3% in 2000 to 48.0% in 2020 while its percentage of renter-occupied housing increased from 2000 (37.0%) to 2020 (52.0%). Homeowner vacancy rates in Kosciusko County decreased from 2.0% in 2010 to 0.9% in 2000. The rental vacancy rate actually increased slightly from 4.5% in 2010 to 4.6% in 2020.

Average Household Size and Households by Type – The average household size in Kosciusko County has declined slightly since 2000. The county’s average household size was 2.66 in 2000 and was 2.46 as of 2020. According to the 2020 ACS 5-year estimates, approximately 66.0% of occupied housing units are occupied by one (1) or two (2) people (33.9% 1-person and 32.1% 2-person). The number of non-family households grew from 26.7% in 2000 to 32.3% in 2020. The percentage of families with children decreased from 35.6% in 2000 to 31.4% in 2020. Conversely, the percentage of families without children increased from 64.4% in 2000 to 68.6% in 2020.

Household Income – Household Income is an indicator of economic health in an area or population. It is the total income of all persons living in a household over the age of 15. Kosciusko County had 39.8% of households making less than \$50,000 in 2020. This has decreased from 2000 when 58.3% of households were making less than \$50,000. The middle-income cohort (\$50,000 - \$99,999) grew from 33.3% in 2000 to 36.2% in 2020. The next income cohort (\$100,000 - \$199,999) increased from 7.0% in 2000 to 20.3% in 2020. Finally, the highest income cohort (\$200,000+) has increased from 1.4% in 2000 to 3.9% in 2020. This data indicates that over time, households in Kosciusko County have increased their earnings.

Median Household Income is a factor that helps in determining an area’s quality of life and shows the stability of a real estate market. Kosciusko County’s median household income grew from \$43,939 in 2000 to \$62,789 in 2020. Within Warsaw, the median household income grew from \$36,564 in 2000 to \$53,006 in 2020.

Kosciusko County’s median household income now represents 107.8% of the State of Indiana’s median household income in 2020 (which was \$58,235) and 97% of the United State’s median household income in 2020

(which was \$64,994). These numbers show that households in Kosciusko County are slightly better off than households across the state but slightly worse off than households across the country.

Housing Costs – The cost of housing in Kosciusko County is rising. The median home value for owner-occupied housing units in Kosciusko County in 2020 was \$153,500, up 9.3% from \$140,500 in 2010. The median home value in Warsaw in 2020 was slightly less than in Kosciusko County at \$138,800. This represents a 12.2% increase in median value from \$123,700 in 2010. The median home value in Kosciusko County is just slightly higher than the median home value in the State of Indiana (\$148,900 in 2020), and significantly lower than the median home value for the rest of the nation (\$229,800 in 2020).

Housing Affordability – In order to determine housing affordability, we need to examine what percentage of income is spent towards housing costs. If costs exceed 30% of income, households are considered housing cost-burdened. In 2020, approximately 17.7% of households with a mortgage and 8.0% of households without mortgages in Kosciusko County spent 30% or more of their household income on housing and therefore are considered housing cost-burdened. In Warsaw, 14.6% of households with a mortgage and 5.6% of households without a mortgage spent 30% or more of their household income on housing costs, and are therefore considered housing cost-burdened. This could be considered a barrier to the county with a lack of affordable housing options such as starter homes.

EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

Major Industries – According to the US Census Bureau, the top industry sector in the county is Manufacturing, in particular, the orthopedic medical device industry, which makes up for approximately 30.8% of jobs in the county. Retail Trade makes up approximately 9.4% of jobs in the county, and Health Care & Social Services make up about 8.3% of jobs in the county.

Largest Employers

- Zimmer Biomet Holdings Inc (Warsaw)
- DePuy Synthes (Warsaw)
- Lutheran Kosciusko Hospital (Warsaw)
- Bowen Center (Warsaw)
- POLYWOOD (Syracuse)
- LSC Communications (Warsaw)
- Tecomet Medical (Warsaw)
- Paragon Medical (Pierceton)
- Cardinal Services Inc (Warsaw)
- Maple Leaf Farms (Leesburg)

Labor Force and Unemployment – Labor Force refers to the number of persons actively employed and those unemployed but looking for employment. Kosciusko County’s total resident labor force is made up of approximately 40,499 persons. This makes up approximately 1.2% of the state’s total resident labor force. The annual unemployment rate was 2.7%, which is slightly lower than the state as a whole which has a 3.6% annual unemployment rate. As of August 2022, the most recent unemployment rate for the county indicates that unemployment has fallen even further in Kosciusko County, as the county now has a 2.5% unemployment rate which is lower than the rest of the state which has a 3.1% unemployment rate.

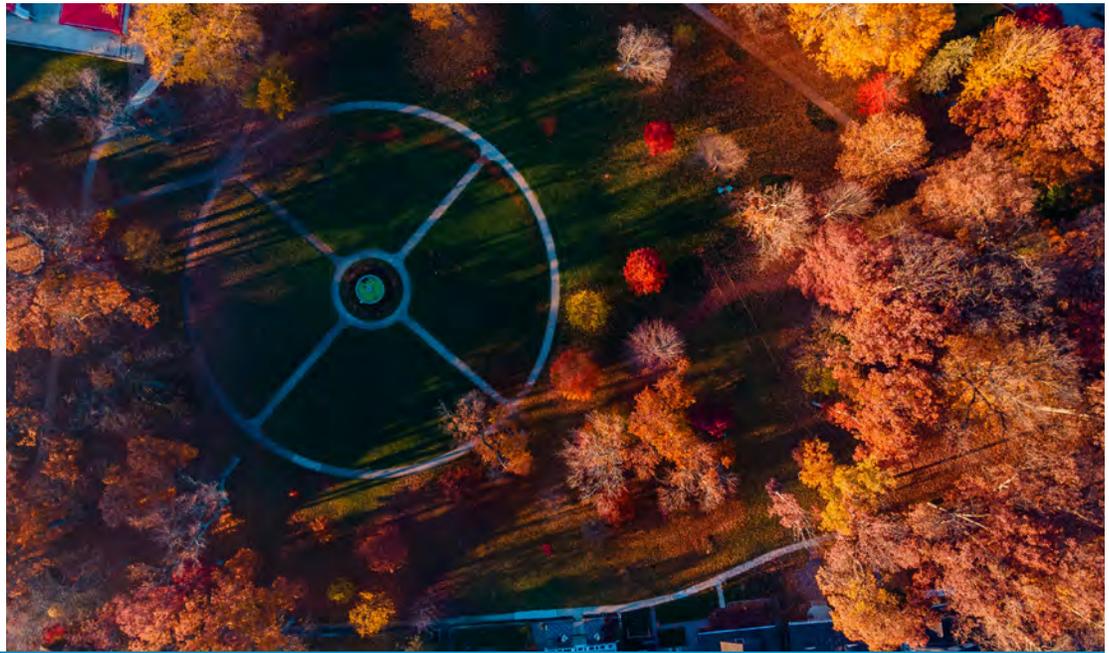
Net Assessed Value – Examining Kosciusko County’s net assessed value can give an indication of the construction activity in the county, which correlates to the county’s budget for capital expenditures and demand for residential, commercial, and industrial uses. In 2021, Kosciusko County’s net assessed value was \$6,078,894,596. This is up approximately 9% from 2018 when the county’s net assessed value was \$5,552,115,355.



Per Capita Income – Kosciusko County’s per capita income level can measure the access to high-quality living-wage jobs for residents’ ability to have a higher disposable income after paying bills. This also gauges the health of the local economy to support local businesses and enjoy parks and recreation activities. As of 2020, Kosciusko County’s per capita income was \$51,687, which was 99.5 % of the state’s per capita income in 2020.

Jobs to Household Ratio – The jobs to household ratio gauges the distribution of employment opportunities and workforce (those actively employed) population across a geographic area. A ratio of 1.0 to 1.5 indicates a community has approximately an equal balance of jobs and housing. A ratio of less than 1.0 indicates a community has more housing than jobs; whereas, a ratio greater than 1.5 indicates a community has more jobs than housing. Based on the numbers provided by the U.S. Census Bureau, Kosciusko County has a jobs to household ratio of 1.25.

3



EXISTING PARKS & RECREATION FACILITIES

As stated earlier, the purpose of the Parks Master Plan is to allow communities to assess current and future recreational needs as well as to evaluate feasible options, develop strategic plans, and budget to meet those needs. Having reviewed the existing socioeconomic conditions and trends, the next step towards evaluating options, planning, and budgeting is to understand the resources already available across the county. This next chapter will review available community parks, recreational facilities, beaches, and open spaces that are accessible to the public.

COMMUNITY PARKS & RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Burket – The Town of Burket offers one recreation area.

- **Burket Educational Center** – located at 5095 South 700 West, this recreation center features the former elementary school playground. The Burket Educational Center is not an official town park but provides some form of recreation for children.

Claypool – The Town of Claypool offers two small-scale community parks that are not official town parks, and has public access to the playgrounds at the Claypool Elementary School.

- **Claypool Park** – This park is approximately 2.14 acres, located on the southwest corner of Main Street and Wells Street. It features a

backdrop for a ball field and playground equipment.

- **Claypool Lions Club Playground** – Located at 205 W. Calhoun Street behind the Claypool Lions Club, this recreational space is approximately 0.4 acres and features a playground and pavilion.
- **Claypool Elementary School** – Located at 2024 W 700 South, the Claypool Elementary School offers public access to the school's playgrounds for added recreational space to residents, comprising approximately 1.5 acres.

Etna Green – The Town of Etna Green offers two small-scale community parks.

- **Remembrance Park** – This space offers a form of passive recreation, approximately 0.4 acres, located at the intersection of Broadway Street and Main Street. Remembrance Park features a linear garden, a walking path, and benches. The entrance area features the iconic stone fountain. At the center is a turnaround paver plaza with the historic bandstand, and landscaping. The adjacent building features a mural by local artist Robert A. Hudson.
- **Heritage Park** – This space offers more active recreation, located at 338 South Walnut Street, with 10 acres. Heritage Park features athletic fields (basketball courts, multi-purpose turf field, playgrounds, indoor/outdoor pavilion, and the Etna Green Museum.

Leesburg – The Town of Leesburg offers one small-scale community park, an outdoor recreational area, and public access to the playgrounds at the Leesburg Elementary School.

- **Clover Park** – Located at 110 East Van Buren Street, Clover Park is approximately 0.2 acres and was donated to the Town by lifelong resident Betty Jane Clover. It features a walking path, open space, and a gazebo for passive recreation.
- **Leesburg Summer Recreational Facility** – Located at 112 East School Street, the Leesburg Summer Recreational Facility is approximately 3.6 acres and is owned and maintained by Maple Leaf Farms, Inc. It offers athletic fields like two baseball fields and one softball field and is used for summer sports leagues.
- **Leesburg Elementary School** – Located at 6250 Old State Road 15, the Leesburg Elementary School offers public access to the school's playgrounds and walking paths for added recreational space to residents, comprising approximately 2 acres.

Mentone – The Town of Mentone offers one community park and two recreational facilities.

- **Mentzer Memorial Park** – Located at 314-398 South Oak Street, Mentzer Memorial Park features a picnic pavilion, playground, basketball court, and plenty of green open spaces.

- **Mentone Youth League Park** – A sports complex along West Jefferson, located to the north of Yellow Creek and bordered on either side by residential properties, contains three ball fields, bleachers, team dug-outs, a parking area, and a small area designated for play equipment.
- **Mentone Elementary School Greenfield** – Mentone Elementary School is working to develop an environmental park from an existing greenfield adjacent to the school grounds that support the local flora and fauna. The wetland area currently covers 11.5 acres of land and extends north outside of town limits. Mentone Elementary School also has a walking path and playground that is open for public use.

Milford – The Town of Milford offers one community park located less than 1 mile southeast of the town limits and public access to the recreational space at the Milford School.

- **Waubee Lake Park** – Waubee Lake Park is maintained by the Town and offers approximately 5 acres of park space, located at 325 E. Camp Mack Road. Waubee Lake Park is open to the public that offers a sand beach, a boat launch, and playground equipment.
- **Milford School** – Located at the intersection of Emeline Street and Elm Street, Milford School offers public access to the school’s playground, athletic fields, and 1.5 acres of open space.

North Webster – The Town of North Webster offers one community park, a community center, and an athletic field recreation area.

- **North Webster Town Park & Beach** – North Webster Town Park and Beach is located on South Dixie Drive between East Huntington Street and East Himes Street and is approximately 0.4 acres. This Park offers a sand beach, playground, swings, pavilion (available to rent for events), and public piers. North Webster Town Park is the main location for watching water sports such as the Ski-Bee Waterskiing shows.
- **North Webster Community Center** – The Town also features the North Webster Community Center, home to the local YMCA. The Community Center is located at 301 North Main Street and offers rental spaces for events and parties, tennis courts, and exercise classes and camps provided in partnership with the YMCA.
- **Athletic Field Recreation Area** – The Town also has an 11.26-acre athletic field recreation area, owned by the Wawasee Community Summer League Corporation, and has three ball diamonds, one children’s ball diamond, two tennis courts, a sand volleyball court, and open lawn space for additional activities.
- **North Webster Elementary School** – The North Webster Elementary School has three playgrounds open for public use outside of school hours. The Elementary School also features the Welah Metekka Nature Trail that is approximately a 0.5-mile paved loop, a 12 hole disc golf course, and wooded walking trails that are open for public use outside of school hours.

Pierceton – The Town of Pierceton offers three community parks.

- **Pierceton Skate Park** – The Pierceton Skate Park, located at the intersection of East Mill Street and East Keith Street, contains numerous ramps and platforms for both beginner and pro skaters to enjoy.
- **Brower Park** – Brower Park can be found at 207 North First Street in Pierceton. This park offers a big pavilion with tables for picnics as well as a large grassy area for sports and games.
- **Pierceton-Washington Township Park** – Located on 20 acres at 508 South 7th Street, Pierceton-Washington Township Park is the largest park with a playground area, a quarter-mile trail, three ball diamonds, two tennis courts, and an outdoor amphitheater. This Park may soon feature two pickleball courts. This Park is owned by the Town and Washington Township.

Sidney – The Town of Sidney offers one outdoor recreation area.

- **Sidney Baseball/Softball Field** – East of SR 13 and south of the rail line, Sidney has one field that can function as a baseball/softball field. The field is equipped with fencing, bleachers, and lights.

Silver Lake – The Town of Silver Lake offers two community parks.

- **Rambler Park** – Rambler Park, at 201 High Street in Silver Lake, is a park filled with a variety of exciting playground equipment like rock climbing walls, many slides, swing sets, teeter-totters, monkey bars, basketball courts, and many more. Additionally, there is available lawn space for picnics and other activities.
- **Memory Park** – Found at 114 South Jefferson Street, Silver Lake's Memory Park is a small park established through the Indiana Brownstone Program. This park includes a pond with fish that visitors can feed, a gazebo available for events like weddings, a monument erected in honor of Silver Lake's veterans, and a memory brick pad that families can use to memorialize their connection to the town. Additionally, in 2010 a time capsule was buried in the park to be opened by a future generation.

Syracuse – The Town of Syracuse offers 6 community parks and many recreational amenities.

- **Veteran's Memorial Park at Crosson Mill** – This park is located at 301 North Huntington Street (SR 13) in Syracuse. This park includes the Laudeman Family Pavilion and playground– which can be rented for special events– as well as a Veteran's Memorial.
- **Syracuse Skate Park** – The skate park located at 1026 North Indiana Street was designed for skateboards, in-line skates, and bikes by the American Ramp Company and features several ramps and platforms for visitors to use.

- **Laudeman Family Park** – The Laudeman Family Park located at 300 West Wildwood Drive is made up of approximately 6.5 acres. This park is currently undergoing additional development which will see the addition of memorial trees, benches, a walking path, a pond, and a pavilion.
- **Lakeside Park and Beach** – Lakeside Park, the largest park in Syracuse, can be found at 1013 North Long Drive. Park amenities include the Kenneth & Lela Harkless Gazebo, an open-air pavilion, a playground, a beach volleyball court, and a swimming beach.
- **Hoy's Beach** – This park is located at the intersection of Henry Street and North Front Street and down to Syracuse Lake. It has many trees and plants, picnic tables, and benches, and also provides swim-at-your-own-risk access to Syracuse Lake.
- **Henry Ward Park** – Visitors can find Henry Ward Park at 142 East Medusa Street. This park was named for one of the co-founders of Syracuse. Park amenities include a boardwalk, fishing pier (popular local fishing spot), playground, and open-air pavilion.



- **Syracuse Community Center** – Located at 1013 North Long Drive, the community center has been serving the community since 2002. This center offers a computer lab, fitness room, Senior Citizen Area, gym, and rooms that can be rented for special events. Additionally, this center is home to the Syracuse Wawasee Historical Museum.

- **Municipal Pier** – In between Downtown and Lakeside Park and Beach, visitors can find the Municipal Pier which offers public access to Syracuse Lake.
- **Eastlake 24 Syracuse** – While not a Town fitness center, it is an opportunity for locals to join a gym. The gym is located at 734 South Huntington Street (SR 13) and has weight equipment, cardio machines, and tanning beds to name a few, with 24-hour access.
- **Harold Schrock Athletic Complex** – The Harold Schrock Athletic Complex is located on Kern Road south of Wawasee High School. The facility's amenities include a playground, four baseball/softball fields (two with lights), two tee-ball fields, one football field, one basketball court, an ice rink, and a half-mile walking trail that includes a trailhead along the Syracuse-Wawasee Trail System. The facility is home to both the Wawasee Community Summer Baseball & Softball Leagues and Wawasee Pee-Wee Football.

Warsaw – The City of Warsaw offers 18 parks and recreation spaces.

- **Beyer Park** – On Pike Lake, at 811 East Arthur Street, Beyer Park offers visitors 3 acres of park space with a playground, public restroom, vending machine, permanent grills, beach access, a basketball court, and a shelter with picnic tables.
- **Bixler Park** – Located right on Center Lake at 503 North Detroit Street, Bixler Park features two shelters with six picnic tables each, access to Center Lake beach for swimming, boating, and fishing, a playground, three tennis courts, a basketball court, horseshoe pit, and a gazebo.

- **Boggs Campus Park** – Located at 420 Little League, this 1.5-acre park is located in the Boggs Industrial Park and features the Mantis Skate Park and two basketball courts. It is anticipated that Skate Park will relocate to Richard Dubois Park and that space will become a new play area. Mantis Skate Park is a supervised skate facility meant for visitors of all ages, open to the public between April and September. The park offers a Rhino ramp system and welcomes skateboarders, scooters, and inline skates. Helmets are required at all times.
- **Buffalo Street Plaza and Castaldi Fountain** – This fountain and plaza located at 347 North Buffalo Street overlooks Center Lake in Warsaw. This recreational space features a beautiful statue and a scenic place to sit and eat lunch or simply appreciate the view.
- **Central Park** – Central Park located at 225 East Ft. Wayne Street contains the Gardens of Central Park, a water feature, picnic shelters, a sidewalk surrounding the park, restrooms, vending machines, rentable shelters, and a large, open, grassy area for performances. The Gardens of Central Park features a perennial garden with over 160 flowers, shrubs, and grasses, and has a walking path to enjoy the variety of plants.
- **Center Lake Beach** – The Warsaw Parks and Recreation Department operates Center Lake Beach from Memorial Day through Labor Day. This beach offers lake access, beach access, picnic tables, restrooms, and vending machines.
- **Funk Park** – Located at 605 North Lake Street, Funk Park is under 1 acre (0.10 acres) and is a pocket park that provides picnic tables in one of Warsaw’s oldest neighborhoods.
- **Hire Park** – Located at 550 East Arthur Street, Hire Park is 4 acres that feature the bicycle motocross (BMX) track. The track is managed by the Hire Park BMX volunteer group and is one of seven tracks in Indiana.
- **Kelly Park** – Kelly Park is nearly 7 acres and can be found at 130 Fawley Street. It offers year-round, all-season fun. Park amenities include a sledding hill, soccer field, basketball court, two tennis courts, two pickleball courts, picnic tables, restrooms, a shelter, and the largest playground in Warsaw, IN.
- **Ker Park** – This neighborhood park at 1220 East Market Street offers 0.75 acres of space with a playground, picnic tables, and an open field that can be used for sports and other activities.
- **Kiddieland Park** – Located at 301 East Canal Street, this 1.2-acre park features a playground area.
- **Kiwanis Park** – Located at 700 East Smith Street, Kiwanis Park is 1 acre that provides a public boat launch onto Winona Lake, picnic tables, and a shelter.
- **Krebs Trailhead Park** – The Krebs Trailhead Park at 214 South McKinley Street features 1-acre of open space, picnic tables, restrooms, a pavilion, a drinking fountain, a bike workstation, a trail to hike, and a historic piece of the Winona Interurban Railroad which used to run from Peru, IN to Goshen, IN.
- **Lucerne Park and Disc Golf Course** – This park is 12 acres located at 800 North Park Avenue on Pike Lake and includes lake access, a stone trail, picnic tables, rental stone shelters/cabins, restrooms, an amphitheater, playground, exercise equipment, and a 9-hole disc golf course. It is also home to the Pete

Thorn Center and the City's Parks & Recreation Department Office.

