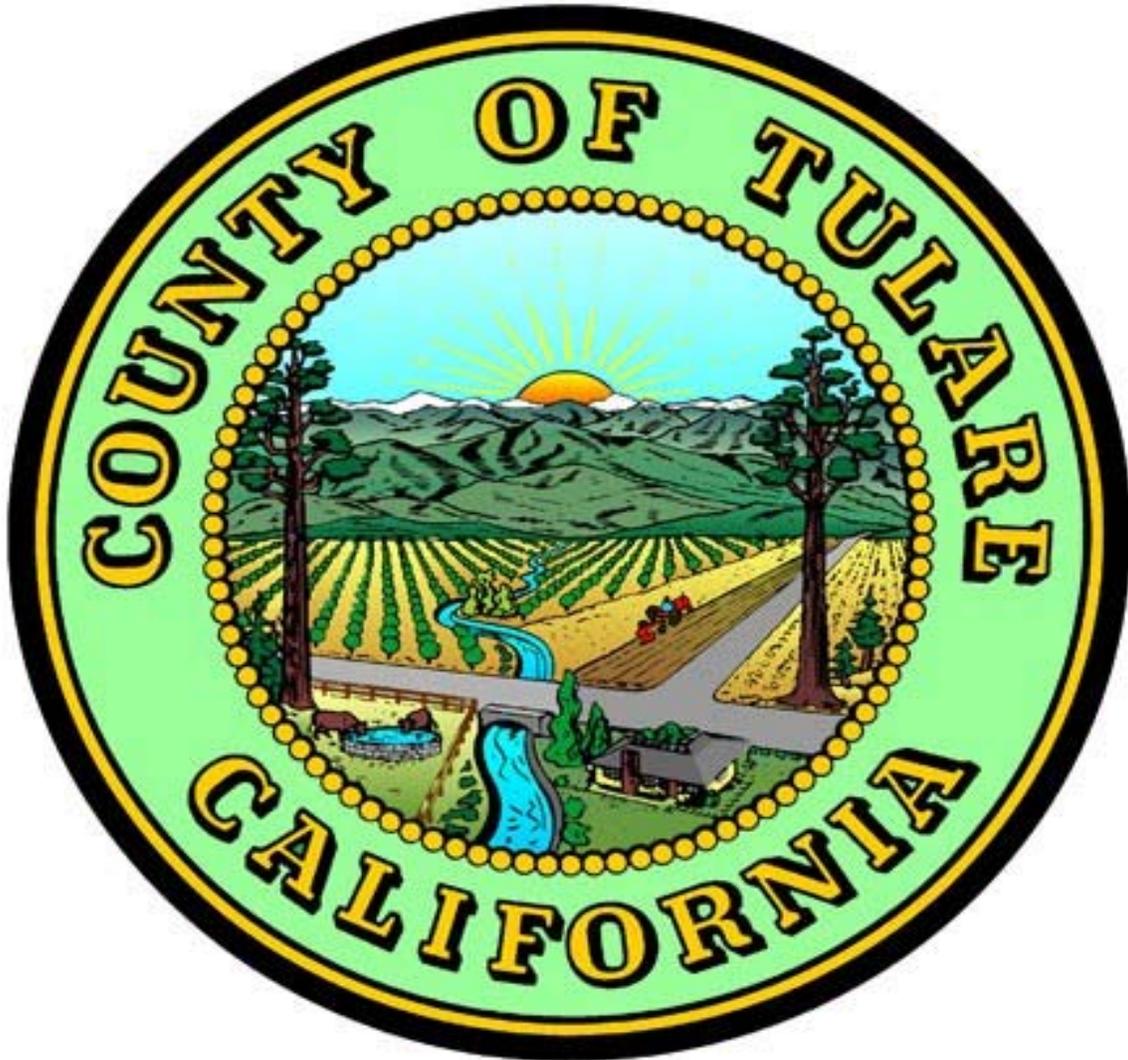


**COUNTY OF TULARE**  
**COUNTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE**



**PARKS & RECREATION**  
**STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN**

**MAY 2016**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- I. INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
- II. EXISTING OPERATIONAL IMPACTS**
- III. BUDGET ANALYSIS**
- IV. CURRENT SOLUTIONS**
- V. PROPOSED ACTIONS**
- VI. EXHIBITS & ATTACHMENTS**

<b>Tulare County Parks Photos</b>		 <b>Alpaugh Park</b>
 <b>Balch Park</b>	 <b>Bartlett Park</b>	 <b>Cutler Park</b>
 <b>Kings River Park</b>	 <b>Ledbetter Park</b>	 <b>Mooney Grove Park</b>
 <b>Pixley Park</b>	 <b>West Main Park</b>	 <b>Woodville Park</b>

## I. INTRODUCTION & EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### *Introduction & Purpose*

The County of Tulare operates ten Parks that provide a variety of outdoor recreational opportunities and are located in diverse settings - neighborhood Parks serving unincorporated communities, larger regional Parks serving a wider area, and a mountain Park available for Sierra Nevada camping and recreation.

This Plan will survey and analyze several important data points relevant to the overall condition of the Parks system. Thereafter, using this analysis, this document will outline a strategy for improving the Parks System to yield greater results for the public. Ultimately, it is the intent of staff that this report be used to assist and inform decision-making to improve the Parks.

This Plan will look at the current status of the Parks system, issues that have been impacting operations, and future opportunities to improve the viability of the Parks. This Plan will provide information regarding the operational budget, major threats, and a proactive list of strategies for consideration designed to materially improve our Parks.

### *Background & Parks Advisory Committee*

Each County Park is a vital part of the community in which it is located. Generations of county residents have enjoyed these Parks and each of them has a rich history. As such, the County wishes to approach the necessary improvements in the Parks system through a public engagement process – this document achieves that goal.

Since 2010, the Parks & Recreation Division has been managed by the County Administrative Office, as part of the General Services & Capital Projects Department. In 2010, Parks & Recreation was reassigned from the Resource Management Agency (RMA) into the County Administrative Office. Prior to its assignment in RMA, Parks & Recreation was managed by the General Services Department. The County uses an internal workforce of 27 full-time equivalent operations employees (FTE) to provide services to these ten Parks.

In 2015, the Board of Supervisors established the Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) in order to increase public engagement. The PAC is addressing significant matters related to the condition of the Parks system, such as deferred maintenance and the Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan. This document will discuss their role in the improvement of the Parks.

