

## **RECREATION ELEMENT**

### **Existing Facilities – Parks, Environmental Lands & Trails**

The following section is a brief summary of existing and planned recreation facilities, trails, blueways and environmental lands. Trails, blueways, and environmental lands are listed in separate sections.

#### **3.1 Parks**

Lake County has thirty-five ~~six~~ (35~~6~~) parks and approximately ~~530~~ 680 acres of park land, nearly half of which is contained in the 268-acre P.E.A.R. (Palatlkaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve) Park. An additional 50 acres ~~for~~ P.E.A.R. Park ~~is being considered for acquisition through the Florida Forever program and was recently ranked high enough on the state list to receive funding in the 2003/2004 fiscal year~~ has been purchased as well as 100 acres for the NE Community Park. The majority of the parks owned and operated by Lake County are resource-based with limited development.

Twenty-six parks provide access to a water body. Twelve of the parks that have access to a water body consist only of a boat ramp and range from just a few acres in size to less than an acre. Some ramps are simply easements. There are a total of five (5) parks classified as activity-based, the largest of which is the 10-acre Astor Lions Park. The heaviest used parks are Astor, Paisley, and McTureous Parks. McTureous Park is a resource-based park that contains a military memorial, WWII cannon, and a homestead/museum commemorating the life of Medal of Honor recipient Robert McTureous. Lake County parklands have been acquired through a variety of ways including dedication from community groups, developers, and homeowners associations. (i.e. Astor Lions, Umatilla Veteran's Hall, Scott Park). The table on the following page is an inventory of Lake County Park lands.

Facilities such as athletic fields, community buildings, and picnic pavilions are scheduled on a first come first serve basis through the Lake County Parks and Recreation Section. The County provides no other direct recreation programming and instead relies on municipalities or private recreation providers to provide programs to its residents. To assist these recreation providers, the County has developed a recreation grant program to ease the burden on these providers.

<b>Lake County Park Lands</b>					
<b>Parks</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Proximity</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Amenities</b>
Astor Lions Park	10.0	Astor	Community	Activity	2 ballfields, basketball courts, football/soccer field, playground, tennis courts, restrooms and picnic shelter
Carlton Village Park	3.09	Lady Lake	Mini	Resource	undeveloped
Haines Creek Park	36.09	Leesburg	Neighborhood	Resource	undeveloped
Lake Idamere Park	45.0	Tavares	Community	Resource	fishing, hiking, picnicking, playground
Lake Jem Park & Boat Ramp	11.0	Tavares	Neighborhood	Resource	½ basketball court, fishing, boat ramp, trails, playground, restrooms
Lake Joanna Park	0.5	Eustis	Mini	Resource	swimming beach, picnicking
Lake Mack Park	1.65	Deland	Mini	Resource	½ basketball court, fishing, picnicking, playground, restrooms
Lake Thomas Cove Park	4.6	Okahumpka	Mini	Resource	undeveloped
Marsh Park & Boat Ramp	35.0	Eustis	Community	Resource	½ basketball court, boat ramp, dock, fishing, trails, picnicking
McTureous Memorial Park	2.56	Altoona	Community	Resource	Veteran memorial, picnic, playground, shelter, restrooms, volleyball
Mt. Plymouth Park	0.4	Mt. Plymouth	Mini	Resource	playground, picnicking
<u>Northeast Community Park</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>Umatilla</u>	<u>Regional</u>	<u>Activity</u>	<u>Proposed tournament sports complex for sports such as football, baseball and soccer, multi-purpose building, flexible open space</u>
Paisley Community Park	8.1	Paisley	Community	Activity	picnicking, playground, shelters, library, Community Bldg., basketball, ballfield, restrooms
Palatlahaha River Park	23.0	Clermont	Community	Resource	boat ramp, dock, fishing, trail, picnic, playground, restrooms, shelter, Scrub Jay habitat
PEAR Park	<del>268.0</del> <u>318.0</u>	Leesburg	District	Resource	undeveloped
Pine Forest Park	48.0	Deland	Community	Resource	basketball, playground, basketball, trail
Scott Park	0.65	Mt.	Mini	Resource	Playground, picnic

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		Plymouth			
Sorrento Park	3.38	Sorrento	Mini	Activity	basketball court, picnic, playground, shelter, tennis, volleyball
South Umatilla Park	4.0	Umatilla	Mini	Activity	picnicking, playground, comm. center
Spring Lake Park	0.38	Fruitland Park	Mini	Resource	fishing
Sylvan Shores Park	4.94	Mount Dora	Neighborhood	Resource	trail
Trout Lake Park	0.31	Eustis	Mini	Resource	undeveloped
Twin Lakes Park	14.5	Leesburg	Neighborhood	Resource	picnic, playground, basketball, trail
Umatilla Veterans Hall	0.75	Umatilla	Special Use	Activity	comm. bldg., restrooms
<b>Total Parks</b>	<b><u>525.9</u></b> <b><u>675.9</u></b>				

<b>Lake County Boat Ramps</b>					
<b>Boat Ramps</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Class</b>	<b>Type</b>	<b>Amenities</b>
Arnold Brothers Boat Ramp	0.15	Groveland	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, fishing
Astatula Boat Ramp	0.25	Astatula	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Butler Street Boat Ramp	0.23	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
John's Lake Boat Ramp	1.3	Winter Garden	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp, dock
Lake Dalhousie Boat Ramp	0.7	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake George Boat Ramp	0.7	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Holly Boat Ramp	0.5	Umatilla	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Saunders Boat Ramp	0.5	Tavares	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Yale Boat Ramp-East	0.7	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Lake Yale Boat Ramp-West	1.5	Eustis	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Pearl Street Boat Ramp	0.25	Astor	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
Sparks Village Boat Ramp	0.23	Leesburg	Special Use	Resource	boat ramp
<b>Total Boat Ramps</b>	<b>7.01</b>				