- **McKinley Park** – At 1013 East Main Street, McKinley Park offers a playground, picnic tables, a covered gazebo, and a paved walkway for visitors to enjoy.
- **Nye Park** – Located at 357 North Buffalo Street, this 0.94-acre park is on Center Lake and offers visitors lake access, a boat launch, picnic tables, rental facilities, a shelter, and the Ramsey Shelter and the Nye Youth Cabin which includes a kitchen, restrooms, parking lot, tables, and chairs and is available to be reserved for events.
- **Pike Lake Park** – Pike Lake Park is 3 acres and is located at 1009 East Arthur Street. This park features a beach with lifeguards on duty from Memorial Day through Labor Day. Other amenities include a public boat launch, swim-at-your-own-risk lake access, a playground area, restrooms, and vending machines. Nearby at 1011 East Arthur Street is a campground (open April 15 through October 1).
- **Rarick Park** – Rarick Park is 1.2 acres neighborhood-scale park and is located at 413 South Washington Street that offers visitors a basketball court, open space for sports, picnic tables, a playground, and an open field.
- **Richardson-Dubois Park** – Located at 700 East Market Street, this 8-acre park is home to Fribley Football Field, a playground area, a basketball court, a shelter, and picnic tables.
- **Rotary Park** – This park is 0.2 acres and was created by the Warsaw Rotary Club to commemorate the club's 100th anniversary is located at 794 West Market Street in Warsaw, IN. Park amenities include a bicycle repair station, picnic shelter, picnic tables, and a climbing structure.
- **Warsaw Biblical Gardens** – Located at 301 East Canal Street is situated on approximately 0.75 of an acre in Warsaw. The garden consists of six microclimates which represent the main environments that the Bible speaks about, containing over 100 plants named in the Bible and making this the third largest biblical garden in the US.

Winona Lake – The Town of Winona Lake offers two community parks with the Village at Winona also offering three recreational areas.

- **Limitless Park** – Limitless Park is the Town's premier park that is the first fully accessible park to all residents. This park is located at 1590 Park Avenue and is approximately 11.6 acres. Limitless Park features a public beach, splash pad, accessible playground, one basketball court, two tennis courts, public restrooms, a senior/community center (available to rent for events), and areas for picnics or outings. Additionally, residents can rent canoes, kayaks, paddle boats, and paddle boards.
- **Bibler Memorial Park** – This single-lot, 1-acre park is located in "south town" off Faunn Street on the shores of Lake John, situated in a residential neighborhood. It has playground equipment, a sheltered area, and public access to the water for fishing and wildlife viewing.
- **Tabernacle Field, Circle Fountain Park, & Spring Fountain Park** – Tabernacle Field, Circle Fountain Park, and Spring Fountain Park are owned and maintained by the Village at Winona. Tabernacle Field features a large open

field located at 703 Park Avenue and is approximately 11.3 acres. Tabernacle Field was home to the former Billy Sunday Tabernacle but now features a large multi-purpose year-round pavilion including an ice skating rink, added in 2021, and pavilion, the Hillside Amphitheater, and a large seating area. Spring Fountain Park was founded by the Beyer Brothers with dreams of making the space for religious retreats but now serves as a great passive recreational space with a pond and fountain. Circle Fountain Park is situated near Tabernacle Field that features a paved circle fountain surrounded by trees making a peaceful shaded area for a picnic or a walk.

Additional Recreational Amenities and Experiences – There are many recreational activities visitors and residents alike can enjoy throughout all the seasons of the year. This is not a comprehensive list, but some of these activities include the following.

- **Geocaching Treasure Hunts** – There are over 70 geocaches in the area, providing the opportunity to explore and go on adventures throughout the county.
- **Golfing** – Kosciusko County has four public golf courses ranging in levels of difficulty. These courses are the Maxwelton Golf Club, the Rozella Ford Golf Course, the Stonehenge Golf Course, and the Wawasee Golf Club.
- **Boat Tours** – There are three tour boats offering cruises in the county. Visitors or residents can hop on board a cruise on the Dixie Sternwheeler, the S.S. Lilypad, or the Oakwood Tour Boat.
- **Kayaking and Water Recreation** – There are many choices for water recreation in the county. Visitors can enjoy the numerous beaches, lakes, and rivers in the county by kayaking, swimming, fishing, or simply sitting and enjoying the view. One kayaking experience on the Tippecanoe River is offered by Tippy River Adventures, located behind the Creighton Brothers in Warsaw.
- **Mountain Bike Trails** – Mountain biking enthusiasts can enjoy 10 miles of mountain bike trails in Winona Lake - touted as one of the Midwest's most highly desired cycling stops. In the near future, the KCV Cycling Club will be installing a bike skills park in Winona Lake near the intersection of Pierceton Road and Packerton Road. The bike skills park may feature amenities like a pump track and jumps to help riders refine their mountain biking skills.
- **YMCAs** – There are two YMCA centers in the county. The first is Parkview Warsaw YMCA located at 1305 Mariners Drive, along US 30, in Warsaw, and the second is located in the North Webster Community Center. These centers allow residents and visitors an opportunity to get active and access community resources to improve their health and wellness. There is also Camp Crosley YMCA, which is a summer camp owned by the Muncie YMCA, located on the shore of Lake Tippecanoe.
- **City-County Athletic Complex (CCAC)** – This 65-acre private not-for-profit sports facility located west of Warsaw on Old US 30 features eight lighted softball/baseball diamonds, one lighted regulation-size soccer field, one non-lighted regulation soccer field, and 13 various-sized soccer fields. There are two regulation sand volleyball courts, a 60' by 80' multi-sport building that will hold Fitness Classes, leagues for Corn Hole, Men's 5 on 5 Basketball,

Coed Volleyball, and Indoor Soccer. Portions of the Chinworth Bridge Trail (approximately 0.3 miles) run through the Athletic Complex.

- **IDNR Public Access Sites** – The Division of Fish & Wildlife manages public lands so Indiana’s fish, wildlife, and habitats can thrive and benefit the present and future generations of Hoosiers. These public lands provide excellent opportunities for hunting, fishing, and shooting sports. Wildlife viewing, walking, and enjoying scenic views are other ways to enjoy your visit. Several sites in the County include the Tri-County Fish and Wildlife Area, the Durham Lake Wetland Conservation Area, and the Deniston Resource Area as well as over 30 public access sites on the County’s many lakes and waterways.

TRAILS

One of the largest draws to the County is accessing the same high-quality amenities found in urbanized areas but in a rural setting and opportunities to enjoy the County’s bountiful natural resources. Trails are a great asset to allow people to enjoy the great outdoors, interact with nature, and view scenic landscapes and wildlife. These aspects are some of the highlights of living in Kosciusko County. Kosciusko County is home to a variety of freshwater lakes, waterways, preserves, recreational destinations, and other natural resources.

Trails can be one way that residents can access and enjoy these aspects of the County. The inclusion of trails can enrich the livability of a community to provide not only recreation options but transportation as well and be usable by nearly all residents. Trails also play a major role in the quality of life enhancing a community’s appeal and economic vitality in that trails have become a hot commodity to attract and retain residents and businesses.

Planning for a comprehensive, connected trail system has been an initiative throughout the County for over 10 years. However, the inclusion of trails has primarily been accomplished at the local level in three Kosciusko County communities. Warsaw, Winona Lake, and Syracuse were amongst the first to construct local trail networks. These communities understood the value and appeal trails have in a community and have formed advisory committees to lead the inclusion of trails in their local communities. The City of Warsaw and the Town of Winona Lake partnered to establish the Ride Walk Advisory Committee and have a Trails Master Plan that proposes 87 miles of multi-use trails, greenways, and on-road bicycle facilities to make it easier to bike and walk and enhance the quality of life. The Town of Syracuse also formed its own advisory committee called Syracuse-Wawasee Trails aimed to achieve similar goals and recently created a Trails Feasibility Study in 2021. This Study builds upon the local success by evaluating options to expand the Town’s trail network and linking to regional trail connections like linking to the Town of North Webster and to the Town of Milford. Soon the Town of Milford will have its first trail from downtown to Waubee Lake Park. The Town of North Webster is also planning for a trail to connect to Syracuse and other destinations.

In addition to these local trails, there are many opportunities for residents and visitors to enjoy trails in a number of recreational areas (nature preserves

or other natural resource areas) offered in the unincorporated areas of the County. These opportunities have become a major draw to the communities enhancing the quality of life and attracting thousands of users from all over the region. Below highlight all of the trail networks in Kosciusko County.

Etna Green – Near the Town of Etna Green is a nature preserve that had one publicly accessible trail.

- **Glennwoods Nature Preserve** – This nature preserve owned by ACRES Land Trust is 36.7 acres that feature a circumneutral bog, one of 15 in Indiana. The bog once was a lake, but it is now nearly filled with a springy mat of mosses, ferns, and sedges resting on a bed of peat. It did feature a 1-mile trail but the Land Trust will be retiring the trail from public access in 2023.

Leesburg – Near the Town of Leesburg is a nature preserve that contains one publicly accessible trail.

- **Oppenheim Woods Trail** – Owned by the Nature Conservancy of Indiana, this trail is located within the 63-acre Oppenheim Woods Nature Preserve at 7060 N Kalorama Road and is a 1.2-mile loop through the mixed hardwood forest that offers a dense canopy overhead. This trail is ideal for bird watching and has many beautiful wildflowers for visitors to enjoy as well.

North Webster – Near the Town of North Webster is one publicly accessible trail.

- **Welsh Metekka Nature Trail** – The Welsh Metekka Nature Trail is located on the south side of North Webster Elementary School and is approximately a 0.5-mile loop.

Pierceton – Near the Town of Pierceton features four areas to access trails, one of which offers a unique horse riding experience.

- **Deniston Natural Resource Area** – This natural resource area is at 7865 West Lincolnway, Larwill, IN is approximately 365 acres next to Robinson Lake. This area is a popular spot for fishing and hunting but also features several trails for hikers. The main trail is a 0.8-mile gravel trail that wraps around the north side of Robinson Lake.
- **The Koinonia Environmental and Retreat Center** – Located between Pierceton and North Manchester just off State Road 13, the facility offers a tranquil setting for hikes, quiet reflection, or groups who want to learn or study. It is owned and operated by Manchester University which is approximately 100 acres of ecologically diverse with a diversity of hardwood and pine forests, a five-acre kettle lake, a large wetland complex with a walkway and observation decks, and a restored prairie.
- **Pisgah Marsh Area and Board Walk** – Located at 9950 E 350 N in Pierceton, the Pisgah Marsh Area and Boardwalk comprises approximately 445 acres, owned by IDNR, and is included in the Tri-County Fish & Wildlife Area. There are many trails in the area including the Pisgah Marsh Board Walk which is approximately 0.5 miles and offers incredible views of the marsh and is a stop on the Indiana Birding Trail system.

- **Deka-Di Riding Stable** – Located at 8409 E 200 N in Pierceton, Deka Di Riding Stable offers horseback riding through a local trail. Horseback riding does come at a cost and the stables request that reservations be made ahead of time.

Silver Lake – Near the Town of Silver Lake is one nature preserve that contains publicly accessible trails.

- **Wildwood Nature Preserve** – This 255-acre Preserve is owned by the ACRES Land Trust and is located at 409 East SR 14 in Silver Lake. This is a popular location for residents and visitors to enjoy outdoor recreation and has been used by SWCD for school programs and master naturalist training. This Preserve also features 2.9 miles of trails that are moderately difficult to trek. This Preserve protects a variety of habitats including a small pond, a forest, wetlands, a prairie, and agricultural acreage.

Syracuse – The Town of Syracuse features several miles of trails dispersed throughout a trail network and a handful of nature preserves.

- **Syracuse-Wawasee Trails** – The Town of Syracuse offers nearly 12 miles of trails that wind around the Town, Syracuse Lake, and Lake Wawasee with connections to the Community Center, athletics complex, wetlands, the History Museum, downtown, and parks.
- **Greider’s Woods Nature Preserve** – This nature preserve, located at 8432 N. 850 East, offers 10 acres of a self-guided nature trail. This is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the many wildflowers and a variety of tree species along the nature trail. Jethro Greider formerly owned this small woodlot and was also once part of the Flatbelly Indian Reservation. This Preserve was improved with state funding through the license plate fee for the environment.

- **Tri-County Fish and Wildlife Area** – The Tri-County Fish and Wildlife Area comprises 3,546 acres of land near Syracuse, IN, with 650 acres being lakes and impoundments. Visitors can enjoy the traversed terrain of flat to rolling uplands and steep slopes. The area offers quality hunting and fishing opportunities. Other features include the wetlands, vital for migratory waterfowl and fish.
- **Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation** – Located one mile south of Syracuse on Lake Wawasee, the Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation maintains approximately 40 acres of wetland, woods, and lakeshore, providing diverse opportunities to enjoy nature. This includes the 1.3-mile loop Buck Island Trail, the 3 miles of Syracuse Lake Wetland Trails, Memorial Garden, the Conklin Bay Boardwalk, and the Sacajawea Wetlands and Boardwalk.



Warsaw – The City of Warsaw has three main trails, both of which offer a historical or educational experience to visitors.



- **Chinworth Bridge Trail** – This nearly 2-mile trail located at 3495 West Old Rd 30 (near the City-County Athletic Complex) in Warsaw incorporates local history throughout the trail. This asphalt trail, perfect for hikers and bicyclists, incorporates two historic bridges along the way and includes a beautiful picnic spot as well, and has a publicly accessible canoe launch onto the Tippecanoe River at the Chinworth Bridge trailhead.
- **Beyer Farm Trail** – This trail located at 1013 East Arthur St helps to educate the public about wetlands, their functions, and the wildlife and vegetation that the wetland supports. This trail is 1.2 miles that feature an 1800-foot boardwalk (south shore of Pike Lake) and connect to the Kosciusko Community Hospital complex, Lucerne Park, and Pike Lake Park.

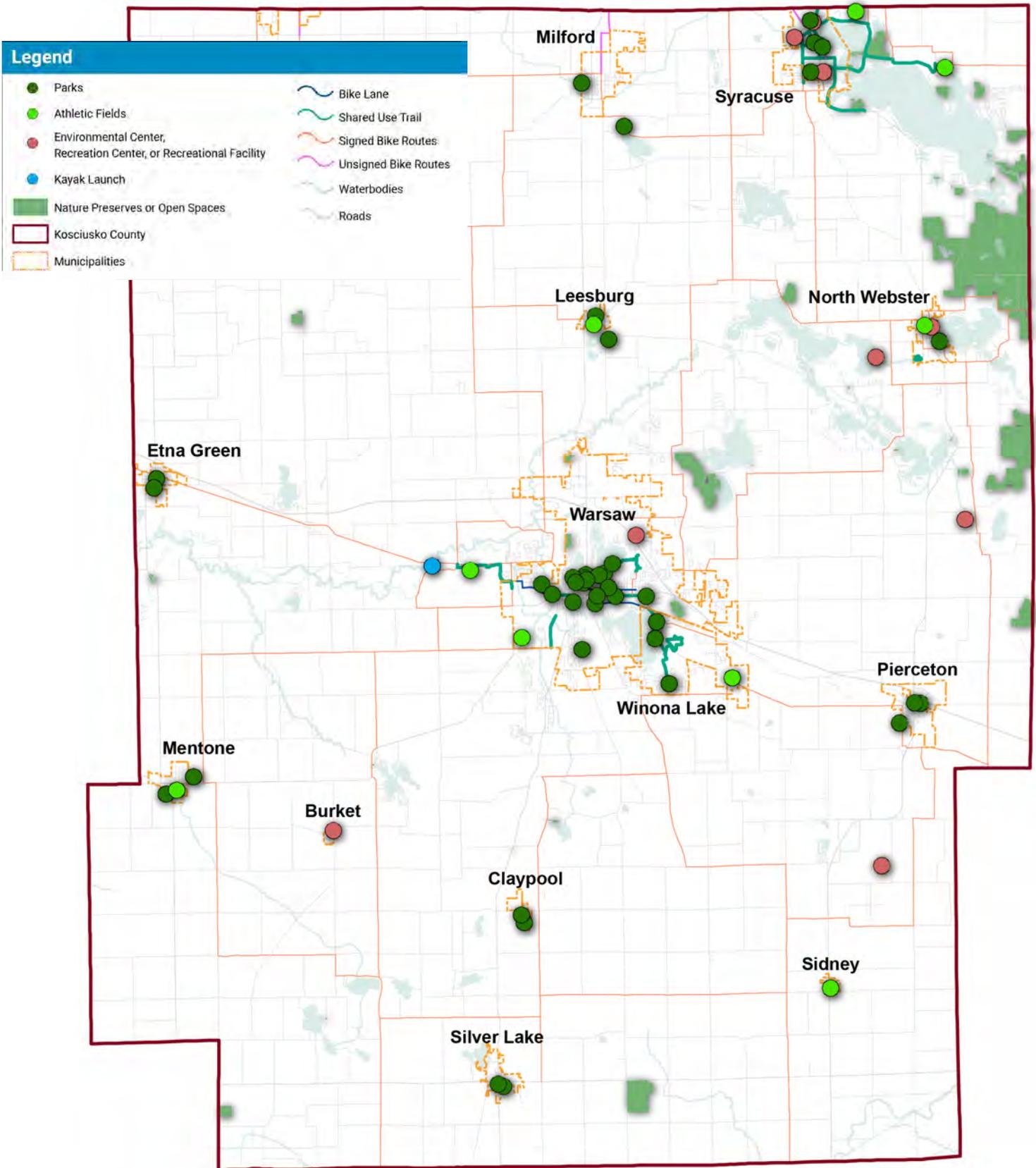
- **Lake City Greenway** – The Lake City Greenway is a regional multi-use trail network in the City of Warsaw and the Town of Winona Lake. This network offers nearly 7 miles of trails that consists of the 1.2-mile Beyer Farm Trail and 1.8-mile Chinworth Bridge Trail in Warsaw, and 1.8 miles of the Heritage Trail in Winona Lake. It accesses the CCAC, Pike Lake Park, Kosciusko Community Hospital, the Village at Winona, Limitless Park, and Grace College.

Winona Lake – Winona Lake offers nearly 11 miles of trails, with portions of the system being part of the Lake City Greenway trail network.

- **Winona Lake Trail System** – The Winona Lake Trails features 9 miles of trails that wind through natural wooded areas, along Cherry Creek, with connections to the Village at Winona, Limitless Park, and Grace College. This trail system offers a basic trail and an advanced technical trail and is perfect for bicyclists, as well as runners and hikers.
- **Heritage Trail** – Starting at the intersection of Park Avenue and Winona Avenue/Kings Highway, the Heritage Trail, part of the Lake City Greenway, offers 1.8 miles of trails with stunning views of Winona Lake that connect to the Village at Winona, and Limitless Park. Most notably this trail gets its name by featuring public art to pay tribute to Winona Lake’s heritage.



EXISTING PARKS AND RECREATION AMENITIES MAP



4



ADA COMPLIANCE & ACCESSIBILITY

OVERVIEW

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 27.2 percent of Kosciusko County residents report having a disability. The report defines a person as having a disability if they have difficulty performing a specific task such as seeing, hearing, bathing, or doing light housework, or if they have a specific condition, such as Alzheimer’s disease. Below is the percentage of Kosciusko County residents by age group that reported having a disability.