### *Conclusion & Recommendations*

This Plan recommends several initiatives to improve the condition of the Parks system. Although much has been accomplished in recent years, the County has a long way to go to make each of the Parks a thriving part of their community. The primary recommendations in this Plan, based off of the analysis conducted, are as follows:

- Establish a Maintenance and Improvement Program (MIP) to ensure that the Parks are being maintained and improved at necessary levels;
- Annually evaluate the availability of a dedicated source of one-time project funding;
- Increase public engagement and outreach through targeted community meetings; and
- Improve customer service efforts for employees in the Parks System.

With these four distinct areas of improvement, staff believes that significant progress will be realized within the Parks system over the next five years.

## II. EXISTING OPERATIONAL IMPACTS

The County Parks system is responsible for maintaining the Parks and providing the space necessary for recreational opportunities within several communities. There are many factors that impact the County's operational abilities to achieve this mission and improve the Parks conditions. This Section will summarize those impacts and indicate how they have created challenges for the County Parks.

The purpose of this Section is to communicate those factors that challenge Parks staff and create difficulties in bringing the necessary improvements forward. These impacts have created fiscal strain and maintenance concerns. Subsequent to the discussion in this Section, the remainder of this report articulates the efforts the County has taken in spite of these challenges, as well as further recommendations for action.

In summary, all of the factors listed below have created strain within the management of the Parks and require additional resources to mitigate, which diverts funds and resources from improvement activities and other basic maintenance efforts – all of which impacts the experience of the patrons.

### a. Severe Drought Conditions

The Central Valley has been experiencing a severe drought over the past several years. This drought has had significant impact on the conditions of each of the Parks. The visible impacts include dead and dying trees, brown grass, and dry waterways. This has impacted the appearance of the Parks, visitor experiences, and the Parks' reputation. Throughout the drought, the County has lost several trees, wells have failed, and turf has died in large areas. All of these have been prominent concerns for the Parks and the community.

Staff has had to revise their maintenance practices and divert resources towards addressing the impacts of the drought. For example, the County installed a new well at Mooney Grove and is installing a new well at Cutler Park to address the major impacts of the drought. Furthermore, staff has had to reduce its watering at each Park furthering the decline of grasses and trees therein.

This matter was highlighted in an article published in the Fresno Bee on October 16, 2015 titled, "Oak Trees Dying in Mooney Grove Park from Drought." The article noted the devastating impacts of the drought on the tree conditions and irrigation infrastructure. The photo below was published in that article and shows a dying Valley Oak tree in the park.



*Photo Credit: Lewis Griswold, Fresno Bee, October 16, 2015*

### **b. Tree Mortality**

As a direct result of the severe drought conditions listed above and a bark beetle infestation, Tulare County has also been experiencing exceptional tree mortality rates. This matter has garnered extensive attention, as it will require creative and ambitious solutions. Tulare County Parks have also been experiencing higher tree mortality rates than in normal conditions. This degrades the appearance of the Parks, creates great liability for the County, and requires extensive maintenance efforts. For this reason, Parks & Recreation has played an important role in the County's Tree Mortality Taskforce – helping to assist in the logistics of tree removal and operational safety.

As reported to the Board of Supervisors on November 8, 2016, the County has spent approximately \$75,000 of the \$250,000 budgeted this fiscal year to address this concern and, despite this expenditure, a significant amount of dead and dying trees persist. This process also includes a managed decline approach discussed later. Parks & Recreation has allocated staff and equipment resources to combatting the tree mortality epidemic in the County – particularly in the vicinity of Balch Park.

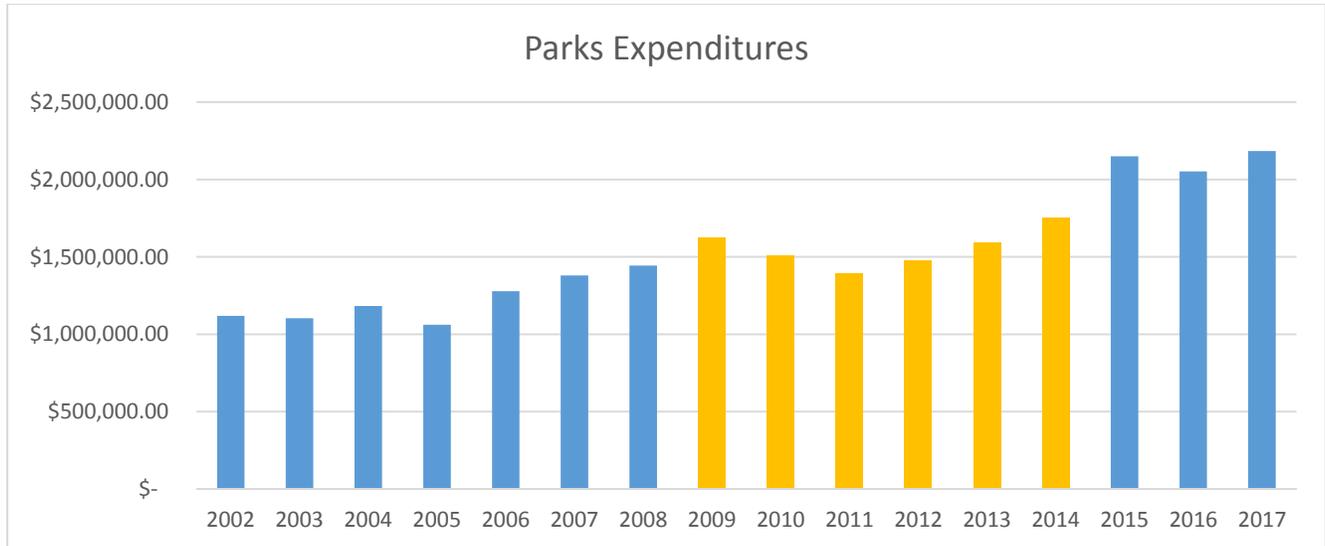
### **c. Global Financial Recession**

The County of Tulare, as with all other entities, was impacted by the Global Financial Recession. The consequences of the recession included budget cuts, staffing shortages, and a reduction in available resources. The chart below shows the total Parks division expenditures in relation to the Global Financial Recession.

As you can see, the funds spent to support all Parks activities were significantly impacted by the recession. Indeed, the County Parks division was only able to climb above pre-recession level expenditures in Fiscal Year 2015. Since that time, expenses have been fairly flat. This is a key factor in the County's ability to address all of the Parks needs. This factor illustrates the decreasing fiscal resources in comparison to rising costs, and displays the philosophy within the Parks system of doing as much as you can, in spite of limited resources. During these

strained years, the County had to balance all of its major priorities, including public safety, health needs, and quality of life matters in the allocation of scarce resources.