<b>Lake County Cemeteries</b>			
<b>Cemeteries</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Owner</b>
Evergreen	1.0	Silver Lake	County
Grand Island	2.0	Grand Island	W.A. Milton, Jr
Hinson	8.0	Altoona, Marion Co.	Ev. Lutheran Good Sam.
Lisbon	3.25	Lisbon	United Methodist
Rigdon	1.0	Umatilla	Hawthorne Residents
Richmond	0.5	Okahumpka	R.W. Thiot
Smythmill	1.0		Lois W. Mize
<b>Total Cemeteries</b>	<b>16.75</b>		

## **Park Classifications**

Parks can be classified in a number of ways and serve a variety of functions, from providing open space in urban areas to large athletic complexes, and everything in between. The size of the park, the population served, service radii, and the types of programming within the park generally determine park classifications. Programming can be passive or active, organized or ‘drop-in’. Passive programming includes adult learning classes such as art or cooking. Active programming includes open fields for activities like flying a kite or a fitness trail. Organized programming includes league sports, like soccer or baseball and drop-in programming includes pick-up games that are not part of an organized group. At any given time, residents of Lake County may desire to use different park types and participate in different kinds of programming.

- ❖ Resource-based recreation facilities are those places where recreation is driven by the natural landscape, such as a river, forest or lake or cultural resources such as historical and archeological sites. Resource-based recreation can be passive such as walking along an interpretive trail or active such as mountain biking or scuba diving.
- ❖ Activity-based parks provide facilities for playing a specific sport or game such as basketball, baseball, and soccer. These facilities are geared toward team sports and are managed for frequent use. Such facilities are frequently located in neighborhood, community, and special use parks and are sometimes located within large resource-based parks as well.

Activity-based and resource-based parks can further be classified by park type. Parks are typically designated as mini parks, neighborhood parks, community parks, district parks and regional parks.

Lake County currently classifies its parks as neighborhood, mini, community, special facilities, district and conservation. In general, counties typically provide the larger parks such as district and regional parks. This is not really the case for Lake County except for P.E.A.R. Park, which is classified as a district park; the County’s parks are all less than 50 acres in size. Most of the County’s parks are classified as neighborhood and mini-parks and are resource-based.

Counties also tend to focus on providing more resource-based parks and large scale specialized facilities. In this area, Lake County is more typical of a county parks department in that nearly all of the County’s parks are resource-based. A key issue facing Lake County today is streamlining its parks system so that resources are used efficiently and provide the most recreation opportunities as possible. This may mean that the County decides to eliminate the smaller more limited parcels it currently has in its parks inventory.

### **Mini Parks**

The mini park (also described as a ‘pocket park’) serves as the local park within neighborhoods or as small urban green spaces that provide a park-like atmosphere. These small areas are either natural or landscaped areas located within built-up areas.

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Urban open spaces may fall into this category. These parks can be small areas nestled within common areas of development or perhaps integrated into intersection or roadway designs on the periphery. Facilities may include walks, benches, gardens or memorials. No planned recreational programming occurs here. Most pocket parks are provided through developer agreements and the land development process with very little responsibility on the part of counties or cities. The ideal community would have these scattered across urban/suburban areas within easy walking distance to many people. The following are typical characteristics of mini parks.

- ❖ <5 acres in size
- ❖ ½ acre per 1000 population
- ❖ ¼ mile service area radius
- ❖ takes advantage of unique opportunity (locality, resource, a view;
- ❖ accessible by low volume streets and trails
- ❖ can be located in high-density areas, including downtown areas.

### **Neighborhood Parks**

Neighborhood parks are significantly larger than pocket parks and could include practice areas or greenspaces/playing courts for drop-in games of all types. Neighborhood parks could be located adjacent to an elementary school site. They are not designed for extensive programmed activities and are generally used by the immediate community they serve. In more urbanized areas, these parks should ideally be accessible on foot or on bicycle. Within suburban areas, they should be accessible by bicycle or a short drive by car. The following are secondary characteristics of neighborhood parks.

- ❖ 5-19 acres
- ❖ NRPA Optimum guidelines 10 acres
- ❖ 2 acres per 1000 population
- ❖ ¼ to ½ mile service area radius
- ❖ located within or adjacent to neighborhoods
- ❖ takes on character of surrounding areas
- ❖ accessible by walking, bike riding or short drive by car
- ❖ casual play with very little programming, if any at all
- ❖ provides a compatible balance of activities and resource-based recreation
- ❖ facilities may include playgrounds, multipurpose courts/fields, tennis courts, landscape areas, benches, recreation buildings, picnic areas, and walkways

### **Community Parks**

Recreational facilities in community parks should be designed for flexibility along with specific uses allowing the recreation provider to respond to changing programming trends. Community parks could be located adjacent to schools (elementary, middle or high school). The primary function of such parks is for providing places where typical recreation programming occurs. Community parks serve broader community areas and provide for a wide range of athletic or team sports opportunities as well as cultural and artistic programs and services. The following are secondary characteristics of community parks.

