

LOOKING FORWARD



This section takes a look into two different topics. Analyzing each and identifying the opportunities they present. The topics are:

- Recreation
- Contemporary Issues and Opportunities for Parks, Open Space and Trails

RECREATION

Outdoor recreation is arguably what makes Colorado the remarkable place that it is today. The pristine and diverse landscapes of the state contribute to a high quality of life and are main reasons for visitation and livability. One of the fastest-growing states in the nation, Colorado's population currently stands at over 5.5 million and is expected to grow to 8.5 million by 2050. More residents and higher visitation rates translate to more stress on parks, natural areas, sensitive landscapes and wildlife habitats, more wear-and-tear and higher maintenance costs, and more crowding and competition for access to trails and recreation facilities. It is critical to think ahead and plan for the future now to address these challenges and keep these spaces in the pristine and diverse condition that makes Colorado a one-of-a-kind state and Adams County a place with high quality of life.

SUMMARY FROM OUTDOOR RECREATION TRENDS REPORT

Today, Adams County's parks, open spaces, and trails offer a broad variety of outdoor recreation activities that are growing in diversity. Some of the recreational offerings include picnic areas, playgrounds, trails, basketball, volleyball, horseshoes, disc golf, golf courses, and fishing. The County's 2018 Riverdale Regional Park Master Plan also seeks to implement a set of features that would create

opportunities for water-based recreation. Adams County aspires and plans to offer more bike courses, specialized playgrounds, dog parks, agricultural programs, and outdoor event spaces. While the County acts as a provider for the infrastructure to support recreational pursuits, it does not program those spaces.

The County partners with different groups to help provide diverse recreation programs. Partnerships include state agencies like Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW), academic interests such as the Colorado State University (CSU) Extension office and local school districts, municipalities, and regional agencies and civic attractions such as the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, the Denver Botanic Gardens, The Colorado Railroad Museum, the Adams County Historical Society, and The Bird Conservancy of the Rockies, to name a few. Public private partnerships are also considered to facilitate programming and concessions.

Adams County is developing a naturalist program to better facilitate some of these partnerships, with the goal of maintaining the interests of county residents through the introduction of programming and facilities that support a broader approach to outdoor education opportunities with these various organizations.

NATIONAL ACTIVITY TRENDS

Supplementing input from Adams County residents, a study of national recreation trends is helpful for understanding changing needs and informing decisions about the activities that may need additional accommodation in the future. Information released through the Sports and Fitness Industry Association's (SFIA) 2020 (based on data collected in 2019) Topline Report on Sports, Fitness, and Leisure Activities reveals that the most popular sport and recreational activities include walking for fitness, treadmill, free weights, running/jogging, and hiking.¹

The report also highlights the lowest point of inactivity recorded in the past six years in America. Nevertheless, the difference in the level of inactivity between different income groups is still a matter of concern with households making less than \$25K showing an increasing inactivity rate over the past five years.

National Trends in General Fitness

According to the SFIA report, fitness sports' participation rates have been the highest for five consecutive years with the participation rate increasing yearly throughout that time frame. In 2019, 67.3% of people indicated that they had participated in some form of fitness activity; the second activity

category (outdoor sports) came in with a 50.7%.²

The most popular fitness activity by far is fitness walking, which had over 111 million participants in 2019.³ Over five years, the activities that grew most rapidly were rowing machine (up 5.5%), kettle bells (up 4.7%), aquatic exercise (up 4.3%) and cross-training style workouts (up 3.8%) and yoga (up 3.8%).⁴

National Trends in Individual and Team Sports

The most heavily participated sports for 2019 were bowling (45.4 million), golf (33.5 million) and basketball (24.2 million).

Other notable activities that were popular in 2019 included Baseball, Soccer, Tennis, and Table Tennis. The activities that have seen strong growth in the past five years were Cardio Tennis (up 9.3%), trail running (up 7.9%), and pickleball (up 7.1%). Ultimate Frisbee was the sport with the largest decline in participation rates by 12.9% over the past five years.