As described below, this financial strain has created ongoing maintenance concerns, and has prohibited Parks staff from implementing and constructing major improvements. It will also be discussed later that, in general, these ongoing maintenance concerns continue to mount at an additional cost, which exacerbates these strains.



**d. Deferred Maintenance**

Because of the financial impact shown in the chart above and combined with the other operational strains also described in this Section (i.e. drought and tree mortality), the Parks system has been forced to defer important and standard maintenance efforts due to lack of available resources.

This deferred maintenance includes a delay in routine tree trimming as resources are addressing extraordinary tree deaths, and the inability to address deficient infrastructure and remove aging structures. In the past three years, Parks staff has made efforts to address the backlog of maintenance within the Parks system. For example, the County replaced the entire electrical system at Bartlett Park – an item that had been outstanding for some time, the County also increased several maintenance efforts associated with the Pond at Mooney Grove Park.

The Tulare County Parks Advisory Committee (PAC), in particular, has taken a position regarding this matter. As an illustration, the PAC has indicated that they would like staff to address these deferred maintenance items prior to finalizing the implementation plan for the Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan. Staff has proceeded accordingly and provides a regular report to the PAC of these deferred maintenance items at each committee meeting and believes the implementation plan will be developed in early 2017.

### III. BUDGET ANALYSIS

The Parks system relies primarily on County General Fund dollars to offset costs. This Section will analyze the various financial matters associated with maintaining and operating the Parks. As part of this Plan, discussed in Section IV, the County is intending to modify the accounting structure of the Parks system to ensure that expenses and revenues are tracked associated with each Park.

The key findings of this Section are that the Parks system does not generate substantial revenue and was significantly and negatively impacted by the consequences of the Global Financial Recession, which are still realized today. To put it differently, the Parks system has been operating with extensive fiscal and operational constraints, while also trying to address significant maintenance concerns.

These fiscal challenges have created a dramatic impact on the ability of the County to address outstanding needs and concerns, particularly when combined with the items listed in Section II above. All of the financial data below are actual expenditure and revenue amounts obtained from the County's web-budget system for Fiscal Year 2015/16.

#### a. Expenses by Park: Fiscal Transparency and Accountability

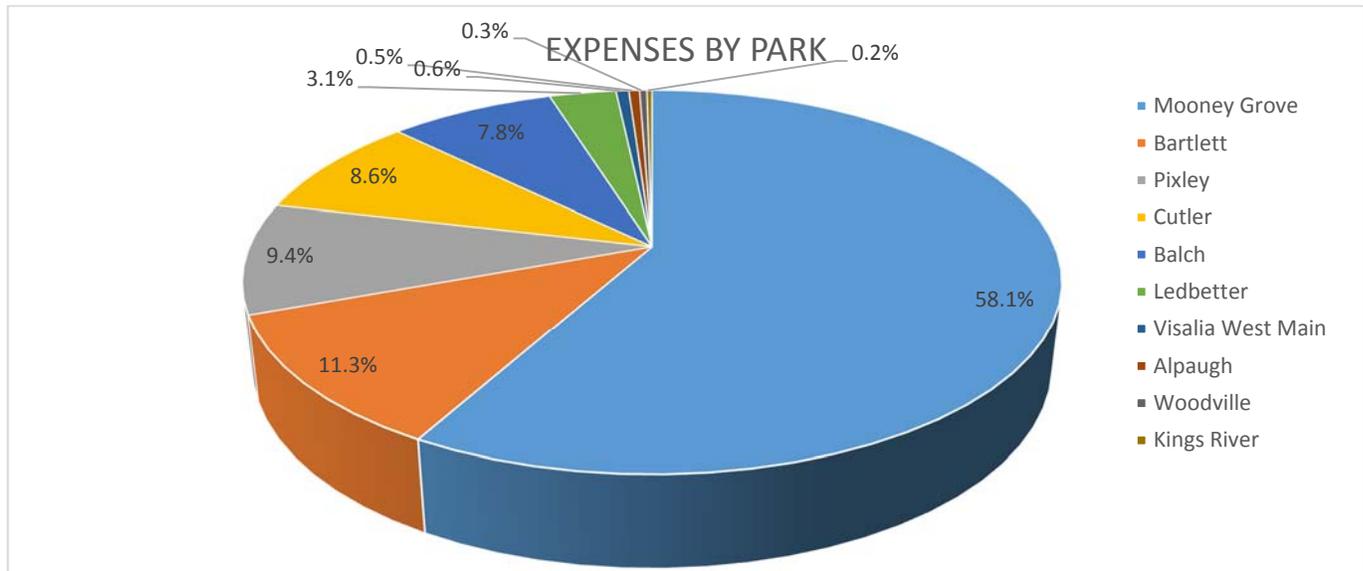
As stated previously, the County operates ten Parks. Each Park is located within a different community, provides different services, and generates different revenue streams. Each Park has different maintenance needs and requirements – some Parks are resource-intensive and others are less so. The chart and table below provide various analytical data associated with the operational expenses for each Park to illustrate this.

This table demonstrates several key points regarding the finances of the Park system. As shown, Mooney Grove Park had the greatest amount of operational expenses at 58.2% of all monies spent within the Parks system. The remaining nine Parks share the available 40% of resources, and some Parks are operating with very little financial support.

PARK	EXPENSES
<b>Mooney Grove</b>	\$ 1,193,052
<b>Bartlett</b>	231,598
<b>Pixley</b>	192,223
<b>Cutler</b>	177,332
<b>Balch</b>	160,311
<b>Ledbetter</b>	65,560
<b>West Main</b>	12,369
<b>Alpaugh</b>	10,350
<b>Woodville</b>	7,142
<b>Kings River</b>	1,100
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$ 2,050,041</b>

This table also demonstrates the diversity of Parks needs within the County's system. Mooney Grove clearly receives the most financial and maintenance attention within the Parks system. Given their rural nature and smaller size, the other Parks are not as maintenance or operational-intensive and, therefore, require less funding.

The chart below provides a graphical illustration of this same data.



Mooney Grove Park and Pixley Park are two of the most visited and utilized Parks in the County. Furthermore, Mooney Grove Park has several maintenance-intensive features not found at other Parks. For example, arbors, a pond, sports fields, several structures and buildings, trails, a disc golf course, and a large amount of turf and trees that require ongoing maintenance.

**b. Revenues by Park: Customer-Generated Funds**

The Parks system generates a small amount of revenues through gate, arbor, and camping fees at select Parks. These fees are only collected from March through October. They are also only collected Friday through Sunday during those months. They are not intended to generate substantial resources to the County, but are an important part of the Parks system budget.

The table below shows the fees charged at each Park.

