

2.0 The Context

This chapter provides an overview of the context for planning the future of the Allegheny County parks system. It summarizes key existing conditions and issues pertaining to:

1. Allegheny County as it relates to the county parks (Section 2.1)
2. The Allegheny County parks system as a whole (Section 2.2)
3. The nine individual parks that comprise the system (Section 2.3)

This information is fully documented in the Inventory and Analysis portion of the separate *Background Report* prepared for the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan.

2.1 COUNTY CONTEXT

Allegheny County is a large, diverse county encompassing 747 square miles with a population of approximately 1.26 million people. Located around the perimeter of the County at about a 15-mile radius from the City of Pittsburgh at the County's core, the Allegheny County parks reflect the diversity of the County as a whole.

2.1.1 Physical Character

In many respects the nine county parks represent a good microcosm of the County's varied physical landscape. The topography of the parks largely consists of relatively flat ridges and hilltops dissected by stream valleys with often steeply sloping sides. Portions of some parks were strip mined in the past and have gradually returned to a forested condition. These conditions pose opportunities and constraints for uses such as conservation and active recreation depending upon the presence of sensitive environmental resources (e.g., steep slopes and valuable habitat areas).

2.1.2 Socioeconomic Characteristics

The demographic and economic characteristics of Allegheny County contribute to an understanding of trends and demands for public recreation as the population changes over time. Population estimates and projections indicate that the Allegheny County

population is slightly decreasing in number and is aging at a faster rate than the state and national levels. Age, income, and employment factors will likely manifest themselves in a slow shift away from demand for younger, active recreational pursuits to more passive activities.

2.1.3 Governmental Context

Allegheny County contains 130 municipalities as well as numerous autonomous school districts, municipal authorities, and special districts. Most of the nine county parks lie within the boundaries of two or more municipalities, highlighting the importance of coordination between the County and local governments on issues that affect the future of the parks and their relationships to local communities.

2.2 SYSTEM-WIDE ASSESSMENT

The Allegheny County Parks are a large, complex system with a broad range of issues that are shared by all nine parks. Key areas of concern for the future of the parks system as a whole include:

- Operation and management of the parks
- The overall programs, services, and events that are offered within the parks
- Park facilities, including their physical condition and accessibility for the physically challenged
- Preservation and management of natural, cultural, and historic resources
- Circulation (i.e., the way people get to and move about the parks)
- The economic impacts and benefits of the parks to the local and regional economy
- Miscellaneous other system-wide issues, including public education, open space, and park design

2.2.1 Park System Operations

Park system operations refers to the “delivery system” for the Allegheny County Parks; i.e., the way things get done in order to provide recreational services, facilities, and programs to customers. Much of this system is not visible to the public at large, but how it functions has a significant and direct impact on the quality of the parks and recreation product.

A. Organization

In Fiscal Year 1998, in a move aimed primarily at reducing the County's annual budget, the former Department of Parks and Recreation was reorganized and placed within the Department of Public Works. This reorganization has resulted in significant savings through the consolidation of administrative and operational functions. However, it also has had the effect of removing management focus from the business of providing park and recreation services. This absence is not due to the people involved, as the dedication of Public Works staff covering parks and recreation is commendable. Rather, it reflects an organizational structure which, by definition, has tried to bring together agencies with two distinct purposes. In view of this, the organizational structure should be reevaluated with the objective of creating a functional, responsive, and accountable structure for the parks system.

B. Personnel

While the motivation and dedication of Public Works staff responsible for the county parks is commendable, there is a need for managers professionally educated and trained in the recreation field. Other personnel-related issues include the need for updated job descriptions, standards, education and skill requirements for all full-time and seasonal positions; clear objectives and standards for measuring work performance; and ongoing training and professional development related to safety, customer relations, and other park policies. The pay level for employees in positions of authority appear to be low compared to other park systems, indicating the need for an evaluation of appropriate compensation levels that are tied to work performance.

C. Maintenance

The current maintenance program appears to be effective in that parks grounds generally look maintained and clean. However, many of the actual buildings and other structures are in need of repair, renovation, or replacement (see Section 2.2.4 below). Seasonal staffing shortages are also an issue. The Department's maintenance management system is managed out of the Director's office; field operations managers are not involved with input and analysis on a daily basis. Other issues include seasonal staffing shortages; the condition of maintenance equipment, much of which is worn out and beyond reasonable repair; and the need for maintenance policies and procedures that are sensitive to natural and historic resources within the parks.

D. Marketing/Public Information

In the public meetings conducted for the Comprehensive Master Plan, a number of people commented on the need for the County

to better communicate to residents what the parks system has to offer. The Parks Division budget does not include funding for the development of marketing materials or staffing for the general promotion of park facilities, programs, and services. The Division does not have any capabilities for mass-market mailings or for-paid advertising to promote business operations. In addition, it lacks a comprehensive brochure that would detail the programs and services available to county residents and which could be distributed to all households.

E. Volunteers/Partnerships

As evidenced by the results of the public meetings conducted for the Comprehensive Master Plan and efforts to recruit volunteers for Hartwood, there is strong citizen interest in volunteer activities to maintain and enhance the parks system. Currently, the use of volunteers to support operations and programming is limited. A plan for the recruitment, training, retention, and recognition of volunteers could significantly enhance the support services to individual parks. Partnerships with entities such as organized groups, nonprofits, and private businesses are another way to involve the public in park programs and improvements.

F. Park Security

The Allegheny County Police provide security for the county parks and have a good working relationship with the Parks Division. Budgetary and manpower cutbacks within the County have, however, resulted in fewer officers available for general county patrol.

2.2.2 Financing¹

The current budget of the Allegheny County parks system is approximately \$20 million. This budget is derived from four major sources: revenues from operations (which are returned to the parks system through the general fund), general fund appropriations, distributions from the Allegheny Regional Asset District (ARAD), and government grants. The ARAD represents the largest single source of funds, providing 57 percent of total funding, or just over \$12 million in 1999. In 1999, county general fund appropriations provided 38 percent of the annual funding and contributed support (grants and private donations) provided 5 percent. Revenue from operations (earned income) amounted to approximately \$4 million or 20 percent of the annual funding, meaning that the County's net contribution was 18 percent of total funding for the parks.

Activity-based revenues earned in 1999 from ice-skating, golf, wave pool admissions, etc., totaled \$3.76 million or 83 percent of all

¹ The existing finances of the Allegheny County Parks are discussed in more detail in Section 6.3 (Long-Term Financial Plan).

revenue from operations. On a locational basis, South Park and North Park are the biggest contributors of activity revenue, providing approximately 78 percent of the system total at the park level in 1999. As noted above, activity revenue goes first to the general fund before being returned to the parks system and is not specifically allocated for the park or activity that generated it.

Development of the Parks Division budget is handled through the Fiscal Accounting Division of the Department of Public Works. Prior to the consolidation of parks and public works, park employees were actively involved in developing their operating budgets. Since the consolidation, park managers, park maintenance supervisors, and other have been removed from involvement in the formation of an operating budget. The budgeting process provides a budget for each park site, but does not include activity site cost analysis to evaluate the financial costs of specific facilities.

Pricing of park system activities and programs is set annually at the county government level. Increases are applied for at the departmental level and then submitted for approval. Examination of the existing price structure reveals a pattern of pricing that is intended to provide affordability to the consumer. Price increases have been quite infrequent. While a seeming benefit to the consumer, this approach shifts the burden to other funding sources to maintain the same level of service or maintenance. In general, consistent policies regulating fees and charges for park programs and services, as well as revenue development and expense recovery, are needed in order to deliver a consistent, high-quality, affordable recreation experience to the park user.

2.2.3 Recreational Facilities

The Allegheny County parks provide a wide range of recreational facilities for residents. These include facilities such as playing fields, courts, and playgrounds that are used for active recreation; passive facilities such as picnic shelters and trails that are used for more informal activities such as picnicking and nature walking; and facilities such as golf courses, swimming/wave pools, and ice-skating rinks that are used for specialized activities. In addition to facilities used directly for recreation, a number of other facilities, such as restrooms, administration buildings, and utility installations, support the recreational functions of the parks.

A. Facility Conditions

From a system-wide perspective, there are two major questions pertaining to the recreational use of the Allegheny County parks:

1. Does the current mix of recreational facilities and activities meet user needs?
2. What is the quality of the overall recreational experience?

The first question has been addressed in the recreational needs assessment that was conducted for the Comprehensive Master Plan (see Section 2.4). With regard to the second question, the quality of the recreational experience is related to a number of factors, such as the ease of getting to and moving about an individual park, the attractiveness of the park environment, and the availability of facilities and activities sought by the user. The input received at the public meetings conducted for the Master Plan indicates that the **physical condition** of park facilities and grounds is an especially important consideration. Many attendees identified the perceived lack of adequate maintenance as the number one factor that adversely affects the quality of their park experience. They most commonly attributed this situation to an insufficient commitment of resources (staffing and funding) by the County to maintaining park facilities and infrastructure.

