

2023 Worcester County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan



Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks
Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs



RESOLUTION NO. 23-09

**RESOLUTION ADOPTING 2023 WORCESTER COUNTY
LAND PRESERVATION, PARKS AND RECREATION PLAN**

WHEREAS, the County Commissioners of Worcester County adopted a Worcester County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan on June 6, 2023 which identifies specific action for improving parks, recreation and farmland/natural resource land preservation in Worcester County; and

WHEREAS, Title 5, Subtitle 9 of the Natural Resources Article of the Annotated Code of Maryland (Program Open Space law) requires each county and Baltimore City to prepare a land preservation, parks and recreation plan every six years with the overarching purpose of developing a strategy that will best ensure good return on public investment in the various state and local land preservation and recreation programs in order to remain eligible to receive Maryland Program Open Space funds, the State's primary grant program for parks, recreation and open space preservation; and

WHEREAS, the County Commissioners authorized the County Planning Commission to prepare a new Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan to replace the 2018 Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission, with the assistance of staff from the Worcester County Department of Development Environmental Programs and the Worcester County Department of Recreation and Parks, prepared and presented to the Commissioners such a Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan; and

WHEREAS, the County's Department of Environmental Programs and the Department of Recreation and Parks administered a survey outreach through online questionnaires from November 2020 to February 2021, and two listening sessions in November 2021, as a means of collecting additional public feedback about what is important to residents regarding public parks, recreation and open spaces in the County; and

WHEREAS, the Worcester County Recreation & Parks Advisory Board has reviewed and approved the Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on April 6, 2023, and considered public comment on the proposed Worcester County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan and have complied with all other requirements of law;

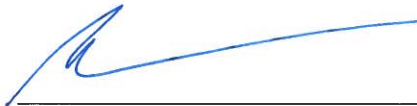
NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the County Commissioners of Worcester County, Maryland hereby adopt the *2017 Worcester County Parks, Recreation and Land Preservation Plan* dated May 16, 2023 and attached it hereto which shall replace the 2018 Plan.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Resolution shall take effect upon its passage.

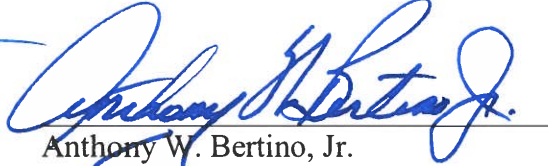
PASSED AND ADOPTED this 6th day of June, 2023.

Attest:

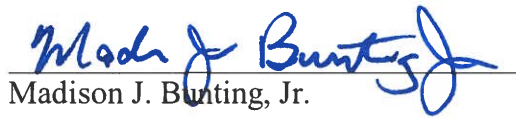
Worcester County Commissioners



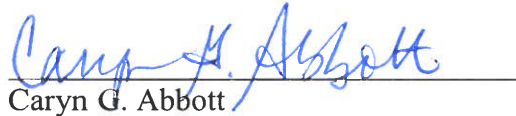
Weston S. Young
Chief Administrative Officer



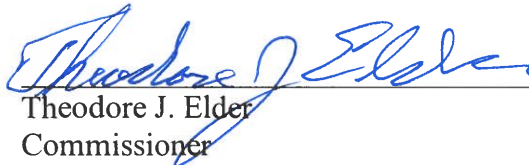
Anthony W. Bertino, Jr.
President



Madison J. Bunting, Jr.
Vice President



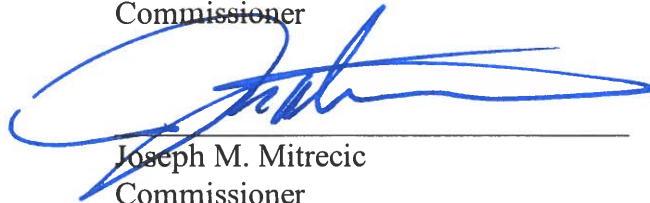
Caryn G. Abbott
Commissioner



Theodore J. Elder
Commissioner



Eric J. Fiori
Commissioner



Joseph M. Mitrecic
Commissioner



Diana Purnell
Commissioner

Worcester County Executive

Weston Young - Chief Administrative Officer
Candace Savage- Assistant Chief Administrative Officer
Roscoe Leslie - County Attorney
Kim Reynolds - Budget Officer
Kim Moses - Public Information Officer

Worcester County Commissioners

Anthony “Chip” W. Bertino Jr. – District 5, President
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Caryn Abbott -- District 1
Diana Purnell, District 2
Eric Fiori – District 3
Theodore “Ted” J. Elder, District 4
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Recreation & Parks Advisory Board**

Norman Bunting
Missy Denault
William Gabeler
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Mary Knight
Marlene Ott
Betty Smith
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**Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks
Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs**



Executive Summary

Maryland Program Open Space law requires all counties to prepare local parks, recreation, and land preservation plans every five years. This is a prerequisite for county participation in Program Open Space, which provides funding for land acquisition and capital improvements to parks. The last county plan was adopted January 22, 2019. State Guidelines require a new plan to be adopted by July 1, 2022.

Parks provide crucial services to every community, particularly in stressful times. The past two years have been unprecedented in the level of community stress, and the demand for outdoor opportunities for recreation has been great. Green spaces are a significant source of resilience, providing positive effects on psychological, physical and social wellness. This has brought increased awareness of the value of open space and provision of adequate public recreation land for all to use and benefit from.

The primary function of the 2023 plan is to collect and evaluate comprehensive data and information to better serve the public by identifying the:

- Locations, extent and recreational opportunities available at park and recreation facilities;
- Rates of park use and public participation in various types of recreation;
- Need for more parks and recreation facilities

- Proximity of parks and recreation facilities to where people live and to underserved populations in particular;
- Accomplishments of local jurisdictions to preserve agricultural and resource land.

Chapter I provides a brief introduction to the county's geography and demographics, and an introduction to the existing system of preserved lands.

Chapter II Includes an updated inventory of Worcester County's Parks and Recreation assets and user demand information; level of service and equity analyses to identify deficiencies and opportunities; and strategies for meeting recreational goals, addressing deficiencies, and improving and managing county parks and recreation facilities over the next five years.

Chapter III Updates information, analysis, goals and strategies for managing and improving county natural resource conservation land networks.

Chapter IV Updates data on preserved agricultural lands and provides the goals and strategies for improving the local program.

Chapter I: Plan Introduction

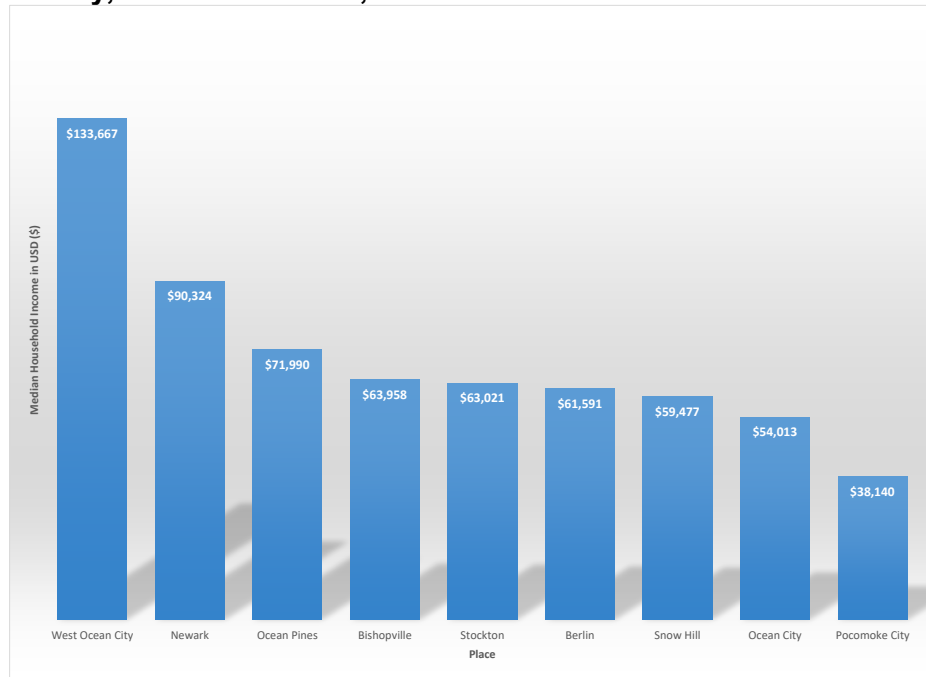
Worcester County is the eastern most county and only seaside county in Maryland, with a large agricultural industry, and concentrated development on the coast that supports a significant hospitality and tourism industry. The northeastern portion of the county serves as a second or retirement home for many. 23% of the year-round resident population lives in Ocean Pines; 52% of the population resides in the northeastern quarter of the county, including Berlin, West Ocean City, Ocean Pines, and Ocean City (Figure 2-1, next chapter).

Worcester County’s resident population grew significantly from 1990 to 2000 (32.9%).

From 2000 to present the resident population has expanded only by 2%. Most of the growth, and most of the population, continues to be in the northeastern part of the county. The 2020 U.S Census count in Worcester County was

52,460. Approximately 27% of the population is aged 65 or older (16% statewide are 65 or older); 19% under age 19; 79% Caucasian, 14% African American, 4% identifying as Hispanic, and 3% identifying as “other”¹. The estimated poverty rate in Worcester County is 9% +/- 1.4%, similar to the state poverty rate of 9.2%². Median household income in Worcester County 2015-2019 was estimated at \$63,499, with an uneven distribution of wealth across the county (see Figure 1-2)³. The statewide median household income is estimated at \$81,868 for this time period. As Figure 1-2 illustrates, West Ocean City and Newark

Figure 1-2. Median Household Income, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates, 2015-2019



¹ 2020 Total Population Projections for Non-Hispanic White, Non-Hispanic Black, Non-Hispanic Other and Hispanic by Age and Gender (12/03/2020). Maryland Department of Planning.

² American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates, 2015-2019. Poverty Rates for Maryland’s Jurisdictions.

³ American Community Survey, Five-Year Estimates, 2015-2019

are above the state mean. Pocomoke City is well below it.

Because of the high percentage of seasonal housing in the Ocean City area, there is significant seasonal population that is not reflected in the census data. This housing is concentrated in Ocean City. Population in Ocean City swells to 70,000, or more, on off-season weekends to up to 300,000 on summer weekends (25-year average of 326,628)⁴. From November through February, when visitation is lowest, the average weekend population estimate is around 78,000⁵. Assateague Island National Seashore attracts an average of 2.2 million visitors annually⁶. While some of this visitation is from Ocean City, there are also visitors who camp on the island or a campground in the county, or other location in the county. There is also significant seasonal housing in Ocean Pines, West Ocean City and South Point. It is estimated that 63% of homes in Worcester County are “vacant”.⁷ An analysis of assessment data finds that 43% of residential properties have an owner with a different mailing address outside of the immediate area⁸, a large portion of these are second homes. This transient population places additional seasonal demand on county resources, including recreation and parks facilities and programs, particularly in the northeastern portion of the county.

Worcester County is the 3rd largest county in the state of Maryland at 303,900 acres, with over 100,000 acres in farming use and over 150,000 acres in forest cover. The

county continues to build on an existing inventory of preserved land through use of voluntary conservation easements. The county has focused for twenty years on conserving contiguous blocks of protected land in Chincoteague Bay and lower Pocomoke watersheds, for the protection of water quality and for the sustenance of agriculture and natural resources on which the county’s primary industries depend. This block of conserved land provides essential ecosystem services that are of general public benefit. It also represents an increasingly shrinking resource—rural, coastal land. Over 30,000 acres are protected with Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF), Rural Legacy or other conservation or agricultural easements. The state of Maryland has protected over 44,000 acres, notably the Pocomoke State Forest and Chesapeake Forest Lands in the southern and western portions of the county through conservation easements and outright purchases. Assateague Island contains over 10,000 acres protected as state and federal parks. The Nature Conservancy’s Nassawango Creek Preserve, one of Maryland’s conservation jewels, protects over 5,000 acres of the creek corridor in Worcester County.

There is abundant public access throughout the county to both passive and active recreation. The County owns and operates fourteen parks located throughout the county, as well as an indoor facility in Snow Hill. Other significant recreational opportunities are available to residents and visitors through the town parks and

⁴ 2017 Ocean City Comprehensive Plan; Summer Seasonal Population Estimates 1990-2015.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ National Park Service. Annual Visitation Report by Years: 2010-2020.

⁷ Maryland Department of Planning/Worcester County Dept of Development Review and Permitting, Technical Services Division

⁸ Worcester County Dept of Development Review and Permitting, Technical Services Division

recreational programs (Pocomoke City, Snow Hill, Berlin, Ocean City). Ocean Pines Recreation and Parks Department, and the State of Maryland, most notably Assateague Island State Park and Shad Landing/Pocomoke River State Park also offer important recreation opportunities to Worcester’s citizens as well as visitors.

The *2023 Worcester County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan* (2022 LPPRP) updates the county’s *2018 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan* in accord with the state of Maryland’s 2022 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Guidelines and with Title 5, Subtitle 9 of the Natural Resources Article of the Maryland Annotated Code (Program Open Space Law). Current Program Open Space Law, requires each county and Baltimore City to prepare a parks, recreation and land preservation plan every five years.

The LPPRP addresses recreation, parks, agricultural land preservation and natural resource protection. It is a joint effort of Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks and Department of Environmental Programs.

The purpose of the *2023 LPPRP* is to:

- Update parks and recreation inventory and user demand information (Chapter 2)
- Conduct level of service and equity analysis to identify deficiencies and opportunities (Chapter 2)
- Identify strategies to meet goals and address deficiencies (Chapter 2)
- Update information, analysis, goals and strategies for managing and improving natural resource conservation land networks (Chapter 3)
- Update data on preserved agricultural land and describe the goals and strategies for agricultural preservation (Chapter 4)

The *2023 LPPRP* conforms with the Worcester County Comprehensive Plan (2006) and is a separate, functional plan as it is not specifically incorporated into the Comprehensive Plan.

Chapter II: Parks and Recreation

Overview of Worcester County's Parks and Recreation System

Worcester County includes the city of Pocomoke, towns of Berlin, Ocean City and Snow Hill and seven additional 'Census designated places': Bishopville, Girdletree, Newark, Ocean Pines, Stockton, West Ocean City and Whaleyville (Figure 2-1). The combined population associated with these areas make up 66% of Worcester County's total population. It is important to note that past, present and future recreational facility and program placement have and will continue to take into account demographics as a primary determinate of future development. Proximity and Park Equity analysis is addressed in this chapter.

The Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks has located major parks in population centers throughout the county. Small county parks are easily accessible to rural communities throughout the county. Additionally, Ocean City and Ocean Pines provide additional, significant public recreational facilities and programs that support recreation in these densely populated locations. (Figure 2-2 and 2-3).

County Park and Recreation Accomplishments since 2018

Since the 2018 *Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan* was adopted, the county has completed several improvements to existing parks.

Countywide, black vinyl-coated fencing was installed at 17 baseball/softball fields, replacing galvanized, rusted and deteriorating fencing. Five (5)

multipurpose fields throughout the county have been renovated including irrigation repairs or installation, seeding with Bermuda grass, fertilizing, spraying and topdressing.

The following describe new construction or other changes that have been implemented at county parks in this time period.

Grey's Creek Nature Park

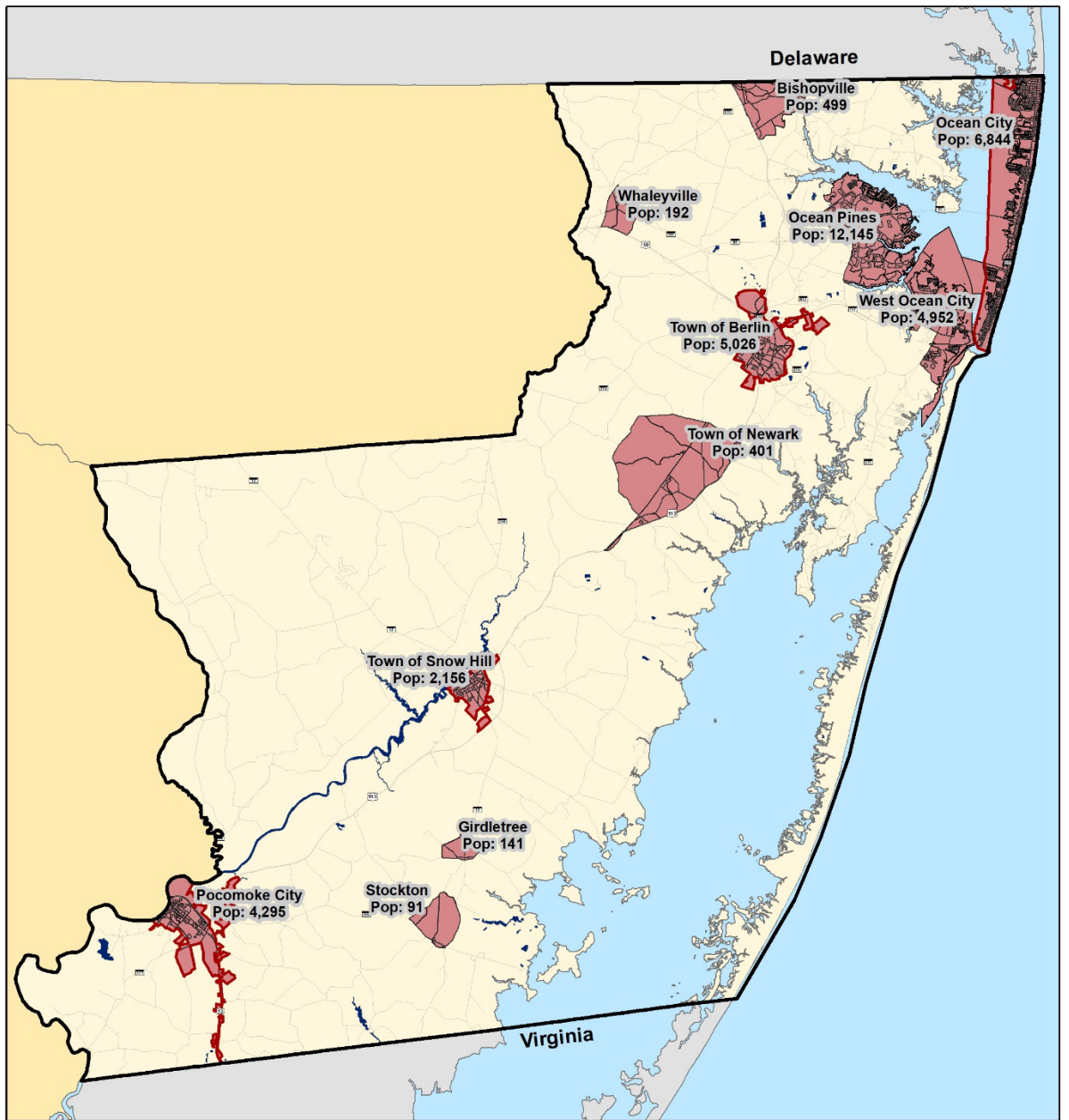
Grey's Creek Nature Park is located in Bishopville, on the Delaware/Maryland border. The property contains upland coastal forest and extensive non-tidal and tidal wetlands. Acquired by the state and transferred to the county, the property is to be managed as a passive recreation park and environmental education site in cooperation with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. A trail head and 1-mile upland trail have been completed.

Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve

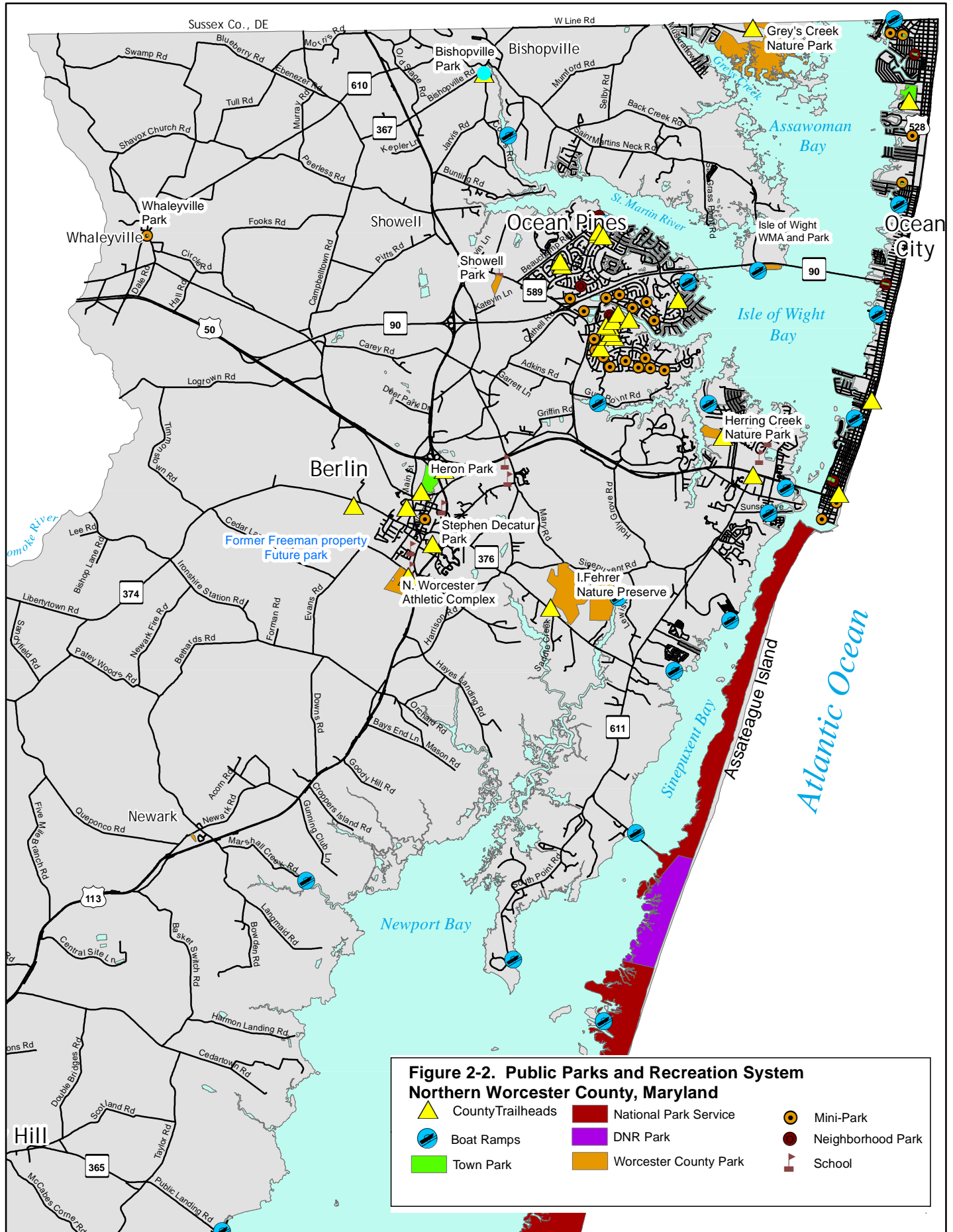
This 420-acre property on Assateague Road includes headwaters of Ayres Creek and is managed and protected in perpetuity as a nature reserve. The Maryland Coastal Bays Program is responsible for management of the preserve through an agreement with the county that was signed in 2011. In 2018-2019 hydrology was restored to areas of the property with ditch plugging and contour grading. Development of access points, trail construction and a maintenance plan for the property are underway. A management committee that includes Worcester County, MCBF, state agencies and local residents, is involved in the planning process.

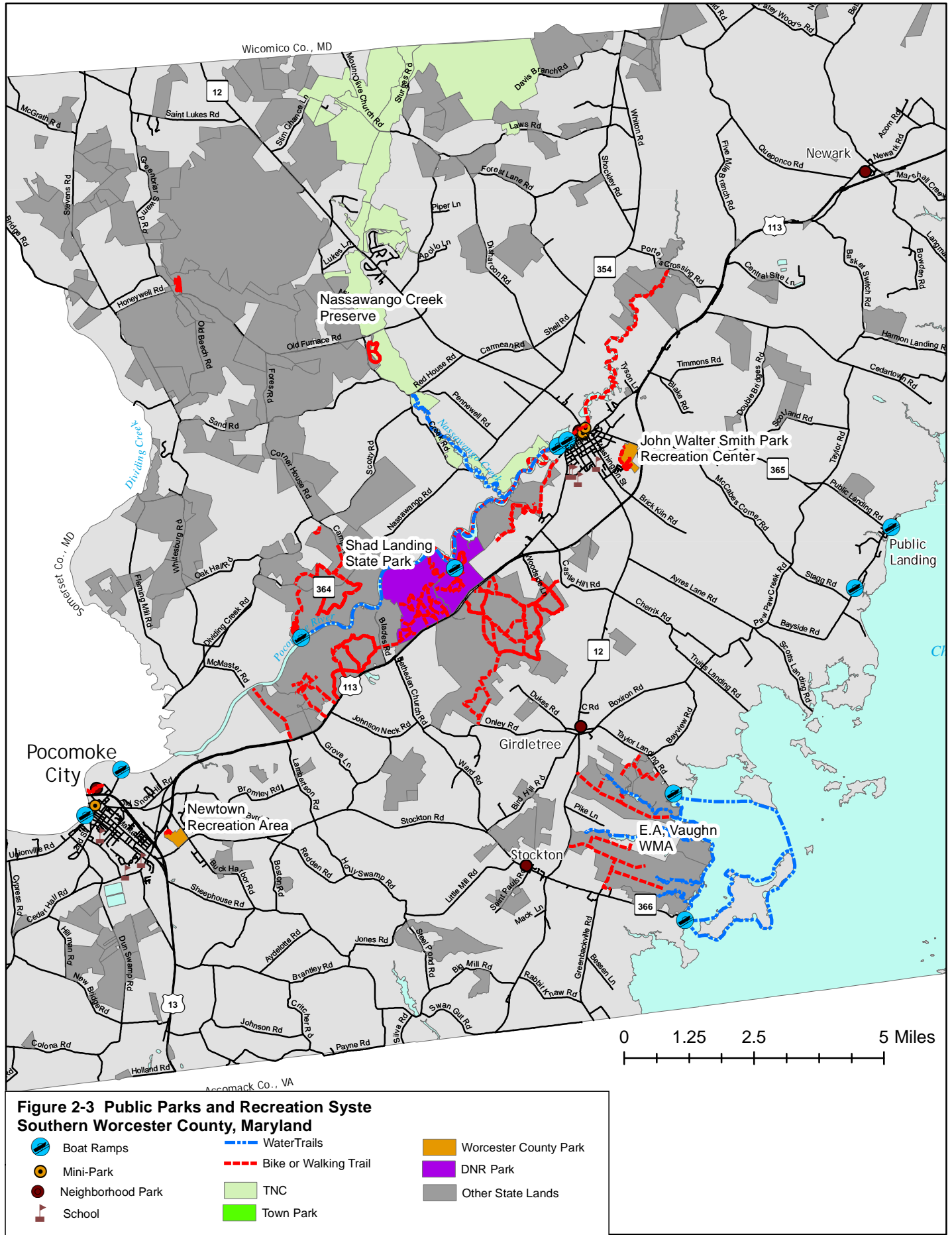
DRAFT 2022 Worcester County Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan

Figure 2-1. 2020 Worcester County Population of Census Designated Places



Source of data: Worcester County Department of Development Review and Permitting, Technical Services Division; Maryland Department of Planning





John Walter Smith Park

John Walter Smith Park is an 80-acre parcel of land with approximately 50-acres developed as an athletic complex to serve particularly the central section of the county. The park includes a state-of-the-art recreation center.

Since 2018, a regulation dimensioned, 81,000 square foot, high quality multi-purpose playing field and lighting was added. In 2020, LED lighting was installed on the field that can be turned on, dimmed, and scheduled electronically. This is the first lighting system on a county owned field with LED components. The increased efficiency will save energy and is planned eventually for all county facilities.

Fencing has been improved on all baseball/softball fields.

Newtown Park

Newtown Park is an athletic complex serving citizens particularly in the southern end of the county. In December 2020, a fishing pier was installed on the 10-acre recreational pond. The T-shaped pier is formed by two segments measuring 8' by 50' and will allow additional opportunities for kids and adults to enjoy the sport of fishing. A survey conducted by Maryland DNR Fisheries determined the pond had an imbalanced fish population. To increase habitat for smaller sized fish, Maryland DNR assisted with adding structure in the form of Christmas trees.

Fencing has been improved on all baseball/softball fields, and a batting cage added.

Northern Worcester Athletic Complex

The 76-acre Northern Worcester Athletic Complex is located in Berlin. Since 2018, one new multi-purpose field, with irrigated Bermuda-grass playing surfaces was added to the inventory. Irrigation was installed to improve one field. In addition, 32,800 square feet of parking, to accommodate 200 additional parking spaces is underway.

Public Landing

Public Landing, located east of Snow Hill, in the village of Public Landing, provides bay access for boating, swimming, crabbing and related activities. In December of 2020, 30 boat slips were installed in the canal adjacent to the landing. Currently all boat slips are leased for the remainder of the year. In the spring of 2021, the parking lot serving the boat slips (sand/fill material) was replaced with 6 inches of crushed concrete, graded, and topped with white stone to increase durability. Water and electric were installed to serve all boat slips. Customers have the option of paying for electric if needed at the rate of \$20 per month. A self-service “pump out system” was installed to pump out holding tanks off of marine vessels.

Showell Park

Showell Park is a 21-acre heavily used park located in Showell. Since 2018, a permanent concession/restroom facility has been constructed and is fully operational for sporting events and league play. The concession stand includes 2 storage rooms, 1 central concessions kitchen area, and bathrooms. This concession stand

enhances the ability to recruit tournaments to the park and county, providing additional revenue from field rentals and also from concessions sales.

All baseball/softball fields fences have also been replaced.

In 2018, the trail was extended by approximately ¼ mile and two pedestrian footbridges were installed.

Stockton Park

Stockton Park is a four-acre park used frequently by the local community, four churches and a daycare center which is located near the park. Since 2018, the playground has been replaced.

County Park and Recreation Challenges since 2018

The Worcester County Parks and Recreation Department has been challenged by aging equipment, infrastructure and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Equipment used to maintain baseball, softball field, multipurpose fields, trails, beaches and more is aging. Due to the pandemic, capital equipment was cut from the budget in FY21, increasing the difficulties of this problem. The capital equipment budget was increased in FY22 and will need to be increased in FY23 and beyond.

Aging infrastructure in the parks includes concession stands, pavilions, maintenance shops and storage buildings. There have been increasing repair costs, and staff time dedicated to repair.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been the leading challenge. From the lockdown period on, park staff continued to work

to keep the parks maintained, to ensure citizens had safe and welcoming places to recreate. As other recreation options closed, the demand on parks was high. The increased usage required more labor and other costs to keep the parks clean and well-maintained.

Municipal Park and Recreation Accomplishments since 2018

Town of Berlin

Permanent bathrooms were added in 2018 and the basketball courts refurbished in 2021 at Dr. William E. Henry Park.

Town of Ocean City

Dog playground improvements were completed at Little Salisbury Park. Tennis/Pickleball/Raquetball court construction was completed at Gorman Park. Renovations were installed in the Northside Park building. Bridges were replaced and improvements made to the clubhouse at Eagle's Landing Golf Course.

Town of Pocomoke City

A 2019 grant from the Community Parks and Playgrounds Program funded conversion of two tennis courts to six pickleball courts, including a new LED lighting system at Cypress Park.

In partnership with the Lower Shore Land Trust, the city hosted a Cypress Park wetland garden clean up.

The town has been awarded a grant to repair the city dock and to install temporary toilets at Cypress Park. The

dilapidated bathrooms are in the process of being demolished.

Town of Snow Hill

The Gateway Park Riverwalk was completed. This is a 0.15-acre riverfront boardwalk and bioretention planting area east of the Snow Hill bridge.

Ocean Pines

New facilities include new playgrounds at White Horse Park, Huntington Park, and Robinhood Park. A new clubhouse has been added to the Ocean Pines Golf Course. Four (4) Pickleball courts were added to the Raquet Sports Complex.

Benefits of Parks

There are significant environmental, community, economic and health benefits of maintaining and enhancing parks and recreation systems, both active (field/court-based) recreation and outdoor/natural resource –based recreation. Parks and other public lands contribute to protection of air and water quality, flood control, and protection of habitat for wildlife. Grey’s Creek Nature Park and Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve in particular were acquired primarily to preserve water quality and protect and restore key habitats. Studies have shown that community benefits of parks include reduction of crime (particularly juvenile), building stronger

communities and families and increased community pride, as parks improve quality of life and provide gathering places for families and social groups regardless of ability to pay⁹. Boosting fitness levels, connection to nature, fresh air, intra- and inter-personal development, are some of the documented individual and societal health benefits of park access. Mental illness and chronic heart disease and diabetes are among the leading causes of poor health and death in the United States, and studies have found that there is an inverse relationship between outdoor recreation and cardiovascular mortality¹⁰. A recent study found that volume of grey matter in the brain, and mood, change depending on how often a person is outside (decreased grey matter is linked to several mental disorders)¹¹. A 2018 study found an estimated financial savings between \$735 million and \$1.4 billion per year by patient participation in outdoor recreation in Oregon¹².

Outdoor recreation is an economic engine in Maryland. The outdoor recreation economy in Maryland generates 109,000 direct jobs, \$14 billion in consumer spending, \$4.4 billion in wages and salaries and \$951 million in state and local tax revenue¹³.

⁹ National Recreation and Park Association.