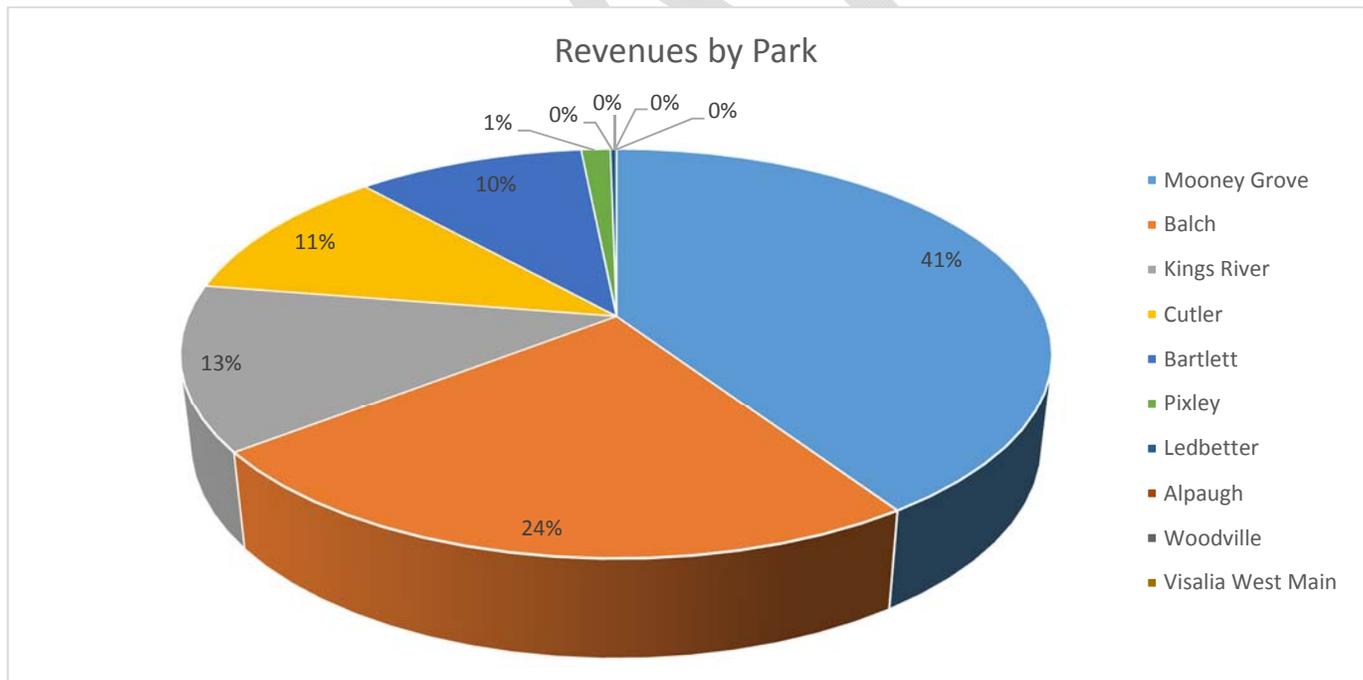
PARK	FEE TYPE	AMOUNT
<b>Mooney Grove</b>	Entrance	\$6/vehicle
<b>Mooney Grove</b>	Arbor	\$45 - \$145
<b>Bartlett</b>	Entrance	\$5/vehicle
<b>Bartlett</b>	Arbor	\$35 - \$50
<b>Cutler</b>	Entrance	\$5/vehicle
<b>Cutler</b>	Arbor	\$50
<b>Balch</b>	Camping – General	\$16/night
<b>Balch</b>	Camping – Seniors	\$8/night
<b>Balch</b>	Day Use	\$1
<b>Ledbetter</b>	Arbor	\$50
<b>Kings River</b>	Disc Golf	\$5/person

From an analytical perspective, these revenues are very important as they generate a small, dedicated source of money for the Parks system. Although they are not designed to recover all the costs of operating each Park, they do recover the costs incurred to collect the fees, and create a small revenue stream for the Parks system. The County also collects fees from special events and charitable donations. All of which helps to offset operational costs in a small but needed amount.

The table below shows the revenues received by each Park in Fiscal Year 2015/16. As with the expenditure data, Mooney Grove Park generates the greatest amount of revenue through fees; approximately 41% of the total Parks revenue is generated at Mooney Grove Park. However, Mooney Grove, as an example, only recoups approximately 10% of its expenses through these fees. As a whole, the Parks system recoups approximately 14% of its expenses through these same fees.

PARK	REVENUES
<b>Mooney Grove</b>	\$ 116,649
<b>Bartlett</b>	28,872
<b>Pixley</b>	3,703
<b>Cutler</b>	31,125
<b>Balch</b>	68,337
<b>Ledbetter</b>	758
<b>West Main</b>	0
<b>Alpaugh</b>	35
<b>Woodville</b>	0
<b>Kings River</b>	37,350
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$ 286,828</b>

The chart below shows the percentage of revenues received by each Park.



**c. General Fund Contributions**

The following data shows the amount of funds contributed to the Parks System from the County General Fund. The General Fund provides the majority of the revenue not generated by Parks fees. This is the single most important source of revenue for the Parks system. Approximately 85% of the funds needed to operate the Parks system is provided by the County General Fund. As a note, Parks is accounted for within the General Services budget.

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Expenses</b>	<b>Revenues</b>	<b>General Fund</b>
<b>2011/12</b>	\$ 1,473,397	\$ 296,359	\$ 1,177,038
<b>2012/13</b>	1,590,133	283,372	1,306,761
<b>2013/14</b>	1,751,780	297,018	1,454,762
<b>2014/15</b>	2,149,684	222,587	1,927,097
<b>2015/16</b>	2,051,855	286,835	1,765,020
<b>2016/17 (Budget)</b>	2,184,184	338,000	1,846,184

#### **d. Volunteer, Donations, and Events Analysis**

In addition to traditional revenues generated by gate fees and monies provided by the County General Fund, Parks has also benefited from volunteer work, donations, and fees generated by various different event registrations.

These sources of revenue are all integral to the financial health of the Parks system and are necessary to provide essential maintenance efforts. Some of the Parks benefit more than other from these sources and the County attempts to continually identify new areas of expansion. For example, Parks staff oversee the special event registration process and work with local service clubs to solicit donations and volunteers.

At Mooney Grove Park, there are several longstanding relationships that highlight the success of this particular endeavor. Some of these relationships are in the form of the Adopt-An-Arbor Program, wherein organizations are able to contribute funds to the ongoing maintenance of a selected arbor and get their name placed on the arbor, as well as complementary use of the arbor.

