

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **ST. LUCIE COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE**

### **RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

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St. Lucie County  
Board of County Commissioners

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**ST. LUCIE COUNTY  
RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT**

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## **RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE ELEMENT ST. LUCIE COUNTY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Recreation and Open Space Element presents a review of the current recreation facilities and opportunities in St. Lucie County, and includes Level of Service Standards and Goals, Objectives and Policies designed to assist the County in meeting the future recreation needs of its residents and visitors.

Recreation facilities are important components of a community's physical development pattern. They contribute to the attractiveness of the area, as well as the health and well-being of its citizens. St. Lucie County's location along the Atlantic Ocean provides abundant water-oriented recreational opportunities. The County has historically placed the highest emphasis of its recreation facility development on those water-oriented opportunities, with non-water oriented development being primarily limited to ballfield development. However, it is important that the County provide and maintain a range of recreational facilities and open space areas for all persons having diverse recreational interests and needs, and not focus all of its efforts on the construction of ballfields and water related activities.

### **OVERVIEW OF CURRENT CONDITIONS**

The St. Lucie County Parks and Recreation Department operates facilities and conducts programs throughout the County. These activities are conducted at County-owned recreational facilities which are under the management of the Parks and Recreation Department. Several park facilities within the City of Ft. Pierce are under the maintenance responsibility of the City; however, program administration has, through an interlocal agreement, been delegated to the County. The City of Port St. Lucie operates and maintains their own park facilities and programs.

In addition to the local facilities, the State of Florida owns/operates/administers approximately 8,000 acres of recreational and open space lands within the County.

Additional recreation opportunities are available at various school sites within the County. In one instance, joint facilities have been developed. In other cases, the public may use school facilities during non-school hours without any formal agreements in place.

#### **A. CURRENT CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

Recreational facilities in St. Lucie County have in the past been loosely grouped into the following categories (see pp 9-13,14, and 15 for current classifications):

- o Beach Access
- o Community Park
- o Neighborhood Park
- o Beach Park
- o Environmental Land
- o Regional Park
- o Special Facility

These categories have generally been patterned to follow the class groupings put forward by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA).

#### **B. INVENTORY OF EXISTING FACILITIES**

Table 9-1 summarizes existing recreation and open space facilities owned, operated, and maintained by St. Lucie County, as well as those facilities operated by the State of Florida within the County. The location of the facilities listed in Table 9-1 is indicated on Map 9-1. This inventory was compiled by the St. Lucie County Department of Parks and Recreation and the St. Lucie County Department of Community Development.

Table 9-1 further classifies these recreational facilities as either resource or activity based or both.

- Resource based, or passive, facilities are those recreation facilities which are based on natural, historic, or archaeological resources. These facilities usually offer relatively passive forms of recreation which are based on the particular resource. Camping, fishing, hiking, canoeing, birdwatching, and museum or historic tours are examples.
- Activity based recreation facilities usually have specific facilities for active recreation, such as athletic fields, ball diamonds, tennis courts, or swimming access points.

As Table 9-1 indicates, St. Lucie County contains 7,499 acres of activity based recreation and open space lands. Regional resource based parks, which include the beach accesses, beach parks, and Environmentally Significant Lands purchased since the establishment of the ESL program, total 8,500 acres. The Environmentally Significant Lands program has been responsible for the acquisition of 5,807 acres of land in St. Lucie County. Ownership of and responsibility for the management of the recreational lands in St. Lucie County falls to a mixture of state and local agencies.

These County facilities are supplemented by city facilities as shown in Table 9-2 and Map 9-2 for the City of Ft. Pierce and Table 9-3 for the City of Port St. Lucie.

The State of Florida owns five major parks in St. Lucie County. These are:

- o Jack Island State Park (958.0 acres)
- o Ft. Pierce Inlet State Recreation Area (338.0 acres)
- o Avalon Tract (571.0 acres)
- o South Savannas (4855.0 acres)
- o John Brooks Park (406.8 acres)

### **C. OPEN SPACES**

Several of the recreation facilities mentioned above have been classified as open space areas. Open space areas are undeveloped lands suitable for passive recreation or conservation uses.

In 1994, the citizens of St. Lucie County approved a 20 million dollar bond issue to purchase environmentally significant lands for preservation and passive recreational uses. The County has been able to leverage that amount into 40 to 60 million dollars of purchasing power, primarily through funding partnerships with state agencies funded through the P2000 program. Significant areas have been purchased along the North Fork of the St. Lucie River, on Hutchinson Island, in the Savannas, and in the western portion of the County. These areas are listed in Table 9-1.