Under 18 Years: 3.1%
18 to 64 Years: 14.5%
65 years or Older: 9.6%

STATEMENT OF ACCESSIBILITY

Kosciusko County will provide reasonable conditions and accommodations for all people with disabilities in the construction of all of the future parks, recreational facilities, programs, activities, and services. This includes utilizing universal design and inclusion principles that provide access and inclusion for people with disabilities, either physical or mental.

The 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that local governments, including park boards, remove any barriers to access and inclusion in facilities, programs, activities, and services. Kosciusko County will provide these accessibility modifications that meet ADA guidelines for any significant alterations of an existing facility, program, activity, or service. Beyond physical alterations and improvements, inclusion and universal design will be utilized for the development of programs, services, activities, communication, signage, policies, and procedures

Kosciusko County has an ADA Transition Plan (2023) in place along with a County ADA Coordinator, Marsha McSherry. Marsha is also the County Administrator and the Title VI Coordinator. Individuals should submit a complaint to Marsha, contact information below, notifying that a program, service, or activity in the County is not accessible to a person with disabilities.

Marsha McSherry, Kosciusko County Administrator
574-372-2475 | mmcsherry@kcgov.com
100 W Center, Warsaw, IN 46580

ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW AND PROPOSED ACCESSIBILITY

Since Kosciusko County currently does not own, operate, or maintain any parks or recreation facilities, services, or programs, there is no current accessibility information available. This plan will work to include provisions for an accessibility review as the County establishes a parks and recreation system, and will coordinate with local municipalities park departments or park boards, or applicable staff to assess ADA accessibility of their local facilities to enhance accessibility. The County will ensure new park amenities and recreation facilities will comply with ADA standards at the forefront to not retro-fit later.



5



PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community engagement throughout the process is key to understanding the needs and aspirations of Kosciusko County residents. This builds trust and accountability, instills community pride, and establishes a lasting relationship between the County and its residents. Plan implementation is successful when a project like this is well supported by the community.

The development of the County’s 5-year Parks Master Plan was built on the foundation laid from the extensive community engagement efforts conducted from prior planning efforts with a continued momentum to garner residents’ needs and aspirations for a county park system. New engagement activities included a public input survey, multiple public open houses, a public review form, stakeholder interviews, and Steering Committee meetings. These engagement activities gave opportunities for residents, visitors, and stakeholders to share their aspirations of a county parks and recreation system and what needs to improve to implement the vision. This Chapter summarizes the new and previous engagement activities.

Public Input Survey – The Parks and Recreation Board and Steering Committee offered a public input survey at the forefront of the planning process to engage county residents and visitors on what draws them to visit a park within or outside of the county, amenities or opportunities they would like to have access to, and how the Parks and Recreation Board should focus their efforts and priorities over the next five years. The survey was available for input from November 30, 2022, to January 11,



2023, formatted to complete online or by filling out a paper copy. Paper surveys and promotional materials were available to pick up at all of the local municipalities' Clerk Offices and public libraries. The survey was also promoted through a Press Release, local municipalities put a notice in their community newsletters, and promoted on Steering Committee members' Facebook pages. We received 500 total responses, 496 were completed online and four (4) paper surveys were returned.

Below are the highlights of the public's response to the survey. A full summary of the survey results is in the Appendix.

77%

visit parks within Kosciusko County to utilize walking paths

- 77% of respondents indicated they visit parks within Kosciusko County to utilize walking paths
- 55% of respondents indicated they visit parks within Kosciusko County to utilize playgrounds
- 53% of respondents indicated they visit parks within Kosciusko County to enjoy beaches

193

respondents indicated they would like to see more hiking paths

- 193 respondents indicated they would like to see more hiking trails in Kosciusko County
- 163 respondents indicated they would like to see more nature preserves and/or open spaces in Kosciusko County
- 153 respondents indicated they would like to see more walking paths in Kosciusko County

302

respondents would like to see at least one county trail that links communities

- When asked which initiatives they would like to see the Parks Board implement in the next five years, 302 respondents chose building at least one county trail that links communities, 147 respondents chose exploring the feasibility of increasing public access to Kosciusko County's water resources for recreational opportunities, and 126 respondents chose partnering with municipalities and other groups within the county to manage and maintain recreational resources such as parks.

Public Review On The Draft Plan – Kosciusko County residents and visitors had the opportunity to review the draft Kosciusko County 2023-2027 Parks Master Plan between March 6, 2023, and April 6, 2023, and sharing their input by filling out a public review form and attending one of three open houses. The public review form and draft Plan were available for electronic viewing on the Parks & Recreation Board's webpage, and hard copies were provided at the municipal offices and public libraries in the county. Notifications of the engagement activities were advertised on the Board members' and Steering Committee members' Facebook Pages, by Press Release in local media in the county, and flyers were posted at the municipal offices and public libraries.

We received 185 online submissions and two (2) paper submissions for the public review form that asked respondents to select the top goals and strategies they thought should be a priority for the Board to focus on implementing in the next five (5) years.

The three scheduled open houses were offered in North Webster (March 14th), Mentone (March 16th), and Warsaw (March 28th) and had a total of 40 attendees. Participants of the open houses were able to review highlights of the draft Plan on large display boards and complete the public review form.

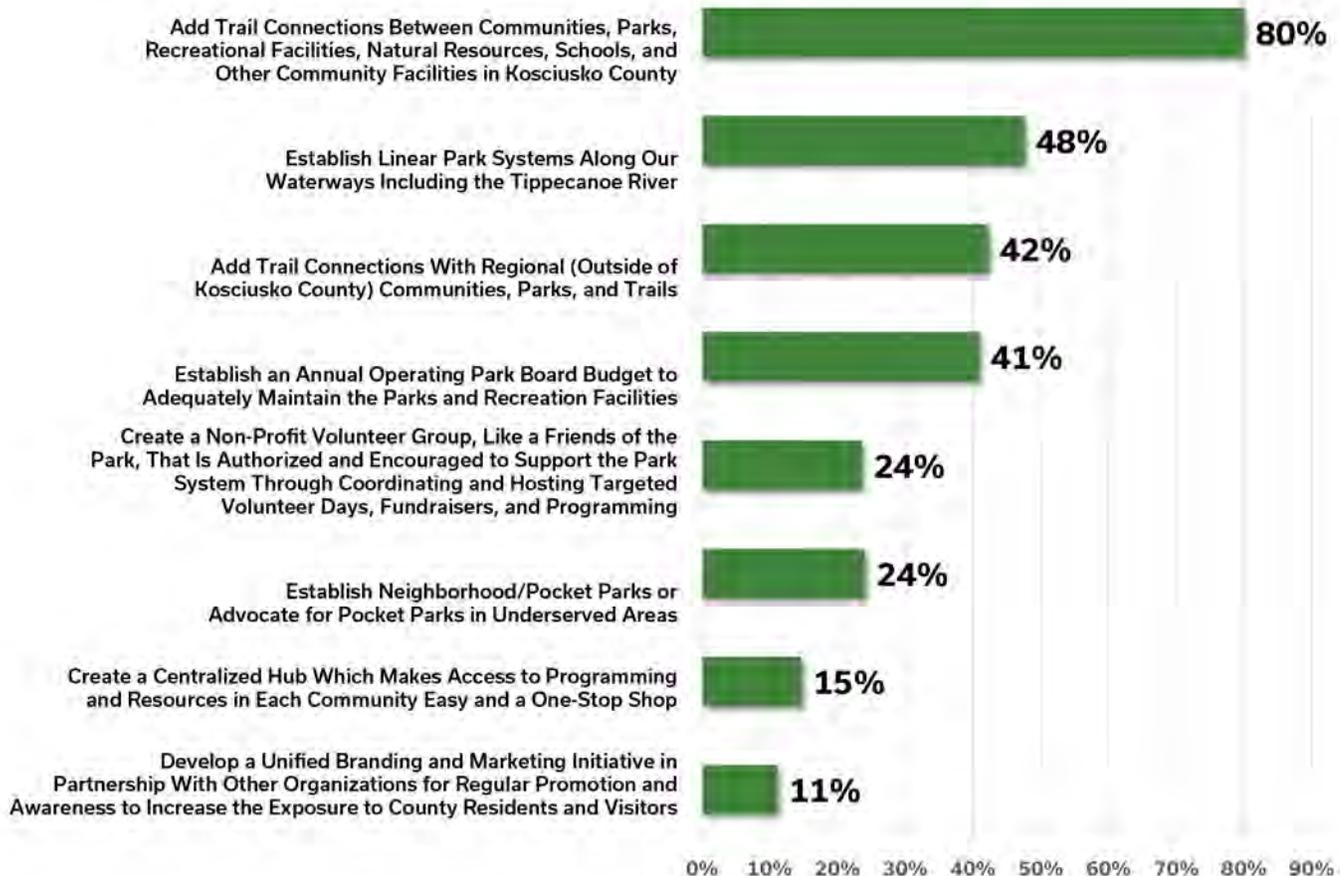
Public Review Form Highlights

The community was asked to first select up to three (3) goals they thought should be a priority for the Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board to focus on implementing in the next five (5) years. These goals address the major needs residents and stakeholders identified from the first public input survey, stakeholder interviews, and from the series of Steering Committee meetings. The goals were first prioritized by the Parks & Recreation Board and the Steering Committee prior to the release of the public review form to serve as a comparison to the public's response. The results were shared with the Board and the Steering Committee and confirms the priority action program further discussed on page 52. Below are the highlights of the results of the public review form. A complete summary of the results is in the Appendix.



80%

Respondents indicated they would like to see the Board focus on implementing the goal **"Add Trail Connections Between Communities, Parks, Recreational Facilities, Natural Resources, Schools, And Other Community Facilities In Kosciusko County."**



The prior question asked the community to select up to three goals they believe should be a priority for the board. This second question asked respondents to choose one top action strategy from each goal they selected as a priority in the previous question. The primary purpose for this was to help the Parks & Recreation Board know what actions the public supports most to help guide implementation efforts.

The following are the top action strategies from each goal that received the highest responses from respondents as what they would like to see the Board first implement:

Park & Recreation Amenities

- 43 respondents would like to see the Board develop a strategic plan to guide land acquisition for the construction of canoe/kayak launches and trails for the linear park along the Tippecanoe River
- 28 respondents would like to see every county resident have access to a park

Trail & Blueway Connections

- 33 respondents would like to see a trail connection from Warsaw to Silver Lake
- 54 respondents would like to see a trail connection to the Nickel Plate Trail in Rochester and the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail in Goshen

Promotion & Marketing

- 14 respondents would like to see the Board leverage current resources available from Visit Kosciusko, Clearly Kosciusko, and other entities
- 30 respondents would like to see the Board partner with Visit Kosciusko & Clearly Kosciusko to use their websites to host information and promote the central hub website

Staffing & Maintenance

- 37 respondents would like to see the Board develop a maintenance and budget plan
- 19 respondents would like to see the Board learn how the Nickel Plate Trail and Pumpkinvine Nature Trail Advocacy Groups manage their systems

Steering Committee Meetings – MACOG facilitated monthly Steering Committee meetings in conjunction with the regularly scheduled Parks and Recreation Board meetings to provide additional opportunities for the public to participate in the development of the parks master plan. MACOG also guided everyone through a five-step planning process, detailed below, and reported on the progress of the Plan development. Community engagement and past public participation were vital components shared with everyone to help guide discussions.

- 1. Establish a Vision and Goals for the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Department**
- 2. Analyze Existing Conditions, Community Needs, and Conduct a Gap Analysis**
- 3. Develop Action Strategies**
- 4. Prepare Plan Document and Review**
- 5. Adopt the Final Plan**

Stakeholder Interviews – An integral step in inventorying the existing parks and recreation facilities in the County and establishing a list of needs was conducting stakeholder interviews. During the months of October and November 2022, interviews were conducted with the stakeholders listed below, who are involved in local municipal park departments, those who are in a position to affect the success of the plan, and those affected most by the outcomes of the plan. Stakeholders interviewed were conducted virtually by conference calls or through Google Meets that lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. The major needs identified by stakeholders are included in the overall list of major needs reflected in the next chapter titled, “Needs & Gap Analysis.” A full summary of the interviews is provided in the Appendix.

- Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board
- Kosciusko County Historical Society
- Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams
- The Watershed Foundation
- Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Kosciusko Water and Woodland Invasive Partnership
- Municipal Park Superintendents

PRIOR PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

Kosciusko County has gone through multiple planning efforts in the past three years that have included the Hometown Chats (led by the Kosciusko County Community Foundation), the Hoosiers Enduring Legacy Program (HELP), and Forward Kosciusko. These various projects engaged residents through multiple input surveys, open house meetings, and attending events and festivals. The results of these efforts, combined with the engagement efforts for this Plan are summarized below and were used to inform discussions at the Steering Committee Meetings for the development of the needs and gaps, and the priorities for this Plan.

Hometown Chats – In 2019, the Kosciusko County Community Foundation was awarded the Community Leadership Planning Grant from the Lilly Endowment Inc. to strengthen the Foundation’s ability to meet the needs of its communities. As part of the planning process, the Foundation conducted 11 Hometown Chats across the County in July 2019 and August 2019, inviting residents to share their concerns and aspirations for the communities they live in. A total of 228 individuals attended one of the Chats. In relation to parks and trails, a common response heard was “parks and trail/bike systems are valued and need investment,” “there is a need for more activities and programs designed to engage the youth of all ages,” and future planning should focus on expanding sidewalks and trails throughout the County, expanding parks, additional gathering spaces, and adding an event center.

Hoosiers Enduring Legacy Program (HELP) – Kosciusko County was one of three counties or communities initially to be chosen as part of HELP. The Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs provided the County with a \$1 million grant to implement HELP. These funds were meant to assist the County and participating communities within it with spending their American Rescue Plan Act funds from the federal government on projects to better their communities. The County invited communities within it to join in participating in the program, with Milford, Etna Green, Mentone, and Pierceton agreeing to take part.

Community engagement was an important piece of this process in order to ensure that the projects planned and the funds spent aligned with the communities’ visions. The HELP team worked with the Kosciusko Economic Development Corporation (KEDCO) to put together a survey to gauge community interest in the following four topics: Advancing E-Connectivity, Enhancing Quality of Place, Promoting Community Wellness, and Strengthening Local Economies. When respondents were asked to choose which topic they had an interest in, 37.8% of the County chose Promoting Community Wellness, 35.88% chose Enhancing Quality of Place, 19.1% chose Strengthening Local Economies, and 7.6% chose Advancing E-Connectivity. The most popular choice, Promoting Community Wellness, was defined by initiatives concerning the following: mental health, parks and trails, healthy food markets, ADA accessibility, walkability and bike lanes, childcare, and Blue Zones.

Forward Kosciusko – Forward Kosciusko is a comprehensive plan that serves as a one-of-a-kind update to the County’s previous comprehensive plan which was adopted in 1996. This plan strived to include detailed information and recommendations for most aspects of each incorporated community within the county. Because of the level of detail and community-specific data, this would require, the Forward Kosciusko team undertook a massive public engagement campaign and also utilized data collected during the Lilly Endowment funded Hometown Chats.

This more involved engagement campaign included static and digital engagement which included: a mobile data collection tool placed in community spaces like libraries, virtual interactive maps, and vision walls which allowed residents to map challenges or assets. Additionally, the team

conducted an online community-wide survey, which the following narrative will further break down. All in all, over 2,100 individual comments were received through these engagement methods.

53.4%

of respondents indicated parks, open space, and recreational opportunities were the county's three strongest assets

When asked in the survey to describe Kosciusko County in three words, out of the 452 responses received, 164 (or 38.3%) included "lakes" or "beautiful lakes" indicating that the natural resources the county has to offer are important to the identity of Kosciusko County and the community.

When asked to choose the county's three strongest assets, 53.4% of respondents indicated that "parks, open space, and recreational opportunities" were among the county's three strongest assets. Of the 5.36% of respondents who chose "other" and wrote in their responses, 40% wrote in "lakes", "natural resources", or "outdoor recreation".

When asked to choose the county's three greatest challenges, 9.0% of respondents chose "access to parks, open space, and recreational opportunities". This indicates that despite the wealth of existing resources and opportunities, there is still a need for additional resources and opportunities to adequately serve all residents and visitors of Kosciusko County.

The survey also asked residents what types of leisure activities they feel their communities need more of in the coming years. 38.5% of respondents said they need more "outdoor event areas", 39.8% said they need more "parks and open spaces", and 53.3% said they need more "walking and biking facilities (trails, bike lanes, etc.)". This yet again underscores the need for additional park-related activities and resources, showing the necessity of a parks master plan that can help the Parks and Recreation Board to distribute existing resources in addition to helping plan new resources and their type, locations, and budgets.

Finally, when asked the question, "regarding community services and infrastructure, which systems need the most improvements?". In response to this question, 33.7% of respondents chose "Parks, recreation, and open space system". This answer further supports the need for a parks master plan which will help support the existing parks and recreation services by taking on the planning role for them, thereby expanding their capacity.

In addition to the survey and other digital forms of engagement, the team also facilitated meetings and workshops including field tours in which a community leader could express and display needs and assets in their community (among other things), stakeholder interviews in which experts were invited to provide their insight on complex topics, community focus group meetings which functioned like small public workshops to allow residents to provide more complex feedback, and public workshops which

53.3% of respondents need more walking and biking facilities

39.8% need more parks and open spaces

38.5% need more outdoor event areas

allowed for larger crowds of people to interact directly with the planning team to provide more complex feedback. These engagement methods amounted to 13 field tours, more than 40 stakeholder interviews, 7 individual community focus group meetings, more than 40 participants in public open houses, and 44 participants across several land use and growth workshop sessions.

Each response and session from both the online and in-person engagement was analyzed separately and the following common themes were identified across the responses:

Community Strengths and Opportunities

- Population Growth
- Established and Expanding Industries
- Water Recreation/Tourism
- Strong Local School Systems
- Safe and Family-Friendly Communities
- Expanding Year-Round Seasonal Activities
- Enhancing Tourism

Community Weaknesses and Threats

- Aging Infrastructure
- Lack of Quantity and Diversity in Housing Options
- Access to Quality Internet Services
- Maintaining Structures and Facades Within Downtowns
- Access to Social and Support Services
- Vacancies within Downtowns
- Access to Fresh Foods and Pantry Staples
- Maintenance of Recreation Areas
- Pedestrian Infrastructure and Connectivity

Shared Aspirations

- Agricultural Conservation
- Family Friendly
- Protecting and Enhancing the Lakes
- Being a Safe Place to Live
- Growing in the Right Direction
- Creating a Strong Economic Base

6



NEEDS & GAP ANALYSIS

MACOG, the Parks and Recreation Board, and the Steering Committee used several quantitative and qualitative methods to identify the county's major challenges with establishing a county park and recreation system. Quantitative methods included evaluating the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) Acreage and Park Level of Service (LOS) Metrics and analysis of Census demographic and socioeconomic data. Qualitative methods included brainstorming activities with the Steering Committee to identify aspirations of their ideal parks and recreation system, what's working today to achieve that vision, and the current barriers preventing them to achieve the vision. Other activities with the Steering Committee and the Parks and Recreation Board included a gap analysis that examined where opportunities exist based on the location and types of parks or recreational amenities in the County. Other qualitative methods were the stakeholder interviews and the public input survey.

ACREAGE & PARKLANDS LEVEL OF SERVICE METRICS

The Steering Committee and Board used NRPA's Acreage and Park LOS Metrics to determine if the County provides adequate acreage of outdoor recreation use and the number of parks available per the current and projected populations. NRPA Acreage and Park Metrics measure the total acreage of recreational lands per 1,000 residents and the total number of parks per 2,277 residents. These metrics are regarded as the most

utilized standard given the ease of measurement and can be used by the County as a vitality indicator to help measure residents' quality of life in terms of parks and recreation enjoyment. These metrics can also be useful for the County Parks and Recreation Board to have a general sense of what comparably sized communities operate and maintain for their park and recreation systems.

