

Chapter 6. RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

Recreation and Open Space Vision: *To be a place where open space for passive and active recreation is an integral part of development and growth.*

6.1 OVERVIEW OF RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

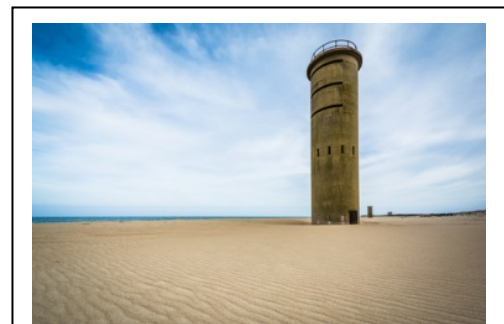
Sussex County residents and visitors have many choices on how to spend their outdoor leisure time. The County is famous for its renowned public beaches. Innumerable docks, marinas, boat launches and landings provide access to the Atlantic Ocean, the Inland Bays and the County's rivers and creeks. State parks, state forests, federal and state wildlife refuges, municipal parks, nature preserves, and multi-use trails and greenways offer a diverse variety of public recreation opportunities. In addition, there are recreational opportunities provided through the school districts, non-profit, and for-profit organizations. This chapter looks at the recreational and open space opportunities and outlines strategies for sustaining and expanding public recreation choices in Sussex County.

6.2 STATE RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

By far, the largest amount of recreation and open space lands in the County is owned and managed by the State through DNREC. With over 40,000 in acreage in state parks, forests, wildlife areas, nature preserves, ponds, and other open spaces, Sussex County residents and visitors have access to a wide variety of landscapes and recreational opportunities.

6.2.1 State Parks

Fishing, camping, boating, hunting, swimming, and hiking are among the primary activities offered at the state parks in Sussex County. There are five state parks in the County. These parks as well as other public federal, state, county, municipal, and privately managed, protected lands that are open to public access are depicted in Figure 6.2-1.



World War II Observation Tower at
Cape Henlopen State Park

- *Cape Henlopen State Park* is a 5,193-acre park in Lewes, where the Atlantic Ocean meets the Delaware Bay. The park features public beaches, a nature trail, a World War II observation tower, family campgrounds, and an 18-hole disc golf course. There is also a quarter-mile fishing pier onto the Delaware Bay. Winter hunting is permitted in some areas.
- *Delaware Seashore State Park* is a 2,825-acre park located between Dewey Beach and Bethany Beach. It has six miles of ocean and bay shoreline for fishing, swimming and

sunbathing. The park features a 250-slip marina and a boat ramp. Seasonal hunting is permitted in some areas of the park.

- *Holts Landing State Park*, originally a family farm, is a 203-acre park located on the southern shore of the Indian River in Millville. Recreational facilities include tree-shaded picnic areas with grills, a playground, two ball fields, a boat-launching ramp for small, motorized boats, sailboats, and windsurfing boards. The park also features the only pier on the Inland Bays built specifically for crabbing.
- *Fenwick Island State Park* is a 344-acre park situated between Bethany Beach to the north and Fenwick Island to the south. Little Assawoman Bay forms the western edge of this park, providing many opportunities for salt water recreation. The park has large areas of ocean and bay shoreline for swimming, surfing, and surf fishing. Seasonal hunting is allowed in some areas of the park. The park also has one the State's few designated surfing areas.
- *Trap Pond State Park* is a 3,653-acre park located four miles east of Laurel off Route 24. The park has over 21 miles of trails and offers hiking, biking, fishing, swimming, and camping activities around the park's 90-acre pond. Picnicking, abundant wildlife, wild flowers and the country's northernmost stand of Bald Cypress trees is also found there. The park also features the Baldcypress Nature Center which offers education and recreation opportunities as well as a as meeting and conference space.

6.2.2 State Forest

Delaware's state forests are managed for a variety of objectives including timber production, habitat enhancement, forestry demonstrations, and forestry research. State forests also provide recreation opportunities such as hiking, horseback riding, and hunting.

Redden State Forest, managed by the Delaware Forest Service under the Department of Agriculture, is located in central Sussex County north of Georgetown. It offers over 44 miles of trails, some primitive camping sites, lodging at Redden Lodge, a nature center, and a catch and release fishing pond. It is also popular for hiking, horseback riding, bicycling, and bird watching. At over 12,400 acres (distributed over 18 tracts), it is the largest of Delaware's three state forests.