- ❖ 20-50 acres
- ❖ 5 acres per 1000 population
- ❖ up to a 3-mile service area radius for urban areas
- ❖ up to a 6-mile service area radius for rural areas
- ❖ access by walking, biking, but more often by car
- ❖ usually located near major collector streets or arterial roads
- ❖ serves needs of several neighborhoods
- ❖ more intensely developed than neighborhood parks
- ❖ are primarily activity-based recreation sites, but can be resource-based as well
- ❖ can include such facilities as athletic fields, swimming pools, multi-purpose fields, and recreation centers
- ❖ natural areas should be incorporated to provide biking, fitness, picnicking, and open space activities
- ❖ other community services (i.e., libraries, law enforcement substations, or fire/emergency services) may be located within a community park

### **District Parks**

District parks are usually resource-based and located contiguous to or encompassing natural resources. Activities and facilities may include picnicking, boating, swimming, hiking, camping, and play areas. These parks are usually 'drive to' parks and can be a 30-40 minute drive away, although, these parks should be connected to a community's trail system as well. In some cases, district parks can be multi-purpose large-scale activity-based parks that serve several communities. Such parks would be very appropriate in outlying areas of the County or in areas with a high concentration of unincorporated residents adjacent to cities. The service area for a district park is generally countywide, however given the geography and transportation network of Lake County, district parks should serve several communities. The following are secondary characteristics of district parks.

- ❖ 75+ acres (minimum of 50 acres)
- ❖ 5 acres per 1000 population
- ❖ 30-40 minute driving time

- ❖ access by car, bikeways or trails

### **Regional Parks**

Regional parks are almost always resource-based. Regional parks are usually located in areas of diverse natural resources such as lakes, rivers, flora, fauna or topography. These are usually very large tracts of land and provide camping, equestrian activities, canoeing, boating, fishing, and other resource-based activities. Such parks often serve to protect environmentally sensitive lands with facilities limited to resource-based activities. Care should be taken not to over use the land or allow activities that tax the stability of the resources contained within or adjacent to the park. The service area of a regional park could be multi-county. The following are secondary characteristics of district parks.

- ❖ 250+ acres
- ❖ 20 acres per 1000 population
- ❖ offers same type of activities as district but on a larger scale
- ❖ up to 60 minute driving time
- ❖ access by car, bikeways or trails

### **Special Facilities**

Special facilities are parks that often have a particular function, resource or single activity located within them. The activity or natural/cultural resource opportunity found within the site drives these facilities. Special facilities can include a soccer complex, a large natural park with equestrian or hiking opportunities, or an aquatic facility with competition size swimming pools or interactive water play features. Community centers with multipurpose buildings also fit into this category. Additionally, large-scale cultural or natural facilities can be classified as a special facility. Special facilities can include resource-based facilities such as lakes or rivers, or cultural resources such as museums, history centers, or the fair grounds for example.

The following are secondary characteristics of a typical special facility.

- ❖ >1 acre
- ❖ optimally >20 acres for large scale competition facilities
- ❖ Acres per 1000 population is not applicable
- ❖ county-wide service area
- ❖ access by car, bikeways or trails
- ❖ may be resource-based; located contiguous to or encompassing natural resources or man-made facilities
- ❖ resource oriented facilities may include picnicking, boating, swimming, hiking, camping and play areas;

- ❖ activity-based facilities may include a single purpose or activity, such as an equestrian center, golf course, senior center, or museum;
- ❖ located based on the center of activity or where the population demands it; and
- ❖ size varies depending on facility.

## **Service Areas**

There are three, possibly four, basic service area types present in Lake County today, urban, suburban, emerging, and rural. Urbanized service areas are defined as places and communities with full service recreation departments and facilities. Suburban areas include cities transitioning from a rural character to a more urbanized character and having an established recreation program. Emerging areas are characterized by small towns and places located in more remote parts of the County. Rural areas could either be included in the Emerging category or categorized separately. For the most part, rural areas in Lake County could be considered as emerging based on growth trends and the changing character of Lake County.

Geographically, Lake County can be divided into several distinct service areas. These areas are the SR 50 corridor, the US 27 corridor, the Golden Triangle area, Citrus Ridge/Four Corners area, and unincorporated Lake County in general.

The US 27 Corridor includes Lady Lake, Fruitland Park, and Leesburg in the north. This area is fairly removed from the Orlando Metro area but is rapidly developing due to its small town character and the rapid development of the Villages, a popular retirement community located in nearby Sumter County.

The Four Corners/Citrus Ridge area is uniquely situated in 4 counties midway between the expanding Orlando and Lakeland urban areas. It has the unique characteristic of being part of four counties, four school districts, seven ZIP codes, three area codes, three water management districts, two regional planning councils and multitudes of service providers. This 90 square mile area is rapidly developing with retirees, seasonal residents and permanent residents. Several major highways converge in the area and provide access to Disney, Osceola and Orange County as well as Lakeland, making it readily accessible to jobs and housing.

The SR 50 Corridor includes the small towns located along SR 50 in south Lake County. This area is becoming a popular bedroom community of the Orlando Metro area. Cities include Mascotte, Groveland, Clermont, Montverde, and Minneola. Clermont is the largest city in the area and is home to The National Training Center, a private sports complex affiliated with South Lake Hospital and the Orlando Regional Health Center. The aim of the Center is to become the standard setter among specialized training facilities for cyclists, runners, sprinters, swimmers, rowers, canoeists, and more. The area is very popular among cyclists and folks seeking an active lifestyle and proximity to jobs in the Orlando Metro area. Because of the rapid growth, many cities are grappling with the demands of providing services at a level and scale they are unaccustomed to. Public meetings held in the area for the Master Plan were well attended and garnered the most consistent and largest turnouts.