According to the 2022 NRPA Park Metrics, a typical (an established) park and recreation board or agency have approximately 9.9 acres of land for outdoor recreation use per 1,000 residents in the service area and one park for every 2,277 residents. Kosciusko County's population in 2020 was 79,156 residents (2020 Decennial Census). Analyzing the trend in population between 2000 and 2020, it is projected that the County's population could grow to approximately 81,813 residents by 2030. Using this metric, there would need to be approximately 792 acres of land for outdoor recreation use and 35 parks available in the county to adequately serve residents living in Kosciusko County. Factoring the County's 2030 projected population, there would need to be a total of 818 acres of outdoor recreational land and a total of 36 parks available in the county. Although the County does not own any parklands yet, there are many opportunities within the county for residents and visitors to access and enjoy outdoor recreation. There are approximately 182 acres of parks in the local communities and 4,907.5 acres of nature preserve with hiking trails or open spaces offered by IDNR, Land Trusts, or other local conservancy organizations. This well exceeds NRPA's LOS Metrics.

Additional metrics provided in the 2022 NRPA Agency Performance Review are the average park and recreation agency has an annual operating expenditure per capita of \$93.01, manages 14 miles of walking, hiking, and biking trails, has a revenue-to-operating expenditure of 23.6 percent, and has nine full-time employees per 10,000 residents in the service area.

GAP ANALYSIS

In light of NRPA's Acreage and Park LOS Metrics, it should be noted that NRPA states given the diversity of communities and their park systems it does not necessarily lend themselves to compare against another community. What works well in one community may not necessarily be best in another community. Kosciusko County is in a bit different situation than most park boards or park departments across the state as the County government established its first parks and recreation board in August 2022 and currently does not own parklands. However, parks and outdoor recreation are provided within the local communities or offered by IDNR, ACRES Land Trust, or other local conservancy organizations. Therefore, MACOG worked with the Steering Committee and the Parks and Recreation Board to analyze qualitative methods to provide a more realistic picture of the major challenges and deficiencies, and where opportunities exist. These methods included a gap analysis to map access and connectivity to parks and recreational amenities, and a

benchmark comparison with other communities or agencies of similar scale and capacity of amenities offered. Other forms of analyses included responses from the public input survey on what they perceived are the major challenges and amenities missing in the county, stakeholder interviews to know of their needs, and SWOT exercises from Steering Committee meetings. A summary of the community engagement efforts is in the previous chapter with a detailed summary of the input survey results provided in the Appendix. These methods are summarized below.

MACOG facilitated monthly Steering Committee meetings in conjunction with the regularly scheduled Parks and Recreation Board meetings to allow the public opportunities to participate in these meetings and be a part of the whole planning process in addition to other community engagement efforts. To kick the planning process off, MACOG facilitated a “Wow, Now, How” exercise with the Steering Committee. The “How” component was reserved for later in the planning process during the formation of the priority action program. This exercise led the Steering Committee, Board members, and the public to identify their aspirations for the County’s park and recreation system, identify what is working to support their aspirations, and identify the major barriers preventing their aspirations from being a reality. Next, MACOG mapped the collected responses into common themes that inspired the creation of the vision and mission statements, and identified the major opportunities and challenges. Similar questions were asked in the first public input survey to serve as a comparison of what the general community thinks and what those on the Steering Committee thought to identify the similarities and differences.

Using the common themes of challenges from the kickoff meeting and from the public input survey as inspiration, the second joint Steering Committee-Parks and Recreation Board meeting led to a brainstorming session to identify the specific items or areas that need to be addressed to achieve the vision of the Kosciusko County park and recreation system. This information is summarized on pages 43, 44, and 45. Following this exercise, a gap analysis was conducted to map all of the existing parks and recreational amenities and overlaid them on top of the population densities in the county. This gave an idea of what’s currently being provided by local communities and where people are living to inform the “gaps,” see the Needs & Gap Analysis Map and Map Key on pages 46 and 47. This also

informed of potential opportunities to add amenities like new parks or trail connections in underserved areas. The following are the major challenges or priorities that need to be addressed to achieve the vision of the Kosciusko County park and recreation system. The major needs are organized by the four common themes identified from the joint Steering Committee-Parks and Recreation Board meetings, stakeholder interviews, and the public input survey.



MAJOR NEEDS:

Parks & Recreation Amenities

- Survey respondents indicated that the second main amenity missing in the county is nature preserves/open spaces
- Need ADA-accessible playgrounds
- Redevelop/reimagine/updated the facilities at the City-County Athletic Complex to have updated fields and tournaments to draw in more money and visitors
- Need for a multipurpose indoor sports facility, i.e. an indoor turf field for soccer and baseball
- Explore the feasibility to repurpose the old Madison Elementary School into a YMCA or similar recreational facility
- Making sure new builds are ADA compliant
- The County is challenged with needing to secure large tracts of land to support the creation of new parks or space for outdoor recreation i.e. hiking and walking trails, and deciding who will initially purchase the land and who is going to maintain and protect the land going forward

Trails & Blueway Connections

- Limited trail connections in the unincorporated areas connecting to communities, parks, and recreational amenities
- The County is in desperate need of connectivity (trails and launches), both to and from communities, connecting users to the natural resources, and educating users to treat the natural resources sustainably
- Survey respondents indicated that the main amenity missing in the county are hiking and walking trails, followed by increasing public access to waterways for recreational use
- There are several bridge crossings of the Tippecanoe River that could be potential access sites, but these are private property and an agreement with the landowner(s) would need to be secured
- Need to advocate to INDOT to ensure bicycle and pedestrian connectivity across US 30 are planned for
- The length of trail connections needed will be costly
- General public safety and liability concerns
- Explore the feasibility to add bike rentals so people can access the trail like a bike dropoff/pickup setup
- Include the YMCA on bike accessibility
- Potential issues with right-of-way acquisition, if deemed necessary, as many of the County Roads have narrow right-of-ways so limited space to add a trail, or bicycle and pedestrian facilities

- Existing utilities and coordinating with easements to add bicycle and pedestrian facilities
- Various soil conditions and the presence of wetlands may pose an issue with constructing trails
- Marching orders - simple mantras - strategy screen 1 yr, 3 yr, 5 yr plans (see early wins)
- A wide range of project scopes may make it difficult to see the broader need to phase projects
- A long-term need is to add trail amenities i.e. public restrooms, benches, and lighting

Promotion & Marketing

- Currently, there's a lack of community involvement, community buy-in on the value of parks, and a unified vision
- Need local champions
- Need more promotion to access parks for those with disabilities
- Lack of knowledge on where to go for expertise
- Lack of knowledge and promotion of existing parks and recreation areas in the county
- Currently, there's no centralized map that displays all of the trails in the county and blueway access points
- Lack of unified marketing by the two main marketing organizations (Visit Kosciusko and Clearly Kosciusko)
- Need for a consistent message as media sources have become fragmented and difficult to follow
- Clearly Kosciusko needs to stay unified across platforms and Visit Kosciusko needs to be the main point of contact moving forward
- Need to explore funding an innkeepers tax to be a source to help fund these initiatives
- Not a single repository to update - Who owns it? A barrier to a single source

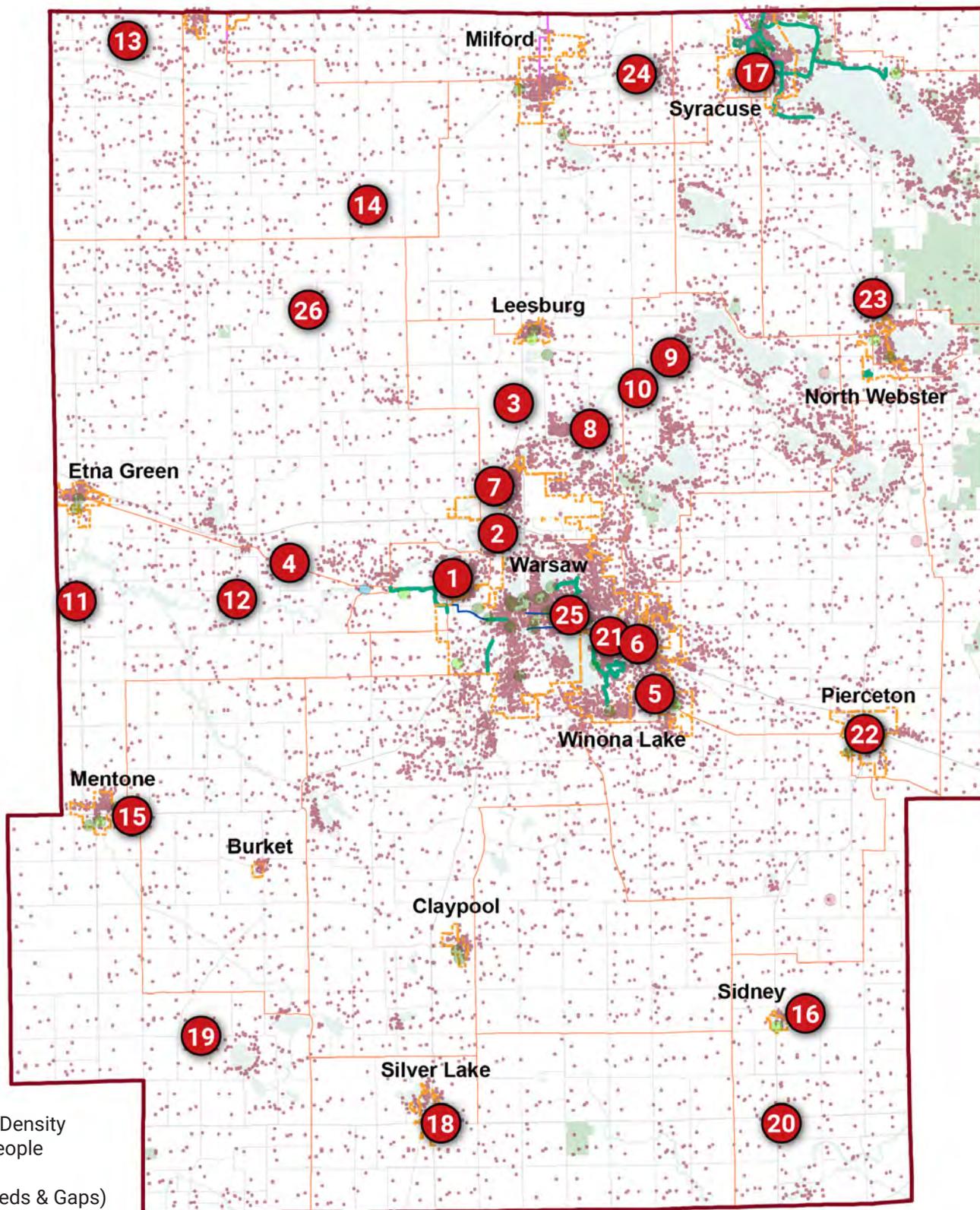
Staffing & Maintenance

- Lack of clarity of the role, purpose, and responsibilities of the county in terms of provision for parks and recreation
- Limited staffing capacities at the county level, no annual budget for parks, and no maintenance plan for future parks and trails
- Need a parks master plan and a funding plan to monitor progress and projects
- Need to organize a volunteer organization to help leverage volunteers
- Need to explore establishing an agreement with the County Highway Department to help maintain future facilities, and/or establish an agreement with local municipalities
- Need support from County Commissioners and County Council to establish a Parks Department or a maintenance plan
- Needs are great so we need more outside money without relying on donations
- Limited experience with seeking grant opportunities
- Conducts onsite field surveys of the county to identify potential areas needing conservation assistance with a focus on soil health and water quality
- Challenged with keeping the river channels/river banks clear to access and be navigable to support blueways, and keeping the waterways clean and safe for recreational use
- A few aquatic invasive species pose a concern to the lakes
- Need a county-wide initiative to educate property owners on best management practices to reduce soil erosion, sedimentation, tilling of farmlands, and use of chemicals on crops and lawns

KOSCIUSKO COUNTY PARKS & RECREATION GAPS ANALYSIS MAP KEY

Map ID	Description of the Needs and Gaps
1	Create a trail connection to the Chinworth Bridge Trail
2	Add a canoe/kayak launch on the Tippecanoe River
3	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail
4	Create a trail connection to Marshall County
5	Create a trail connection from the Winona Lake Heritage Trail to Pierceton
6	Create a trail connection from Winona Lake to North Webster and Syracuse
7	Create a linear park along the Tippecanoe River
8	Add a canoe/kayak launch on the Tippecanoe River
9	Add a canoe/kayak launch on the Tippecanoe River
10	Add a public parking lot to serve as a drop off starting point for bicyclists and canoers/kayakers
11	Add a canoe/kayak launch on the Tippecanoe River and promote connections to the Potawatomi Park in Marshall County
12	Create camping spots along the Tippecanoe River and along trails that connect to adjacent counties to allow for long term trips
13	Create a trail connection to increase safety for bicyclists
14	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to Nappanee
15	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to Mentone
16	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to Sidney
17	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to Syracuse
18	Create a trail connection from Warsaw to Silver Lake
19	Consider adding a new park to better serve residents living in the southern region of the county
20	Consider adding a new park to better serve residents living in the southern region of the county
21	Partner with ACRES Land Trust about adding new recreational opportunities
22	Create a trail connection from the Winona Lake Heritage Trail to Pierceton
23	Create a trail connection from Syracuse to North Webster
24	Create a trail connection from Milford to Syracuse
25	Add a new trail connection between schools in Warsaw and Winona Lake
26	Create a trail connection that links to the Great American Rail Trail to be a destination for long distance bikers

NEEDS OF IMPROVEMENT & GAP ANALYSIS MAP



Community Benchmarking

The benchmark analysis provides a comparison between Kosciusko County and other similar counties in Indiana, specifically counties which have recently begun to create a county park system. This analysis is focused on comparing Kosciusko County's parks and recreation infrastructure and resources with other counties to determine where Kosciusko County should aim when planning for the coming years. This analysis considers population, population change between 2010-2020, the number of parks the county is responsible for, the total acres of that public park land, the number of full-time employees in the county park system, the total yearly budget of the county park system, the total miles of walking paths/trails and then the number of beaches and playgrounds in the county park system.

Marshall County – Marshall County is the county directly west of Kosciusko County. It has a population of 46,095, a median household income of \$58,296.00, and has experienced a -2.05% population change since 2010. The Marshall County Park Board is responsible for a total of 2 parks which make up approximately 115 acres of land. These parks contain no beaches, no playgrounds, and a total of 6 miles of walking paths/trails. The Marshall County park system employs no full-time employees and operates with an annual budget of \$70,000.

Putnam County – Putnam County is another county with a relatively new county parks system, less than a year old, located just west of Indianapolis. Putnam County has a population of 36,726, a median household income of \$64,993.00, and has experienced a -3.31% population growth since 2010. Putnam County has a total of 20 parks which occupy just over 7730 acres of land. These parks contain 3 beaches, 9 playgrounds, and a total of 21.5 miles of walking paths/trails. The Putnam County park system currently employs 2 full-time employees and operates on an annual budget of \$307,000. The county's outdoor recreation effort is overseen by the boards of four collaborating organizations which all play different roles. The County Parks Board acts as the administrators/governors, Putnam Parks & Pathways (3P) acts as the doers or the executors, Friends of the Park of Putnam County (FOTP) act as the funders, and the Convention & Visitors Bureau (CVB) act as the promoters for the parks system and its initiatives.

Lake County – Lake County, located in Western Indiana and sharing a border with Illinois, is also home to a new county parks system. Lake County is the largest in population within this analysis, with a population of 498,700, and has experienced a 0.54% increase in population since 2010. Lake County's median household income (\$61,443.00) is the closest to Kosciusko County's median household income (\$62,789.00) within this benchmark analysis. The Lake County Parks Department manages a total of 11 parks which inhabit just approximately 7000 acres of land, including a portion of the Indiana Dunes. These parks contain a total of 1 beach, 7 playgrounds, and an impressive total of just over 100 miles of walking paths/trails. Lake County employs 70 full-time employees and operates with an annual budget of \$10,000,000.

Benchmarking Matrix

	Kosciusko County	Marshall County	Putnam County	Lake County
Population	79,156	46,095	36,726	498,700
Median Household Income	\$62,789.00	\$58,296.00	\$64,993.00	\$61,443.00
Percent Population Growth Since Last Census (2010-2020)	2.80%	-2.05%	-3.31%	0.54%
Number of Parks	0*	2	20	11
Total Acres of Public Park Land	0*	115	7730	7000
Number of Full-Time Employees in the Park System	0	0	2	70
Total Yearly Budget of the Park System	\$0	0	\$307,000	\$10 Million
Beaches	0*	0	3	1
Playgrounds	0*	0	9	7
Miles of Walking Paths/ Trails	0*	6	21.5	101.3

* While these amenities exist in towns and cities within Kosciusko County, this chart reflects only the amenities each County Park System is responsible for. As the Kosciusko County Parks Board is not yet responsible for any of these amenities, a zero is listed in the chart. Please see Chapter 2: Existing Conditions for details regarding existing amenities in Kosciusko County.

Benchmarking Conclusions – This benchmarking analysis was conducted to provide a comparison between other relatively new county parks systems to guide the Kosciusko County Parks System moving forward. These counties were selected because they are all relatively new and share at least a few characteristics with Kosciusko County.

Putnam County presents an example which Kosciusko County can strive to model as it begins to set up its county parks system. The Putnam County Parks Board was able to partner with other already established organizations to get their operation off of the ground. Dividing duties between the four entities which currently govern, fund, execute strategies, and promote the parks system has allowed for this fairly new parks system to have a smooth launch, even without employing many full-time staff whose sole duties would be to serve the county parks system. The data from the public survey indicates that residents of Kosciusko County are interested in the Parks Board creating partnerships with other existing organizations to help manage the parks system, so this very well could be a viable model for the Kosciusko County Parks Board to pursue.

7



PRIORITY ACTION PROGRAM

This chapter provides the framework for “how” the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board plans to achieve the community’s aspirations with an actionable plan that addresses the major challenges of its parks and recreation system. The priority action program was developed by the Steering Committee by going through the “How” portion of the “Wow, Now” activity. Using the summarized major needs identified from the quantitative and qualitative methods mentioned in the previous “Needs & Gap Analysis” chapter, the Steering Committee, Parks and Recreation Board, and the participating public was able to think through “how” the County will address these major challenges by identifying goals and strategies. MACOG worked with the Steering Committee to frame the list of major challenges into goals and then brainstorm the action strategies that achieve the goals.

The major challenges were framed into the following eight (8) goals and were categorized by the four (4) main themes.

Park & Recreation Amenities

1. Establish linear park systems along our waterways including the Tippecanoe River
2. Establish neighborhood/pocket parks or advocate for pocket parks in underserved areas

Trail & Blueway Connections

3. Add trail connections between communities, parks, recreational facilities, natural resources, schools, and other community facilities in Kosciusko County
4. Add trail connections with regional (outside of Kosciusko County) communities, parks, and trails

Promotion & Marketing

5. Develop a unified branding and marketing initiative in partnership with other organizations for regular promotion and awareness to increase the exposure to county residents and visitors
6. Create a centralized hub which makes access to programming and resources in each community easy and a one-stop shop

Staffing & Maintenance

7. Establish an annual operating park board budget to adequately maintain the parks and recreation facilities
8. Create a non-profit volunteer group, like a Friends of the Park, that is authorized and encouraged to support the park system through coordinating and hosting targeted volunteer days, fundraisers, and programming

At the third joint Parks and Recreation Board-Steering Committee Meeting, the Parks and Recreation Board, the Steering Committee, and the participating public next went through a prioritization activity to vote on the action strategies that have the most impact in establishing a county parks and recreation system. These priorities were also included in the public input survey to select the top three priorities they would like to see implemented in the next five years. A full summary of the survey results is provided in the Appendix. The fourth meeting had everyone identify a time frame for implementation, responsibilities, and a priority level. This is represented in the Priority Action Schedule on the subsequent page. The time frame consists of short term (<2 years), mid term (3-5 years), long term (>5 years), and ongoing projects. The responsibilities include the lead entity and involved primary and secondary partners to help with implementation.

PRIORITY ACTION SCHEDULE

The following is the Priority Action Schedule identified by the Parks and Recreation Board, the Steering Committee, and the public as the top priorities the Parks and Recreation Board can begin implementing over the next five years. Following the Priority Action Schedule are all other supporting strategies that are longer term initiatives the Parks and Recreation Board can consider implementing to address changes to residents and visitors needs.