National Trends in Outdoor Recreation

The second most popular of the activity groups was Outdoor Sports with more than 50.7% of people reporting that they have participated in such activities in 2019. Much like the general fitness activities, outdoor

1 Sport & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) Sports, Fitness, And Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report 2020, pages 22-34

2 Ibid, page 8
3 Ibid, page 23
4 Ibid, page 22-24

recreation activities encourage an active lifestyle, can be performed individually or with a group and are not limited by time restraints. In 2019, the most popular activities in the outdoor recreation category include hiking (49.6 million), road bicycling (39.3 million), freshwater fishing (39.1 million) and camping (28.1 million).⁵

National Non-Participant Interest

The SFIA report also includes a chapter that shows which sports interest non-participants. The first part of this sections shows that for most age segments, fishing, camping, biking, and hiking were aspirational activities. Swimming for fitness was also a popular activity for groups older than 25 years. When activities were viewed by income, fishing, camping, bicycling, and swimming were all in the top four for all income groups. Fishing and camping were more popular amongst lower income groups whilst bicycling and swimming were more popular amongst the higher income groups.

COLORADO AND LOCAL ACTIVITY TRENDS

Colorado Recreation Trends

The 2019 Colorado Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) report findings indicate that at least 92% of Coloradans participated at least once every few weeks in some form of outdoor recreation over the year prior to the

⁵ Sport & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) Sports, Fitness, And Leisure Activities Topline Participation Report 2020, page 22-24

survey, and some four or more times per week. The top three barriers to outdoor recreation were limited time, traffic congestion and crowding. The North Central region, which includes Adams County and six other counties, also has high participation in outdoor recreation, with 46% of adults taking part in these types of activities.⁶ A majority of Coloradans (64%) are not traveling far to spend time outdoors, but rather are using parks, open spaces, and trails in their local communities between one and four times per week.⁷

One of the demographic shifts occurring in Adams County and throughout the state is the increase in the Hispanic population, which is an important factor when planning for parks.

Colorado's Most Popular Outdoor Activities

SCORP states that the top ten outdoor activities in Colorado for 2019 were walking, hiking/backpacking, picnicking/tent camping, fishing, playground activities, jogging/running outdoors, skiing (alpine/telemark)/snowboarding, wildlife viewing, RV camping/cabins, and team or individual sports.⁸ While the percentage of people that participated in recreation activities is similar to the rate reported five years prior, some recreation activities are showing stronger increases than

⁶ National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2019, page 115

⁷ Ibid, page 64

⁸ Ibid, page 22

others. For example, the number of days Coloradans recreated on trails grew by 44% from 2012-2017. Spending profiles also showed the greatest increase in trail sports, snow sports, RV camping, and running. Significant increases in trail use are being seen throughout Colorado and Adams County due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as users look for physical and mental reprieve in outdoor settings that lend to safe social distancing.

What the number one activity makes clear is that people of all ages and backgrounds like to get outside in nature and partake in activities that are low-impact and do not necessarily cost money. Colorado public recreation initiatives focus on building more walking and hiking trails and creating more opportunities for people to go into nature together.

SCORP also categorizes all outdoor activities into five groups and ranks the popularity of these groups by

region of the state. In the North Central region, the most popular activities are trail/road-based, such as walking, hiking, biking, and off-roading, followed by other outdoor activities, like RV and tent camping and target shooting. The third most popular activity group in terms of participation is wildlife-related, such as hunting, fishing and bird watching. In 2017, outdoor recreationists in the North Central region spent 39.3 days road biking, 20.6 days bird watching, 16.3 days hiking/backpacking, 15.2 days wildlife viewing, and 13.5 days skiing/snowboarding.⁹ According to eBird, an online platform for birdwatchers, there are more than 4,245 eBirders who have visited Adams County and documented more than 374 species in 85 hotspot areas around the County.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid, Table 14, page 138

¹⁰ eBird, Adams County profile page (accessed 20.13.2020)