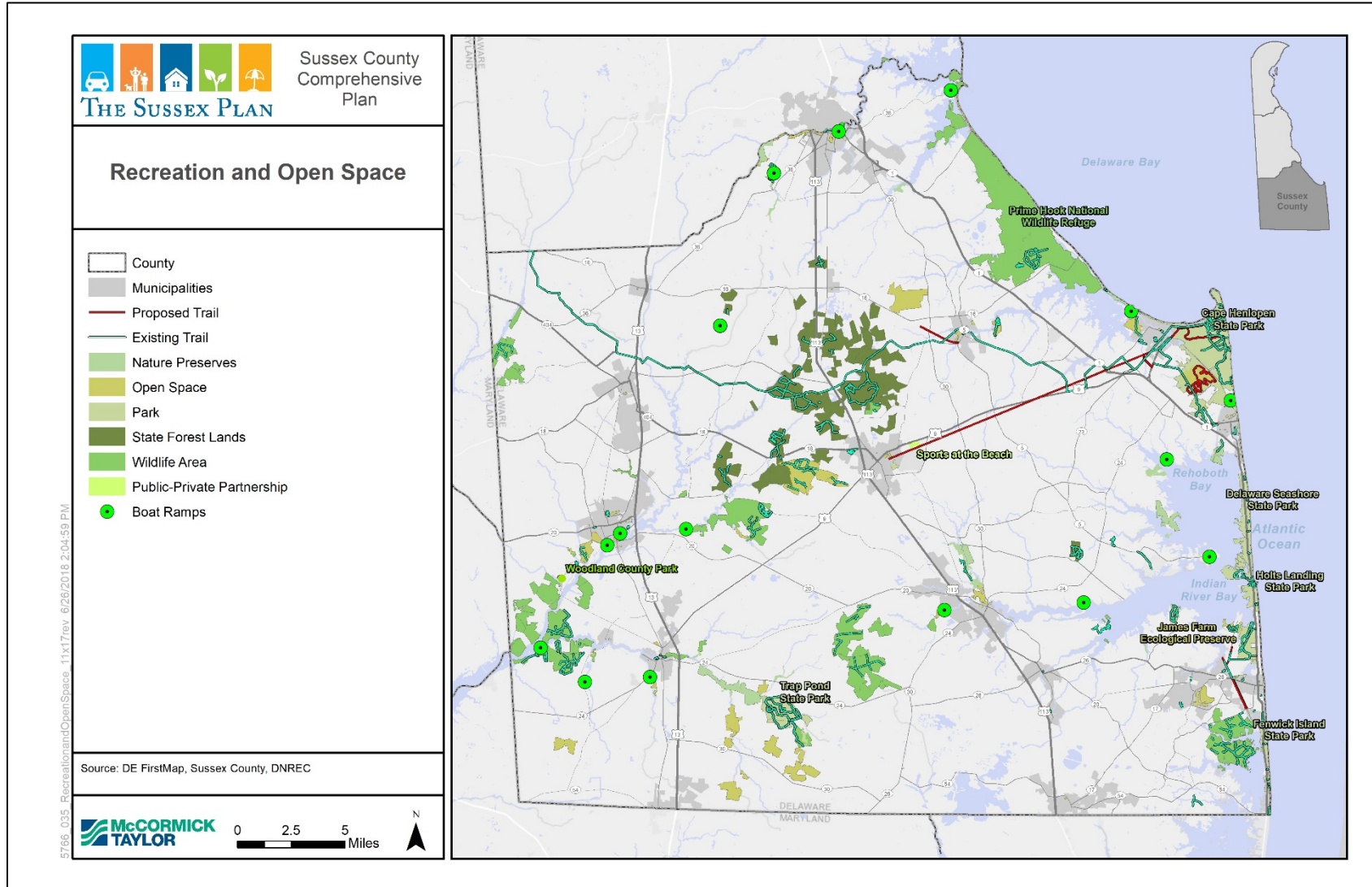
6.2.3 State Wildlife Areas, Nature Preserves, and Other Open Space Areas

DNREC also manages over 24,000 acres of wildlife areas, nature preserves, natural areas, and other open space areas and ponds in Sussex County. At many of these areas, DNREC provides boat ramps/launches, fishing access/piers, and nature trails (see Figure 6.2-1). For example, DNREC operates a public boat ramp, fishing pier and basin at Massey's Landing, at the far eastern tip of Long Neck. Another popular boating location in the County is Phillips Landing at the Nanticoke Wildlife Area, which features a public boat ramp to access Broad Creek and the

Nanticoke. Hunting is permitted at some of the wildlife refuges, and specific regulations are available on DNREC's Division of Fish and Wildlife website.