Table 9-1

Figure 9-1 - Recreational Facilities

Table 9-2 - Ft. Pierce Parks

Table 9-3 - Port St. Lucie Parks

The Indian River Lagoon, from Vero Beach to Jensen Beach, (exclusive of the Port of Ft. Pierce), and the North Fork of the St. Lucie River are identified as Outstanding Florida Waters. These bodies of water represent a vitally unique resource/activity based recreation resource to the community. For the purposes of this element these areas are considered as open space. Further elaboration on them in regard to their environmental and economic influences on the community can be found in the Coastal Management and Conservation Elements of this Comprehensive Plan.

**D. SCHOOL FACILITIES**

The playgrounds and sports activity areas found at the community's schools provide excellent recreation opportunities on a neighborhood service level. The St. Lucie County School Board operates 32 schools; five high schools, five middle schools, and 19 elementary schools. In addition, there are three exceptional education centers existing or under construction. Public access to the high school grounds and their potential for use as recreational facilities is presently restricted due to security fencing but could be made available for the public. With the exception of a few sites within the City of Ft. Pierce, all other County School Facilities are not fenced, leaving their open areas available for public use during non-school hours.

St. Lucie County and the School Board have constructed lighted tennis and basketball facilities as well as a lighted softball/little league field at the White City Elementary School Site. Through the construction of the new White City school, the field was shortened so that use as a softball field is not recommended. The field is adequate for little league practice. These facilities are utilized by the students during the school hours and are then available to the general public for league softball and other activities. Primary maintenance of the recreation facilities is the responsibility of the County. Development of school parks such as this represents a viable, land efficient method for meeting the community's neighborhood park needs.

The public high school and Magnet School of the Arts auditoriums are also leaseable for public events.

**E. OTHER PRIMARY RECREATION FACILITIES**

Golf courses are an important component in the recreational activities of both resident and visitor to the South Florida region. There is presently one public golf course (Fairwinds) in the County. There are also 12 private golf courses which, depending upon the season, permit general public play. Table 9-4 identifies the existing golf courses and whether public play is permitted.

The St. Lucie Sports Complex, located in Port St. Lucie, and the auditorium at Indian River Community College in Ft. Pierce, are under the special facility category. These facilities are available to the public, through leasing agreements, for concerts, special promotion events, productions, ball camps and other sporting events.

In addition to public facilities, St. Lucie County has a number of large developments that have private recreational facilities such as golf courses, tennis courts, pools, and trails. Most residential development projects that use the Planned Unit Development zoning furnish some type of recreational facilities for their residents. These facilities satisfy some proportion of the total recreation demand for the residents of these communities.

<b>TABLE 9-4 St. Lucie County Golf Courses</b>				
<b>Course Name</b>	<b># Holes</b>	<b>Public</b>	<b>Private</b>	<b>Semi-Private (1)</b>

TABLE 9-4 St. Lucie County Golf Courses				
Course Name	# Holes	Public	Private	Semi-Private (1)
Spanish Lakes 1	9		X (2)	
Spanish Lakes Golf Village	9		X (2)	
Spanish Lakes County Club Village	18		X (2)	
Savannah Club PUD	18			X (2)
Pantherwood PUD	18			X (2)
Club Med	36			X (2)
Harbour Ridge Yacht & C. Club	36		X (2)	
The Floridian	18		X (2)	
PGA Village/ The Legacy	18		X (2)	
PGA Village/ The Reserve	54	X (2)		
PGA/ St. Lucie West CC	18	X (2)		
Island Dunes CC	9	X (2)		
Indian Pines CC	18	X (2)		
Indian Hills CC	18	X		
Fairwinds	18	X		
<p>NOTES: 1: Seasonal play denotes short term memberships (summer or winter) and the ability to play the course on a daily greens fee only basis. Membership not always required but nonmembers must defer to members for scheduling of available time.</p> <p>2: Course developed in conjunction with private residential community. Course operation not always associated with residential developments, however access to clubhouse facility often through security controlled community entrance.</p>				
Source: St. Lucie County Leisure Services and Community Development Departments				

**NEEDS ANALYSIS**

**A. SERVICE POPULATION PROJECTIONS:**

St. Lucie County has not conducted any surveys on the present demand for recreation and open space facilities. In order to assess the present need for these facilities, ratios have been used which are based, in part, upon national standards and, in part, upon the desired standards of the St. Lucie County Recreation Advisory Board.