Priority Action Schedule - Park & Recreation Amenities

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 1: Establish linear park systems along our waterways including the Tippecanoe River					
Establish a committee to envision linear park systems and create evaluation criteria	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	The Watershed Foundation, Lilly Center, Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District, IDNR, F&W, Ride/Walk Committee, Syracuse-Wawasee Trails, County Highway, Parkview YMCA, & Parkview Hospital	N/A	High
Hire an engineering firm to complete a feasibility study to determine suitable locations along the Tippecanoe River for paddler launches on the blueway and for hiking trails on the adjoining greenway	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Newly Established Trails Evaluation Committee & Lilly Center	\$60,000 - \$80,000 OCRA HELP Funds	High
Understand other factors involved in identifying and maintaining a blueway such as "river clean up" and riverbank access, IDNR requirements and river designation	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	The Watershed Foundation, Kosciusko County Soil and Water Conservation District, Lilly Center, & IDNR	N/A	Medium
Expand public access for paddlers along the Tippecanoe River with the addition of a canoe/kayak launch near James Lake	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Kosciusko County Commissioners & Council	<\$100K OCRA HELP Funds	Low

Priority Action Schedule - Park & Recreation Amenities Continued

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 1: Establish linear park systems along our waterways including the Tippecanoe River					
Develop a strategic plan for land acquisition and canoe/kayak launches and trail development for linear park along the Tippecanoe River, move forward with segments as feasible	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board		TBD Local Foundations, Individual Donors, LWCF, & ITP	High
Goal 2: Establish neighborhood/pocket parks or advocate for pocket parks in underserved areas					
Establish criteria (i.e. population density, location to existing assets, etc.) to identify areas for residents to access a municipal, county, or regional park within X miles of their homes	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	BWI, County GIS Director, Ride/Walk Committee, Syracuse-Wawasee Trails, County Highway, Parkview YMCA, & Parkview Hospital	N/A	Medium
Establish a communication strategy with Township Trustees and/or municipal Councils for funding and maintenance	Ongoing	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Township Trustees, and Municipal Clerks, & Municipal Councils	N/A	Medium to High
Achieve goal that every citizen would have access to a park within X miles of home by 20XX	Long term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board		N/A	Medium

Priority Action Schedule - Trail & Blueway Connections

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 3: Add trail connections between communities, parks, recreational facilities, natural resources, schools, and other community facilities in Kosciusko County					
Add a 1 mile trail extension along Old 30 west from Chinworth Bridge to provide trail access to residential areas	Short Term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, County Highway, Municipalities, Grant Leaders (e.g. HELP), & MACOG	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	High
Advocate that safe bicycle and pedestrian crossings be planned in INDOT's US 30 Corridor Study	Short term (Advocate) Long term (Implementation)	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, County Highway, Municipalities, INDOT, & MACOG	N/A	High (Advocate) Medium (Implementation)
Add a trail connection from Syracuse to North Webster	Mid term	Towns of Syracuse & North Webster	Syracuse-Wawasee Trails, Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board, Ride/Walk Committee, & County Highway	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	High
Add a trail connection from Pierceton to Winona Lake's Heritage Trail	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, County Highway, and Towns of Pierceton & Winona Lake	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium to High
Add a trail connection from North Webster to Warsaw	Mid term	Town of North Webster & City of Warsaw	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board, Ride/Walk Committee, & County Highway	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium to High
Add a trail connection from Warsaw to Mentone - Precursor connection to the Nickel Plate Trail	Mid term	Town of Mentone & City of Warsaw	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board, Ride/Walk Committee, & County Highway	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium
Add a trail connection from Warsaw to Silver Lake	Long term	Town of Silver Lake & City of Warsaw	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board, Ride/Walk Committee, & County Highway	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium
Add a trail connection from Warsaw's Chinworth Bridge Trail to Etna Green along Old US 30	Long term	Town of Etna Green & City of Warsaw	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board, Ride/Walk Committee, & County Highway	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Low

Priority Action Schedule - Trail & Blueway Connections Continued

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 4: Add trail connections with regional (outside of Kosciusko County) communities, parks, and trails					
Advocate that Kosciusko County is included in the State's Visionary Trail System	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, IDNR, & Bicycle Indiana Greenways	N/A	High
Partner with Marshall, Fulton, and Pulaski Counties to define and support a collaborative blueway system	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	IDNR, Local Paddling Outfitters & Clubs, & Lilly Center	N/A	High
Add a trail connection from Rochester's Nickel Plate Trail to Goshen's Pumpkinvine Nature Trail through Kosciusko County's core trail system (Nickel Plate Trail connection also connects Great American Rail Trail)	Long term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, IDNR, Bicycle Indiana Greenway, Regional Trail Association, & MACOG	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium to High
Add trail connections to adjacent counties' trail and blueway systems	Long term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, IDNR, Bicycle Indiana Greenway, Regional Trail Association, & MACOG	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Medium
Connect east to the west through the County (i.e. Plymouth to Ft. Wayne)	Long term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Ride/Walk Committee, IDNR, Bicycle Indiana Greenway, Regional Trail Association, & MACOG	TBD ITP, FHWA & INDOT Grants	Low

Priority Action Schedule - Promotion & Marketing

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 5: Develop a unified branding and marketing initiative in partnership with other organizations for regular promotion and awareness to increase the exposure to county residents and visitors					
Develop branding and messaging (logo, key messages) for awareness and promotion of County Parks and Recreation amenities and activities	Short Term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Visit Kosciusko & Clearly Kosciusko	\$1,000	High
Leverage current resource content: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit Kosciusko and Clearly Kosciusko • Regional trail branding resources • Kosciusko Chamber • Local and regional municipalities, organizations, and others for social media reach 	Ongoing	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Visit Kosciusko, Clearly Kosciusko, & Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce	TBD	Medium
Identify and leverage additional funding sources (e.g. KCCRVC grants)	Ongoing	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board		TBD	Medium
Identify and incorporate regional trail branding resources	Ongoing	MACOG	Ride/Walk Committee, Syracuse-Wawasee Trails, & Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	TBD	Medium
Partner with Live Well Kosciusko on health and wellness programs and initiatives	Long term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Local Purdue Extension	N/A	Medium

Priority Action Schedule - Promotion & Marketing Continued

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 6: Create a centralized hub which makes access to programming and resources in each community easy and a one-stop shop					
Leverage Clearly Kosciusko or Visit Kosciusko websites to host information	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Visit Kosciusko, Clearly Kosciusko, & County Auditor	N/A	High
Promote awareness of the central hub website	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Visit Kosciusko, Clearly Kosciusko, & County Auditor	N/A	High

Priority Action Schedule - Staffing & Maintenance

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 7: Establish an annual operating park board budget to adequately maintain the parks and recreation facilities					
Develop maintenance needs and budget proposal based on priorities and timelines	Short Term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Kosciusko County Commissioners & Council	TBD	High
Identify and evaluate resource requirements for maintenance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal Park Departments • Potential collaboration with other County resources or entities 	Short Term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Kosciusko County Commissioners & Council	N/A	High
Evaluate invitations to incorporate existing land and/or blueway access into Parks & Recreation strategy to include maintenance, resource and budget needs	Ongoing	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Existing property owners & Kosciusko County	N/A	High
Utilize grant administrative services to apply for grants and administer grant awards	Ongoing	Kosciusko County	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board & MACOG	TBD	High

Priority Action Schedule - Staffing & Maintenance Continued

Strategies	Time Frame	Responsibility (Lead Entity)	Involved Partners (Primary & Secondary)	Cost Estimates & Funding Sources	Priority Level
Goal 8: Create a non-profit volunteer group, like a Friends of the Park, that is authorized and encouraged to support the park system through coordinating and hosting targeted volunteer days, fundraisers, and programming					
Learn how the Pumpkinvine Nature Trail and the Nickel Plate Trail groups manage their systems	Short term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Friends of the Pumpkinvine & Nickel Plate Trail, Inc.	N/A	High
Identify existing groups to be involved	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Municipal Park Departments & Local Volunteers	N/A	Medium
Create “maintain a mile” to attract organizations for staffing and maintenance	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Municipal Parks Departments & Local Volunteers	N/A	Medium
Identify potential leaders for a county volunteer group that can build an organization	Mid term	Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board	Kosciusko County residents	N/A	Medium

OTHER SUPPORTING STRATEGIES

Park & Recreation Amenities

- Explore the feasibility of adding a new park in the southwest and southeast areas of the County
- Preserve our natural resources
- Develop a regional indoor multi-purpose sports facility/community center
- Partner with the Board of Directors of the City-County Athletic Complex to reimagine the ball fields
- Incorporate ADA accessible playground equipment and recreation facilities for all ages and needs
- Establish a bike rental program with designated drop-off and pickup locations

Trail & Blueway Connections

- Add canoe/kayak launches at key locations along the Tippecanoe River
- Install public trail amenities like restrooms, seating, lighting, parking, etc.
- Keep the waterway channels clear and navigable. Partner with the Kosciusko County Highway Department to share staff and resources for the time being
- Add campsite locations along the County trail and blueway system

Promotion & Marketing

- Partner with environmental groups to balance recreational access with environmental concerns like sustainability and stewardship of natural resources
- Offer one or two learning programs (such as exercise/fitness classes or bicycle and pedestrian safety classes)

Staffing & Maintenance

- Develop a maintenance schedule and asset management plan
- Explore the feasibility of seeking corporate sponsorships
- Establish common policies/rules/regulations across the parks
- Partner with municipalities and other groups in Kosciusko County to manage and maintain parks and recreational facilities, amenities, and other recreational resources
- Establish a County Parks Department (long term)
- Explore the feasibility of establishing a “local membership” contribution from Kosciusko County’s communities and townships to help fund new facilities, amenities, improvements, and maintenance
- Establish a user fee for the County’s parks and recreational facilities
- Explore the feasibility of utilizing maintenance bonds to fund facility improvements

IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING

Non-Reverting Capital Funds

Non-reverting capital funds can be created by the County to assist with property acquisition or for specific capital improvements. These funds are provided by the sale of properties, equipment, or special user fees established by the Parks and Recreation Board as a county park and recreation system becomes more established.

Non-Reverting Operational Funds

Non-reverting operational funds can be used for appropriations done by the Park Board for operational expenditures. These funds are provided from program and event fees, sale of merchandise, or special user fees established by the Parks and Recreation Board as a county park and recreation system becomes more established.

Parks Donation Account

A donation account can be created by the Park Board to accept public donations specifically to fund park improvements.

GRANT PROGRAMS

Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Sources

Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)

The LWCF is a state match grant that provides 50 percent of the costs for land acquisition to expand park property, and/or development of parks and recreational facilities upon project approval.

IDNR Recreational Trails Program

The RTP is an 80 percent state funds/20 percent local match grant used for the development of multi-use trails up to \$200,000.

IDNR Next Level Trails Program

The Next Level Trails Program is a state grant opportunity, administered by IDNR, and available to accelerate regionally and locally significant trail projects. The program requires a minimum 20% match, with higher considerations for projects that exceed 20%. Preference is given to projects that connect to multiple municipalities or regions, projects that further the State's Visionary Trail System, projects that extend or connect to existing trails, and projects that are included in regional or local comprehensive plans.

IDNR Lakes and Rivers Enhancement Program (LARE)

This is a grant opportunity used to protect and enhance aquatic habitats for fish and wildlife while allowing publicly accessible waterways to be used for recreational and other use.

IDNR Division of Forestry

The Indiana Division of Forestry provides grants for community and urban forestry programs. This can be used to inventory the County's forests, develop management plans, and tree plantings. Grants range from \$2,000 to \$20,000 and require either a cash match or in-kind contributions.

Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) Sources

Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

OCRA oversees the allocation of federal CDBG funds for community development projects including the planning and construction of public facilities and Main Street revitalization. Under the Public Facilities Program, a community can apply for up to a grant award of \$500,000 which requires a local match of 10 percent of the total project cost.

Quick Impact Placebased (QIP) Grant

QIP is designed to fund small-scale projects that make a quick community enhancement and transformation of underutilized spaces to spark community conversation and creativity. This grant encourages the establishment and strengthening of the partnership between the County, residents, community groups and organizations, and businesses. Grant requests must be between \$2,500 and \$5,000 and have a local match of either cash, in-kind contributions, or a combination of both.

Indiana Housing and Community Development Authority (IHCDA) Sources

Patronicity CreatiNG Places Grant

The CreatiNG Places grant is a crowd-source funding mechanism that communities can apply and submit a project campaign that seeks public donations. IHCDA will match the dollars raised for successful campaigns up to \$50,000.

OTHER FUNDING SOURCES

Indiana Native Plant Society (INPS)

INPS offers grants to communities that promote the appreciation, preservation, conversation, utilization, and studies of Indiana's native flora. Additional considerations go to communities that educate their residents on the values and environmental importance of indigenous vegetation.

Kosciusko County Community Foundation

The Kosciusko County Community Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports new and existing programs of nonprofit organizations through grant distributions to financially support quality of life, public art, and other community development projects for Kosciusko County communities. The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board can look into building partnerships with the Foundation as a resource for grant opportunities.

K21 Health Foundation

The K21 Health Foundation is a nonprofit organization that supports improving the health and wellness of the residents of Kosciusko County. The K21 Health Foundation provides investment and grant opportunities to meet the health needs and opportunities of the communities. The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board can increase collaborations with K21 as a resource for grant opportunities to increase opportunities for residents and visitors to live active-healthy lifestyles by accessing parks and recreational amenities.

Lilly Endowment

The Lilly Endowment is a nonprofit organization that financially supports community facilities and programs that advances a county's economic development and quality of life opportunities.

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APPENDIX - PUBLIC INPUT

STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board

The Parks & Recreation Board was founded in response to the Kosciusko County Comprehensive Plan as a community-wide desire for more recreational opportunities was communicated very clearly in the plan. The Parks & Recreation Board will function to serve this desire in many ways such as organizing efforts, identifying projects, and applying for grants. The Parks & Recreation Board was asked to indicate an initial list of goals they'd like to accomplish, a two that were listed included developing trail systems and commissioning a Trails and Blueways Master Plan, but the Board indicated they were looking to the public engagement conducted for this plan to guide more goals for the Board to aspire to. When asked to identify challenges the board faces and/or anticipates, the Board identified a few including a lack of community buy-in, as well as a lack of funding and other resources.

Kosciusko County Historical Society

The Kosciusko County Historical Society, founded in 1966, works to preserve, protect, and promote all of the history of Kosciusko County, Indiana for future generations to come. In addition to hosting events and offering other opportunities for the public to interact with Kosciusko County history, the Historical Society also manages the Kosciusko County Genealogy Research Library which contains many records including photographs to help the descendants of Kosciusko County residents

research their genealogy. When asked to identify challenges and needs related to their mission and other activities in the county such as creating a county parks and recreation system, the Historical Society indicated maintaining community involvement and buy-in may be challenging.

Lilly Center for Lakes & Streams

The Lilly Center for Lake and Streams is a research and education center based out of Grace College in Winona Lake dedicated to protecting local lakes and streams. The Lilly Center recommends lake-focused best practices based on thorough research. In this interview, the organization mentioned a few known concerns about the water bodies in the area including Microcystin, invasive species, and nutrient loading/sedimentation/eutrophication. Additionally, concerning the creation of a parks and recreation system by the County Parks Board, the organization mentioned two concerns: funding for the purchase of land to house amenities and the maintenance and protection of the land moving forward.

The Watershed Foundation

The Watershed Foundation is an environmental non-profit dedicated to protecting and improving water quality in the lakes and streams of the Upper Tippecanoe River Watershed. They carry out this mission in a number of ways including: engaging the public in learning and service opportunities, uniting conservation partners to address water quality issues, and implementing projects that protect the region's waters from pollution. When asked about the challenges the Watershed Foundation faces in working towards their mission, they identified a few including the need for additional community buy-in for long-term funding of pollution reduction projects and the need for more public education and personal buy-in.

Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District

The Kosciusko County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) is a local unit of state government responsible for the conservation and development of local soil, water, and related natural resources. The Kosciusko County SWCD was formed in 1957, and has been serving the community since. When asked to identify challenges or concerns related to the work Kosciusko County SWCD does, a district representative identified the following: impaired waterbodies, soil health and water quality, and the community's lack of connection to their natural environment.

Kosciusko Water and Woodland Invasive Partnership

KWWIP, or the Kosciusko Water and Woodland Invasive Partnership is a 501(c)3 that exists to build community support and protect land and water from non-native species. There are several organizations that participate in this partnership including IDNR, Kosciusko County VELO, the Lilly Center for Lakes and Streams, and many others. The partnership is currently tracking a number of invasive species in the county and

coordinating several efforts to mitigate the effects of invasive species in the county including: education events done throughout the year, promoting free landowner surveys for invasive species, weed wrangles, and other efforts. When asked to identify challenges the Partnership faces related to mitigating the effects of invasive species, they indicated the public education was the number one challenge the partnership faces, noting that nurseries and greenhouses in the region still sell invasive species.

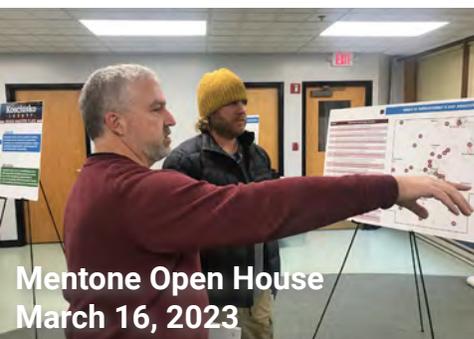
Municipal Park Superintendents

Park superintendents are responsible for overseeing park operations and are integral to park management and maintenance. Park superintendents serving towns and cities within the county were reached out to for interview to ascertain their opinions on opportunities for growth and improvements within the park system, as well as their opinions on challenges associated with growing and improving the county park system. One park superintendent who was able to respond indicated they saw opportunity to increase connections for bicyclists and other active recreation and also indicated that funding, land acquisition, and implementation may be challenges moving forward.

PUBLIC OPEN HOUSES

Kosciusko County residents and visitors had the opportunity to review the draft Kosciusko County 2023-2027 Parks Master Plan for a 30-day public comment period between March 6, 2023, and April 6, 2023. During the 30-days residents and visitors were encouraged by Press Releases in local media, Facebook postings, and flyers at the Clerk offices and public libraries in the County to review the draft Plan and share their input by completing the public review form and/or attending one of three open houses. The three scheduled open houses were offered in three locations at a central facility in the northern, central, and southern portions of the County to provide ample opportunities for residents and visitors to attend. The public open houses were offered in North Webster (March 14th), Mentone (March 16th), and Warsaw (March 28th) from 5 PM to 7 PM that had a total of 40 attendees. Ten (10) residents attended the open houses in North Webster and Mentone and 20 attended the open house in Warsaw.

The format for the open houses was a drop-in style that residents and visitors could attend anytime between the two (2) hours and learn about highlights of the Plan and meet the Parks & Recreation Board and the Steering Committee. The room was set up with four (4) stations that showcased the major elements of the Plan on large display boards like the new vision and mission statements, the existing facilities map, and the needs and gap analysis map, and the in-person version of the public review form



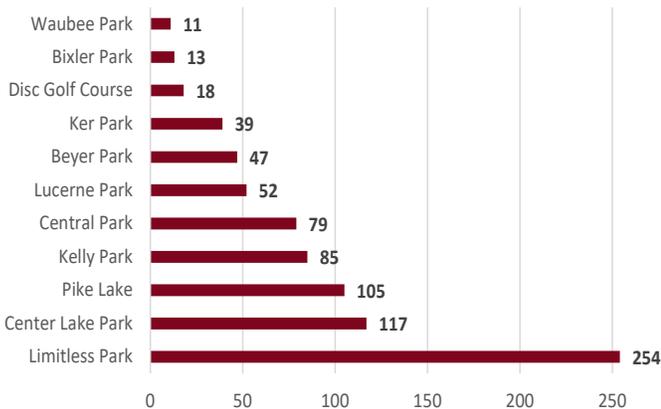
PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY SUMMARY

Between the months of November and January, the Kosciusko County Parks Master Plan Input Survey received 500 responses. This survey asked respondents to identify amenities they enjoyed in the County, as well as amenities that were missing. Respondents were also asked to identify goals they believe should be priorities for the Parks Board moving forward. The following pages contain more detailed data from the Kosciusko County Parks Master Plan Public Input Survey.