Table 26: Activities and Participation in North Central Colorado Region

POPULARITY	ACTIVITY GROUP	ACTIVITIES IN GROUP	PARTICIPATION (THOUSANDS)
1	Trail/Road	Walking, Jogging/Running (outdoors), Hiking/Backpacking, Horseback riding, Road biking, Mountain biking, Off-highway vehicle (OHV) or 4-wheeling/motorcycling	1,706
2	Other Outdoor	Developed/RV camping, Tent camping, Picnicking, Target or skeet shooting, Rock climbing, Team or individual sports (outdoors), Playground activities	1,238
3	Wildlife-related	Hunting, Fishing, Ice fishing, Bird Watching, Wildlife viewing (excluding bird watching)	759
4	Water-based	Swimming (outdoors), Power boating, Water/Jet skiing, Sailing, Canoeing/Kayaking, Whitewater rafting, Stand up paddle-boarding	676
5	Winter	Skiing (alpine/tele)/snowboarding, Sledding/tubing, Snowmobiling, Snowshoeing or cross-country skiing	481

Source: 2019 Colorado SCORP

Adams County is one of the top ten counties in the state for hunting (#6), generating \$32,169 in economic output, and supporting 344 jobs.¹¹ Annually, approximately 4,481 people participate in big game hunting, 3,561 in small game hunting, and 7,089 in hunting waterfowl.¹²

Local Sport and Market Potential

Walking for exercise is the number one activity in Adams County according to ESRI Business Analyst Sports + Leisure Market Potential Report and Recreation Expenditures Report by County 2019.¹³ Though not as popular within the county compared to the nation, more than 82,000 individuals participate in walking for exercise, or nearly 16 percent of the population. The other activities that many adults participate in are swimming, jogging/running, camping, and hiking. Nevertheless, not all these activities have participation rates higher than the national average. Categorizing these activities by general sports, fitness, and outdoor activities shows how general sports in Adams County are more popular than the national average and thus hold a greater potential for residents to actively participate in them. Other significant activities worth highlighting for having a higher participation rate than the national average are volleyball, Zumba, football, soccer, baseball, and

11 Colorado's 2019 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), Table 8, page 122
12 Ibid, Table 17, page 141
13 ESRI Business Analyst Sports + Leisure Market Potential Report & Recreation Expenditures Report (created 05.14.2020)

mountain biking. The staff of Adams County also noted an increase of interest over the past five years in pickleball, futsal, and soccer.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RECREATION

The outdoor recreation industry is a major economic engine for Colorado. In 2017, it generated over \$62 billion in economic output, over \$35 billion in GDP (10 percent of the total state GDP), and \$9.4 billion in tax revenue (local, state, and federal). The North Central region contributed a significant portion of that – its economic output was \$13.8 billion, it added \$7.5 billion to the GDP, and it generated \$2 billion in tax revenue.¹⁴ According to the Outdoor Industry Association, national consumer spending on outdoor recreation increased by 37% between 2011 and 2016.

Outdoor recreation is a significant job creator in Colorado, providing more jobs than construction and manufacturing combined.¹⁵ An estimated 511,000 jobs, or 18.7 percent of all jobs in the state, are outdoor recreation-related; 119,958 of those jobs are in the North Central region.¹⁶

Coloradans spent over \$36.8 billion on trips and equipment for outdoor recreation in 2017, and \$9.6 billion of that was spent in the North Central region.¹⁷ The majority of spending

14 Ibid, page 111
15 Ibid, page 119
16 Ibid, page 119
17 Ibid, page 116

on equipment in this region was for walking (\$1.3 billion), followed by hiking/backpacking (\$900 million) and playground activities (\$546 million).¹⁸ This differs markedly from how recreation dollars were spent statewide, where residents and nonresidents alike spent the most dollars on skiing and snowboarding, spending \$9.3 billion in 2017. Statewide, residents alone spent \$4.9 billion on skiing and snowboarding, \$2.9 billion on hiking/backpacking, \$2.1 billion on tent camping, \$1.8 billion on RV camping/cabins, and \$1 billion on wildlife viewing.¹⁹