¹⁰ Meyer, C., MD. 2020. Wilderness is Medicine: On Advocating for the Role of Outdoor Recreation in Public Health.

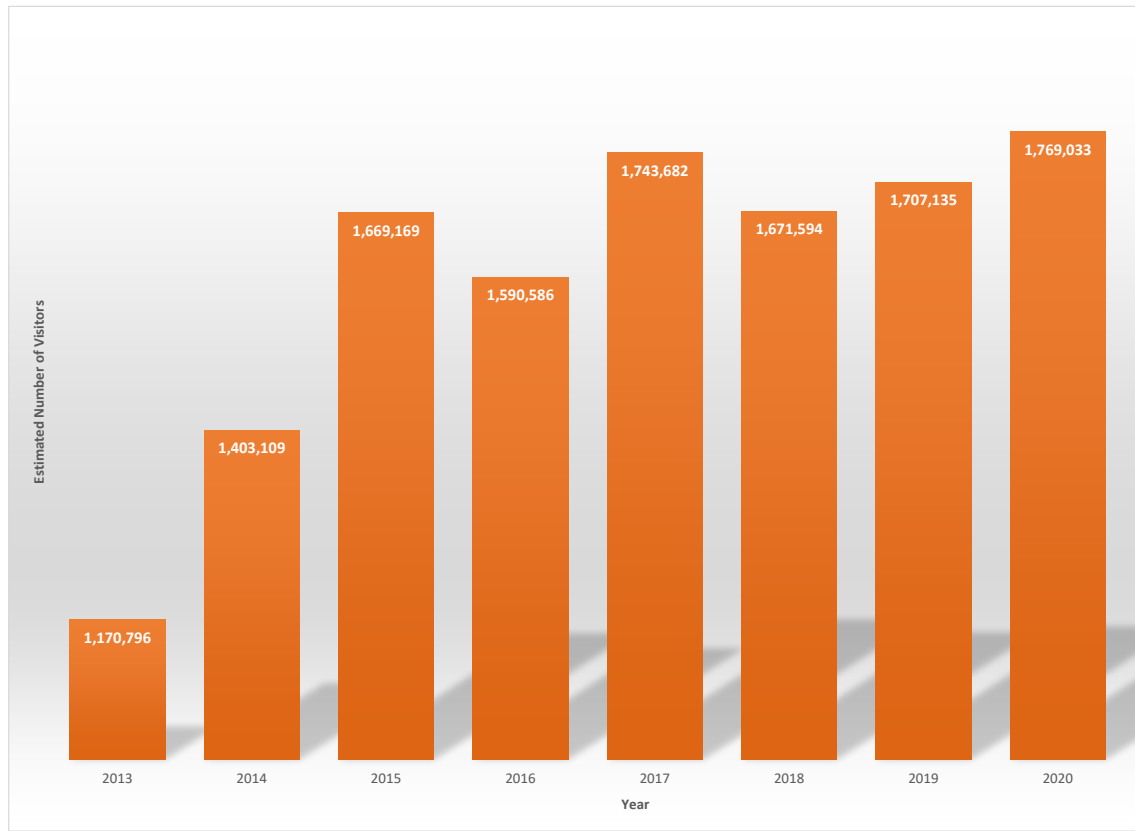
¹¹ Kühn, S., Mascherek, A., Filevich, E., Lisofsky, N., Becker, M., Butler, O., Lochstet, M., Mårtensson, J., Wenger, E., Lindenberger, U., & Gallinat, J. (2021). Spend time outdoors for your brain: An in-depth longitudinal MRI study. *The World Journal of*

Biological Psychiatry. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15622975.2021.1938670>

¹² Rosenberger, R.S. 2018. *Total Net Economic Value from Residents’ Outdoor Recreation Participation in Oregon*.

¹³ Maryland Department of Natural Resources and Maryland Department of Commerce. 2019. *Maryland Outdoor Recreation Economic Commission Final Report*.

Figure 2-4. Annual Estimated Visitation to Assateague Island State Park and National Seashore, 2013-2020



For every \$1 the state invests in state parks, \$29.27 is generated in economic activity¹⁴.

New businesses prefer to locate in communities with parks and high quality environments. The Joint Economic Committee of the U.S. Congress reported that a city’s quality of life is “more important than purely business-related factors” when it comes to attracting new businesses. Businesses which move to an area because of tax incentives tend to leave as soon as the incentives expire. Businesses drawn to an area because of its quality of life

remain long term residents and taxpayers¹⁵.

On a smaller scale, parks and open space contribute to maintaining residential property values.

Community Conditions

Parks provide even more crucial services at times of societal stress. The COVID-19 pandemic has driven increased demand for public outdoor space everywhere, including in Worcester County. In 2020 17.9 million people visited Maryland state parks, breaking the 2019 record of 14.9 million in 2019.

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ US Dept of Interior, National Park Service. 1995. *Economic Impacts of Protecting Rivers, Trails, and Greenway Corridors*.

2020 visitation at Assateague Island hit a record high, despite depressed visitation in April and May, 1.77 million visited Assateague Island State Park and/or National Seashore in 2020¹⁶ (Figure 2-4). June and July 2021 visitation was slightly lower than 2020, but it appears that 2021 was close to or exceeded 2020 in visitation volume.

The issue that impacts provision of public recreation the most continues to be the demands of the seasonal population, which puts tremendous demand on public and private outdoor space in the northeastern/coastal areas of the county. The Ocean City, national seashore and state park beaches and Ocean City boardwalk are the primary recreational resources used by the seasonal population influx of up to 300,000 on summer weekends.

However, town and county boat ramps, and fishing and water access sites, such as Homer Gudelsky Park, experience a high seasonal demand, as well.

In addition to the pressure of seasonal demand, skyrocketing growth in Sussex County, Delaware, that borders Worcester County to the north, is putting increasing pressure on some county parks infrastructure, notably boat ramps and other facilities in northeastern Worcester County.

Inventory of Existing Public Parks and Recreation Facilities

An inventory of the lands and facilities available to support specific recreational activities is shown in Tables 2-10-2-13 (see end of this chapter). This is a list of all public recreational lands and facilities maintained in and by the state and

federal government, Worcester County, municipalities and Ocean Pines Association. The county facilities are described in detail that follows, as well.

Worcester County Parks

Worcester County's population is concentrated in the towns of Pocomoke City and Snow Hill in the central and southern part of the county. In the northern portion of the county, population is concentrated in the towns of Berlin and Ocean City and also the unincorporated Ocean Pines and West Ocean City. 21% of the county's population lives in Ocean Pines; 52% of the population resides in the northeastern quarter of the county, including Berlin, West Ocean City, Ocean Pines, and Ocean City. The county's large parks: Newtown, John Walter Smith, Northern Worcester Athletic Complex, and Showell Park were developed to provide recreation needs, across the county, where populations are most concentrated. Smaller unincorporated communities have each been outfitted with 'Neighborhood' parks to serve the recreational needs of these communities.

Northern Worcester County

The northern portion of Worcester County is the location of over 70 percent of the county's population, the surge in summer population, and also is the planned primary future growth area in Worcester County. This area includes Ocean City, West Ocean City, Ocean Pines, and Berlin. Figure 2-2 shows this area of the county and the parks that serve this area. Residential growth in northern Worcester County is expected to continue at a low to moderate pace, so planning for adequate access to active

¹⁶ Assateague Island State Park vehicle count.

recreation and also public waterfront for active and passive recreation is important.

Greys Creek Nature Park, located in northeastern Worcester County on the Assawoman Bay, is a 574-acre park containing woodland and extensive marsh. One trail has been developed and the property will eventually provide public passive recreational and environmental educational opportunities, including water access and water trails. Water access, water trail and additional walking trails are being planned. Additional shoreline restoration (removal of bulkhead and replacement with a living shoreline) is being planned by the Maryland Coastal Bays Program and Worcester County.

Homer Gudelsky Park is a 1-acre parcel of sandy beach located at the end of Route 707, Old Bridge Road, in West Ocean City. The land is adjacent to the Ocean City Inlet on the Sinepuxent Bay affords a spectacular vista of natural features, as well as the Harry Kelley Memorial Bridge. An ongoing beach replenishment program has been established for this park, as sand dredged from the Shantytown Channel will be pumped on an annual basis, or as needed, onto the property. Beach replenishment and regular channel dredging is key in maintaining the recreational benefits of the ocean and the bays in northern Worcester County. Worcester County continues to work with multiple state and federal agencies to ensure adequate maintenance of beaches and boating access. The park plays a key role.

Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve is a 420-acre woodland that includes headwaters of

Ayres Creek. Managed previously for timber, various restoration projects led by the Maryland Coastal Bays Program are returning the site to a more natural, native condition. The forest will be managed long-term for wildlife and native woodland; timber harvest is disallowed by the funding source (Coastal Estuarine and Land Conservation Program, NOAA). The preserve will eventually be open to the public for passive recreation.

The Isle of Wight Nature Park is a twelve-acre wildlife sanctuary. With observation piers and an area to launch canoes and kayaks, this park offers opportunity for both wildlife appreciation and protection. Located at the intersection of Route 90 and Saint Martins Neck Road, in Bishopville, visitors can view both the Isle of Wight Bay and the mouth of the Saint Martin River. Formerly a part of the Isle of Wight Wildlife Management Area, creation of this park was a joint project of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Worcester County.

The Herring Creek Nature Park provides a natural setting for passive recreation, including a pond, a meadow, a grassy knoll, a pavilion and walking/jogging trails.

Showell Park in Showell, is a multisport complex near Ocean Pines, providing tennis, pickleball and basketball courts, three (3) softball/baseball fields, two playgrounds and a pavilion.

Northern Worcester Athletic Complex in Berlin, provides softball/baseball, soccer/lacrosse fields and a football field.

Bishopville Park serves the community of Bishopville with a pavilion, playground and open grassy area for informal and organized recreation.

Whaleyville Park serves the community of Whaleyville with a playground and picnic tables.

Non –County Recreational Facilities

Assateague State and National Parks provide beach and bay access to hundreds of thousands of users annually for swimming, fishing, boating/kayaking and other passive uses. Although the number one recreational attraction is the ocean beach, The Town of Ocean City includes 15 recreational sites and parks available for public use by both visitors Figure 2-2 and year-round residents, including ball fields, crabbing and fishing, walking and jogging, picnic shelters, playgrounds and other recreational offerings. Programming in exercise, fitness, swimming, creative arts and other areas as well as special events and outings are also offered. The Town of Berlin offers residents and visitors three parks, including a new park, located at a former poultry processing plant in the town. The park currently offers passive recreational uses. The Ocean Pines Association manages 14 parks available generally for public use to both residents of Ocean Pines and the area. There are seven (7) locations for boat/kayak launch, multiple short walking trails, indoor and outdoor swimming pools, and other amenities. Extensive programming is offered as well.

The former Bay Club Golf Course and adjacent property, located just outside the town of Berlin was acquired by the

State of Maryland this year for the purpose of conservation and public access for passive recreation. The nearly 700-acre property contains a mix of forests and fields that will be managed by the Maryland forest Service as an addition to the Chesapeake Forest Lands for public hunting and trail-based activities such as walking and wildlife observation. The potential for equestrian trail will be explored.

Central Worcester County

Central Worcester County’s population center is Snow Hill. Figure 2-3 shows parks that serve this area.

The Worcester County Recreation Center at John Walter Smith Park, located in Snow Hill serves the local population while also drawing visitors from the Delaware and the Eastern Shore of Virginia. The 36,000 square foot gymnasium provides a home for indoor track, soccer, basketball, volleyball, pickleball, and other sports. A 2016 addition includes a weight room, aerobics room, conference room, childcare room, and additional bathrooms with a shower. In addition, the recreation center is the central administrative base for the Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks.

John Walter Smith Park serves as the athletic complex to the citizens in the central part of Worcester County. The park includes multipurpose fields, baseball/softball fields, a playground, pavilion area, Frisbee golf course, outdoor basketball courts, sand volleyball court, and tennis courts.

Public Landing includes a beach and pier with pavilion and picnic tables. 30 boat

slips with electric and water access and a marine pump out station are offered.

Newark Park provides a pavilion, playground and volleyball pit in the village of Newark.

Non –County Recreational Facilities

The Town of Snow Hill offers three (3) municipal parks. Byrd Park is the largest of the three, and is equipped with a concession stand, 2 large pavilions, an eco-friendly playground and large expanses of green grass to accommodate festivals and specials events. Additionally, boaters will find ramps for canoes, kayaks, and motor boats. There is dockage available along with water, electricity, comfort stations, lighted parking lots, and spacious picnic areas. Just up the river (northeast) from Byrd Park lies Sturgis Park. This prominent spot on the water at the northern entrance to town provides a large pavilion and open lawn for civic events and passive recreation. Snow Hill has a deep water port, with pump out stations, restrooms, and overnight availability for docking. Electric and water are available along with comfort stations and lighted parking lots. Finally, Fisher Park is a small, simple space, equipped with two picnic tables in downtown Snow Hill. The town also recently added Riverview Square, by blocking off Bank St to vehicular traffic and adding six picnic tables.

Southern Worcester County

Pocomoke City is the population hub of southern Worcester County. Figure 2-3 shows the locations of parks serving this area.

Newtown Park is a 58-acre athletic complex serving southern Worcester

County. One highlight of Newtown Park is an abandoned gravel pit that now serves as a scenic pond. Citizens use this section of Newtown Park as a passive park for fishing, walking or jogging. Additionally, a mountain bike trail system has been developed.

Girdletree Park is a rural 3-acre park that includes a playground, pavilion, and picnic tables.

Newtown Park offers baseball/softball fields, multipurpose fields, playground, and pavilion area.

Stockton Park is a neighborhood park in the village of Stockton that includes a playground and pavilion area.

Non –County Recreational Facilities

The scenic Pocomoke River is the setting for the Pocomoke River State Park which includes Shad Landing and Milburn Landing.

Located within the 15,000 wooded acres of Pocomoke State Forest in the Southwestern section of Worcester County the park provides a base for a vast array of outdoor and tourist activities. The forest is famous for its stands of loblolly pine and for its cypress swamps which border the wild and scenic Pocomoke River. The park's combination of swamp, uplands and 13 miles of biking and walking trails offers visitors the opportunity to experience a variety of plant and animal life, including white dogwood and pink laurel in the spring, river otters and bald eagles, and over 50 species of fish.

Pocomoke River State Park offers boating opportunity, boat rental, camp fire programs, camp sites, park store,

dump station, food & beverage, fishing, flat water canoeing, hiking trails, electrical hook ups, picnic areas, playgrounds, picnic shelters, swimming pool, and nature center.

Cypress Park, the municipal park in Pocomoke City, offers a playground, tennis courts and a beautiful 1.5 mile nature trail which begins on the city dock and winds around Stevenson's Pond to Winter Quarters Landing. The trail is enhanced by several sections of floating boardwalk, exercise stations, a 57-foot pedestrian bridge, 260-foot fishing pier, gazebo and canoe launch sites.

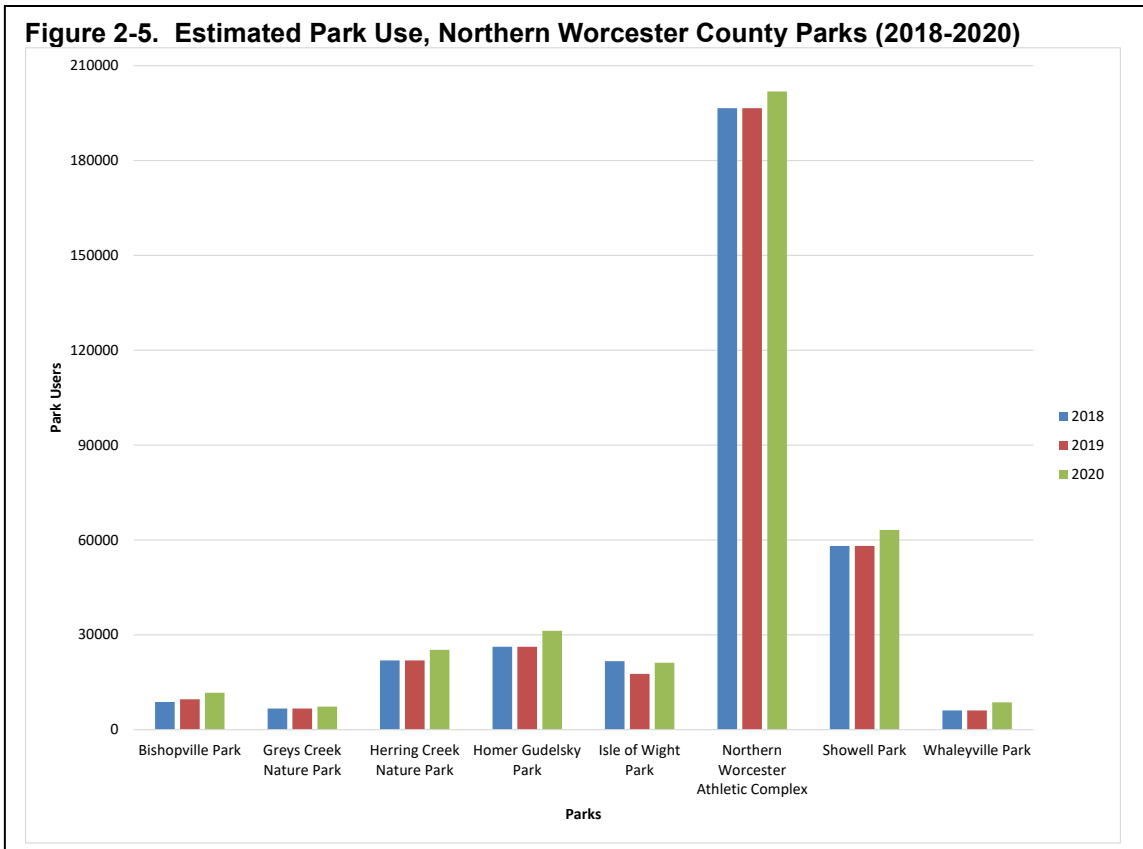
The Lower Shore YMCA in Pocomoke City, Maryland, bolsters the supply of recreational facilities in the southern section of the county. Amenities included are a fitness center, three

gymnasiums, and an indoor swimming pool. In addition, zip lining, 4.7 miles of bike trails, and a multipurpose field are offered in order to promote outdoor recreation.

Nature Education

Since 2012, Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks has offered a variety of nature education activities. Through partnerships and in-house programming, county programming continues to promote the understanding of importance of sustainability and environmental stewardship.

Worcester County Department of Recreation & Parks assists local Boy Scout troops with Eagle Scout projects. A reading book sharing stand was constructed and installed at both John



Walter Smith Park and Newark Park, Fall of 2019. During Fall of 2020, a bounce back wall was constructed, painted and installed for baseball and softball players at John Walter Smith Park.

The Worcester County Department of Recreation & parks has worked annually with Stephen Decatur Middle School staff and students on a variety of service projects, providing outdoor experiences and learning within the county park system. Parks projects were completed by students at Newark Park in 2018 and at Showell in 2019.

Newark Park projects:

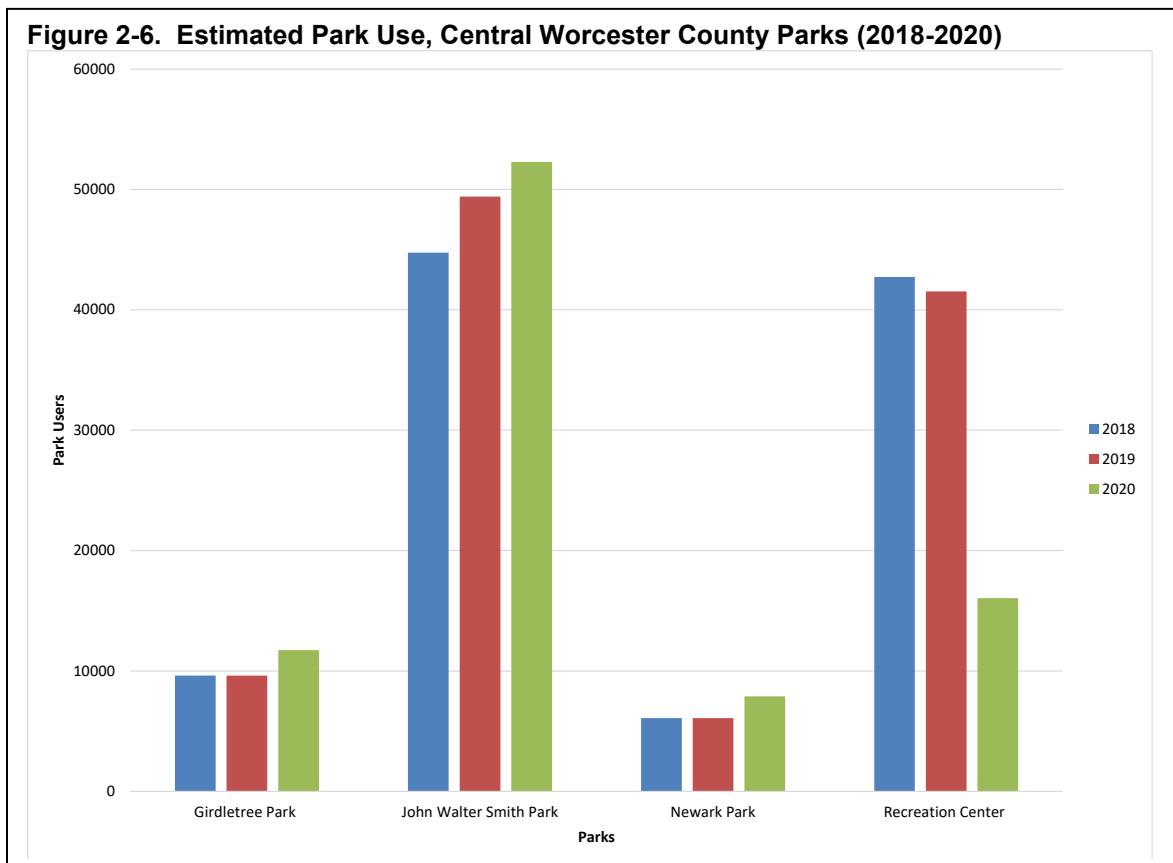
- Painted concrete landing behind pavilion to create a kids’ play area (Hop Scotch & Four Square)
- Constructed, painted, and installed birdhouses

- Painted and installed benches
- Laid out a baseball diamond and installed bases and a pitcher’s mound
- Planted a wildflower meadow and created a grass walking path
- Fixed rotted boards on pedestrian bridge and cleared walking path to neighboring housing community
- Planted trees and surrounded them with a river rock circle then filled with mulch
- Cleaned up garbage around parks and weeded the landscape beds

Showell Park projects:

- Cleared a .06 mile walking path through the wooded

Figure 2-6. Estimated Park Use, Central Worcester County Parks (2018-2020)



area behind Field 3. (This was later incorporated into the .5 mile posted walking trail created by Recreation and Health Department.)

- Constructed 2 pedestrian bridges
- Constructed, painted and installed bird houses
- Stained playground boards along with crossing bridge that separates both playground complexes
- Painted and installed sitting benches
- Created a new bed (planted tree, surrounded with a circle of river rock, and mulched)

Outdoor learning is known to benefit children in a variety of ways. Research

has shown that children who spend more time outdoors are often more physically active and perform better during higher intensity activities. Being outside can also improve a child’s mental and emotional health and overall wellbeing. The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of outdoor activities for safety reasons and as a result, Worcester County Recreation and Parks implemented a variety of outdoor experiences. Since 2020, over 400 kids have participated in the nature/science-based Pop-up Programs. These are free, one-day events that feature a variety of outdoor activities including canoeing, fishing, nature scavenger hunts, composting and trail hikes. In addition, an emphasis has been placed on programming around the natural amenities offered by the county parks system. The Newtown Park pond has been a staple outdoor learning site where

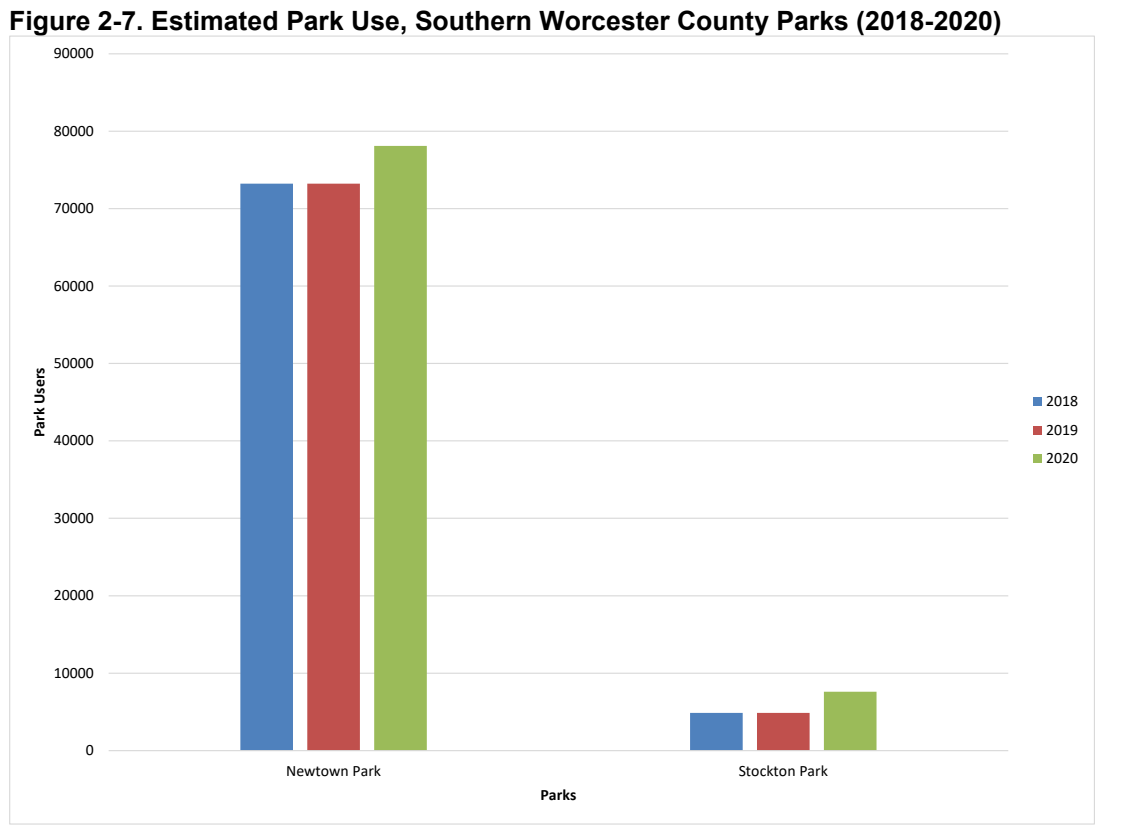
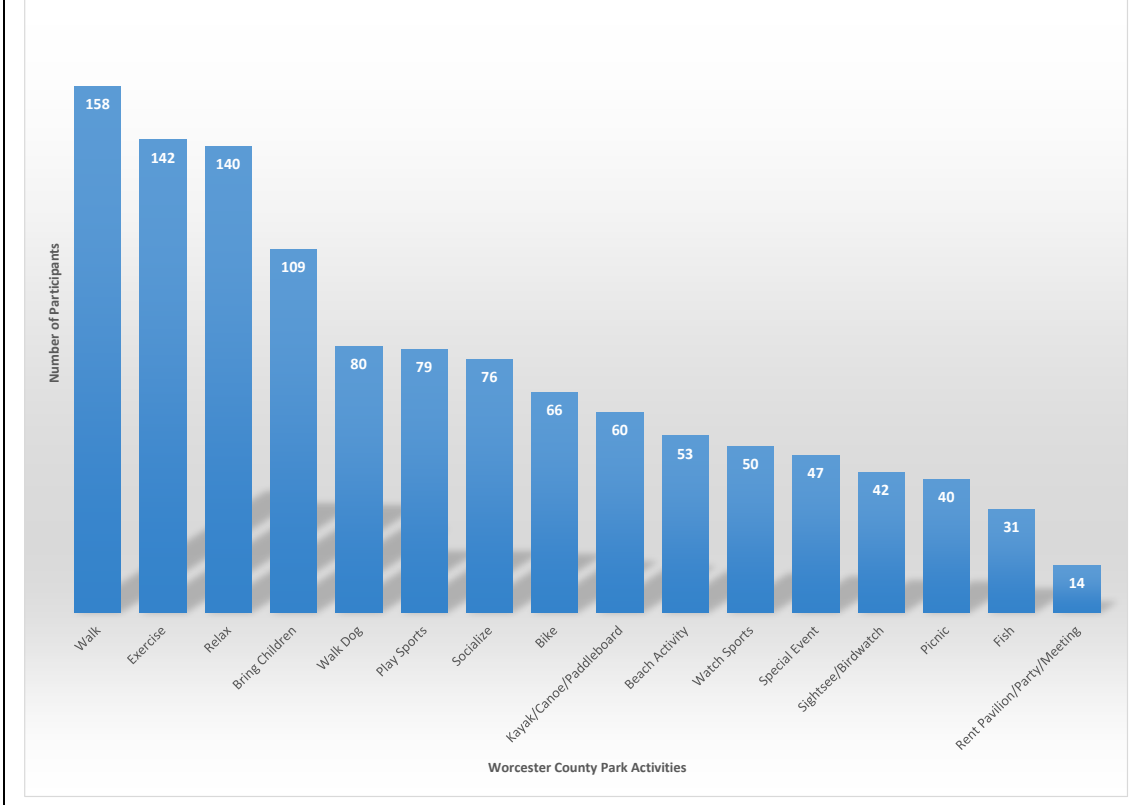


Figure 2-8. Survey: Why did you visit a Worcester County park/parks in the last year?



Learn to Fish programs, canoeing and the Newtown Nature Camp has found sustainable success. The pond is also the site for the popular Youth Fishing Derby where children fish for free to compete for prizes in several categories including Biggest Fish and Most Fish Caught.

Local Needs for Recreational Lands and Facilities

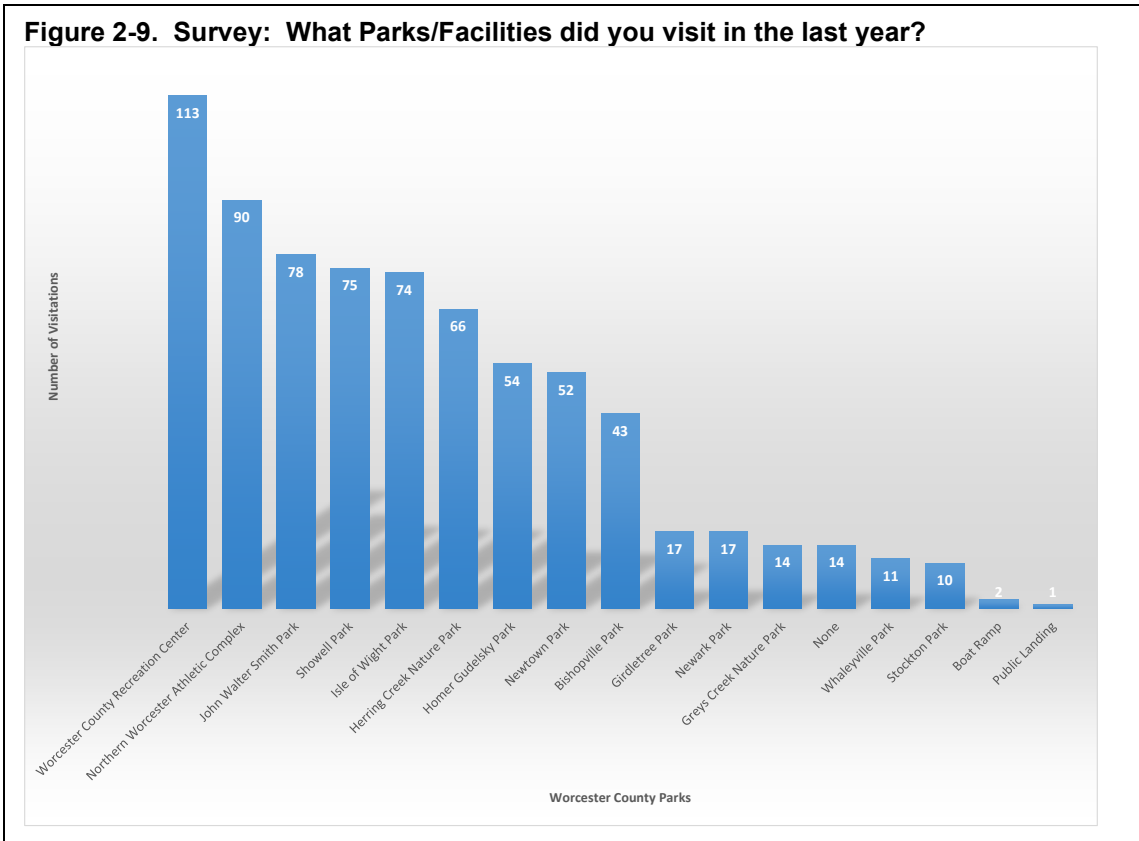
Local needs for recreational lands and facilities were measured through the use of a citizen survey, conducted in January and February 2021, public meetings, held November 2021, and proximity analyses.

Demographics and Park Usage

The growing proportion of senior citizens is placing changing demands on recreation and parks programming and facilities, particularly in northeastern Worcester County: 27% of the county’s population is 65 years old, or older; this is projected to rise to 31% by 2030¹⁷. This growing segment of the population requires lower intensity recreational options, such as walking trails, tennis courts, and indoor activities.

