



# PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

January 2016

**System**  
noun *sys·tem* \ˈsɪs-təm\  
a regularly interacting or interdependent  
group of items forming a unified whole







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# 1. INTRODUCTION



Eugene, Oregon is uniquely situated within a bounty of natural beauty and recreational opportunities. The Willamette River runs through the center of our fair city. We are surrounded by forested buttes that offer plentiful trails and scenic vistas overlooking large swaths of natural areas, developed parks and the buzz of urban life.

From Delta Ponds to the West Eugene Wetlands, habitat is protected and wildlife thrives in the urban area. We are a physically active and spirited community of students, professionals and hard-working people. We have something distinctly special here and we know it. It's why we chose this as our place to live, work and play.

We've heard from over 7,000 voices as part of the outreach phase of the PARKS and REcreate system planning process. We don't always agree here in Eugene, but on one topic agreement is overwhelming: 90 percent of residents surveyed told us they consider parks and recreation important to their quality of life. Given this priority, a thoughtful and visionary plan for the future of these critical assets is in order. As we embark on this endeavor, it is necessary to know where we are now in order to determine where we want to go—we will explore both in depth throughout this needs assessment report. First, let's reflect on where we've been.





*Top of Spencer Butte, 1900*

## Building on a Legacy

“Eugene boys and girls will be climbing Spencer Butte 50 and 100 years from today, inspired by looking over a city built to the very foot of the Butte.”

—Francis M. Wilkins, 1937

Eugene has a rich history of parks and recreation. Since our earliest days, Eugeneans have consistently acted in both small and heroic ways to make possible the parks and recreation system we now enjoy. It all began in 1906 with a land donation from the Hendricks family and continued with the bond-funded purchase of Skinner Butte in 1914. This spirit was never better epitomized than in 1937’s “buy a piece of the Butte” campaign. At the time, proposed logging threatened 240 acres of land beyond the outskirts of town, on the most prominent butte in a series of ridges. Despite the severely depressed economy, more than 1,000 Eugeneans pitched in \$.05–\$5 per family and together with a few larger donations, they saved Spencer Butte for future generations. Today the park system has grown to over 4,300 acres.

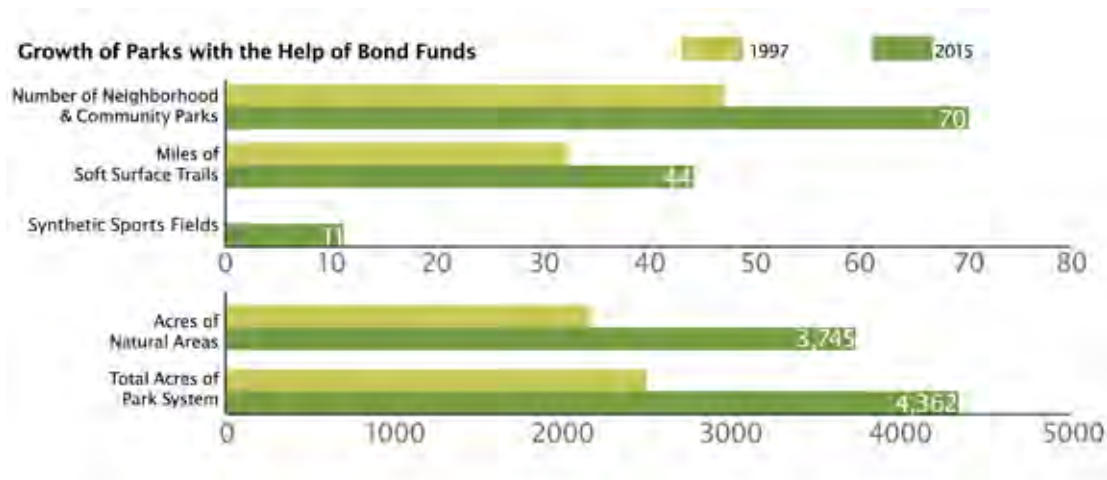
From a sporadic patchwork in the beginning to the vibrant connected system of today, the Ridgeline and Riverfront Parks are shining examples of what can take shape through careful planning and a grand shared vision. In the 1960s parkland along the Willamette River was still scarce and so were City funds. Six acres of riverfront land became available, but at a very steep price. Seven community leaders each put \$5,000 from their own pockets on the table and the negotiations began. The property owner lowered the price and the prized land was secured for future generations—becoming what is now Skinner Butte Park and the site of Campbell Senior Center. Building on that pioneering spirit, the first steps of a four-decade-long journey took place when construction of the Riverbank Path System began in the 1970s. This well-loved paved path now loops 12 miles and connects the community along both sides of the Willamette River.



The roots of recreation programming first took hold in 1927, when the voters of Eugene approved a Public Recreation and Playground Fund. This levy established a Playground Commission to administer funds and create summer youth programming. But it was the 1960s and '70s that marked the heyday of community center and pool development in Eugene. Once again, in 1966, the residents of Eugene showed their support for parks and recreation and passed a bond measure for \$1.75 million. As a result, three new community centers and two pools sprang up in quick succession.

Other recreation facilities were born of more humble beginnings. In 1972, an old house along the river was transformed into a new home for the River House Outdoor Program. Petersen Barn started out as an old dairy barn. In 1976, Bethel residents saw past the cow stalls and envisioned the thriving neighborhood hub it has now become. Today our recreation centers are places people visit to learn new skills, connect with other people and to simply have fun.

In our more recent history, Eugene voters have passed two bond measures, one in 1998 and one in 2006 totaling \$52.8 million in investments in Eugene's parks, sports fields and pools.



Washburn Park, 1920s

We have inherited an amazing system and it is our generation's responsibility to chart a course for the future—to create a bold vision that reflects our values and love of parks and recreation. Ours is a responsibility to keep a close eye on our collective pocket-book while never losing sight of the grand vision, being responsive to today's challenges and rising to meet tomorrow's needs. It's our turn to create a legacy. Let's begin.

# The Importance of Parks and Recreation



## Health and wellness

Exercising in parks and participating in recreation programs can improve your health – preventing obesity, improving cognitive function and enhancing social connectedness.



## Personal growth

Recreation programming creates opportunities for people to come together, develop and practice new skills, make friends, and have a greater sense of belonging.



## Economic prosperity

Eugene's parks, natural areas and urban forest provide \$42.2 million in economic benefits annually in the form of water quality improvement, flood protection, air quality improvement, increased property values and enhanced outdoor recreation. Parks and Recreation greatly enhances the quality of life in Eugene—making it a desirable place to live for existing residents and attracting new ones.



## Building community

Parks, community centers and pools provide opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to come together and connect socially through festivals, events, classes, programs, and volunteer projects.



## Environmental health

More than 3,700 acres of natural areas and over 100,000 trees along our streets and in developed parks clean our air and water and can lower summer local temperatures by up to nine degrees Fahrenheit. Outdoor and environmental education participants, from preschoolers to older adults, are taught the responsibility and value of becoming stewards of our natural environment.



## Livability, community identity and sense of place

The Willamette River, Skinner and Spencer Buttes, the West Eugene Wetlands, our neighborhood parks and our tree lined streets — all provide the physical underpinning to Eugene's unique identity.



## System

noun *sis-təm* \ˈsɪs-təm\  
a regularly interacting or  
interdependent group of items  
forming a unified whole



## Parks and Recreation System at a Glance

In this report, we refer to the diverse collection of park and recreation facilities and amenities as a system because it is much more than an unrelated collection of things—it is an interconnected whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

### The Eugene Parks and Recreation system is comprised of:

- ◆ 3,745 acres of natural areas
- ◆ 48 neighborhood park sites
- ◆ 19 community and metropolitan parks
- ◆ Six community centers
- ◆ Three pools
- ◆ Another eight buildings that are leased to partner organizations or available for rental or programming
- ◆ 100,000 trees along our streets and in developed parks
- ◆ 87 miles of paved paths and unpaved trails
- ◆ 6,000 programs and events every year
- ◆ Approximately 150 agencies and service providers who partner with us to deliver better services
- ◆ 131 staff who steward the system (many more in the summer months)
- ◆ Hundreds of volunteers who contribute thousands of hours of hard work

### And most importantly:

- ◆ 9.3 million park visits and 2.7 million recreation facility visits by adults on an annual basis.

That's why we call it a system. All of these elements work together to create places and experiences that make Eugene a better place to live.



Throughout this document and in subsequent ones, we will refer to six broad neighborhood planning districts. These areas will help us look at facilities and services and how they are distributed in various parts of our community.

- ◆ River Road/ Santa Clara
- ◆ Willakenzie
- ◆ City Central
- ◆ Southeast Eugene
- ◆ Southwest Eugene
- ◆ Bethel-Danebo

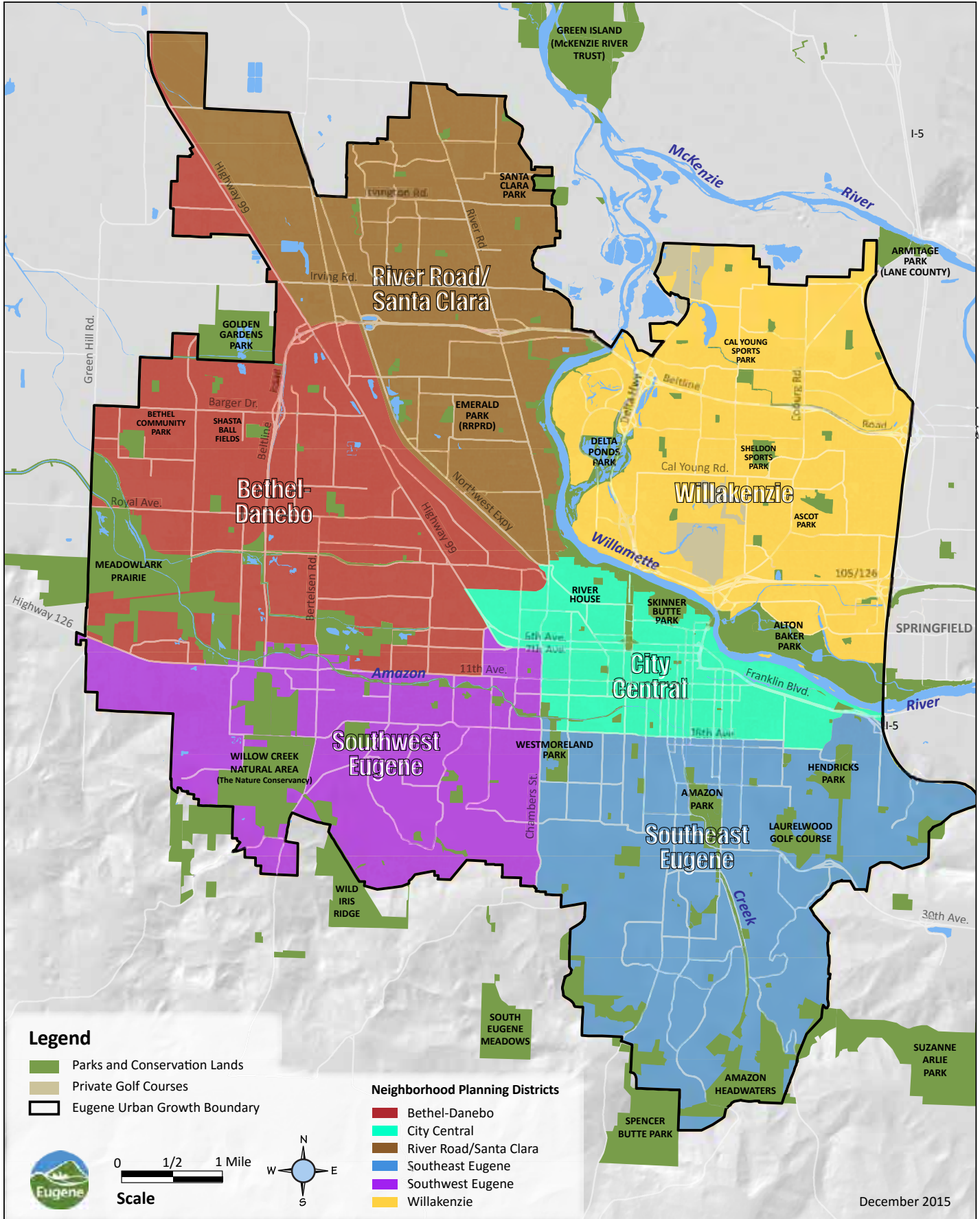
And we're not in this parks and recreation business alone. Eugene's system sits within a larger context of recreation providers and conservation land owners. You will see references to additional public and non-profit agencies (other than the City) that also provide local recreation and conservation opportunities. These include:

- ◆ Lane County Parks
- ◆ River Road Parks and Recreation District
- ◆ Willamalane Parks and Recreation District
- ◆ 4J School District
- ◆ Bethel School District
- ◆ The University of Oregon
- ◆ The Nature Conservancy
- ◆ McKenzie River Trust
- ◆ U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- ◆ Boys & Girls Club of Emerald Valley
- ◆ Kidsports
- ◆ Eugene Family YMCA



# Neighborhood Planning Districts

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



December 2015







# 2. THE PARKS AND RECREATE PROCESS



## What's it all about?

“PARKS and RECreate: Picture. Plan. Play.” is a community conversation to help us identify priorities for the next 10-plus years of Parks and Recreation in Eugene.



With this collective vision in hand, we will create proposals for the future of the parks and recreation system, and again engage the community in conversation and input on those proposals.

This needs assessment synthesizes 12 months of work spent collecting ideas and opinions from the community and assessing the strengths, challenges and opportunities of the existing parks and recreation system. Some of the findings were as expected, and some were surprising. Together they lay a solid foundation from which recommendations for the future can be built.

# Community Outreach

In the “Collect” phase, we set out to do the most comprehensive community engagement and assessment of Eugene’s Parks and Recreation system to date. We combined traditional public outreach tools with new innovative approaches to reach out to more individuals than ever before. We succeeded: 7,000 voices were heard.



## 1. Pop-up Events



30 mobile meetings/parties popped up where people were already gathered. Community events, parks and parking lots played host to these fun and spontaneous outreach opportunities. Feedback was captured in various forms including one-on-one conversations, recorded stories about parks and recreation experiences, drawings, and Instagram photos. *2,600 individuals participated.*





## 2. Latino Community Outreach

This specialized outreach involved a partnership with the office of Human Rights and Neighborhood Involvement, University of Oregon students, UO Professor Gerardo Sandoval, and public engagement specialist James Rojas. Based on previous information suggesting that local Latinos encounter barriers to their use of parks and recreation facilities, this effort was focused on gaining an understanding of what is needed to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment in parks and recreation facilities. This outreach was accomplished through informal conversations, creative play exercises, and going to places where people were already gathered. *350 Eugene and Springfield residents participated.*

## 3. Online System Survey

This online survey covered general topics such as overall system usage, service satisfaction, concerns, and priorities for the future. The survey was promoted through the pop-up events, stakeholder and interested party email lists, traditional and social media. Residents of affordable housing developments were offered additional incentives for participation and a Spanish-language version was available. *2,700 surveys were completed.*

## 4. Statistically Valid System Survey

Administered by phone to randomly identified Eugene residents, this survey was almost identical to the questions asked in the online system survey. It provides a statistically valid data set that is helpful in comparing to those who self-selected to take the online version, and provides an accurate representation of views in the community as a whole on a percentage basis. *400 Eugene residents were surveyed.*



## 5. Recreation Facility Survey

With a focus on how the condition of the facility affects customer experience and satisfaction at individual recreation facilities, this survey was available on paper at community centers and pools and online. A Spanish-language version was also available. *600 surveys were completed.*

## 6. Stakeholder Listening Sessions

Informal, open-ended meetings with individuals of all ages who partner or regularly interact with Parks and Recreation Services were held. Some were one-on-one, others were in groups. Participants described what issues are in need of consideration and imagined their best possible outcomes for the future of Parks and Recreation in Eugene. *130 individuals participated.*

## 7. Staff Listening Sessions

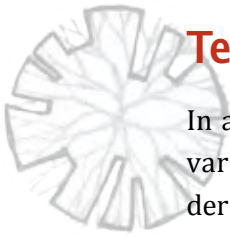
Informal, open-ended meetings were also held with staff who work in the City's Parks and Open Space Division and Recreation Division. From parks operations staff to recreation programmers, these individuals have insights and expertise to offer. *105 City employees participated.*

## 8. Website, Facebook, Twitter, E-newsletter

Online tools were utilized to make available information about the project and opportunities for involvement on a 24/7, wherever-you-are basis. An online "Project Idea Form" allowed individuals to submit ideas for consideration and a Spanish-language page provides basic project information.







## Technical Analysis

In addition to extensive and innovative community engagement, a variety of technical analyses were conducted to help us better understand the system of today and opportunities for the future.

### A. Equity Mapping

The Trust for Public Land is a national non-profit that advocates for access to parks. They have developed a system of mapping that not only identifies areas that need additional services, but also prioritizes those areas based on three factors (population density, income, and age of residents). These “equity maps” were made for community centers and pools and are an important tool for understanding current geographical access to recreation facilities across the community. Equity maps for parks are underway and are anticipated to be complete in early spring of 2016.



## B. Benchmarking

The Trust for Public Land also helped to evaluate Eugene’s parks and recreation system against other comparable communities. Communities for this comparison were chosen based on size, median income, location and cultural similarities. They include: Springfield OR, Salem OR, Spokane WA, Boise ID, and Fort Collins CO.