SCORP also includes a study conducted by Southwick Associates for Colorado Parks and Wildlife that estimates the economic contributions of outdoor recreational activity in Colorado during 2017. The North Central region that Adams County and six other counties are a part of is the 2nd largest beneficiary of the regions in every economic category listed.²⁰ The economic output associated with outdoor recreation in this region is estimated at \$13.85 billion dollars, contributing \$7.5 billion dollars to the Gross Domestic Product of seven counties.²¹ The economic activity generated from outdoor recreation supports 120,000 jobs in the region and 511,000 in the state. This translates to 18.7% of the entire labor force in

18 Table 13Ibid, page 137
19 Ibid, Table 16, page 140
20 Ibid, page 111
21 Ibid, page 111

Colorado who are receiving \$21.4 billion dollars in salaries and wages.²²

DEMOGRAPHICS AND RECREATIONAL TRENDS

Adams County is socially and culturally diverse and, as the research into demographics reveals, economically diverse, as well. Additionally, the County is fast-growing – the State Demographer forecasts that the County will grow by 21.4% over the next ten years, which is faster than the national average. The age group expected to grow the most in that time is 65 years and older.²³ The County also has a larger portion of children (less than 14 years of age) than the State average, representing 23% of the population and can be attributed to a larger number of young families. Currently, population growth seems to be concentrated in specific areas of the County – on the western edge bordering Denver County and other urban centers. What can be gleaned from all this anticipated growth and demographic variety is that Adams County will have to devise targeted strategies to meet the needs of all its open space user groups who enjoy getting outside and using the parks and trails close to home.

The Physical Activity Council's 2020 annual study for sports, fitness, and recreation participation shows that fitness, outdoor, and individual sports have the highest participation rates

22 Ibid, page 111
23 ESRI Business Analyst Sports + Leisure Market Potential Report & Recreation Expenditures Report (created 05.14.2020)

among Americans for the past six years at rates reaching 67.3%, 50.7%, and 45% respectively. Nevertheless, when broken down by generation, a significant difference is noticed in how popular team sports are among Gen Z (people less than 20-years-old) and Millennials (people between 20 to 40 years of age) where it reaches a participation rate of almost 56.3% and 27.2% respectively. There is a significant difference between these numbers and the 12% and 4.3% of Gen X (people between 40 and 55 years of age) and Boomers (people ages 56 to 75). When asked about which activities they most interested yet do not participate in, younger individuals (ages six to 24) predominantly chose fishing and camping. People 45 and older expressed more interest in bicycling and swimming for fitness as well. This information is very critical in understanding and translating Adams County's large young and elderly populations' outdoor and recreation needs. The report also shows how inactivity is reversely proportional to income with individuals making under \$25,000 showing an inactivity rate as high as 45.6%. Fishing and camping where the two activities people of lower income expressed most interest in compared to bicycling and swimming for fitness on the other side of the spectrum. This should influence the County's decisions towards facilitating access to recreational opportunities to lower income communities and allocating different offerings in a more reasonable manner.

Youth and Recreation Trends

According to a National Study: Project Play. State of Play 2020 Trends in Youth Play Report, the most popular sports among youth that agencies indicated were among their Top Five where, Basketball (85% included it within their top 5), Baseball/Softball (81%), Soccer (73%), Football (58%), and Volleyball (34%).²⁴ In 2018, 15.7% of children between 6 and 12 participated in Bicycling on a regular basis. Other activities with high participation rates on a regular basis were Basketball (14.1%), Baseball (13.6%), and Soccer 7.4%.²⁵ Soccer participation continues to decline nationally, while the other most popular sports for kids ages 6 to 12 either grew participation in 2018 (baseball) or only slightly decreased (basketball). While noting the decline in soccer on a national level, Adams County continues to experience interest and growth in the sport, especially amongst its Hispanic population.