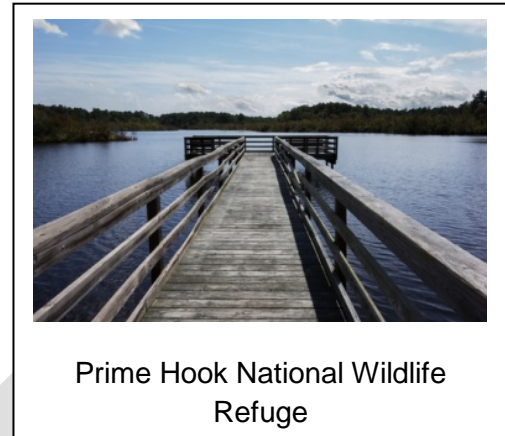
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Figure 6.2-1 Recreation and Open Space



6.3 FEDERAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge is a 10,144-acre refuge in Sussex County managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Refuge. It is an important site for conservation as it is a stopover site for migratory birds and provides breeding habitat. In addition, it is open to the public for recreation activities such as wildlife observation and environmental education.



6.4 COUNTY AND LOCAL RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE OPPORTUNITIES

In Sussex County, the incorporated municipalities and private non-profit entities are the prime parties responsible for the construction and maintenance of local public parks and trails. They manage almost 2,500 acres of public recreation and open space lands in Sussex County. In addition, the school districts and private organizations also construct and maintain recreation facilities. Private organizations range from several Little League Organizations operating across the County to the Western Sussex Boys and Girls Club in Seaford that offers a wide variety of programming for the local community, a full size heated pool, and an athletic gym.

The municipalities and assorted private groups provide most recreation programming in Sussex. Sussex County donates to various recreation-related community groups to assist with these efforts. For example, in FY 2017, the County awarded over \$11,000 in grants to various community groups such as little leagues and rotary clubs for recreation-related activities, and provided \$20,000 for the Little League World Series. The County also provides \$15,000 annually to Fenwick Island to provide lifeguards on four blocks of the beach within the County.

Sussex County previously did not own any parks; however, in 2016 it converted 20 acres between Seaford and Woodland Ferry into a county park called Woodland Park. The land was acquired in 2010 to receive dredged soil from the Nanticoke River. The County committed almost \$163,000 to convert the property into a park containing gravel trails, a parking lot, and an information kiosk.

The County also owns the 150-acre James Farm Ecological Preserve. The property was donated to the County in the early 2000s. It is however managed by Center for Inland Bays, which receives annual funding support from the County for its operations at the site. The James Farm Ecological Preserve is currently undergoing a major renovation utilizing a \$37,500 County grant to upgrade the preserve entrance, provide school bus access, and add an informational kiosk and other learning areas.

The County is also working with DNREC to convert a farm the County leases from the state to spray wastewater from the Wolfe Neck Regional Wastewater Facility. The project, once complete,

will involve conversion of 376 acres of farmland to woodlands. In addition, the project will involve construction of public, passive recreation trails and connect to the Junction & Breakwater Trail.

Sussex County also helps finance open space preservation through general revenue funds in cooperation with the Sussex County Land Trust. Typically, the preserved tracts are administered by a conservation group if purchased outright. The tracts remain in private hands if they were preserved by easement. However, the last year that acreage was acquired was in FY 2010, and there have not been any County contributions to the Land Trust since FY 2013.

The County also collects funds from developers through bonus density open space contributions. In recent years, the County has had three contributions totaling over \$1.4 million, and is in the process of determining how best to utilize these funds for open space preservation.