Businesses and individuals are able to make tax deductible, in-kind, or monetary contributions to the Parks through the Friends of Tulare County (FTC), a 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization that accepts donations on behalf of Tulare County. More than \$60,000 in monetary donations have been made through the FTC since 2012.

#### **IV. CURRENT SOLUTIONS**

Though there are significant challenges facing the Parks system, staff continues to seek ways of improving and maintaining the Parks. The purpose of this Section is to outline those activities that are currently underway and have been initiated recently. These activities and initiatives are designed to yield the greatest return on investment and to create meaningful improvements in the condition of the Parks.

Parks staff has taken many actions within the Parks system that actively improve the conditions of the Parks and provide a path forward for future progress. Several of these have been in the form of community partnerships, creative thinking, and alternative funding resources, such as grants.

##### **a. Parks Advisory Committee**

Because of their rich history and heritage, many of the County's Parks are vital parts of their communities. Historically, the County did not have a venue to solicit community input and work with members of the community to find new solutions to these challenges.

Accordingly, the Board of Supervisors established the Parks Advisory Committee (PAC) in May 2015 to create a forum for public input regarding Parks matters. This was done at the request of Supervisors Vander Poel and Worthley in response to a constituent proposal they had received.

The PAC has been a vital part of improving the Parks condition since its inception. It is comprised of a diverse membership and has overseen several key initiatives, including the approval of a Trap, Neuter, and Return Pilot Program with the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition. This initiative in particular is a key accomplishment of the PAC. The Board of Supervisors asked the PAC to review and vet this initiative, after which, the Board accepted the Committee's recommendation to proceed with this Pilot Program.

In the coming months, the County will be filling two vacancies on the PAC and beginning more robust outreach efforts in the areas served by each of the parks. Thereafter, beginning in early 2017, the PAC will conduct community working sessions to solicit input on the Implementation Strategy for each of the ten parks, including the Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan.

##### **b. Mooney Grove Strategic Improvements**

###### **i. Mooney Grove Well & Increased Irrigation**

The County replaced the previous domestic and irrigation well at Mooney Grove Park in the spring of 2016. The new well is a full-service, irrigation and domestic well, it is connected to the existing infrastructure, and will help to address the landscaping needs. The well was funded through a partnership with Capital Projects and overseen by Capital Projects staff in assistance with Parks & Recreation staff. This project was an important improvement in the Park and was needed as a direct result of the drought conditions.

###### **ii. Geese Clean Up**

The County has increased the amount of staff and volunteer labor to clean up the increasing amount of geese droppings around the Pond. This goose waste removal effort has improved the appearance of the perimeter of the Pond and allowed for better customer utilization. The County has experienced high numbers of geese at Mooney Grove Park and has taken steps to reduce this population through non-invasive practices, which should create a sustainable solution.

### iii. Pond Clean Up

In addition to the geese waste removal practices described above, Parks staff has also taken measures to clean up the milfoil in the pond. The milfoil was brought under control through the utilization of licensed triploid grass carp. The County continues to manage the algae using microbial products. Both of these efforts have also improved the appearance of the Pond.

### iv. Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan



#### *Plan Background*

The Mooney Grove Park 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan (Plan) is a planning document intended to provide a vision for the future of Mooney Grove Park while recognizing the Park's historic value. The document is a starting point for future comprehensive planning, engineering, architectural and landscape concepts.

In this way, the Plan is not an operational or strategic plan and, therefore, does not identify current facility, landscape, or maintenance needs. These items are addressed in a variety of documents, including, but not limited to, the County's Capital Improvement Plan, Facilities Improvement Plan, and annual Parks budget.

The Plan's recommendations are designed to increase attendance and create a greater diversity of activities available at the Park for visitors. The proposed recommendations would enhance the public's experience while visiting the museum complex, the historical buildings, and recreational facilities. The Plan provides a concept for development that includes the relocation of existing features reconfigured into a Main Street plan, new trails and venues, historic monuments, public art spaces, improved utilities and circulation, and Cameron Creek improvements.

The Mooney Grove Park 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan was prepared by Kleinfelder, Inc. in cooperation with County staff, community organizations, and County residents. Kleinfelder was selected by the County in 2008 to provide four contract deliverables for Mooney Grove Park, one of which was the Conceptual Master Plan.

To support the recommendations, the Plan includes: a conceptual layout of the proposed improvements; elevations or cross-sections of major elements, scaled figures and photographed elevations of structures to be reconstructed; a concept for dry utilities, domestic water, sanitary sewer, recharge water and waterways, storm drainage, internal circulation, and parking.

*Improvement Recommendations*

The Board of Supervisors adopted the Conceptual Master Plan on January 27, 2015. In summary, the Plan includes six major improvement categories, which are:

- *Roads and Trails:* new vehicle entries, trails, parking, and roads
- *Park in the Park concept:* a central, dedicated area surrounding the lake and museum complex for identified recreational and historical activities
- *Cameron Creek improvements:* new vegetation and naturalization of existing stream banks
- *Main Street concept:* rehabilitate and relocate existing historic structures into a newly designed Main Street configuration
- *Public Space features:* a variety of improvements for public use, including an outdoor performance venue, ball field, outdoor art, and picnic areas
- *Utilities:* water, sewer, and dry utilities

The Plan outlines the County’s priorities in regards to the future of the Park and includes a proposed set of recommendations for the Park that will enhance the recreational experiences for visitors.



*Community Outreach Process*

The preparation of the Plan included several meetings within Visalia. In late 2014, the County held two forums at Café 210 in Visalia to review the Plan's details and seek public input. Both of these meetings were very well attended and substantive comments were provided. Several of the attendees have become members of the Parks Advisory Committee.

Upon formation of the PAC, the Board requested that the Committee review the Plan and prepare final recommendations regarding the implementation of the Plan's proposed improvements. These recommendations would be in the form of a Committee-approved Implementation Strategy.

Prior to formally preparing these recommendations, the PAC chose to become familiar with the Parks' needs and address the backlog of deferred maintenance.

**v. Visalia Feral Cat Coalition Trap, Neuter and Return Pilot Program**

Mooney Grove Park is home to a large population of stray and feral cats. The impacts of these feral cats and their wellbeing became a major concern for Parks staff and the community. The County has traditionally removed feral cats from the Park as a method of reducing cat populations.

A local non-profit, the Visalia Feral Cat Coalition (VFCC), became actively involved in efforts to maintain the animals' well-being by providing a solution known as Trap Neuter and Return (TNR) several years ago. In a TNR program, feral cats are captured, taken to a veterinarian for sterilization, vaccination, and flea treatment, and subsequently brought back to their original location. Once the cats have been returned, volunteers maintain regular daily feeding. The premise of a TNR program is that it is a more cost effective method of reducing feral cat populations overtime.