Population estimates and projections for St. Lucie County from the year 1990 to 2010 are shown in Table 9-5. For the purposes of this Plan, the future recreation demand relative to neighborhood and community parks are based upon the unincorporated County population only. The future recreation demand relative to regional facilities and open space is based upon the County population as a whole. However, it is recognized that interlocal agreements and coordination between the County and the Cities of Ft. Pierce and Port St. Lucie will enhance the recreational opportunities for residents throughout the County.

<b>TABLE 9-5 1990 And Projected Populations For Unincorporated St. Lucie County, Ft. Pierce, Port St. Lucie, and St. Lucie Village</b>			
<b>Jurisdiction</b>	<b>Estimated 1997 Population</b>	<b>Projected 2005 / Population</b>	<b>Projected 2010/ Population</b>
Unincorporated County	63,058	70,951 72,764*	76,246 77,400*
Ft. Pierce	37,484	37,210	37,097
Port St. Lucie	77,985	111,571	130,452
St. Lucie Village	606	602	594
Total	179,133	220,334	244,389

Source: 1997 Florida Estimates of Population - University of Florida Bureau of Business and Economic Research and Shimborg Center for Affordable Housing; \*1990 U.S. Census (consistent with Housing Element)

As Table 9-5 indicates, the total County-wide permanent population is expected to increase from 179,133 in 1997 to 244,389 by the year 2010, an increase of 36.4%. The unincorporated areas of the County are expected to account for 31.5% of the total population. However, in the short term planning period from 1997 to 2005, the unincorporated County population is expected to climb from 63,058 to 70,951, an increase of 12.5%.

It should be noted that, for the purpose of this Plan, only the permanent population estimates are being utilized. Seasonal population influences on the County's recreational services have historically occurred when the local demand/use for those facilities is at its lowest. Stated simply, the local population does not use the beach a lot in the winter and the seasonal visitor does not use the softball fields in the summer. So long as this trend continues, and St. Lucie County foresees no changes in the seasonal visitation patterns for this area, the permanent population estimates will be those utilized for determining facility needs.

**B. RECOMMENDED CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM**

In November 1987, the St. Lucie County Recreation Advisory Board developed an updated classification system for recreational space. Except for the elimination of the mini or pocket park, the County is not proposing changes to the existing system. Mini- parks are difficult and expensive to maintain. Existing mini- parks have been included in the neighborhood or beach access category as appropriate.

The classification system provides the basis for determining future level of service standards.

The system, as approved by the Recreation Advisory Board, has three major categories which have, in turn, been further broken down into sub-categories as follows:

1. Local Recreation Spaces: Recreational facilities that serve a limited population size and that are located close to residential areas.
  - a. Neighborhood Recreation Area: Area for intense and diverse recreational activities that may include, but are not limited to, field games, court games, sport fields, playground apparatus areas, picnic areas, landscaping and gardens, or senior citizen areas, and have a service area radius of .5 mile and a desirable size of 5 acres.
  - b. Community Recreation Area: An area that provides a diverse range of recreational and leisure activities or contains areas of environmental or aesthetic quality, and that has a service area radius of . to 3 miles and a desirable size of 30 to 50 acres. Facilities and activities may include, but are not limited to, athletic fields, swimming pools, gymnasiums, performing and design art centers, crafts buildings, and any facilities associated with neighborhood or mini-park recreation areas.
2. Regional Recreation Spaces: Areas of aesthetic or natural quality that are designed to serve a regional or metropolitan population.
  - a. Regional/Metropolitan Recreation Area: Area providing facilities designed for outdoor recreation and leisure activities that may include, but are not limited to, boating, fishing, or camping; bicycle, hiking, or horse trail systems; botanical gardens, nature centers, or zoo or husbandry centers; museums; performing and design art centers; and activities included under community neighborhood, or mini-park recreation areas. Area typically has a service area of 60 miles and a desirable size of 100 acres.
  - b. Outdoor Reserve Recreation Area: Area primarily designed with consideration for outdoor recreation and nature preservation, including, but not limited to, areas for viewing and studying land, aquatic, or avian wildlife, conservation activities, swimming, hiking, camping, trail facilities, nature centers, or botanical gardens. Area typically has a service area radius of 60 miles and a desirable size of 500 acres, with the majority of the area preserved and managed in its natural environment.
3. Unique Recreation Spaces, Either Local or Regional: Spaces developed for unique recreational activities or for a single recreational activity.
  - a. Special Recreation Areas/Facilities: Areas designed for a single purpose or specific recreational and leisure activities that may include, but are not limited to, activities such as zoos, conservatories, golf courses, gun or archery ranges, outdoor theaters, historic sites, marinas, botanical gardens, athletic complexes, or water sports. The service area and desirable facility size may vary.
  - b. Conservation/Open Space Area: Area preserved and managed to protect its natural environment or aesthetic quality, or to protect