As part of the inventory and analysis work, a broad statistical evaluation of the condition of park facilities and infrastructure components was conducted based upon qualitative visual inspections. Of the total number of facilities inspected, 38.6% were determined to be in good condition, 43% in fair condition, 15.2% in poor condition, and 3.2% not functional.² These figures reflect a mature parks system with numerous older facilities that are experiencing the effects of deferred maintenance.

Park playgrounds are one type of facility that reflects the age of the county parks. With the exception of new equipment being installed in North and South Parks, most of the park playground facilities were installed prior to 1980 and do not meet current safety standards.

In addition to individual facility conditions, there are a number of potential safety/environmental issues that occur throughout the parks. Examples include trip/fall hazards, parking lots located too close to traveled roads, shelters infested with stinging insects, and pollutant spill and disposal issues.

² These categories are defined as follows: Facilities in **good condition** require normal maintenance attention. Facilities in **fair condition** will require more significant maintenance within the next one to five years. Facilities in **poor condition** require immediate maintenance attention. Facilities classified as **not functional** are no longer functional for their intended use.

B. Accessibility

An issue related to the condition of park facilities is their accessibility to persons with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires that all public facilities be reasonably accessible and usable to persons who are physically challenged or disabled. As part of the inventory work, park facilities were evaluated for compliance with ADA. The findings indicate that 26.6% of park facilities have ADA accommodations present and probably adequate while 73.4% have ADA accommodations not present or inadequate. These findings are not surprising considering the age of most park facilities. Most outdoor recreational facilities, such as picnic shelters and playgrounds, are inaccessible to the physically challenged because of conditions such as the lack of an adequate pathway from the parking area to the facility. Intensive and special use facilities are in some cases accessible, for example the North Park pool and the Four Seasons Lodge at Boyce Park.

2.2.4 Programs and Events

The Allegheny County parks system offers a variety of organized programs and unprogrammed recreational activities, such as golf, swimming, tennis, ice skating, downhill skiing, sheltered areas for picnics and gatherings, and rental buildings. In general, programmed recreation represents a relatively minor element in the overall delivery of recreation in the parks. Even in for-fee activities, formal programs are limited in scope, with the delivery of lessons often in the hands of independent or off-the-clock personnel.

The county parks also hosts special events, such as Hartwood's Festival of Lights, the Allegheny Rib Cook-off, the Allegheny County Fair, and concerts in Hartwood and South Park. The County currently lacks formal policies for special events to address issues such as the setting of concessionaire fees, the effects on quality of life of nearby residents, and the ability to recover the costs of providing manpower and security.

2.2.5 Natural, Cultural, and Historic Resources**A. Natural Resources**

Reflecting the wealth of natural resources found in Allegheny County as a whole, some of the finest examples of western Pennsylvania's natural features are found in the Allegheny County parks. These include three natural areas identified as being of particular significance in the 1994 Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory – the Hemlock Grove area in North Park, portions of Harrison Hills Park adjacent to the Allegheny River, and Jacks Run Valley in White Oak Park. In addition, all nine parks

contain large, relatively intact natural habitat areas. Throughout the planning process, residents consistently ranked preservation of natural resources and provision of trails to allow contact with the natural world as high priorities for the future of the parks system.

A number of issues related to the protection and management of natural resources in the county parks have been identified. These issues include:

- The need to preserve significant habitat areas and manage them to allow compatible passive recreational uses
- The need for trail system improvements throughout the parks, including accurate mapping; adequate trail construction and maintenance appropriate to the setting; a standard trail marking system; and specific designation of trail use
- Evaluation of current mowing practices, including consideration of converting some open grassy areas away from heavy use areas to wildflower meadows or other natural habitat.
- The use of native species for park landscaping and restoration activities
- Management of riparian zones next to streams and water bodies
- Stormwater drainage
- The potential involvement of park naturalists in natural resource management activities in the parks
- The presence of undeveloped land with natural resource value that should be considered for protection next to some of the parks
- The impacts of an overabundance of white-tailed deer on natural vegetation in the parks
- The environmental impacts of park dumps/storage areas

B. Cultural and Historic Resources

Significant cultural and historic resources are found within the Allegheny County parks. The earliest cultural resources are prehistoric archaeological sites, including the remains of an Indian village in Boyce Park, a cluster of campsites in North Park, and a campsite in Round Hill. A second group of properties dates from the mid- to late-1700s and is associated with the early settlement period of the region. Three potential archaeological sites from this period include: Washington's Camp on the old Forbes Road in Boyce Park; the frontier forts of Fort Reburn in White Oak Park; and the McJunkin farm fort in Boyce Park. The National Register-listed Oliver Miller Homestead in South Park dates from this period as well. A third group of resources reflects the 19th century occupation and agrarian settlement of the region, dating from 1800

to 1920 when the majority of farmsteads in the parks system were constructed. The significance of these historic agricultural properties could be evaluated as a National Register Thematic Group Nomination entitled *Allegheny County Parks Barns*.

The most significant group of cultural resources is associated with the construction and development of the current county parks system. The significant landscapes within North Park and South Park, which were designed by notable architects and landscape designs and embody significant national trends and programs of the New Deal era, are considered eligible for the National Register as Historic Designed Landscapes. The newer regional parks (with the exception of Hartwood) consist of landscapes designed in the late 1950s or early 1960s. These properties do not meet the National Register criterion of being over 50 years of age and therefore would not qualify as Historic Designed Landscapes. Hartwood has been determined eligible for the National Register because of its architectural significance and beautifully designed landscape that predates its acquisition as a county park.

Despite this rich legacy, there is currently limited recognition or interpretation of historic resources within the parks, with the exception of the mansion at Hartwood and the Oliver Miller Homestead.³ Moreover, the County lacks guidelines to protect historic structures and other resources against adverse impacts from park maintenance and improvement projects.

2.2.6 Circulation

Circulation refers to how people get to and move about the parks, via automobile (or public transportation), bicycle, or on foot. A number of issues related to circulation in the Allegheny County parks have been identified. These issues include:

1. There are conflicts between vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists and related safety concerns in some parks. Of particular concern are South and North Parks, the two most heavily used parks in the system, where popular walking/biking paths in some cases directly abut well-traveled roadways.
2. Increasing traffic volumes and speeds on roadways that accommodate significant amounts of through traffic is a related concern in South and North Parks.
3. Based upon the results of field observations of traffic conditions during the inventory and analysis work, some road

³ The Oliver Miller Homestead is operated and programmed by a private volunteer group, the Oliver Miller Homestead Associates, who were approved by the County as the official curators of the site in 1973.

segments within the parks appear to have deficient horizontal and/or vertical road alignments at the posted speed limits.

4. Traffic generated by special events in the parks can affect intersections and roadways used by the local community.
5. In general, the lack of adequate directional signage to the county parks and a clearly defined arrival and entry sequence make it difficult for visitors who are unfamiliar with the parks to find and move about them.
6. Public transportation to the parks provided by the Port Authority of Allegheny County is limited, making it difficult for residents who do not have access to an automobile to visit the parks.

2.2.7 Economic Impacts and Benefits

In addition to being regionally significant recreational, natural, and historic resources, the Allegheny County parks provide quantifiable and non-quantifiable economic benefits for county residents. These benefits include the positive impacts generated by the operations of the parks and facilities themselves; expenditures by out-of-county park users; the impact on property values in areas adjacent to park properties; and use as “quality of life” assets in marketing the County and region to economic development prospects.

A. Operational Impacts

The annual budget for the county parks is approximately \$20 million. Of this total, some \$17 million represents expenditures for salaries, materials and supplies, most of which are directed toward the local and regional economies.

B. Visitor Expenditures

Total revenues generated by visitor use of park facilities equal some \$4.5 million annually. Based on an analysis of picnic grove rentals, it appears that approximately 90 percent of park users reside in Allegheny County. Assuming that the remaining 10 percent of visitors account for 10 percent of expenditures, out-of-county residents would introduce approximately \$450,000 in new money into the local economy. Applying the multiplier factor, which recognizes the potential re-circulation of initial expenditures in the local economy, the total economic contribution of expenditures would equal roughly \$900,000.

C. Property Values

While it is difficult to isolate the specific impact of adjacency to a park on property values, both the Allegheny County Assessors Office and local real estate brokers believe that proximity to parks has an overall positive impact on property values. On a national level, work by the National Golf Foundation shows that golf

course proximity, in general, increases property values by 15 to 30 percent. Additionally, the National Recreation and Park Association has recently completed a study of the impacts of park and open space on property values, which draws the same overall conclusion.

D. Economic Development

An indirect benefit provided by the county parks is their use by local and regional economic development organizations to describe and promote the quality of life in Greater Pittsburgh/Allegheny County. These quality-of-life factors, along with basic business criteria, are important in corporate relocation decisions. In addition, the recreational and leisure opportunities they offer are valued by young professionals and others that the County seeks to attract to counteract the prevalent trend of an aging, slightly declining population.

2.2.8 Other System-Wide Issues

A. Public Education

Public education primarily focused on natural resources has historically been part of the county parks mission. Currently, environmental education programs are operated by park naturalists at Nature Centers in North, South, and Boyce Parks. Significant opportunities exist for expanded educational and interpretive programming focused on natural, cultural, and historic resources.