The Golden Triangle area includes Mount Dora, Eustis, and Tavares. Leesburg can also be included in this area, which is home to the greatest concentration of urbanized areas in the County and the County Seat. The cities are all well established and have a good mix of older historic neighborhoods and new developments. Demographics are changing slightly as more families move to the area to escape the rapidly growing areas in Metro Orlando. All three (or four, if Leesburg is included) cities have established recreation programs and facilities.

The County has also created several Joint Planning Areas (JPA's) that could be used as a foundation for creating parks service areas or partnerships with the local governments involved since these planning areas already have established a partnership structure. Items that should be addressed are location of regional parks, trail opportunities and sharing of responsibilities as they relate to recreation in terms of funding, land acquisition, development, programming, and operations.

## **Trails Network Assessment**

### **Greenways, Blueways and Trails**

A "greenway" is described as a linear open space established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridge-line, or over land along a railroad right of way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route; any natural or landscaped course for pedestrian or bicycle passage; an open space connector linking parks, natural reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and populated areas; or a local strip or linear park designated as a parkway or greenbelt.

A blueway is similar to a hiking trail for canoeists and kayakers. Physical and geo-positioned markers guide trail users through the waterways. An ideal blueway also includes an abundance of scenery and wildlife as well as easy canoe access. Each blueway designation requires the ability to respond to water-borne emergency search and rescue situations.

Trails are defined as linear corridors and any adjacent support parcels on land or water providing public access for recreation or authorized alternative modes of transportation. Trails are a common recreational component of greenways.

The Florida Greenways and Trails System has its roots in the Florida Recreational Trails System, the Florida Canoe Trail System, and the public parks, forests, refuges, wildlife management areas, and water management areas created to protect Florida's natural heritage. On the local level, Lake County's trails initiative will mesh nicely with the State's overall planned greenways and trails system. Several major state greenways and trails intersect and pass through Lake County. From the Van Fleet Trail in the southwest to the West Orange Trail near Clermont and to the Florida Trail in the Ocala National Forest, Lake County is part of nearly 300 miles of existing and planned interconnected greenways and trails.

## **Existing and Planned Trails**

There are numerous trail programs and projects in various stages of development within Lake County. Numerous organizations and local governments are involved in a variety of ways in developing trails in Lake County. Many trail projects are administered by various local governments and agencies. Lake County established a Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee to help with the coordination of trail projects throughout the County. Trail planning and construction is coordinated by the Public Works Engineering Division and the maintenance and operation of trails will be handled by the Parks and Recreation Section. The following is a list of known trails projects in Lake County.

### **Countywide Trail Network**

- 25 miles of existing trails
- Nearly 120 miles of proposed trails
- Existing Trails
  - Emerald Marsh – 3.6 miles from Lake Griffin to Lake Yale
  - Paisley – 14.9-mile loop between CR 445 & CR 42 thru Ocala National Forest
  - Van Fleet State Trail – 13.5 miles from So. County line to West County line
- Partially Existing Trails
  - Lake Minneola/So. Lake Trail – 27.1 miles, West County line to Orange County, phase two under design, phase 3&4 in FDOT work program
- Proposed Trails
  - Tav/Lee – 9.5 miles, West County line to Lake Dora, 0.2 miles under construction
  - Leesburg-Okahumpka – 11.1 miles, West County line to Tav/Lee Trail near SR 44
  - Leesburg-Lady Lake – 10.4 miles, Tav/Lee Trail to North County line
  - Seminole Woods/Springs – 2.5 miles, Sorrento to Seminole line trail at SR 46 to Seminole Springs

- Ocala NF Ravenswood to SR 19 – 8.5 miles, SR 19 near Lake Dorr to SR 19 at CR 445
- Sorrento to Seminole line – 9 miles, CR 437 to East County line
- Tavares and Gulf – 17.9 miles, Montverde Junction Trail to CR 448
- Montverde Junction – 4.4 miles, Lake Minneola Trail to East County line
- Leesburg Eustis – 14.4 miles, Tav/Lee Trail to CR 452
- Howey-in-the-Hills to Okahumpka – 8.2 miles
- Franks Farm – 3.2 miles East of Astatula along CR 448

### Lake Apopka Greenways & Trails Master Plan

The segments below are conceptual in nature and primarily consist of potential alignments for the proposed Lake Apopka Loop Trail, a +/- 57 mile loop around Lake Apopka.