The northeastern area of the county, where 70 percent of the resident population is concentrated, needs to be a focus for expansion and for development of new facilities due to the concentrated and growing year-round and visitor population in that area. Northern

¹⁷ Population Projections, Maryland Department of Planning, 2020.



Worcester Athletic Complex has particularly heavy use according to estimates compiled by Worcester County Department of Recreation and Parks.(Figure 2-5).

It is also notable that there is exponentially growing demand for the facilities at the Recreation Center (Snow Hill): in 2014 the annual count of users was 13,644, and 2016 was 15,300. In 2018 and 2019 there were over 40,000 annual visitors (Figure 2-6). Use of the building dropped greatly in 2020 due to the COVID pandemic, while estimated use of all parks increased at least modestly in 2020. Estimated use of southern parks is depicted in Figure 2-7.

Public Engagement and Outreach

Public Meetings

The Worcester County Department of

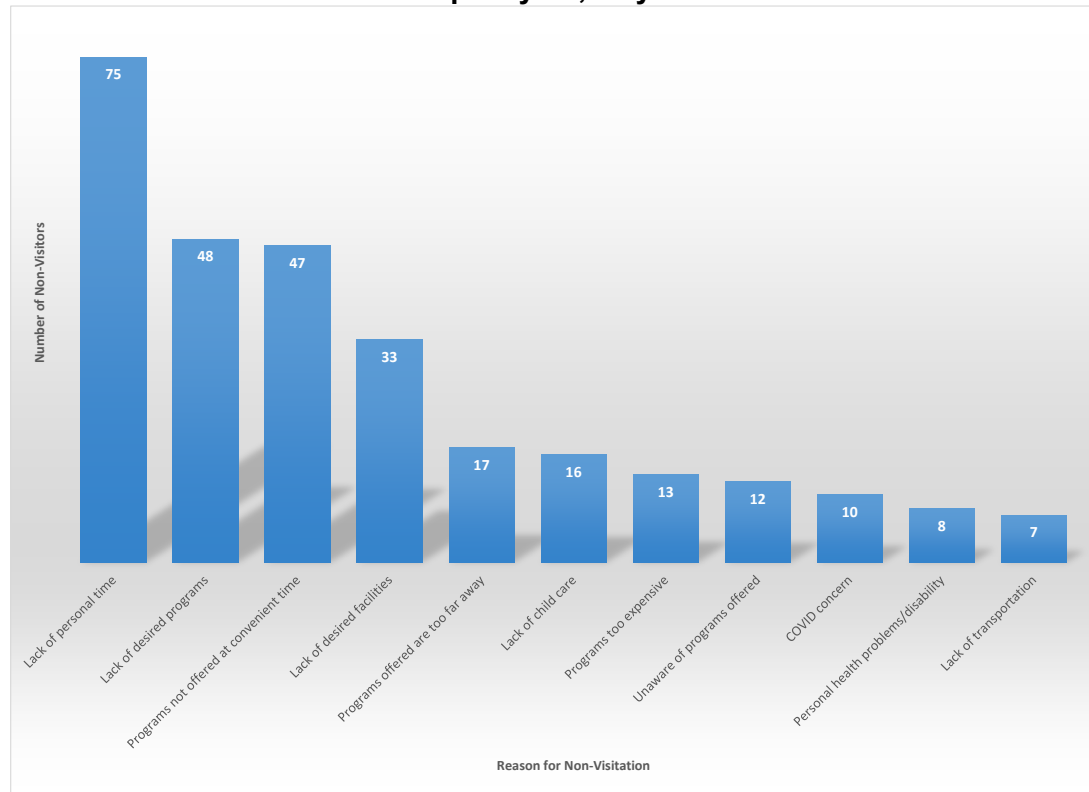
Recreation & Parks and Department of Environmental Programs held two listening sessions in November 2021: one in Berlin and one in Snow Hill. These were advertised with press releases and through social media.

The listening sessions were attended by eleven (11) individuals. Attendees were asked to identify parks they visit or have visited, amenities they use, and improvements they would like to see. The feedback collected at the listening sessions is in Appendix 1.

Citizen Surveys

Figures 2-8 to 2-11 provide a summary of responses to questions asked in the citizen surveys that were conducted from November 2020 to February 2021. A link to the survey was provided electronically to the entire e-mail data base of participants in county recreation

Figure 2-10. Survey: If you were unable to participate in Worcester County Parks and Recreation activities in the past year, why?



programs. In addition, the survey was linked on the county website and in social media. A press release describing the survey was sent to local newspapers.

representing 779 adults and children in total: 61 toddlers; 204 youth ages 5-18; 331 adults ages 19-54; 183 adults over age 54.

The survey was answered by 252 people. Responses were similar to responses received to the survey conducted for the *2018 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan*. Most respondents (220; 88%) indicated they live in Worcester County: 61% with a Berlin, Bishopville, West Ocean City, Ocean Pines or Ocean City zip code; 14% from Snow Hill; 8% from Pocomoke City area; the rest from Newark, Girdletree, Stockton and Whaleyville (6%). 4% indicated they reside in Delaware or Virginia; the rest indicated residency elsewhere. They responded to the survey for their entire household,

Figure 2-11. Survey: How far do you travel to visit a park in Worcester County?

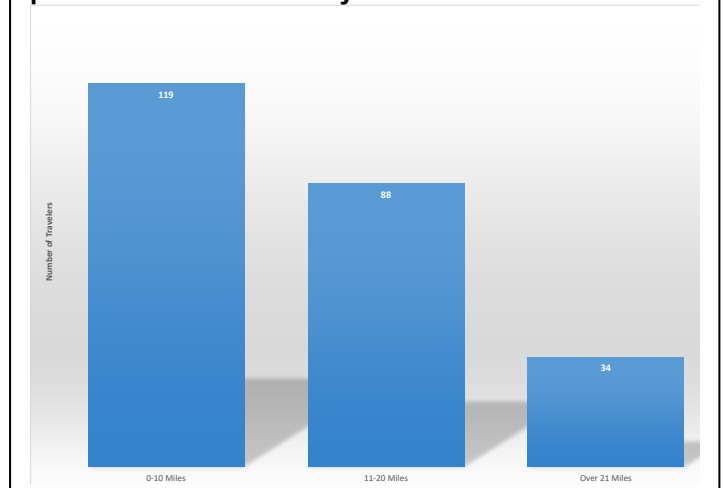


Table 2-1. Survey: On a scale of 1-5 with 1 least, how important are the following amenities to your household?

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	MEAN
	4.60%	2.09%	8.37%	12.55%	72.38%		
Outdoor Walking/Biking Trails	11	5	20	30	173	239	4.5
	6.22%	3.11%	10.67%	16.89%	63.11%		
Passive Parks and Natural Areas	14	7	24	38	142	225	4.3
	9.13%	3.20%	14.61%	16.44%	56.62%		
Water Access	20	7	32	36	124	219	4.1
	18.83%	5.38%	13.45%	11.66%	50.67%		
Playgrounds	42	12	30	26	113	223	3.7
	18.64%	7.27%	24.09%	22.73%	27.27%		
Pavilions	41	16	53	50	60	220	3.3
	22.42%	11.66%	18.39%	16.59%	30.94%		
Indoor Arenas	50	26	41	37	69	223	3.2
	29.73%	9.91%	18.02%	16.22%	26.13%		
Rectangular Fields (Soccer/LAX)	66	22	40	36	58	222	3.0
	30.73%	12.39%	19.72%	10.55%	26.61%		
Indoor Courts	67	27	43	23	58	218	2.9
	31.22%	15.38%	14.48%	15.38%	23.53%		
Indoor Walking Track	69	34	32	34	52	221	2.8
	36.07%	12.79%	20.09%	10.05%	21.00%		
Ball Diamonds (Baseball/Softball)	79	28	44	22	46	219	2.7
	31.36%	16.36%	19.55%	12.27%	20.45%		
Outdoor Tennis/Pickleball Courts	69	36	43	27	45	220	2.7
	38.89%	14.35%	16.67%	10.65%	19.44%		
Indoor Basketball/Volleyball Courts	84	31	36	23	42	216	2.6
	33.65%	12.80%	25.12%	13.27%	15.17%		
Turf Fields	71	27	53	28	32	211	2.6
	40.09%	12.44%	17.51%	13.36%	16.59%		
Outdoor Basketball Courts	87	27	38	29	36	217	2.5
	43.27%	13.46%	21.63%	9.62%	12.02%		
Disc Golf Course	90	28	45	20	25	208	2.3

29% indicated a weekly use of a park. 4% indicated they use a county park daily. Respondents indicated their top reasons for using the county park or parks they visited in the past year were walking, general exercise, relaxing and bringing children (Figure 2-8).

Survey respondents visited the county recreation center in Snow Hill and Northern Worcester Athletic Complex in Berlin most frequently (Figure 2-9). Half of the respondents travel over 10 miles to visit a county park (Figure 2-11). The greatest barriers to using a

county park (Figure 2-10) were lack of personal time, lack of desired programs, and lack of convenient program time. Distance and desired amenities were of lesser concern.

Survey respondents ranked outdoor walking and biking trails as of highest importance to their household (average score of 4.5 out of 5), followed by passive parks and natural areas (4.3) and water access (4.1), Table 2-1. Walking and trails also scored highest in popularity in the statewide survey conducted in 2017¹⁸.

¹⁸ Maryland Department of Natural Resources. 2019. *Land Preservation and Recreation Plan 2019-2023*.

Improvements most wanted at parks were cleanliness and trails (both ranked 4.3/5), Table 2-2.

All written responses received through the survey are compiled in Appendix 2.

Staff Input:

Sometimes important needs do not get reflected in surveys or come out in public meetings. Recreation and Park staff indicate that more storage space for both recreation and parks will allow for more growth in programming and better quality of the facilities. This need would not be readily noted by the public.

National Trends

National trends mirror local survey

results. The Physical Activity Council’s Annual Report provides an annual overview of Americans’ participation in recreation through a large survey with a high degree of statistical accuracy. The 2021 report reflects a continuing strong participation in fitness sports but also a significant increase (since 2015) in participation in outdoor sports activities (such as cycling, kayaking, hiking).¹⁹ The report finds age differences in activity preferences, with Millennial, Gen X, and Boomer generation most preferring fitness sports, and Gen Z (born 2000+) most preferring outdoor and team sports. Inactivity is on a downward trend for all age groups except ages 18-34, for whom it increased in 2020 to over 25%. Overall inactivity rate has trended down from 27% of the population (2015) to 24% in 2020.

Table 2-2. On a scale of 1-5 with 1 least, what are your priorities for improvements to Worcester County Parks?’

	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	MEAN
Clean Park	3.13%	4.02%	12.05%	16.96%	63.84%		
	7	9	27	38	143	224	4.3
Trails	5.75%	3.10%	15.04%	10.18%	65.93%		
	13	7	34	23	149	226	4.3
Bathrooms	6.76%	4.50%	23.87%	22.52%	42.34%		
	15	10	53	50	94	222	3.9
Trash Recepticles	7.41%	5.56%	25.46%	24.07%	37.50%		
	16	12	55	52	81	216	3.8
Parking	10.09%	5.05%	21.56%	24.31%	38.99%		
	22	11	47	53	85	218	3.8
Benches/Tables	8.29%	7.37%	30.88%	26.73%	26.73%		
	18	16	67	58	58	217	3.6
Playgrounds	13.74%	6.64%	22.75%	16.59%	40.28%		
	29	14	48	35	85	211	3.6
Security	12.32%	5.69%	25.12%	20.38%	36.49%		
	26	12	53	43	77	211	3.6
Lighting	12.86%	9.05%	22.86%	20.95%	34.29%		
	27	19	48	44	72	210	3.5
Gardens/Landscaping	8.33%	12.50%	31.94%	19.44%	27.78%		
	18	27	69	42	60	216	3.5
Courts/Field	18.66%	9.09%	26.79%	16.27%	29.19%		
	39	19	56	34	61	209	3.3
Handicap Access	21.08%	9.31%	28.92%	16.18%	24.51%		
	43	19	59	33	50	204	3.1

¹⁹ Physical Activity Council. 2021. 2021 Physical Activity Council’s Overview Report on U.S. Participation.

Inactivity tends to be correlated to income, with higher levels of inactivity associated with lower income. Across income levels, however, there is a strong interest in outdoor sports activities, with fishing and hiking at the top. It should be noted that a diversity gap still exists in outdoor recreation participation. Black and Hispanic American participation in outdoor recreation is growing, but these groups are still underrepresented²⁰. In addition, youngest participants ages 6 to 17, of all races and ethnicities, were outdoors far less in 2019 than in 2012. Just 50.7% of the US population participated in one outdoor activity in 2019 according to the Outdoor Foundation.²¹

Level of Service Analysis

An analysis of the level of service provided by public parks and recreation systems was conducted with intent to identify areas in the county where additional investment in land or facilities may be needed to meet the recreational needs of residents. Historically, Maryland counties used a single metric of 30 acres of parks per 1,000 population to measure extent of need for recreational land. This acreage could be any distance away from population centers, and the amenities offered were not part of the analysis. By analyzing and mapping park and recreation inventory in relation to population, and taking into consideration known needs and demands of users, a more accurate analysis of level of service can be made, and better plans formulated to address them.

To measure the level of service provided by public parks and recreation facilities,

it is required that counties use at least two methods: “proximity analysis” and “park equity analysis”. Not only do these two methods provide means for analyzing multiple factors impacting the level of service provided by public parks and recreation amenities, they also are used to create maps that illustrate existing conditions and findings. These visual tools convey key levels of service related information that are helpful in supporting decision-making.

Proximity Maps and Analysis

Proximity analysis determines where public parks and recreation sites are located in the county in relation to the population, and identifies areas where the population has greater or lesser access. It’s important to note, however, that a distinction must be made between proximity and access. The analyses conducted indicate greater or lesser proximity to a recreation amenity. These maps should not be interpreted to suggest better or worse access because other considerations would need to be included.

Large-Scale/county-wide Analysis (5 mile catchment)

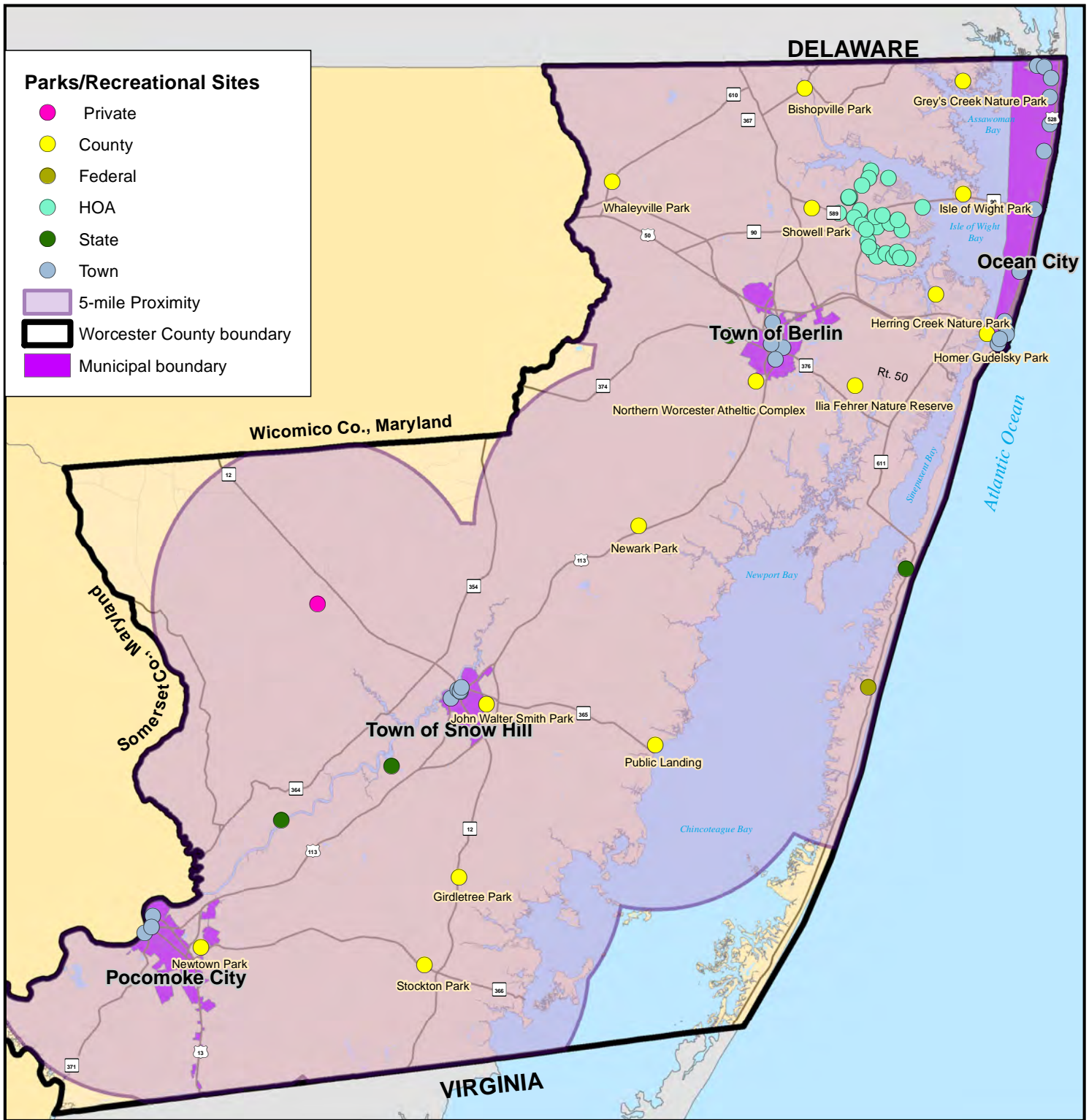
Entire Parks and Recreation System

The vast majority (99% +) of Worcester County residents live within 5 miles of at least one park. Figure 2-12 shows the areas of the county within 5 miles of any park or recreational site, a distance that approximates a 15-minute drive. Per 2020 census block data, only approximately 300 residents live in this 13,500-acre area outside of this catchment area (although may be less than 5 miles from a park in another county). While this analysis suggests

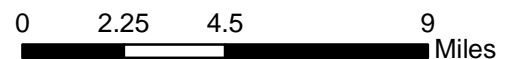
²⁰ Outdoor Foundation. 2020. 2020 Outdoor Participation Report.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Figure 2-12 Proximity Analysis: Catchment Area within Five Miles of a Park or Recreational Area



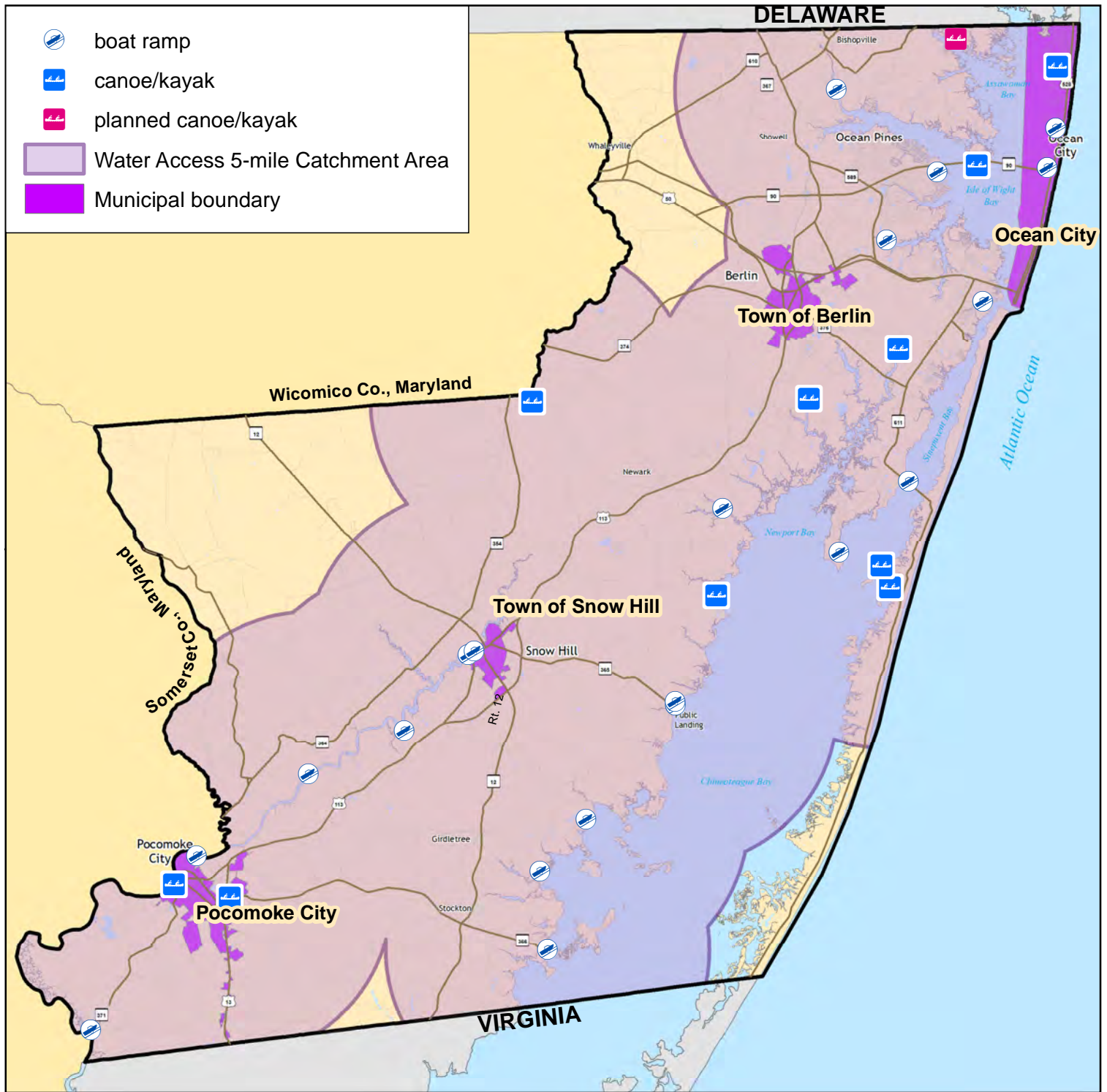
Worcester County Total Population (2020): 52,460
 Estimated Population within Gap in Service (17,000+/- acres): 300



Note: A "Gap in Service" is any area within Worcester County more than 5 miles from an amenity.

March 9, 2022
 Source: Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs

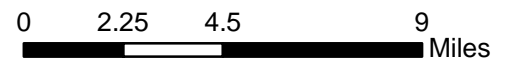
Figure 2-13 Proximity Analysis: Catchment Area within Five Miles of a Point of Water Access



Worcester County Total Population (2020): 52,460
Estimated Population within Gap in Service (45,000+/- acres): 1,746



Note: A "Gap in Service" is any area within Worcester County more than 5 miles from an amenity.



that parks are well-distributed across the the county, more refined analysis is necessary to identify gaps in access to specific types of amenities. In addition, an adequate driving distance to a park does not equate to access for citizens without access to reliable transportation.

Water Access

Figure 2-13 shows all areas of the county within 5 miles of a public boat ramp or soft launch. These amenities are spread across the county, providing access to the Pocomoke River and Maryland's coastal bays and the waterways that feed them. Only 3% of the county population lives outside of a 5-mile proximity to public water access, and in most cases these residences are more than five miles from any water body. This suggests that there is generally adequate distribution of water access throughout the county, although there may be increasing demand, as the population continues to grow in the northeastern portion of the county, and there is more demand from the growing number of residents in Delaware in particular. Increasing use of boat ramps by out of state boaters has been a recent concern voiced by some citizens. Traffic counters are recommended to be placed at certain northern boat ramps to gauge use and determine if current supply is adequate.

Trails Access

Figure 2-14 shows all areas of the county within five miles of any walking trail available to the public (water trails are included on the map but not the analysis since the emphasis in this analysis is access to walking trails). Most residents in the county live within five miles of at least one walking trail. The analysis shows an abundance of

walking trails associated with the Pocomoke State Forest, which encompasses 18,000 acres of woodland in the lower three eastern shore counties. There are multiple short walking trails offered in parks in each municipality and Ocean Pines, and in many county parks. Assateague State Park and National Seashore maintain walking trails. New trails since 2018 are available or will be in several locations in the northern area of the county, including the new Grey's Creek Nature Park and in the Town of Berlin. Property purchased west of Berlin by the state of Maryland is planned for walking trail access. The county owned Ilia Fehrer Nature Reserve on Assateague Road will eventually offer public walking trails. With the majority of the county's population, and population growth, in the northern portion of the county, additional walking trails in this area may still be needed to address demand. This deficiency may be reflected in the large number of citizen survey responses noting a need for more walking trails.

Greenways/Bikeways

Safe walking/biking trails that *connect* destinations, and that offer opportunity for longer distance travel, and an alternative to vehicular travel as well as recreation, have been identified by citizens as a need, both in on-line survey feedback and in listening sessions. Such a trail system would offer many benefits including promoting health, new opportunities for recreation and non-motorized transportation, strengthening the local economy by offering a tourism amenity, as well as enhancing quality of life for local residents. Worcester County, each municipality and Ocean Pines have been at work on this concept in various ways and at various stages. What is missing is a comprehensive plan

and strategy for creating a county-wide trails system. Figure 2-15 depicts existing and proposed or potential locations for bike or bike/walk trails, which are also described below:

- Pocomoke City rail trail. A potential trail would connect to a planned Virginia eastern shore rail trail, making Pocomoke City a destination on this trail, as well as provide a bike/pedestrian path within the town.
- The town of Snow Hill is working with citizens to identify bikeway options and opportunities to safely link destinations within the town.
- The town of Berlin plans to develop a dual use bike/walk path with a 14-ft access agreement on the existing railroad ROW from Route 50 to Evans Road. The first phase, from Heron Park to Main Street, is funded and expected to begin construction soon.
- Worcester County Department of Public Works is exploring development of a bikeway parallel to Route 611 that would extend from Route 50 to Assateague Island.
- The Town of Ocean City is exploring improved biking route from the Inlet to Delaware (not depicted on map).
- Ocean Pines Association is working with Worcester County and State Highway Administration to improve pedestrian access to commercial areas, the library and recreational areas (not depicted on the map).

- Worcester County Regional Shared Use Path Network: Worcester County Department of Public Works has received a MDOT Bikeways grant and Transportation Alternatives grant for a preliminary study of a shared use path along MD 611 connecting the existing path on US 50 to the existing path at Assateague State Park. Future grant applications will be submitted for the design phase and the construction phase. Once the MD 611 project is successfully constructed, the county intends to pursue funds to expand the network to US 113 (Berlin) along MD 376, then along US 113 from Berlin to Snow Hill and Pocomoke.

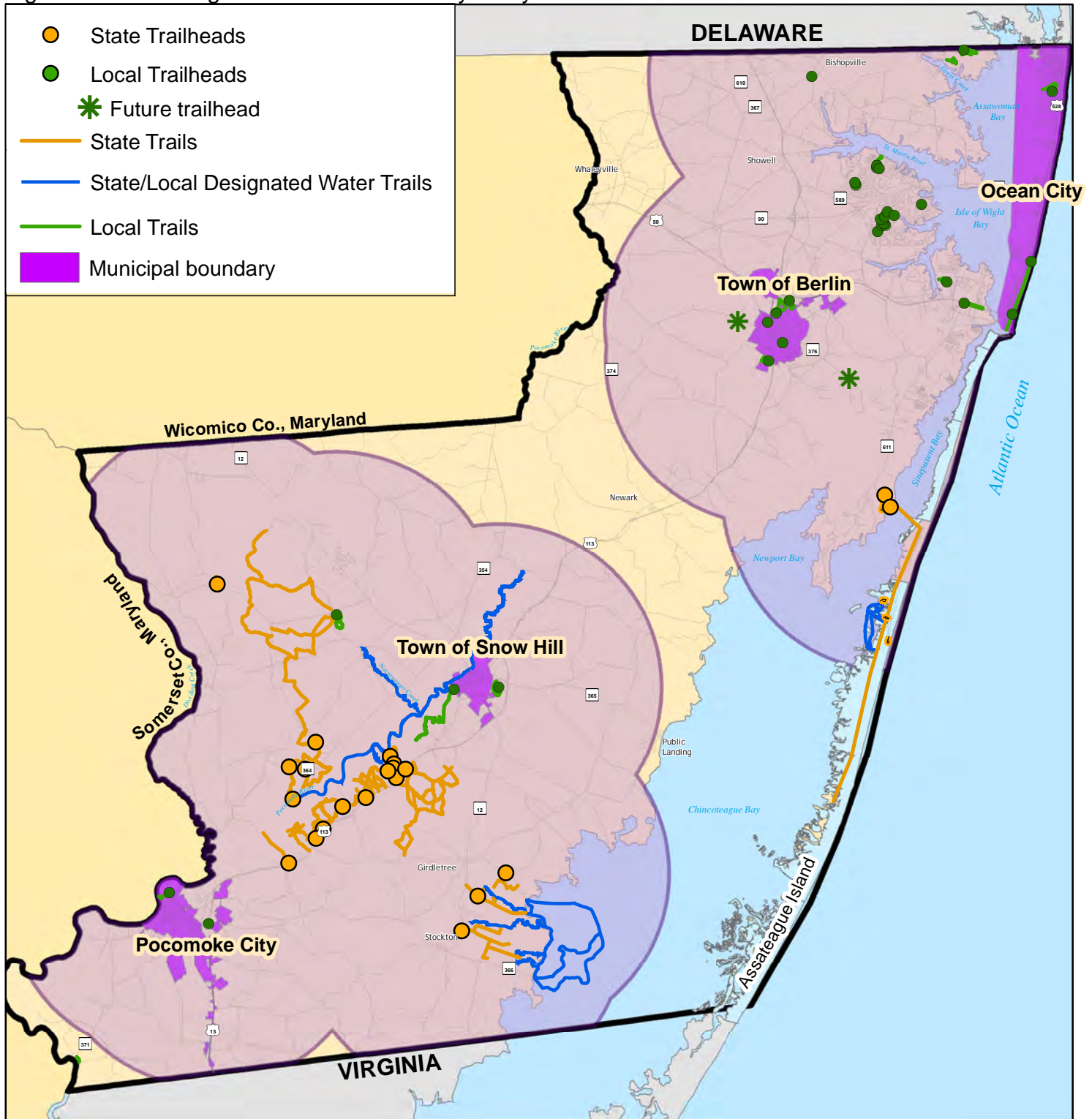
The map also depicts the existing bike/pedestrian path on Route 50 in West Ocean City, and the View Trail 100. The View Trail 100 is a mapped route on existing roads that is suggested for cyclists. A revised route is needed because the dualization of Route 113 affects that portion of the View Trail; the entire route is currently under review by the Worcester County Office of Economic Development/Tourism.

A separate greenways/bikeways plan for Worcester County that would facilitate an organized planning process for the entire county, coordinate efforts of municipalities and other entities, and potentially facilitate funding, is recommended.

Picnic Facilities

Figure 2-16 depicts all areas of the county within 5 miles of a picnicking facility—either stand-alone picnic tables or a pavilion. These facilities are widely

Figure 2-14. Walking Trail Access - Proximity Analysis



Worcester County Total Population (2020): 52,460
Estimated Population within Gap in Service (43,000+/- acres): 1,995



Note: A "Gap in Service" is any area within Worcester County more than 5 miles from an amenity.