### How We Compare: Benchmarking

City	Eugene, OR	Boise, ID	Fort Collins, CO	Salem, OR	Spokane, WA	Springfield, OR	Comparison
Population (2013)	159,190	214,237	152,061	160,614	210,721	60,177	
Parkland per 1,000 Residents (acres)	26	26	9	17	19	34	Eugene is tied for having the 2nd highest amount of parkland per 1,000 residents
Number of Recreation Facilities (Community Centers) per 20,000 Residents	0.75	0.37	0.66	0.25	0	1.66	Eugene has the 2nd highest number of Recreation Facilities per 20,000 residents
Combined Square Footage of all Recreation Facilities	51,350	15,000	245,000	10,000	N/A	230,000	
Average Age of Recreation Facilities (years)	35	40+	20	5	N/A	25	Eugene has the 2nd oldest Recreation Facilities
Number of Pools per 100,000 Residents	1.88	3.27	2.63	N/A	2.85	3.32	Eugene has the fewest number of pools per 100,000 residents
Average Age of Pools (years)	37	39	26	N/A	5	32	Eugene has the 2nd oldest pools
Number of Ball Diamonds per 10,000 Residents	1.82	2.15	2.5	0.62	4.6	1.16	
Number of Multi-Purpose Fields per 10,000 Residents	2.2	2.24	3.22	0.75	2.14	0.66	
Number of Playgrounds per 10,000 Residents	3.27	3.69	2.89	3.05	2.89	4.82	
Community Garden Plots per 10,000 Residents	21.74	1.45	3.42	12.45	0.14	13.29	Eugene has the highest number of community garden plots per 10,000 residents
Miles of Paved Paths per 10,000 Residents	2.89	1.17	2.37	0.75	1.19	1	Eugene has the most miles of paved paths per 10,000 residents
Miles of Unpaved Trails per 10,000 Residents	2.58	7	N/A	0.68	0.24	3.82	



## C. Trends Research

A compilation of sources was used to identify trends related to local demographics, health and wellness, safety, climate change, facilities, programming and park and recreation facilities. This research also identified innovations from other communities that may be relevant or informative to Eugene's needs and challenges.

## D. Recreation Facility Assessment

The physical condition of Eugene's primary community centers and pools was assessed by Eugene's Facility Management Division. A qualitative assessment of how well each facility functions in its purpose of recreation programming and services was also developed based on recreation user surveys and staff input.



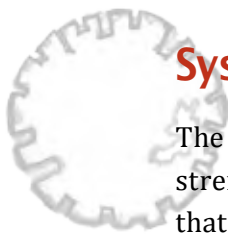
# 3. WHAT WE'VE LEARNED: THE PARKS AND RECREATION SYSTEM TODAY



The collective findings of the Needs Assessment are described in the following pages. This chapter focuses on findings that apply across the system.

More specific findings for individual facilities, amenities and programs are discussed in the following chapter. System-wide findings are described in terms of strengths, challenges and opportunities, and include information from existing facility inventories, staff assessments, community outreach and the various technical analyses described in the previous chapter (as cited).





## System Strengths

The strengths of Eugene’s parks and recreation system are many. Most striking are the strengths that are intrinsic to this unique landscape and community. These are strengths that cannot be bought or created, but are deeply rooted in people and place.

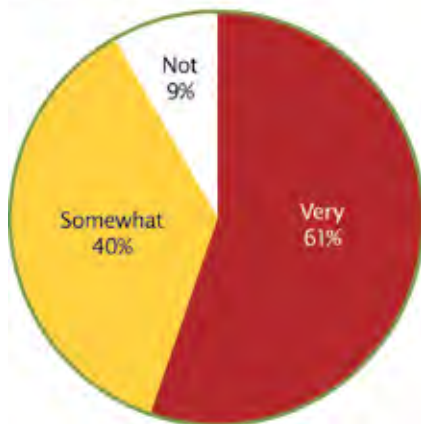
Park Visitor Usage



Recreation Facility Usage



Importance to Quality of Life



### 1. Parks and Recreation Services are highly valued by Eugeneans

Eugene’s Park and Recreation system is beloved across our community and is considered an essential component to the community’s quality of life. Whether they are hiking the Ridgeline Trail, swimming at Amazon Pool, bicycling along the Willamette River or playing at one of Eugene’s many playgrounds with their kids, Eugeneans are active and enthusiastic participants in the outdoors. Recreation programs provide opportunities for activities critical to the health and wellness of thousands every year in both classroom and outdoor settings.

- ◆ 50 percent of Eugeneans visit a developed or natural area park once a week, while 73 percent visit at least once a month. [1] This translates to a staggering 9.3 million park visits a year by Eugene resident adults. These figures do not even include park visits by children or those of visitors who come to Eugene each year from outside our area. However, these figures probably include a small percentage of visits to sites managed by other regional park agencies.
- ◆ Nearly 20 percent of Eugene’s population visits a community center or a pool weekly and 33 percent visit at least monthly. Our phone survey data documents 2.7 million Eugene resident adult visits to pools or community centers a year. [1] Recreation program participation is high with approximately 650,000 registrations for classes, camps or programs every year.
- ◆ The contribution that the city’s parks and recreation system makes towards people’s quality of life is significant, with nine out of ten Eugeneans reporting that the system is “very” or “somewhat” important to their quality of life. [1]. This community value is now being translated into important messaging from private local and growing businesses looking to attract new talent to Eugene with a strong message that our community is a “great place to live, work and play.” [2].

## 2. The natural beauty of Oregon is our backdrop

The natural beauty of our area plays a significant role in the community's appreciation for Eugene's park and recreation system. The park system boasts over 4,300 acres of natural and developed park areas within the context of the broad Willamette River basin and its adjacent buttes and ridgelines. Nestled between and around two primary buttes, Skinner and Spencer, the City's parks system provides the community access to and conservation of viewpoints, riverbanks, wetlands, forests and everything in between.

Of the park system's 4,300 acres, more than 3,700 acres are natural area parks. This relatively large proportion of natural area parks is reflective of the community's values of ecological conservation, appreciation of beauty and its vision for a large connected trail system, as well as the lower cost of acquiring and maintaining these lands. Natural areas received the highest ranking when those surveyed were asked to prioritize a list of 18 facility types, and nearly 50 percent of survey respondents selected "enjoy beauty and nature in parks" when asked what they value most about the City's parks and recreation system. [1]







### 3. Eugene's park system is large, diverse and connected

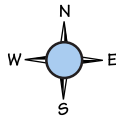
Eugene's developed park system includes 46 completed neighborhood parks and 19 community and metropolitan park sites. Although neighborhoods remain that are not adequately served by parks, tremendous progress has been made in the last 15 years to acquire land to address these gaps. In recent years, the City has acquired 12 future neighborhood park sites throughout the community. In benchmarking Eugene's park system against those of six other cities, Eugene shared the second highest ranking (with Boise, Idaho) in total number of acres of park land per thousand residents at 26 acres per thousand. Springfield's Willamalane Park and Recreation District topped the list at 34 acres per thousand residents. [3] In addition to the park sites mentioned above, Eugene's park system includes 40 natural area park sites, 10 linear parks, six special facilities, and nine waterway corridors.

When looking at a map of Eugene's parks, what becomes apparent are the three broad landscape features that create connections of land, water and habitat through the community:

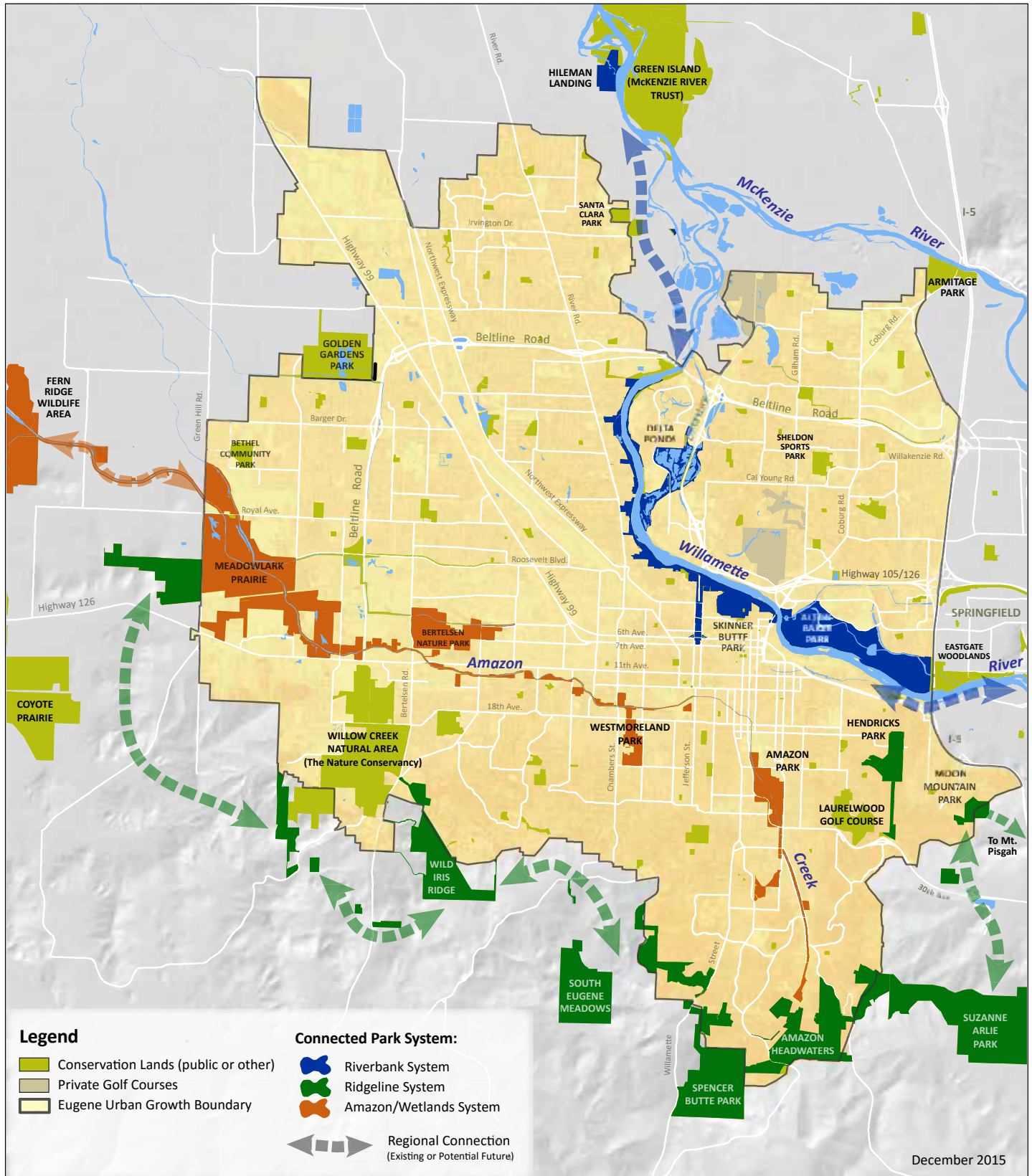
- ◆ Eugene's south Ridgeline system hosts 12 miles of trails between seven trailheads to connect buttes and hillsides along the forested ridges that form Eugene's south hills.
- ◆ The Willamette River, its forested margins and the associated riverfront park and path system combine to provide a central off-street transportation and habitat corridor through the center and north parts of the community.
- ◆ Amazon Creek flows from Spencer Butte north through downtown, then west through the West Eugene Wetlands and out to Fern Ridge Reservoir and the Long Tom River. Soft surface running trails, bike paths and habitat corridors surround the edges of this historic channel through the City and beyond.







# Highlighting Connected Park Systems Eugene Parks and Recreation System



#### 4. Parks provide environmental benefits and cost savings

Eugene’s urban forest is home to approximately 100,000 trees in developed parks and along streets that are cared for by the City of Eugene’s Parks and Open Space Division. Eugene has been recognized and designated for the last 36 years by The Arbor Day Foundation as a “Tree City USA”. This is a tradition the City is committed to upholding with continued planting of trees in cooperation with local neighbors and non-profit groups such as Friends of Trees. The tree canopy not only provides shade and beauty, it also helps clean the air and lower local urban temperatures in summer.

Park lands also provide critical environmental functions related to clean water and flood control. Open green spaces catch rain water in vegetated areas, slowing its flow and filtering it prior to its entrance into the Willamette River and Amazon Creek. In a recent study, these environmental benefits of Eugene parks were valued at almost \$8 million annually. [4]

Places like Delta Ponds, the West Eugene Wetlands and the Ridgeline provide connected habitat corridors that are critical to long-term sustainability of plant and animal populations and are important for the safe movement of wildlife. Plants, animals and people alike benefit from the presence of nature in the city. In addition, connected corridors provide abundant recreational opportunities.





“The best experience I had all summer.”  
—Pop-up Participant

## 5. Recreation programs benefit thousands

Eugene’s Recreation Division is the predominant provider of recreational programs in the City and extends services throughout the community by partnering with more than 150 other agencies and service providers. Eugene’s recreation programming provides services and experiences that support the social fabric as well as the health and wellness of the community. Recreation patrons rave about how much they appreciate the exceptional teaching staff and variety of classes, programs and experiences offered through community centers around the City. [5]

Recreation programming spans all ages and abilities, with five areas of service: Adaptive, Aquatics, Athletics, Seniors, and Youth and Family. Many program participants are repeat customers who visit pools, sign up for a camp, a trip, or childcare, or participate in programs geared toward specific user groups. Municipal Recreation programs expand access to personal enrichment and community development activities to people that otherwise would not be able to afford them.

Eugene Recreation Division improves the quality of life for thousands of Eugeneans every year. Here are just a few examples:

- ◆ With an emphasis on access to services, scholarships lower program participation costs for 3,200 Eugeneans annually (with many more on the wait list).
- ◆ Club Bethel offers the largest after school program for middle schoolers in Eugene, with 148 children enrolled in the 2015–2016 school year. The program is free for participants and funded entirely by Eugene Recreation.

“My favorite thing about Eugene Recreation is the variety for all ages, capabilities and interests. A very fun and engaging service that has nurtured our community for years and hopefully, always will.”  
— Judy S., Recreation patron



“Eugene is a shining example of what an inclusive community should look like- a place where people with all types of disabilities use the accessible public transportation, play in our accessible parks and recreation centers, go river rafting, do the challenge course and are leaders in our city government. It’s a place where hundreds of people, with and without disabilities from throughout the world have visited and been inspired to make changes in their own communities.”

–Susan Sygall, Mobility International USA

- ◆ Fun for All provides free, supervised drop-in summer camp programs in parks throughout the city, drawing more than 14,000 visits from local youth and teens in 2015. Fun for All partnered with Food for Lane County to provide 10,298 free lunches to the kids who attended in the summer of 2015.
- ◆ The energy assistance program facilitates distribution of nearly \$450,000 in county and utility energy assistance for low-income seniors in our community.
- ◆ The Campbell Community Center — serving 100 seniors a day on average — is often local seniors’ only outlet for social interaction. They come to Campbell to enjoy affordable lunches, work on creative endeavors, sharpen their minds, and maintain their mobility through fitness. For the growing senior population, many of whom cannot afford or do not want to live in a retirement facility, this center becomes increasingly important in our community.
- ◆ Eugene Recreation’s adaptive services, which provide activities and services for Eugeneans with disabilities, have been consistently recognized as a leader in this field. One recent notable award came from the National Recreation & Parks Association and the National Therapeutic Recreation Society in recognition of excellence.
- ◆ Athletics creates and facilitates competitive and recreational team sports for 13,000 adults in the community every year, providing yet another opportunity for community members to live healthy active lives.
- ◆ Unique to Eugeneans’ passion for the outdoors, the River House Outdoor Program has been providing outdoor recreation skill development opportunities in our community for 50 years.





## 6. Parks and Recreation support community health and wellness

Scores of research studies have shown that the presence of parks and recreation in urban areas provides social, physical and mental health benefits. A 2006 paper published by the Trust for Public Land detailed these benefits such as enabling people to exercise, healthy child development and building stable communities. Some studies also show that the closer people live to parks, the more often they exercise. These benefits are important due to the dire impacts of lack of exercise and its role in high rates of obesity. [6]

What is less well-known is that parks also have been documented to provide a range of social and mental health benefits. Research shows that visual exposure to the greenery in parks helps people recover faster from illness and surgery. Studies have shown that children with attention deficit disorder have increased concentration after walking or playing in a park. Visual exposure to the plant life in parks has been shown to reduce mental fatigue and procrastination in urban residents. Also the kinds of play and exercise that are supported by access to parks also supports brain development in youth and brain health maintenance in adults. Finally, studies also show that access to open green spaces like parks promotes the formation of stronger social ties in the neighborhood. [6]

*“For some people this is like a lifeline. It’s the only place they go to be social and feel a sense of connection.”*

*—Pop-up Participant*



“The counselors were active and engaged and truly acted like they enjoyed their jobs! My child loved it.”

—Survey Respondent

## 7. Parks and Recreation staff and volunteers are talented and passionate public servants

Throughout the PARKS and RECreate outreach process, Eugeneans praised Recreation Program staff and instructors, and acknowledged the great work done by Parks and Open Space operations staff and Eugene Park Stewards coordinators. Community members see the consistent passion, professionalism, commitment to service, and care for park spaces and patrons exhibited by our staff and volunteers, and this feedback resonated throughout survey responses and other outreach conversations. [5] [7] [2] [8]

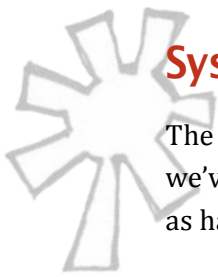
Eugene’s park and recreation staff are an invaluable resource and a significant strength of our system. About 130 year-round staff bring their skill, passion, professionalism and service ethic to their work to provide abundant, varied and high quality recreational experiences to Eugene’s residents and visitors. Their excellent performance in providing programming; maintaining developed and natural area parks; planning, designing and building parks; managing trees; managing resources and communicating with the community help make the park and recreation system what it is.