B. Open Space

Currently, county management efforts are directed towards operation and management of the nine individual parks, with little or no provision for further expansion of the system. However, opportunities exist to enhance open space on a countywide level, as evidenced by plans and initiatives developed by various organizations to develop a regional system of greenways and trails. An analysis of the 1995 *Allegheny County Greenways Plan* indicates the potential to connect the County parks through a combination of existing and proposed trail corridors. The 1994 *Allegheny County Conservation Corridor Plan* identifies tracts of land adjacent to existing county parks that may lend themselves to be considered for future park expansion.

C. Park Design

Both the original parks in the system (North and South) and the later regional parks were laid out by talented designers. Today, each of the nine parks has a signature feature that establishes a theme to distinguish the park. However, consistent design standards for park improvements, either to express the specific character of an

individual park or tie the parks system together as a whole, are lacking.

In addition to design standards, master plans for the nine parks are lacking. Park-specific Master Plans are needed to ensure that detailed facility and program development at the individual park level follows a coherent design that addresses conditions in the park within the context of the goals and objectives set by this Comprehensive Master Plan.

2.3 ASSESSMENT OF INDIVIDUAL PARKS

The nine parks that comprise the Allegheny County parks system are remarkable for the breadth and diversity of resources, activities, and programs they accommodate. This section summarizes information and issues regarding natural and cultural resources, facilities and programs, and operations for each park.⁴

2.3.1 North Park

Located in Hampton, McCandless and Pine Townships, North Park is the largest of the Allegheny County Parks at 3,010 acres. Heavily developed compared to most of the rest of the county parks, North Park provides numerous recreational opportunities for residents. Existing conditions in the park are shown on Figure 2-1.

A. Natural Resources

North Park contains a variety of high-quality natural habitats and a system of streams that interface with North Park Lake, a man-made lake that serves as the park's signature and the most prominent "natural" feature of the park.

Typical of western Pennsylvania, North Park's topography consists of gently rolling hills, ridgetops, and steep-walled valleys that have influenced patterns of development in the park. The park's terrain is very steeply sloped around North Park Lake and the tributaries that flow into it. Tributary streams located in North Park all flow into North Park Lake, which drains into the east-flowing Pine Run to its eventual confluence with the Allegheny River.

The drainage patterns in the park have resulted in the deposition of a large quantity of sediment in North Park Lake, which has

⁴ Please refer to the Inventory and Analysis portion of the separate *Background Report* prepared for the Comprehensive Parks Master Plan for a complete treatment of this information.

adversely affected water quality. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is in the planning phase of a dredging project that will remove the sediment from the lake. The non-point sources of sediment and other potential pollutants to the lake and watercourses in the park are possibly the result of existing grass-cutting procedures in riparian zones, lack of a streambank management program, and floodplain infringements.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) notes two Biological Diversity Areas (BDA's) in North Park: Hemlock Grove and North Park Lake. An ecological field survey of the park conducted for the inventory and analysis revealed four significant biological zones: Hemlock Grove, Latodami Farm, Rocky Dell and Irwin Run.

Hemlock Grove Biological Zone: The Hemlock Grove Biological Zone is located in the southeast corner of the park along Pine Creek. This area displays high-quality woodlands and a diversity of habitats. Although portions of the forests have been impacted by past uses, for the most part the woodlands are mature and representative of the natural vegetation of the region. The habitat types range from bottomlands and floodplain next to Pine Creek to drier upland forest types (Dry Oak-mixed hardwood and Red Oak-mixed hardwood).

The ACNHI special concern species found in this area is state listed *Trillium nivale* (snow trillium, Pennsylvania Rare, SP001). Confirmed in the field in March 2000, this colony of snow trillium has been known from the Hemlock Grove area for many years and appears to be a healthy, viable population that is maintaining itself.

Several official and unofficial trails and an internal park road passes through the center of the Hemlock Grove Biological Zone. Maintenance personnel use the road as a shortcut between the Swimming Pool area and the County Maintenance facility on Wildwood Road. A large active dump is located on the uplands in the vicinity of Massachusetts and Tupelo groves. The deposition in this dump of materials and debris from park projects has greatly impacted the area and has the potential to do more damage as the unconsolidated, unvegetated slopes erode further into the valley below.

Latodami Farm Biological Zone: Located in the northeastern corner of the park, the Latodami Farm Biological Zone is centered on the Latodami Nature Interpretive Center, the Nature Access Trail for the visually impaired, and the lands surrounding these facilities. This area encompasses a wide variety of habitats, including maturing and mature forests and abandoned agricultural fields in various stages of succession. A small farm pond in the later stages of succession is

located near the Nature Interpretive Center. Areas that are being mowed and brushed to maintain various ages and stages of succession are also located in the vicinity of the Center.

School groups, organized clubs, and the general public consistently visit the Latodami Nature Interpretive Center. Essential to the basic functioning of the Interpretive Center is retention of a large area containing a variety of natural communities and habitats, and which is relatively secluded from the activities of the more developed portions of the park. In particular, the Nature Access Trail (developed in part for sight-impaired visitors) requires a setting where the subtle natural sounds of the streams and organisms are clearly heard without interference or distractions. There are a number of existing trails but no single unifying loop that serves the entire area.

Rocky Dell Biological Zone: Located in the southernmost portion of North Park, the central focus of the Rocky Dell Biological Zone is Rocky Dell, a very steep ravine with rock ledges and groves of hemlock. Although small, this area has a wild, secluded character. It is also the corridor through which the Rachael Carson Trail passes and exits the park. This area adjoins the Hemlock Grove Biological Zone and complements that area with forests of similar quality.

The rest of the Rocky Dell Biological Zone is primarily mixed oak forest on moderate slopes. This forest type contrasts with the forests of the Hemlock Grove Biological Zone and thus provides additional habitat diversity.

The Rocky Dell area saw little development originally but has been more actively used over the past several decades. At one time there were dirt roads through the area that were open to general public use. These are now closed and natural succession is slowly erasing their presence. However, they are still easily followed and could be the basis of an outstanding trail system.

Irwin Run Biological Zone: The Irwin Run Biological Zone is in the northeastern portion of the park centered on the Irwin Run valley. Most of the land is in forests that vary from very young successional communities regenerating on recently abandoned farmlands to more mature forest on northeast-facing slopes. A tributary of the North Fork of Pine Creek, Irwin Run is a perennial stream that meanders across a broad bottomland. Again, much of the land is in various stages of succession and offers a wide variety of habitats for plant and animal species.

The Irwin Run valley has a road that has been closed to traffic. There is little development in the valley except at the upper portions of the watershed.

B. Cultural Resources

North Park has nearly 40 historically significant properties plus 23 archaeological sites. The park is significant as a Historic Designed Landscape developed in the 1920s by the Allegheny County Planning Department with consultant Paul Riis, who also worked on Yellowstone and other National Parks, and later under the direction of architect Henry Hornbostel. The Park is associated with the New Deal programs involving the CCC, WPA and CWA that embody historically significant national events and trends.

North Park Lake and the North Park Boathouse are the central historic features in the park and currently serve as the signature image of the park. The North Park Swimming Pool is perhaps the most historically significant structure in that it was one of the nation's largest swimming pools when it was built in the 1930s. The North Park Swimming Pool Bathhouse is an architectural gem with a high level of integrity from the original slate roof to the extensive masonry work around the pool dating from the Federal Emergency Administration's era.

Other noteworthy historic properties in North Park include several stone bridges around North Park Lake, the North Park Golf Clubhouse, North Park Lodge and Observation Tower, and several historic barns that were transformed into Dance Halls.

C. Facilities and Programs

A variety of recreational facilities are found in North Park. Active-use facilities include the swimming pool, golf course, ice skating rink, tennis/platform tennis, assorted ballfields and courts, and playgrounds. Passive-use facilities include picnic groves/shelters and trails. Other facilities and conservation areas include North Park Lake and Boathouse, Latodami Nature Center, the Boy and Girl Scout Areas, Marshall Island Waterfowl Reserve, and numerous bicycling, walking, jogging, and exercise trails.

Revenue-generating activities at North Park include the skating rink, golf course, boathouse, tennis courts, platform tennis courts, and pool. Other revenues are generated from the rentals of the groves, buildings and fields.

Programs and events comprise a vital portion of the activity at North Park. Major programs, uses, and users include Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, nature programs, adult nature walks, and charity runs. Others include swim team practices, swim lessons, soccer leagues and clubs, golf clinics, water safety instruction, football leagues, baseball leagues, bikers, and walkers, hikers, and joggers.

North Park's facilities are used extensively by the public for a variety of recreational activities; however, many areas are used below their potential. For example, the North Park Swimming Pool is extremely large and the mix of activities offered is considered to be outdated for a summer pool. There are also abundant opportunities for increased recreational programming and increased revenue at many of the facilities, for example: tennis, swimming, natural and historic resource programs, golf lessons, golf tournaments, and recreational classes.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Based on the facility evaluation conducted for the inventory and analysis, approximately 85% of the facilities in North Park are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 11% of the facilities are in poor condition, including, among others, 8% of the shelters, 18% of the park roads, and 13% of the parking areas. In general, facilities that receive the heaviest use, such as the swimming pool, ice rink, golf course, ball fields, basketball courts, soccer fields and outdoor theaters, are better maintained.