March 9, 2022
 Source: Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs

Figure 2-15 Proposed/Potential Bikeways

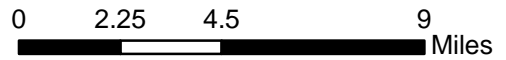
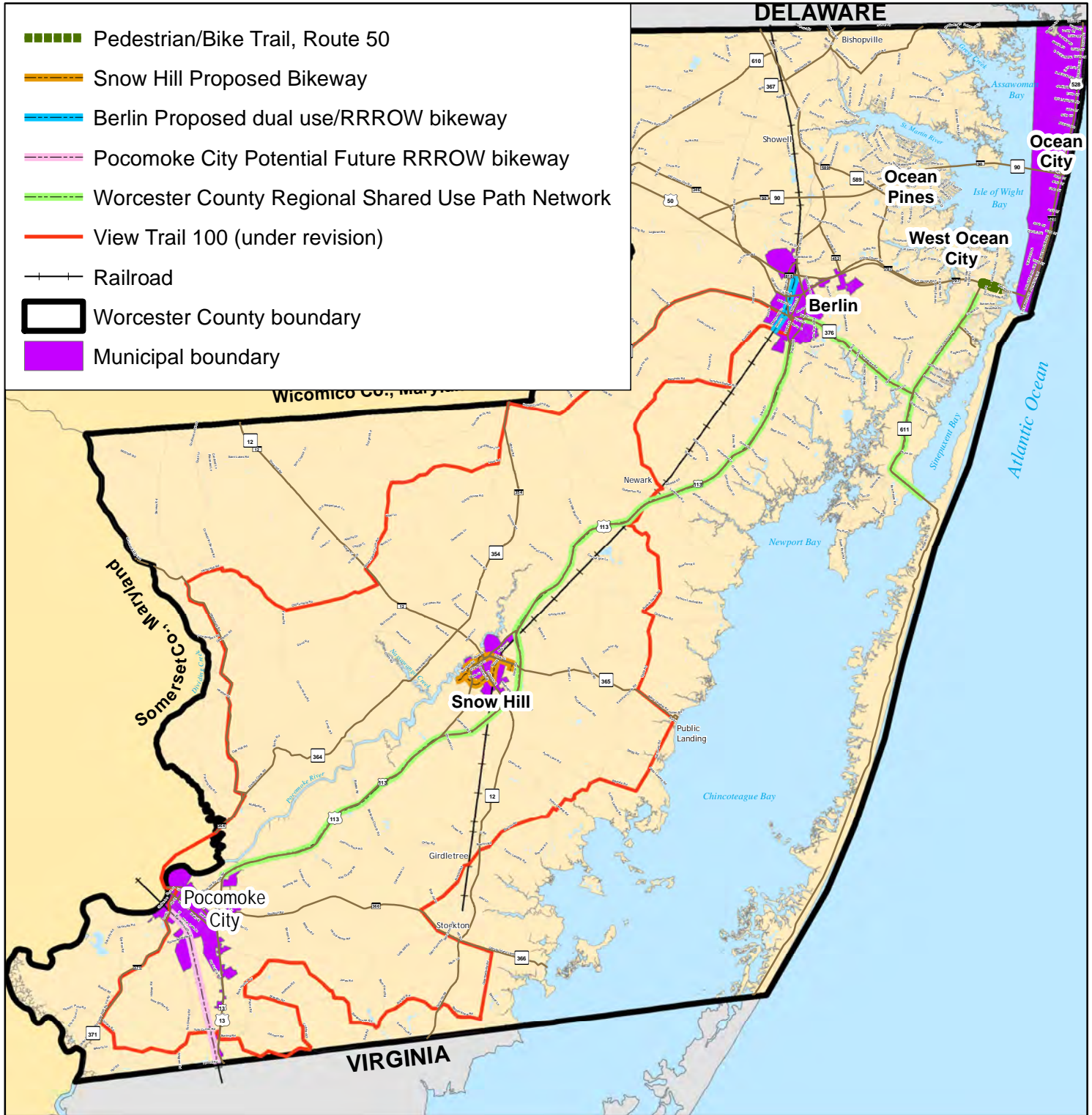
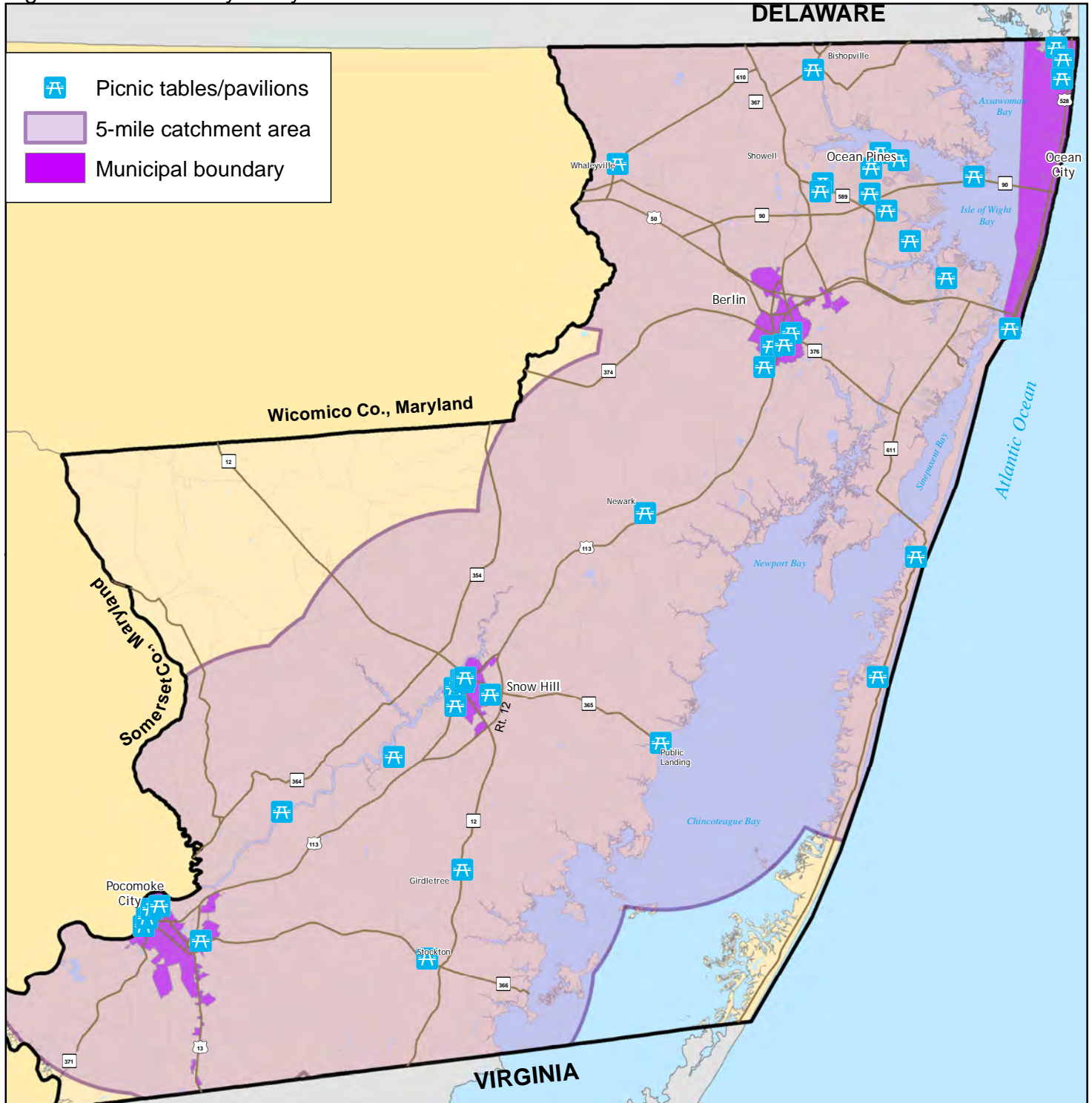
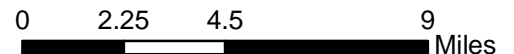


Figure 2-16. Proximity Analysis: Catchment Area within Five Miles of Picnic Facilities



Worcester County Total Population (2020): 52,460
Estimated Population within Gap in service (37,944+/- acres): 1,202



Note: A "Gap in Service" is any area within Worcester County more than 5 miles from an amenity.

March 9, 2022
 Source: Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs

Table 2-3. Facility Use (Scheduled Recreation Programs)

Facility name	In State program usage	Out of state program usage
Bishopville Park	50	0
Herring Creek Nature Park	50	0
John Walter Smith Park	309	28
Multiple Facility Programs	208	11
Newark Park	50	0
Newtown Park	132	10
Northern Worcester Athletic Complex	178	43
Pocomoke Middle School	11	0
Pocomoke River - Snow Hill	23	2
Public Landing Beach	101	0
Shad Landing Pool	150	6
Showell Park	60	2
Worcester Recreation Center	1621	56

distributed across the county, located at most county parks, town parks and the state parks. Only 2% of the population lives more than five miles from a picnic facility. The citizen surveys did not indicate a deficit in this amenity.

Playing Field Access

The 2018 *Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan* identified a playing fields deficit in the northern end of the county. Since 2018 one new field has been added at the Northern Worcester Athletic Complex in Berlin, and expansion of the parking lot by 200 spaces is underway. However, a deficit still exists in the northern end of the county. Figure 2-17 depicts the significant difference in supply per resident across the county. The map shows a 5-mile radius from playing fields in three regions. In the “Southern” 5-mile catchment area, there are seven (7) fields serving around 6,000 residents. Within the “Central” 5-mile

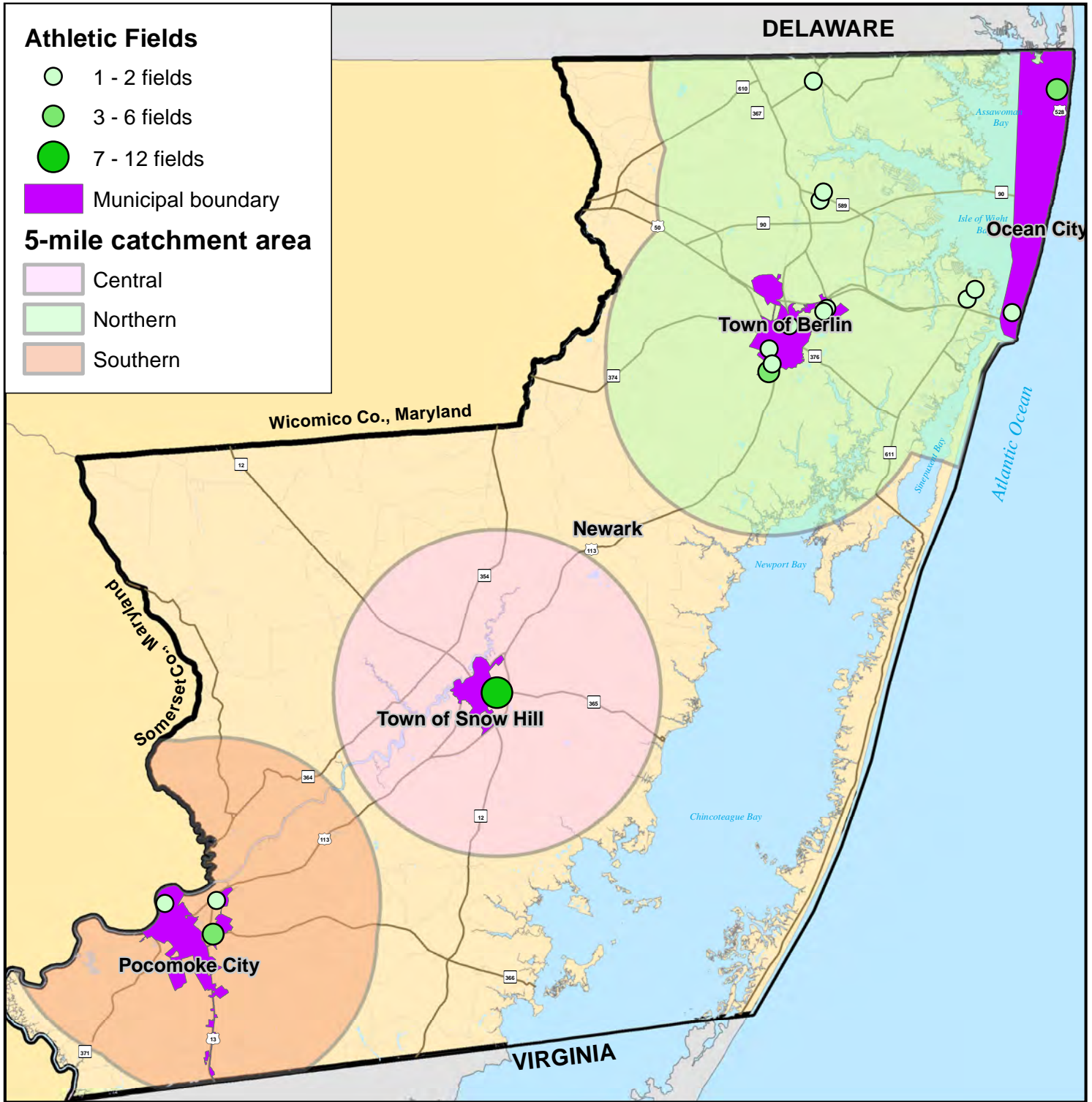
catchment area, there are 13 fields serving around 6,000 residents. The “Northern” 5-mile catchment area contains 26 ball fields, but is within 5 miles of over 37,000 residents. (The gap in service excludes about 4,000 residents, or about 8% of the county population. While this gap is larger than gaps for other amenities, the practicality of maintaining playing fields dispersed more widely across the county prevents reduction of this gap). While the population per facility metric is lower than the median of 8,291 (soccer fields) and 11,212 (multipurpose fields) ²², the

Table 2-4. Worcester County vs NRPA All Agency Median – Acres pf Park Per 1,000 Residents

Location	Total Population 2020	Park Acres	Acres per 1000 Residents
Town of Berlin	5,026	133.75	26.6
West Ocean City	5,877	45.5	7.7
Town of Ocean City	6,844	76.5	11.2
Ocean Pines	12,145	214	17.6
Town of Snow Hill	2,156	64	29.1
Town of Pocomoke City	4,295	129	30.0
NRPA Mean (2021)			9.9

²² 2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review.

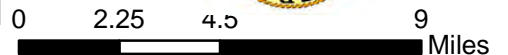
Figure 2-17. Athletic Fields - Proximity Analysis



Region	Residents in 5-mile catchment	Residents per athletic field
Northern	37,000+/-	1,441
Central	5,100 +/-	425
Southern	6,300 +/-	894

Worcester County Total Population (2020): 52,460
Estimated Population within Gap in Service (108,000+/- acres): 4,140

Note: A "Gap in Service" is any area within Worcester County more than 5 miles from an amenity.



per capita imbalance within the county is large. Demand for fields in the northern end of the county exceeds supply and demand is growing. Northern Worcester Athletic Complex is in particularly high demand. In recent years, Berlin Little League and Beach Lacrosse, with over 700 participants in total, use playing fields Monday through Saturday in the Spring season. Multiple other organizations also request to reserve fields, and many requests have to be turned down. The Fall season has a similar level of demand from soccer, football and lacrosse clubs. While lighting fields will extend the amount of use, demand for use during daylight will remain high. Of importance to note is

Worcester Athletic complex is warranted for these reasons.

Proximity Analysis – Half Mile Service Area

A second ‘proximity analysis’ series was conducted using a 0.5 mile radius to evaluate pedestrian access to recreational facilities in the county’s population centers (Figures 2-18 through 2-23). Table 2-4 and Table 2-5 present population and parks data in all municipalities, West Ocean City and Ocean Pines. The *All Agency Median values*, from the National Recreation and Parks Association’s (NRPA) *2021 NRPA Agency Performance Review, Parks and Recreation Agency Performance*

Table 2-5. Worcester County vs NRPA All Agency Median – Residents Per Park

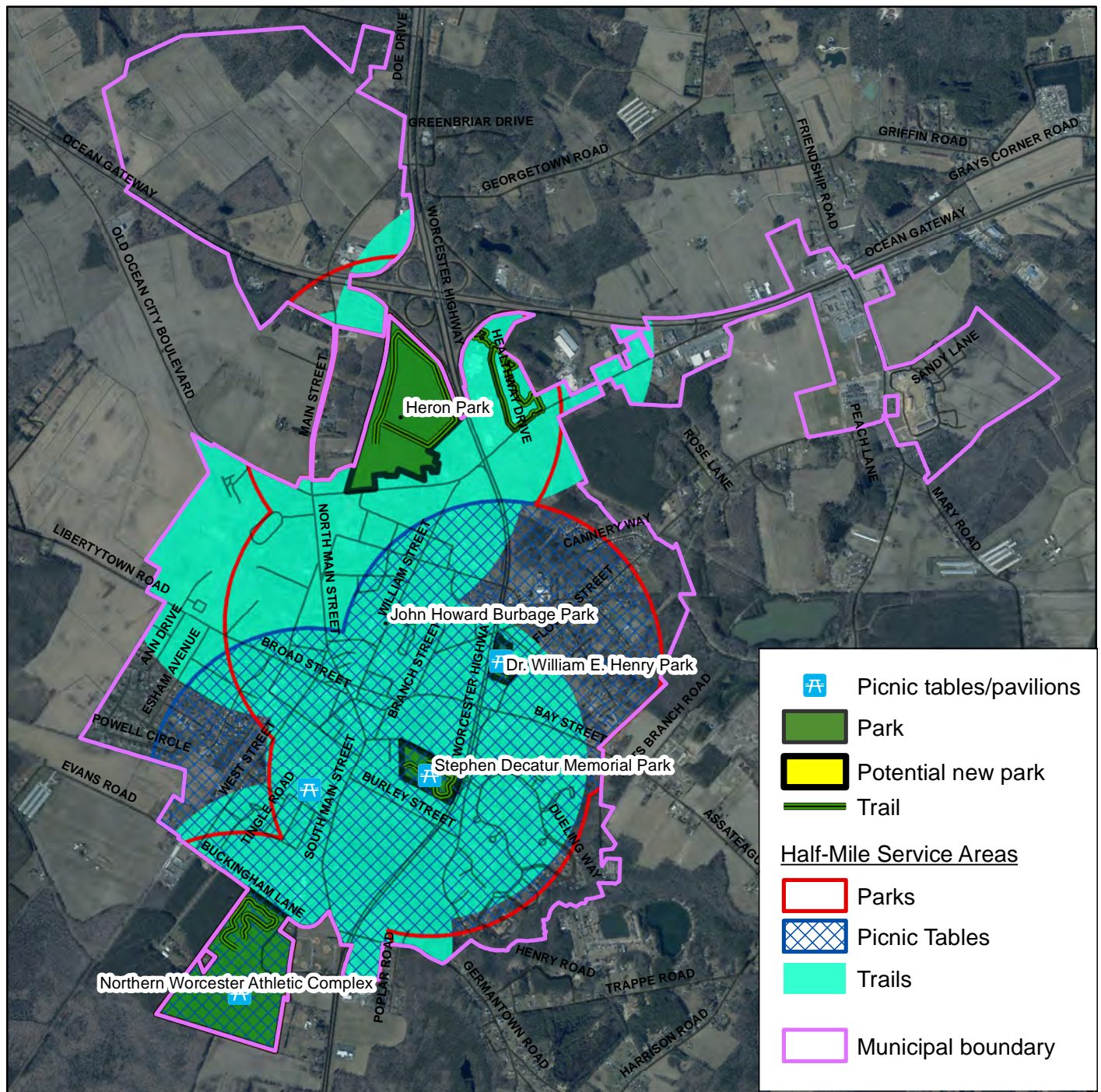
Location	Total Population 2020	Number of Parks	Residents per Park
Town of Berlin	5,026	5	1,005
West Ocean City	5,877	2	2,939
Town of Ocean City	6,844	12	570
Ocean Pines	12,145	26	467
Town of Snow Hill	2,156	4	539
Town of Pocomoke City	4,295	4	1,074
NRPA Mean (2021)			2,277

Benchmarks, were used to evaluate population and park ratios. The 2021 NRPA median value, nationally, for residents per park is 2,277. The NRPA median acres of park land per 1,000 residents is 9.9. As Tables 2-4 and 2-5 indicate, Worcester County’s population centers offer park access in excess of

that a significant number of users are coming from outside of the 5-mile, 37,000 +/-citizen catchment area. Part of the demand for the playing fields comes from Delaware. Forty (40) programs from Delaware used the Northern Worcester Athletic Complex in 2021, out of a total of 221 programs using the facility (Table 2-3). As Delaware continues to experience significant growth, this will continue to impact Worcester County’s recreational facilities, including demand for ball fields. Acquisition of additional land to enlarge the capacity of the Northern

the NRPA published medians. The only exception is West Ocean City. While West Ocean City exceeds the NPRPA median acreage of parks per 1,000 residents, the residents per park value is slightly higher than the NPRPA median. It is important to note that West Ocean City land use and land cover limits possible additional park locations. What currently remains in open space is primarily tidal wetland or wooded non-tidal wetland, a limiting factor for recreational development.

Figure 2-18 Town of Berlin Facilities - Large Scale Proximity Analysis



Total Berlin Population (2020 census): 5026

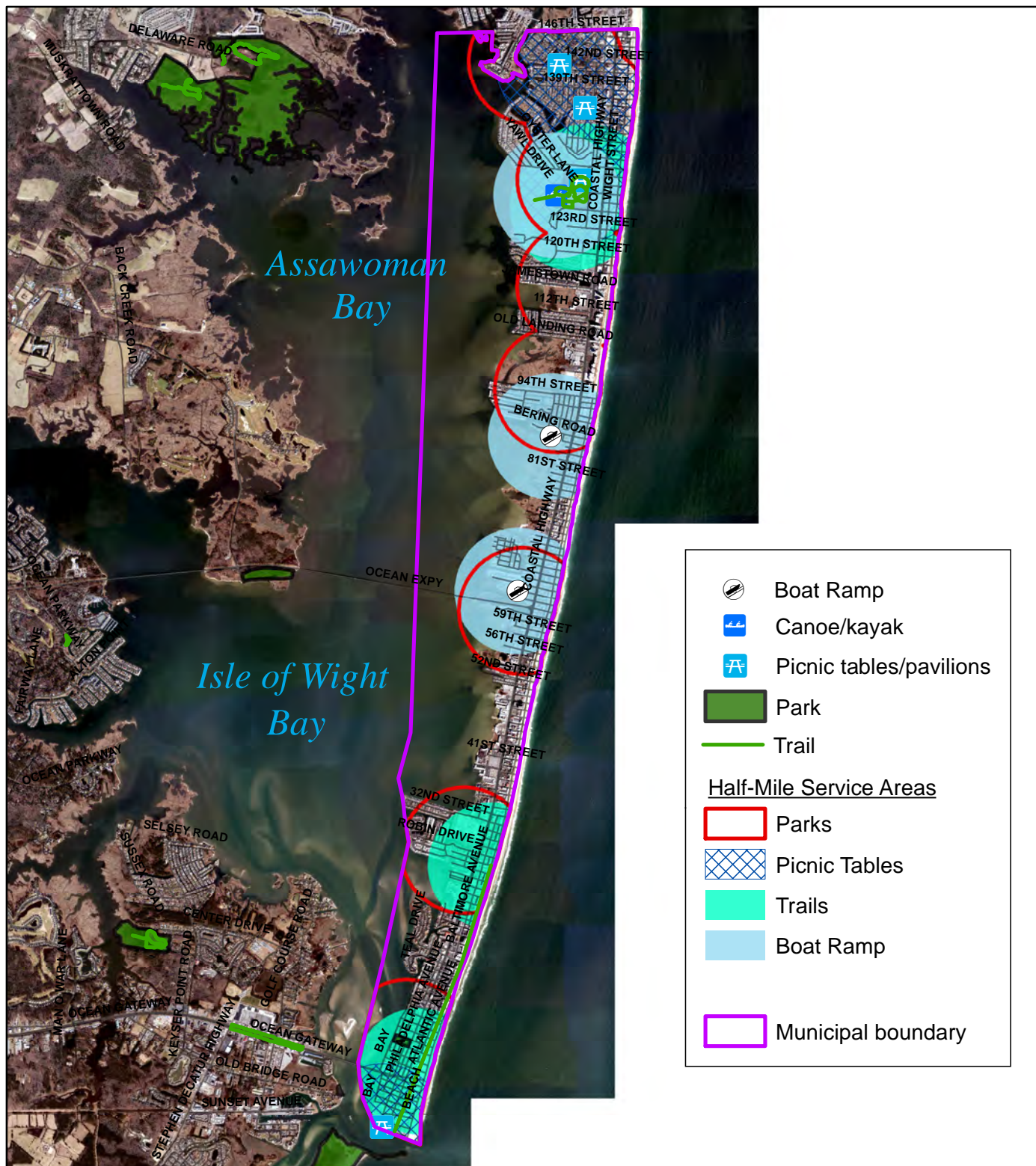


Parks: Estimated 25% of population within Gap in Service.
 Water Access: No water access in Town of Berlin.
 Trails: Estimated 33% of population within Gap in Service.
 Picnic Areas: Estimated 25% of the population within Gap in Service.

March 18, 2022

Source: Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs

Figure 2-19 Town of Ocean City Facilities - Proximity Analysis



2020 Ocean City Population: 6,844

Parks: Estimated 24% of population within Gap in Service.

Boat/Canoe/Kayak Launch: Estimated 74% of population within Gap in Service.

Trails: Estimated 73% of population within Gap in Service.

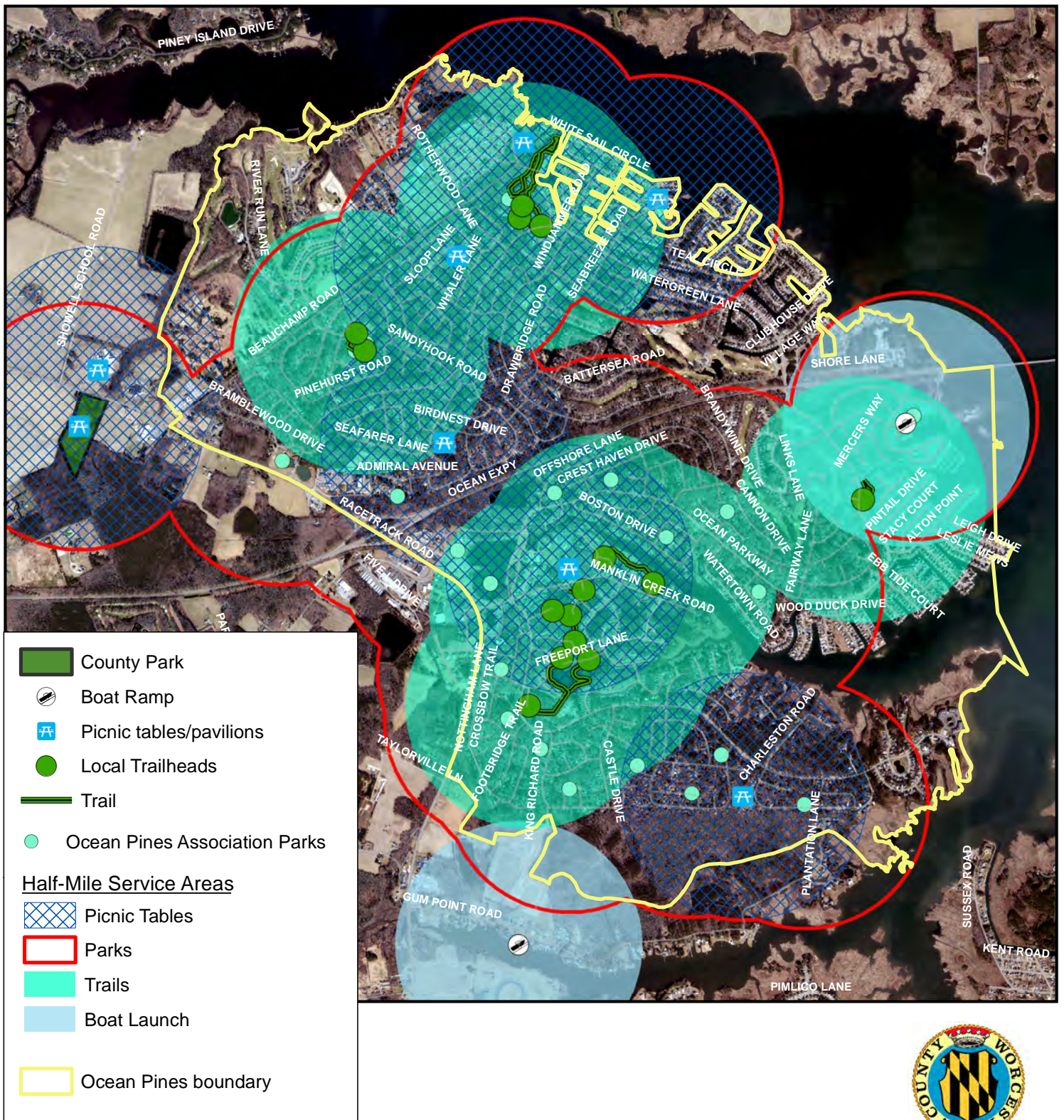
Picnic Areas: Estimated 70% of population within Gap in Service



March 22, 2022

Source: Worcester County Department of Environmental Programs
Maryland IMAP Mapping & GIS Data Portal

Figure 2-20 Ocean Pines Facilities - Proximity Analysis

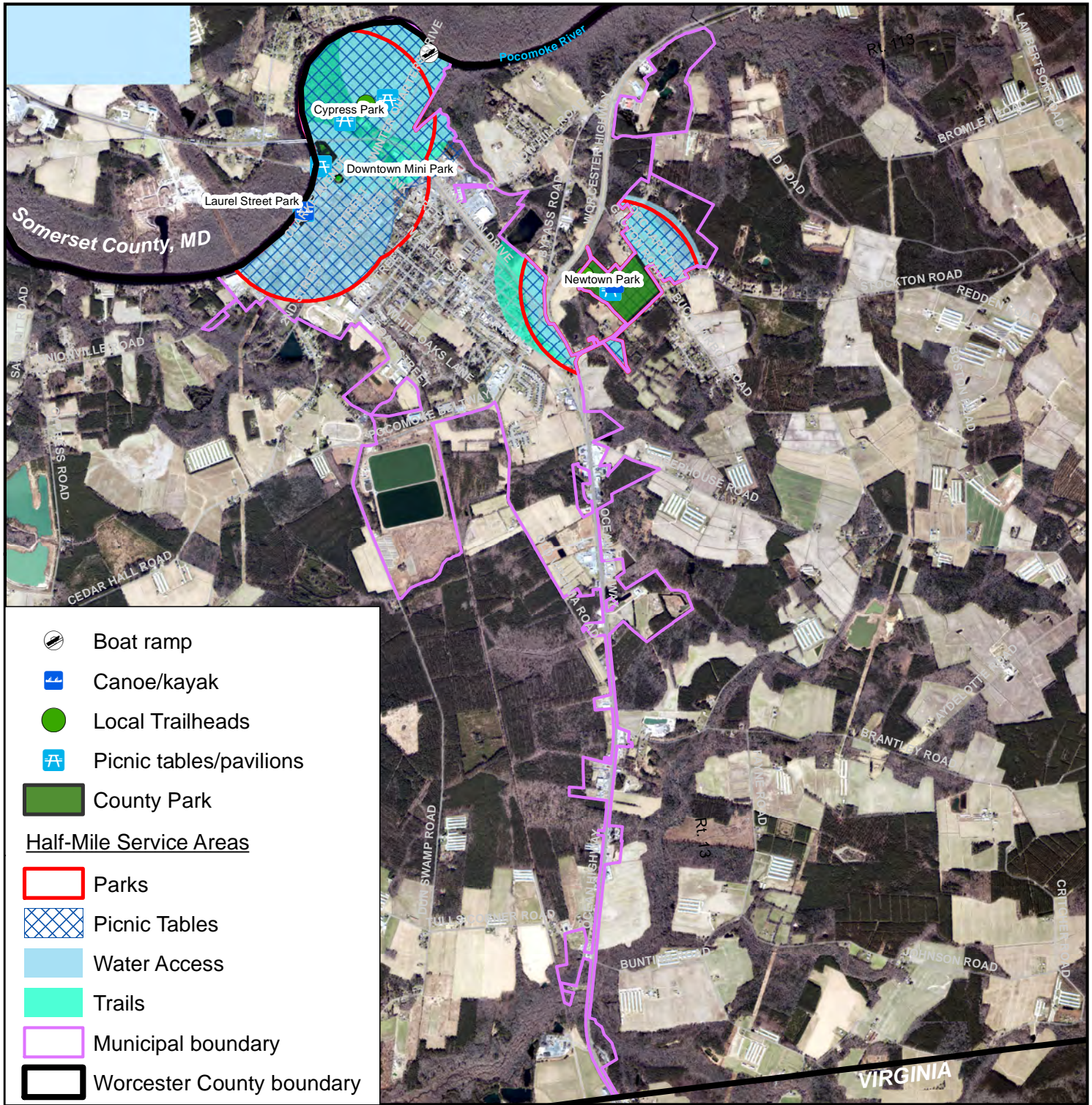


Ocean Pines Population, 2020: 12,145

- Parks: Estimated 13% of population within Gap in Service.
- Water Access: Estimated 90% of population within Gap in Service.
- Trails: Estimated 49% of population within Gap in Service.
- Picnic Areas: Estimated 62% of population within Gap in Service.