In 2014, Recreation’s Volunteer Coordinator and program staff worked alongside volunteers for 43,350 hours of donated time. Some examples of volunteer opportunities include assisting seniors at centers and in programs, helping staff lead adaptive recreation programs for people with disabilities, role modeling for youth in classes and camps, and maintaining and repairing equipment for outdoor programs.

In 2014, Eugene’s three park Volunteer Coordinators supported 347 volunteer events, drawing a total of 15,464 volunteer hours on projects throughout Eugene’s park system, from the ridgeline to the river, in both developed parks and natural areas. [9]







## System Challenges

The challenges faced by Eugene’s Parks and Recreation system are generally not new—we’ve been working on them for years. But the magnitude of each of these issues has grown, as has the need to find solutions.

### 1. Park Maintenance and Operations Funding

#### Where we are

Over the past 16 years, Eugene residents have passed two bond measures that supported nearly doubling the acreage within our park system. While this expansion added great value for future residents and their park opportunities, there is a growing challenge. During those 16 years, the park maintenance budget has remained at virtually the same pre-expansion levels, leading to a \$2 million gap in funding for annual maintenance and operations of parks. Contributing to this gap are a series of budget reductions, combined with the costs of maintenance deferrals and increases in vandalism, graffiti, and illegal camping. The result of these funding shortages persisting over many years is a cumulative backlog of deferred maintenance capital projects totaling nearly \$24 million dollars. Deferred maintenance projects are capital projects needed to repair what is broken and worn out in our parks that we haven’t been able to address in an on-going way due to insufficient funding.



The financial impact of illegal homeless camping on the park system has become very significant and difficult to address within existing resources. The number of illegal camps has grown several-fold over the last three years in Eugene’s parks, rising to 600 camps in 2014 and 715 camps in 2015. In 2014 alone, the Eugene Parks and Open Space Division spent over \$250,000 cleaning up these camps. Addressing this issue has become an ongoing, urgent and critical function of park maintenance staff duties as established camps can generate extreme accumulations of trash, hazardous and human waste, safety concerns and environmental impacts. This workload has placed an additional burden on City Parks and Open Space operations staff, resulting in reduced operational service to other needs in the park system.

## What we're doing about it

This stark financial reality has motivated the Parks and Open Space Division to become significantly more efficient in its daily routines as well as to prioritize maintenance activities. Park maintenance staff has been organized into regional teams to realize efficiencies in route servicing and transportation of staff and equipment. Priority daily maintenance functions include trash pickup, restroom servicing and litter patrol, while other maintenance activities are done less frequently. Within individual parks, park amenities and areas that have the highest level of public use are being prioritized for the highest levels of maintenance. To accomplish this, park operations staff have developed and implemented a series of park maintenance standards to clarify priorities. These efforts have paid off—42 percent of phone survey respondents strongly agreed and 45 percent somewhat agreed that parks and natural areas are well-maintained. But efficiencies alone will not solve this problem. A reduction in services has resulted. A few examples of these reductions are:



- ◆ a 75 percent reduction in turf watering over the summer months in neighborhood parks;
- ◆ a 50 percent reduction in sports field mowing frequencies;
- ◆ permanent closure of three park restrooms;
- ◆ a 25 percent reduction in materials and supplies for soft surface trail maintenance.

## Community concern

The on-going underfunding of maintenance of parks is a growing concern for Eugene's park patrons and community members. Listening sessions with key partners in the community revealed this issue to be their biggest concern. [2] In the phone survey, 96 percent of respondents said that it was "very or somewhat important" to adequately fund maintenance of park and recreation facilities so that they remain safe, usable, and attractive. In addition, 83 percent of survey respondents said they were "very or somewhat concerned" that funding for park maintenance was not sufficient to allow new parks and recreation facilities to be added in the future. [1] In addition, the community strongly communicated the importance of the role that park maintenance plays in making parks feel safe and well cared for over the short and long term. [7]



## 2. Park Safety and Security

People generally feel safe in a majority of Eugene's Parks. Forty percent of phone survey respondents strongly agreed and 46 percent somewhat agreed that parks and natural areas are safe to use. However there are parts of the system where people do not feel safe, and many members of the community are expressing their concern. Throughout multiple surveys, pop-up event discussions, targeted outreach efforts and numerous staff and community listening sessions, concerns about park safety surfaced repeatedly as a significant and highly complex set of issues needing immediate attention. Eighty-seven percent of online survey respondents answered that they are concerned about the impacts of illegal camping and vandalism in Eugene parks. Of the 2,300 respondents to this survey question, 1,700 opted to provide additional information in an open-ended response. These responses were grouped into categories and are the basis for the following findings. [10]

In general, many park patrons attribute feeling unsafe in parks to Eugene's growing homeless population, citing human behaviors and impacts to park facility conditions that combine to create an unwelcoming environment in many parks. While many of the problems may be related to the significant visual, social and environmental impacts of illegal camping in parks, ongoing illegal behaviors related to drug abuse, drug sales, prostitution, and aggressive panhandling in Eugene's parks are not entirely related to members of the homeless community.



## Illegal Camping

In voicing their concern for their safety in parks, hundreds of people described what they see in detail and on a regular basis in the parks system and how it affects their use of the parks. Specific impacts cited include many related to illegal camping – trash, feces, and degradation of sensitive park areas. Most frequently noted areas for these problems were along the river banks throughout the Willamette Riverfront Parks, in Washington Jefferson Park under the I-105 Bridge, and in Monroe and Martin Luther King Jr. Parks. The Amazon Creek corridor was also mentioned frequently and many people cited feeling unsafe around some community centers in the Amazon and Riverfront park corridors. [10]

“There are significant transient issues in some of the parks, so we avoid those areas.”

—*Survey Respondent*

## Intimidating Behaviors

Unpredictable, aggressive and violent behaviors were a second category of concern and a reason why park users have stopped feeling safe in many of the parks they visit on a regular basis. Drug use and sales; groups of unfriendly people dominating a shelter or other park area all day; aggressive dogs; panhandling with angry responses to receiving a ‘no’ answer; and a generally uncomfortable feeling about these behaviors keep families away from playgrounds, discourage women from exercising in parks on their own, and create barriers to all park patrons for use of effected parks after dark. [10]

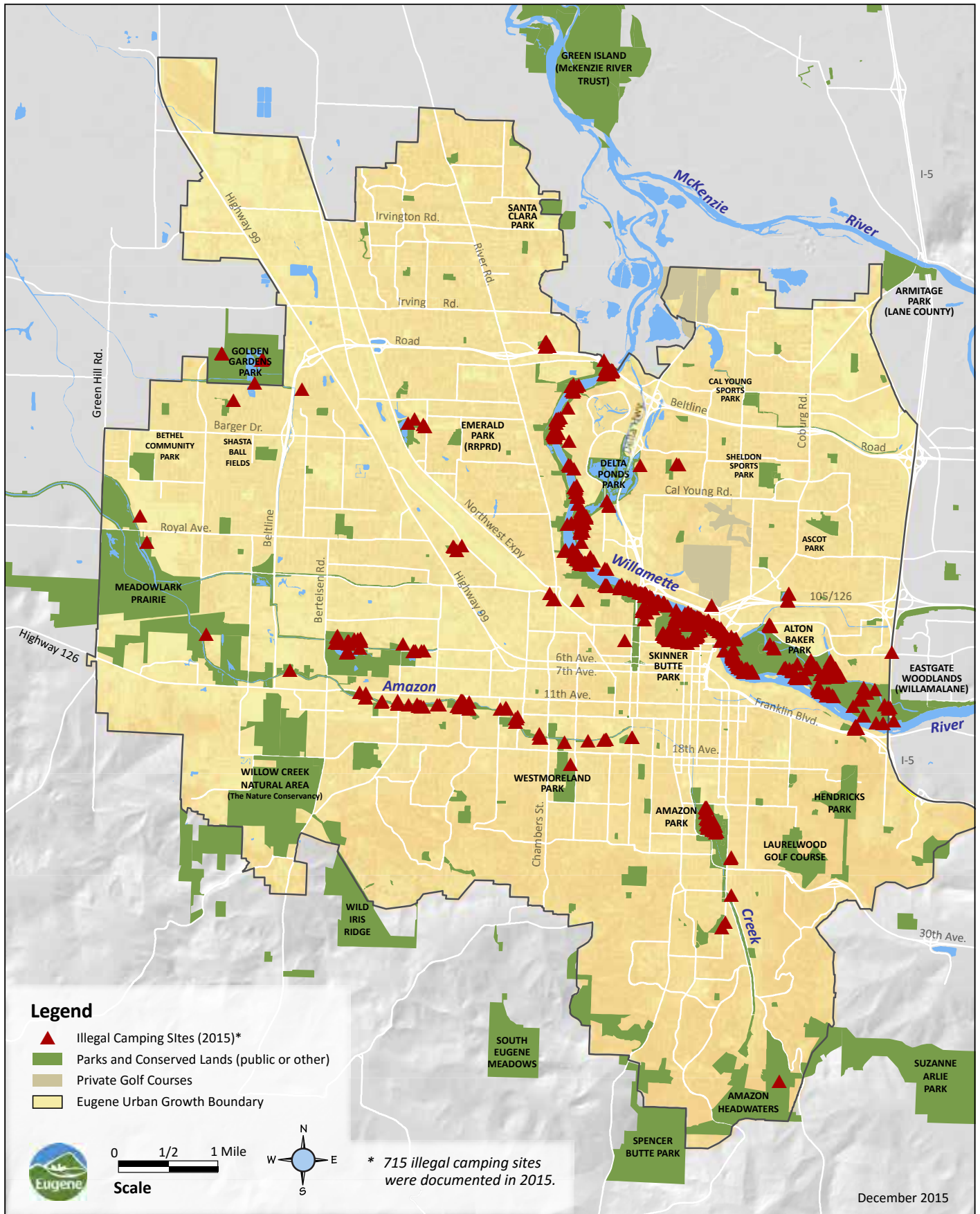
## Vandalism

Vandalism was a third category of negative impacts that participants reported making them feel that some parks are less safe than others. Graffiti, restrooms that are made unusable by illegal and unsanitary uses, and broken equipment or furniture contribute to the feeling of a ‘broken windows’ image, where people feel less and less invested in the care of a park site and its value to the community.



# Illegal Camping Sites in 2015

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



## Ideas for Improvement

Participants proposed solutions to these various park safety issues throughout all the community conversations and surveys:

- ◆ Provide additional park patrols, security or police presence on a regular basis for enforcement purposes.
- ◆ Provide legal places for homeless people to camp – a place for people to go if they're removed from parks.
- ◆ Activate parks by bringing more people to them with free and accessible programming for the community
- ◆ Improve park maintenance and operations service levels.
- ◆ Install more park lighting
- ◆ Provide clear views into parks through vegetation management
- ◆ Install security call boxes or Emergency Telephone Boxes

In all, the messages we heard from the community were loud and clear that this is a problem that must be addressed effectively and very soon. In addition, the environmental impacts of homeless camping in parks are understood by the community to be significant and there is keen interest in resolving this growing issue compassionately, effectively and in a timely fashion. [10] [5]





### 3. Aging Facilities and Infrastructure

Eugeneans are experiencing the negative effects of aging community centers, pools and parks that are in need of updating and expansion.

#### Community Centers

Eugene has six regularly staffed community centers. Five of the six were built in the late 1960s and 70s (averaging 45 years old). In keeping with the philosophy of developing dispersed, smaller neighborhood-based centers in the 1960s and 70s, Eugene’s community centers have a relatively small average size of 8,500 square feet. In addition to their small footprints, the quality and condition of the facilities reflect their age and lack of financial investment in renovation or expansion since they were built. As a result, most centers are in need of rehabilitation, are costly to maintain, and do not have the capacity or the flexibility to meet growing community programming needs. [11]

“Things haven’t been upgraded at all. I don’t know how much longer we can Band-Aid it together.”

*–Ed Smith, former Parks and Recreation Executive Director in a 1987 quote to the Eugene Register Guard*



A rating system that combines building condition scores with programming ability, shows one good rating (Hilyard Center), one poor rating (Petersen Barn), and the other four facilities as fair. Community sentiment echoes this reality in surveys with patrons consistently citing lack of space, crowding, and the difficulty of inappropriate floors for exercise and dance classes. The lack of adequate and flexible indoor programming space inhibits staff’s ability to program current and trending activities important to the health and wellness of the community. [11]

Limited flexible programming space also prevents the City of Eugene from attracting outside recreational and athletic events that have the potential to contribute to the local economy. For example, after Amazon Pool was renovated the City of Eugene was able to host large, regional swim meets twice annually. These meets attract 3,000 tourists who contribute several hundred thousand dollars to the local economy every time they visit. Eugene is well known for its local and regional athletic and entertainment events and venues. Improving Eugene’s existing facilities will help expand the City’s offerings.

Find more information on Eugene’s Community Centers on page 50.



## Pools

The City of Eugene owns and operates three pools in Eugene. Two of the three pools were built in the late 1960s and are now 48 years old. Amazon Pool in South Eugene was expanded and renovated in 2001, and is the “crown jewel” among our recreation facilities. The popularity of Amazon Pool shows the community benefit of remodeling facilities to meet current needs. But it is only open six months of the year—placing the burden of aquatic services through the winter months on Sheldon and Echo Hollow Pools, which are both in need of major renovation.

Sheldon Pool, an indoor facility in North Eugene, underwent maintenance-based improvements in 2014 to extend its useful life and is open 12 months of the year. Echo Hollow Pool in northwest Eugene is an indoor/outdoor facility that is also open 12 months of the year. Many of the primary systems of both of these pools (plumbing, electrical, HVAC, furnishings) are beyond their expected useful lifespan and are in need of replacement.

Find more information on Eugene’s Pools on page 55.

## Parks

As noted earlier, lack of on-going maintenance and repairs have generated a backlog of park renovation needs that now exceed \$24 million. Examples of aging park infrastructure include play equipment reaching the end of its useful life, broken and worn out park furniture, bark running trails that verge on being unsafe, and restrooms needing repairs and aesthetic upgrades. While the City has managed to extend the life of these types of amenities for many years, eventually they will need to be removed or closed if funding for maintenance remains limited. Maintenance of our natural area assets through trail maintenance, vegetation management and habitat enhancement is an ongoing expense needed to protect and sustain the natural beauty valued by the community. [12]



## Funding

Funding for renovating or replacing park and recreation amenities and facilities is limited and, because of the magnitude of the need, will require voter-approved bond funding or another large source of capital dollars dedicated to specific projects. Ongoing sources of maintenance-eligible facility replacement funds are relatively limited when compared to the backlog of work needing to be addressed. Small amounts of the City's General Fund and developer permit fees are allowed to be dedicated to park renovation work, but in general, Community Centers, Parks and Pools tend to be managed to maintain infrastructure in its current state for as long as possible. Available capital dollars for maintenance-based re-construction in Parks has been focused almost solely on projects that will reduce maintenance or make maintenance more sustainable over the long term, such as conversion of large landscape planting beds to lawn areas and conversion of sand play surfacing in playgrounds to wood fiber chips.

In general, the inability of the City to adequately fund ongoing park maintenance and to be able to significantly invest in renovation and updating of existing community center facilities and pools has contributed to the acceleration of aging infrastructure and often, reduction in park and recreation system services.



## 4. Equity and Inclusion

Geographic inequity of parks and recreation facilities has long been an identified problem. Strides have been made to address this inequity through the purchase of land for parks in areas that were previously unserved. However, little progress has been made in improving access to community centers and pools.

### Geographic Equity

Mapping analysis is a good way to begin to understand the geographic distribution of park and recreation services and identify areas of gaps in service. Several maps were generated that took into consideration identified service areas for park and recreation facilities; population density; density of low-income households (households making under \$35,000 per year); and population density of children 19 and younger. [13]



**Community Centers:** The highest number of community center facilities are in the Southeast and City Central planning areas. This reflects the history of community center development in areas of the city that were densely developed in the 1960s and 70s, with limited facility development since the community has grown northward and westward from the downtown and UO campus areas. The addition of Petersen Barn and Sheldon Community Center extended some services to Eugene’s north and west neighborhoods, but significant gaps in service remain.