There are 282 facilities at North Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 26% of these facilities are considered to be ADA-compliant.

E. Circulation

Circulation issues in North Park include conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, a lack of pedestrian paths along most internal park roads, lack of pedestrian crosswalks and signage, and vertical alignment deficiencies in some road segments. In addition, traffic congestion along several internal roadways and problems with vehicles turning from the major and/or minor roadways in the park were observed in the field. Conflicts between different types of users of the trail around North Park Lake are of particular concern. This heavily-used trail is too narrow to accommodate two side-by-side joggers or walkers and a passing bicycle, resulting in spillover traffic on the adjacent road and the potential for accidents with vehicles. These issues were addressed in the 1990 *North Park and South Park Trail Improvement Feasibility Study* and the associated *North Park Traffic Study*, but the recommendations contained in these studies have for the most part not been implemented.

2.3.2 South Park

The 1,999-acre South Park is located in the Townships of South Park and Bethel Park. Like North Park, South Park is highly developed compared to most parks in the system and provides numerous recreational opportunities for residents of southern

Allegheny County. The majority of recreational uses in South Park are centered along the Corrigan Drive corridor, which bisects the park from the north to south. Existing conditions in South Park are shown on Figure 5-2.

A. Natural Resources

South Park's varied topography includes gently rolling hills, ridgetops, and steep-walled valleys that have affected patterns of development in the park. The undulating terrain lies within the Catfish Run watershed and is organized around Catfish Run, which flows southward through the center of the park along Corrigan Drive to its confluence with Piney Fork at the southwest corner of the park. The water quality of Catfish Run is poor, most likely resulting from streambank erosion caused by a lack of adequate riparian buffers and from field grass cutting procedures within the riparian zones.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes several undeveloped areas within South Park where forested areas are recovering from past disturbance and have the potential to become a high-quality forest community if conservation efforts protect these areas from future disturbance. An ecological field survey of South Park conducted in Spring 2000 confirmed the presence of three significant biological zones in the park: Sleepy Hollow, Reflecting Pools, and Girl Scout.

Sleepy Hollow Biological Zone: Located in the southwestern portion of the park west of the Fairgrounds Complex, Sleepy Hollow is the largest and most intact area in South Park from a natural resource standpoint. Most of the woodlands in this area are in various stages of succession resulting from a variety of past agricultural and other cultural practices. There are some areas of shrub thickets that might be reopened to meadows with annual mowing and the establishment of native grasses.

A building centrally located in the Sleepy Hollow area is used occasionally for educational purposes. The Model Airplane Field found in the northern portion of the area is actively used and does not appear to be adversely affecting the surroundings.

The Sleepy Hollow area contains coal deposits for which Allegheny County does not own the mining rights. Private concerns have approached the County on several occasions in the past with proposals to remove (strip mine) the coal and subsequently restore the landscape.

Reflecting Pools Biological Zone: This biological zone is located along the east branch of Catfish Run in the northern portion of the

park. Catfish Run is South Park's primary watercourse and in most places has been heavily impacted by the development on Corrigan Drive and the Fairgrounds. The east branch of the stream is in a valley bounded by the golf course to the east and extensive mowed upland areas to the west. The valley is characterized by maturing forest on gentle slopes and a wide, flat floodplain.

At one time there were a series of reflecting pools constructed in the middle portion of the Reflecting Pools reportedly built in the 1930s. The stone walls and portions of the downstream pool remain.

Girl Scouts Biological Zone: The Girl Scouts Biological Zone is located in a small tributary valley west of Catfish Run at the Corrigan Drive Circle. This area contains mature forest stands as well as woodlands in the surrounding valley to the north and south. A small stand of some of the most mature forested cover in South Park is located in the central portion of the valley. Existing trails in the area appear to be footpaths established by visitors that are not being adequately maintained as official trails.

B. Cultural Resources

Like North Park, South Park qualifies as a Historic Designed Landscape with significant buildings, circulation system, and historic structures integrated within a former rural environment dating to the late 18th century. The park is significant for its association with important individuals including architects Henry Hornbostel, Bernard Lawson, and Carl Weber, and sculptor Frank Vittor and also for its relevance to historically significant national events and trends embodied in the New Deal-era public works projects.

The most significant of South Park's historical features is the Oliver Miller "Old Stone Manse" farmstead. The Millers, who were associated with the Whiskey Rebellion, built a loghouse on this site in 1772. A stone addition was attached to the loghouse in 1808 and, in 1830, the Millers replaced the log section of the house with a large stone addition. Both of the stone additions are extant and the property is individually listed on the National Register as "one of the best preserved example of indigenous domestic architecture" in Western Pennsylvania.

Another important historical element in South Park is the Allegheny County Fairgrounds, a key component in the design and history of South Park. The fairgrounds opened in 1933 and today contain exhibit halls, a museum, stables, outbuildings, and the former polo field, now a racing track. Many of the buildings,

however, are no longer used for their original purposes and are in deteriorated condition.

Other noteworthy historic properties in South Park include the Maits House, the South Park Bathing Pool and Bath House (currently known as the VIP Picnic and Fun Center), and several historic farmsteads and barns that were transformed into dance halls.

C. Facilities and Programs

Like North Park, South Park is home to a variety of recreational facilities. Active-use facilities include 18-hole and 9-hole golf courses, a wave pool, BMX bike track, ice-skating rink, DEK hockey rink, assorted ballfields and courts, and playgrounds. Passive-use facilities include picnic groves/shelters and trails. Other facilities include the Fairground Complex, concert area, horse show ring, model airplane field, and numerous bicycling, walking, jogging, and exercise trails.

Revenue-generating activities at South Park include the golf courses, wave pool, skating rink, tennis courts, and concessionaire agreements and other miscellaneous sources of revenue.

Programs and events comprise a major source of activity at South Park. The largest and most significant events are the Allegheny County Fair and the summer concerts held in the South Park Amphitheater. Typical concert events attract an estimated 5,000 people with the largest, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, attracting upwards of 12,000 spectators. Other activities include the park's nature programs, ice skating lessons, and swimming lessons.

South Park's facilities are used extensively by the public for a variety of formal and informal park and recreation program uses, but many areas are used below their potential. For example, the park contains many buildings that could provide space for indoor recreation. In general, the numerous buildings and facilities in the park provide the opportunity for increased recreational programming.

Vandalism and nighttime loitering in the park are significant problems that could be addressed with a stronger police presence.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 65% of the facilities in South Park are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 29% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the administration building, ice rink area, tennis courts, 24% of the shelters, 34% of the culverts/bridges, 35% of the park roads, 28% of the parking areas,

all trails evaluated, water and electric distribution systems, and 24% of the other park facilities. The swimming pool, golf course, ball fields, basketball courts, BMX bike track, restrooms, historic cabins, exhibit farm, soccer field, and outdoor theaters appear to receive better maintenance.

Overall, many structures in the park are old and need repair or renovation, and improvements to the general appearance and cleanliness of the park are needed.

There are 201 facilities at South Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 21% of these facilities are considered to be ADA-compliant.

E. Traffic Circulation

Circulation issues in South Park include conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, lack of pedestrian crosswalks and signage, a lack of pedestrian paths along internal park roads (with the exception of Corrigan Drive), and vertical and horizontal alignment deficiencies in some road segments. Traffic flow problems include congestion along several roadways and problems with vehicles turning from the major and/or minor roadways at several intersections.

A continuous, dedicated bike/walking trail runs adjacent to the east side of Corrigan Drive. This trail is heavily used by walkers, bikers, runners, and in-line skaters which causes some conflicts between these multiple users and automobile traffic. These conflicts were addressed in the 1990 *North Park and South Park Trail Improvement Feasibility Study* and the associated *South Park Traffic Study*, but the recommendations contained in these studies have for the most part not been implemented.

While the posted speed limit along Corrigan Drive is 25 MPH, many perceive that speeding is a problem along this four-lane roadway.

2.3.3 Boyce Park

Boyce Park is located in the east-central part of Allegheny County. The majority of the park's 1,096 acres are located in Plum Borough with a small section in the Municipality of Monroeville. Boyce Park is known for the Four Seasons Lodge and ski slope, which is the park's signature. Existing conditions in the park are shown in Figure 2-3.

A. Natural Resources

Boyce Park's terrain is varied, with steep slopes found along the banks of the major tributaries flowing through the park. The ski slope in the southeast corner of the park is steepest at the top of the slope, just to the north of Old Frankstown Road.

The majority of Boyce Park drains into Pierson Run, which originates in the park and flows southward through the park to its confluence with Abers Creek. Abers Creek drains into Turtle Creek, which eventually flows into the Monongahela River.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes Boyce Park as a significant open space resource but due to past uses, including strip mining and agriculture, the park lacks high-quality natural areas. The ACNHI notes, however, that the area around the headwaters of Piersons Run should be protected from future development.

An ecological field survey of Boyce Park conducted in Spring 2000 revealed two significant biological zones in the park: Piersons Run and Indian Hill.