- Segment D – Oakland to Montverde
  - South Lake Trail to West – proposed alignment would connect West Orange trail to Lake Minneola Trail, right of way needed in portion of segment to complete
  - South Lake Trail to North – Alignment proposes using the Seaboard RR right of way, connect South Lake Trail towards Montverde
  - Pine Island Trail – Trail along the length of entire length of Pine Island property; agreement with owner needs to be formalized
  - Montverde Trail – From Pine Island Trail to Montverde, abandoned RR right of way proposed for alignment, additional private property needed for alignment
- Segment E – Downtown Montverde to Lake County Waterfront Preserve
  - This trail segment would connect Montverde with the proposed Lake County Lakefront Preserve
  - Lake Front Trail – may require boardwalks, other wetland considerations
  - Scenic Highway Trail – parallel trail along CR 455 (proposed scenic highway) using former Tavares & Gulf RR right of way, some portions of right of way are in private ownership
- Segment F – Lake County Lake Lakefront Preserve to Lake County Aquatic Park
  - This segment would connect the proposed Lakefront Preserve and Aquatic Park

- The preferred alignment is to be as close to the lakefront as possible
- The second, less desired (but most likely more feasible) alignment is to develop a trail along the Seaboard Air Line RR and parallel to the scenic highway
- Segment G – Lake County Aquatic Park to Bird Sanctuary
  - This trail would connect the proposed Lake County Aquatic Park with the Bird Sanctuary by way of the McDonald Levy
  - Rural trail designed to allow horseback riding
  - An additional/alternative alignment along the north shore of the lake, would run along perimeter of SJRWMD lands
- Segment I – Lake Apopka Loop to Clermont (Segment H is not in Lake County)
  - Connection between Lake Apopka Loop and the Lake Minneola Scenic Trail (21 miles when complete), it will have access to the Gen. James Van Fleet Trail (29 miles)
  - Alignments still need to be determined and right of way acquired

#### City of Leesburg Trails Master Plan

The City of Leesburg adopted a Trails Master Plan in October 2004 outlining their vision for their City's trail network. The following is a summary of the trails included in their trail system.

- Magnolia Trail
  - Rail trail located just south of Main Street
  - ½ mile completed
  - Trailhead located at Mote Morris House & Museum
- Venetian Trail
  - ½ mile north-south connector between the Tav/Lee, Wild/Lee and downtown (Fountain Lake and Magnolia) trails
  - Adjacent to Canal Street
  - Additional connection to Venetian Gardens in the south and LCWA nature preserve to the north
- Fountain Lake Trail
  - Approximately 1 mile long
  - Runs east/west through downtown just north of City Hall
  - Rail trail that will include a trailhead at the historic train depot and exercise stations
- Lake Denham Trail

- Just over 5 miles of paved trail connecting the Magnolia and Gardenia Trails to the City's future Lake Denham Park site on the north side of CR 470
- Several miles of abandoned RR bed already in City ownership
- Proposed connection to Water Authority's Flat Island property
- 5 miles of unpaved trails proposed on City-owned property
- Gardenia Trail
  - Connect Fruitland Park to Carver Heights neighborhood, Carver Middle School and Susan Street recreational complex
  - Can be constructed exclusively on abandoned rail corridor
- Tav/Lee Trail
  - This trail is that portion of the Tav/Lee Trail through Leesburg
  - Working with FDOT to create a separated trail from US 27/441 from Lake Square Mall to the City of Leesburg's downtown trails
- Wild/Lee Trail
  - Connect Leesburg and Wildwood
  - Approximately 2.3 miles in length
  - Alignment is proposed for the CSX railroad
  - Requires interlocal agreements between Leesburg, Wildwood, Lake County and Sumter County
- Connector Trails
  - 13<sup>th</sup> Street connector – provides north-south connection between Fountain Lake and Magnolia Trails
  - Sleepy Hollow Road connector – connects Sleepy Hollow Park to the Tav/Lee Trail
  - Lee School Connector – connection to Fountain Lake Trail
  - City Hall Connector – connection between Fountain Lake and Magnolia Trails at City Hall
  - Lake Square Mall – connection to Tav/Lee Trail
  - Leesburg Regional Medical Center Connector – connection to Magnolia Trail
  - Lake Sumter Community College – connection to Tav/Lee Trail

#### Green Mountain Scenic Byway

- CR 455 and Old Hwy 50, 12 miles
- Extremely popular cycling and motoring route through Montverde and Ferndale

- The vision of the Scenic Byway Corridor Advocacy Group is to be part of an interconnected and interdependent system of Scenic Highways, preserves, parks, trails, education and recreation centers surrounding Lake Apopka
- Could be part of a larger 27.5 mile cycling route proposed by Lake County for on-road bicycling

#### Florida Hospital Waterman

- Wellness Trail
  - The Hospital has plans to develop a trail connecting Lakeshore Blvd to SR 441 through their campus
  - Possible linkage between the downtowns of Tavares and Eustis

## **Blueways**

Lake County has identified four zones with potential to be designated as blueways. The designation of blueways is highly regarded throughout the nation as it alone attracts visiting paddlers to the area. To market the proposed blueways, maps and pamphlets will be designed.

In addition to trail markers, the blueways will feature surrounding amenities. Maps outlining each trail will include other surrounding amenities, such as launch areas, waterfront restaurants, sites of historic significance, hiking trails, annual events near the water trail and parks.

The blueways permit application is expected to take approximately four months to complete. The Florida Wildlife and Fish Conservation Commission, the U.S. Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Coast Guard review the permit.

The permit is essential in the process as it gives Lake County water trails credibility. Essentially the definition of a blueways is a water trail equivalent to a greenway trail that is specifically permitted through Florida Wildlife and Fish Conservation Commission.

Four areas where potential blueways have been identified are the St. Johns River, Golden Triangle area, the Ocklawaha and Palatka river basins. Program officials are proposing at least two to three blueway opportunities in each zone. Each zone will present different opportunities for users.