health, safety, and welfare by providing open spaces between roadways or development, with recreation and leisure activity serving as a secondary function.

- c. Linear Recreation Area: Area developed to provide travel routes for one or more types of recreational or human-operated vehicles, such as horseback riding, bicycling, hiking, jogging, or motorcross riding.
- d. Waterfront Recreation Area: Area that is designed primarily for aquatic-related recreation and leisure activities and that abuts rivers, lakes, lagoons, or saltwater bodies.
  - 1. Beach Access Area: Area developed to provide access to waterfront areas. Service area and desirable park size can vary.
  - 2. Activity Area: Waterfront area providing recreation and leisure activities or facilities that may include, but are not limited to, swimming, water sports, boating, sunbathing, picnicking, playground apparatus, dressing rooms and showers, boat ramps and docks, boardwalks and pavilions, or concession stands.

**C. LEVEL OF SERVICE STANDARDS**

In order to establish an appropriate level of service standard for each class of facility, national standards and standards for other communities in southeast Florida were reviewed.

Integral to the level of service is the base year population on which to set the service standard. For the purpose of this Plan, the year 1997 has been established as the base year. The estimated 1997 population, as provided by the St. Lucie County Department of Community Development for the identified recreational facilities is as follows:

APRIL 1, 1997 POPULATION	
FACILITY TYPE	SERVICE POPULATION
Community Park	63,058
Regional Park	179,133

The extent to which level of service standards are met for the current population was determined, as was the demand for additional facilities to serve the projected populations for the initial planning period ending in the year 2005, and the second planning period ending in the year 2015. The results of this analysis serve as the basis for the determination of future recreation demand. The methods of funding the short term needs to the year 2005, are addressed in the Capital Improvements Element.

Table 9-6 indicates the desired level of service standards for recreational facilities in St. Lucie County. As a guide in planning recreation and open space standards, it is

imperative that a basic determination be made as to the level of service considered to be appropriate, desirable, and affordable by a given community. Such level of service standards represent a significant policy statement within the Comprehensive Plan and provide an orderly basis for a land acquisition and facility development program, which responds to increases in a community's population.

<b>TABLE 9-6 Desired Outdoor Recreation Standards for St. Lucie County</b>				
<b>Facility</b>	<b>Standard Per 1000 Population</b>	<b>Site Size</b>	<b>Service Area Radius</b>	<b>Persons Served</b>
Neighborhood Parks	.5 acres (service area)	5.0 acres	0.5 miles	up to 5,000
Community Park	5.0 acres (service area)	30-50 acres	10.0 miles	30,000-50,000
Regional Parks	5.0 acres (service area)	100 acres	60 miles	no standards
Open Space Reserves	no standard	500 acres	60 miles	no standards
Special Purpose				
Special Recreation Areas/Facilities				no standards
Conservation/Open Space Areas				no standards
Linear Recreation Areas				no standards
Beach Access				no standards
Beach Park				no standards
Waterfront Activity Area				no standards
Source: St. Lucie County Department of Community Development				

**GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

The following Comprehensive Plan Goals, Objectives, and Policies are modifications of the portions of the Element as adopted in 1990.

**RECREATION SUB-ELEMENT  
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

**GOAL 9.1 PROVIDE ADEQUATE RECREATION FACILITIES AND OPEN SPACE AREAS THAT OFFER A BROAD RANGE OF ACTIVITIES TO ALL CITIZENS AND VISITORS OF ST. LUCIE COUNTY.**

**Objective 9.1.1 Active and passive recreation facilities and open space areas for the residents and visitors of St. Lucie County shall be provided in a manner consistent with the level of service standards set forth in this element. Consistency with these standards shall be maintained in subsequent years.**

Policy 9.1.1.1 Level of Service for Recreation and Open Space shall be as follows:

- Community parks: 5 acres/1000 residents in the unincorporated area.
- Regional parks: 5 acres/1000 residents county wide.