In addition to the City of Eugene’s community centers, recreation resources provided by other entities include Boys & Girls Club, River Road Parks and Recreation District facilities, Willamalane facilities, the University of Oregon Student Recreation Center, and the YMCA facility in south Eugene. Even considering these other facilities, some parts of town lack access to any community recreation facility at all. Southwest Eugene and Santa Clara do not have equitable access to community centers. [13]

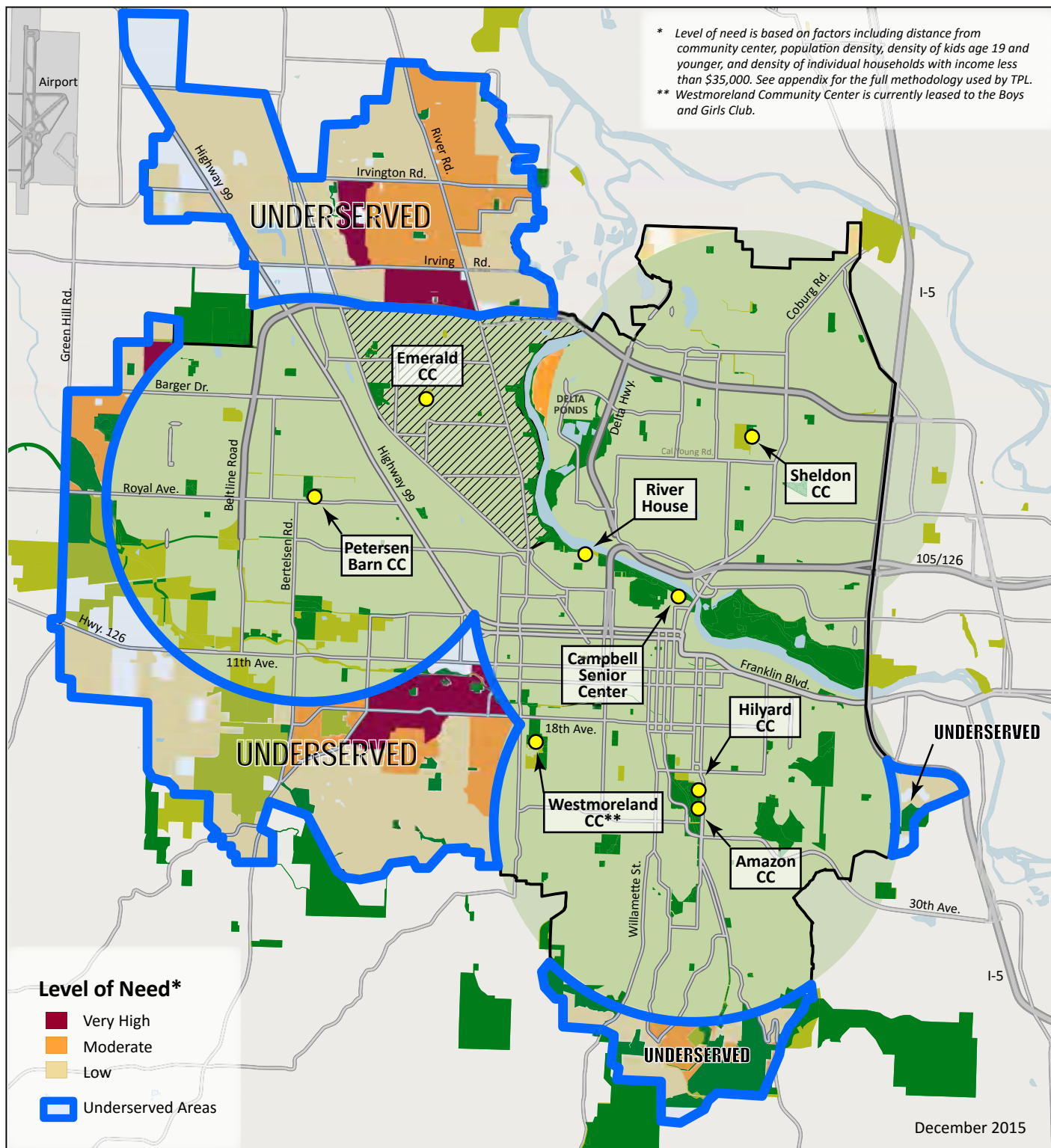
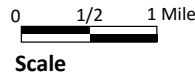
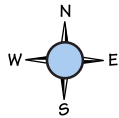


# Community Center Service Area Equity Map

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System

### Legend

- City and RRPRD Community Centers
- City of Eugene Parks
- Other Conservation Lands (non-City)
- Community Center Service Areas
- Emerald Recreation Center Service Area
- Eugene Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)



### Level of Need\*

- Very High
- Moderate
- Low
- Underserved Areas

December 2015



**Pools:** Eugene’s three pools are beloved and heavily used, but two of them are significantly aged facilities. Other pools serving the local area include River Road Parks and Rec District pool, Willamalane’s two pools, the University of Oregon Student Recreation Center pool, the YMCA and Tamarack Wellness Center pools. Despite these additional resources, both Southwest Eugene and Santa Clara are lacking in access to pools. [13] In fact, there is strong evidence that Eugene as a whole is underserved for aquatic facilities when compared to other cities. In comparing Eugene’s aquatic facilities to comparable communities, Eugene has the fewest aquatic facilities per 100,000 residents. [3]



**Parks:** Equity maps for parks are still underway, while we address details related to how the service areas of parks are determined. In the past, the definition of ‘service area’ for neighborhood parks has been based upon the presence of a playground and the ability to safely walk one-half mile to the park without crossing an arterial street. In comparison to the practice of other communities and national organizations, these parameters now appear to be unnecessarily restrictive. For example, under those parameters, areas in Eugene immediately adjacent to significant community parks with existing playgrounds are shown as ‘un-served’ due to an arterial street barrier, even though signalized pedestrian crossings enable safe pedestrian and bicycle access. As a result, additional analysis is underway to create park service maps that incorporate safe crossings of arterial streets.

Evaluating park service areas that serve recreation functions beyond children’s playgrounds may be important in assessing the distribution of recreational opportunities at the neighborhood level. Additional analysis is being performed to consider expanding the current park service criteria to look more broadly at all types of parks (and the amenities within them) as long as they are publicly accessible.

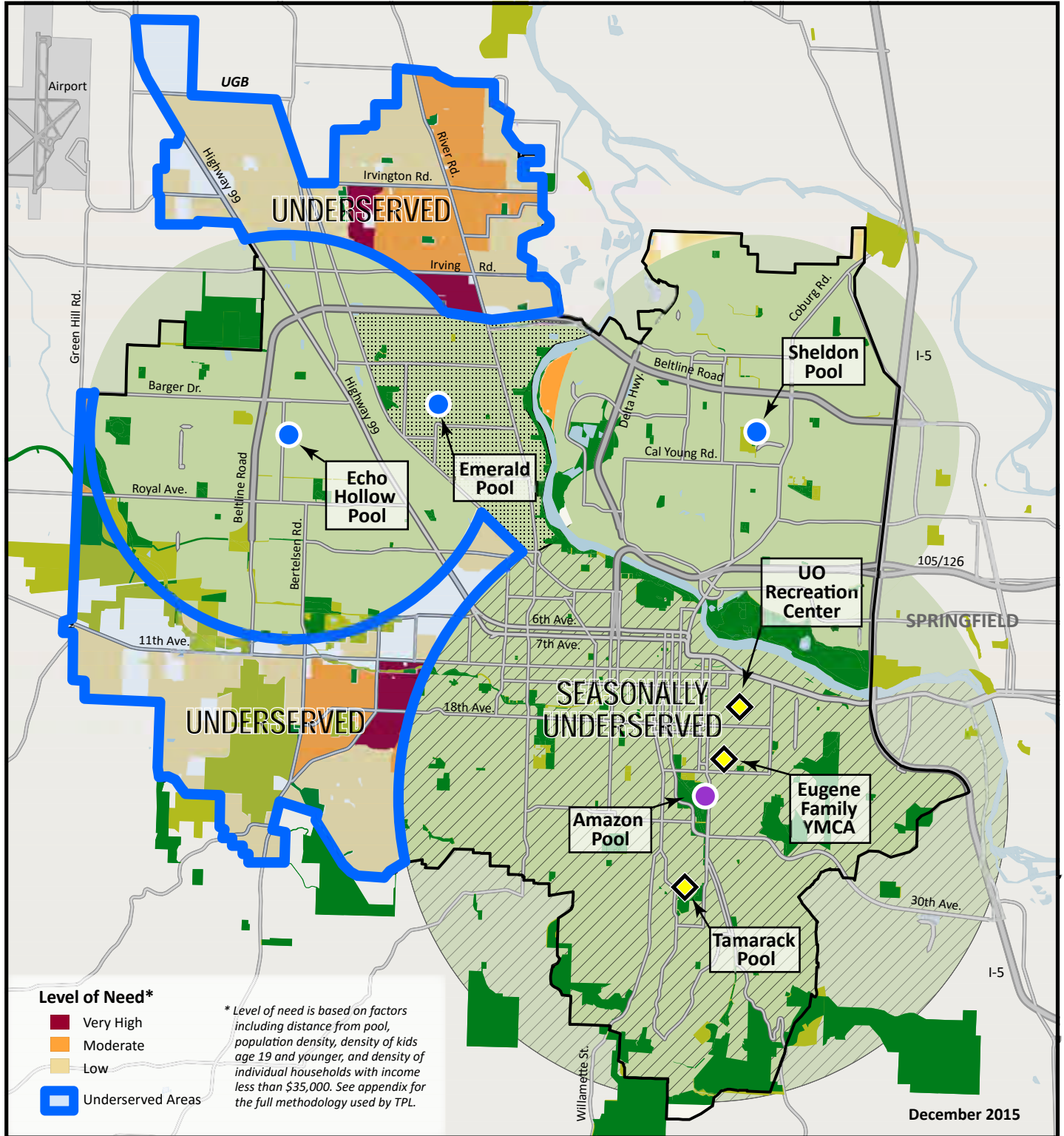
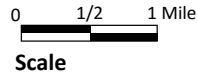
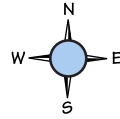


# Legend

- City or RRPRD Aquatic Facility (all-season)
- City Aquatic Facility (seasonal)
- ◇ Other Aquatic Facility (all-season)
- City of Eugene Parks
- Other Conservation Lands (non-City)
- Public Aquatic Facility Service Areas
- Emerald Pool Service Area
- Open Seasonally Only
- Eugene Urban Growth Boundary (UGB)

# Aquatic Facility Service Area Equity Map

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



### Level of Need\*

- Very High
- Moderate
- Low
- Underserved Areas

\* Level of need is based on factors including distance from pool, population density, density of kids age 19 and younger, and density of individual households with income less than \$35,000. See appendix for the full methodology used by TPL.

December 2015

## Inclusion

While the equity mapping analysis illustrates geographical areas of needed parks and recreation services, other outreach and research efforts revealed the importance of cross-cultural inclusion and access to services across ability and income levels.

### Eugene's Latino Community



Latinos make up the fastest growing demographic in Eugene's population. A focused effort to hear from the Latino community revealed distinct and potentially significant gaps in cultural inclusion and equity of service provision in the Park and Recreation system. Latinos reported that they often don't feel welcome in parks for a variety of reasons. Some reasons are structural, while others are cultural and social. Structural gaps include lack of park signage in Spanish including welcome signs, rule signs and instructional signs for park amenities. A lack of understanding of the rules and fear of inadvertently breaking them, leaves many Latinos feeling anxious about being active in parks. In addition, the current park reservation process was described as intimidating and difficult to navigate as the City doesn't provide Spanish language signs explaining how to make a reservation, or which facilities require reservations. A larger, symbolic representation of welcoming Latinos to Eugene's parks we heard was the idea of naming one of Eugene's parks after a prominent Latino leader. [14]

"It would be great to have additional game/sports areas... basketball goals or bocce ball courts. Or soccer goals"

—*Survey Respondent*

Another issue is that Latino community members often gather spontaneously for soccer games and other group events, and preferred to have some fields and facilities available without reservations on a "first come, first served" basis. Rental fees were also mentioned as a structural barrier to lower income members of the Latino community. While many of Eugene's park users often use park singly or in small groups, a cultural norm for the Latino community is often to gather in larger groups for family picnics or other types of social gatherings. Large groupings of easily movable tables, first-come first-serve picnic shelters and in-place barbecues provide ideal settings for these types of family group events. Eugene's parks are particularly lacking in many of these amenities, especially located closely together. [14]





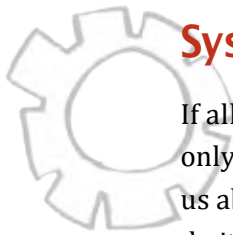
### **Access regardless of income**

Financial barriers were another reason that many in the community felt they had limited access to recreation programs or park facilities that require rental fees. With trend information showing that Eugene families are struggling economically, it is important to understand how income affects people's ability to participate. Targeted surveying of low-income supported housing residents revealed that many do not partake in programs or visit facilities due to the expense involved, including pool entry fees or program registration fees. Park shelter rental fees also provide a barrier to service for lower income residents. [7]

### **Inclusive parks and playgrounds**

The City has long met or exceeded the letter and intent of the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) accessibility guidelines in Eugene's playgrounds. Meeting these legal guidelines, however, is not enough to create environments that facilitate truly inclusive play amongst children and adults of all ages and abilities. The Riverplay Discovery Playground in Skinner Butte Park is the most inclusive of Eugene's playgrounds, but having been constructed nearly 10 years ago, it does not benefit from the latest philosophies and understanding about best practices for inclusive play. Many parents commented in surveys about the need to effectively accommodate and include people of all ages and abilities in playground settings through installation of specialized equipment and accessible surfacing methods. [5] [2] The upfront expense of such methods has proven to be a barrier to this type of development or upgrades in Eugene's playgrounds to date.





## System Opportunities

If all the opportunities that emerged from the community outreach were summarized into only one theme, it would be to “build on our strengths”. At a broad level Eugeneans spoke to us about what they love about our park and recreation system, what they want, and how to do it best into the future. The clarity of feedback was consistent, refreshing, and unwaveringly passionate in support of the following four priorities.



### 1. Take care of what we have

When asked about the importance of park maintenance and prioritization of future financial investments, survey respondents overwhelmingly and repeatedly voiced the importance and value of “caring for what we have.” Ninety-six percent of residents responded that availability of funds to adequately maintain park and recreation facilities was “very or somewhat important” to them. Making major repairs was also strongly favored over constructing new park facilities. [1]

These strong messages from the survey data were bolstered by conversations held with key park and recreation stakeholders throughout the community. The importance of maintaining, repairing and bringing our existing park system back to health stood out as a priority for many. [2] At the same time, the importance of addressing the homeless camping issue, and associated environmental impacts and park patron safety also was a strong theme through all outreach methods. People urge a compassionate and effective resolution to the park impacts of this complex problem that is painfully evident throughout the City. [7]

All the City’s recreation facilities are loved, and “expanding or improving” existing community centers and pools is a priority. [1] In describing existing recreation facilities, respondents to the recreation facility survey used words such as “dingy,” “cramped” and “shabby.” Indeed, most of these facilities suffer from outdated HVAC and other primary systems, small classrooms, and lack of storage. According to survey respondents, some facilities such as Amazon Community Center, Campbell Senior Center and the River House also experience safety and security issues. [11]

Beyond the constructed and developed park and recreation environment, Eugene’s strong appreciation for undeveloped natural areas is consistently evident in responses to what people value about their park system. When asked to pick what they value in parks, “Enjoy beauty and nature” ranked highest. Natural areas also ranked highest on a list of 18 park facility types. The health and wellness of Eugene’s rivers, forests, wetlands and trees are important to Eugene’s residents and conservation of these resources for everyone’s enjoyment ranks high. [1].

## 2. Provide more basic amenities and restrooms

People discussed the importance of informative and clear signage, places to sit, shade and shelter from the elements, lighting, and connective trails and paths, and—perhaps most important—restrooms. Inclusion of additional shelters, tables and barbeque facilities are highly desired items, particularly for Latino families.

To complete the ideal picture of parks for Eugeneans, most of these types of amenities would be in parks that are located within close walking distance to where they live. Ease of access to parks and connectivity among them in and through the community will help create ideal access to parks for Eugene’s residents. [5] [2] [15] [14] As walking and hiking are the most frequent recreation activities of Oregonians, an expansion of the existing path and trail network through Eugene’s Parks will increase recreation opportunities. [16] Improving the pedestrian environment of local sidewalks is another opportunity to increase access and recreational opportunities throughout the city.





### 3. Provide more access to water

Between our beloved Willamette River and Eugene’s city pools, Eugene’s residents have a real and deep appreciation for access to water during our hot and dry summer months. In anticipation of longer periods of summer drought, conservative and strategic use of Eugene’s water sources will be critical considerations. [7] [5] [2] [15]

“I would like access to the Willamette River with grass, trees, restrooms and access to swim/wade in the river.”

—Survey Respondent

- ◆ The Willamette River provides some of the best water experiences in the City including swimming, boating, fishing and gorgeous natural views. Eugene’s residents view the Willamette as critical to the City’s identity and desire safe ways to access the water’s edge. While safety and site impacts of Eugene’s homeless population camping along the river’s banks reportedly keep people away, hot summer days invite many for a river swim or float. River drowning is tragically an annual event in the community, making safe points of access even more of a priority.
- ◆ Amazon Pool is Eugene’s most popular pool and draws visitors from around the community. With nearly 200,000 visits in a six-month period every year, Amazon’s popularity also results in complaints of over-crowding, lack of pool space for desired activities, and chronic shortage of programming time for scheduling pool-based events, classes, and recreational swim hours. Eugene’s two other pools are smaller, have somewhat limited hours of operation, and don’t provide the recreational aquatic amenities that kids and families have grown to appreciate at Amazon Pool. Throughout survey responses and other outreach conversations, people continually voiced the need and desire for convenient access to a public pool in unserved areas of the community.



#### 4. Provide more community-based events

Parks in Eugene are places where people come to socialize, meet their neighbors, engage in civic contributions and just get outside. In our increasingly technology-driven world, Eugene's residents extolled the values of parks as places to get away from the information overload and make personal connections, find tranquility, and help their children grow up healthy and happy.