Although Sussex County does not currently have a Recreation and Open Space Department or staff specifically dedicated to advancing recreation and open space opportunities in the County, County staff from various departments provide technical support to non-profits and municipalities engaging in recreation and open space planning. For example, the County's Historic Preservation Planner assisted with efforts to designate and promote the two byways in the County (see Chapter 11). Additionally, the County Planning Department provides technical support to the Delaware Botanic Gardens at Pepper Creek, a nonprofit organization that is in the process of creating a public botanic garden at a 37-acre site along Piney Neck Road. The parcel contains a mix of farmland, woodland, and tidal waterfront on Pepper Creek. The target date for completion of the project is 2019. According to the master plan for the site, the garden will contain a visitor center, parking areas, trails, boardwalk, and other site features.

6.5 GREENWAYS AND TRAILS

DNREC's Division of Parks and Recreation defines a greenway as follows:

"A greenway is a natural area of unbroken vegetation where recreation and conservation are the primary values. They link parks, forests, wildlife refuges and historical landmarks. Greenways can follow rivers, streams, wetlands, barrier beaches, hilltops and abandoned rail lines, and cross fields and forests. Some greenways are publicly owned; others are private; some are for recreation; others protect a scenic view or wildlife habitat. Greenways can include biking and hiking trails, and paths of grass and trees threading their way through cities and countryside like ribbons of green."

The Delaware Council on Greenways & Trails is appointed by the General Assembly to preserve, protect and link the State's green open spaces. The Council encourages local communities, counties, and State agencies to work together toward greenway goals. The Council also works closely with other public and private groups to foster new greenways and trails.

Trails are present at all five of the state parks, Prime Hook Wildlife Refuge, Redden State Forest, and many of the state wildlife areas and nature preserves in Sussex County. In addition, there are several existing and proposed greenways and trails in the County. These are not contained

entirely within recreation and open space, however they serve to connect areas by utilizing roads, right-of-way, or waterways. Some are clearly defined recreation corridors already in use. Others are planned routes or initial concepts that require further study, design and implementation.

- *The Junction and Breakwater Trail* connects southwestern side of Cape Henlopen State Park with Hebron Road in West Rehoboth with 6 miles of crushed stone. It takes its name from the former Penn Central Rail Line that ran between Lewes and Rehoboth in the mid 1800's. As of 2018, this is the longest rail-trail in Sussex County and Delaware. Northern trail access points in Lewes include from Kings Highway opposite the Cape Henlopen High School and from Gills Neck Road, west of the entrance to the Hawks Eye Community. At the Gills Neck Road trailhead, there is access to the Georgetown-Lewes Trail. West Rehoboth access is from Hebron Road, just off Route 1. No parking is available at these access points. Trail access from the historic Wolfe House in Rehoboth Beach includes a 56-car parking lot, an information center, and a bike rack. The trail includes a reconstructed 80-foot railroad bridge across Holland Glade, a dedicated bike path through the Hawkseye and Showfield developments, and a bathroom, water station and bike repair station adjacent to the Lewes Library. The Junction and Breakwater Trail, now complete, represents an excellent partnership among state, county and municipal governments, as well as developers.
- *Georgetown-Lewes Rail/Trail* opened in 2016 with one-mile of off-road, paved trail from Gills Neck Road to Savannah Road. It will eventually span 17 miles to link Cape Henlopen State Park in Lewes with South Railroad Avenue in Georgetown. Junction and Breakwater Trail is accessible from the Georgetown-Lewes trail along Gills Neck Road. Phase I follows the Delaware Coast Line Railroad. Originally, it was planned for the entire trail to be built alongside the railroad, however a section of tracks has been decommissioned and, starting in 2018, several miles of track will be removed to make way for Phase II of the trail. Phase II will run from Savannah Road to Minos Conway Road in Lewes. The trail, once complete, will be the longest multi-use trail in Delaware.
- *Assawoman Canal Trail* is an approximately 2-mile trail that connects Ocean View, Bethany, and South Bethany Beaches. The first phase of it opened in 2015 and the trail is built on the old federal right of way that was created when the canal was originally built. DNREC is working on plans to extend the trail further.
- *American Discovery Trail* is a continuous 6,356-mile trail that extends across the United States coast to coast – from Cape Henlopen State Park to Point Reyes, California. The trail travels 45 miles through Sussex County, primarily on road shoulders and sidewalks.
- *Coastal Heritage Greenway* celebrates the diverse history of Delaware's waterfront from colonial settlement to 20th century industrialization. The greenway is a corridor that spans the coast for 90 miles from Fox Point State Park north of Wilmington to the state line at Fenwick Island. It is designed as a 27-stop auto tour with various side trips for hiking,