Each zone will offer different experiences for trail users. A “waterfront lake” blueway will feature shorter trails in populated areas with waterfronts suitable for casual or novice users. A “shoreline lake” trail will offer transitional day trips in mixed density areas offering amenities such as refreshments and restrooms. A “wilderness lake” blueway will generally be located in remote, undeveloped areas and offer paddlers hiking and camping opportunities.

Another proposed blueway is a cooperative effort with the City of Tavares. As Lake County identifies and maps potential blueways, establishing other county-city partnerships will be key.

Blueway Zones

- Waterfronts Lake
  - Short trails in populated areas with developed waterfronts suitable for casual or novice users.
- Shorelines Lake
  - Transitional “day trip” trails in mixed density areas offering amenities such as refreshments and restrooms.
- Wilderness Lake
  - Remote, undeveloped and challenging offering paddle and hike or paddle and remote camping opportunities.

<b>Lake County Blueways</b>	
<b>Location</b>	<b>Length</b>
Lake Denham/ Helena Run	6.47 miles
South Lake Area	22.34 miles
Lake Norris/Blackwater Creek	6.63 miles
Tavares	6.09 miles
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.53</b>

**Environmental Lands**

In 2002 the Lake County Board of County Commissioners (BCC) created an Environmental Land Management and Acquisition Study Committee charged with exploring the feasibility of creating an ongoing program for the acquisition and management of environmental lands in Lake County. The BCC accepted and approved the report of the ELMASC in April of 2003. The report called for the creation of a Public Land Acquisition Advisory Council, which would be charged with the development of rules and guidelines to guide the acquisition of public lands, including environmental and recreational properties, to review the facts concerning possible land acquisitions and to advise the BCC regarding specific acquisitions.

The Public Land Acquisition Advisory Council (PLAAC) was created by Ordinance 2003-48 in May of 2003 for the purpose of recommending to the BCC policies to guide the acquisition and management of public lands, both environmental and recreational, and to advise the BCC in the implementation of the land acquisition tasks prescribed by the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. This Council was asked to report to the BCC by

April 27, 2004, its recommendations concerning specific types of lands for purchase, recreational opportunities appropriate for those lands, and general guidelines for appropriate management of acquired lands.

## Public Lands Inventory

This section is an inventory of public lands acquired for the purpose of conserving environmentally sensitive lands for conservation and resource-based recreation. The following table lists the environmental lands located in Lake County.

<b>Lake County Environmental Lands</b>		
<b>Property</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Acreage</b>
Ocala National Forest*	US Forest Service	85,000
Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern	State	21,217
Wekiva River Protection Area*	State	19,000
Lake Griffin State Recreation Area	State	475
Lake Louisa State Park	State	4,450
Haines Creek Park	Lake County	36
Marsh Park	Lake County	35
PEAR Park	Lake County	<del>238</del> 318
Chris Ford Environmental Park	Lake County	25
Pine Forest Park	Lake County	48
Lake Jem Park	Lake County	11
Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area	SJRWMD	7,089
Lake Norris Conservation Area	SJRWMD	2,352
Lake Apopka Restoration Area	SJRWMD	20,068
<u>Banana Point</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>11.9</u>
<u>Brightwater Mitigation</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>34.9</u>
<u>Bourlay Historic Nature Park</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>83.1</u>
<u>Bugg Spring</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>7.1</u>
<u>Carson Mitigation</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>193.6</u>
Crooked River Preserve	LCWA	63.6
<del>Dead River</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>34.9</del>
Double Run Preserve	LCWA	<del>348.8</del> 566.9
<u>Eagle Ridge Preserve</u>	<u>LCWA</u>	<u>341.5</u>
Fern Prairie Preserve	LCWA	<del>587.4</del> 595.4

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Flat Island Preserve	LCWA	2,303.7 <del>2,361.0</del>
Flowing Waters Preserve	LCWA	205.9 <del>202.8</del>
Hidden Waters Preserve	LCWA	90.3
<del>Lake Griffin</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>270.1</del>
<del>Lake Norris</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>629.7</del>
<del>Lake Tracey</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>444.8</del>
Ocklawaha Picnic Ground	LCWA	31.1 <del>30.3</del>
Palatlkaha <del>Marsh Island</del>	LCWA	28.8 <del>30.6</del>
<del>Sabal Bluff</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>55.7</del>
Sawgrass Island Preserve	LCWA	1,136.7 <del>1,168.1</del>
Scrub Point Preserve	LCWA	88.9 <del>93.1</del>
<del>E.C. Tanner Preserve</del>	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>39 <del>36.8</del></del>
Treasure Island Preserve	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>65.7</del>
Wilkin Property	<del>LCWA</del>	<del>33.6</del>
Wolf Branch Sink Preserve	LCWA	154.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>166,058 <del>166,759.9</del></b>

### Federal Lands

The *Ocala National Forest* was established in 1908. The Forest Service administers 383,573 acres, 85,000 of which are located in northern Lake County. In addition to the forested lands, which include large stands of longleaf and sand pine, the Forest contains some of Florida’s most beautiful and productive springs. An estimated two million people use the Forest each year for outdoor recreation activities at numerous recreation sites located in the forest. Resource-based activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, picnicking, camping, canoeing, birding, and nature study.

### State Lands

*Lake Griffin State Recreation Area*, near Fruitland Park, is a 475-acre site, acquired by the State of Florida in 1946 with funds from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund. Relatively small by state park standards, the park provides opportunities for camping, fishing, picnicking, boating, canoeing, and nature study. In FY 2001/02, the park accommodated 23,579 visitors.