The community expressed appreciation for regularly scheduled recreation programming in parks such as the Fun-for-All program. Art activities, theater, barbecues, tennis classes, guided meditation and story times were all listed as ideas and activities that people wanted to do in parks. Providing these experiences in partnership with other local agencies, businesses, and community organizations will diversify and broaden community commitment to growing park-based programming. [5]

Free community events in parks were also identified as a program that Eugene residents appreciate and would like to see more of. In addition to bringing neighborhoods together for fun and engaging performances, activities, food events or movies, people see activating parks as a way to build community. They also see these events as opportunities for improving park safety and security by activating parks with lively and legitimate community use. [5]

These sentiments were echoed by residents living in supported housing. They cited program fees as a consistent barrier to their participation in recreation activities and expressed a clear desire for more free-of-charge events or programs in park settings. [7]

In 2021, for the first time ever on U.S. soil, Eugene will host the World Track and Field Championships. This is one of the largest international sporting events (behind the Olympics and the World Cup). With the eyes of the world on Eugene, there is a great opportunity to make investments in the parks and recreation system that will inspire the world and benefit the community for years to come.







*"I take my Mom every Sunday."  
—Pop-up Participant*





# 4. A CLOSER LOOK: FACILITIES, AMENITIES AND PROGRAMMING



This chapter takes a more detailed look at the current parks and recreation system by exploring the findings related to specific amenities and programs in these categories:

Community Centers

Pools

Paths, Trails and River Access

Playgrounds and Spray Play

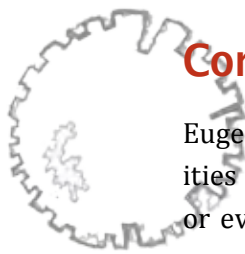
Sports Fields

Courts and Gyms

Specialty Facilities (community gardens, ornamental gardens, dog parks, skate parks, disc golf/golf)

Basic Amenities (seating, paved areas, trees, and lawn) and Restrooms

Programming



## Community Centers

Eugene offers six staffed community centers and eight other facilities that are either leased to organizations or available for rental or events. Community centers house indoor recreation programs, community events and meetings, and function as hubs for all recreation programming and services throughout the city. As noted earlier, most of Eugene’s community centers are over 40 years old, and as a result, most centers are in need of rehabilitation, are costly to maintain, and do not have the capacity or the flexibility to meet growing and shifting recreational needs. These deficiencies limit programming potential and in some cases pose continuous disruption to activities. [11]

### Recreation Facility Rating Summary

Facility	Programmability Quality Rating	Condition Rating	Overall Rating
Amazon Pool-Seasonal	B	B	Good
Sheldon Pool	C	D	Fair
Echo Hollow Pool	C	D	Fair
Amazon Community Center	C	D	Fair
Sheldon Community Center	C	D	Fair
Petersen Barn Community Center	D	D	Poor
Campbell Senior Center	C	D	Fair
Hilyard Adaptive Center	A	D	Good
The River House	D	B	Fair

### Community Feedback

The community has favorable opinions of Eugene’s community centers with 78 percent of phone survey respondents saying that community centers meet the needs of their families and 88 percent saying that community centers are easily accessible. However, those living in areas that are unserved by a community center (Santa Clara and Southwest Eugene) indicated less access and a desire for community gathering space. [1] [2] Youth expressed interest in a teen center with access to technology resources and performance space. [15]



In recreation facility surveys, respondents asked for more and bigger classroom spaces, bigger exercise rooms, and better flooring surfaces for dancing and exercise. “Concrete is hard on my knees” is a regular complaint and wood flooring frequently suggested as a solution. New exercise equipment in gym or workout areas is also a repeated request. [11]

Updated and accessible reception and lobby areas were identified as an area of needed improvements. Welcoming and updated entry areas to recreation centers were felt to be critical to customer satisfaction. Universal and inclusive access to these entry areas for people of all ages and abilities reflects the values and services the Recreation Division provides to the community. [11]

### Trends and Research

In comparison to other communities in our benchmarking study, Eugene’s community centers are much smaller and older. [3] Whereas Eugene’s average square footage is 8,500 the majority of community centers that are being built today are between 65,000 and 75,000 square feet. [17] Many of these larger community center footprints are designed as multi-purpose facilities and serve larger populations and a larger geographic area. Eugene, on the other hand, has smaller facilities, but more of them. Eugene’s facilities tend to be more dispersed, providing localized access (with the exception of unserved area of Southwest and Santa Clara), while many communities follow a more centralized model with larger facilities. [3]



Other national trends are that most recently constructed centers include three primary components A) a pool area usually with competitive and leisure amenities, B) multipurpose gymnasium space, and C) a weight/cardiovascular equipment area. In addition, most centers also have group exercise rooms, drop-in childcare, and classroom and/or community spaces. Most of these centers are open an average of 105 hours a week, with weekday hours being 5 a.m. to 10 p.m., Saturdays 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sundays from noon to 8 p.m. [17] These trends reflect a recognized need for drop-in classes, fitness equipment, and childcare that is more adaptive and flexible to people’s busy schedules. Eugene’s recreation facilities have not kept pace with many of these trends.

## A Summary of Eugene's Staffed Community Centers



**Petersen Barn**— A traditional community center that serves as a recreation hub for senior-based programming, youth services, the Latino Community, and the Bethel Neighborhood.

Year built: 1931 /Year converted: 1976

Includes: classrooms and multi-purpose room

Square feet: 6,752 / Capacity: 150

Hours: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Poor

---



**Sheldon Community Center**— The only center serving northeast of the Willamette River, this facility offers primarily youth services, including all day childcare.

Year built: 1968

Includes: classrooms and one small gymnasium

Square feet: 11,962/ Capacity: 320

Hours: 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Fair

---



**Campbell Senior Center**— The primary provider of senior-based programming and services. A wood shop and patio/garden for weddings and events are unique amenities of this center.

Year converted: 1962/ Moved to current location: 1966

Includes: classrooms, a multi-purpose room, woodshop, and computer lab

Square feet: 8,277/ Capacity: 250

Hours: 8:30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Fair





**River House Outdoor Program**— Uniquely located on the Willamette River, home to all outdoor programming for youth, families and adults.

Year converted: 1972

Includes: offices and front desk (no classrooms or public space)

Square feet: 2,329 / Capacity: 40

Hours: Noon to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Fair

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**Hilyard Community Center**— Home to Eugene’s internationally recognized Adaptive Recreation program, this facility is fully accessible and has a wide array of adaptive bicycles and equipment to borrow or rent.

Year built: 1990

Includes: one classroom and a multi-purpose room

Square feet: 5,882 / Capacity: 165

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Good

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**Amazon Community Center**— Offers a diverse array of summer camps, art and dance classes.

Year built: 1973

Includes: classrooms, a ceramics room, and dance room

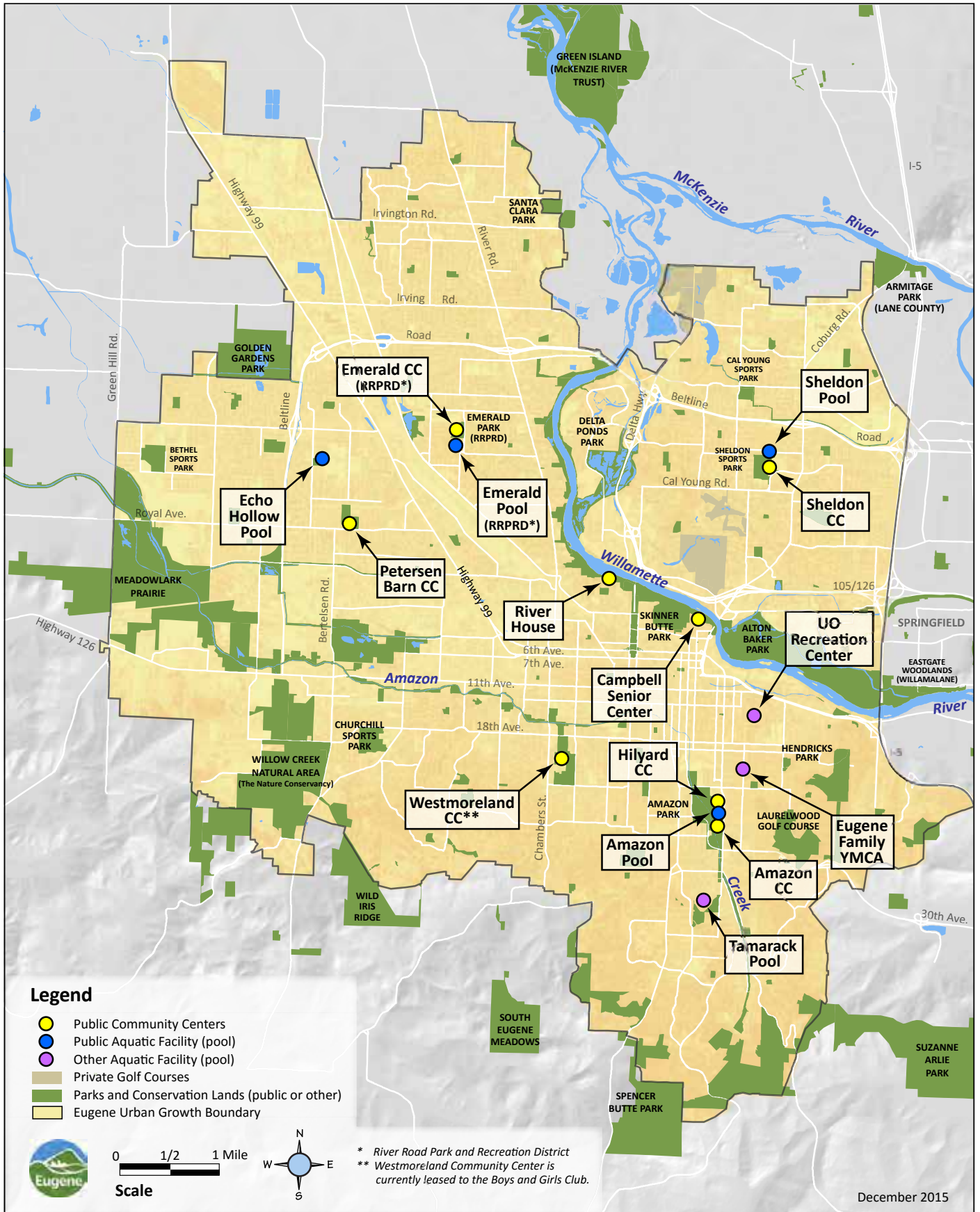
Square feet: 8,743 / Capacity: 125

Hours: 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday

Quality and condition rating: Fair

# Community Centers and Pools

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System





## Pools

There are three city-owned pools: Amazon Pool (outdoor), Sheldon Pool (indoor), and Echo Hollow Pool (outdoor and indoor). Amazon Pool was remodeled in 2001 and for six months of the year is the most popular swimming pool in the region. Sheldon and Echo Hollow Pools were built in 1967 and 1968 respectively. These pools are also well used and fully programmed. While repairs and replacement of many operational components have been made throughout the years, both these pools' primary systems such as plumbing, electrical, HVAC, shell, equipment and furnishings are not energy efficient, beyond their expected useful lifespan and in need of replacement. They also lack the multi-purpose recreation swim amenities that makes Amazon Pool so popular.

### Community Feedback

Eugene's pools are notably popular with patrons, as swimming ranked third in the phone survey as a favorite activity. [1] Amazon Pool is particularly notable for its recreational swim and water play amenities and is frequently full to capacity on hot summer days. Increased access to pools was a common theme that was raised by residents throughout all public outreach. It was frequently expressed in conversation at pop-up events, in listening sessions with stakeholders, with youth, and in survey responses. People are currently driven away from the existing pools due to over crowding, especially at Amazon Pool. [7] There is not enough capacity to accommodate the demand for swim lessons and youth swim teams may have a wait list of 70 children that never get the chance to participate. Essentially no user group is happy with the present service level, as scheduling of swim lessons, high school, youth and adult swim teams, water polo, water fitness, lap swims and recreation swims all compete for scarce pool time. [2]





## Trends and Research

The biggest aquatic facility trend in the country is incorporating recreational elements such as slides, current channels (“lazy rivers”), fountains, zero depth entry and other special water features into pool design. By attracting larger crowds, it is estimated conservatively that recreational pool elements can generate up to 20 to 25 percent more revenue than a comparable conventional pool without them. [17] This has certainly proven true in Eugene with the redesign of Amazon Pool in 2001. In the first year after the remodel, attendance increased 72 percent — from 113,000 to nearly 200,000 pool visits. The community’s interest in the pool hasn’t waned since the remodel, and attendance figures continue to hold strong today.

Another trend is moving away from stand-alone pool facilities that only have aquatic features to more of a full-service recreation center that has fitness, sports and community based amenities in addition to a pool. This change has allowed for a better rate of cost recovery and stronger rates of use of the aquatic portion of the facility as well as the other “dry side” amenities. [17]

## A Summary of Eugene’s Pools

**Amazon Pool**— Open seasonally and the most popular swimming pool in the region, Amazon Pool offers activities for recreational swimming, lap swimming, deep water fitness, competitive swimming, water polo, and summer camps.

Year built: 1957/ Year renovated: 2001

Four pools: beginner pool, zero-depth pool, spa, 50 meter-8 lanes

Two water slides, five-meter diving platform, three-meter diving board

Capacity: 1,048

Hours: varies

Quality and condition rating: Good





**Sheldon Pool**— This indoor, year-round swimming pool offers activities for recreational swimming, lap swimming, deep water fitness, competitive swimming, water polo, a fitness center and summer camps.

Year built: 1968/ Seismic upgrades: 2012

Two pools: six-lane, 25-yard , diving well and fitness center

Capacity: 228

Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Tuesday and Thursday 6:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Saturday 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Quality and condition rating: Fair



**Echo Hollow Pool**— This indoor/outdoor year-round swimming pool facility offers activities for recreational swimming, lap swimming, deep water fitness, competitive swimming, water polo, a fitness center and summer camps.

Year built: 1969/ Some updates: 2012

Three pools, six-lane 25-yard, six-lane 25-meter, spa and fitness center

Capacity: 430

Hours: Monday through Friday 5:30 a.m. to 8:30 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Quality and condition rating: Fair

## Paths, Trails and River Access



### Paths and Trails

The collective quantity and location of Eugene’s off-street paved and soft-surface trails are regionally outstanding and often cited as a reason people have moved to Eugene or enjoyed their visit here. With 46 miles of off-street paved paths Eugene ranks as having the highest mileage per capita in this category when compared with the other benchmark cities. An additional 41 miles of off-street unpaved trails ranks Eugene third per capita in this category. [3] Correlated with Eugene’s robust trail system bordering beautiful natural areas and features, cycling and hiking are the first and third most-often listed recreational activities for Eugene’s residents. [1] Pre’s Trail, a four-mile looped running trail through Alton Baker Park, is Eugene’s most popular running trail and a significant part of Eugene’s identity as Track Town USA.

The recently completed 2015 Eugene Trails Plan will guide future development of soft-surface hiking and jogging trails throughout the community, proposing 68 potential additional miles of unpaved trails. There are plans to add more bike and pedestrian paths as well. The Rivers to Ridges Vision and Action Plan and the Willamette River Open Space Vision and Action Plan identify a continuation of the Riverbank Path System north of Beltline, and the Eugene Transportation System Plan identifies projects and priorities for additional off-street and on-street paths throughout the City. [18] [19] [20]

Springfield also does a good job of providing both paved paths and unpaved trails. Eugene’s Riverbank Path System connects to Springfield along both sides of the river, thus leveraging the resources and opportunities of both communities.[19]

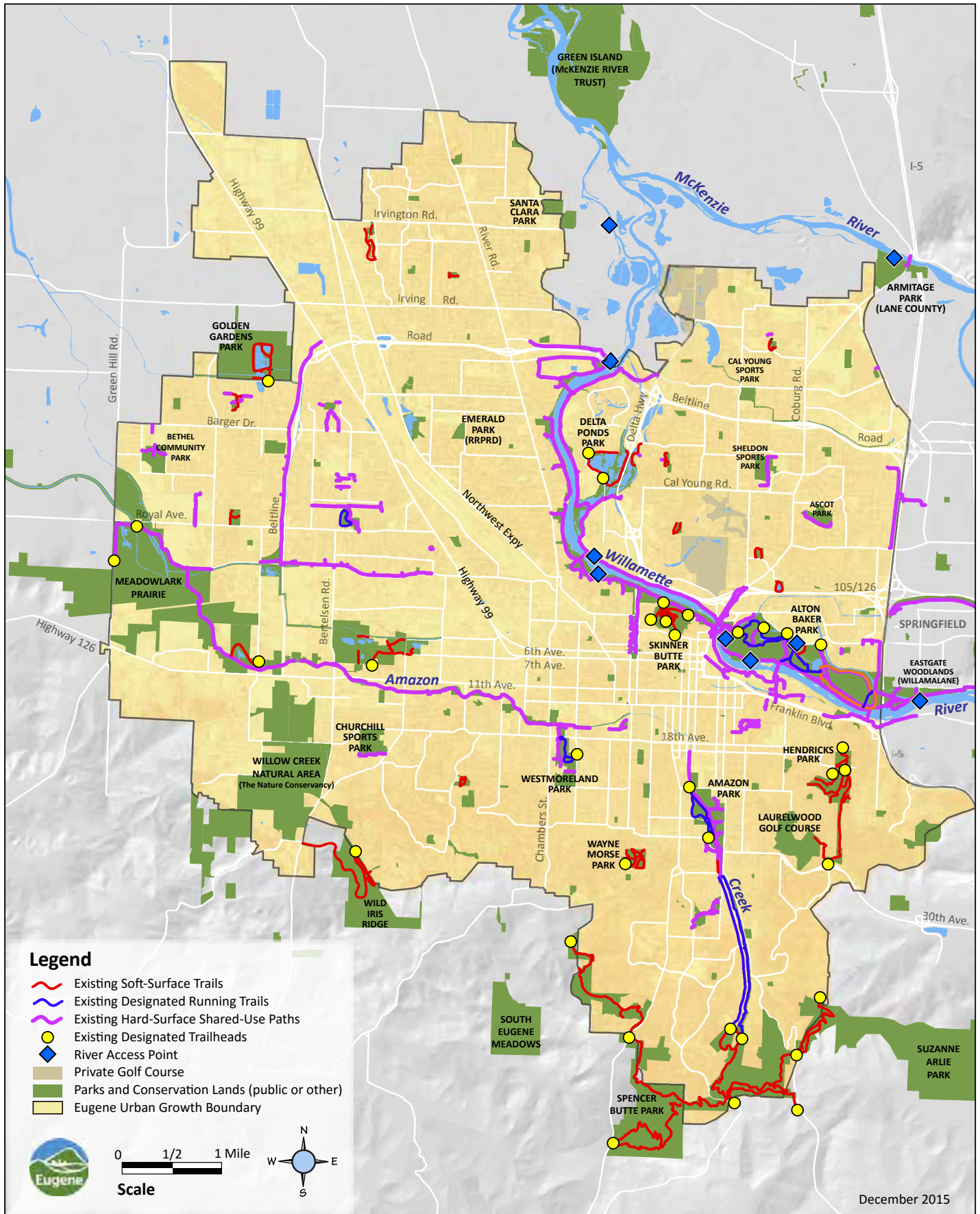
Eugene’s paths and trails have always been popular, but more issues are cropping up such as over-crowding, user conflicts (cyclists/hikers/runners/dogs), full parking lots at trailheads, and an increase in scheduled events that periodically load trails and paths even further. [18] The aforementioned plans not only identify an expansion of the path and trail network, but also identify strategies to address these growing concerns.