Piersons Run Biological Zone: The Piersons Run area includes most of the eastern portion of Boyce Park. This area has been severely impacted by strip mining and lack of proper reclamation but has made or is in the process of making a recovery. Uplands above the mining area support poor mixtures of black locust and other disturbance species, but woodlands down slope of the mined area are mature and in relatively good condition.

There are numerous informal trails through the area, many of which are being used by mountain bikes. Areas that have been partially developed as picnic sites are located along one existing pathway.

Indian Hill Biological Zone: The Indian Hill Biological Zone is located in the western part of Boyce Park next to the Nature Interpretive Center. The woodlands in this area, as in most of the rest of the park, are in the early to middle stages of succession as a result of cutting and abandonment of former agricultural land. There are several open fields with different mowing regimes. Several informal trails are found throughout this area.

B. Cultural Resources

Boyce Park was named for William D. Boyce, founder of the Boy Scouts of America. The park contains a number of important historic and archaeological resources. A short segment of Forbes Road, later the Frankstown Road and Frankstown Indian Path,

crosses the park. The site of George Washington's Second Camp during the Forbes Campaign is located near or within the park boundaries. Washington and his brigade camped here on November 22, 1758 on their way to capture Fort Duquesne from the French. After the Revolutionary War, a frontier fort or blockhouse was reportedly located near or within the park boundaries.

The remains of a prehistoric Indian village are buried beneath the ground near Boyce Park's tennis courts. Artifacts, including fragments of stone tools and prehistoric pottery, were recovered during archaeological testing, confirming that a section of the village is intact and should be protected.

Other noteworthy historic properties in Boyce Park include the Carpenter Loghouse, several historic barns, and a sealed opening for the Plum Creek bituminous coal mine.

C. Facilities and Programs

Active-use facilities in Boyce Park include the downhill ski area, wave pool, a recreation complex with multiple fields and courts, soccer complex, cross-country ski slopes, mountain bike trails, and playgrounds. Passive-use facilities include picnic groves/shelters and walking/equestrian trails. Other facilities include the Four Seasons Lodge, Interpretive Nature Center, model airplane field, and the performance space at the loghouse/barn.

The park receives significant use through the wave pool, ski slopes, sports fields, and grove reservations. The ski slopes create unique maintenance and operating issues not found in any other county park.

Programs and events at Boyce Park include nature education programs, Boy Scout and Girl Scout utilization of park facilities, youth sports leagues, swimming lessons, scholastic cross-country racing, and tennis tournaments.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 93% of the facilities in Boyce Park are considered to be in good condition or in fair condition. Approximately 4% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the picnic hut, Maintenance Shop and asphalt yard, Top Ski Slope Shelter A, Patrol Restroom, and Silver Beaver Grove Parking Lot.

There are 96 facilities at Boyce Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 19% are considered to be ADA-compliant.

E. Traffic Circulation

No serious traffic flow problems exist in Boyce Park. Field observations revealed several sight distance problems at key intersections. Like other parks, there are vehicular/pedestrian conflicts in the park. These conflicts are related to a lack of pedestrian crosswalks, signage, and paths along internal park roads.

Most visitors to Boyce Park arrive via automobile. Some users bike or walk from nearby residential neighborhoods. Boyce Park is one of the few Allegheny County parks that provides for a sense of arrival to the park, with signage clearly identifying the three main entrances. However, directional signage to the park from the larger community is poor as is the case with all the county parks.

2.3.4 Deer Lakes Park

Deer Lakes Park, 1,180 acres in size, is located in Frazer and West Deer Townships in the northeast region of Allegheny County. The primary attractions of the park are the three man-made fishing lakes, several groves and shelters, and the Wagman Observatory. Existing conditions in Deer Lakes Park are shown in Figure 2-4.

A. Natural Resources

Formerly used for agriculture, Deer Lakes is gently sloping in most areas. Steep slopes are found to the south of the fishing lakes and near the banks of major tributaries flowing through the site in the northwest corner and the southern area of the park.

The three fishing lakes constitute the signature and most prominent feature of Deer Lakes Park. These lakes are interconnected by West Deer Creek, which originates in the south-central section of the park and flows to the north and then west, through the three fishing lakes to its confluence with Little Deer Creek to the west of the park's boundary. Little Deer Creek flows into Deer Creek, which eventually flows into the Allegheny River.

Allegheny County funded a Lake Evaluation Study for Deer Lakes Park in December 1997. This study identified several problems in the lakes, including: overabundant growth of vegetation; low concentrations of oxygen in the water; decreasing water levels during the summer months; and accumulation of sediment in the lakes. The study also examined issues related to lake access, including pedestrian bridge safety and ADA-accessibility. The study offered several recommendations to improve water quality in the three fishing lakes. Allegheny County is currently seeking funding for the implementation of these projects.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes Deer Lakes Park as reverting agricultural land mixed with young, second growth forest. The Bailey Run area is called out as an area with potential to become a high-quality example of a natural community. An ecological field survey of Deer Lakes Park conducted in Spring 2000 revealed one significant biological zone in the park: West Deer Lake.

West Deer Lake Biological Zone: Located in the southern part of the park, the West Deer Lake Biological Zone wholly encompasses the watershed of the lakes that are the signature of Deer Lakes Park. It includes the east-facing slope running parallel to Bailey Run and Fairfield Road that is noted in the ACNHI description. The remainder of the zone has the qualities of a Dry-Mesic Acidic Central Forest with early successional areas dominated by red oak, white oak, and tulip poplar.

There are a number of trails, both official and unofficial, in the area.

B. Cultural Resources

Cultural resources within Deer Lakes Park include two 19th century farmsteads: the Gillespie Farmstead and the Video Farm, now used as a park office and maintenance facility. Based on the preliminary survey of cultural resources conducted for the Inventory and Analysis, neither of these properties appear to meet the criteria for National Register listing. However, the barns may qualify as properties within a thematic group nomination.

C. Facilities and Programs

Recreational development in Deer Lakes Park includes shelters, parking lots, the fishing lakes, and a playground. The three fishing lakes are the park's most prominent recreational features. The more developed lower lake provides opportunities for active and passive recreation, including sheltered groves, fishing docks, and a small play area. It is ADA-accessible for the physically challenged.

Wagman Observatory is not maintained by the County. Located at one of the highest points in Allegheny County, this special-use facility is operated by the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh and is open to the public through Association-sponsored programs.

Programs, events, and users at Deer Lakes include Boy Scout and Girl Scout summer camps, fishing (5 stocking events a year), local horse clubs (1 to 2 events per year), and youth football. Park groves and shelters are used frequently by organized groups. The park is well maintained, although additional seasonal labor for summer

months would benefit the cleanliness of the park on weekends. The park manager's office is remotely located from the more heavily used areas of the park, resulting in poor accessibility for park visitors.

E. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 78% of the facilities observed in Deer Lakes Park are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 20% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the Administration Building, 36% of culverts/bridges, three parking areas, Lower and Middle Lake Spillways, four Restrooms, Rental Farm Barn, and the riding/hiking trails.

There are 51 facilities at Deer Lakes Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 59% of these facilities are considered to be ADA-compliant.

F. Traffic Circulation

No serious traffic flow problems exist in Deer Lakes Park. Field observations revealed vertical and horizontal alignment deficiency and sight distance problems at key intersections. The field evaluation also indicated that the east side of the park lacks signage informing people when they are entering and/or leaving the park.

Like other parks, Deer Lakes Park experiences vehicular/pedestrian conflicts in the park related to a lack of pedestrian crosswalks, signage, and paths along internal park roads.

2.3.5 Harrison Hills Park

Harrison Hills Park is located in Harrison Township in the northeasternmost corner of the county. The park's 500 acres are located on a plateau high above the Allegheny River. Existing conditions in Harrison Hills Park are shown in Figure 2-5.

A. Natural Resources

The most prominent natural feature of Harrison Hills Park is the steep slope leading down to the Allegheny River along the entire eastern border of the park. Particularly from the Watts Overlook, the views across the river are extraordinary and have been highlighted by the County as the park's signature feature.

Three unnamed tributaries in the park originate within and flow through the park and then down steep slopes to their confluence with the Allegheny River. The southernmost tributary flows through a man-made pond with an engineered dam at the eastern end. The dam at this man-made pond was found during the field

survey to be unstable, with several gulleys eroded and an inadequate spillway, presenting a potential hazard for the roadway to the south of the lake if the dam were to fail.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) identifies a Biological Diversity Area (BDA) in Harrison Hills Park. The ACNHI recognizes this area as a High Diversity Area and a Community/Ecosystem Conservation Area. An ecological field survey of the park conducted in Spring 2000 revealed one significant biological zone: Harrison Hills Falls.

Harrison Hills Falls Biological Zone: As noted, the east side of the park is characterized by steep to nearly vertical slopes adjacent to the Allegheny River. The mid and upper slopes contain dry mixed-oak forests on mid- and upper slopes. Exposed sandstone cliffs and outcrops along the summit of the slope. This relatively undisturbed topography and forest is uncommon along the lower portion of the Allegheny River and Harrison Hills Park contains the best example remaining in Allegheny County.