*Lake Louisa State Park*, on the south shore of Lake Louisa in southeast Lake County, was acquired with LATF funds beginning in 1972. The 4,450-acre park has not yet been fully developed, but 37,000 people visited it in FY 2001/02. Recreational uses include equestrian trails, swimming, picnicking, canoeing, and fishing. Camping will be added soon.

*The Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern* is located in southern Lake and northern Polk Counties. It is a critical hydrological resource and the headwaters of four important rivers—the Withlacoochee, the Ocklawaha, the Hillsborough, and the Peace. The last two rivers are the primary tributaries of two of Florida’s most important

estuaries, Tampa Bay and Charlotte Harbor. The Green Swamp is also a major recharge area for the Florida Aquifer. The Green Swamp has been a Florida Forever (Conservation And Recreation Lands, aka CARL) project since 1992, encompassing an area of 147,111 acres. So far, 21,217 acres have been acquired at a cost of \$52,779,344. Significant portions of the Green Swamp Area of Critical State Concern lie outside the acquisition area. Portions of the Green Swamp will eventually become a state park and a wildlife management area. Other parts will be dedicated to hunting, hiking, and nature appreciation.

*The Wekiva River Protection Area* is located in northeast Lake County and in portions of Seminole and Orange Counties. A major CARL project (a state land acquisition program, since replaced by Florida Forever) since 1995, the Wekiva-Ocala Greenway encompasses a project area of 68,904 acres, of which 37,705 have been acquired at a cost of \$99,851,554. These acquisitions include 19,000 acres located in Lake County. The area is host to numerous outdoor recreation activities, including off road biking, birding, hiking, and swimming.

### **St. Johns River Water Management District Lands**

*The St. John's River Water Management District* is a very important player in land acquisition and management in Lake County. The District administers the Save Our Rivers program within its jurisdiction and is sometimes designated to manage holdings acquired via other sources. The Water Management District owns and maintains three properties that are open to the public and provide outdoor recreation opportunities.

*Emeralda Marsh Conservation Area* is a 7,089-acre property on an isthmus between Lakes Griffin and Yale, north of Lisbon. Emeralda Marsh offers a wide variety of sporting and recreational activities, including seasonal waterfowl hunting, fishing, canoeing, hiking, and primitive camping. This site is also a popular birding area.

*Lake Norris Conservation Area* is a 2,352-acre property located on the west shore of Lake Norris, north of CR 44. The Boy Scouts of America own the property to the north of the lake, which they manage as a camp. The Conservation Area includes most of Black Water Swamp.

*Lake Apopka Restoration Area* is a 20,068-acre property on the north shore of Lake Apopka. The property is also a popular birding site. Approximately forty percent of the property lies within Lake County; the remainder is in Orange County to the east. Lake Apopka was targeted for clean-up by the Surface Water Improvement and Management (SWIM) Act of 1987. Most of the lands acquired were formerly in agricultural use.

### **Lake County Lands**

Lake County owns several properties that are classified as Conservation. *The Palatlahaha Environmental and Agricultural Reserve* (PEAR Park) is a ~~264~~ 318-acre site on a former agricultural experimental station for grapes and melons near Okahumpka. PEAR Park may eventually be expanded by 150 acres or more with help from an FCT grant. This project, which has the potential to be Lake County's first district park, is a venue for hiking, picnicking, and a farmers' market. A 25-acre portion of Chris Ford Industrial Park serves as a Gopher Tortoise relocation habitat. Palatlahaha River Park in Clermont contains protected Scrub Jay habitat. Other Conservation lands managed by the Parks and Recreation Section include the 36-Acre Haines Creek Park (which is predominately a wetland) near Leesburg; the 35-acre Marsh Park (which is also predominately a wetland) in Eustis; the 11-acre Lake Jem Park, which contains wetlands; and the 28-acre Pine Forest Park, which contains scrub jay habitat.

### **Lake County Water Authority**

*The Lake County Water Authority* is an elected body independent of the Lake County Board of County Commissioners. ~~The LCWA receives *ad valorem* revenues of approximately \$500,000 annually which may be used for the purchase of lands. (There is a disagreement within the Authority's governing board as to whether land acquisition will continue. This issue has not been resolved yet.)~~ To date, the LCWA has acquired 6,600 acres through purchase or donation. Approximately 71 percent of the LCWA's holdings are wetlands; the remaining 29 percent are uplands. ~~Four tracts are currently open to the public—the Crooked River, Flat Island, Hidden Waters, and Sawgrass Island Preserves. Four other holdings—Scrub Point, Bourlay East and West, the Wolf Branch Sink, and Fern Prairie, are scheduled to open on or before 2005.~~ Six tracts are currently open to the public; the Crooked River, Flat Island, Hidden Waters, and Sawgrass Island Preserve and Sabal Bluff Preserve. LCWA lands provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities including nature study, canoeing, hiking, and birding.

### **Land Acquisition and Protection**

It is recommended by the PLAAC that land acquisition be broken down into four main categories which will cover the many types of land that have been discussed for this program. An overarching objective of land protections following any of these categories is the positive effect on Lake County's water resources. The four categories are:

- ❖ Protection of Water Resources: Lands would be purchased or protected for enhancement of surface water and groundwater quantity as well as quality. Land characteristics of special concern may include those with geologic/hydrologic conditions that would easily enable contamination of vulnerable aquifers that have value as drinking water sources; property that serves as an important groundwater recharge function; property that contains or has direct connections to lakes, creeks, rivers, springs, sinkholes, or wetlands for which conservation of the property will protect or improve surface water quality; and property that serves an important flood management function other than manmade water retention facilities.