biking, sightseeing, and other activities. From Dover to Dewey Beach, the greenway lies east of Route 1. From Dewey Beach to Fenwick Island, Route 1 is the center of the greenway. Popular Sussex County stops include Mispillion Lighthouse, Prime Hook National Wildlife Refuge, Beach Plum Island Nature Preserve, Lewes, and other points south.

- *Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Trail* is a water trail overseen by the National Park Service. It starts in the Chesapeake Bay and branches through the Nanticoke River.
- *Historic Lewes Byway* was created through the Byways program, a tourism-based project run through the Delaware Department of Transportation intended to link historic sites through routes to encourage motorists to explore new areas. The Lewes Byway is over 12 miles long and takes travelers through the city of Lewes and Cape Henlopen State Park.
- *Nanticoke Heritage Byway* is the second byway in Sussex County created through DelDOT's Byways Program. It is approximately 35 miles in length and extends along several roads in western Sussex County through Seaford, Bethel, Laurel, and Trap Pond State Park.
- *Statewide, Regional, and Connector Bicycle Routes* – DelDOT maintains electronic versions of Delaware bicycle maps on its website at http://deldot.gov/Programs/bike/biking_in_delaware. Routes include north-south connections among Delaware counties; routes that provide direct connections between major municipalities and activity centers; and routes that provide connections from local activity and recreation centers to the larger bicycle networks.

Several Sussex County municipalities and non-profit organizations are also operating, constructing or planning their own greenways. Notable examples include the following:

- *Broadkill River Canoe Trail* – a canoe trail between Milton and the Nature Conservancy's McCabe Preserve made possible by a joint venture between the Town of Milton and the Nature Conservancy
- *Edward H. McCabe Preserve and Greenway Trail* – contains three miles of hiking trails on a property in Milton owned and maintained by the Nature Conservancy
- *Abbott's Mill Nature Center* – contains three miles of trails at Abbott's Mill in Milford
- *Mispillion River Walk* – a one-mile walk in the City of Milford
- *Governors Walk* – located along the Broadkill River in the downtown district of Milton

- *Broad Creek Riverwalk* – located in the Town of Laurel
- *Seaford River Walk* – located on the Nanticoke River in Seaford
- City of Lewes greenway network

6.6 DELAWARE STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

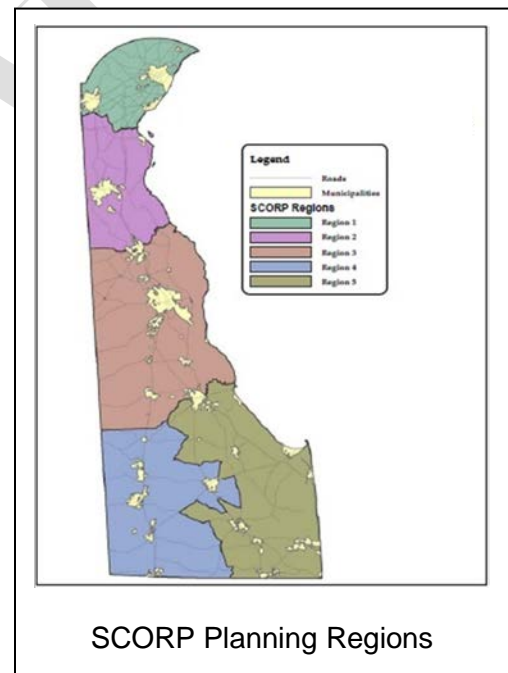
DNREC’s Division of Parks and Recreation updates the Delaware State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) every five years. By law, this plan maintains Delaware’s eligibility to receive grants through the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. It also assists in setting spending priorities for a similar State recreation funding source called the Delaware Conservation Trust Fund.

The SCORP has a statewide focus, and includes extensive inventory data and utilizes a public survey to help measure outdoor recreation preferences. Consequently, recreation resources, needs and goals are identified on a regional basis rather than at the municipal level.