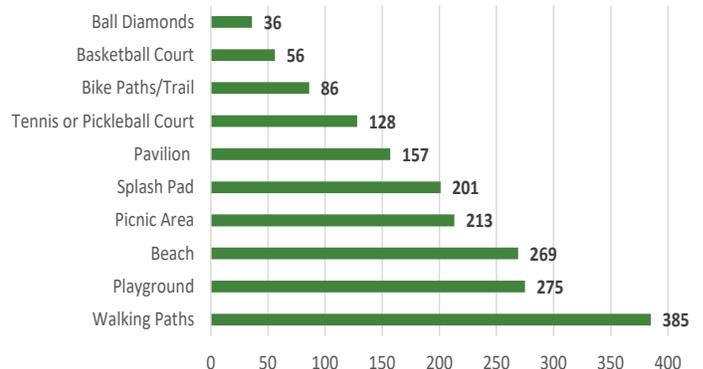
Parks and Recreation Within Kosciusko County

The first set of questions asks survey respondents to answer about their experiences with parks within Kosciusko County. When asked if they visit parks within Kosciusko County, 98% of respondents indicated that they do visit parks within the county, while 2% indicated that they do not. When asked to name the parks they visit, the three most popular parks were: Limitless Park (254 responses), Center Lake Park (117 responses), and Pike Lake (105 responses). When asked which amenities draw them to parks in the county, the most popular answer by far was Walking Paths (385 responses). Playground (275 responses), Beach (269 responses), and Picnic Areas (213 responses) were all popular among respondents as well. Please see the charts below for a more detailed data breakdown.

Which Parks do You Visit?



Which Amenities Draw You to Parks in Kosciusko County?

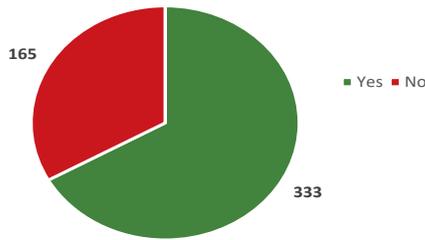


Parks and Recreation Outside Kosciusko County

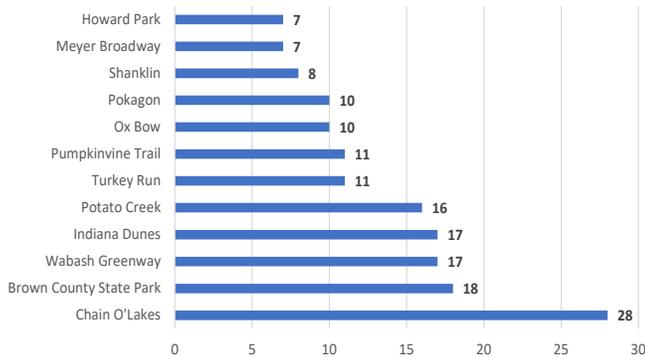
The second set of questions asks survey respondents to answer about their experiences with parks outside of Kosciusko County. When asked if they travel outside of Kosciusko County for the purpose of visiting another park, 67% of respondents indicated that they do, while 33% indicated that they do not. When asked to name the parks they visit, among the three most popular parks were: Chain O'Lakes (28 responses), Brown County State Park (18 responses), and the Wabash Greenway (17 responses). When asked which amenities draw them to parks outside the county, the most popular answer was Hiking Trails (207 responses) followed closely by Walking Paths (190 responses), and Nature Preserves and Open Spaces (170 responses). Please see the charts on the following page for a more detailed data breakdown.

Parks and Recreation Outside Kosciusko County (continued)

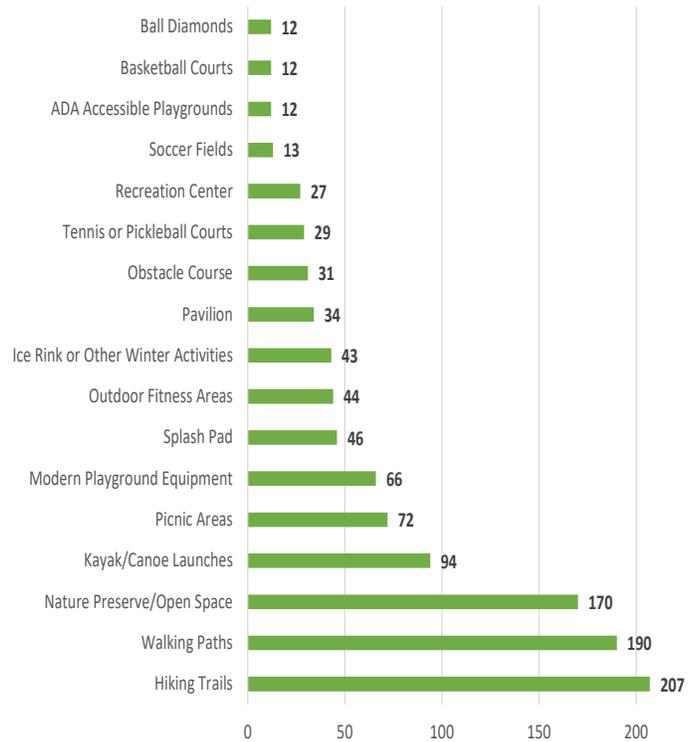
Do You Ever Travel Outside of Kosciusko County for the Express Purpose of Visiting Another Park?



What is the Name of the Park You Visit Outside of Kosciusko County?



Which Amenities Draw You Out of the County?

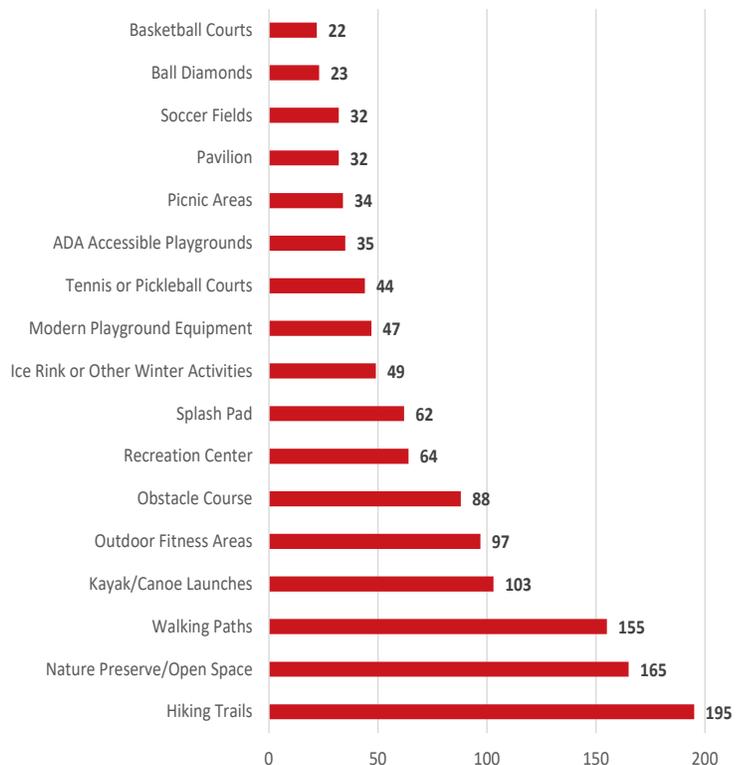


Amenities Missing From Kosciusko County Parks

This question asked respondents to consider the already existing amenities in their parks and then indicate which amenities or opportunities were missing from the county.

The most popular answer for this question was Hiking Trails (195 responses) followed by Nature Preserve/Open Space (165 responses), and Walking Paths (155 responses).

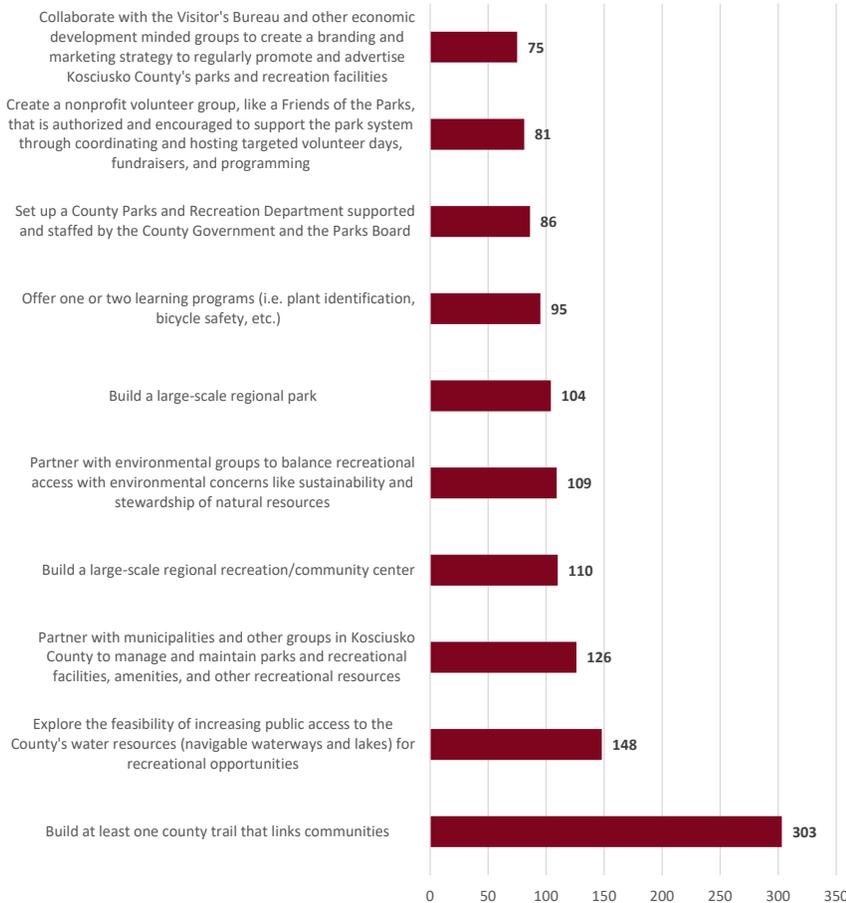
Which Amenities or Opportunities are Missing From Kosciusko County?



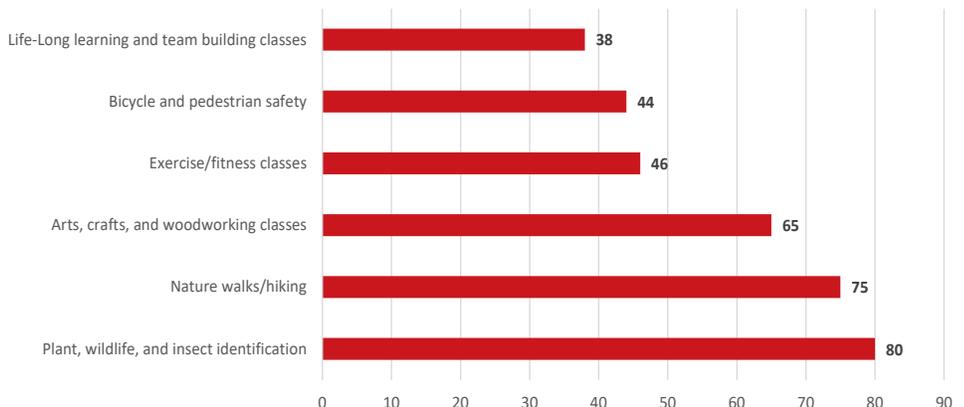
Priorities For the Future

This set of questions asked survey respondents to indicate which initiatives should be a priority in the coming years, as well as their specific thoughts on a few initiatives. When asked which initiatives should be a priority, 303 respondents chose “Build at least one county trail that links communities”, 148 chose, “Explore the feasibility of increasing public access to the County’s water resources (navigable waterways and lakes) for recreational opportunities”, and 126 chose “Partner with municipalities and other groups in Kosciusko County to manage and maintain parks and recreational facilities, amenities, and other recreational resources”. Respondents were also asked to give additional detail about some of the choices including which two communities they would like to see linked by a trail. The following pages contain the responses received.

In the Next Five Years, Which of the Following Three (3) Initiatives Would You Like to See Implemented?

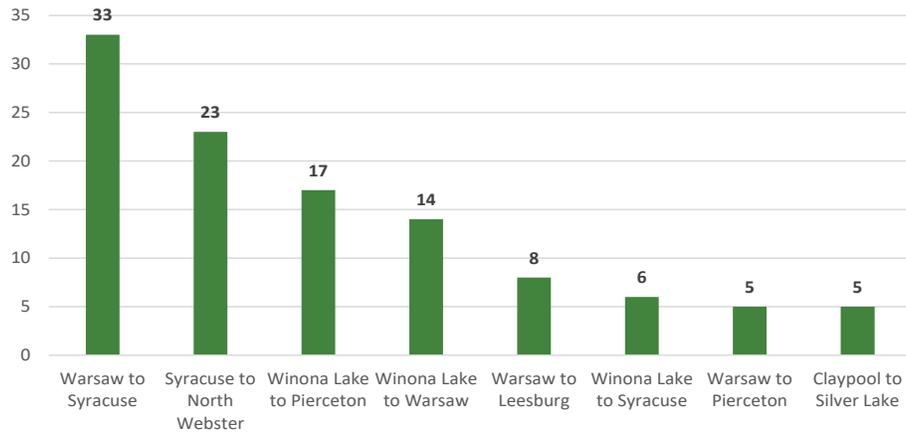


What Programs or Services Would You Like to See Offered Through the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation System?

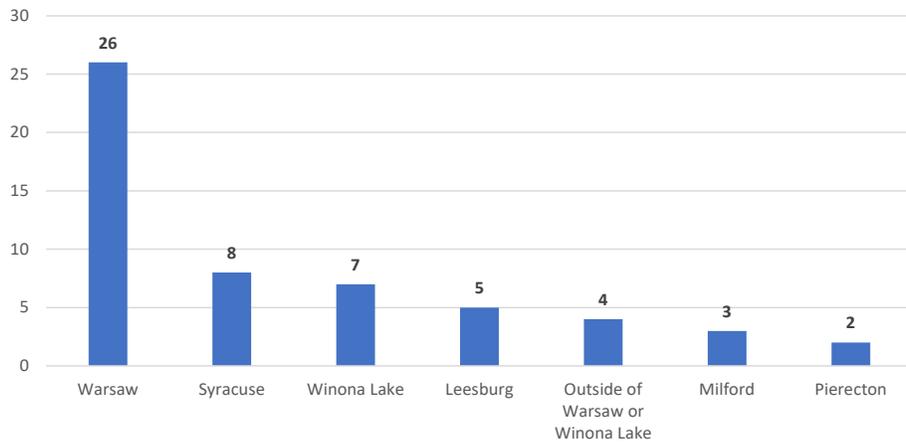


Priorities For the Future (continued)

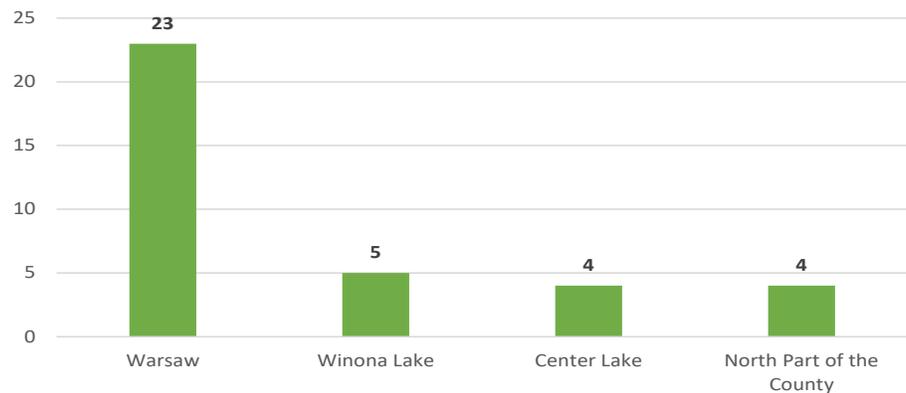
If the County Could Only Build One Trail Linking Two Communities, Where Should This be?



Where in the County do You Think has the Greatest Potential to be the First County Park?



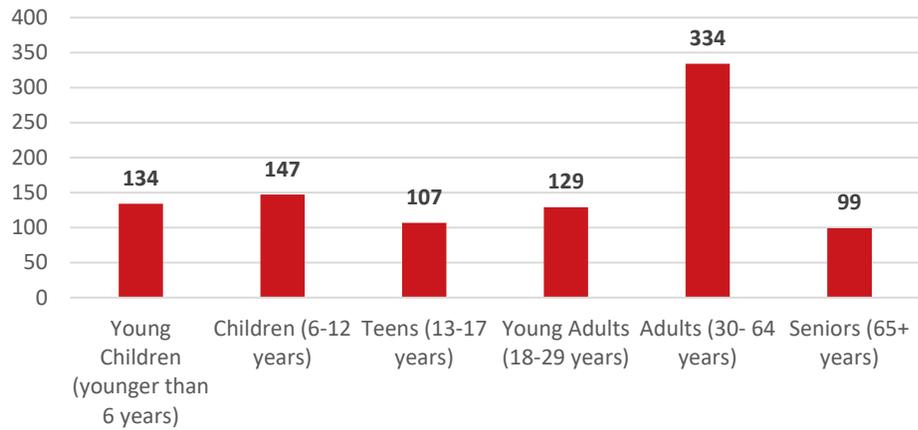
Where in the County do You Think has the Greatest Potential to Build the Recreation/Community Center?



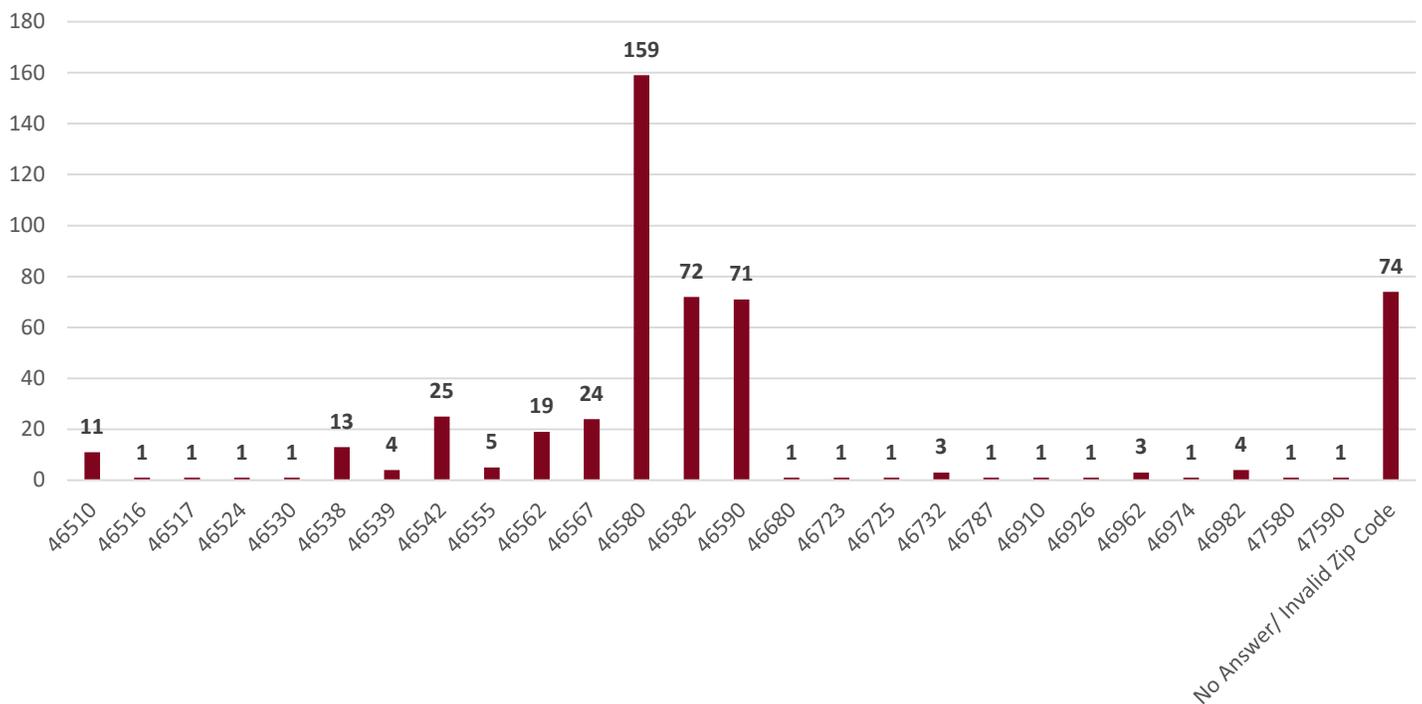
Demographic Data

The last set of questions asked respondents to identify who in their household uses the recreational amenities in the county and to provide their zip code so the Parks Board could see the geographical distribution of survey respondents.