Shortly after the PAC was formed, the Committee heard regular presentations from the VFCC, advocating for TNR as a humane way of reducing the population of feral animals, which can, in turn, reduce the impacts associated with those animals.

Feedback from other experts and community members was also heard in opposition to the program for reasons including flea infestations in Parks buildings, liability exposure for the County, and the possibility of harm to other Park animals.

After much deliberation and consideration of all of the facts presented, at their April 2016 meeting, the PAC recommended that staff request the Board of Supervisors approve a TNR Pilot Program as a strategy of managing and reducing the population of feral cats at the Park.

The Board of Supervisors approved an agreement with the VFCC for a period of 12 months. The Program provides the County the opportunity to make a data-driven decision regarding the long term utilization of TNR as a method of reducing the population. County staff and VFCC representatives have worked together extensively to coordinate the details of the program and monitor its progress.

It is recommended that the Board of Supervisors consider a report from staff regarding this Pilot Program to determine the future and continued use of this Program.

**vi. Strategic Tree Removal Program**

Due to the tree mortality impacts discussed elsewhere in this document, staff has been implementing a strategic tree removal program. In this program, only dead trees are removed and dying trees are pruned to create a managed decline state. This allows for the greatest amount of trees to remain standing while reducing the risk created by dead and dying trees. This also helps to encourage new growth in younger trees and the possibility that a declining tree can return to full growth.

**c. County Funding Partnerships: Grants and Capital Projects**

*Resource Management Agency*

Parks staff has sought creative methods of bringing funding into the Parks system over the past several years to ensure that improvement projects can move forward. The most important contribution of funds have come in the form of grant partnerships with the Resource Management Agency (RMA) and in the form of one-time project support from Capital Projects. These two contributions combine to ensure that the Parks can invest in improvement projects regardless of the current budget concerns discussed earlier.

Over the past few years, RMA has been a helpful partner in the acquisition of grant funds to improve the condition of the Parks. RMA has an experienced staff of grant writers and managers who are able to seek funds and manage grants in conjunction with the implementation by Parks staff. These individuals have pursued many grant opportunities successfully which has supported a variety of projects.

The relationship with RMA has resulted in the contribution of more than \$500,000 in Housing Related Parks Program funds over the past three years. Specifically, this funding has made substantial improvements to Ledbetter Park including a current project to modernize infrastructure and improve recreational amenities. This relationship has been highlighted by the Visalia Times-Delta in its February 24, 2016 article titled, “County Park Gets a Boost, Improvements.”



*Photo Credit: Eric Woomer, Visalia Times-Delta, February 24, 2016*

Currently, County Parks has partnered with RMA to actively pursue additional recreational development grants. For example, in January 2017 the Board of Supervisors approved the submittal of a \$1 million plan to improve Pixley Park and a \$800,000 plan to enhance the Woodville Park. If successful, these grant-funded projects would make substantial improvements by adding soccer fields, lighting to enable extended hours of play, and make accessibility improvements.

#### *Public Health*

One of the objectives of the Parks system is to foster and encourage healthier lifestyles through kinetic outdoor activities. These have included expanding on the Parks' successful athletic events with local schools, such as long-distance running events, disc golf, and partnerships with walking groups. Similarly, the Public Health Department within the Health and Human Services Agency has worked closely with County Parks staff to install a hydration station and self-guided exercise path as part of the current Ledbetter Park makeover. With encouragement from Public Health, this is an example of a "move-it-or-lose-it" healthy lifestyle approach.

#### *Capital Projects*

In addition to its relationship with RMA, Parks has also received support from Capital Projects. As mentioned previously, Parks & Recreation is overseen by the County Administrative Office, which also oversees the Capital Projects division. Capital Projects undertakes major maintenance and construction projects throughout the County.

Because of the great level of deferred maintenance within the Parks system, due to the factors listed in Section I, the CAO and Board of Supervisors have significantly increased the investment of Capital Projects resources towards the Parks system.

The Capital Projects fiscal year 2015/16 budget included \$1 million for needs within the Parks system. This amount was included in the Capital Projects Fund. Of this amount, \$125,625 was spent on an irrigation system for Ledbetter Park. As part of the adoption of the Fiscal Year 2016/17 budget, the remaining funding was increased to \$1,500,000.

At this time, the remaining resources will fund the replacement of the Cutler Well, which is a critical part of that Park's infrastructure, and a Fuel Reduction Program at Balch Park. This funding will also help in the acquisition of grant funding in partnership with RMA. Many grants have local matching criteria or award additional rating consideration for matching funds.

Most recently, matching funds were pledged for the California Youth Soccer and Recreation Development Program grants for Pixley and Woodville Parks, which, if selected, would allow for the construction of soccer fields, including the necessary upgrades to support the projects, as well as new irrigation systems for water conservation purposes.

The purpose of these funding relationships is to stretch the County's limited resources as far as possible. Furthermore, the use of local funds for grant match purposes has the ability to turn a small local investment into a much greater return.

#### **d. Cutler Well Project**

Due to the extreme drought conditions referenced above, the County has taken an active role in addressing our water infrastructure needs. Sufficient groundwater supplies are necessary for irrigation and domestic purposes at each of our Parks. As listed above, the County replaced the irrigation and domestic well at Mooney Grove Park as a first activity in this matter.

After the completion of that well, the County began the replacement of the irrigation and domestic well at Cutler Park. This has been a critical need as Cutler Park has been experiencing significant tree mortality. The well is currently underway in the amount of \$573,500 and will be serviceable by summer 2017.

#### **e. Park Safety Measures**

As a result of the recreational uses of the Park, the County is continuously concerned with the safety of Parks patrons. From time-to-time, safety incidents occur within our Parks. After a prominent safety incident last summer, the County installed signs to warn patrons of dangerous conditions and prevent further incidents at Cutler Park.

During late summer when the river is flowing, the Park is utilized by patrons for swimming access to the St. John's River. The County does not patrol the river, however, many people use the Park for access and other recreation while enjoying the river.

To that end, County staff is available on site during business hours and has responded to emergencies. The well referenced above will also address the safety risks posed by dying trees and grass areas. For example, the Park experienced a grass fire over several acres last summer.

#### **f. Partnership with Film Commission and Tourism**

##### *Film Commission*

In addition to the grant partnerships listed above, Parks has been partnering with the RMA Film Commission for many years. This partnership has also proven to be very fruitful as it has resulted in the receipt of additional funding and attention from the public. Location scouts for movie and television production companies will utilize County Parks for their productions, which results in substantial local investment.