The steep slopes are cut in places by small tributary valleys. The largest tributary is almost fully within the park. As it flows off the uplands, this stream falls and cascades down a steep rocky gorge containing mature, mesic central oak forest that is unlike anything on the uplands. Although the upper portions of this area are within the boundary of the park, much of the lower portion of the gorge is not owned by Allegheny County. This unnamed tributary is the central feature of the suggested Falls Natural Area. The primary feature to be protected is the stream throughout its watershed, and especially that portion that flows under Cottontail Drive to the gorge where it flows out of the park.

The next ridge south opposite the Watts Memorial Overlook is the location of an enormous mass of glass bottles. Apparently this area was formerly a dump for municipal waste. The organic materials, including much of the metal, have decomposed but the glass remains on the surface in young woods that have grown since the dumping was stopped. This area will require a major clean-up effort, but it is presently a source of potential liability to the County.

The uplands are a mosaic of woodlands, reverting agricultural land, and some areas that are retained as open fields. Portions have been developed for recreation, including picnic area pavilions, trails, playfields, and organized sports facilities. One notable recreational feature in the park is the Rachel Carson Trail, which enters the park from the southwest and runs along the upper edge of the steep river slope. The terminus of the Rachel Carson Trail is located in

Harrison Hills Park at the Ox Roast Shelter. However, a trail continues north along the upper edge of the cliff to the far northern end of the park.

B. Cultural Resources

The Watts Overlook above the Allegheny River is an important cultural and landscape feature in Harrison Hills Park. Named for Michael Watts, who continued the conservation efforts of Rachael Carson, the overlook is one of the park's prominent features. A second resource is the Harrison Farmstead, a vernacular early 20th century farmhouse and barn currently used by park maintenance personnel. Although both buildings are over 50 years old, the farmstead does not appear to possess the attributes necessary to meet National Register criteria.

C. Facilities and Programs

Recreational facilities in Harrison Hills Park include picnic groves and shelters, a new playground, the McCurdy soccer fields, Watts Memorial Overlook, and numerous trails. Use of the soccer fields by the Harrison Youth Soccer Association is a major activity in the park. Other events include three annual equestrian rides by local horse clubs and the use of the park by the local high school for cross-country track meets.

Harrison Hills Park is well maintained but has limited park amenities to attract users to the park. Community concerns exist regarding inappropriate activities occurring in the park and lack of a police presence. The park does not have a regular onsite manager or maintenance supervisor support staff. Additional seasonal support staff is needed for maintenance activities on weekends when park use is the greatest.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 81% of the facilities in Harrison Hills are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 11% of the facilities are in poor condition, including an unoccupied residence, 2-car concrete block garage, bulk storage garage, the 6050 Freeport Road Maple Building, a CMP culvert at Cottontail Drive, an outfall at Woodchuck Drive, Lothlorien Lane Road, Lothlorien Lane Lake, and the potable water distribution system.

There are 49 facilities at Harrison Hills Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 27% are considered to be ADA-compliant.

F. Traffic Circulation

Vehicular traffic in Harrison Hills Park is light. Field observations revealed vertical and horizontal alignment deficiencies and ripples

along roadways that could cause bikers to lose control. Like other parks in the system, Harrison Hills lacks crosswalks, signage to inform drivers of pedestrians, and paths along most internal roads.

2.3.6 White Oak Park

This 810-acre park is located in White Oak Borough in the southeastern corner of the County. Residents of both Allegheny and Westmoreland Counties enjoy this largely undeveloped regional park. Existing conditions in the park are shown in Figure 2-6.

A. Natural Resources

Several large areas of White Oak Park consist of very steeply sloped terrain. Steep slopes occur on either side of the unnamed tributary in the northeast area of the park, along the western boundary of the park, and in the southwest corner around the groves and shelters found along Sylvan Drive.

White Oak Park is bisected by a central east-west drainage divide. The northern area of White Oak Park drains into Jacks Run. Two unnamed tributaries of Jacks Run flow through the northern section of the park to their confluence with Jacks Run. The southern area of the site contains three unnamed tributaries in the Long Run watershed that all originate in White Oak Park and flow into Long Run. Jacks Run flows into Long Run, which eventually converges with the Youghiogheny River.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes White Oak Park as second-growth forest or reverting forest with areas that were once strip-mined and farmed. The ACNHI notes one Biological Diversity Area (BDA) for the park: the Jacks Run Valley BDA. An ecological field survey of the park conducted in Spring 2000 confirmed the significance of Jacks Run as a biological zone.

Jacks Run Biological Zone: The Jacks Run Biological Zone includes much of the undeveloped portions of the park. The area includes some mature woodlands on steep moist valley slopes. These woodlands contain a diversity of tree species and age classes, and the shrub and herbaceous layers are intact and diverse. This is a typical western Pennsylvania valley that has not been highly disturbed in the past or recently. The surrounding uplands support younger forests that developed on former agricultural fields.

The tributary valley to Jacks Run that is the major feature of White Oak Park contains some of the best stands of native wildflowers to be found in the Allegheny County parks. In addition, the valley has

experienced very little disturbance by motorized vehicles and even by foot travel. The quality of the existing forests, good diversity of the herbaceous layer, and lack of damage from incompatible uses qualifies this area as biologically significant.

B. Cultural Resources

The **John J. Muse Farmstead** is currently a mental health facility operated by the Mon-Yough Center (a community-based non-profit organization) and a maintenance area for White Oak Park. The property contains a beautiful five-bay brick farmhouse with a wood Victorian porch built in the 1800s. It was formerly the site of **Fort Reburn (Rayburn)**, a log fortification typical of the frontier forts that were built to protect families from persistent Indian raids after the Revolutionary War. The gravesites of persons killed during two raids were tended on the site well into the late 1800s. The Queen Aliquippa Chapter of Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) placed a marker on the site commemorate these events. In the 1960s, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documented the John J. Muse House, which is considered potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

C. Facilities and Programs

Recreational facilities in White Oak Park include picnic groves and shelters, a multi-purpose playing field, a playground, and the Angora Gardens and Rabbit Farm operated by the Mon-Yough Center. Programs, events, and activities include Boy Scout day camps, the Ham Radio Operators annual campout, nature walks, tree plantings, fundraising walks, scholastic sports practices, weddings and receptions (spring/summer only), soccer leagues, and baseball and softball leagues.

There are no designated trails marked on the park trail map. Many users walk and run along the park roads.

White Oak Park is maintained with limited labor staff.

E. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 89% of the facilities in White Oak Park are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 11% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the Administration Building and staff support facilities, Maple Grove Shelter, and three restrooms.

There are 40 facilities at White Oak Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 43% are considered to be ADA-compliant.

F. Traffic Circulation

Vehicular traffic in White Oak Park is light. Field observations revealed a sight distance problem at the McClintock Road/Sylvan Drive intersection and the lack of pavement markings along Sylvan Drive. Like other parks in the system, Harrison Hills lacks crosswalks, signage to inform drivers of pedestrians, and paths along most internal roads.

2.3.7 Round Hill Park

This 1101-acre park is located in the south-easternmost corner of the County in Elizabeth Township. The popular exhibit farm is the highlight of a trip to Round Hill Park where self-guided tours direct visitors through the day to day operations of a working farm. Visitors stroll along ADA-accessible paths past the farm garden, wood shed, corn crib and visitors center and have opportunities to interact with farm animals. Existing conditions at Round Hill Park are shown in Figure 2.3.7.

A. Natural Resources

The landscape of Round Hill Park has historically been used for agricultural purposes. The park is characterized by undulating terrain, with steep slopes concentrated along Round Hill Road and Douglass Run in the eastern part of the park.

The principal watercourse in Round Hill Park is Douglass Run, which flows eastward through the center of the park. Douglass Run drains into Gillespie Run at the southeastern corner of the park. Gillespie Run eventually flows into the Youghiogheny River. Overall the park has problems with overland drainage, which is causing erosion in different parts of the park.

The 1994 Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory (ACNHI) describes Round Hill Park as reverting forest and agricultural fields, with the most mature forest around Douglass Run. An ecological field survey conducted in Spring 2000 confirmed the presence of one significant biological zone in the park: Douglass Run.

Douglass Run Biological Zone: The northern portion of Round Hill Park is dedicated to the demonstration farm and much of the land remains in agricultural use. The Douglass Run Biological Zone is located in the undeveloped southeastern portion of the park, where woodland occurs in a various stages of succession. The eastern portion of the area is more heavily forested with later successional, maturing woodlands. These woodlands have intact and well-developed shrub and herbaceous layers. Some of the best herbaceous spring vernal wildflower colonies are found on the north-facing slopes adjacent to Douglass Run and in some of the small coves

carved into the slope. The uplands, generally above the 1,120' elevation, have more gentle terrain and support open, reverting fields.

B. Cultural Resources

The location of Round Hill Park between two of the region's major rivers, the Monongahela and the Youghiogheny, has provided an important agricultural environment of well-watered lands with rich soils for peoples residing here for the past several thousand years. A prehistoric camp known as the Round Hill Farm Archaeological Site (36AL246) is located within the park boundaries and the historic farmsteads within the park boundaries maintain strong ties to the region's rural agricultural past.