Who in Your Household Uses the Recreational Amenities in Kosciusko County?



Survey Responses by Zip Code



PUBLIC REVIEW FORM SUMMARY

Kosciusko County residents and visitors had the opportunity to review the draft Kosciusko County 2023-2027 Parks Master Plan between March 6, 2023, and April 6, 2023 and share their input by filling out a public review form and attending one of three open houses. The public review form and draft Plan were available for electronic viewing, and hard copies were provided at the municipal offices and public libraries in the county. We received 185 online submissions and two (2) paper submissions for the public review form that asked respondents to select the top goals and strategies they thought should be a priority for the Board to focus on implementing in the next five (5) years.

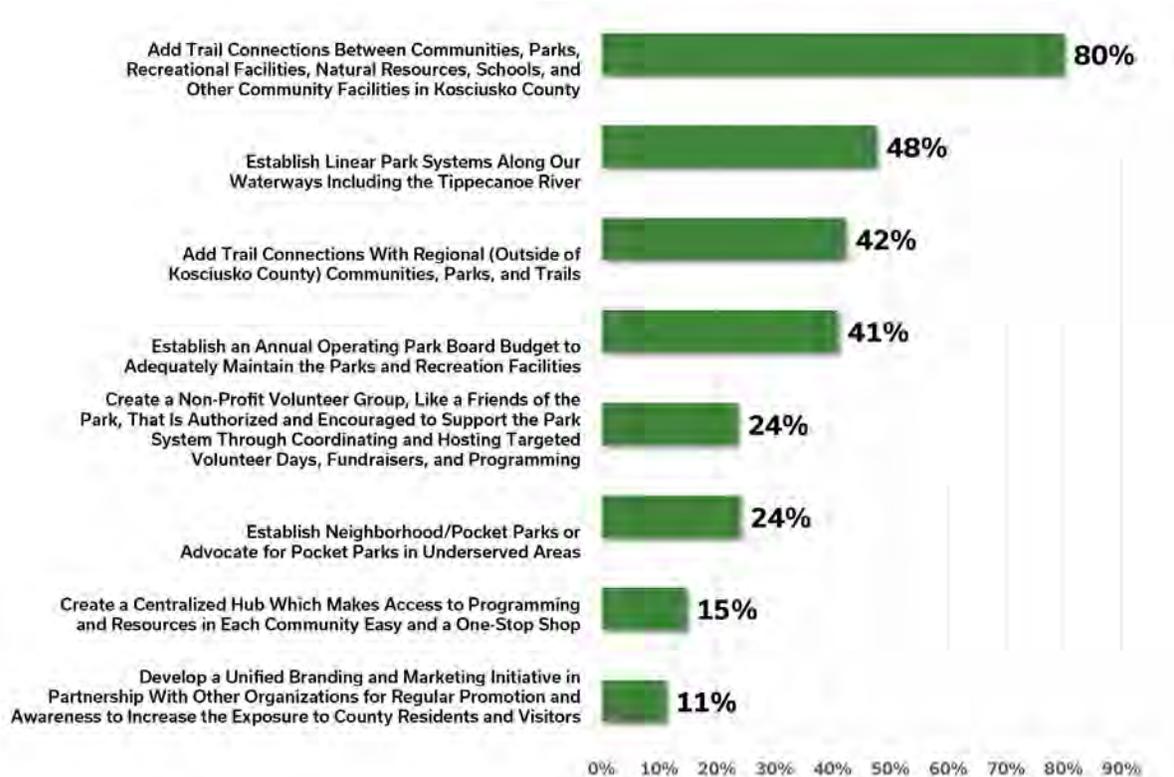
The three scheduled open houses were offered in North Webster (March 14th), Mentone (March 16th), and Warsaw (March 28th) and had a total of 40 attendees. Participants of the open houses were able to review highlights of the draft Plan on large display boards and complete the public review form.

The following pages summarize the results of the public review form. Results were aggregated with the online and paper submissions and the public open houses with a total of 225 respondents.

Priority Goals

The community was asked to first select up to three (3) goals they thought should be a priority for the Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board to focus on implementing in the next five (5) years. These goals address the major needs residents and stakeholders identified from the first public input survey, stakeholder interviews, and from the series of Steering Committee meetings. The goals were first prioritized by the Parks & Recreation Board and the Steering Committee prior to the release of the public review form to serve as a comparison to the public's response.

Out of eight (8) goals, the goal that received the highest response was, "Add Trail Connections Between Communities, Parks, Recreational Facilities, Natural Resources, Schools, And Other Community Facilities In Kosciusko County" with 180 responses, representing 80% of the total responses. See the chart below for a detailed breakdown.

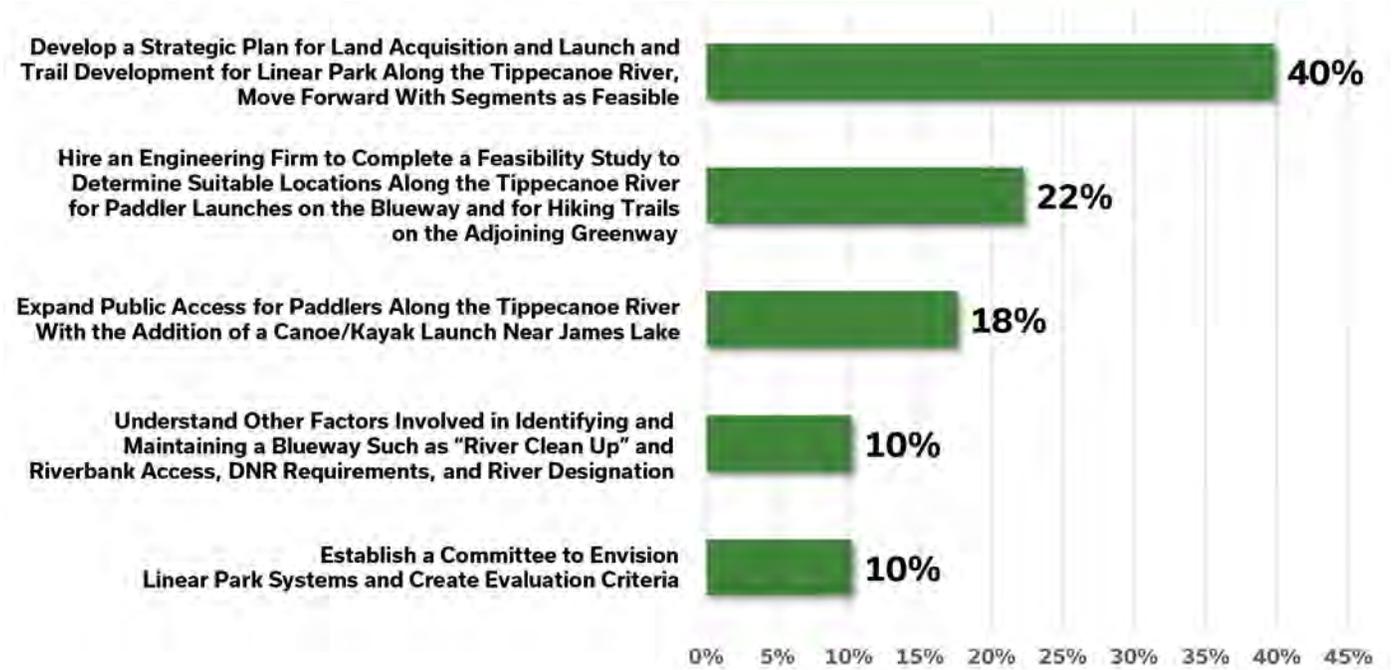


Priority Action Strategies

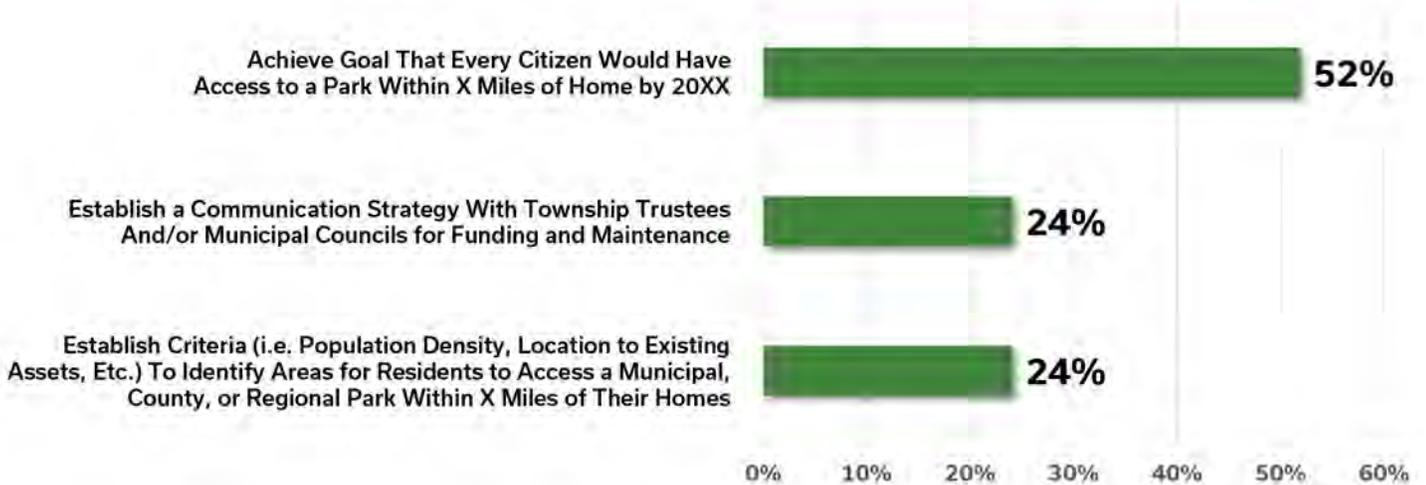
The prior question asked the community to select up to three goals they believe should be a priority for the board. This second question asked respondents to choose one top action strategy from each goal they selected as a priority in the previous question. The primary purpose for this was to help the Parks & Recreation Board know what actions the public supports most to help guide implementation efforts. The following charts summarize the top strategies selected for each goal.

Park & Recreation Amenities

Goal 1: Establish Linear Park Systems Along Our Waterways Including the Tippecanoe River



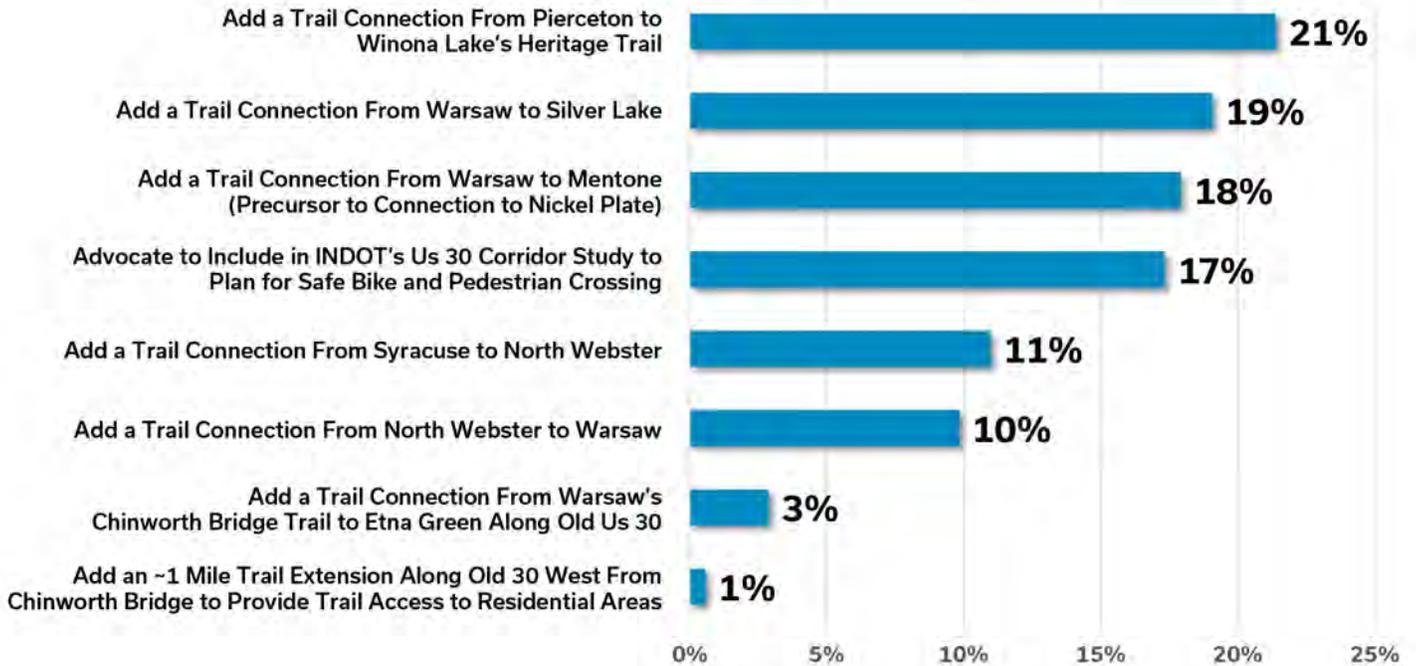
Goal 2: Establish Neighborhood/Pocket Parks or Advocate for Pocket Parks in Underserved Areas



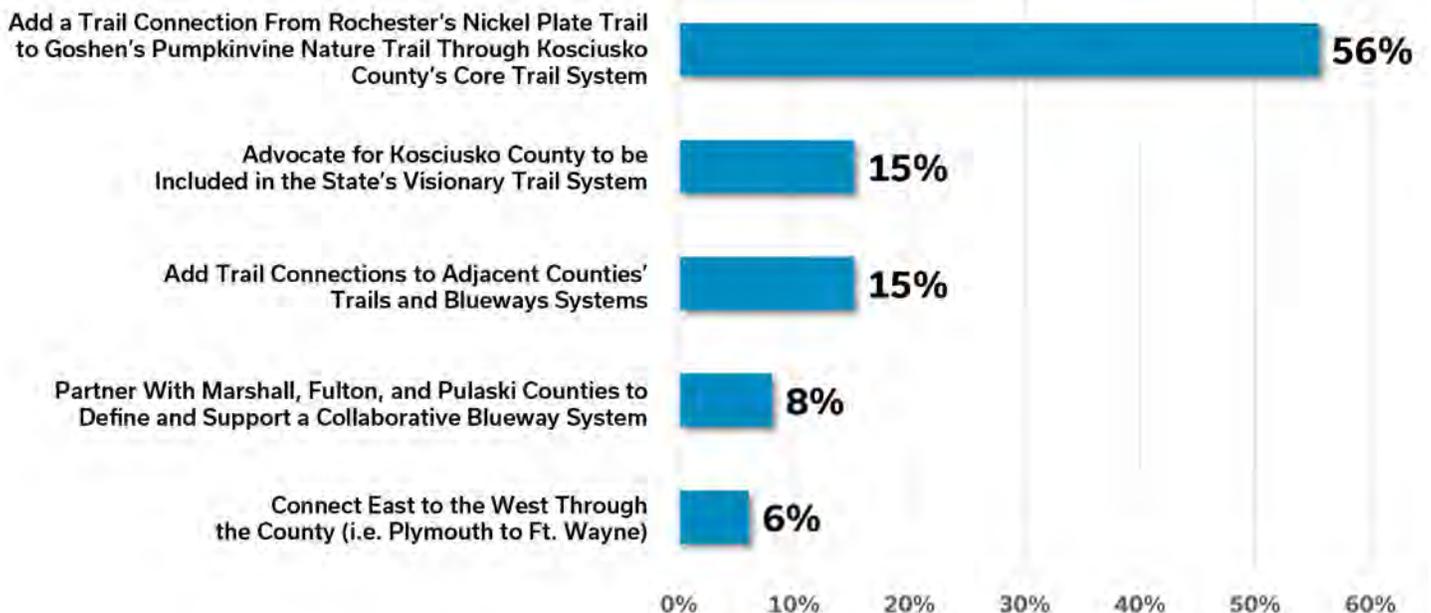
Priority Action Strategies (continued)

Trail & Blueway Connections

Goal 3: Add Trail Connections Between Communities, Parks, Recreational Facilities, Natural Resources, Schools, and Other Community Facilities in Kosciusko County



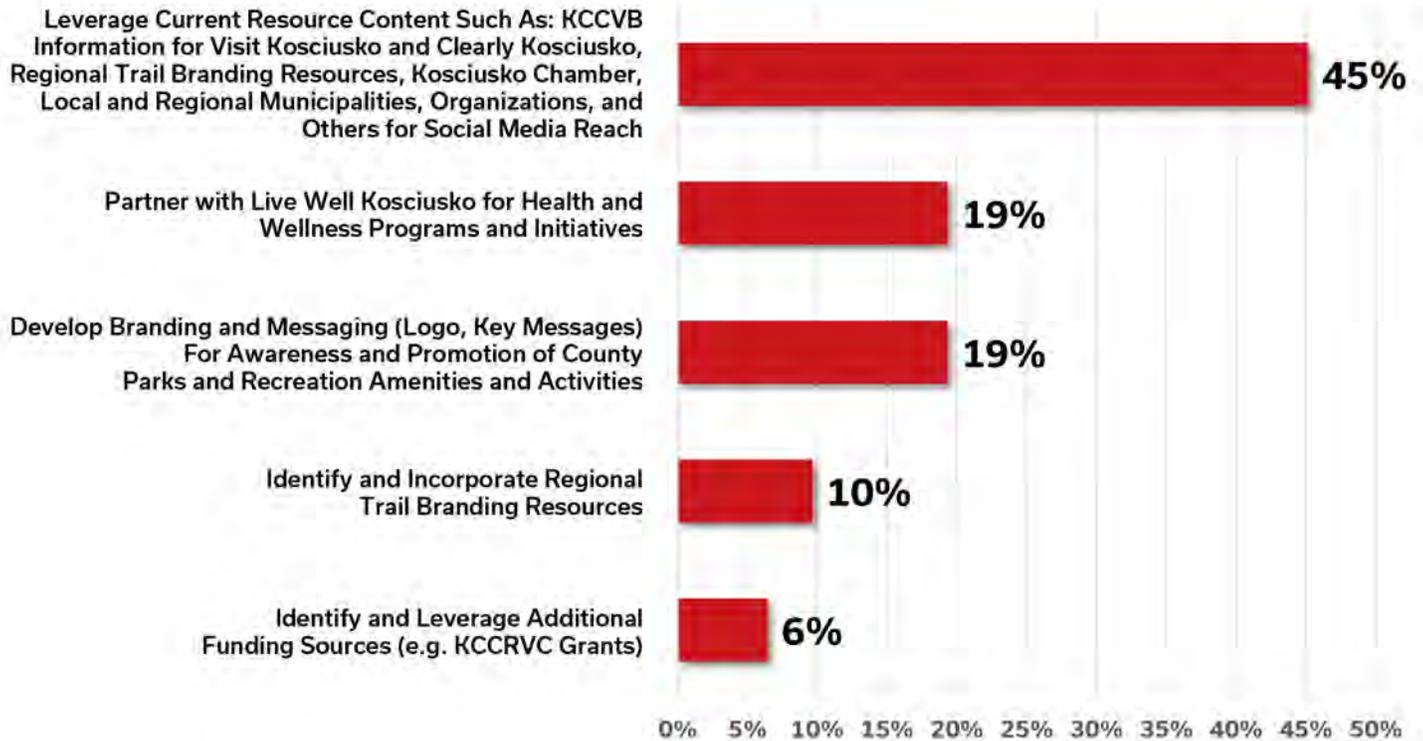
Goal 4: Add Trail Connections With Regional (Outside of Kosciusko County) Communities, Parks, and Trails