Figure 2-21. Pocomoke City Facilities - Proximity Analysis

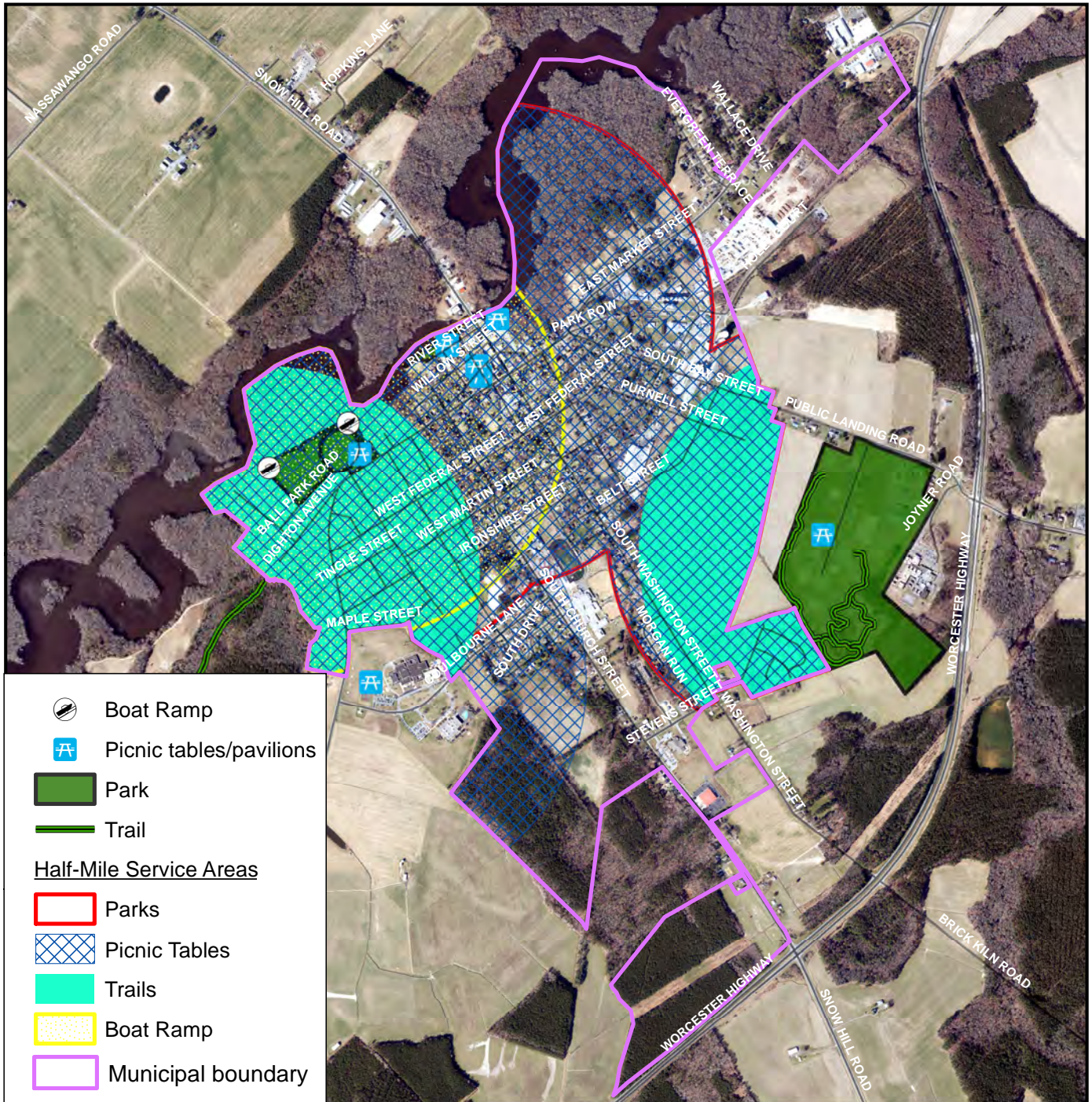


Pocomoke City Population, 2020: 4,295



Parks/Recreational Sites: Estimated 58% of population within Gap in Service.
 Water Access: Estimated 59% of population within Gap in Service.
 Trails: Estimated 84% of population within Gap in Service.
 Picnic Areas: 59% of population within Gap in Service.

Figure 2-22. Snow Hill Facilities - Proximity Analysis



Total Snow Hill Population (2020 census): 2156



Parks: Estimated 14% of population within Gap in Service.
 Water Access: Estimated 58% of population within Gap in Service.
 Trails: Estimated 68% of population within Gap in Service.
 Picnic Areas: Estimated 2% of population within Gap in Service

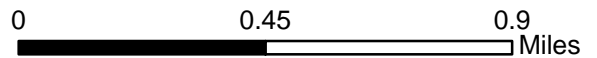
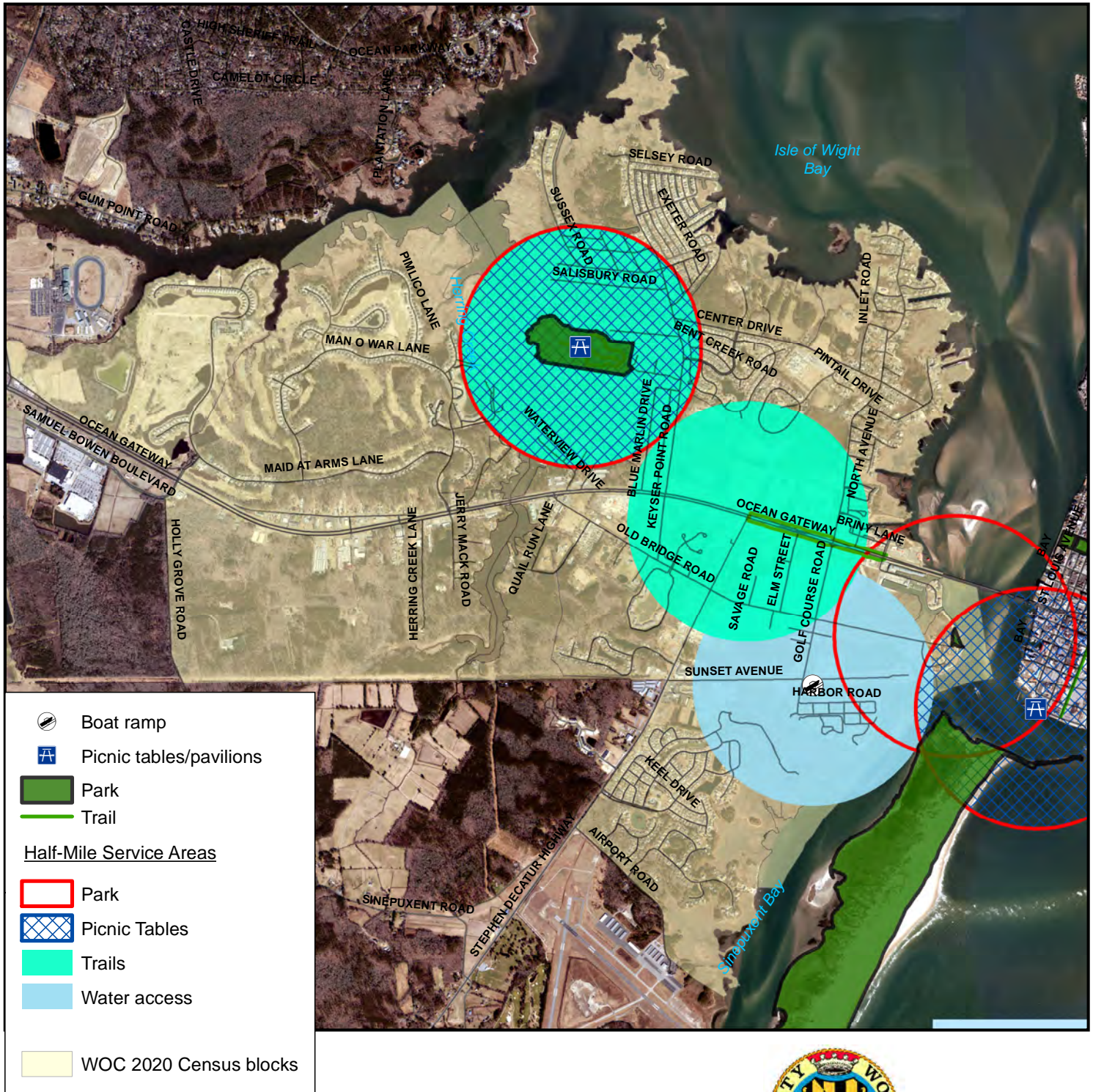


Figure 2-23 West Ocean City Facilities - Proximity Analysis



Total West Ocean City Population: 5,877 +/-



Parks: Estimated 81% of population within Gap in Service.
 Water Access: Estimated 86% of population within Gap in Service.
 Trails: Estimated 75% of population within Gap in Service.
 Picnic Areas: 87% of population in Gap in Service.

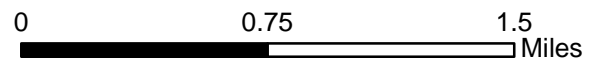


Table 2-6 provides detailed data regarding pedestrian accessibility within population centers. These are areas of the population center within a half mile of a park, trail or water access. Table 2-6 characterizes accessibility as high, adequate or low. All towns and Ocean Pines provide adequate to excellent pedestrian access to parks. West Ocean City (not a town or HOA, but contains over 5,800 residents) has a park within walking distance for only 19% of its

developed with limited open space remaining (as previously noted). However, Worcester County is exploring a bikeway parallel to Route 611 that would start in West Ocean City. All of the towns are evaluating or planning new trail locations that will likely close this gap within the coming years. The Ocean City beach and boardwalk was not broadly included in this analysis, and is obviously a significant amenity including walking opportunities within

Table 2-6. Half-Mile Service Area Proximity Analysis Summary

Town/Community	Total Population	Percentage of Population within Half-Mile			
		Parks	Trails	Boat/ Canoe Launch	Picnic Facilities
Town of Berlin	5,026	75%	66%	0%	75%
West Ocean City	5,877	19%	25%	14%	13%
Town of Ocean City	6,844	76%	27%	26%	30%
Ocean Pines	12,145	87%	51%	10%	38%
Town of Snow Hill	2,156	86%	32%	42%	98%
Town of Pocomoke City	4,295	42%	16%	41%	41%
High level of Service -- 75% or greater					
Low Level of Service -- 33% or less					

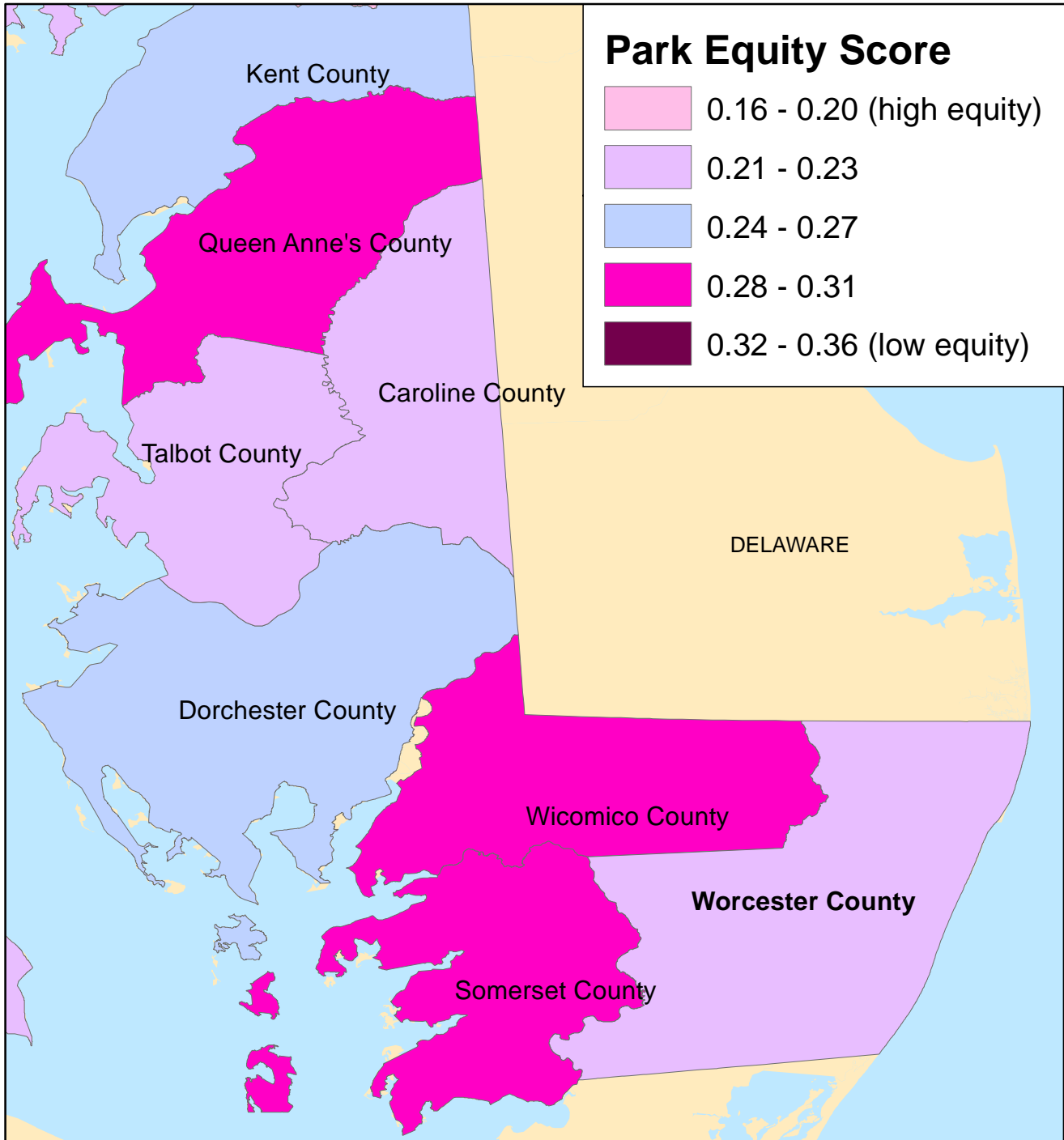
residents. This is not ideal, however West Ocean City was developed prior to park and open space planning and regulations; the availability of land for a new park is extremely limited (as noted previously). The most significant access gaps are in water access and trails. In West Ocean City, there are a myriad of private access points to the water that serve many residents. Close proximity to water access also has a natural constraint that cannot always be overcome. The Town of Berlin is not within walking distance to waterfront and in general, most housing in any community is not located within a half mile of a waterfront. Trails access in West Ocean City will likely remain limited because the area is highly

walking distance for the majority of Ocean City residents. Where no constraints in doing so exist, the county will consider, and urge any recipients of Program Open Space funding to consider the feasibility of placing amenities to close pedestrian access “gaps”, as a first priority when evaluating potential new amenity locations.

Park Equity Analysis

The Park Equity Analysis, developed by Maryland Department of Natural Resources, is a decision support tool built upon the US Census data analyzed at the Census Tract Block Group level,

Figure 2-24 Eastern Shore Park Equity Analysis



The Park Equity Analysis is built upon the US Census data analyzed at the Census Tract Block Group level, combined with statewide maps of public and local parks. The model prioritizes underserved areas of Maryland in need of park space.



Final scores are displayed in a quantile manner, categorizing block groups into five categories- measured against each other. The lowest score represents highest equity (low need) and the highest score represents low equity (high need).

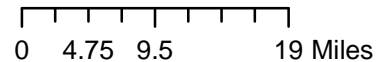
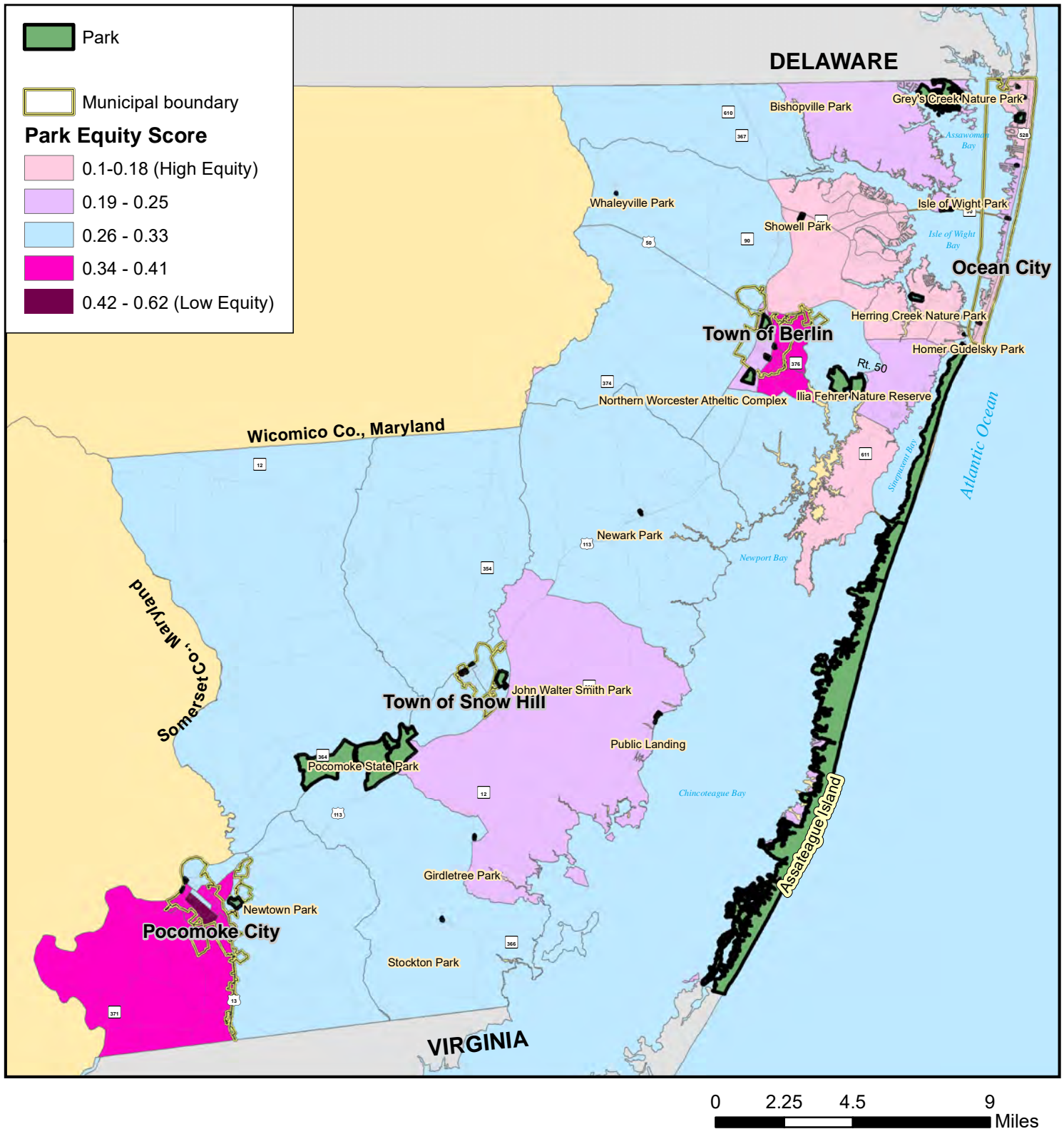


Figure 2-25 Countywide Park Equity Analysis: Worcester County, Maryland



The Park Equity Analysis was developed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources and the University of Maryland to support both the goal of the department to increase equitable access to green space and those of Maryland's Project Green Classrooms. The analysis was created to provide an initial quantitative tool to extend public access to nature to underinvested communities, foster community connections, and grow future stewards of our natural world.



It is the goal of this analysis to provide a tool that employs national, statewide, and local data in a consistent and strategic manner for the state and its local partners. The Park Equity Analysis is meant for guidance only and is a first look at where resources may be needed. As always, a more in-depth evaluation of on-the-ground resources, challenges, and opportunities will help inform land use decisions regarding the location and development of local and state park lands.

April 1, 2022

Source: MD Department of Natural Resources

combined with statewide maps of public and local parks. The model combines the following data layers to generate a combined park equity score:

- Distance to Public Park Space
- Concentration of children under the age of 17
- Concentration of Adults over the age of 65

Concentration of low-income households

- Concentration of Non-White Population
- Population density
- Distance to Public Transportation
- Walkability

Each of these factors is represented in the model and contributes to the combined score.

The resulting analysis is a “first look” at the distribution of parks and their related amenities, suggesting areas of the county where access to recreation amenities may need further investigation.

Areas with higher scores are considered to be those with underserved populations in higher need of additional access to parks and natural areas.

Figure 2-24 shows the park equity scores across Maryland’s Eastern Shore. On a statewide level, Worcester County has an overall low score (0.22), meaning it scores “high” for equity, however there are some areas of the county that have a high park equity score (“low” for equity). The park equity score data, per Census Tract Block Groups for Worcester County, is displayed in Figure 25. The analysis indicates high park equity score for the West Ocean City, Ocean City, Ocean Pines and the South

Point area. The towns of Pocomoke City and Berlin contain areas scoring lowest, with a portion of Pocomoke City west of Cedar Street and East of Railroad Avenue with the very lowest equity score. The underlying data that supports this low score includes population density, concentration of households below 185% of the Federal poverty line, concentration of Non-White population. The area of the town of Berlin with the lowest score includes a larger concentration of children under the age of 18, below average walkability score, as well as the factors noted above.

While distance to public park space is “least distance” for these areas of “low equity”, accessibility could be further investigated, as these areas have a great need for accessible outdoor recreation, which should be taken into consideration when locating new facilities. In the case of Berlin, Route 113 is a barrier for pedestrians and cyclists wishing to safely and easily access amenities. While actions have been taken to make crossing the road safer, this challenge, and the inequity it perpetuates, should continue to be considered and addressed when planning parks and trails. The volume of pedestrians/demand is at this time not high enough to justify the cost of an elevated walkway over Route 113, however the Town of Berlin is taking actions to improve the parks on the east side of the roadway, including basketball court lighting.

Land Acquisition Goal

Based upon the results of the proximity and the park equity analysis, Worcester County has met the minimum park land acquisition goal. Worcester County offers park access greatly in excess of the NRPA public means of number of facilities per person. Walkable

distances to parks is excellent in the county's areas of population density, with the exception of West Ocean City. Opportunity for new public recreational open space is severely limited in this area due to existing development. Recreational field access is more limited in the northern end of the county, as the proximity analysis demonstrates. Areas of lowest park equity are areas within the towns of Berlin and Pocomoke City. Additional acquisition opportunities associated with these facilities and areas should be considered, although not a current deficiency.

County Goals and Objectives for Parks and Recreation

Worcester County's parks and recreational programming goals are guided by the state's goals and the goals and objectives of the county's 2006 comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive plan's relevant goals include: maintain and improve the county's rural and coastal character, protect its natural resources and ecological functions, accommodate a planned amount of growth served by adequate public facilities, improve development's compatibility and aesthetics, continue the county's prosperous economy, and provide for resident's safety and health.

The following objectives, stated in the 2006 comprehensive plan, direct the county's recreation and parks programming:

1. Establish local standards for the creation, accessibility, and adequacy of public recreation facilities.

2. Develop programs and facilities able to meet diverse community recreation needs regardless of age, gender, income and abilities
3. Continue public participation in recreation program creation, operation and maintenance
4. Grow our Environmental and Nature programming opportunities
5. Increase attention to cleanliness and park upkeep due to influx and increased population of users since the onset of the covid pandemic
6. Continue to evaluate older playgrounds and park amenities to stay in compliance and replace/enhance where necessary
7. Seek acquisition of land at Northern Worcester Athletic complex to address parking issues and needed field upgrades
8. Enhance public access to the ocean, bays and beaches
9. Plan for region-wide trail and bikeway system to link existing and new communities with commercial, institutional, cultural, and recreational activity centers (link county, state, and municipal parks and natural areas)
10. Integrate walking trails and bikeways into new developments and facilitate a greenways system
11. Continue to require new development to provide for its internal passive and recreation needs
12. Require developers to pay for or provide the public recreation

- facilities necessary to support their development
13. Coordinate the county's recreation program with the federal, state, and municipal parks and programs
 14. Update and implement the land preservation, parks and recreation plan as required by law

Worcester County is committed to providing the best facilities possible for its citizens to enjoy. The online and in-person feedback received in preparation of this plan has shown it is imperative that the county works toward providing adequate access to trail systems for everyone to enjoy. Over 70% of those surveyed indicated that trails are the most important amenity in a park, and over 65% indicated this was the highest priority for improvement to county parks. Over 63% indicated clean facilities are a priority for improvement, and as stated in our goals, this will continue to be a priority. During the pandemic restrictions, there was a surge in parks visitation, increasing demand for general maintenance and cleaning. This trend in demand for outdoor space is anticipated to continue.

State Goals

- Make a variety of quality recreational environments and opportunities readily accessible to all of its citizens and thereby contribute to their physical and mental well-being. *Relates to County goals and objectives 1 through 4.*
- Recognize and strategically use parks and recreation facilities as amenities to make communities, counties and the State more desirable places to live, work, play and visit. *Relates to County goals*

and objectives 2, 9, and 11.

- Use state investment in parks, recreation and open space to complement and mutually support the broader goals and objectives of local comprehensive / master plans. *Relates to County goals and objectives 6, 11, and 13.*
- To the greatest degree feasible, ensure that recreational land and facilities for local populations are conveniently located relative to population centers, are accessible without reliance on the automobile and help to protect natural open spaces and resources. *Relates to County goals and objectives 9 and 10.*
- Complement infrastructure and other public investments and priorities in existing communities and areas planned for growth through investment in neighborhood and community parks and facilities. *Relates to County goals and objectives 6, 7, 11, and 12.*
- Continue to protect recreational open space and resource lands at a rate that equals or exceeds the rate that land is developed at a statewide level. *Relates to County goals and objectives 11 and 12.*

Implementing programs

Worcester County Recreation and Parks Funding Sources

The Worcester County Commissioners have a strong commitment to Worcester County Recreation and Parks department and their needs to provide quality recreation and park opportunities. In 2017, the County allocated approximately \$461,000 for its park system maintenance and renovation of facilities. As of the 2022 fiscal year

budget, the commitment was \$1,093,000. These increases are required due to rising cost associated with materials and personnel, and partly due to the County’s recognition that over time sufficient resources are necessary to maintain/sustain the County’s existing park facilities and infrastructure.

The Worcester County Recreation and Parks also uses other funding sources to help support the needs of the Recreation and Parks Department. Some other funding sources include Program Open Space, Land and Water Conservation Fund, Local Parks Playground and Infrastructure Grant, Waterway Improvement Funds, and donations from local businesses.

In FY 2022, the county allocation from Program Open space totaled \$758,769.54. Program Open Space

continually supports the needs of the department to renovate, and establish new recreation and park opportunities. In the last five years, many upgrades have been possible due to Program Open Space, including but not limited to, 17 athletic field fencing projects, multipurpose field renovations, lighting projects, new playgrounds, a concession facility, and other valuable projects. Program Open Space funds can be allocated, when funds are available, to each municipality, for parkland development projects for Worcester County citizens. In years when funds are available for allocation to municipalities, the Worcester County Department of Recreation and Parks representatives, along with the Worcester County Recreation and Parks Advisory Board members may host a

Table 2-7. Goals and Accomplishments Since 2018

Open Space and Parks Recreational Land Goals Established in 2017	Type of Specific Location	Acreage Needed	Acreage Acquired
Comprehensive development of Grey’s Creek Nature Park of Passive use	Expand public use access to nature at Grey’s Creek Nature Park located in the northern post area of the county.	0	0
Acquisition of land for development of additional field space in northern Worcester County.	Multi-use fields in the Northern area of the county.	20	0
Additional passive recreational space in Bishopville.	Public access to passive reaction and nature in Bishopville area.	.7	0
Augment an approved multipurpose field lighting project at John Walter Smith Park to include irrigation and Bermuda-grass installation.	Multi-use field project and upgrade in Snow Hill, southern area of the county.	0	0
Playground replacement at Stockton Park.	Playground upgrade in Stockton.	0	0

Table 2-8. Funding Priorities for FY23-FY27

Open Space and parks Recreational Land Goals 2022	Type and Specific Location	Acreage Needed	Plan for Meeting Need
Acquisition of land for development of additional field space and parking	Sport field development/upgrade and parking in Berlin	20 acres	Acquire the Lion’s Club property in Berlin. Create master plan for best field and parking use.
Passive recreation space and trails	Expand public access to nature in northern Worcester County on current properties including but not limited to Northern Worcester Athletic Complex.	0	Work with Environmental Programs to determine best possible trail system in our current park system.
Added/Upgraded amenities and multi-sport space opportunities at neighborhood parks	Park amenities and multisport opportunities to the public at Newark Park	0	Incorporate a multiuse/mini sport field to address field needs.
Concession stand and bathroom facility renovations	Enhancements of concession and bathrooms at Newtown Park, John Walter Smith Park, and Northern Worcester Athletic Complex	0	Upgrade or replace current facilities with energy efficient systems while making needed upgrades to kitchen and bathroom areas.
County Dog-Park	Expand public access to dog park access and opportunities to Bishopville Park	0	Create an enclosed dog park at Bishopville park to enable users the opportunity to recreate with their dog in a safe environment.

budget request meeting with the municipality representatives. After the Worcester County Program Open Space Liaison presents the proposed Program Open Space Annual Program, the Advisory Board, along with the Director, who serves as the Worcester County Liaison to Program Open Space make recommendations to the Worcester County Commissioners for the Program Open Space Annual Program and the Program Open Space funding allocations. The County Commissioners make the final decision for the County Program Open Space Annual Program and the Worcester County and municipality park improvement and acquisition allocations.

The Land and Water Conservation fund has assisted the parks department in

funding to help restore and establish natural areas. In 2018, Worcester County received \$150,000 to help restore Greys Creek park. In FY22, Worcester County received \$1,000,000 from the Local Parks Playground and Infrastructure grant. This is funding new field lighting at Northern Worcester Athletic Complex and new fencing throughout several parks for batting cages, bullpens, and safety. The Waterway Improvement fund has allowed the Recreation and Parks Department to provide adequate water access throughout the county and continually supports the needs of maintaining these facilities. Private donations from events and sponsors assist with recreation programming, underprivileged participation, and a youth scholarship fund. In 2021 a total

of \$11,410 was raised from six events and/or sponsors.

Capital Improvement Plan

A review of the proximity analysis and public input concludes:

Parks, generally: No deficits in parks were identified at large scale/county wide level. At the half-mile service area level, there are no deficits identified, except that walking distance access to parks is lacking for many households in West Ocean City. The lack of availability of land for a park in West Ocean City makes addressing this deficit difficult to impossible. Public feedback received did not identify a need for a new park in West Ocean City. No new parks are determined to be needed at this time.

Water access/boat/canoe launch: No deficits identified at large scale/county-wide level. At the half-mile service area level, it is evident that there is a low level of access within a walkable distance in most communities. This analysis did not take into account private water access in these communities or that waterfront within that distance simply does not exist. The public feedback received rarely noted water access as inadequate. Water access is not deemed a deficit at this time.

Picnic Facilities: No deficits identified at large scale/county-wide level. At the half-mile service area level, there is a low level of access to picnic facilities evident in West Ocean City and Town of Ocean City. The public feedback received never noted picnic facilities as inadequate. Picnic facilities are not deemed inadequate at this time.

Trails: At the large scale/county wide level, a need for trails in the northern end of the county was identified. The public feedback received identified trails as high priority, and a need for additional trails. At the half-mile service area level, there is shown to be a low level of access to trails within a walkable distance for several communities.

Trails, particularly in the northern end of the county, are deemed inadequate at this time.

Playing fields: The 2018 LPPRP identified a playing field deficit in the northern end of the county. This is shown to be a deficit at large scale/countywide level in this current plan as well. While the gap in 5-mile service excludes about 8% of the county population, the practicality of maintaining playing fields in multiple dispersed locations, prevents this from being addressed. The larger problem is lack of enough fields in existing locations. Public feedback also noted lack of fields in the northern end of the county. It is estimated that 5-10 more playing fields are needed in the northern end of the county to adequately meet demand.

General Public Feedback: Generally, the public feedback noted outdoor walking/hiking trails, passive parks, water access, playgrounds and pavilions as most important amenities.

Supported by citizen feedback and spatial and demographic analysis previously described, Worcester County's Program Open Space funding priorities for the next five years are:

1. Acquisition of land for development of additional field

- space and parking in northern Worcester County.
2. Additional passive recreation space and trails within the county, assessing all current park locations for growth.
 3. Assessment of neighborhood satellite parks for added/upgraded amenities and multi-sport space opportunities.
 4. Renovation of current concession stands and bathroom facilities within our county park system.
 5. Identification of location for a county dog park.

Table 2-9 lists planned capital improvement projects FY23-FY27 planned in Worcester County, including the municipalities and Ocean Pines. A longer-term capital improvement plan has not been prepared. In the long term (2027-2036), the county plans to continue to evaluate and renovate existing facilities. The county will also continue to assess and monitor needs throughout the county.

To summarize the completion of goals and projects identified in the *2018 LPPRP* including the 2018 Capital Improvement Plan:

- The development of Grey's Creek Nature parks for passive use is in progress. In the winter of 2020/2021, 1.2 miles of trails were established on the northern portion of the property. In the winter of 2022, a 4,000 square foot parking lot was established to provide public access to the property. Additional planning to

- develop the southern portion of the property is underway.
- Current acquisition of land for development of additional field space in northern Worcester County is being assessed at Northern Worcester Athletic Complex. The acquired land would allow for more parking and additional ball fields.
 - The addition of passive recreational space in Bishopville was assessed and determined to not be needed due to the location, safety considerations, and feasibility of the project.
 - Field lighting project at John Walter Smith Park, including irrigation and Bermuda-grass installation was completed in the winter of 2021. The 220' by 360' open space was graded and irrigation was installed in the summer of 2019. Bermuda grass was sprigged into place and fertilized adequately to ensure proper succession. Qualite lighting company installed LED lighting in the winter of 2020-2021.
 - The playground at Stockton Park was replaced in the winter/spring of 2019. Cunningham Recreation installed the playground, adequate for the ages of 5-12 years old. Playground mulch was installed for safety measures as well as a retaining border composed of salt treated material.