Sussex County includes two of the SCORP’s five planning areas: Region 4 in western Sussex and Region 5 in eastern Sussex. According to the 2013 SCORP, Region 4 had 27,304 acres of publicly accessible outdoor recreation and conservation lands. Region 5 had 55,106 acres of publicly accessible outdoor recreation and conservation lands.

Among other findings, the 2013 SCORP reported from the public survey and research results that the top recreation activities engaged in by respondents’ households included:

- Region 4 respondents: Walking/jogging (73 percent), Swimming (pool) (64 percent), Gardening (62 percent), Swimming (beach) (58 percent), and Picnicking (58 percent).
- Region 5 respondents: Walking/jogging (78 percent), Gardening (68 percent), Swimming (beach) (67 percent), Swimming (pool) (59 percent).



Delaware’s SCORP contains many recommendations on what elected officials and other public policy makers can do to: a) direct more investment toward public recreation; and b) promote

healthier and more active lifestyles. The State is actively working with key partners to implement the goals of the SCORP through new and existing partnerships, growing collaborations and ad-hoc implementation teams.

6.7 RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE STRATEGIES

Below is a list of goals, objectives, and strategies for Sussex County's Recreation and Open Space Element:

Goal 6.1: Enhance the quality of life of County residents and visitors by sustaining and encouraging recreation and open space opportunities in the County.

Objective 6.1.1 Continue the County's role in parks, recreation, and open space planning in Sussex County.

Strategy 6.1.1.1 Evaluate if the establishment of a County Parks and Recreation Department or designation of existing staff to lead County parks, recreation, and open space planning efforts is desirable.

Strategy 6.1.1.2 Evaluate opportunities to provide financial support in the establishment of public parks, recreation centers, or trails.

Strategy 6.1.1.3 Evaluate the possibilities of public-private partnerships for recreation opportunities.

Objective 6.1.2 Continue support of and increase coordination with the State and other entities to identify opportunities to increase public recreation lands and facilities in Sussex County.

Strategy 6.1.2.1 Keep providing selected and coordinated grant assistance to selected non-profit recreation providers that help meet high priority public recreation needs.

Strategy 6.1.2.2 Periodically re-evaluate the possibility of becoming an active financial partner in establishing a public park, building an indoor recreation complex, or constructing a related recreation endeavor, such as a greenway trail. Council should evaluate these opportunities on a case-by case basis as they may arise in the future.

Strategy 6.1.2.3 Continue working with DNREC and other state agencies to ensure the State continues to add to the supply of active and passive recreation land and facilities in Sussex County.

Strategy 6.1.2.4 Support and partner with municipalities and school districts to create and enhance parks and recreation facilities.

Objective 6.1.3 Increase the network of greenways and trails in the County.

Strategy 6.1.3.1 Continue to support the State, local municipalities, and private non-profit organizations on their greenway and trail goals.

Objective 6.1.4 Maintain and improve public access to parks and recreation facilities, including coastal areas and inland waterways.

Strategy 6.1.4.1 Require that recreation lands open to the public that are in new developments be protected by easements.

Goal 6.2: Expand and improve the open space system of the County.

Objective 6.2.1 Encourage the preservation of open space parcels.

Strategy 6.2.1.1 Evaluate the County density bonus program to determine ways to better encourage the use of the program.

Strategy 6.2.1.2 Consider the expansion of the density bonus program into other districts in order to obtain funds for open space and natural resource preservation.

Strategy 6.2.1.3 Consider developing a program for installation of signage at permanently preserved open space tracts acknowledging that the County has preserved the land.

Strategy 6.2.1.4 Consider County-level financing mechanisms for open space preservation and management to leverage state and federal dollars.

Objective 6.2.2 Encourage development that protects open space in new developments.

Strategy 6.2.2.1 Strengthen County development regulations to ensure that open space dedicated by developers contains contiguous open space.

Objective 6.2.3 Continue work with resource protection programs, federal and state agencies, and other organizations to target and preserve open space.

Strategy 6.2.3.1 Continue to facilitate the preservation of more undeveloped land. This should include working with the Sussex County Land Trust and other organization's efforts to preserve and expand open space access across the County.

Strategy 6.2.3.2 Continue and expand partnerships with organizations to manage open space and recreation properties such as the James Farm.

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