When Parks are used for this purpose, these production companies make a tax deductible donation to the Friends of Tulare County that is designated for future Parks uses. Some of the media productions that have used County Parks include the final episode of *True Detective Season Two* (shown on the right), the promotional video of *Titan Fall 2*, a music video from the movie *Divergent*, and more than two dozen other projects.



*Photo Credit: Film Locations Website*

The benefits of these productions have resulted in contributions totaling \$45,226 allowing for matching funds for the Fuel Load Reduction Program and to initiate an inventory of old growth Giant Sequoias at Balch Park.

##### *Tourism*

Parks staff worked closely with the Tulare County Tourism staff to co-promote national and regional disc golf championships. Leveraging considerable investment of staff time by County Parks with a \$5,000 contribution from County Tourism, the annual End of the Trail Classic disc golf event routinely attracts more than 100 of the top professional disc golfers practicing nationwide, sanctioned by the Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA). County Tourism officials estimate that each annual event results in more than \$100,000 in local spending for

lodging and dining alone. The Kings River Nature Preserve has also become a very popular disc golfing venue due to its remote and scenic location.

**g. Community and Local Support**

Because of their importance in the lives of residents, the County has attempted to cultivate working relationships with various community groups to improve the conditions of the Parks. One of the most important support services received by the Parks system is in the form of donated labor through the TCSO Sheriff’s Work Alternative Program (SWAP). These individuals supplement the ongoing efforts of the Parks staff by performing essential maintenance tasks.

In addition to the assistance of civic groups and non-profit organizations, the County has also partnered with local Cities for Parks improvements. The West Main Park is a joint-effort between the County and the City of Visalia that has successfully provided amenities for the public. The City installed interpretive features which enhance the user experience along the trail. This Park is primarily used for its section of trail by walkers and joggers for outdoor exercise.

Other community organizations that have provided support to the Parks in recent years include: Lions Clubs, Rotary Groups, and the Boy Scouts of America. The projects that have been provided or assisted by these groups includes:

<b>Park</b>	<b>Improvement Description</b>
<b>Mooney Grove Park</b>	<p><b>Extensive Arbor Improvements</b></p> <p><i>Arbor 4:</i> installed grill, new roof, and painting through a \$5,500 donation</p> <p><i>Arbor 6:</i> installed new roof and painted</p> <p><i>Arbor 8:</i> installed new roof and painted</p> <p><i>Arbor 11:</i> repainted and cleaned</p> <p><i>Arbor 12:</i> painted through a \$1,500 donation</p> <p><i>Arbor 13:</i> rebuilt through an on-going monthly sponsorship</p> <p><i>Arbors 14-18:</i> installed sidewalks throughout the area to improve accessibility</p> <p><i>Arbor 19:</i> installed new roof, painted through a \$5,500 donation</p> <p>Entrance Sign painted by Lions Club</p>
	Reservation signs installed at each arbor, benches refurbished, and trellis reconstructed by the Boy Scouts of America
<b>Ledbetter Park</b>	Tree planting and stage improvements by Young Men's Initiative
<b>Cutler Park</b>	Arbor 4: installed new roof and painted

**h. Parks Services to Other Entities**

In addition to receiving valuable support from a variety of entities, County Parks also provides services and assistance to community organizations and County departments. Parks works collaboratively on special events, parks-related services, public safety needs, and emergency response needs. This has been in the form of equipment donation, staff volunteering at neighboring events, and utilization of Parks space for community purposes.

**i. Conservation Efforts**

As the County replaces irrigation systems within the Parks system, newer and more efficient equipment is installed, creating a better utilization of resources. In some instances we have been able to reduce the amount of water consumption necessary for irrigation needs, while greatly improving the conditions of the Park. These results are dependent on having the necessary irrigation infrastructure, including wells and sufficient water amounts.

The County has partnered with the City of Tulare, Kaweah Water Conservation District, and Tulare Irrigation District to develop a groundwater recharge basin at Mooney Grove Park. When Cameron Creek has sufficient water, the County utilizes the basin extensively. This replenishes the underground aquifer that is necessary to supply the water to the irrigation and domestic wells.

**j. Tree Mortality Task Force**

As discussed throughout this operational analysis, one of the largest impacts for the health of our Parks has been the major tree mortality phenomenon affecting the Central Valley due to the drought and other factors. This has resulted in the premature loss of many trees and the advance decline of many others. To address this crisis, the County has established a Tree Mortality Task Force.

This Task Force is engaged in assessing the problem, creating a forum for all of the involved parties to discuss their solutions and pool their resources, and advocate for the State and other entities to act on this matter. The Parks manager is a member of this Task Force, attends all meetings, and is working on getting a prescribed burn training exercise in Tulare County. Parks staff serve as a part of the logistics team to plan the public safety partners, tree removal strategy, and environmental clearance efforts.

**k. Outreach Efforts**

The Parks Donation Coordinator regularly gives presentations to community groups and organizations to expand the County's outreach efforts and solicit donations on behalf of the Parks, some of these include: the Breakfast Lions Club, Rotary Clubs, Young Men's Initiative, Family Healthcare Network, Charter Oak Lions Club and Visalia Host Lions Club. As listed above, many of these groups are faithful donors to the Parks system.

Due to the direct interaction that Tulare County Parks and Recreation has with the public, staff recognized the need to effectively engage constituents about park activities, events, and projects. A work group was established to identify efficient methods of disseminating accurate information to the greatest audience possible. After much research and consideration, the workgroup determined that social media would be an effective outlet to engage a wide range of demographics.

The Parks and Recreation division officially launched its Facebook page on October 3, 2016. To broaden the reach of the page, Parks and Recreation implemented a paid advertising promotion. Normally, the creation of a page would be promoted by word of mouth and through sharing of content on Facebook. The promotion was used to expedite this process by pushing created content to Facebook users that otherwise would not be aware of the new Tulare County Parks and Recreation page.

The advertising campaign was initiated on October 24th and ran for 14 days through November 7th. During that time, the page created over 20,000 local impressions for almost 9,000 users

within a 50 mile radius of Mooney Grove Park. In order to reach the greatest audience, parameters were set to include all genders between the ages of 13 to 65+. Although the ratio of impressions to new page likes was low, the advertising resulted in a noticeable increase in page visits.

Going forward, it is the goal of the division to maintain a page that keeps the public informed and up to date with County activities and events while providing an inviting place to leave feedback and share experiences from their visits to County Parks.