The former **Peairs Farmstead** now functions as an Exhibit Farm for Round Hill Park. Although the historic farmstead has been somewhat altered by its development as an exhibit farm, the fields, fences, pond, and circulation system all contribute to the integrity of this historic rural landscape. A second farm on the Peairs property was located east of the existing Exhibit Farm on Round Hill Road. Only the barn and well remain along with the archaeological remains of a 19th century farmhouse. A third property consists of a late Victorian farmhouse located south of Round Hill Road opposite the Pearis House.

Another historic property, the Round Hill Church and Cemetery, is located on the western park boundary. The Van Kirk and the Hutchinson Farms are located west of the cemetery outside of the park boundaries; both of these properties are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These two farmsteads, Round Hill Park, the church and cemetery, and the adjacent Miller Farmstead appear to meet the criteria for listing on the National Register as a **Vernacular Rural Historic Landscape**.

C. Facilities and Programs

Special use and recreational facilities in Round Hill Park include the Exhibit Farm, Visitors' Center, picnic groves and shelters, a soccer complex, and a bridle trail. The Exhibit Farm and associated programs constitute the major source of activity for the park. Other major users include the annual Boy Scout Soap Box Derby and the Annual Concert in the Park.

The opportunity exists to significantly enhance the Exhibit Farm as an attraction and educational resource. The park manager currently serves as the maintenance supervisor and has limited maintenance personnel available. This reduces the ability of management to focus on enhancing the operations of the park through expanded programming and more entrepreneurial activities. The park does not have a foundation, friends' organization, or volunteer groups

that could support the park and its activities and enhance its effectiveness.

E. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 89% of the facilities in Round Hill are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 10% of the facilities are in poor condition, including two restrooms, the Implement Shed, Cattle Feeding Shed, Green House propane tank and piping, Green House walkway, and the Maintenance Building driveway.

There are 54 facilities at Round Hill Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 19% are considered to be ADA-compliant.

F. Traffic Circulation

Vehicular traffic in Round Hill Park is light. Field observations revealed a lack of pavement markings along Hereford Drive. Additionally, there is a lack of signage along the east end of Round Hill Road and Simpson Howell Road (near Dillon Road) to inform people when they are entering or leaving the park and no internal wayfinding signs directing people to the Exhibit Farm or soccer fields. Like other parks in the system, Round Hill Park lacks crosswalks, signage to inform drivers of pedestrians, and paths along most internal roads.

2.3.8 Settler’s Cabin Park

Settler’s Cabin Park is located in North Fayette and Collier Townships. A large, mostly undeveloped park at 1,589 acres in size, its major attraction and signature feature is the wave and diving pool. Existing conditions in Settler’s Cabin Park are shown in Figure 2.8.

A. Natural Resources

The undulating terrain at Settler’s Cabin Park is varied, with steep slope areas tending to run parallel to the major tributaries flowing through the park. The majority of the park site drains into Pinkertons Run, which flows southward through the center of the park to its confluence with Robinson Run. Robinson Run flows eastward along the southernmost boundary of the park to its eventual confluence with Chartiers Creek, which flows northward into the Ohio River.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes Settler’s Cabin Park as young, second-growth forest on land that was strip-mined at one time. The ACNHI identifies the Pinkerton Run Valley as having the most potential to recover some of the natural qualities that once existed in this area. An ecological

field survey conducted in Spring 2000 revealed one significant biological zone in the park: Pinkertons Run.

Pinkertons Run Biological Zone: This biological zone is located in the northwestern section of Settler's Cabin Park. Although much of the park has had extensive disturbance from surface mining, the scars are beginning to heal and the resilience of natural communities is remarkably exemplified in this landscape. The zone is focused on Pinkertons Run, which flows to the south in a relatively flat-bottomed valley for most of its course. The area was once farmland and is in various stages of succession to woodland. Beavers have colonized the area and built a number of various sized dams, creating both open water areas and wet meadow wetlands throughout the valley.

The valley slopes have scars remaining from past surface mining, including a level bench where coal was extracted, which follows the topography just below the 1,100-foot contour. Above this bench the woodlands are generally very poor, but below the forest is less disturbed and there are occasional maturing groves. Past and present disturbance has created habitat for invasive species, including multiflora rose.

Although the Pinkertons Run Valley is recovering from past land disturbance, there are several major environmental problems that need to be addressed. The area has been heavily impacted by all terrain vehicle use that enters from the Pinkerton Run Road area. Much of the bottomland vegetation has been destroyed in some areas, and erosion is a major problem.

A second problem is acid mine drainage. In a number of locations, acid discharges from the mines run down the slopes, making up much of the flow of the main stream. However, fish and wildlife inhabit the area despite this situation.

B. Cultural Resources

Settler's Cabin Park was named for an early settlement of the property that included a log farmhouse reportedly built in 1798. Archaeologists excavated the area around the loghouse and recovered a significant collection of historic artifacts. The **Walker-Ewing Loghouse**, including the stone chimney, was entirely reconstructed on the site of the original farmhouse. The Walker-Ewing house is listed on the National Register of Historic Places dated January 30, 1976.

Adjacent to the restored loghouse is the 1855 **Ewing-Glass House and Barn**. The interior of the house appears to retain a high degree of integrity with original fireplaces, woodwork, and

early wallpaper. The original well is located behind the house. The interior of the barn appears to have been retained although it been covered with modern materials. Currently vacant and in deteriorating condition, this property is an excellent candidate for restoration.

The vernacular **Four-Square Farmhouse**, constructed of yellow brick with a slate roof, dates to the early 20th century and is typical of many farmhouses of the period. The building has been extensively modified to function as the park headquarters.

C. Facilities and Programs

Recreational facilities in Settler's Cabin Park include the wave pool and diving complex, tennis complex, playground, picnic groves and shelters, and numerous trails. Programs and events at the park include tennis clinics, swimming lessons, a motorcycle clinic, Boy Scout Camps, charity runs, and fishing.

The park's primary success has been from the wave pool, which attracts a large number of area residents. The park manager's office is remote from the main activities in the park, which reduces the capabilities of the manager to provide effective customer service.

In the southwest corner of the park, adjacent to the Pinkertons Run Biological Zone, the County has made an agreement with the Western Pennsylvania Horticultural Society to develop a regional arboretum/botanical garden. This facility is in the planning and fundraising stages at this time.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 85% of these facilities in Settler's Cabin Park are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 8% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the Administration Building, Ewing-Glass House, Maintenance Barn, the Wave Pool Bath House and Ticket Booth, Oil Storage Building, Gregg Road, and all the park trails.

There are 65 facilities at Settler's Cabin Park that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Approximately 26% are considered to be ADA-compliant.

E. Traffic Circulation

Field observations revealed a sight distance problem at the Papoose Drive/Tepee Drive. Additionally, there is a lack of signage informing people when they are entering or leaving the park and no internal wayfinding signage. Like other parks in the system, Settler's Cabin lacks crosswalks, signage to inform drivers of pedestrians, and paths along most internal roads.

The asphalt pavement along Greer Road from Tepee Drive to the park administrative office and from Tepee Drive to Ridge Road is in poor condition. Greer Road has been closed to vehicular traffic south of the park office, which limits internal circulation between the northern and southern areas of the park.

2.3.9 Hartwood

This 629-acre park is located in the north-central part of the County in Hampton and Indiana Townships. Hartwood remains undeveloped over much of the interior of the park. Unlike the other parks in the system, there are no picnic groves and pavilions, play fields, or a well-developed infrastructure of roads and parking areas. The activity centers are the mansion area and the performance area. The mansion and stable complex support guided tours, rental facilities, summer theatre, and other special events. The performance area is used for a number of special events throughout the year. Existing conditions in Hartwood are shown in Figure 2-9.

A. Natural Resources

Hartwood has the most gently sloping terrain of all the county parks, with more steeply sloping areas mostly associated with tributary streams. The most significant of these streams, Little Pine Creek originates in the northwestern corner of the park, coalesces into a perennial stream, and flows southward through a steepening valley as it exits the park. Little Pine Creek flows to Pine Run, which eventually flows into the Allegheny River.

The 1994 *Allegheny County Natural Heritage Inventory* (ACNHI) describes Hartwood as having forested land that is recovering from past agricultural and grazing uses. An ecological field survey conducted in Spring 2000 revealed one significant biological zone in the park: Little Pine Creek.

Little Pine Creek Biological Zone: This zone covers most of the undeveloped portion of Hartwood. It supports oak forests mixed with other species such as tulip poplar, black cherry, red maple, and white ash. Although there was damage to these woodlands during the first gypsy moth outbreaks that occurred in western Pennsylvania, they are recovering and in part have become more diverse in both species and age. Most of the more undisturbed stands are found in the central and northern portions of the park.

Trails exist through these areas, the most developed being roads leading from the mansion area west to the performance area.

B. Cultural Resources

Preserved within this county park is one of the largest and most spectacular country estates in the region. Built for Mary Flinn Lawrence in 1926, the Cotswold mansion house is beautifully appointed and contains many fine original objects. The stable, barns, other agricultural buildings, and historic landscape possess a high degree of integrity. Allegheny County acquired Hartwood Farms in 1969 but the property has never been formally listed on the National Register.

C. Facilities and Programs

As previously noted, there are organized recreational uses in Hartwood. Facilities located in the park include the Hartwood Mansion and Stables, concert area/stage, theater (a temporary structure), and numerous trails (hiking, biking, and equestrian).