Policy 9.1.1.2 Accept and achieve the level of service standards as set forth in this and the Capital Improvements Elements, through an equitable and systematic land acquisition and development program.

Policy 9.1.1.3 The County will continue to correct and improve upon existing deficiencies through additional land acquisition and development, and through expansion or renovation of existing parks and recreational facilities through projects specified in the Capital Improvement Element.

Policy 9.1.1.4 All areas having the Conservation Public Land Use designation will be used solely for preservation and/or passive recreation. No residential or commercial development will be permitted other than development typically related to park service and security functions.

**Objective 9.1.2 Through the use of public funds, gifts, contributions, mandatory fees and/or deductions, cooperative agreements, or other means, St. Lucie County will coordinate public and private resources to meet the recreation and open space needs of its residents and visitors.**

Policy 9.1.2.1 The County shall pursue development and enhancement of its recreational programs in the following programs:

- a. Continue to administer the countywide parks impact fee in order to partially fund new park development.
- b. Supplement facility needs through interlocal agreements, operational practices, user fees and public/private cooperative efforts.

## RECREATION SUB-ELEMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

- Policy 9.1.2.2 The County shall use monies collected from the parks impact fee to acquire additional open space and natural preservation areas and to develop necessary facilities.
- Policy 9.1.2.3 The County shall continue to work with other units of local government to provide for the reciprocal use of recreation, school and other facilities.
- Policy 9.1.2.4 The County shall allow, to the extent legally possible, and whenever practical, other governmental agencies, such as the St. Lucie County School Board, to use the St. Lucie County Sports Complex.
- Policy 9.1.2.5 The County shall maintain a detailed Recreation and Open Space Inventory that indicates the general location of existing and proposed sites and facilities as well as functional classification, nature of improvements, usage, size, priority, and other appropriate considerations.
- Objective 9.1.3 St. Lucie County shall provide vehicular and pedestrian access to all public recreation facilities, including barrier-free design features at entrance points to facilities such as buildings used for group assembly, spectator seating areas, and beaches and shores.**
- Policy 9.1.3.1 Acquire and develop easements or rights-of-way as required to provide adequate access for public recreation facilities. Construct access ways which are compatible with the character and needs of the facility, as well as being harmonious with surrounding development patterns.
- Policy 9.1.3.2 Continue to provide public access to Atlantic Ocean beaches, and continue to give careful consideration to providing related parking areas and dune cross-over facilities without disturbance to the dune environment, natural habitats, and designated areas of particular concern.
- Objective 9.1.4 By January 2002, update the Countywide Facilities Master Plan.**
- Policy 9.1.4.1 Assess the County's recreational needs based on this Level of Service Standards as defined in this plan.
- Policy 9.1.4.2 Continue to seek funding for acquisition and development of recreational infrastructure.

## RECREATION SUB-ELEMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES

Policy 9.1.4.3 Provide recreational infrastructure as required.

**Objective 9.1.5** **Develop and implement strategies to encourage eco-tourism in St. Lucie County.**

9.1.5

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Policy 9.1.5.1 Identify appropriate sites to develop as eco-tourism destinations.

Policy 9.1.5.2 Provide required infrastructure to attract visitors to and protect eco-tourism destinations.

Policy 9.1.5.3 In conjunction with the County's Tourist Development Office, publicize the improved eco-tourism sites and St. Lucie County as an eco-tourism destination.

**Objective 9.1.6** **Develop and implement strategies to adequately manage Environmentally Sensitive Lands in St. Lucie County.**

9.1.6

Policy 9.1.6.1 Encourage the State of Florida to provide future funding for management of Environmentally Sensitive Lands.

Policy 9.1.6.2 Seek funding from outside sources for improvement and management of Environmentally Sensitive Lands.

Policy 9.1.6.3 Budget for personnel and equipment for management of Environmentally Sensitive Lands to ensure that these lands are preserved, enhanced, and developed for uses that will maintain wildlife habitat, open space, aesthetic value, and passive recreation.

**Objective** **Provide for an integrated system of Greenways and Trails in St. Lucie County.**

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**RECREATION SUB-ELEMENT  
GOALS, OBJECTIVES AND POLICIES**

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**9.1.7**

Policy 9.1.7.1 By July 1, 2002, finalize the Greenways and Trails Masterplan for St. Lucie County.

Policy 9.1.7.2 Seek funding from outside sources for development and management of Greenways and Trails.