- ❖ Protection of Natural Communities and Landscapes: Lands would be purchased or protected that contain a diversity of natural communities; property containing natural communities that are rare; ecological quality in the communities present on the property; property that is functionally connected to other natural communities; property adjacent to properties that are in public ownership or have other environmental protections such as conservation easements; property that is large enough to contribute substantially to conservation efforts; property that contains important, Florida-specific geologic features such as caves or springs; and property that is relatively free from internal fragmentation from roads, power lines, and other features that create barriers and edge effects.
- ❖ Protection of Plant and Animal Species: Lands would be purchased or protected that serve as documented or potential habitat for rare, threatened, or endangered species or species of special concern; property that serves as documented or potential habitat for species with large home ranges; property that contains plants or animals that are endemic or near-endemic to Florida or Lake County; property that serves as a special wildlife migration or aggregation site for activities such as breeding, roosting, colonial nesting, or over-wintering; property that offers high vegetation quality and species diversity; and property that has low incidence of non-native invasive species.
- ❖ Protection of Social/Human Values: Lands would be purchased or protected that are suitable for parks, sportsfields, trails, and recreation lands; property that offers opportunities for compatible user-oriented and/or resource-based outdoor recreation facilities and programs; property suitable for connective trails, greenways, or blueways; land that will protect open space from overdevelopment; property that has historic, archeological, or cultural significance, and property that contributes to urban green space, provides a municipal defining greenbelt, provides scenic vistas, or has other value from an urban and regional planning perspective. Active recreation facilities such as golf courses and associated support facilities should not be developed from these funds.

## Recreational Uses of Acquired Lands

In the development of a recommendation for recreational opportunities appropriate for acquired lands the Council used the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan of Florida. This Plan speaks of outdoor recreation as any leisure time activity conducted outdoors. Within the vast range of such a definition lie an almost unlimited number of possible activities. The two primary categories used throughout Florida are user-oriented outdoor recreation and resource-based outdoor recreation.

User-oriented types of outdoor recreation are those, which can be, provided almost anywhere for the convenience of the user. The user-oriented category is much the broader of the two being recommended and covers such activities as tennis, basketball, soccer, baseball, archery, skeet and trap shooting, and playground activities. It may also include such less strenuous activities as listening to a band concert in the park, watching spectator sports, or visiting a zoo.

Resource-based outdoor recreation differs drastically from user-oriented in that it cannot be provide just anywhere, but rather, it is dependent on some particular element or combination of elements in the natural or cultural environments. It also involves both active and passive types of activities but is generally less formalized and less program oriented. Resource-based activities consist of such things as hunting, fishing, camping,

boating, mountain biking, water skiing, surfing, and nature study—all of which require some natural condition that cannot easily be duplicated by man.

Some outdoor recreation activities, of course, can be considered either user-oriented or resource-based, depending on where the opportunity is made available. Good examples are swimming, picnicking, bicycling, and horseback riding.

The Council reviewed recreational opportunities relative to each of the four categories of land use protection objectives. Some recreational uses and land-types are obviously as compatible as others are incompatible. Because of the variability of recreational uses, the Council would recommend that recreational opportunity for land acquired is prioritized in the following order:

- ❖ Resource-based,
- ❖ Multiple-use, and
- ❖ User-oriented.

Considering that each property will likely have unique characteristics, each property will require a Site Management Plan that will outline the proposed recreational activities as well as the level or intensity of site management. Site Management Plans will encompass the entire property and will be based on site-specific features and criteria.

## **Management of Acquired Lands**

Appropriate management of acquired Public Lands is the final element of the PLAAC recommendation. The Council feels very strong that the referendum funds should be able to purchase land for active recreation facilities and programs but that operating funds should be derived from other sources. The Council recommends that the three functions of parks, trails, and environmental (public) lands fall under the same County Department/Division and managed by the same Director. They also recommend that the Public Lands Section be staffed by professionals trained and experienced in the acquisition, development, and management of multi-use environmental/recreational lands. The specific level of staffing, equipment, supplies, and timing should be determined through the creation of a Lake County Public Lands Management Plan. This Plan should serve to refine the preparation work contained in the recommendations section of this Master Plan, the work of the Environmental Lands Management and Acquisition Study Committee, and the Public Lands Acquisition Advisory Council.

Primary funding for the management of these lands can come from the allowable holdback of non-bonded funds set aside in a trust fund for this specific use. Included in the Plan will be a recommendation for a percentage holdback that will allow for the development of a long-range management budget program. Considering existing public lands, current potential acquisitions, current designated funding sources, and potential

passage of the bond referendum it would be in the County's best interest to consider the acquisition of a Manager/Supervisor for this specific function by the first of the year.

In providing a recommendation for guidelines for appropriate management of acquired lands the Council reviewed several existing maintenance systems. All are established programs used throughout the country. The Council is recommending the National Recreation and Park Association Park Maintenance Standards Mode System. This system establishes six levels of operational maintenance based on issues such as public usage, funding, community standards, site requirements, and others. The modes range from minimum maintenance of low visitation undeveloped lands up to state of the art maintenance for high quality, high usage diverse landscape. It would be normal that certain properties would move up or down the original site mode level established due to the above factors. The mode level would be established originally, and potentially change over time as a result of the specific properties Site Management Plan.