### **1. Healthy Communities Planning**

As part of the outreach efforts of the PAC and the preparation of the Mooney Grove 20 Year Conceptual Master Plan, the County also ensured that the planning of health communities and spaces was considered. The Board established the Health Advisory Committee in 2011, and Parks staff has made presentations to the Health Advisory Committee regarding several of their initiatives. In addition, staff to the Health Advisory Committee have also attended and made presentations to the PAC. This helps ensure that the Parks continue to serve as a location for outdoor exercise and fitness, thereby generating and building healthy communities.

#### **m. Museum Coordination**

Finally, the County operates three County Museums: one at Balch Park, and two at Mooney Grove Park – the Historical Museum and the Agriculture and Farm Labor Museum. The museum operations are funded separately from the operations of the Parks system. The museum operational needs are not addressed within this document.

Museum staff works under the Parks & Recreation Manager, and there is close coordination between Parks and the Museum. For example, the President of the Historical Society is an ex-officio member of the PAC. Also, Parks staff regularly attends the Museum Board meetings and discusses ongoing maintenance and operational needs.



*Photo Credit: <http://www.visitvisalia.org>*

## V. PROPOSED ACTIONS

After careful analysis of the facts included in this report and after consultation with various groups and interested individuals, staff has concluded that, although there are many obstacles and constraints facing the County Parks, there are also several opportunities to build on the progress discussed in Section IV of this report.

As evidenced by the data included in this report, it is clear that the County has been able to accomplish quite a bit in the Parks despite several constraints, but can still make significant progress to improve the conditions of the Parks.

Therefore, the primary recommendation for action is to establish an annual Maintenance and Improvement Program (MIP) – thereby organizing the needs of the Parks in a meaningful manner and ensuring that these needs are reviewed annually and are approved by the Board.

### a. Establish an annual Maintenance and Improvement Program (MIP)

As discussed more thoroughly in Sections II and III above, there are significant constraints with respect to improving the Parks system. Although these constraints can have an impact on the conditions of the Parks, it has been the long-standing goal of Parks staff to ensure a certain level of maintenance at each Park.

To formalize this process and create a forum for input and direction from the public and Board of Supervisors, it is recommended that the County establish an annual Maintenance and Improvement Program (MIP). This would be similar in format to the County's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) used for the County's Capital Projects' needs.

The primary objective of this MIP will be to ensure that maintenance and improvement efforts are aligned with the Board of Supervisors goals for each individual Park. Furthermore, the MIP would organize the maintenance efforts of Parks staff, create a record of all of the basic Parks' needs, and allocate resources to the County's major priorities.

It is proposed that the MIP be presented and approved annually to the Board of Supervisors after consideration by the Parks Advisory Committee to ensure transparency, accountability, and input from the public. This further ensures that Parks employees are achieving the mission and direction of the Board and County.

As mentioned previously, each Park has a unique history and provides unique services to the County. Accordingly, the MIP would be divided by Supervisorial District, so that each Board member has the ability to comment and direct the efforts at the Parks within their communities.

The MIP would have two major components: Maintenance projects and major improvement projects. This is consistent with the current structure of the Parks system, wherein Parks utilizes funding for ongoing maintenance as well as one-time funds supported by Capital Projects and other sources.

Furthermore, these two components address interrelated needs of the Park: Current and basic conditions, as well as significant improvements and expansions. In this way, the MIP would also be a strategically-focused long-range planning tool to identify immediate needs as well as planning for major improvements and projects within the Parks. Finally, the MIP will significantly improve the maintenance and improvement efforts of the County without significantly increasing the funding necessary to support the County's Parks System.

**b. Capital Projects Dedicated Funding: One-Time Improvements**

In addition to the MIP which will improve the maintenance and improvement efforts without additional funding, it is recommended that the County continue the multi-disciplinary approach of utilizing the Capital Projects fund for major one-time Parks needs. As discussed in the previous Section, over the past two fiscal years, the County has established a Parks Improvement budget in the Capital Projects Fund.

This relationship allows for increased responsiveness to major infrastructure needs within the Parks and the ability to address unforeseen emergencies without continuing to sacrifice essential operational resources and diverting them from the Parks budget.

Therefore, it is recommended that this model proceed and that, when financially feasible to do so, funds be allocated for this designated purpose within the Capital Projects budget. This would allow for major projects to proceed as the funding is available. As described previously, the best illustration of this is the use of these funds as grant matches as leveraging opportunities and replacement of needed infrastructure.

**c. Increased Community Involvement: Expand and Maintain Public Support**

With the assistance of RMA, Parks is proposing to develop and initiate a public outreach strategy. This strategy will include conducting public forums in each community in which a Park is located to better understand the needs of the Parks users. These meetings would include surveys, the results of which would be tabulated to analyze the community outreach results and create informed decisions for the improvement of the Parks system.

It is suggested that, after the development of this outreach effort and survey formats, that this be maintained and conducted on an annual or biennial basis to continue to forge and maintain community relationships.

**d. Improved Customer Service: Develop Results-Oriented Outcomes**

The improvement of customer service by developing visible, measurable results will be critical to enhance the public perception and overall Parks experience going forward. Some of the action items that have been proposed include: development of a Parks website where patrons have the ability to make Parks Reservations and credit card payments online; staff development opportunities, such as customer service and safety training and the opportunity to participate in workgroups and committees; increased involvement and development of the Parks Advisory Committee; and developing and implementing a customer survey to ensure continuous improvement.

**e. Conclusion**

The intent of this document was to provide a background and context to the Tulare County Parks system. Although there are challenges facing the Parks system at this time, there are also many opportunities, and the local community has demonstrated an active and engaged interest in the health of the Parks. Therefore, the County is optimistic with respect to the future of each of the Parks and believes that the recommendations put forth in this document, and the actions already in place, will ensure positive growth for years to come.

The enhancements described above aim to utilize a dual approach to expanding the Parks system's performance. In the first instance, it will help address the immediate maintenance needs within the Parks system; and it also aims to address the major one-time needs that arise

– joining together responsiveness to current conditions and operations as well as long-range strategic planning for improvements. This plan also recommends two important community- and customer-oriented actions: increased community involvement and improved customer service.

The first of these two initiatives is designed to obtain feedback from those individuals who care about the Parks the most: the users. These residents and families spend time in the Parks and know what works for them and what does not. Parks staff will spend time listening and learning from the public to understand their needs better. Second, Parks will take several efforts to improve customer service. As Parks staff are the face of the Parks system and interact directly with the users, it is important that they are providing the best experience for the public.

Accordingly, Parks staff are prepared and enthusiastic about the ability to improve and enhance all of the County Parks for the public they serve.

DRAFT

**VI. EXHIBITS**

- a. Parks Maps**
- b. Parks Information Pages**
- c. Top County Parks Needs**

**DRAFT**