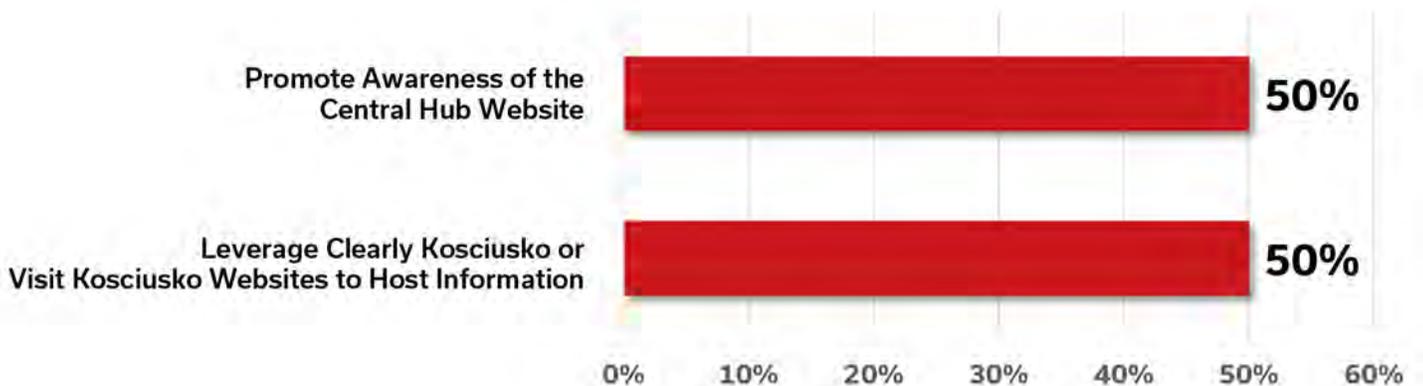
Priority Action Strategies (continued)

Promotion & Marketing

Goal 5: Develop a Unified Branding and Marketing Initiative in Partnership With Other Organizations for Regular Promotion and Awareness to Increase the Exposure to County Residents and Visitors



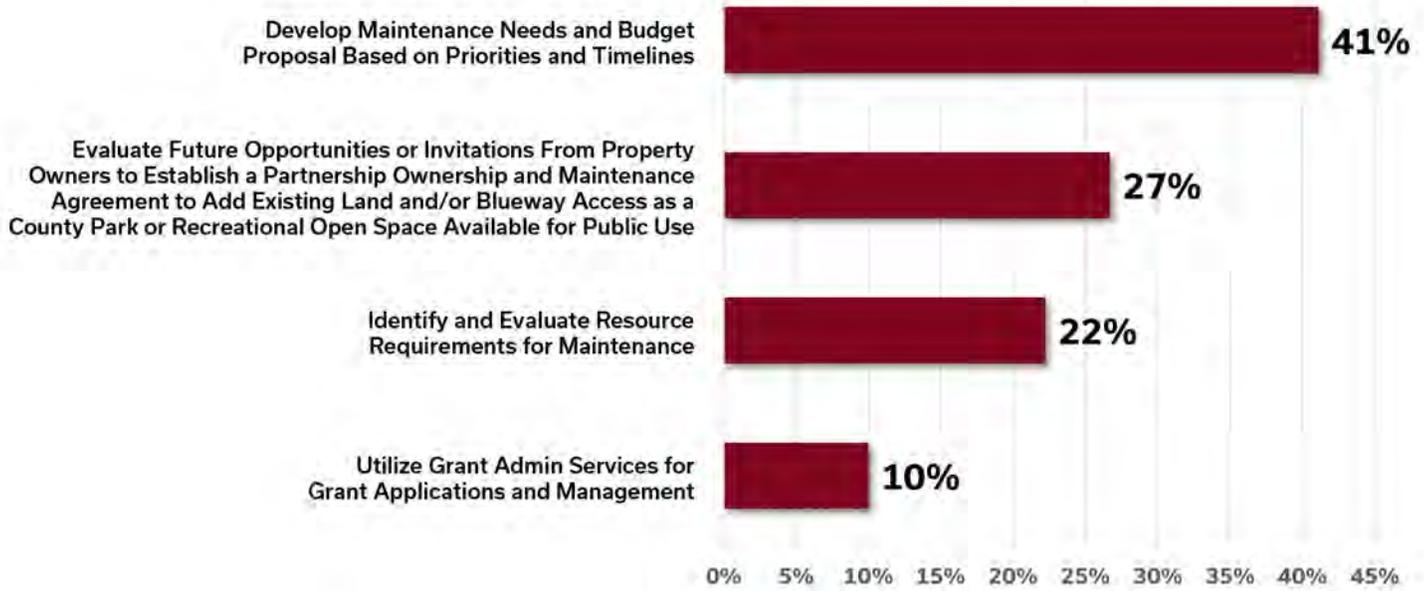
Goal 6: Create a Centralized Hub Which Makes Access to Programming and Resources in Each Community Easy and a One-Stop Shop



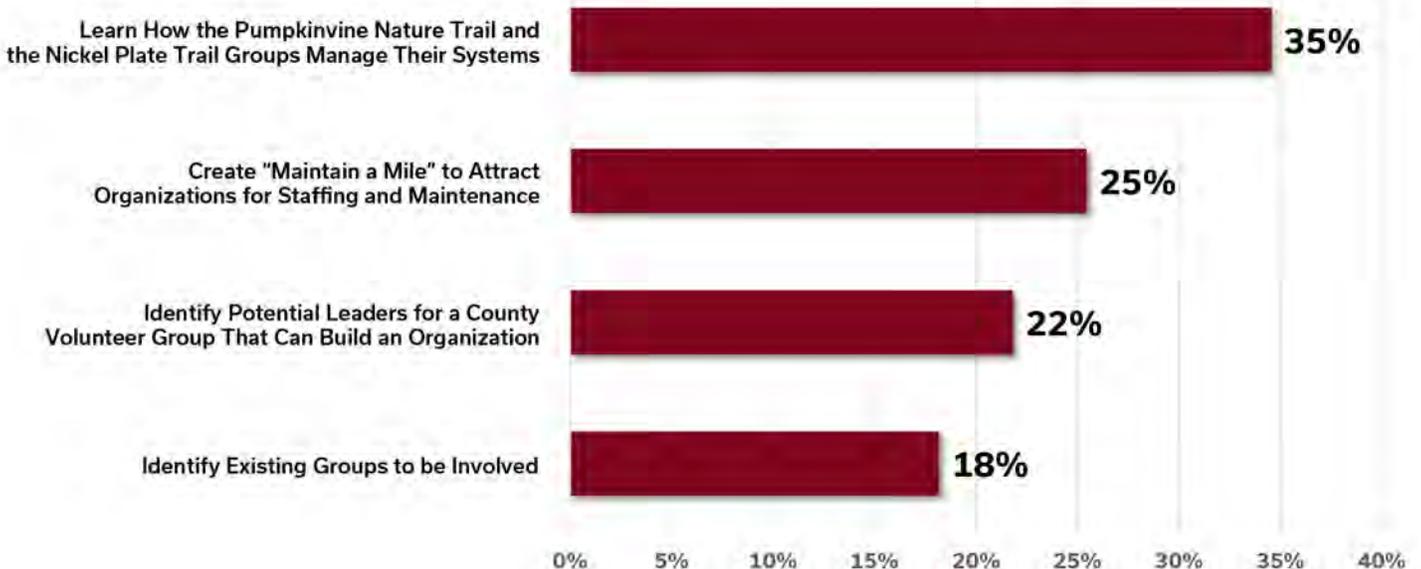
Priority Action Strategies (continued)

■ Staffing & Maintenance

Goal 7: Establish an Annual Operating Park Board Budget to Adequately Maintain the Parks and Recreation Facilities



Goal 8: Create a Non-Profit Volunteer Group, Like a Friends of the Park, That Is Authorized and Encouraged to Support the Park System Through Coordinating and Hosting Targeted Volunteer Days, Fundraisers, and Programming



Additional Comments

At the end of the form, the public was able to provide additional comments for the Parks & Recreation Board's consideration. The following are additional comments received by respondents.

- Please use caution when planning to develop recreation opportunities along the Tippecanoe River. There are many threatened and endangered species that live in the Tippecanoe River, which could be impacted negatively by high levels of recreation in certain areas. I love the idea of increasing access and a park space along the river, but it should not be at the expense of imperiled species and protecting a quality habitat for them. There are already lots of other bodies of water in the county with easy access. One area where I see a major need in the county for parks and recreation opportunities is for nature parks. There are already plenty of playgrounds, picnic areas, and athletic fields in most parts of the county. There is a need for more natural areas that have opportunities for hiking and enjoying nature (bird watching, photography, geocaching, botanizing, etc.), especially with ACRES recently closing several of their preserves to the public.
- Thank you for providing this vision.
- Trail system should connect to each school in Kosciusko County as well.
- Would love to see grants provided to residents for beautification of exteriors similar to what Fort Wayne did on Jefferson Blvd (Downtown).
- Indoor activities on weekends during colder months, multicultural events such as a sports showcase, dancing or popular forms of exercise, hard copies of a quarterly calendar for events and program.
- I would LOVE to see trails that involve the southern part of the county. Currently, Warsaw & Winona Lake have tons of trails, however, there is absolutely nothing for families who live in the Claypool/Silver Lake areas.
- A lot of focus on northern county, this needs to be looked at. Southern Kosciusko needs more attention.
- I wanted to select almost each action item for connecting trails in our area! Each sound excellent, though a safe way to cross US 30 will immediately enhance access throughout the county.
- The second part of the survey was a little confusing. In short, I'd love to see more trail connections, safe crossings, better communication/opportunities to help make and maintain trails.
- Kosciusko has amazing lakes and waterways, natural areas and bike paths. Easy access to them will benefit the community.
- Who is advocating for the southern part of the county vs Warsaw and Winona Lake?
- Please consider, as a step in fulfillment of environmental stewardship per the vision statement, incorporation of specific conservation goals e.g. Wildlife Habitat Certification. For instance, National Wildlife Federation has a Community Wildlife Habitat Certification that could be pursued as a long term goal for the county wide park lands. There are many existing parks listed in the master plan, each of which could be turned into certified habitats, perhaps as part of an education program with schools. And the new trails could be planned to fulfill requirements for wildlife habitat certification. This habitat certification approach could be used as a guide for the portion of the mission statement that calls for creation of recreational opportunity "while conserving and caring for its natural areas."

Additional Comments (continued)

- Consider an option from Warsaw north to Leesburg & Milford.
- Nobody should be excluded from the parks who are law abiding individuals (NOT those who have been convicted as sexual offenders). Include LGBT individuals.
- Make it safe SOMEWHERE as part of a trail/path to cross US 30 on foot or bike from Warsaw to get to the YMCA and other things on the other side of the highway!
- Annually set aside funds to be used as matching funds for grant opportunities. These funds could roll over each year if not used, up to a cap of at least \$250,000.
- I am VERY excited about the progress that has been made so far. Keep up the good work.
- Adding a trail/sidewalk system that includes property owners on the Warsaw communities that border the Lake should be a priority. Trail/Sidewalk would head South on McClellan/Country Club to Winona Beach to connect to the greenway in Winona Lake. Current roadway is Non Usable for connectivity as it's unsafe.
- Biking access to the high school should be a priority. It promotes healthy teenagers as well as relieves stress on the undermanned busing system. Connecting the high school with downtown Warsaw would promote those local businesses and farmers market. Teens could meet at a library or restaurant after school. Families would have better access to the K21 pool facilities and track, which remain closed and under utilized. I wish Kosciusko county would recognize that local parks are useless without clean air. In the fall, every pleasant sunny weekend, my backyard is unusable because of the massive leaf piles my neighbors burn. The pollution from school buses goes directly into our children's lungs. I've recently been diagnosed with cancer. My only risk factor, not weight, age, sex, diet, or genetics was pesticide and herbicide residue. My neighbor and crop dusters spray over my house and the whole town whenever they feel like it.
- The Warsaw Park systems needs to focus more on providing one big park that brings more people together. I have lived in various area of the US. There are so many little parks in pocket areas in Warsaw but there needs to be one central location that has a recreation center for indoor activities as well as outdoor activities. Indiana winters are brutal and depressing. With our size we should be able to provide an indoor community pool as well as an outdoor pool with water slides. Make the parks accessible by bike trails and sidewalks. Bring the community together. Stop putting parks in inconvenient areas. Having sports fields closer to the parks do when a family has younger children they can play at a park while an older sibling has practice. In our chaotic world we need more simplicity not driving from one side of town to the other.
- Would love to see more involvement with our schools. Also, agriculture is the #2 industry in Kosciusko County. I know of at least one farm family that is considering adding agritourism to their operation. Information along the trail connections about our natural resources, farming practices as related to conservation, etc would be a great way to educate our community! I'm sure the Extension Office or NRCS/ Soil and Water Office could provide some support.
- I selected the trails linking communities and linear parks along rivers as two priorities but it seems like that's a great opportunity to do both at once. North Webster to Warsaw via a linear park along the Tippecanoe River. Connect the trail to the pathways along 300 N in Warsaw.
- I love our parks! We just need more walking and biking trails to connect the county.

Additional Comments (continued)

- More trees on park land. It is disturbing how many trees are taken down to add buildings and parking lots. Each time a new home or business goes up we see fewer trees. Visit Michigan, Vermont and Washington State to see what the beauty of trees in a community can look like. As an artist I see so many possibilities of how are community could look so much better. Our park system may be are best solution for getting more trees in our community.
- Having sidewalk from Walmart area to Center Lake trail around Center Lake.
- While I agree parks can be an important part of a community there needs to be more adequate housing for lower income residents. Already there is a widening gap between economic classes in Warsaw particularly and if workers can't find housing they will ultimately leave the city. You're already experiencing a shortage of workers and housing and you're not addressing the problem. So while recreation is great it doesn't solve the growing issues I've mentioned.
- We need to find a county park system and make it a permanent part of our county government. I appreciate the volunteers, but we need these to be appointments and paid positions as most county positions are.
- More public accessible kayak and paddleboarding docks to put in at and a small cage storage area for people who want to store their kayaks/boards/canoes near the water for easy access. Reference the board rentals at Pike Lake and utilize that style for srirage of your kayak for a monthly fee or weekly rate. I don't own a pick up and don't have a kayak rack. Would love to have my kayak at the waters edge for the summer for a fee.
- Thank you for adding pickleball courts to our parks.
- Bike trails should not be on the county roads or city streets. Connect Warsaw to North Webster and North Webster to Syracuse without using roads or streets. Build DEDICATED bike pathways! County roads are not bike friendly no matter how many signs you post stating so! The county is one of the wealthiest counties and we don't have a DEDICATED bike pathway?
- We need to make sure that the opportunities we create are accessible to all and are pet friendly. Appreciate all the work you are doing!
- Thank you for your work in this area!
- No taxes should be raised.
- Thanks for all the work on this!
- Cross-country ski trails would be wonderful!

Additional Comments (continued)

- I noticed on the list of potential priorities that almost everything had to do with a trail, or perhaps a canoe/kayak launch. I didn't see anything about perhaps combining programs. For example, could someone in Milford come for a tennis lesson program in Warsaw? Do any of the town parks offer summer day camps? I know the Y does, but not everyone belongs to the Y.
- When we lived in the suburbs of Chicago, about 8 or 10 suburbs joined together and formed a special parks district. Each suburb would contribute something toward this program. The program would offer various activities to special kids and adults like my son Andrew. All of the programs had some sort of fee depending on the cost of the program. Here is some examples. Ice skating lessons, tennis lessons, golf lessons, field hockey, field trips to athletic events or shows, Adult social club on Friday night and of course dances. The programs were staffed by various people. Some were teachers, college students, high school students, etc. A dance was an inexpensive activity. It maybe lasted 2 ½ hours. Limited snacks were served. We have been here almost 10 years, but at the time, the dance might cost \$15. This would be long enough for the parents or guardians to go out to dinner, or just have a break at home. An athletic event, might be a way higher price as it would require a bus ride and also a ticket to the event such as Bulls game. The social club would meet every Friday night, maybe from 6-8. Some Fridays might just be a game night. Another might be dinner at a restaurant or trip to bowling alley. The social club would meet at a community center or even a church. The parents would provide the transportation to and from unless they were going somewhere in which case they would have a van. I think Kosciusko County has enough population to offer something on a smaller scale.
- Currently in the county, there are very limited respite opportunities for parents/guardians of adults and children with special needs. The Y offers a few programs, but does not coordinate the times with Cardinal Services. The respite nights in the past have only been for younger children. Special Olympics has their own programs. Many of them meet later in the evening.

PRESS RELEASE FOR PUBLIC INPUT SURVEY



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release, December 5, 2022

PARTICIPATE IN KOSCIUSKO COUNTY PARKS MASTER PLAN SURVEY

KOSCIUSKO COUNTY, Indiana – The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board has started the planning process to develop its first 5-Year Parks Master Plan. This Plan will help establish a vision for a county-wide parks and recreation system and priorities that enhance the County’s quality of life by providing access to parks and recreational amenities.

This Plan will not be successful or meaningful unless it reflects the goals and aspirations of the users of the parks and recreational amenities in the County! One of the ways you can participate is to fill out this brief Kosciusko County Parks Master Plan Survey at tiny.cc/KosciuskoParksPlan. The survey is available in English and Spanish in an online and paper format. Pickup and return paper surveys at any local library or City/Town Hall in Kosciusko County.

“We need everyone’s input to help fashion the County’s first parks master plan, states Rob Bishop, President of the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board.” “We want to hear what recreational amenities you would like to see in the County, where we should make connections to, and what are priorities ought to be to create an accessible parks system with vibrant recreational experiences and opportunities. We encourage you to take a few minutes to complete this survey.”

Vice-President Troy Turley also states, “We have an unprecedented opportunity to create and connect parks and trails in Kosciusko County. Voices like yours will help guide our progress and success to lay the foundation for the County’s parks and recreation system so please take a moment to share your opinions by completing the survey.”

Visit the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board webpage to learn more about the Board and to access the online survey. If you would like more information or have comments, please contact Donny Ritsema with MACOG at dritsema@macog.com or 574-287-1829, ext. 503.

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For additional information, contact MACOG at (574) 674-8894 or (574) 287-1829

PRESS RELEASE FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release, March 8, 2023

KOSCIUSKO COUNTY SEEKS INPUT ON THE PARKS MASTER PLAN

KOSCIUSKO COUNTY, Indiana – The Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board has been working on developing its first 5-year park master plan to help establish a vision and priorities to guide the establishment of a county parks and recreation system. This plan seeks to address the needs of residents and visitors by providing access to quality parks and recreational amenities. The draft Kosciusko County Parks Master Plan is now ready for public review!

Now through April 6, 2023, the Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board needs to hear your input on the action strategies you would like to see started in the next 5 years! There are multiple opportunities for you to share your input that includes filling out the Public Review Form at <http://tiny.cc/ReviewKosciuskoParksPlan> and visiting us at one of the three Public Open Houses. The Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board and Steering Committee will be hosting three Public Open Houses from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM at the following locations and dates.

- Tuesday, March 14th, at the North Webster Community Center in North Webster.
- Thursday, March 16th, at the Bell Memorial Public Library in Mentone.
- Tuesday, March 28th, at the Warsaw Community Public Library in Warsaw.

“It’s critical for the County Parks and Recreation Board to gain public input on our 5-Year Parks Master Plan to ensure that Kosciusko County residents’ priorities are being heard and incorporated,” states Parks and Recreation Board member Mike Cusick. “We encourage everyone to attend one of the upcoming public open houses or share your input by filling out the Public Review Form to make sure the Plan is representative of the interests and needs of the community.”

The draft Plan is available for electronic review on the Kosciusko County Parks and Recreation Board’s webpage at <https://www.kcgov.com/departments/board.php?structureid=235>. Hard copies of the draft Plan and the Public Review Form are available at any of the local public libraries and municipal clerk offices in the county.

The Kosciusko County Parks & Recreation Board kicked off the planning process in September 2022 and was built upon community engagement efforts to guide the establishment of a vision and mission for the Board, the major challenges and gaps, and priorities to guide implementation efforts over the next five years. Engagement efforts so far have included holding monthly project meetings that were open for public attendance, conducted stakeholder interviews, and issued a public input survey. The public input survey was available as an online and paper survey from November 30, 2022 to January 11, 2023, and received responses from 500 county residents!

If you need assistance filling out the Public Review Form or other questions related to the County’s Parks Master Plan, please contact Donny Ritsema with MACOG at dritsema@macog.com or 574-287-1829, extension 503.

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For additional information, contact MACOG at (574) 287-1829.

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Kosciusko

■ C O U N T Y ■

PARKS MASTER PLAN

2023-2027