# Paths, Trails and River Access Points

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



## Community survey rankings of most important park types and amenities [7]

### Park Types

1. Natural areas
2. Small neighborhood parks
3. Large community parks

### Park Amenities

1. Restrooms
2. Safe river access
3. Paved multiuse paths in parks
4. Playgrounds
5. Unpaved trails

## River Access

The Ruth Bascom Riverbank Path System offers access near the river, but safe access points where one can actually touch the water and get wet are few and far between. In Eugene, there are four access points that are either formally or informally designed for launching boats. Although they are not great places for swimming, fishing, or relaxing, those activities take place because there are few other options. Areas that are less developed are accessible only by the fit and the adventurous. Aside from the physical challenges, there are safety concerns associated with the large number of homeless camps that are concealed along the river's edge and the hazardous materials that may be associated with them.

## Community Feedback

Community survey respondents ranked paved paths as the 3rd most important park amenity and unpaved trails as the 5th most important. [7] There is tremendous interest in more multi-modal transportation options through expanded path connections as well as in path related amenities such as signage and lighting. The River Road and Santa Clara neighborhoods are very interested in seeing the riverbank path system extended north of Beltline Highway. [2]

There is also great interest in building out the Ridgeline Trail System, and connecting to Mount Pisgah in particular. With the increase in popularity of paths and trails, there is interest in having specialized facilities, such as mountain bike tracks, that run parallel to hiking trails to avoid user conflicts. [2] [18]

Direct and enhanced access to the Willamette River is one of the most desired improvements to the current park system. [2] [7] [5] Survey responses, pop-up findings and stakeholder interviews all point to a desire to have more locations to safely access the Willamette River. Interest in a whitewater park for paddlers has been expressed by some boating enthusiasts for years and the recent completion of the Colorado Dam Safe Passage project on the Deschutes River in Bend has renewed interest in the recreation and economic development aspects such a project could bring to Eugene.

## Trends and Research

The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) conducted a state-wide recreation demand survey in support of its Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Among the findings in this 2011 survey, they found that walking on local streets and sidewalks and walking on local paths (68 percent) and trails (61 percent) are the number one and two recreation activities in the state, with over 500,000,000 instances of these activities annually. [16] OPRD also completed a new survey of trail participation and priorities in 2015, which provides updated information on trail use in Oregon. Across Oregon, walking and hiking are the most popular activities on trails, and 96 percent of trail users are engaged in walking and hiking. [21]

Communities across the country are building more paths and trails to meet recreational demand and to address desired health outcomes. Eugene is ahead of the curve in this area, but access is not equitably distributed across the city. Other communities around the country are addressing this problem of equitable access to paths and trails with ambitious plans. For example, The **Louisville Loop** in Louisville, KY is a proposed 100-mile trail network that is expected to circle the city, connecting neighborhoods to parks and recreation centers, with a goal of ensuring that all residents can easily access parks and open space in order to engage in active lifestyles.







# Playgrounds and Spray Play

## Playgrounds

Eugene has 52 playgrounds of a variety of scales and sizes throughout the City that are heavily used and beloved by the community. Playgrounds have been priority components of capital neighborhood park investment over the years as they have played a key role defining whether a geographical area is ‘served’ by a park or not. In comparing Eugene’s playground counts and youth populations with other cities, Eugene comes a close second to Springfield’s Willamalane Park and Recreation District. Eugene’s playgrounds include sand and water play, traditional and innovative play equipment, and occasionally, a spray play facility.

Playgrounds are also provided by Bethel and 4J School District Elementary Schools. Larger scale playgrounds are located at community parks such as Amazon and Bethel Community Parks. Eugene’s largest and most popular playground is RiverPlay in Skinner Butte Park.

## Spray Play

Spray play is a zero-depth water feature without the safety and health concerns posed by wading pools. Accessibility is also a great benefit of barrier-free spray play features. Across the country, wading pools have been decommissioned and spray play, or spray parks, have become the new standard. Eugene currently has five spray play features at Washington, Oakmont, Fairmount, Skinner Butte, and Amazon Pool. The Southwest, Bethel, and River Road/ Santa Clara neighborhoods do not have convenient access to spray play.

## Community Feedback

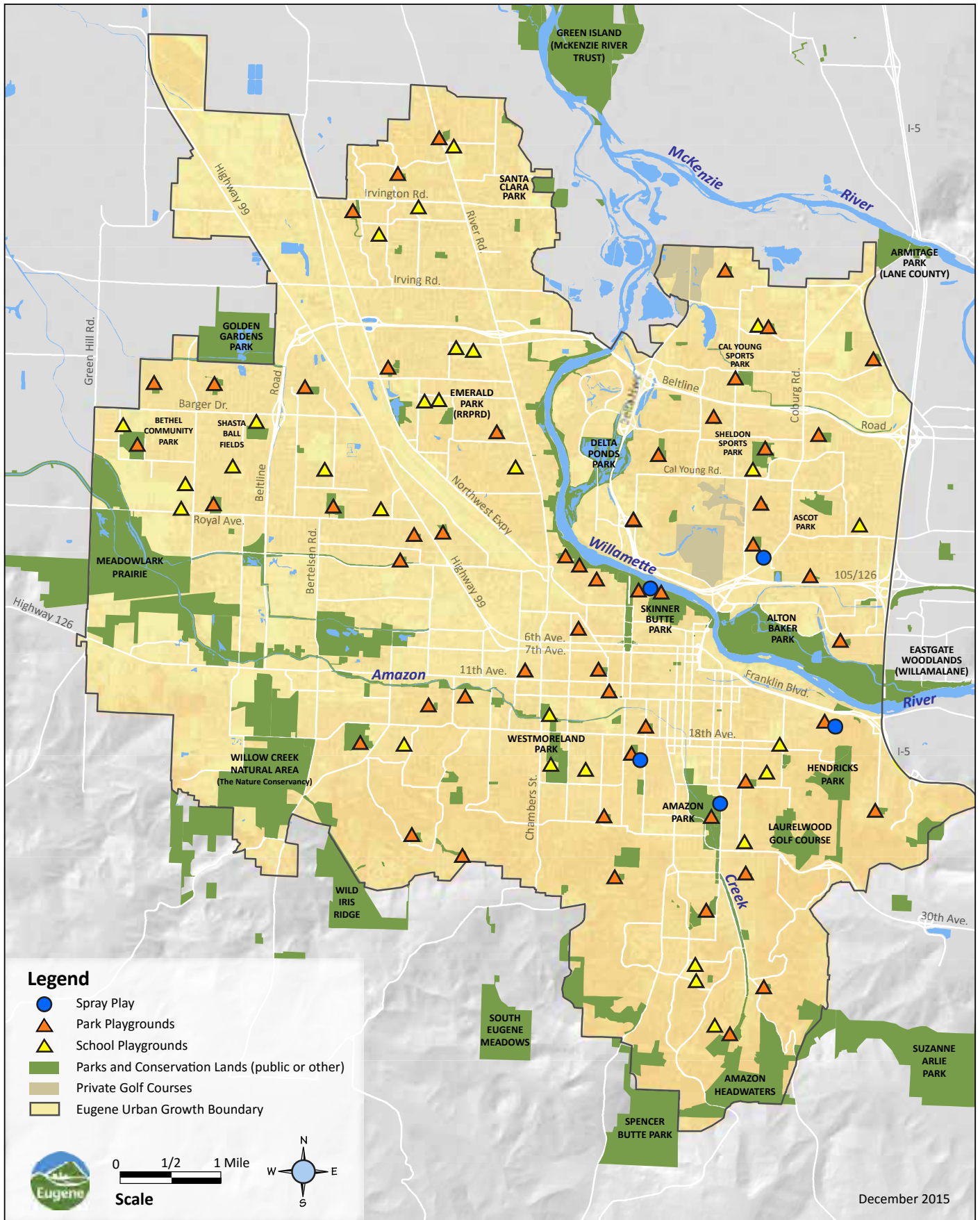
Playgrounds are identified as the fourth most important park amenity by survey respondents and are one of the most frequented park amenities, often on a daily or weekly basis. [7] A popular topic at pop-up events, parents commonly mentioned the ability to go to parks and burn off their children’s energy as a sanity saver.



*“She’d tell us not to come back until the streetlights came on.”*  
—Pop-up Participant

# Playgrounds and Spray Play

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



There is interest in expanding the definition of “playground” and thinking beyond standard play structures — consider nature play, exercise stations for adults, intergenerational playgrounds with something for every age, and intellectual play spaces outdoors. More spray play features are wanted throughout the park system, particularly in neighborhoods not currently served.

In recent years, many of Eugene’s playgrounds with sand surfacing have been transitioned to bark or rubber surfacing. This transition is the result of changes in safety regulations (related to fall attenuation), accessibility requirements, and maintenance considerations. Many parents expressed concern and dissatisfaction with this change, noting that sand is a popular play element, particularly for younger children. [5]

“I would LOVE to see Eugene design the first teen/adult playground!”

—*Survey Respondent*

## Trends and Research

Nature play is a movement that recognizes the importance of unstructured interaction with nature in child development. The goal of nature play is to create settings in developed parks that encourage creative play and interaction with natural features. Eugene has incorporated small natural elements into developed parks for years with this goal in mind. There are several recent examples in other communities of park agencies more fully exploring the potential of this type of play, such as **Westmoreland Park** in Portland OR.

Westmoreland Park is also an excellent example of inclusive play. Inclusive play focuses on providing a variety of challenge levels to accommodate children of all abilities and developmental stages. Intergenerational participation is also enabled as all people of all abilities play in the same environment.

Playgrounds are not just for kids anymore. A trend that started in Asia and Europe for building senior and **multi-generational playgrounds** is picking up momentum in the US. Aimed at keeping people of all ages healthy and active, there are also social benefits of playing with others in public settings.







## Sports Fields

“The most competitive sport in Eugene right now is gym/ field scheduling.”

—Bev Smith, Kidsports



Serving outdoor team sports with sports fields in Eugene relies heavily on a partnership between the City and the 4J and Bethel school districts. Over the last 15 years, 11 artificial turf multi-use fields have been constructed on school property with funding from two Parks-related bond measures passed by Eugene voters, matching funding from the school districts. An agreement between the City and the school districts helps govern programming of these multi-use fields. This partnership has resulted in year-round access to school sports teams and youth and community teams alike in a climate where grass fields get shut down during the wettest portion of the year. It has also resulted in a dispersed system of sports fields that is well-distributed throughout the City. While this dispersed system has advantages as it relates to neighborhood access, its primary drawback is that there is a lack of co-located fields in a complex that is capable of accommodating local or regional tournaments. The result is that many families regularly travel to other communities for tournaments.

Willamalane Center has the closest multi-sport complex locally and serves many Eugene teams. Other sports fields within the system are grass-fields both on park and school property. Some are sized for youth play only, and others are only suitable as practice fields.

There are no artificial turf baseball and softball fields in our area. The City and Bethel School District have an agreement for use of the Shasta ball field, which was constructed in 1975 and in need of renovation. Other baseball/softball fields are scattered in parks and on school property throughout the city.

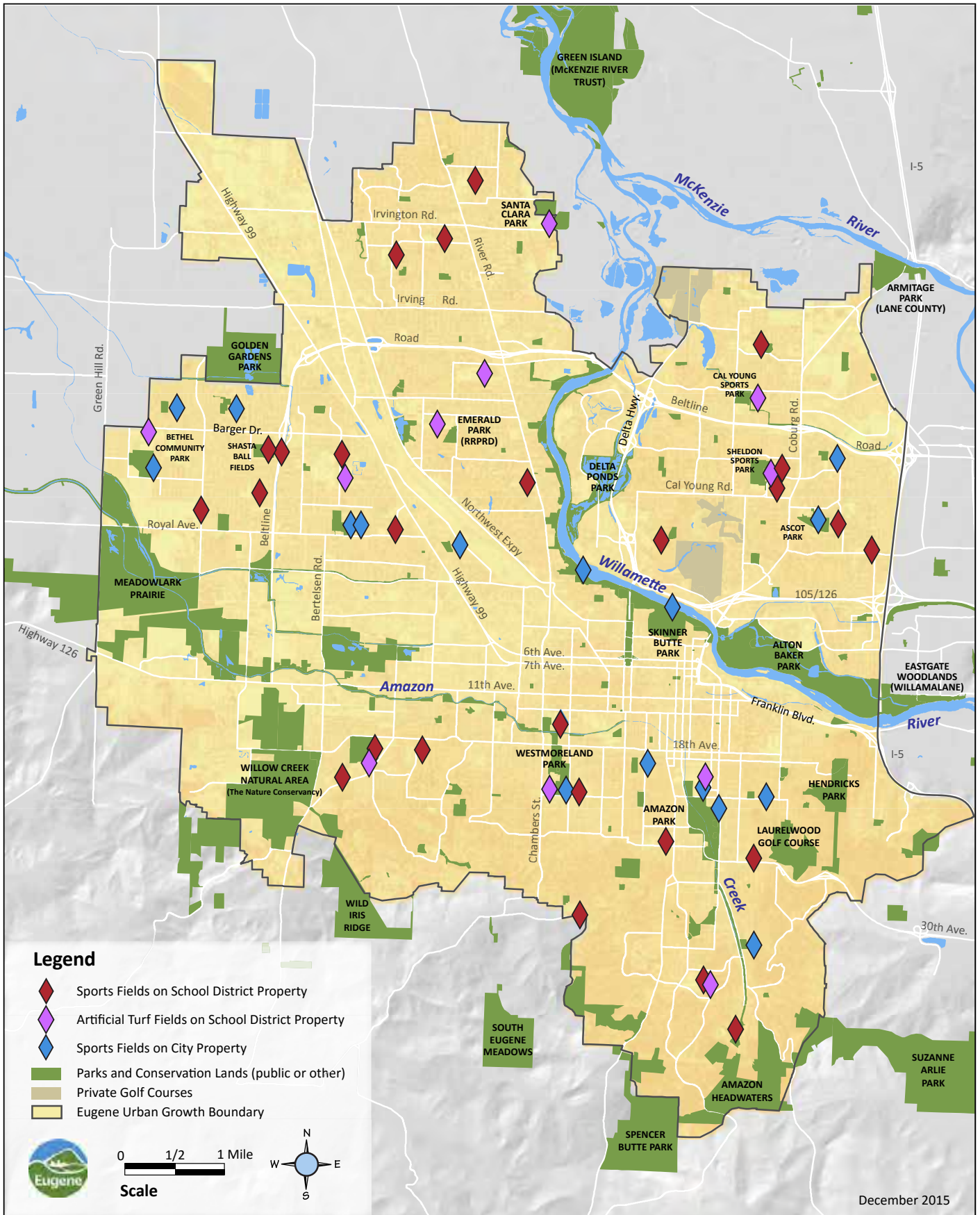
### Community Feedback

Stakeholders that utilize sports fields — Kidsports, youth club sports, adult recreation leagues, and informal pick-up game participants — all have great difficulty finding adequate field space. This problem is exacerbated in the fall and spring when grass fields become unplayable. These groups have interest in seeing more fields (multi-use, baseball and softball) added to the system, and more specifically to build a sports complex that has the additional benefit of hosting local and potentially regional tournaments. There is also interest in revisiting the shared-use agreements with the school districts and providing more clarity and transparency in the scheduling of turf fields. [2] [8]



# Sports Fields

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System







The Aspen Institute's **Project Play** focuses on finding ways for all children in America to become active through sports. It identifies barriers to participation and serves as a playbook to help get and keep all children in the game by age 12—whatever the game, whatever the form.