Table 2-9 (continued). Capital Improvement Plans: Worcester County, Ocean Pines and Municipalities

Location:	Acreeage to Acquire:	Develop?	Rehabilitate?	Estimated Cost:	Description:
Capital Improvement Plan:					
1. Permanent Restrooms	0	X		266,000	Additional funds estimated at approximately \$25K needed
2. Inclusive Playground	0		X	1,000,000	Based on a concept currently under review for a Community Parks and Playgrounds grant
3. Skate Park, Phase I	0	X		250,000	Feasibility report underway to be followed by community input regarding location, design work to include stormwater mitigation and other factors
4. Skate Park, Phase II	0	X		250,000	Completion of above
5. Rails and Trails Bikeway	0		X	1,300,000	Partial design work completed and balance of design is underway. Funding has been sought from MDOT Bikeways program. Town of Berlin and Worcester County have committed approximately \$190,000 to the project.
6. ADA Walking Path	0	X		500,000	Development of accessible access from the parking area to and around the lagoons
7. Entertainment Pavillion	0	X		750,000	Construction of an entertainment venue and parking for live performances
8. Pickleball Courts	0	X		100,000	Construction of 1 or 2 (of 4) tennis court/s to pickleball courts
9. Dog Park	TBD	X		100,000	development of a dog park
10. Observation platforms	0	X		250,000	Building an observation platform over one or more lagoons
	Total: 0		Total:	4,516,000	
Pocomoke Projects					
Capital Improvement Plan:					
1. Refurbish Pavillion	0		X	TBD	
2. New Signage	0		x	TBD	
3. Mini Park	TBD	X		TBD	New Brickwork, New Brick Walkways, Replace Brick around the existing fountain.
4. Winters Quarters Dock	0		X	TBD	Repair/Replace all boards on dock. Some docking has been repaired through DNR Grant funding, but not all of it.
	Total: 0		Total:	0	
Ocean Pines Projects					
Capital Improvement Plan:					
1. New Inclusive playground	0	X		TBD	not currently in the current budget, Many other factors to be completed
2. Trail riding areas	0			TBD	not currently in the current budget, Many other factors to be completed
3. Disc Golf	0			0	Complete
	Total: 0		Total:	0	

Table 2-10. County-Owned Recreational Sites, Worcester County

Site Name	City/Town	Site Class	Boat Ramps	Boat Slips	Group Campsites	Tent/RV Campsites	Canoeing/kayaking	Basketball Courts	Skateboard Courts	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts	Ball Fields, Diamond	Lighted Ball Fields, Diamond	Multipurpose Fields	Lighted Multipurpose Fields	Picnic Pavilion	Picnic Tables	Indoor Recreational Areas	Swimming Pools	Tot Lots	Trails, Mileage
Berlin Intermediate School	Berlin	School								2				2				1		2	
Bird Hill Road Site	Girdletree	Special Use Area										1					1				0.1
Bishopville Park	Bishopville	Community Park									1	1				1	8			1	0.25
Buckingham Elementary School	Berlin	School												1		1	4	1		2	
Cedar Chapel Special School	Snow Hill	School						1											1	1	
Cedar Hall Wharf	Pocomoke City	Boat Ramp	2																		
George Island Landing	Stockton	Boat Ramp	1																		
Girdletree Park	Girdletree	Community Park															4			1	0.1
Greys Creek Nature Park	Bishopville	Community Park																			TBD
Gum Point Landing	Berlin	Boat Ramp	1																		
Herring Creek Nature Park	Ocean City	Community Park														1	2				0.75
Homer Gudelsky Park	Ocean City	Community Park																			
Illa Fehrer Nature Preserve	Berlin	Community Park																			TBD
Isle of Wight Park	Bishopville	Other Public Land					1										5				
John Walter Smith Park	Snow Hill	Sports Complex						2		2	1	7	3	5	3	1	11	1		1	1.2
Mason Landing	Newark	Boat Ramp	1																		
Newark Park	Newark	Community Park									1	1				1	4			1	0.1
Newtown Park	Pocomoke City	Sports Complex									1	6	2	1	1	1	10			1	1.5
Northern Worcester Athletic Complex	Berlin	Sports Complex										7	1	5	2	1	10			1	0.5
Ocean City Elementary School	Ocean City	School												1					1	2	
Pocomoke Elementary School	Pocomoke City	School						1						1						3	
Pocomoke High School	Pocomoke City	School								6		2	2	2	1	7	1				
Pocomoke Middle School	Pocomoke City	School						2		2				1						5	
Public Landing	Snow Hill	Boat Ramp	1													2	5				
Shell Mill Landing	Bishopville	Boat Ramp	1																		
Showell Elementary School	Showell	School														1				1	
Showell Park	Showell	Sports Complex						2		2	1	3	2	1	1	11				2	0.5
Snow Hill Elementary School	Snow Hill	School												1		1	7	1		3	
Snow Hill High School	Snow Hill	School								4		2	2	2	1						
Snow Hill Middle School	Snow Hill	School								2				1			3	1		5	
South Point Landing	Berlin	Boat Ramp	1																		
Stephen Decatur Middle School	Berlin	School										2		4							
Stephen Decatur High School	Berlin	School								6		2	2	2	1						
Stockton Neighborhood Park	Stockton	Community Park														1	4			1	0.25
Taylor Landing	Girdletree	Boat Ramp	1					1													
West Ocean City Boat Ramp	West Ocean City	Boat Ramp	3	9																	
Whaleyville Park	Whaleyville	Mini-Park																			
Total			12	9	0	0	9	10	0	26	5	33	5	30	9	13	97	13	1	34	5.3

Table 2-11. Privately Owned Recreational Sites, Worcester County

Site Name	City/Town/Comm Site Class	Boat Ramps	Boat Slips	Group Campsites	Tent/RV Campsites	Canoeing/kayaking	Basketball Courts	Skateboard Courts	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts	Ball Fields, Diamond	Lighted Ball Fields, Diamond	Multipurpose Fields	Lighted Multipurpose Fields	Picnic Pavilion	Picnic Tables	Indoor Recreational Areas	Swimming Pools	Tot Lots	Trails, Mileage	Playground	Dog Park	Bike Trails
Bainbridge Park	Ocean Pines						1						1						0	0.25	1		
Huntington Park	Ocean Pines												1			1					1		
Manklin Meadows Complex	Ocean Pines						1				1	1				3					1	1	
Manklin Raquet Sports	Ocean Pines								18							6							
Nassawango Creek Presene	Snow Hill																						
Ocean Pines Swim and Racquet Club	Ocean Pines	1	12				1	1	2						1	12	1			1.00			
Ocean Pines--"Pocket" Parks (18 total)	Ocean Pines															10					1		
Robin Hood Park	Ocean Pines						1						1		3					2.50	1		
South Gate Pond	Ocean Pines												1		2					2.50			
Somerset Park	Ocean Pines												1		1								
Sports Core Pool	Ocean Pines																						
Veterans Memorial Park	Ocean Pines												1										
White Horse Park	Ocean Pines	1					1	1							1	14	1			1.00	1		
Worcester Preparatory School	Berlin								4				3										
Yacht Club Marina / Mumford Landing	Ocean Pines	1	86																				
Total		2	12	0	929	4	5	1	24	0	1	1	9	0	2	52	1	2	1	7	1	1	7

Table 2-12. Town-Owned Recreational Sites, Worcester County

Site Name	City/Town	Site Class	Boat Ramps	Boat Slips	Group Campsites	Tent/RV Campsites	Canoeing/Kayaking	Basketball Courts	Skateboard Courts	Pickleball Courts	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts	Ball Fields, Diamond	Lighted Ball Field, Diamond	Multipurpose Field	Lighted Multipurpose Field	Picnic Pavilion	Picnic Tables	Indoor Recreational Areas	Swimming Pools	Playgrounds	Trails, Mileage	Stage	Horseshoe Pits	Fitness Stations	Fishing Piers	Fitness Equipment	
9th St. Fishing Pier	Ocean City	Special Use Area																										
64th St. Boat Ramp	Ocean City	Special Use Area	2																									
Bering Road Boat Ramp	Ocean City	Boat Ramp	1																									
Byrd Park	Snow Hill	Community Park	3	8			1	1									2	20			1					1		
Cypress Park	Pocomoke City	Community Park	1	25				1	1	6	1				1	1	2	15			1	1.5	1.0					
Dorchester Beach Volleyball Park	Ocean City	Mini Park										8																
Downtown Mini-Park	Pocomoke City	Mini Park															1	8										
Downtown Recreation Complex	Ocean City	Community Park						2	1						1	1					1							
Dr. William E. Henry Park	Berlin	Community Park						3									1	5			1							4
Eagle's Landing Golf Course	Ocean City	Golf Course only																										
Fiesta Park	Ocean City	Neighborhood Park															1	8										
Fisher Park	Snow Hill	Mini Park																2								2	7	
Gateway Park	Snow Hill	Special Use Area	2				1																					
Gorman Ave Park	Ocean City	Neighborhood Park									1						1	1			1							
Heron Park	Berlin	Community Park																				1.0						
James T. Sturgis Memorial Park	Snow Hill	Mini Park		10													1	10										
Jamestown Park	Ocean City	Mini Park																								1		
John Howard Burbage Park	Berlin	Mini Park																										
Laurel Street Park	Pocomoke City	Community Park	1	25														3										
Little Salisbury Park	Ocean City	Neighborhood Park						1			2										1							
Little Salisbury Park- Dog Playground	Ocean City	Special Use Area																										
Market Street Dock - Discovery Center	Pocomoke City	Special Use Area		12														1										
North Surf Park	Ocean City	Neighborhood Park																										
Northside Park	Ocean City	Sports Complex					1						3	1	1	1	10			1	1	1.0						
Ocean City Beach	Ocean City	Special Use Area																										
Ocean City Boardwalk	Ocean City	Special Use Area																										
Ocean City Convention Center	Ocean City	Special Use Area																		1								
Ocean City Entry Park	Ocean City	Special Use Area																										
Ocean City Inlet Park	Ocean City	Mini Park																										
Ocean City Tennis Center	Ocean City	Community Park									9																	
Riverview Square	Snow Hill	Community Park																										
Robin Park	Ocean City	Neighborhood Park																										
Stephen Decatur Memorial Park	Berlin	Community Park									4	1					1	20			1	1.0						8
Sunset Park	Ocean City	Community Park																										
Winter Quarters Park & Log Cabin	Pocomoke City	Special Use Area	1												1													
Beach Volleyball Courts - 2nd St. to 11th St.	Ocean City	Special Use Area										9																
Total			9	82	0	0	4	7	2	6	17	18	0	3	4	3	11	113	2	0	12	9.0	1.0	4.0	8.0	5	7	

Table 2-13. State- and Federal-Owned Recreational Sites, Worcester County

Site Name	Acres	Site Class	Boat Ramps	Boat Slips	Group Campsites	RV/Tent Campsites	Canoeing/Kayaking	Basketball Courts	Skateboard Courts	Tennis Courts	Volleyball Courts	Ball Fields, Diamond	Lighted Ball Fields, Diamond	Lighted Multi-Purpose Fields	Multi-Purpose Fields	Lighted Multi-Purpose Fields	Picnic Pavilions	Picnic Tables	Indoor Recreational Areas	Swimming Pools	Tot Lots	Trails, mileage
Assateague Island National Seashore	8,200	National Seashore			1,354	22												6				5
Assateague Island State Park	855	State Park	2		343	1												4				3.0
E. A. Vaughn Wildlife Management Area	2,769	State Wildlife Management Area																				
Isle of Wight Wildlife Management Area	224	State Wildlife Management Area																				
Lankford's Discovery Natural Heritage Area	283	State Natural Resource Management Area																				
Milburn Landing	370	State Park	1		2	32						1					2					1
Pocomoke River State Forest	13,639	State Natural Resource Management Area																				
Pocomoke River Wildlife Management Area	1,008	State Natural Resource Management Area																				
Pocomoke River State Park	915	State Park	2	25	2,175						2			1			2			1		
Sinepuxent Bay Wildlife Management Area	93	State Natural Resource Management Area																				
Total	28,356		5	25	5,904	23	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	1	0	4	10	0	0	1	1	21

Chapter III: Other Protected Lands

Overview

This chapter focuses on protection of land for purposes other than public access. Lands conserved and managed for natural resource purposes typically serves multiple functions that benefit people and communities where they live, work and play. Forests, tidal and nontidal wetlands, river corridors, open meadows and other landscapes preserved in their natural state provide valuable ecosystem services such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, soil formation, stormwater management, and extreme weather mitigation. Targeted land conservation avoids costs to taxpayers in providing these services through costly restoration after these services have been reduced or destroyed. Land protection additionally protects a community from rising taxes as revenue becomes needed to cover the costs of services for new development.

This chapter documents the county's goals for preserving natural resource lands and resources and the extent to which progress has been made toward achievement of the program development strategy identified in the County's 2019 *Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan*.

Overview of Natural Resource Land Conservation in Worcester County

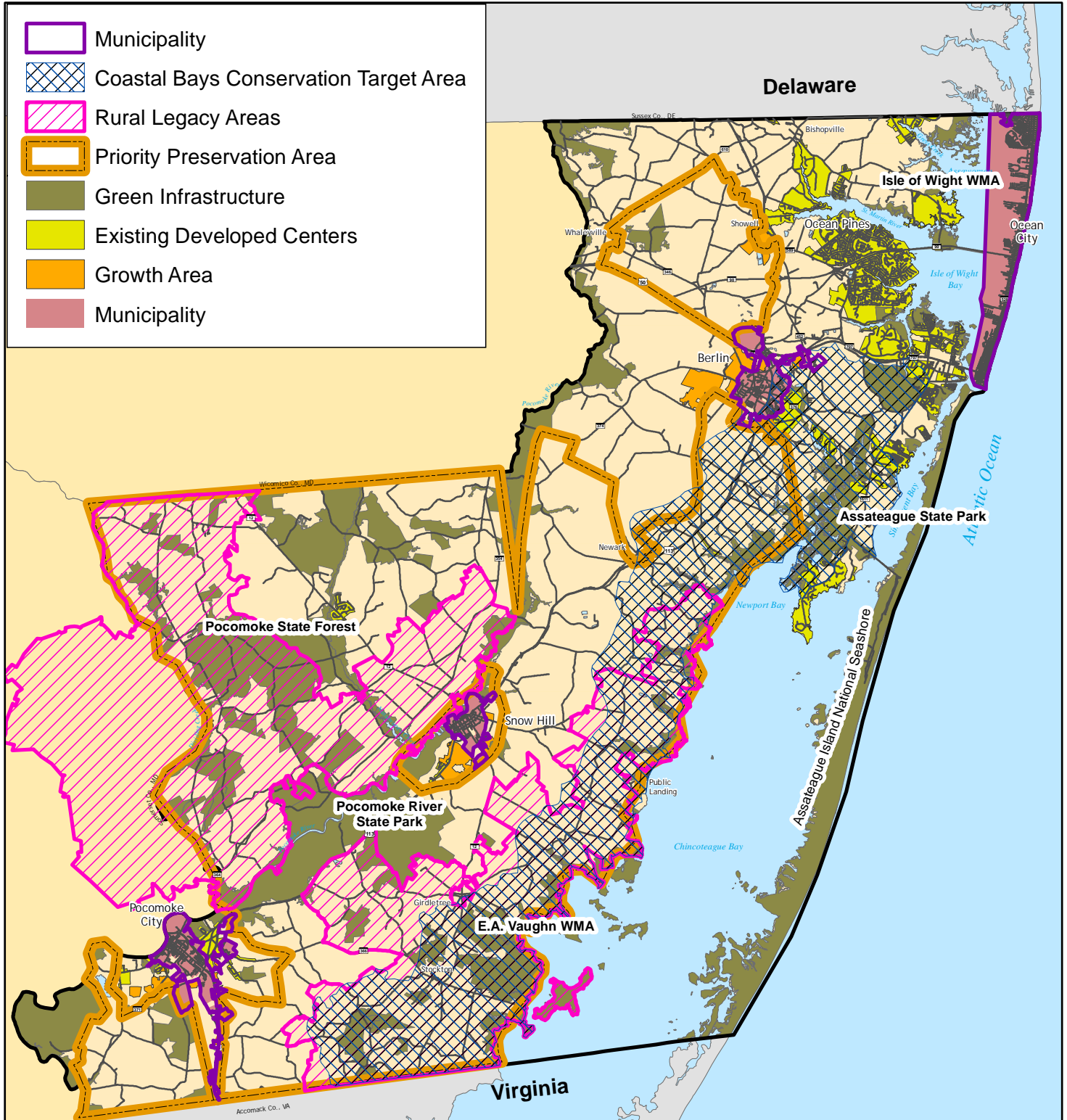
Worcester County government and citizens are in a unique position of being stewards to a breathtaking array of unique natural resources, from the beaches and marshland of the coast to inland non-tidal river, creeks and wetlands. These resources enrich the

county economically, by providing a basis for the tourism and natural resource based industries, which is a bedrock of the county's economy. The county's natural resources also provide ecosystem services, such as storm protection, flood control, clean air and water, open space and other benefits that make the county a unique, attractive and pleasant place to live and do business. Finally these resources, if well-protected, are an irreplaceable legacy to pass to the next generations. Unlike many coastal communities, Worcester County is in the enviable position of having many natural resources still intact, and faces the challenge not of costly restoration but of protection of what remains.

Figure 3-1 indicates the general areas of the county targeted for natural resources conservation and for growth. In general the areas targeted for conservation are the shorelines and headwaters of both the Pocumoke and the Coastal Bays watersheds, and areas that still contain contiguous natural lands, such as the lower Chincoteague Bay watershed and the Dividing Creek watershed (where the county's Rural Legacy Areas are located). Growth areas as determined by the *2006 Worcester County Comprehensive Plan* (2006 Land Use Plan map), and municipality boundaries are shown on Figure 3-1 as well.

Figure 3-2 depicts natural resource land conservation in Worcester County. Protected land includes federal, state and local parks, Wildlife Management Areas, State Forest, land protected by The Nature Conservancy, and other land protected with conservation easements

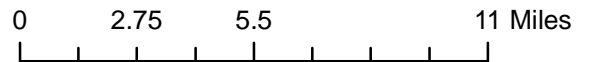
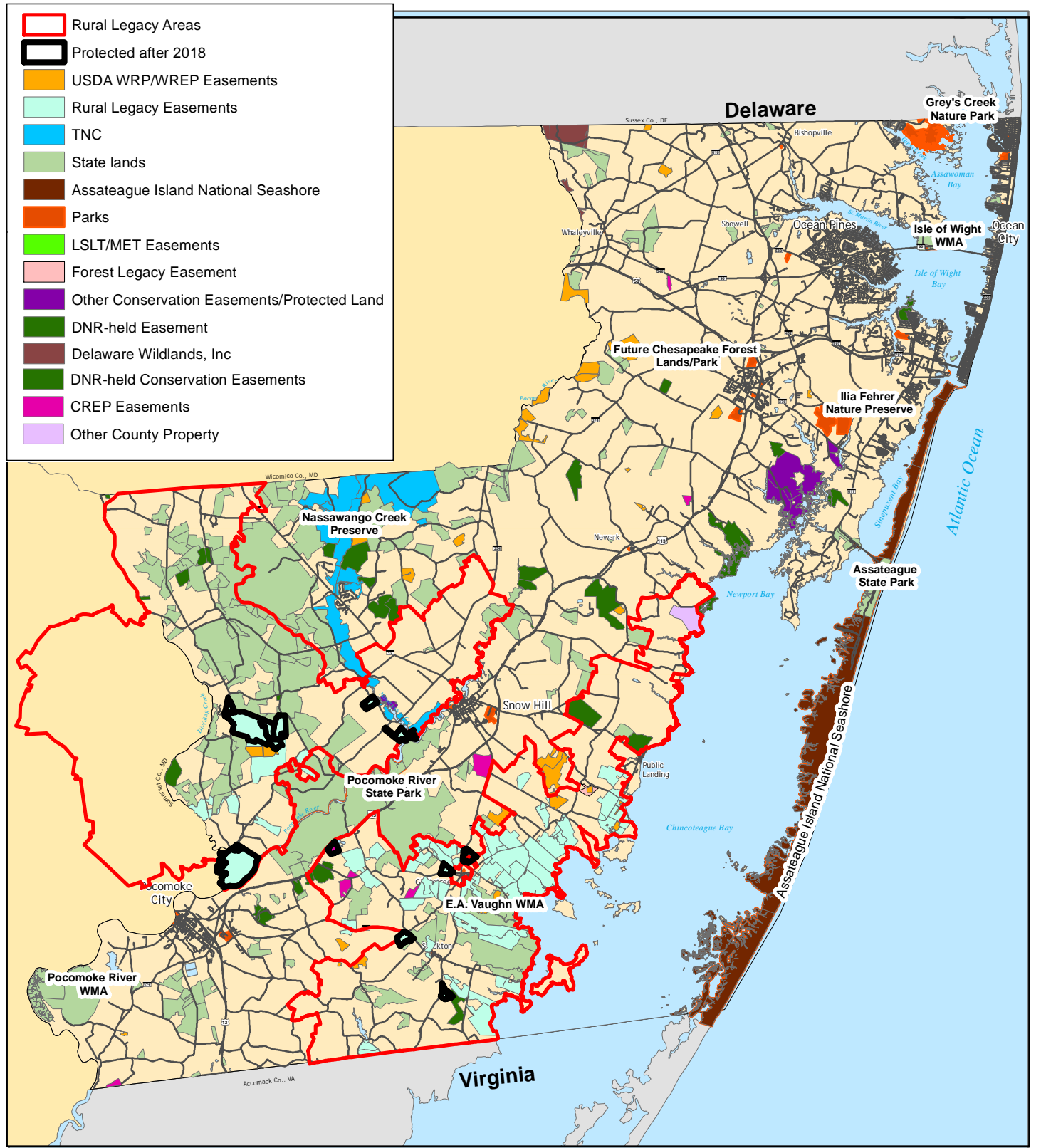
Figure 3-1. Local and State Targeted Conservation Areas /Growth Areas, Worcester County, Maryland



0 2 4 8 Miles

April 4, 2022

Figure 3-2. Public Parks/Recreation and Private Parcels Protected for Natural Resource Conservation



April 6, 2022

primarily or partly for protection of natural resources. The map includes Rural Legacy easements, that protect both agriculture and natural resources on private lands. Table 3-1 provides acreage data²³.

Assateague Island National Seashore, managed by the National Park Service, is 8,200+ acres of a 37-mile long barrier island that stretches into Virginia. The barrier island not only provides protection to the mainland from storms and flooding, it provides an outdoor recreation destination available not just to county citizens but that provides economic benefits to Worcester County. A 2021 National Park Service report showed that nearly 2.5 million visitors in 2020 spent over \$111 million in communities near Assateague Island National Seashore, supporting over 1,400 jobs, and providing a cumulative benefit of over \$124 million²⁴.

State Parks in Worcester County include Assateague Island State Park (519 acres) and Pocomoke River State Park (located within the Pocomoke State Forest), which are also important visitor destinations for camping and day use, as well as provide environmental services to the county. E.A. Vaughn, Isle of Wight, Pocomoke River, Sinepuxent Bay Wildlife Management Areas preserve important wildlife habitat while also offering some access for hiking and/or hunting.

The State of Maryland owns over 43,000 acres of land in Worcester County, much of it forested. The Pocomoke State Forest consists of over 18,000 acres of land, mostly in Worcester County (a few small parcels in Somerset and Wicomico Counties are included)²⁵. Chesapeake Forest Lands are spread across eight (8) counties, including Worcester County (20,190 acres²⁶). Both forests are managed with a goal of sustainable forestry. Passive access (trails) and hunting use is allowed on certain tracts.

The Nassawango Creek Preserve, 9,953 acres and The Nature Conservancy's largest preserve in Maryland, is located mainly in Worcester County and is one of the last pieces of true wilderness on Delmarva. It is also one of the northernmost remaining examples of bald cypress swamp. 90 rare plants and animals including dozens of orchids and warblers are found in the preserve. Thousands of visitors annually use the preserve to bird watch and to enjoy the unique beauty of this gem of Maryland.

Various local, state and federal programs protect and restore land using conservation easements. Details of the county-based programs are described in the "Implementing Programs" section later in this chapter. Program Open Space purchases conservation easements on land with natural resource value, sometimes with matching federal funds (see Table 3-1 for a list of land preserved for protection of natural resources). An important federal program for natural

²³ Data for state land acreage was obtained from "Maryland DNR Fiscal Year 2021 DNR Lands Acreage Report", Undated.

²⁴ *2020 National Park Visitor Spending Effects - Economic Contributions to Local Communities*,

States and the Nation. National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior. 2021.

²⁵ Maryland Department of Natural Resources, website.

²⁶ "Maryland DNR Fiscal Year 2021 DNR Lands Acreage Report", Undated.

resource protection and enhancement is the Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (formerly the Wetland Reserve Program), which restores wetlands and protects the land with a permanent conservation easement (see Table 3-1). These programs do not provide for public access as the properties remain in private ownership and management, however the public reaps the benefits that come from open space, preserved habitat, clean air and water.

Outdoor Recreation: County Amenities

The county maintains natural areas at nearly every county park to encourage citizen connections with nature.

In 2004 Worcester County acquired the Grey's Creek Nature Park, a nearly 600-acre site containing woodland and extensive marsh, to preserve natural habitat and protect the water quality of Assawoman Bay. The 430-acre wooded Iia Fehrer Nature Preserve was acquired in 2012 as an on-going effort to preserve and enhance the Holly Grove Swamp Area, key to the water quality of Newport Bay. With leadership from the Maryland Coastal Bays Program, wetlands and woodland are being restored on the site. Eventually these parks will be open for public passive use (walking and riding trails) in cooperation with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. Grey's Creek Nature Park is slated to open to the public this fall, offering a new walking trail.

The county also manages several smaller parks that have a natural resource emphasis. Herring Creek Nature Park, in West Ocean City, offers an oasis for picnicking and walking/jogging. Homer Gudelsky Park is directly across from

the Ocean City inlet and offers waterfront access for passive enjoyment and fishing. Isle of Wight Park (formerly part of the Isle of Wight Wildlife Management Area) is a passive nature park offering a canoe/kayak launch site, piers and picnic tables. The county continues to seek ways to offer additional opportunities at existing county parks for people to connect with nature, including a new 1.2 mile nature trail loop at John Walter Smith Park in Snow Hill. Trails have also been added at Northern Worcester Athletic Complex and Newtown Park.

The county includes both the Maryland Coastal Bays and watershed as well as the Pocomoke River and creeks and other tributaries (Chesapeake Bay watershed). Water access and recreation are key amenities in the county. Currently there is an established water trail on the Pocomoke River/Nassawango Creek as well as in Sinepuxent Bay (Assateague).

Natural Resource Lands Conservation Goals

General Context

Natural resource conservation land provides environmental and social benefits for Worcester County citizens and also for people visiting the county. These include:

- Natural filtration of air and water
- Supporting a better quality of life
- Maintaining low costs of community services (undeveloped land does not demand government services)
- Resiliency (protection from flooding and wind damage)

- Outdoor recreational opportunities
- Economic benefits from tourism and increased property values for adjacent residential lots and communities
- Protection or restoration of wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Protection of Worcester County's unique cultural and historical landscape

County Goals

Situated on the lower eastern shore of Maryland, Worcester County is the only seaside county, with 40 miles of ocean beach. One third of the county is within the Maryland Coastal Bays watershed, a unique estuarine ecosystem. In addition, unlike many Maryland counties, Worcester County includes intensely developed areas and areas that are mainly characterized by forested land, wetland and agricultural land. The ocean beaches and the balance between development and conservation is what creates a high quality of life in the county, what draws businesses to locate in the county, and what is able to support a viable tourism industry and agricultural/natural resources industry, both bedrocks of the County's economy.

Worcester County's natural resource protection objectives, identified in the 2006 comprehensive plan, are to:

1. Use a systems approach to environmental planning addressing pollution at or close to its source and use sustainable development techniques
2. Instill environmental stewardship as an universal ethic

3. Identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas
4. Restore and/or enhance natural resource functions where possible
5. Reduce imperviousness of existing and new development
6. Improve water bodies on the "Impaired Water Bodies (303d) List" to the point of their removal from this list
7. Meet the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) standards
8. Conserve resources by reducing unnecessary consumption
9. Channel development within a particular site to any existing disturbed areas if possible
10. Establish sufficient buffers for sensitive areas

The 2006 comprehensive plan also identifies specific actions for protection/preservation of groundwater, forests, threatened and endangered species, floodplains, mineral resources. Environmentally sensitive design, green building and green infrastructure are also addressed.

The county's goals and objectives, stated in the comprehensive plan, encompass or accommodate all of the state's goals for conservation of natural resource lands, which are:

- Identify, protect, and restore lands and waterways in Maryland that support important aquatic and terrestrial natural resources and ecological functions, through combined use of the following techniques:
 - Public land acquisition and stewardship;
 - Private land conservation easements and stewardship practices through purchased or

- donated easement programs;
- Local land use management plans and procedures that conserve natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas and minimize impacts to resource lands when development occurs;
- Incentives for resource-based economies that increase retention of forests, wetlands, or agricultural lands;
- Avoidance of impacts on natural resources by publicly funded infrastructure development projects; and
- Appropriate mitigation response, commensurate with the value of resource impacted.
- Focus conservation and restoration activities on priority areas, according to a strategic framework such as Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs) in GreenPrint.
- Conserve and restore species of concern and important habitat types that fall outside of designated green infrastructure (examples include: grasslands, shoreline beach and dune systems, mud flats, non-forested islands, etc.)
- Develop a more comprehensive inventory of natural resource lands and environmentally sensitive areas to assist State and local implementation programs.
- Establish measurable objectives for natural resource conservation and an integrated State/local strategy to achieve them through State and local implementation programs.
- Assess the combined ability of State and local programs to achieve the following:
 - Expand and connect forests, farmlands, and other natural lands as a network of contiguous green infrastructure.
 - Protect critical terrestrial and aquatic habitats, biological communities, and populations;
 - Manage watersheds in ways that protect, conserve, and restore stream corridors, riparian forest buffers, wetlands, floodplains, and aquifer recharge areas and their associated hydrologic and water quality functions;
 - Adopt coordinated land and watershed management strategies that recognize the critical links between growth management and aquatic biodiversity and fisheries production; and
 - Support a productive forestland base and forest-resource industry, emphasizing the economic viability of privately owned forestland.

Update on Status since 2018 LPPRP

The areas of highest priority for natural resource land conservation in Worcester County continue to be the Coastal Bays and Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Areas, the entire Coastal Bays shoreline, and lands that abut the tributaries to the Coastal Bays. The latter two areas, although protected to some degree by restrictive zoning and the Critical Area regulations, have been subject to greatest development pressure or other alteration, and their preservation is key to preserving the water quality of the Coastal Bays. The county also recognizes the importance of headwaters in the protection of waterway/watershed health. Forested lands in headwater areas are considered important for long-term protection. An example of this kind of area is Holly Grove Swamp in the Ayres Creek watershed, which has been targeted for conservation in cooperation with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program. In 2009 Worcester County and the Maryland Coastal Bays Program identified a Coastal Bays Target Area for resource land protection and set a goal of protection of 500 acres annually in this area²⁷.

A map showing the areas targeted for land protection is provided as Figure 3-1. Land protected for natural resource conservation with CREP and Rural Legacy conservation easements acquired after 2019 are highlighted in Figure 3-2.

The Coastal Bays and Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Area (RLA) programs not only protect key agricultural lands, but

along with it, buffers, wetlands, forestlands and other sensitive natural resources. The county goal was to protect 3,000 to 5,000 acres in these areas, between 2019 and 2022²⁸, continuing to build on a permanent “greenway” connecting E.A.Vaughn Wildlife Management Area to Pocomoke State Forest and important contiguous woodland in Dividing Creek and Nassawango Creek watersheds; 2,483 acres have been protected as of April 2022. Since 2018, 556 acres have been protected in the Coastal Bays RLA and 1,926 acres in the Worcester County portion of the Dividing Creek RLA. The Rural Legacy properties are reflected in maps and tables in both this and the following chapter, as there is a dual purpose of the program to protect both natural resource and agricultural features of properties.

The permanent Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) Easement program which purchases permanent easements on property partly or completely in a CREP contract, became available in 2010 and again in 2014 and 2017 (in Maryland, to selected counties/areas). 424 acres have been protected with this program, 57 acres since 2018 (see Figure 3-2). The federal Conservation Reserve Program removes environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production and plants vegetation (usually trees) to improve water quality and reduce loss of wildlife habitat. The landowner enters a contract during which time this practice must stay in place. The CREP easement program places property that includes land in this

²⁷ Maryland Coastal Bays Program, Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, Ocean City, Maryland (revised 2015), first published in 1999.

²⁸ Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Certification Program Application, Worcester County, Maryland. 2018.

program into permanent easement, including a requirement that the CREP conservation practices remain in effect in perpetuity.

Since 2018, Worcester County continued to work with the Maryland Coastal Bays Program to protect and restore the headwaters of Ayres Creek (Holly Grove Swamp). It is the largest contiguous forest remaining in the northern coastal bays watershed and is a key stop-over in the migratory bird “Atlantic Flyway”. Specifically, since the Adkins property on Ayres Creek was purchased in 2011 (now Ilia Fehrer Nature Reserve), MCBP and Worcester County are working together to restore the property and offer passive public access. Since 2018, wetlands and forest restoration has been implemented on this site.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Chesapeake Bay Field Office initiated the Pocomoke River Conservation Partnership in 2006, which included the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Nature Conservancy, and Worcester County as a non-matching partner. This project is a long-term effort to protect and restore migratory bird habitat in the Pocomoke River watershed. Since 2011, 6,500 acres in the mainstem of the Pocomoke River including properties in both Wicomico and Worcester counties along the county line, north of Snow Hill have been protected with conservation easements held by the State of Maryland (Department of Natural Resources). In recent years the focus has been on restoration of the floodplain in the channelize portions of the Pocomoke

River: Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA), The Nature Conservancy and US Fish and Wildlife Service have been partners in this effort.

Coastal Resiliency

Worcester County has approximately 361 miles of bay shoreline²⁹; 41,059 acres in Atlantic Coastal Bays Critical Area and 10,030 acres in Chesapeake Bay Critical Area (land within 1,000 feet of tidal waters).

The likely range (66% probability) of the relative rise of mean sea level expected in Maryland between 2000 and 2050 is 0.8 to 1.6 feet, with about a one-in-twenty chance it could exceed 2.0 feet and about a one-in one hundred chance it could exceed 2.3 feet. Later this century, rates of sea-level rise increasingly depend on the future pathway of global emissions of greenhouse gases during the next sixty years. If emissions reductions are sufficient to limit the increase in global mean temperature to less than 2° Celsius over pre-industrial levels, the likely sea level rise increase by 2100 is 1.2 to 3.0 feet, with a one-in twenty chance that it would exceed 3.7 feet.