Major events and activities at Hartwood include weddings, company picnics, small fundraisers, mansion tours, hay rides, Christmas tours, the annual Festival of Lights, summer theatre, poetry readings, a polo fundraiser, an annual horseshoe competition, bus tours, and the annual concert series. Revenue generating activities at Hartwood are generally confined to activities utilizing the live performance venues, either through ticket receipts or through direct rental of the facilities themselves. Surprisingly, the single largest revenue generator at Hartwood is the rental of facilities to third parties and not income generated from its concert series. This is due primarily to the fact that the series are provided largely free of charge.

The concert area/stage is located next to Middle Road with no buffer provided from the adjacent neighborhood. Residents of the surrounding community have expressed concerns regarding noise and traffic generated by concerts and by the Festival of Lights.

Hartwood is a highly valuable historical and cultural resource for the County. The park has been operating without a park manager, which significantly reduces the opportunity to enhance the usability of the park through tours, and general admission.

An effort to attract volunteers has had positive results and is indicative of the type of interest this historical site could generate. The park hosts a variety of special events, ranging from the Festival of Lights to the summer concerts and theater performances. However the park does not financially benefit from the revenues generated by these events. The park does not have any effective marketing and promotions plan, which could benefit the park and the county's overall efforts in promoting and enhancing tourism.

D. Facility and Infrastructure Conditions

Approximately 82% of the facilities in Hartwood are considered to be in good or fair condition. Approximately 10% of the facilities are in poor condition, including the concrete walk for the picnic tables, 24% of the culverts/bridges, and the Hay Barn.

There are 23 facilities at Hartwood that are accessible to the public and are subject to ADA compliance regulations. Eight of these facilities or approximately 35% have, in AWK's opinion, ADA facilities that are probably adequate.

E. Traffic Circulation

Special events held at Hartwood, including major concerts and the Festival of Lights, can generate heavy traffic that impacts roadways external to the park. With respect to internal park circulation, field observations revealed conflicts between vehicles along Service Road (South) from Middle Road to the concert stage. In areas where the pavement width of Service Road (South) was less than 16', there was confusion between opposing drivers as to who should yield the right-of-way by driving onto the grass along the roadway. Like other parks in the system, Hartwood lacks crosswalks, signage to inform drivers of pedestrians, and paths along most internal roads.

2.4 RECREATIONAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Estimating demand by Allegheny County residents for recreational facilities and programs is essential to ensuring a Comprehensive Master Plan that reflects citizens' needs. As part of development of the Plan, a Recreational Needs Assessment was conducted to provide a quantitative and qualitative estimation of demand. The following sources of input were used in this analysis:

- ***Recreational Trends:*** Trends in recreational participation at the national and state levels were examined to understand the changing patterns and their implications for Allegheny County.
- ***Stated Needs:*** Public meetings conducted in April 2000 provided input on recreational needs stated by a self-selected audience.
- ***Expressed Needs:*** Recreational needs expressed by a broader cross-section of Allegheny County residents were revealed through a survey questionnaire that was distributed in June 2000 through a statistically valid random mailing to 5,300 households. For the purposes of the Recreational Needs Assessment, those survey questions that demonstrate demand for additional programs or facilities were analyzed.

- **Observed Needs:** Demand for programs and facilities was evaluated from the perspective of the consultant team's observations from the inventory and analysis work and knowledge of what is offered in other park systems.

The Recreational Needs Assessment is fully documented in the separate *Background Information Report*. The following text summarizes its major findings.

2.4.1 Recreational Trends

Recreational trends evolve over time. According to *Americans at Play*, a 1994-1995 National Survey on Recreation and the Environment conducted by the National Park Service, the top three recreational pursuits in the U.S. are walking, sightseeing, and picnicking. In 1972, the top three pursuits were picnicking, sightseeing, and driving for pleasure. A 1999 survey of recreational participation by the National Sporting Goods Association found on-road use of mountain bikes to be the fastest growing activity over the past several years, followed by camping and exercise walking. Exercise walking, swimming, and camping were found to be the three most popular recreational activities in terms of overall participation. The 1999 survey found these three activities to also be the most popular in the Pennsylvania.

As demonstrated in *Americans at Play*, the relationship between age/income is another important factor that affects demand for recreational activities and programs. Aging has the general effect of decreasing participation. Younger persons tend to participate in more rigorous athletic activities such as running, volleyball, and basketball. Older populations are more apt to participate in less physically demanding activities such as bird watching, fishing, and golf.

Income also has a clear influence on the level of recreational participation for some activities. Higher incomes correlate closely with activities that demand fees (e.g., golf). Conversely, walking, picnicking, bird watching, fresh water fishing, camping, volleyball, and hunting are all top-20 recreational activities that are largely unaffected by income level.

2.4.2 Stated Needs

A series of five meetings were held in April 2000 in downtown Pittsburgh, Boyce Park, North Park, Round Hill Park, and South Park to allow citizens to provide input on issues pertaining to the county parks. Comments consistently heard at the meetings were used to identify potential opportunities to enhance recreational

facilities or programs in the parks system. Needs identified at all five meetings included:

- Expanded/better maintained trails and paths
- Expanded/improved athletic fields

Needs identified at four of the five meetings included:

- Hiking/biking trails as linkages between parks
- Address crowding issues
- Designated (fenced off-leash) dog areas
- Improved tennis courts
- Maintain free/inexpensive fee structure

2.4.3 Expressed Needs

The results of a mail survey conducted during the summer of 2000 yield additional insight into the recreational needs of Allegheny County residents. Of the 1,490 responses received from the 5,300 surveys distributed, 86 percent indicated they had made at least one visit to county parks in the previous year. Fourteen percent of those who responded reported participating in county park programs, a figure that is likely related to the relatively low level of programming offered in the parks. Twenty-eight percent, or double the response rate of persons who indicated that they participate in current park programs, expressed a desire for additional programming. When asked to identify additional programs by type, respondents identified essentially the same programs that they reported participating in most frequently – musical events, fairs and festivals, and the Festival of Lights – indicating that they would apparently like to see more of what they already have. Nevertheless, experience has shown that when new recreational options are offered to a community, those that are successful typically have similar characteristics: they address underlying demand, are appropriately priced, and are well publicized.

A much higher percentage (45%) of persons responding to the survey indicated that they use park facilities than those who reported participation in park programs. Twenty-four percent of respondents expressed a desire for additional facilities in the parks. Restrooms, an infrastructure component, were the highest ranked candidate for new facility development. Other highly ranked facilities included bike paths, walking/hiking trails, swimming pools, and playgrounds. While these all are facilities that are currently available in the county parks, they are different from the top three facilities that respondents reported using (picnic shelters/pavilions, golf courses, swimming pools).

2.4.4 Observed Needs

A fourth source of input for the Recreational Needs Assessment came from field observations, a review of available information on the operation of the county parks, and knowledge of facilities in other park systems that would address the other three sources of input. Candidate activities/facilities identified through this analysis include:

- Enhanced aquatic park (add water slides, etc. to existing wave pools)
- Soccer complex w/ minimum number of fields
- Softball complex w/ minimum number of fields
- Function space (built for specific purpose as opposed to existing retrofitted facilities)
- Indoor multi-purpose arena
- Equestrian center
- Skateboard park
- Campground (capable of accommodating RV campers)
- Conference & meeting facilities
- Lodge
- Cabins
- Recreation and fitness center w/ or w/o pool (regional event capacity)
- Community center (focus on classroom and programmable space)
- Tennis complex/center
- Multi-purpose/program space
- Arboretum/botanical garden
- Fitness/survival course

2.4.5 Preferred Candidate Uses

The next step in the Recreational Needs Assessment was to identify candidate activities or uses that provide the best opportunity to satisfy community recreational needs and to meet the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan. To allow a comparative rating of potential uses, the overall need for each use was identified based upon its relative “score” using a series of numerically weighted criteria. Examples of these criteria include: ***meets recreational needs*** as identified through two or more of the sources of input described above (+5), ***regionally serving*** (+4), ***capital intensive*** (-3), and ***income potential*** (+3).

The following uses achieved the highest scores applying the numerically weighted criteria:

- Sport shooting facilities (12)
- Fishing related facilities (10)
- Trail systems (8)
- Golf courses/driving ranges (8)
- Outdoor theaters/concerts/amphitheaters (7)
- Camping areas (7)
- Soccer complex (7)
- Conference & meeting facilities (7)
- Cabins (7)
- Sports fields (6)
- Enhanced aquatic park (6)
- Indoor multi-purpose arena (6)

The Recreational Needs Assessment is not intended to provide a definitive list of new or expanded facilities for future development in the Allegheny County parks system. As an example, sport shooting facilities rate highly using the weighted criteria but were not identified by residents through the stated or expressed needs inputs, raising the question as to whether this use is truly appropriate in the Allegheny County parks and if so, in what context. Similarly, other uses not included on the list may make sense based upon specific recreational demand factors or park/site characteristics. Nevertheless, the assessment provides a useful guide to focus planning efforts on those uses that have the best chance for success while furthering the goals of the Comprehensive Master Plan.