## Trends and Research

Many communities have developed multi-sport complexes to both serve local recreation needs and to attract regional sports tournaments and tourism dollars. [US Cellular Community Park](#) is a \$32 million, 132-acre sports park owned and operated by the City of Medford, OR. The facility has not only been an economic development success, it has increased opportunity and participation in local sports leagues.

An important consideration in the scheduling of sports fields is to have “non-scheduled” times when fields are available for informal pick-up games. Soccer, in particular, is a sport that is central to Latino and other cultures world wide. Local research has shown that costs associated with sports leagues and formalized scheduling of facilities are barriers to Latinos utilizing park and field facilities. [14]



## Courts and Gyms

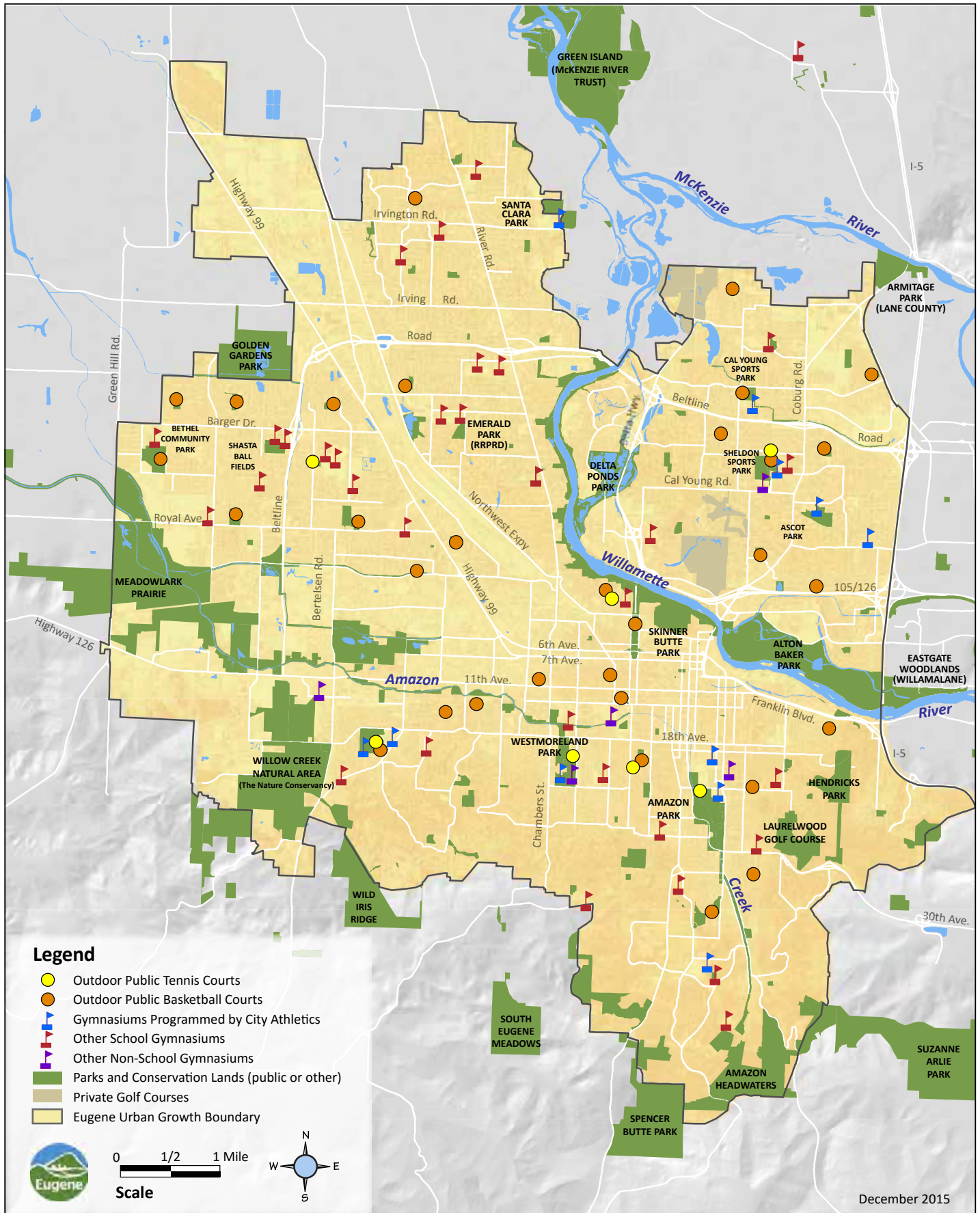
Indoor gyms in Eugene are almost exclusively provided by the 4J and Bethel School Districts. While the Lane County Fairgrounds livestock building also provides space for youth volleyball and basketball, middle school and high school gymnasiums are the primary facilities. These spaces are in high demand for high school teams, youth club teams, and youth and adult community leagues. Similar to sports fields, many families need to regularly travel to other communities for tournaments. Other gym space in the community is provided by the YMCA, the University of Oregon Student Recreation Center, River Road Parks and Recreation District, and the Wilamalane Center for Sports and Recreation.

Outdoor basketball courts, particularly half courts, are fairly common in the City's community parks and neighborhood parks throughout Eugene. Many school properties also have outdoor basketball courts. Washington Jefferson Park has several full-sized courts that are covered and lighted. These courts serve multiple purposes and are sometimes converted for street hockey and bike polo use.

Outdoor tennis courts are found in three Eugene parks, Westmoreland (four courts), Washington (two courts) and Sladden (one court). All of these courts are in poor condition and contain large

# Courts and Gyms

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



cracks on the playing surface. Other courts that are open to the public are located on the grounds of these high schools: South Eugene, Churchill, Sheldon, Willamette, and North Eugene. Additional tennis courts are available at the University of Oregon and membership clubs such as the YMCA and Eugene Swim and Tennis Club.

## Community Feedback



Scheduling of gym space is a big concern for stakeholders that provide both youth and adult sports programming. Indoor gym space is in short supply and high demand and scheduling is managed by the school districts. Similar to sports fields, there is interest in revisiting the shared-use agreements with the school districts and providing more clarity and transparency in the scheduling of gym space. [2] [8] Kidsport’s proposal to construct a field house at the Civic Stadium site is in response to this need.

Pickleball players are a growing contingency locally, as the sport gains popularity across the country. Pickleball can be played on a tennis court, with minor modifications. There is interest in conversion of existing tennis courts to pickleball as a short-term measure, and a long-term interest in constructing multiple pickleball courts that can accommodate multiple games simultaneously and tournaments [2]



## Specialty Facilities

Specialty facilities are less common amenities but by no means less popular. In fact, these types of facilities (community gardens, ornamental gardens, dog parks, skate parks, and golf/ disc golf courses) have some of the most passionate and dedicated users.

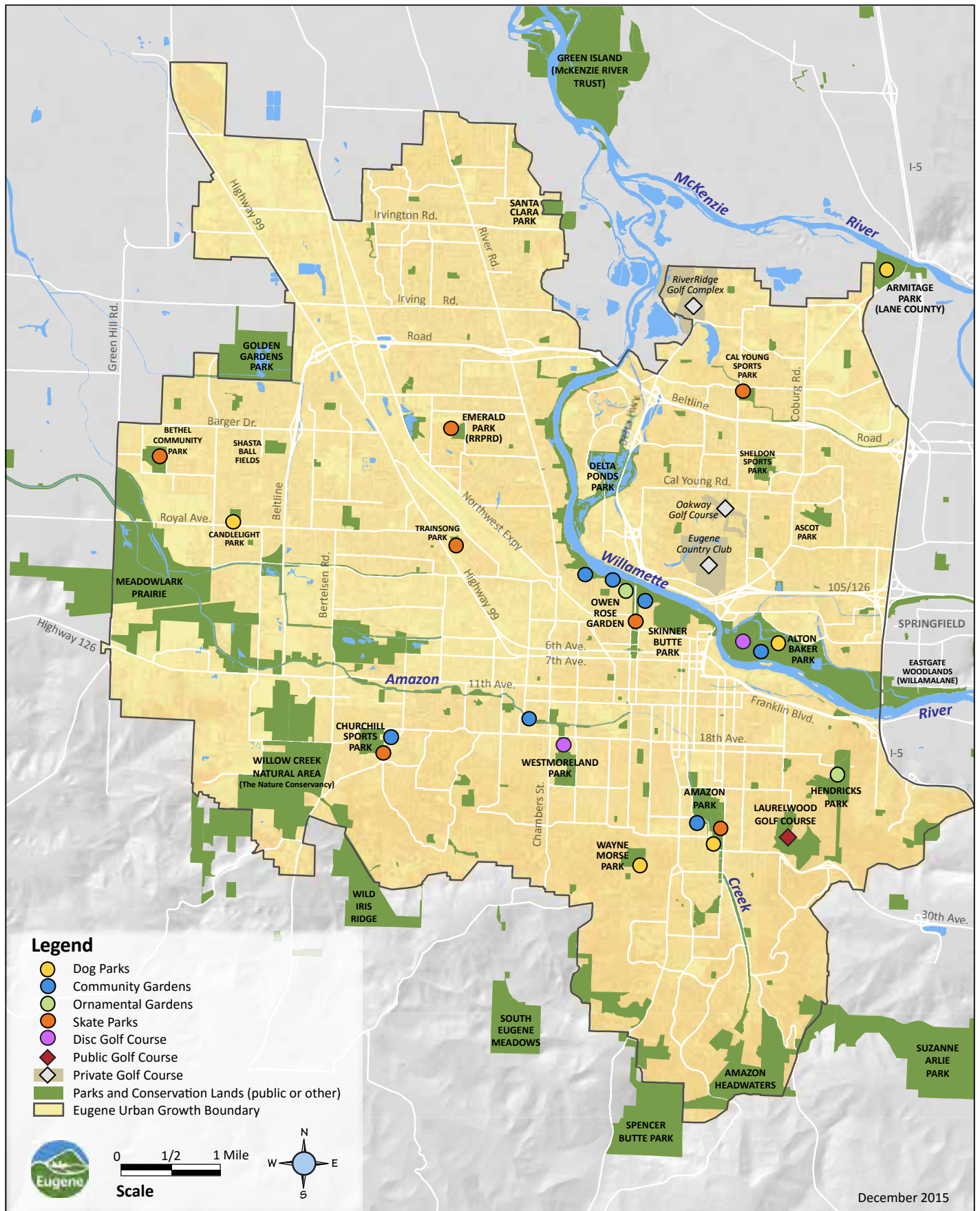
## Community Gardens

There are six community gardens totaling 346 garden plots. Four of these gardens are located along the Willamette River corridor, taking advantage of the rich loamy soils there. The other two are located along the Amazon Creek corridor. Additionally, Food for Lane County manages a community garden in Southwest Eugene. Eugene’s Community Garden program is by far the biggest and most robust program of all the benchmarked communities with a total of 346 garden plots. [3]



# Specialty Facilities

*Community Gardens, Ornamental Gardens, Dog Parks, Skateparks, Disc Golf, Golf*





## Community Feedback

Participants in Eugene’s Community Garden program are passionate about the benefits it provides: low-cost access to food, healthy food options, food security (particularly in the event of an emergency) and building civic engagement and self-reliance. Gardeners also feel that the program is under-resourced in terms of maintenance and management, and that as a result, the program suffers and is not living up to its potential. Residents of the neighborhoods that do not currently have gardens (Bethel and River Road/ Santa Clara) have expressed a strong interest in them. [2]



Urban agriculture and local or home-grown food production is clearly of high value to Eugene’s community from a sustainability and resiliency standpoint. This is reflected in the success of community gardening in our parks and the community’s desire to expand the program further.

## Trends and Research

Common Ground Garden is a neighborhood sharing garden in the Friendly area in Southeast Eugene. Located on a vacant piece of city-owned right-of-way, the garden is maintained and managed completely by volunteers and open to all.

A “food forest” is a concept that combines agriculture with ecology, focusing on tree crops. The **Beacon Food Forest Permaculture Project** is located in Seattle and is described as an edible forest ecosystem. Located on land owned by Seattle Public Utilities, the Food Forest is maintained and managed by volunteers. The program is supported by Seattle’s large and well-funded “Seattle P-Patch” program, and was planned and designed beginning in 2009 with the support of two significant local grants.







## Ornamental Gardens

The Owen Rose Garden and the Hendricks Park Rhododendron Garden are Eugene’s two ornamental gardens. Both gardens are beloved and maintained through significant volunteer efforts. Ornamental gardens take approximately twice as much in resources per acre to maintain than other park areas. Significant efforts have been made in recent years to preserve the historic and ornamental significance of the gardens, while employing sustainable maintenance and management techniques to reduce resource need. Community feedback indicates that both gardens, but particularly Hendricks Park, suffer from a lack of City resources. [2]

## Dog Parks

Eugene has four dog parks: Alton Baker, Amazon, Wayne Morse, and Candlelight. Lane County also manages a dog park at Armitage Park. Amazon Dog Park has a separate area that is for small dogs only. All of Eugene’s dog parks are very popular and well used. Interest for additional dog parks in areas of the city without convenient access (Santa Clara and Southwest Eugene) has been expressed. [2]

A common complaint throughout Eugene’s parks system is of dogs off-leash in parks, where leashes are required. Dog parks, where leashes are not required, provide an alternative to breaking park rules by running dogs off-leash elsewhere. Portland takes a different approach to accommodating dogs off-leash: instead of dedicating fenced-off areas for that single purpose, dog off-leash hours are programmed into certain areas of designated parks. A proposal to allow dog off-leash hours on a portion of the Ridgeline Trail has been brought up locally. [2]







## Skate Parks

Eugene’s parks have six skate parks: Bethel, Trainsong, Churchill, Cal Young, Amazon and Washington/Jefferson (WJ). Additionally, River Road Parks and Recreation District has a skate park at their Emerald Park facility.

Eugene’s skate parks have long been valued and heavily utilized by adults and youth alike throughout Eugene. Completion of the landmark Washington Jefferson Skate park in downtown Eugene in 2014 put Eugene on the map as home to the nation’s largest covered and lighted skate park, with the additional cache of a world class design by an internationally renowned firm. It is the only skate park in Eugene to be designed for all wheeled users (scooters, rollerblades, bikes and skateboards). Its development was a catalyst for reactivating a park in the urban core that had not seen much positive use in many years. The overall park still has challenges with regards to illegal activities and vandalism, but the skate park and the programming that has accompanied it has made positive strides in the area that is now actively used and enjoyed by thousands of park users.

## Golf/Disc Golf

Eugene has one municipal golf course and two disc golf courses. Laurelwood is a nine-hole golf course in Southeast Eugene that is owned by the City and managed by a private contractor. This course is in need of major building facility improvements. There are three other golf courses within Eugene that are privately owned, all within the Willakenzie neighborhood.

Westmoreland Park has a free nine-hole disc golf course and Alton Baker Park’s 18-hole course is a pay-to-play course managed by a private contractor. Sladden Park has three permanent disc golf baskets for practice or less-structured play. Another 18-hole course is scheduled to open soon at Stewart Ponds/Bertelsen Nature Park, owned by the Bureau of Land Management and will be maintained by a volunteer group.

The Alton Baker course was implemented as a temporary course, and may be phased out if planned future facilities in the affected area of the park are constructed. Suzanne Arlie Park is also being considered as the location for a future permanent course.





## Basic Amenities and Restrooms

Basic amenities are those basic features within parks that make them usable and enjoyable, such as seating areas, paved areas, trees and lawns.

### Benches and Picnic Tables

Benches and picnic tables provide places for rest and social interaction. There are hundreds of them throughout the system, but community feedback suggests there are not enough. Benches and picnic tables are important elements to encourage seniors to be more active and use parks for walking (and resting when needed). They are also specifically requested by teens, who tend to socialize and hang out with friends in parks. [15] [2] [5] A bench adoption program exists to increase the number of benches in the system through donated funds.



### Paved Areas

Sidewalks, pathways and plazas can easily be overlooked and taken for granted. But the actuality is that they are crucial for providing access to and throughout parks for everyone and especially for individuals with disabilities. Investments in sidewalks, curb cuts, paved pathways and plazas have helped make Eugene a model for providing an accessible city and park system. These spaces are also important for community events and programming. This critical infrastructure does require maintenance and periodic replacement and a significant backlog of such renovation work has developed over the years.



### Trees

It's conservatively estimated that Eugene's Urban Forestry team cares for 100,000 public trees located on streets and in developed parks. Aside from the multitude of health and environmental benefits that trees provide, they offer shade on a hot summer day and are a critical source of Eugene's identity and sense of place. [4] Trees can also provide corridors for wildlife between natural areas. Eugene has an impressive amount of canopy cover city wide, however some neighborhoods have far fewer trees than others.

Trees are a unique physical asset in the system, in that their value actually increases with age. In order to have a healthy mature urban forest and maximize that value, a seven- to 10-year preventative pruning cycle is needed. Due to limited maintenance funding, a pruning cycle

of 11 to 13 years is what currently exists for street trees, and much longer (if at all) for trees in parks. An active preventative pruning cycle also greatly reduces damage to trees from storm events.

## Lawns



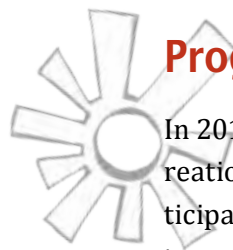
Whether it is a casual game of frisbee, kite flying, or sunbathing, open lawn areas are often where the action is. They provide flexible space for a multitude of activities as well as wide-open spaces that can be hard to come by in and increasingly dense city. But lawns are surprisingly resource intensive. Frequent watering and mowing, and occasional fertilizing are required to keep lawns soft and green. The summer of 2014 was hard on park lawns due to unusually hot temperatures, a lack of rain, and a reduced watering schedule. If current climate trends continue, expectations around the condition of lawns will need to be reevaluated.