As sea level rises, salt marsh and other important low lying habitats will be at risk for change or disappearing altogether. Currently the county’s mainland is protected by barrier island as well as smaller islands found throughout the coastal bays. These islands are experiencing accelerated erosion, and significant loss of island could result in impacts to the mainland. This loss is

²⁹ Maryland Geological Survey, 2000. Digital wetlands delineation based on 1989 and 1998 imagery.

expected to continue. As well, Assateague Island continues to migrate westward and to experience erosion. It's also important that the county consider preservation of upland areas adjacent to salt marsh and other low lying habitats, so that marsh "migration" is possible as sea level rises. It is also important that the county consider the potential impact of inundation on public access points and any infrastructure placed there, as repeated loss and replacement can be an economic cost to the county.

Coastal resilience is a proactive approach to addressing the expected impacts of sea level rise on communities, including coastal storm surge, flooding and erosion. Rather than simply reacting to impacts, coastal resiliency is the ability to adapt, withstand and rapidly recover from these disruptions through understanding the impacts, planning ahead and implementing effective solutions. The state of Maryland has provided GIS and other tools to counties to assist with planning to improve coastal resiliency. Figure 3-3 shows priority "wetland adaptation areas" that are currently unprotected, along with all protected lands in Worcester County. The conservation criteria included areas that may support future wetland migration, wildlife habitat, wildlife corridors, high priority aquatic and terrestrial living resources, vulnerable wetland habitat, suitable hydric soils for wetland establishment and marsh-dependent breeding bird habitat. From these criteria a conservation model was developed to prioritize the most important areas for wetland adaptation. The top priorities were used to create the "Wetland Adaptation Areas". This data can

provide further support for protection priorities. Many of these unprotected priority wetland adaptation areas are within the existing Rural Legacy Areas and the Priority Protection Area.

Figure 3-4 depicts the Shoreline Hazard Index and Marsh Protection Potential Index, both prepared as part of the Maryland Coastal Resiliency Assessment. The Shoreline Hazard Index represents relative exposure to storm-induced erosion and flooding. Inputs to the model included 6 physical variables (geomorphology, elevation, sea level rise, wave power, storm surge height and erosion rates) and 5 habitat types (forest, marsh, dune, oyster reef and underwater grass). Two scenarios of the model were run: one scenario incorporating the protective role of all existing coastal habitats and the other scenario simulating the complete loss of habitats. The difference between the two scenarios indicates the potential magnitude of coastal hazard reduction by habitats at each location. Much of the Coastal Bays shoreline scored "high" in the Shoreline Hazard index. The Marsh Protection Potential Index (MPPI) ranks Maryland's coastal marshes by their ability to protect vulnerable communities from coastal hazards. The MPPI overall rating ranks the protective ability of over 14,000 marshes statewide. It is important to note that the MPPI ranks marshes relative to other marshes, rather than providing an absolute measure of protective services. The MPPI does not attempt to describe the dollar-value of protective services provided by each marsh, nor does it compare marshes to other types of habitat or to other protection infrastructure solutions. In addition, the

MPPI does not assess marshes on any of the other characteristics that often inform conservation priorities. Things like biodiversity, ecosystem health, rare species, recreation value, or water quality services are not captured by the MPPI. The MPPI is intended to supplement, not replace, the other ways conservation decision-makers prioritize natural habitats. The analysis suggests that much of the marsh in the Coastal Bays is providing a medium to high level of protection at this time. While this is good news, it is also important to continue to monitor the bay marshes and also to investigate further what protective measures are needed to maintain this status. The areas that are characterized as “low” should be investigated further to determine what protective measures may be needed.

Implementing Programs

Worcester County employs the following programs and ordinances to work towards achieving its goals for natural resource conservation:

Voluntary or Non-Regulatory Programs

- **Rural Legacy Program.** The Rural Legacy Program, enacted by the General Assembly in 1997, provides funding to preserve large, contiguous tracts of land and to enhance natural resource, agricultural, forestry and environmental protection while supporting a sustainable land base for natural resource based industries. The Coastal Bays Rural Legacy Area was established in 1998. The long term goal is protection of

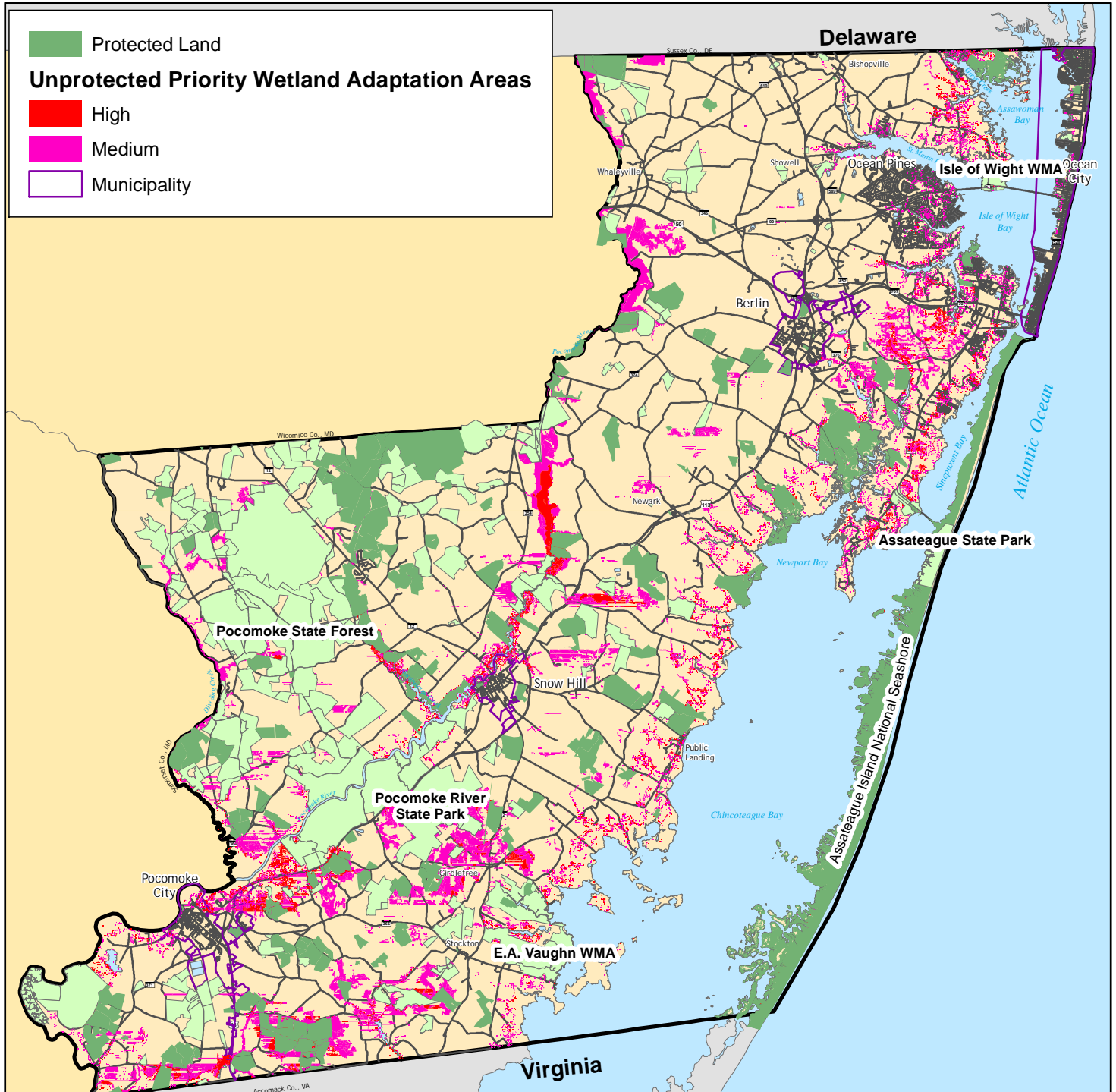
contiguous shoreline and a greenway connecting the E.A. Vaughn Wildlife Management Area and the Pocomoke State Forest. The Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Area includes land in Worcester and Somerset Counties that is within the lower Dividing Creek watershed, an area with important, contiguous farmland, and rich biodiversity. The 23,000-acre Area connects to The Nature Conservancy’s Nassawango Creek and includes and links with large blocks of woodland within the Pocomoke State Forest system. More details are provided in the Agricultural Land Preservation chapter, which follows.

- **Donated Conservation Easements.** Worcester County is served by the Lower Shore Land Trust, a non-profit organization that works in cooperation with the Maryland Environmental Trust to obtain donated permanent conservation easements in rural areas. Over 1,900 acres in Worcester County are protected by a donated conservation easement, held by the Lower Shore Land Trust and Maryland Environmental Trust. Landowners who donate have access to certain tax benefits (see Figure 3-2).
- **Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF).** More detail on this program is provided in the Agricultural Land Preservation (Chapter Four), however, the MALPF program protects natural resources as well as active farmland. Nearly 10,000 acres of

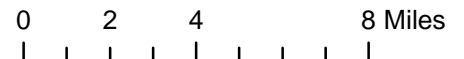
Table 3-1. Natural Resource Lands Inventory, Worcester County, Maryland

Site Name:	Property Size (Acres)	Outdoor Recreation Amenities (if any):	Trails/Interpretive Trails	Water Access	Fishing	Hunting	Other
Grey's Creek Nature Park (Worcester Co.)	575	trail	yes	yes	n/a	n/a	expected to open to the public Fall 2022
Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve (Worcester Co.)	442		yes	no	n/a	n/a	not currently open to public
Herring Creek Nature Park (Worcester Co.)	44	trail, gazebo	yes	no	no	no	
Homer Gudelsky Park (Worcester Co.)	2	beach		yes	yes	no	
Isle of Wight Park (Worcester Co.)	12	pier, kayak/canoe launch	yes	yes	yes	no	
Assateague Island National Seashore	8,200	beach, camping, canoes/kayak rentals	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Assateague Island State Park (State)	855	beach, camping, nature center		yes	yes	no	
E.A. Vaughn Wildlife Management Area (State)	2,769	trails	yes	no	no	yes	
Isle of Wight Wildlife Management Area (State)	224		no	yes	yes	yes	
Sinepuxent Bay Wildlife Management Area (State)	93		no	yes	yes	no	accessible only by boat, most islands are closed during nesting season
Pocomoke River Wildlife Management Area (State)	1,008	trails	yes	yes	yes	yes	
Pocomoke State Forest (State)	17,626	trails	yes	no	no	yes	
Pocomoke River State Park (State)	916	boat slips, pier, canoe/kayak rental, camping, picnicking, pool, nature center, marina	yes	yes	yes	no	
Chesapeake Forest Lands (State)	20,190	trails	yes	no	no	yes	some tracts allow public access
Nassawango Creek Preserve (TNC)	5,426	water and walking trails	yes	no	no	no	
Lands under conservation easement held by DNR	7,157	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Wetland Reserve Program easement (USDA)	3,142	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Delaware Wildlands (non-profit)	623	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Lower Shore Land Trust/MD Environmental Trust conservation easement (non-profit)	6,414	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) easements	9,817	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Rural Legacy easements	13,232	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) Easement	156	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Forest Legacy Easement	95	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
CREP permanent conservation easements (Worcester County)	655	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Other protected lands (County/State/Non-profit)	1,696	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	no public access
Totals*:	101,369						

Figure 3-3. Priority Wetland Adaptation Areas, Worcester County, Maryland

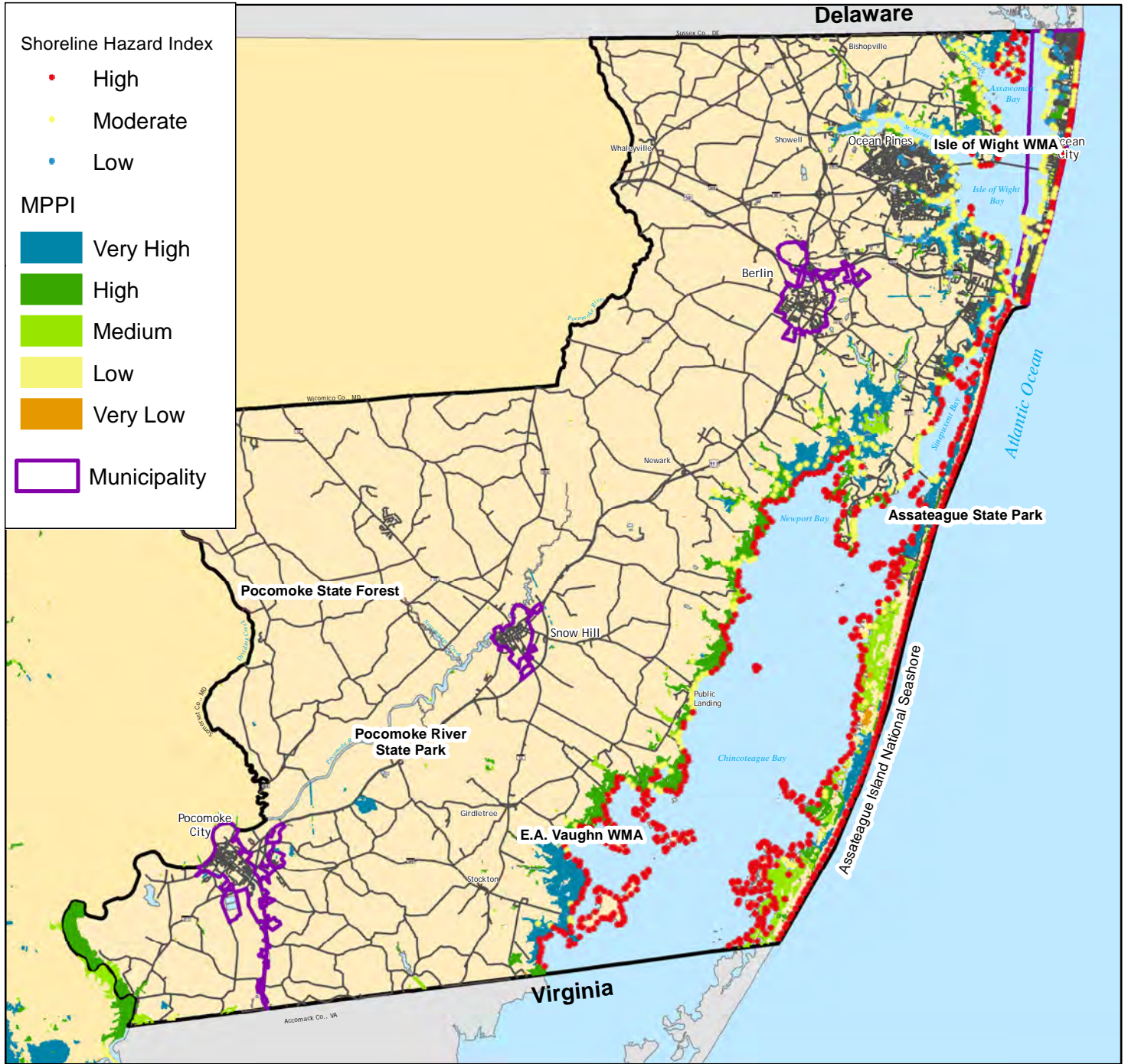


In order to better understand the impacts sea level rise may have on the State's coastal marsh system, the Sea-Level Affecting Marshes Model (SLAMM) was run for all 16 coastal counties and Baltimore City. The results of SLAMM were analyzed for specific conservation criteria for long-term planning that may help increase coastal resiliency in Maryland. The conservation criteria included areas that may support future wetland migration, wildlife habitat, high priority aquatic and terrestrial living resources, vulnerable wetland habitat, suitable hydric soils for wetland establishment and marsh-dependent breeding bird habitat. From these criteria a conservation model was developed to prioritize the most important areas for wetland adaptation. As a result the top priorities were used to create the Wetland Adaptation Areas for the Targeted Ecological Areas (TEAs) used in Maryland's GreenPrint.



April 4, 2022

**Figure 3-4. Coastal Resiliency Assessment, Worcester County:
Shoreline Hazard and Marsh Protection Index**



Source of data: Worcester County Department of Development Review and Permitting, Technical Services Division; Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

- farmland and forest are permanently protected with this program.
- **CREP Permanent Easement Program.** This state-funded program protects forest resources (land in CREP contracts) with permanent easements. Over 600 acres have been protected with this program.
- **CELCP and Coastal Wetlands Programs.** Worcester County has partnered with, and plans to continue to work with, the state and the Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (CELCP) (NOAA) and the Coastal Wetlands Program (USFWS), two federal programs that protect coastal resources through purchase of conservation easements or fee simple purchase for passive parks. The Greys Creek Nature Park and Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve were both purchased with CELCP funding.
- **Maryland Coastal Bays Program.** Part of the National Estuary Program, the Maryland Coastal Bays Program cooperates with the towns of Ocean City and Berlin, National Park Service, Worcester County, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Maryland Departments of Natural Resources, Agriculture, Environment, and Planning, which came together to produce the first ever comprehensive management plan for the coastal bays, completed in 1999. The plan was updated in 2015 following three years of development through a similar process. 222 actions items for government and non-government entities are identified in the 2015 plan to address water quality, habitat and living resource challenges in the watershed. Established in 1987 under the Clean Water Act, the National Estuary Program was developed to protect economically and environmentally sensitive estuaries across the United States by engaging all user groups. Implementation of many of these actions are underway. An Implementation Committee made up of partner representatives meets regularly to review progress. A policy committee meets annually as well.
- **Coastal Resilience Initiatives** Worcester County is working with Maryland Coastal Bays Program, Maryland Department of Natural Resources and other partners to identify and implement nature-based restoration projects that strengthen community resilience. With funding from Maryland Department of Natural Resources and support from the Maryland Coastal Bays Program , the county is working with Cape Isle of Wight residents/property owners to implement an expanded marsh and beach system adjacent to Selsey Road, where significant erosion has occurred. This demonstration project will showcase the concept of nature-based solutions for protection of communities from the effects of sea level rise and climate change. Worcester County is working with US Fish and Wildlife Service and other

partners to identify other areas where a nature-based solution would be viable. The Maryland Coastal Bays Program has been pursuing similar projects, including at Tizzard Island in Chincoteague Bay. The mapping and analysis resources provided by Maryland Department of Natural Resources, some of which are depicted in Figures 3-3 and 3-4 are key tools for supporting decision-making.

- **TMDL Implementation.** In 2019 Worcester County with assistance from the Maryland Coastal Bays Program and funding through the Maryland Department of the Environment developed a coastal bays watershed plan that meets Section 319 requirements and addresses reduction of nutrient loads in the watershed for the Assawoman Bay watershed. The county anticipates meeting Section 319 requirements for the rest of the coastal bays and pursuing projects and funding for these projects that will result in nutrient load reductions in these watersheds.

Regulatory Programs

- **Atlantic Coastal Bays and Chesapeake Bay Critical Area Programs.** The Critical Area programs provide land use and environmental regulations in the 1,000 feet landward of tidal waters and marsh. See Figure 3-4.
- **Forest Conservation Program.** The law applies to many projects outside of the Critical Areas that

remove 40,000 square feet of forest. The law sets standards for preservation or replacement of forest during the development process.

- **Sediment and Erosion Control and Stormwater Management**
The county administers state sediment and erosion control and stormwater management regulations. Sediment and erosion control regulations require an approved plan for earth disturbance of 5,000 square feet or more and/or 100 cubic yards or more. The state's recently updated stormwater management regulation program is also administered by Worcester County. This program regulates development to hold post-construction stormwater runoff to a prescribed pre-construction level. The latest program manual emphasizes stormwater source reduction and on-site treatment methods.
- **Groundwater Protection.** The Groundwater Protection Report, an appendix of the county's *Comprehensive Water and Sewerage Plan*, identifies management areas, within which certain strategies (septic system design and well construction standards) must be followed to protect groundwater from pollution. In 2000, Worcester County requested that the State of Maryland declare the entire Coastal Bays watershed an Area of Special State Concern (ASSC). This designation is designed to address groundwater

- nutrient inputs from septic systems in this area. An Area of Special State Concern Plan was prepared in 2002. Worcester County maintains a digital inventory of all county septic systems to track potential problems and target outreach.
- **Comprehensive Plan and Zoning.** Worcester County adopted a new comprehensive plan in 2006 and zoning map in 2009. The 2006 Land Use Map identifies the majority of the county as Agriculture and Green Infrastructure. Under the 2009 re-zoning, 170,000 acres are zoned A-1 (Agriculture) and 87,000 acres zoned RP (Resource Protection). Worcester County has among the most strict zoning in the state of Maryland—only 5-6 lots may be created from what was a single parcel of land in 1967. This has been in place now for decades and has successfully preserved the county’s rural areas from sprawl development. Development has been focused in the four towns and in the Ocean Pines and West Ocean City areas. See Figure 3-1.

government or non-profit entity. As development pressure continues, so should conservation efforts. The natural resource amenities that make the county a beautiful, healthy and less expensive place to live should continue to be protected, using the land preservation programs and planning policies described in this and the next chapter. In addition, Worcester County must continue to consider resiliency in planning future growth and evaluating restoration and conservation investments. Land protection strengths and deficiencies and planned strategies and actions are discussed at the end of Chapter 4.

Conclusion

Worcester County continues to build upon past land preservation successes. As of the end of 2021, approximately 31% of the county’s approximately 304,000-acre land base is protected either with a fee simple ownership by government or non-profit conservation organization, or with a conservation (or agricultural) easement owned and managed privately and held by a

Chapter IV: Agricultural Land Preservation

Overview

This chapter provides a general overview of the public benefits of protecting agricultural lands and describes the county's agricultural land preservation efforts, including accomplishments since the *2018 Land Preservation, Parks and Recreation Plan* was adopted.

According to the 2010 Land Use/Land Cover data produced by the Maryland Department of Planning, Worcester County contains 89,000 acres of cropland and 145,000 acres of forested land³⁰; 30% and 49% of the county, respectively. The 2017 Census of Agriculture, which collects data in a different way, notes that the county's 369 "farms" covered 99,239 acres or 34 percent of Worcester County (a negligible change from the 2012 census).³¹ Average farm size was 269 acres (average farm size was 266 in the 2012 census), and median size was 50 acres.³² 92% are characterized as family farms. Worcester County ranks third in the state in poultry/eggs sold; 64 million broilers/meat type chickens were sold in 2017.³³ Worcester County ranks twenty-third among *all counties nationwide* in broiler production³⁴. The total value of all agricultural products sold in Worcester County in 2017 was over \$249 million (ranking fourth in the state and a +25% change from 2012).³⁵

The poultry industry continues to be a staple element of the economy on the

Delmarva Peninsula including in Worcester County. Not only chicken production itself, but also locally produced corn and soybeans are essential for the continued success of the chicken industry; the large base of local farmers is an important part of the "three legged stool" (poultry growers, poultry companies, and grain farmers) needed to sustain the industry. Contiguous farmland that is minimally disrupted by other types of development is also important for the continued success, and flexibility of the farming industries. When residential and other development occurs in agricultural areas, it creates traffic, adjacent landowner complaints and other conflicts with agricultural industries which at some point becomes detrimental economically to farming.

The forest products industry is also important in Worcester County. Like farmland, all forestland is not equally productive. Forested riparian areas, critical area buffers, wetlands and certain hydric soils are important to protect for habitat and water quality, but not critical to the forestry industry. Despite what may appear to be a large resource, there is actually a shortage of forestland available for forest products in the lower shore region. This has contributed to a large reduction in the capacity of the forest products industry on the lower shore.³⁶ Demand is expected to grow in the long run especially for wood for fuel (cellulosic ethanol or wood fired power

³⁰

<http://www.mdp.state.md.us/OurWork/landuse.html>

³¹ Census of Agriculture, USDA. 2017.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Larry Walton, Vision Forestry, personal communication. February 18, 2009.

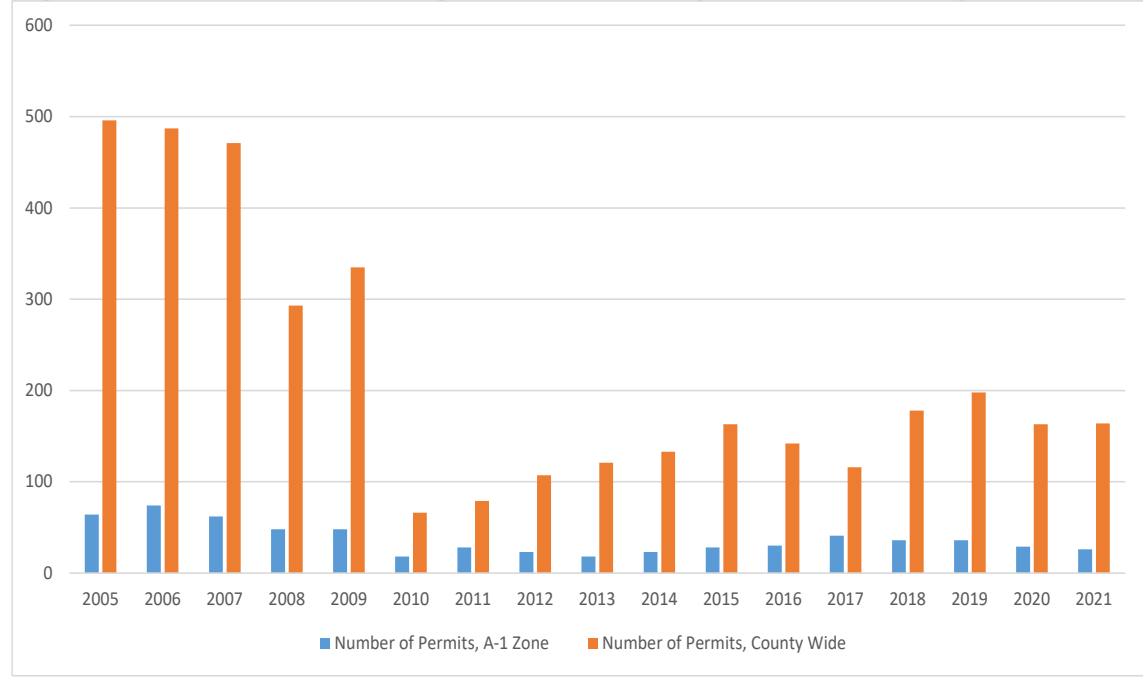
plants).³⁷ The more acres of forestland available in the future, the more likely Worcester’s forests can be managed sustainably.³⁸

It is important to note that farmland, and forested land, does much more for a community than simply provide for a specific industry. Cost of Community Service Studies carried out across the nation consistently find that farmland, forested land and other agricultural land use generates a fiscal surplus for a community, even when the land is assessed at its current agricultural use. In this way, farmland is similar to other commercial and industrial uses. In contrast, residential land use does not cover its costs to local government, it must be subsidized by the aforementioned land uses. Conversion of agricultural land to residential land,

therefore, should not be seen as a way to generate more revenue and balance local budgets.³⁹

As described in the 2006 comprehensive plan, it is the county’s intent to protect and promote private farming and forestry by accommodating inevitable population growth through appropriate planning and zoning, and by taking advantage of every program available to landowners to voluntarily protect open space. Specifically, the county is committed to continuing to seek and/or provide additional funds for the purchase of both Rural Legacy and Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Fund (MALPF) easements, to pursue other agricultural land conservation programs, and to maintain State certification for the county’s agricultural land preservation program, which allows access to

Figure 4-1 Residential Building Permits Issued By Worcester County, 2005 -2021



³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ American Farmland Trust. Fact Sheet: Farmland Information Center, Cost of Community Services Studies. September 2016.

additional agricultural transfer tax funds that are collected in the county.

There is more landowner interest in land protection than there is funding available, particularly for the MALPF program. In FY2019 through FY2022, 28 landowners applied to sell an easement to MALPF. Of these landowners, 15 were made a purchase offer. More funding has been available during this time period than the previous several years. Fortunately, development pressure on these areas has also been minimal, generally during this time period, due to strong A-1 (agricultural) zoning and lack of strong demand for new housing since the real estate decline that began with the nationwide market collapse in 2008. However, there appears to be a trend in increased residential building permits issued in Worcester County, especially since 2018 (Figure 4-1). Continued land protection, working with interested landowners, is essential to ensure continued progress in protecting agricultural land in Worcester County as development pressure eventually rebounds, along with protective zoning policies.

Agricultural Land Preservation Goals

Worcester County recognizes the important economic role and other long-term benefits of agriculture, and shares the State of Maryland's goals for farmland protection. The County's 2006 Plan identified the following goals:

- Permanently preserve agricultural land capable of supporting agricultural production;
- Protect natural, forestry and historic resources and the rural character of the landscape associated with farmland;
- To the greatest degree possible, concentrate preserved land in large, contiguous blocks to effectively support long-term protection of resources and resource-based industries.

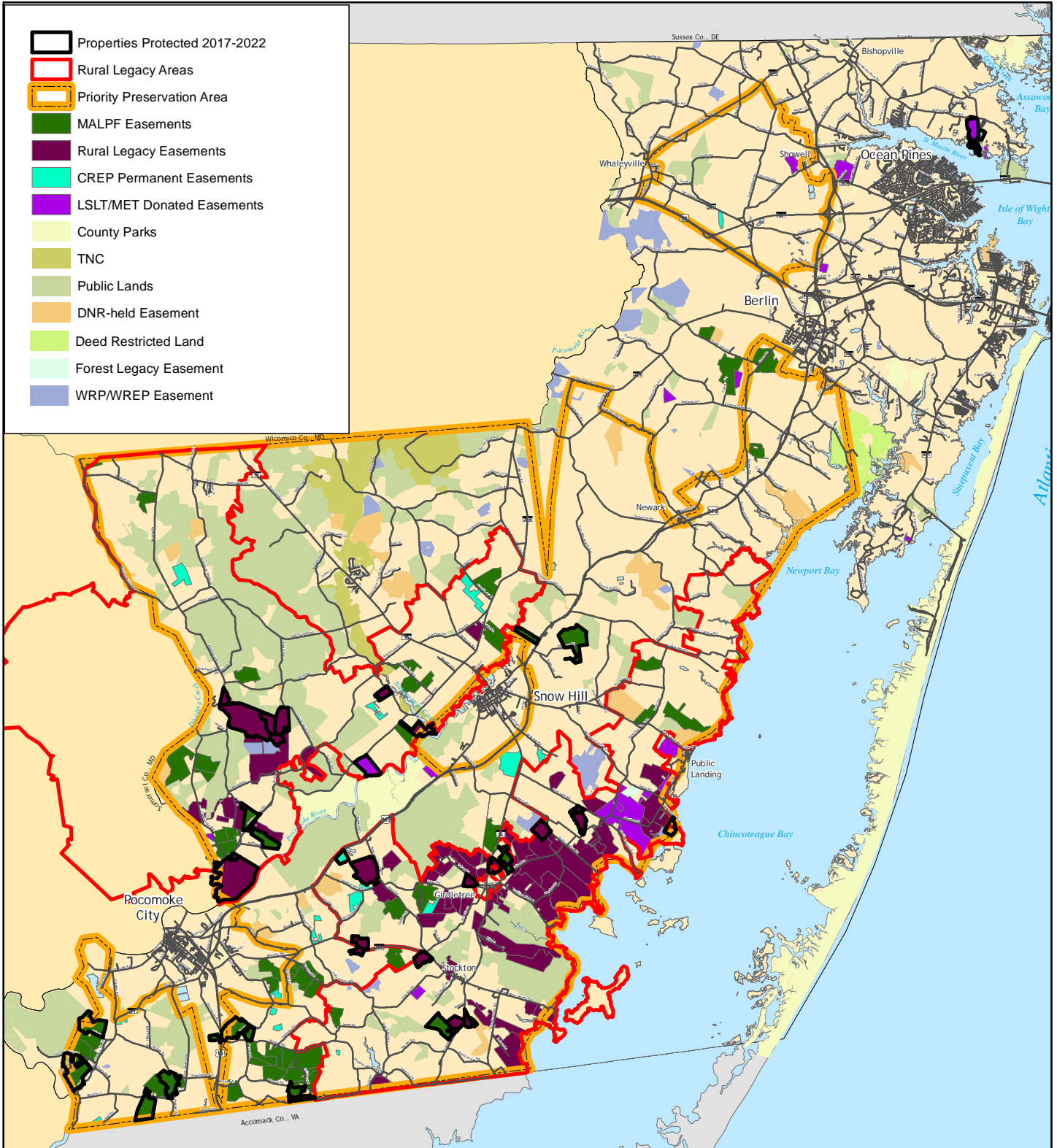
Worcester County's 2006 comprehensive plan which was revised with adoption of the Priority Preservation Element in 2010, recommended the goal of 1,000 acres of agricultural land protection per year (800 acres *within* the PPA annually).. The Priority Preservation Element identifies a Priority Preservation Area (PPA) of 195,000 acres, 64% of the county's land area (Figure 4-1). The long-term goal is to protect 100,000 acres within this area for agricultural and forestry. These goals are re-articulated in the county's Agricultural Land Preservation Re-certification report, which was last updated in 2021.

Progress Since 2018

Worcester County has protected, on average, approximately 1,009 acres of farmland/productive forestland annually from 2017 to 2021, through the Rural Legacy and MALPF programs, the vast majority within the Priority Preservation Area (PPA). This meets the acreage goals noted in the previous section.