## Restrooms



Restrooms are one of the most difficult maintenance challenges within the system, one of the most expensive park amenities to construct, and one of the most desired by park patrons. Twenty-two permanent restrooms are located throughout the system, primarily in community parks and also in seven of the larger neighborhood parks. Temporary portable toilets are brought into other parks during high park usage in the summer months. In recent years, several restrooms have been permanently or temporarily closed due to extreme misuse, vandalism, illegal activities and reduced maintenance funding. This has posed a hardship on park users, especially those with small children. In fact, when asked to rank the most important park amenity, survey respondents identified restrooms as number one. [7] Parks frequented by small children and seniors have a particular need. [5]





## Programming

In 2014, more than 650,000 attendees participated in the City's recreation classes, camps, or programs. Recreation vans carried participants across town, across the county, and even across the state to provide unique and quality recreational experiences to participants. The Recreation Guide, which is published three times a year, truly has something for almost everyone with over 6,080 program options to choose from.

### Community Feedback

The variety and range of program offerings for people of all ages are well loved by those who use them. Through recreation centers, pools, classes and parks, the system provides fee-based activities, low-cost options and free entertainment for every member of the family. The connections made with other people there are incredibly impactful and were referred to as "a life line" for many. [5]

Events that bring the community together are cherished and the City is recognized for doing this very well. In fact, people want to see even more neighborhood scale events, music, movies, concerts, and interactive public art. Community members view the City as both a provider and a facilitator of these kinds of activities in building neighborhood bonds and civic engagement. Many of the programming ideas submitted convey a desire for more recreation programming of outdoor park spaces. [5]

### Trends and Research

The National Recreation and Park Association cites "programming" as the number one trend that will impact the future of Parks and Recreation. [22] Programming is cited as the most effective tool to increase park attendance (by up to 50 percent). On-site marketing of programs is also associated with more park users (by up to 80 percent). [23]



A 2014 example of "pop-up" programming of activities at **a temporary park in Boston** was wildly successful and included lighted swings and ping pong oriented toward adult users.

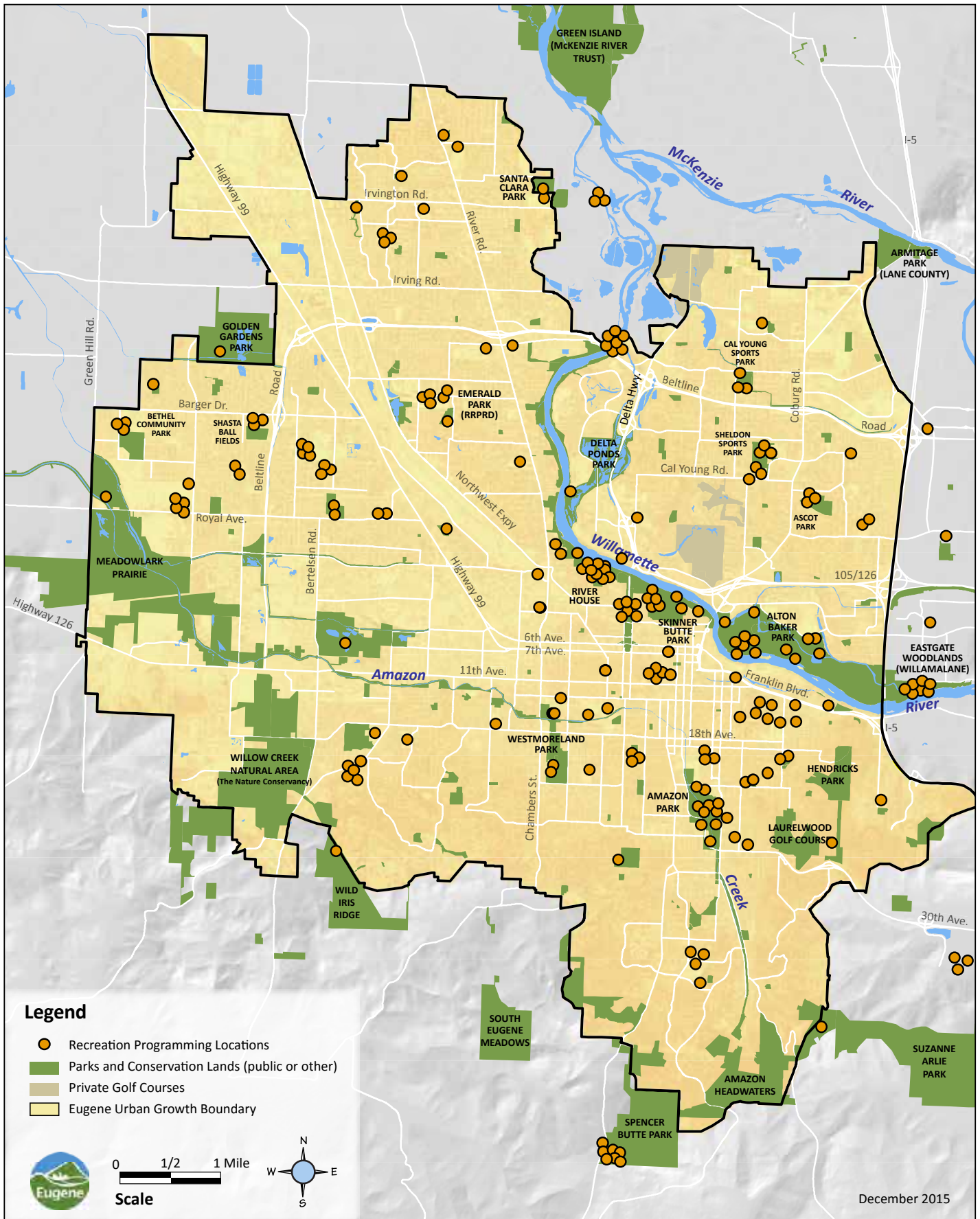


It was just a fun, safe, kinda wild thing to do."  
—Pop-up Participant



# Recreation Programming Locations

## Eugene Parks and Recreation System



December 2015



# 5. SYSTEM-WIDE TRENDS, RESEARCH AND EXAMPLES



The following system-wide trends will have implications for the services that Parks and Recreation provide:

Population growth

Aging of the population

Becoming more ethnically diverse

Families struggling economically

Health concerns

Safety and security concerns

Climate change

## Eugene is growing

In 2015, Eugene's population for the entire Urban Growth Boundary was 185,000. Over the next 20 years, it is estimated to grow to approximately 219,000. According to the City's comprehensive planning effort, Envision Eugene, this growth will primarily occur within the existing urban area, increasing the development density of the city.

### Implications:

- ◆ As Eugene becomes a more densely populated city, parks and recreation facilities will become even more vital to the urban fabric and livability of the city. Areas that are projected for increased housing and jobs, such as the transit corridors of West 11th Avenue, Hwy 99, River Road, Coburg Road, Franklin Boulevard, and Willamette Street will need parks and places for people to recreate.
- ◆ As open land in developed areas is in short supply, it can be difficult to acquire new parks in some neighborhoods. Streets designed and constructed with bicycle and pedestrian amenities can offer quality and convenient recreation experiences throughout the city that also function for alternative transportation modes, and help people reach their nearest park and recreation facility.



The City of Portland has created a vision for a linear park and **Green Loop** that would circumnavigate Portland's urban core with world-class bikeways, walkways and parks. The concept is a relatively low-cost opportunity because the loop would use facilities and right-of-way that is already publicly owned.]



## Eugene's population is aging

The number of people 60 years and older is expected to increase by approximately 25 percent in the 20-year span from 2010 to 2030.

### Implications:

- ◆ There will be an increased demand for facilities, programming and activities for seniors and those with age-related disabilities. The most popular activities for Oregonians between the ages of 42 and 80 include walking and picnicking. Ensuring clean and well-maintained parks and facilities is the most important management action that will lead to a large increase in recreation in this age group. Additional actions include developing walking/hiking trails closer to home and providing more free of charge recreation opportunities. [16]



## Eugene is becoming more ethnically diverse

The ethnic composition of Eugene's population is currently 82 percent white, eight percent Latino, four percent Asian, four percent two or more races, one percent African American, and one percent American Indian. Eugene's Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic group, increasing by 260 percent between 1990 and 2007. This trend is expected to continue.

### Implications:

- ◆ Park and Recreation amenities, management, programming and services will increasingly need to reflect this evolving demographic diversity to provide effective and accessible services to the entire community. Bi-lingual signage, informality and cultural inclusion are the primary recommendations for removing barriers to parks and recreation facilities experienced by Eugene's Latino population. [14]



“Sometimes a kid just wants to go to a park and eat an orange.”  
—Pop-up Participant



### SUN Community Schools

are full-service neighborhood hubs where Multnomah County, the local school districts, and Portland Parks and Recreation come together to make sure kids and families have what they need to be successful in school and in life. Program goals include:

- ◆ Improve student achievement, attendance, behavior and other skills for healthy development and academic success.
- ◆ Increase parent and family involvement.
- ◆ Increase community and business involvement.
- ◆ Improve collaboration among school districts, government and community-based agencies.
- ◆ Improve use of public facilities and services.

## Many Eugene families are struggling economically

From 2010-2014, 24 percent of Eugene households were below the federal poverty rate, compared with 17 percent in the rest of Oregon. In the 2014-2015 school year, 57 percent of students in the Bethel School District and 40 percent of students in the 4J School District qualified for the free or reduced lunch program due to economic status. In 2015, the annual count of homeless people in Lane County found nearly 1,500 individuals, and the Egan Warming centers in Eugene served over 900 individuals during 10 nights in the winter season. [24]

### Implications:

- ◆ Services to homeless, low-income and at-risk youth and families will continue to be a need in the community. Existing recreation programming that serves these populations may need enhancement, including improved collaborative partnerships with the local school districts. Financial drivers for increased cost recovery for recreation programs should be balanced with economic realities to avoid an adverse impact on the populations that are most dependent on those services.
- ◆ Eugene has the opportunity to provide a range of recreation opportunities for all residents. Equitable access to parks and recreation facilities throughout the entire community will require additional land acquisition, new facility development and transportation improvements, and significant taxpayer investment.

## Eugene and Lane County residents are suffering health consequences of inactivity

There is a vast amount of research concerning negative health and wellness trends both across the country and locally:

- ◆ In Lane County, obesity is the second highest cause of preventable death (behind tobacco use). [25] Also in Lane County, 26 percent of 8th graders and 25 percent of 11th graders are overweight or obese. [26]

A similar amount of research has proven the benefits of physical activity and contact with nature:

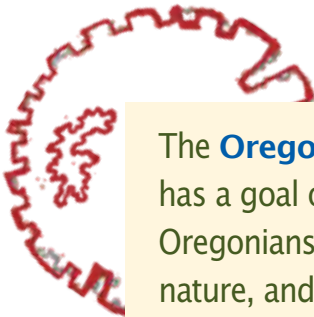
- ◆ Physical activity is one of the most important routine behaviors that reduces chronic diseases such as obesity related heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, and improves health outcomes for all

age groups. [27] Even a moderate amount of physical activity can have a significant impact on health that goes far beyond weight control. [28]

- ◆ Increasing youth participation in fitness activities and programming can lower obesity rates, increase self-confidence, and build healthy habits for life.
- ◆ Contact with nature has been linked to a greater ability to cope with life stressors, improved work/school productivity, reduced job/school-related frustration, increased self-esteem, enhanced capacity to pay attention, and greater life satisfaction. [27]

### Implications:

- ◆ Easy access to parks is associated with increased exercise levels. Park visitation is much more frequent and physical activity levels are much higher for those who live within walking distance to a park. [29] Equitable access to parks and recreation facilities throughout the entire community will require additional land acquisition, new facility development and transportation improvements, and significant tax payer investment.
- ◆ Park facilities that are consistently well maintained, aesthetically appealing and safe are associated with increased public use and physical activity. [29] Addressing concerns about safety and adequate maintenance in parks are necessary to promote increased physical activity.



### The **Oregon Action Framework for Health and the Outdoors**

has a goal of accelerating positive health and conservation outcomes for all Oregonians by increasing the presence of, access to, and use of parks, nature, and the outdoors in communities facing inequities. The framework was built by a planning team from various organizations and identifies four strategies to get more people active and outdoors. The strategies are:

1. Address barriers to spending time outdoors;
2. Increase parks, trails and trees;
3. Increase access to safe green space; and
4. Activate and scale programs to get people outdoors.









Willamalane's Clearwater Park on the Middle Fork of the Willamette River was once the site of frequent illicit activities and problem behaviors. After recent capital improvements including the construction of the Middle Fork Path and Trailhead, new boat ramp, expanded parking, an automatic park entry gate, and installation of a park host site to provide a 24/7 presence in the park, problematic behaviors are now very minimal.

## Safety and security in parks is a growing concern

A large number of Eugene residents feel unsafe in Eugene parks due to illicit activities, threatening behaviors, trash, litter and reduced maintenance. The parks most identified for safety concerns include the downtown Park Blocks, all riverfront parks, Washington Jefferson Park, Monroe Park, Martin Luther King Jr. Park, and the Amazon Creek corridor. [7] This problem is being felt nation-wide in big and small cities alike. Some promising techniques and approaches are emerging.

In a summer 2015 pilot program by Eugene's Parks and Open Space Division, two Park Ambassadors made the rounds on bicycles along the Riverbank Path system and Washington Jefferson Park during daylight hours. Park Ambassadors provided information to visitors, helped with wayfinding, informed individuals of park rules, and worked with the Eugene Police Department and CAHOOTS on more difficult social service or enforcement issues. The pilot program was considered a success and expansion is being considered for the future.

A variation on Eugene's Park Ambassadors is the Portland Parks and Recreation Park Ranger program. Rangers are unarmed and non-sworn (law enforcement) officials who have the authority to enforce park rules and issue park exclusions. In 2012, Portland expanded its Park Ranger program to provide service in the central business district/downtown area year-round during the day and early evening.

Many communities experiencing similar problems are finding recreational programming to be an effective tool. Research by the Citizens' Taskforce on the Use and Security of Central Park found that there was a direct relationship between the level of park use and the perception of security: the larger the number of visitors involved in positive activities, the more likely that anti-social behavior was deterred. The taskforce linked recreational programs with improved security by suggesting that an emphasis on expanded recreation initiatives will encourage greater use and ultimately create a safer park environment. [30]

### Implications:

- ◆ A variety of tools can be explored to make parks safer including more lighting, better visibility through vegetation management, and an increase in the presence of authority figures such as police, park rangers, park ambassadors or park hosts.

- ◆ Programming events and activities has been shown to be an effective way to increase legitimate use of parks and has the added benefit of creating more enjoyment and recreational opportunities for the general population. Eugene Recreation and Cultural Services community events offered increased programming in many parks this summer to the delight of residents. Expanding the capacity to provide more programming in parks throughout the City, with a focus on problem parks may have even greater results.

### **The effects of climate change will have impacts on park and the community**

During the summer of 2015, the hottest year on record, residents clamored for more access to shade and water. More pools, more spray play and more river access were common refrains. [5] [7]

Climate scientists project that Eugene's climate will become hotter and drier in the summer and for longer periods of time. Parks and trees will play key roles in creating an urban environment that is able to withstand these environmental changes, particularly as mitigation for urban heat islands. More than 100,000 trees in Eugene's urban forest help to purify the air and can significantly reduce local temperatures. Shaded areas in parks and along streets will become more important, particularly for residents who are vulnerable to heat-related illness.

Reduced snow pack in the Cascade Mountains is expected to reduce Eugene's available water in the summer, while more intense down-pours will highlight the need for stormwater runoff protections and the flood control benefits provided by Eugene's natural areas such as the Willamette River floodplain forests, Amazon Creek and its associated wetlands and Delta Ponds. [31]

#### **Implications:**

- ◆ As summers become hotter and drier, people will find respite in the shaded areas of Eugene's parks, pools, rivers and spray play playgrounds. Additional trees and access to water will be needed.
- ◆ Decisions regarding the maintenance of Eugene's parks, specifically around watering will be needed to balance community expectations with conservation efforts.
- ◆ Investment in new technologies can improve sustainability efforts.

# 6. WHERE WE'RE GOING



The findings in this needs assessment will provide a foundation for the development of recommendations for the future of Eugene's parks and recreation system. Based on what we've learned, five themes have emerged to guide this work.



# Guiding Themes



**Serve the entire community**—Provide equitable and welcoming access to parks, recreation facilities and programs regardless of geography, culture, ability or income.

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**Grow responsibly**—Understand where growth of the system is required to meet the needs of the community. Focus on quality of life and build on existing strengths.

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**Integrate with other systems**—Make regional connections and recognize the inter-dependence of Parks and Recreation with public health, transportation, land use, green infrastructure, education, art and culture, and economic development.

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**Invest in partnerships**—Continue to leverage Eugene’s assets and expand services to the community through effectively partnering with public agencies, non-profits, the private sector, and community volunteers.

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**Care for what we have**— Ensure that basic amenities are provided and that they are safe and clean. Be responsible stewards of current assets and infrastructure by making the best possible use of what we have.



## Next Steps

Another round of community outreach will take place in the summer of 2016 to get feedback on draft recommendations. We look forward to continuing the robust community conversation we began in 2015 about parks and recreation in Eugene and to moving towards implementation of a new System Plan in early 2017.



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