A map showing protected land discussed below is provided at the end of this chapter (Figure 4-1). Table 4-1 lists the inventory of protected agricultural lands

Figure 4-1. Preserved Agricultural Land and Priority Preservation Areas for Farmland Preservation



Source of data: Worcester County Department of Development Review and Permitting, Technical Services Division



0 1.75 3.5 7 Miles

February 28, 2023

(under the MALPF and Rural Legacy Programs) as of April 2022.

MALPF

Created by the General Assembly in 1977, Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation (MALPF) purchases agricultural preservation easements that forever restrict development on prime farmland and woodland. Worcester County continues to have a “certified” agricultural land preservation program (as of July 1, 2004). This allows the county to retain additional transfer tax and access additional state funding match for purchase of agricultural easements through the Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Foundation.

The pace of land protection increased significantly since 2017. From 2017 to 2021, 2,243 +/- acres (13 properties) were protected with MALPF easements, or about 450 acres protected annually. Annual acreage protection was anticipated to increase in 2018 and after because the transfer tax funds (state revenue dedicated for land protection) were re-dedicated solely to land protection under new authorizing legislation. Funding is anticipated to be strong in FY22 and FY 23 as well. In addition, Worcester County’s approach to ranking that prioritizes discount offers along with other factors, has allowed for purchase of easements on more acreage. MALPF’s “round 2” funding cycle prioritizes bargain sales, and Worcester County landowners have increasingly received “round 2” offers due to its competitive bid process. Worcester County also provides cash match from the agricultural land transfer tax, revenue collected by the county, as well as

allocates funds most years from the county general fund. These funds are matched by MALPF on a 60/40 basis. This has allowed for additional MALPF easement purchases, and has been necessary for the county to meet minimum acreage protection goals. The county should continue to provide an annual cash match to MALPF.

Rural Legacy

The Rural Legacy Program was created to discourage sprawl development and protect areas, designated by local government, for future generations to enjoy. The Program provides farmers and landowners an alternative to developing (or subdividing) their land or selling their property to developers. The program also supports protection of water quality and habitat through additional protections including vegetative buffers and limitations on impervious surface. Under the Program landowners can sell or donate their development rights and still retain ownership to continue growing crops or limited raising of livestock (similar to the MALPF program). Worcester County’s Coastal Bays Rural Legacy Area, which includes the entire Chincoteague Bay shoreline and watershed, lower Pocomoke River watershed, and connects the Chincoteague Bay to the Pocomoke State Forest with a permanent “greenway”, is approximately 45,945 acres in size (expanded in FY2019). 17,440 acres+ are permanently protected, either by state ownership or privately owned land under conservation easement. The FY2019 Coastal Bays Rural Legacy application stated a goal of protecting 4,000 to 7,000 acres by FY29. From 2017 to 2021, 967 acres were

protected (193+/_ acres annually). Approximately 9,894 acres are protected with a Coastal Bays Rural Legacy easement as of end of 2021.

Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Area was created in 2008 in partnership with Somerset County, The Nature Conservancy and Lower Shore Land Trust. The boundary was expanded in 2019 in both counties. In Worcester County it was expanded to include the entire Dividing Creek watershed, portions of the Nassawango Creek watershed, and upper Pocomoke River shoreline and watershed. The Dividing Creek and Nassawango watersheds are an area of Maryland recognized by The Nature Conservancy as high in biodiversity. The Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Area is also an area with productive and contiguous farmland. The Area is 55,526 acres in size, including both counties. Protection of the first Dividing Creek Rural Legacy Area easement in Worcester County occurred in 2009. Eleven (11) properties have been protected in Worcester County to date (6 since 2017), totaling approximately 3,013 acres. FY2019 Dividing Creek Rural Legacy application stated a goal of protecting an additional 5,325 acres by FY29.

Land Use Management

Worcester County’s zoning code continues to protect rural areas from irreversible, sprawl development that would negatively impact farming and forestry. In the “A-1” (Agricultural) zone only five (5) lots may be created from what was an entire parcel of land in

1967; six (6) lots only where rural clustering is accomplished. The estimated build-out density in the 169,000-acre+ “A-1” zone is 1:20⁴⁰. Between 2014 and 2020, 778.92 acres of land in the Priority Preservation Area was subdivided for residential purposes (Table 4-2). This represents less than 1% of the 195,000-acre PPA. It’s important to note that some subdivisions were large and the properties continue therefore to be viable for agricultural use.

Lands zoned “RP” (Resource Protection) are particularly in proximity to the coast, rivers and streams and generally constrain development due to their environmental sensitivity or the fact that they are already protected by state ownership or permanent conservation easement. Land zoned RP may contain soils that support farming or forestry. Approximately 87,463 acres are zoned RP (29% of the county). The allowed uses in the RP zone are similar to allowed uses in the A-1 zone; a significant difference is that any subdivision in the RP zone must be approved by the Board of Zoning Appeals.

Table 4-2. Acres Lost in the PPA, 2014-2020, Worcester County

Year	Lands subdivided for residential use in the PPA*
2014	6 lots; 36.89 acres
2015	6 lots; 267.37 acres**
2016	5 lots; 351.47 acres
2017	4 lots; 25.08 acres
2018	11 lots; 72.41 acres
2019	6 lots; 22.1 acres
2020	1 lot; 3.6 acres
TOTAL	778.92 acres (39 lots)

⁴⁰ Maryland Agricultural Land Preservation Certification Program Application, Worcester County, Maryland; July 1, 2008 to June 30, 2010.

Value-added processing, agro-tourism, continuing education for farmers, and educating county citizens on the value of supporting local farms are supportive actions that can be taken to keep farming viable. Value-added retail and agro-tourism are permitted by special exception in the A-1 zone, there are many roadside farm stands permitted throughout the county in several zoning districts, although exact numbers are not available. The A-1 zoning code allows farm owners to hold special events in their principally agricultural structures, thus allowing temporary/short-term uses that do not impact farming, but provide income, and may also help connect the public to the agricultural landscape and products. Farm breweries have emerged as a new growth area that the county supports through zoning policies.

Worcester County anticipates updating the 2006 Comprehensive Plan in 2022, which will be an opportunity to review, support and strengthen policies that protect the county's agricultural land.

Land Protection Strengths and Deficiencies

Effective agricultural zoning and low per-acre cost of easements (compared to many other Maryland counties, partly due to the larger size of farm parcels in Worcester County) have been Worcester County's strengths and prevented significant sprawl development in most of the county. In addition, development pressure continues to be generally minimal in the southern end of the county, which buys time for protection of land through purchase of development rights. More state funding for both MALPF and Rural Legacy, especially from 2018 to present has allowed the

county to achieve and even surpass the goal of protecting a minimum of 800 acres in the PPA annually, and in fact protect land in the PPA at over eight times the rate it is being converted to non-agricultural uses.

Primary weaknesses may include declining landowner interest, increased pressure for development in the northern area of the county, and the need for a revised county comprehensive plan to ensure development minimizes negative impacts. Also of concern is the loss of natural shoreline and tidal marsh due to subsidence and sea level rise.

The Coastal Bays Rural Legacy Area was established in 1999, and has been hugely successful with over 17,000 acres in the Area now permanently protected. For two decades, there has been a waiting list of interested landowners and a need to prioritize projects. With nearly 8,000 acres now protected with Coastal Bays Rural Legacy easements, the roster of eligible properties has diminished. Solutions include continuing outreach to individual landowners but may also include evaluating the need to expand the area further or to establish a new Rural Legacy Area in a different location in the county where the demand and need is greater.

Sussex County, Delaware, Worcester County's neighbor to the north, has been experiencing rapid growth, including in the southern portion of the county, putting increasing demand on roads and other infrastructure and amenities in Worcester County. The increasingly urbanized Sussex County has also created increased demand for development in the area north and west of Ocean Pines. This rural area contains

smaller agricultural parcels than does southern Worcester County, which creates a challenge for land protection, as smaller parcels may not be eligible for MALPF or rank highly under the county's current ranking system. In addition, smaller parcels are generally more expensive per acre to protect. Also, smaller parcels can result in more development potential per acre, because A-1 zoning allows lots on a per parcel basis. Landowner interest and participation in land protection in this area of the county has been limited, to date. To address this threat, Worcester County may consider expanding the PPA in this area, prioritizing properties in this area in the MALPF ranking system, or possibly making other changes to the ranking system to prioritize lands in this area. Additional landowner outreach in this area is needed, to gauge interest in land protection and provide information on land protection strategies. The county may consider establishing a new Rural Legacy Area here, if interest warrants.

Worcester County's current comprehensive plan was adopted in 2006 and new zoning map and code in 2009. Since then the Priority Preservation and Water Resources Elements were added as addenda. The county will begin the process of preparing a new plan in 2023. This will allow the county's citizens an opportunity to provide input on the future of agricultural lands in the county, and clarify how to protect them with zoning and other land use tools.

Planned Strategies and Actions

It is Worcester County's goal to permanently preserve a minimum of 800

acres annually in the county's Priority Preservation Area, as also noted in the 2010 Priority Preservation Area Plan. To meet this goal, the following strategies are recommended:

- A dedicated county staff person will continue to provide landowner outreach and pursue the variety of PDR tools available to protect agricultural land. This will include encouraging farmland conservation easement donation by providing information to landowners on the potential tax benefits and help local landowners make the decision to preserve land by illustrating the total value of preservation, including: direct payment; tax deductions for reduced value donation; property tax credit; continued ownership and use; land resale; future owner/family lots; and peace of mind. Landowner communication will include direct mail, newsletters and workshops/meetings.
- Targeted outreach will be conducted in the Coastal Bays watershed and the Bishopville area, where development pressure is the greatest.
- Worcester County will continue to provide matching funds to the MALPF program for the purchase of MALPF easements.
- Worcester County will evaluate, with input from landowners, whether the Coastal Bays Rural Legacy Area should be expanded or temporarily or permanently put on hold to focus on a new Rural Legacy Area in the Bishopville area.
- Worcester County will continue to work with Maryland Coastal Bays Program, Maryland Department of

Natural Resources, and other entities to understand and address loss of marsh/natural shoreline and islands through restoration and protection measures.

Conclusion

Worcester County's primary land use is agricultural. Agricultural industries are a bedrock of the county's economy, and such land use ensures fiscal health of the local government, as it keeps cost of community services low. The county's agricultural/rural landscape also supports the tourism industry. It is the county's desire to protect its agricultural land base, while also accommodating new development in appropriate, planned locations, and otherwise in ways that do

not compromise agricultural activities. In recent years, the combination of local and state programs have ensured a pattern of land development and protection that concentrates residential and commercial development in planned areas, and protects contiguous farmland. It is critical for economic health that the state and county continue to work closely to ensure that agricultural land protection programs are available and well-funded, and policies to protect farming practices continue to be implemented.

Worcester County anticipates updating the 2006 Comprehensive Plan in the near future, which will be an opportunity to review, support and strengthen policies that protect the county's agricultural land.

Table 4.1 Inventory of Protected Agricultural Lands in Worcester County, Maryland

Site/Landowner Name	Acres Preserved	Year Protected	Protection (easement) Type
Bounds, Todd	214.68	2003	Rural Legacy
Breeding	143.58	2002	Rural Legacy
Chapman	359.46	2000	Rural Legacy
Cropper	391.35	2000	Rural Legacy
DeMarco et al	100.22	2002	Rural Legacy
Harvey	345.99	2000	Rural Legacy
Harkins Farms, LLC	266.98	2002	Rural Legacy
Jones Girdletree	203.21	2002	Rural Legacy
Joyner/Monroe	553.46	2000	Rural Legacy
Parsons (Bird Hill RD)	177.33	2003	Rural Legacy
Parsons (Ward RD)	168.09	2003	Rural Legacy
Rantz (Onley RD)	136.43	2004	Rural Legacy
Rantz (Snow Hill RD)	170.00	2004	Rural Legacy
Redden, P 264	81.00	2002	Rural Legacy
Redden, P 284	53.89	2002	Rural Legacy
Richardson West	104.64	2002	Rural Legacy
Roger Richardson	363.70	2002	Rural Legacy
Rowland	634.50	2000	Rural Legacy
Rural Integrity	201.45	2002	Rural Legacy
Ryton enterprises	648.00	2004	Rural Legacy
Scrimgeour	440.35	2001	Rural Legacy
Scrimgeour Trust	126.43	2004	Rural Legacy
Timmons	347.62	2002	Rural Legacy
Truitt	162.18	2008	Rural Legacy
Breeding/Hall	272.23	2005	Rural Legacy
Rural Integrity, II	129.00	2005	Rural Legacy
Parks	85.48	2007	Rural Legacy
Payne/Daugherty	40.43	2008	Rural Legacy
Phillips Family LLC	227.88	2009	Rural Legacy
Rural Integrity	19.55	2010	Rural Legacy
McCabe's Corner LLC	149.41	2010	Rural Legacy
Blank	129.00	2010	Rural Legacy
Glad Mar Dairy Land	134.40	2011	Rural Legacy
ES Adkins Co	591.90	2011	Rural Legacy
Sirman	246.75	2012	Rural Legacy
West	253.68	2012	Rural Legacy
Bayside Farms (B)	165.12	2012	Rural Legacy
Glad Mar Land Co, Inc	209.07	2013	Rural Legacy
Greenwood	121.64	2013	Rural Legacy
Aydelotte	153.87	2013	Rural Legacy

Table 4.1 Inventory of Protected Agricultural Lands in Worcester County, Maryland, Continued

Site/Landowner Name	Acres Preserved	Year Protected	Protection (easement) Type
Brummitt	164.79	2014	Rural Legacy
Cropper/Strayer	106.26	2016	Rural Legacy
Stevens	156.49	2016	Rural Legacy
Wise	168.78	2016	Rural Legacy
Redden	118.32	2017	Rural Legacy
Pilchard	284.91	2018	Rural Legacy
Clarke	128.86	2018	Rural Legacy
Figgs	61.00	2018	Rural Legacy
Royer, Nassawango Road	122.25	2019	Rural Legacy
Royer, Creek Road	64.64	2019	Rural Legacy
Hauck	78.43	2020	Rural Legacy
Porter Mill Properties, LLC	58.63	2020	Rural Legacy
Happy Chesapeake, LLC	55.85	2021	Rural Legacy
Bryan, Stevens, Soepnel	88.42	2021	Rural Legacy
Barnes	734.37	2021	Rural Legacy
Barnes	21.58	2021	Rural Legacy
Barnes	5.00	2021	Rural Legacy
ES Adkins Co	978.29	2021	Rural Legacy
Porter Mill Properties, LLC	81.60	2022	Rural Legacy
Truitts Landing Farm, LLC	112.03	2022	Rural Legacy
Gerald Redden	236.53	1993	MALPF
Brown	127.89	1996	MALPF
Gregory	3.76	1997	MALPF
GRB Family Limited Partnership and TD&M	301.58	1998	MALPF
Pennewell	126.63	1998	MALPF
Nichols	67.57	1999	MALPF
Pennewell	78.75	1999	MALPF
Richard Jones	177.68	2000	MALPF
Bounds	111.38	2001	MALPF
Rickards	322.849	2001	MALPF
Redden	140	2001	MALPF
Powell	214.66	2001	MALPF
Tarr	123.3552	2001	MALPF
Tarr	303.2	2001	MALPF
Jones	287.58	2002	MALPF
Jones	169.28	2002	MALPF
Jones	120.24	2002	MALPF
Jones	133.22	2002	MALPF
Lambertson	29.002	2003	MALPF
Millenium Farms Partnership	48.58	2003	MALPF
AMEN Corner, LLC	33.39	2003	MALPF

Table 4.1 Inventory of Protected Agricultural Lands in Worcester County, Maryland, Continued

Site/Landowner Name	Acres Preserved	Year Protected	Protection (easement) Type
Moore	185.179	2003	MALPF
Gravenor	31.314	2004	MALPF
Lambertson	87.4	2004	MALPF
Payne	66.19	2004	MALPF
Dykes	76.903	2005	MALPF
G R B Family Limited Partnership LLLP	403.37	2005	MALPF
Davis	271.906	2006	MALPF
Guy	194.55	2007	MALPF
Holland	234.43	2007	MALPF
Redden	163.542	2007	MALPF
Holland	139.765	2008	MALPF
Glad Mar Dairy	92.942	2008	MALPF
Glad Mar Dairy	91.344	2008	MALPF
McGee	123.69	2009	MALPF
Combs	317.689	2009	MALPF
St. Pierre	166.234	2010	MALPF
Aydelotte	136.43	2010	MALPF
Aydelotte Poultry, LLC	33.78	2010	MALPF
Sterling	177.9	2010	MALPF
Widgeon	81.5813	2011	MALPF
Holland	98.91	2012	MALPF
Aydelotte Farms	138.01	2014	MALPF
Justice	47.821	2014	MALPF
Glad Mar Land Co.	234.6	2015	MALPF
Pilchard	183	2016	MALPF
Aydelotte	158.44	2016	MALPF
Holland	98.59	2018	MALPF
Adams	73.565	2018	MALPF
Porter Mill Properties, LLC	176.9	2018	MALPF
Sterling	240.15	2019	MALPF
Aydelotte	54.7	2019	MALPF
Ennis	133.85	2018	MALPF
Jones	326.79	2018	MALPF
GMR, LLC	224.13	2019	MALPF
Powell	281.19	2019	MALPF
Aydelotte	121.18	2021	MALPF
Holland	173.5	2020	MALPF
Holland	199.12	2021	MALPF
Holland Trust	43.12	2022	MALPF
Gross	210.13	2022	MALPF
Wilkins	138.28	2021	MALPF
Lambertson	74.831	2022	MALPF

Appendix I. Feedback From Listening Sessions

Listening sessions were held November 3, 2021 in Snow Hill and November 10, 2021 in Berlin. Ten (10) people attended in total. Below are the responses collected at both sessions.

LPPRP Sessions Attendees Park Visitation

Isle of Wight:

- 5 visited in past 12 months
- 8 visited park at any time in the past.

Ilia Fehrer Nature Park:

- 1 visited in past 12 months
- 2 visited park at any time in the past.

Whaleyville Park:

- 1 visited in past 12 months
- 3 visited park at any time in the past.

Stockton Park:

- 1 visited in past 12 months
- 4 visited park at any time in the past.

Showell Recreation Area:

- 8 visited in past 12 months
- 4 visited park at any time in the past.

Northern Worcester Athletic Complex:

- 11 visited in past 12 months
- 4 visited park at any time in the past.

Newtown Recreation Area:

- 6 visited in past 12 months
- 1 visited park at any time in the past.

Newark Park:

- 5 visited in past 12 months
- 2 visited park at any time in the past.

John Walter Smith Park:

- 10 visited in past 12 months
- 4 visited park at any time in the past.

Homer Gudelsky Park:

- 9 visited in past 12 months
- 5 visited park at any time in the past.

Bishopville Park:

- 3 visited in past 12 months
- 5 visited park at any time in the past.

Herring Creek Nature Park:

- 8 visited in past 12 months
- 4 visited park at any time in the past.

Grey's Creek Nature Park:

- 0 visited in past 12 months
- 5 visited park at any time in the past.

LPPRP Sessions Comments

General Comments:

- Connect bike trail with the one (trail) planned for Pocumoke State Forest to Snow Hill to continue to JW Smith Park.
- Work with Planning Department & Public Works to create master plan for bikes/walking to connect Recreation Resources as described in the County Comp Plan from 2006.

Ilia Fehrer Nature Park:

- Signage & educational display board overlooking wetland.

John Walter Smith Park:

- Bike trails & pump track!

Appendix II. Written Comments Submitted in the On-line Survey (November 2020 – February 2021)

The below is a compilation of the written comments submitted by respondents regarding county park facilities as part of the survey administered on-line November 2020 through January 2021. The opportunity to respond to the survey was provided electronically to the entire e-mail data base of participants in county recreation programs. In addition, the survey was linked on the county website and in social media.

Facility Maintenance

Need bathrooms upkept.

Trash frequently around park area in Whaleyville, portable toilet not clean.

Limit impervious surface and lawn areas.

Interpretation and wildlife habitat.

Please redirect funding to support trail maintenance and park care

The facilities are clean and well equipped.

County facilities are in amazing shape.

More signage and more noticeable care and attention to parks and trails.

I would like to see native landscaping and less spraying of any kind

Bishopville Park is not cleaned enough.

Need a trash can in front of the WCRP building in Snow Hill.

All parks are in good shape. Keep up the great work.

The last time I visited Isle of Wight, the picnic tables were in poor condition and trash overflowing. Wasn't a pleasant visit

Amenities at Existing Parks

General Comments

Poor parking.

Free parking for Handicap

I love the concessions available!

Place benches inside of playground so adults have a place to sit.

With pandemic, need more pavilions, gazebos, areas where people can safely gather in groups outdoors.

Bike access and bike racks are needed.

More disc golf courses.

Sporting clays.

Let's get a disc golf course!

Unused tennis courts make fun dedicated skateboard/scooter/roller skate areas

I think a Northern Worcester disc golf course would get a lot of use from locals and visitors alike.

Water fountains should be more common, especially in the rural parks

We need more spaces for teenagers—skate park, bike trails, community pool.

Grey's Creek Nature Park

Grey's Creek needs better access.

I would love to visit Grey's Creek but it does not appear to be open to the public.

Homer Gudelsky Park

Gudelsky Park badly needs more parking. It is an excellent resource.
More parking.

Ilia Fehrer Nature Preserve

Bike trails on in Sinepuxent road property would be fantastic. Also this area would be great for hunting.
Walking trails in park on Sinepuxent Road.

John Walter Smith Park

Disc golf course is excellent but wildlife more important—bush hog only 1x/year in late September.
Walking trails at John Smith and Showell Parks.
Dog park at John Walter Smith park!
Add an outdoor walking track that is not in the woods and that provides lighting at night especially when the time changes. Provide an exercise circuit class in the fitness room.

Northern Worcester Athletic Complex

Would like to see bathrooms at Northern Worcester Athletic Complex.
Northern wor fields need better drainage and more parking
North Worcester Soccer Fields are amazing!

New Facilities/Parks/Amenities Desired

Indoor Facility/New Facility

I would like an option in Berlin similar to the rec center in Snow Hill.
Would like to be able to swim.
More indoor recreation in Pocomoke is needed.
There needs to be a rec facility in the northern end of the county.
Build a facility in Berlin or use the schools.
County needs a pool.
County pool needs to be built.
Indoor facility closer to Berlin.
Swimming for adults not just seniors.
A Berlin skate park.
County pool.
Music venue similar to Freeman Stage.
Indoor pool. Indoor basketball. Community Center.
Would love a pool and a frisbee golf course
We need an indoor pool badly. Community center. Parks with open facilities. Not closed and only open to programs.
As a senior citizen I don't get to use the facilities as much as I would like. However I have grandchildren who love going to the parks and playgrounds. Also living in West

Ocean City I feel it would improve tourism if our area had such facilities for our vacationers to use.

I would like to see more opportunities in downtown Berlin. Amphitheater, bike trails, hiking, etc.

Build a building in Berlin.

Outdoor swimming pool.

Trails/Passive Recreation

More public trails are needed in northern part of the county where most of the population is.

Need dedicated bike paths and more walking paths besides Northside Park in Ocean City. Indoor all year round recreation center would be a plus for residents as well as for bringing tourists year round.

I strive to find outdoor spaces for hiking and birdwatching and we are actually very limited for public parks that can accommodate these activities.

Need more variety of outdoor activities can do on own such as biking.

We need bike parks. Super popular activity.

More bike paths and walking paths in Berlin.

This survey so far does not give me any opportunity to talk about county access to outdoor recreational opportunities, such as kayak launch facilities

Archery/shooting, nature hikes/local history.

Bike trails, hiking trails.

Bike trails that lead to historic places, county parks and towns.

More soft launches for kayaks, areas for kite flying.

Biking trails not on highways.

Would just like to see more open space.

There has been a great increase in people walking and biking for exercise and enjoyment.

More trails and facilities for these—bike paths, off road trail connections are needed.

Ability to bike/walk to recreation facilities. Also dog park areas would be great at some parks.

More cycling trails. Rails to Trails projects.

I have to go to state and federal parks to find trails.

More areas for fishing and crabbing.

Thanks it's one of the things that helps makes our county great more biking trails is what most people want.

Overall I think they do a fantastic job. Bike trails that would eventually connect parks and towns would be the great!!!

Bike trails please!

A small group of trail advocates are circulating this poll in attempt to influence the county. It seems we already have quite a number of trails that definitely do not suffer from overcrowding or overuse.

More walking trails and pleaseeee more water access for paddle boarding and kayaking
Though I do not live in Worcester County, I do work here and I spend a lot of time birdwatching in the county. I have noticed a lack of County parks with walking trails that provide passive hiking with wildlife watching abilities. It also appears, though they are not my pastimes, that biking and horse riding opportunities are likewise scant. I am a big

proponent of passive hiking/biking/equestrian trails within parks and as connections between parks and that connect parks to communities and communities to each other. The proposed trail from Snow Hill to Shad Landing is a great project and is a great compliment to the Foster Tract trail in Poc. State Forest but these are state administered trails and not county. This county is a birding destination for people from all over MD, the mid-Atlantic, the east coast, and really the world, and there is a lack of good parks and publicly accessible areas on the coast (save Assateague- state and fed) or in other areas of the county. As a tourist destination, the county should provide as many different opportunities as possible for their visitors. Public access for passive recreation is generally lacking in the county and would be a good addition to the active recreation opportunities provided by the ball fields, beach attractions and golf courses.

Trails, more nature, passive recreation, more water trails, kayak access, kids nature programs at times for working parents

More bike paths in Berlin.

Please prioritize bike trails, hiking trails and parks for experiencing wildlife and low impact recreational experiences.

Look at available data indicating tremendous growth in biking and walking by both visitors and tourists. Potential to coordinate with WoCo Health Dept Just Walk program to promote and expand places to walk and bike.

Facility Location

Most parks are not accessible to those without cars and often require crossing dangerous roads to get to them. This is an equity issue.

The majority of programs service primarily the Snow Hill area. There is no way for Pocomoke children to even participate because they are offered in Snow Hill on school/weekdays before kids from ends of county could possibly get to the location. Programs need to be geographically equitable.

Most programs seem to be out of Snow Hill facility, which always feels far considering it's in the opposite direction for most errands, dinner on the go, etc

Not enough in OC.

Snow Hill too far for us.

I don't know about the lower county, but the upper county needs a pool since they are never going to build a YMCA up here. My fitness program of choice is lap swimming and I am not aware of any facility that offers one.

We need more opportunities in Berlin. I am not willing to drive to Ocean City or Snow Hill.

Concerned that in the winter months when activities have to be indoors and the only place to host them is in Snow Hill. Would be helpful to have an indoor location to play sports in Pocomoke.

Need more facilities in northern Worcester - Not Ocean City.

This continues to be a benefit to Snow Hill children and residents that I help foot the bill for. The attention to either end of the county is pathetic.

Fishing in northern Worcester County. Pocumoke is too far to travel from Berlin in the evenings.

Focus is always on the central and north end of county.

Stop marketing the idea that you service all of Worcester County. I'd prefer my dollars go towards building a site in Pocumoke that can actually benefit our residents.

Safety

Concerned about loitering and safety at Isle of Wight.

Sheriff's office should patrol the Isle of Wight Park more often.

Programs

We appreciate the virtual activities that have been provided during the pandemic when we couldn't or didn't feel comfortable, participating in in-person activities.

Yoga for teens.

We need more homeschool programming given the cultural shift due to COVID.

Love WCRP programs. Financially reasonable and good solid programs for kids.

Like to see exercise classes for adults not seniors.

Outreach

I'd like to know more about the parks so I could use them more.

Need to promote nature parks more.

Enlist volunteers to assist with park clean ups.

I would love to see better advertising of events, programs and special activities.

Partner with nonprofit groups to offer environmental education and hikes.

Don't even know where most of these parks are located.

I would love to be on an email list for Worcester County outdoor & special activities news.

Publicity for park and programs must be very limited as I rarely see anything about them.

General Comments

WCRP facilities are the best on the Eastern Shore. Keep up the good work.

The county does an excellent management job.

Thanks for all of your great work! We appreciate our parks!

Thank you!

Keep doing great work!! We love the parks.

Keep up the good work.

We love our parks!

We enjoy the Worcester county parks and appreciate having open space for recreation.

Outdoor parks are good for everybody.

We love WCRP. Looking forward to the future with programs, activities and ideas! :)

Love the open spaces and natural areas around here, and opportunities for kids to get outside.

Thank you for the work you do to keep them available and accessible and inviting!

Great job! Thank you!

Love the parks thank you!

We just moved to the area and have thrown ourselves into all WCRP has to offer—thank you for the warm welcome and great programs!

Worcester County boat ramps are the bomb for kayaking.

Think about more than just recreation - but wellness and nature experiences for the community!

Worcester County is a treasure trove of natural spaces and there should be more emphasis on cultivating & promoting eco-tourism and less on building arenas and ball parks. Thank you.

Thank you WCRP!

Our family lives in Wicomico, but we use Worcester County parks far more often than those in our home county because they offer so many different amenities. The only thing better than the county parks are the Worcester County Recreation and Parks staff, who go above and beyond the call of duty to assist whenever needed.

The facilities and parks are always clean and the staff is professional and friendly.

We love the WCRP. You do a great job. You have great people.

Everything is great. Park and Recreation staff is doing a great job.

Thank you.

Appendix III. Planned Municipal Recreation Projects

Each town maintains, manages, and plans for, parks and amenities. These resources and town plans are important to consider as part of the county recreation and parks planning process.

Following is a list of parks or recreation improvements underway, planned, or under consideration, in each town.

Town of Berlin

Ongoing and future projects:

- Stephen Decatur Memorial Park: permanent restrooms (expected completion spring of 2022)
- Stephen Decatur Memorial Park: replacement of existing rubberized path
- Dr. William E. Henry Park: lighting for basketball courts
- John Howard Burbage Park: table tennis equipment, parking and landscaping improvements. Concept approved by Mayor and Council to be funded by local non-profit We Heart Berlin.
- Heron Park: Demolition of Tyson plant building
- Dual use bikeway along the Rail line from Route 50 to Evans Road, through town

“Wish List” Projects:

- Stephen Decatur Memorial Park and Dr. William E. Henry Park: additional playground equipment
- Dog Park - location not yet determined
- Stephen Decatur Memorial Park and Heron Park ponds: SAM Boxes (box that contains lifesaving device and calls 911)
- Heron Park: walking path improvements and observation deck
- Heron Park: Entertainment pavilion

Town of Ocean City

Ongoing and future projects:

- Downtown Recreation Complex Revitalization, including
 - Park plan development (FY21)
 - Construction drawings (FY22)
 - Construction (FY23 and FY24)
- Additional outdoor pickleball courts (FY24)
- Northside Park, Gorman Park Little Salisbury Park: Playground replacements (FY23-FY27)
- Eagle’s Landing Golf Course and Clubhouse

- Improve drainage and reconstruct bunkers
- Clubhouse improvements
- Pavilion expansion
- Indoor/outdoor sports complex in partnership with Worcester County
- Bikeways strategic plan with the goal of a route from the inlet to the Delaware line

Town of Pocomoke City

Ongoing and future projects:

- Cypress Park:
 - Demolish dilapidated bathroom/reseed grass area/add additional picnic area
 - Fencing for the pickleball court
 - Refurbish the pavilion
 - New interpretive signs for wetland area
- Mini Park (Clark Avenue):
 - New brickwork
 - New brick walkways
 - Replace brick around the existing fountain
- Winters Quarters Dock
 - Repair/Replace all boards on the dock (this will be a capital project that the city will request a DNR grant to assist with)
- Exploration of feasibility of a bike route through town, eventually connecting with the planned Eastern Shore of Virginia Rail Trail that has begun development

Town of Snow Hill

Ongoing and future projects:

- Byrd Park: flooding study, pending
- Byrd, Sturgis, and Gateway Parks: bikeways feasibility study underway
- Sturgis Park: Construction of Riverwalk and Black-Eyed Susan (riverboat) dock (in process)

Ocean Pines

Ongoing and future projects:

Recreation and Parks – Parks Revitalization

- Bainbridge Park Playground – Inclusive playground NEW (FY2023-2024); trail riding areas and disk golf

- Improvements at Robin Hood Trail and South Lake Trail

Racquet Sports Complex

- 8 Designated Pickleball courts
- 6 Platform courts
- 2 Multipurpose – Pickleball and tennis courts

Walking/Biking Access:

Improvement of crosswalks and markings around Ocean Pines to improve safety and pedestrian and bike access to commercial locations, the library and recreational areas

Appendix IV. GIS Data Sets: Parks and Protected Lands

The following data sets are maintained by Worcester County (Technical Services division of Department of Development Review and Permitting) and were submitted to the state of Maryland for purposes of statewide analysis:

1. Worcester County Parks (county protected land)
2. CREP Permanent Easements (county-held conservation easements on private land)
3. Rural Legacy Easements(county-held conservation easements on private land)
4. Forest Conservation Mitigation Retention Areas (county-managed Forest Conservation program)
5. MALPF easements (state held agricultural easements on private land)
6. Forest Legacy Easement (state-held conservation easement on private land)*
7. Other Conservation Easements/Protected Land (state-held conservation easements, deed restricted land, county-held CELCP easement; Delaware Wildlands, Inc.-held land)*
8. Wetland Reserve Program/Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program Easements (data provided by USDA/NRCS)*
9. MET-held donated conservation easements (land trust held conservation easements on private land)*
10. Lands held by The Nature Conservancy*
11. Assateague Island National Seashore (federal land)
12. Maryland Historic Trust Preservation Easements*

*Data was obtained from the agency/source that holds the easement or land.