However, in recent years, there has been a sharp decline in the number of children playing team sports. Only 38% of kids ages 6 to 12 played team or individual sports on a regular basis in 2018, down from 45% in 2008, according to data from the Sports and Fitness Industry Association.²⁶ According to the National Survey of Children's Health, only 24% of youth ages 6 to 17 engage in at least 60

²⁴ National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). 2020 Youth Sports at Park and Recreation Agencies
²⁵ Ibid
²⁶ Ibid

minutes of physical activity per day, down from 30% a decade earlier. Boys (28%) are more likely than girls (20%) to meet this daily physical activity recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to data presented by the Aspen Institute, lacrosse is growing in popularity among children. Between the 14 team sports that were evaluated by the Sports and Fitness Industry Association in 2018, lacrosse had the highest percentage of newcomers and return participants (54.9%) among kids ages 6 to 12. Lacrosse is taking steps to promote multisport sampling. Even as the sport had lost 36% of its players from 2017, it remained with a net gain of 18.9% which was higher than any other sport, surpassing track and field (16.4%) and wrestling (10.8%).²⁷

Equal Access to Recreation

Equity is at the heart of access to youth sports. National Studies demonstrate that gender, household formation and income correlate with the likelihood (and level) of children's engagement with organized sports, what sports they may play and how long they engage in those activities. In fact, 42% of lower-income families cited cost as the reason their children do not play sports.²⁸

Unfortunately, across the nation there are significant disparities in who has access to youth sports opportunities,

²⁷ The Aspen Institute - Project Play. State of Play 2020 Trends in Youth Play Report
²⁸ Ibid

both in terms of proximity to sports fields and courts and the ability to afford registration fees. Kids from lower-income homes face increasing participation barriers. In 2018, 21.6% of children ages six to twelve in households with incomes under \$25,000 played sports on a regular basis, compared to 42.7% of kids from homes earning \$100,000 or more. Kids from the lowest-income homes are more than three times as likely to be physically inactive. There is even greater concern over how this difference between households of the lowest and highest income has grown by 140% between 2012 and 2018 showing an even greater challenge to equal access to recreational opportunities.²⁹

RECREATION CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Outdoor recreation is a continually growing sector in Colorado that touches many other business sectors. It is very much a part of the state's identity and culture, and the foundation for its economic stability and growth. Given how vital outdoor recreation is to Colorado's identity and continued economic prosperity, SCORP identifies the state's top four priorities for outdoor recreation to ensure that it continues to grow successfully.³⁰ Those priorities are: sustainable access and opportunity, stewardship, conservation and funding.

²⁹ Ibid
³⁰ Ibid, pages 5-7

SCORP also details the top three conditions that are negatively impacting parks and open spaces across the state, hindering participation in outdoor recreation. These are: limited time, traffic congestion and overcrowding. Other factors that may be considered include the stability of housing and the ability for individuals and families to earn a living wage. SCORP suggests addressing these hindrances through strategic management, long-term planning, and maintenance of existing infrastructure and trail networks.³¹ The following section highlights how some of these statewide challenges and opportunities apply to Adams County, and also highlights some particular to this place.

Demographic Opportunities

While there are challenges for outdoor recreation, there are also trends that point to opportunities. SCORP identifies some of these. In the last few years, there has been a rapid increase in the 65 years and older population in Colorado and throughout the United States. Even in Adams County, the 65+ age group accounts for 11.3% and is expected to grow the fastest of any age segment, accounting for 12.4% of the population by 2025. This large increase will impact how parks and recreation facilities are programmed in the future. People over the age of 65 tend to gravitate toward opportunities for socialization and serving their larger communities.

³¹ Ibid, page 4

Focusing on providing recreational and outdoor opportunities for these residents, especially to help them stay healthy and active, has the potential to infuse parks and open spaces with dedicated participants who can help teach the next generations how to be good stewards of our public spaces. Localities throughout Colorado have seen the sport of Pickleball begin to fill a need for active recreation within the senior populations. Pickleball is an easy to learn activity that encourages player socialization, physical health, and improved hand-eye coordination.

In addition, Adams County is home to a growing number of young families, with children under the age of 14 years representing 23 percent of the population (above the State average of 18.1%), and millennial adults between the ages of 25 and 44 accounting for the largest segment of the county population at 31.3 percent.

The fact that in the last 12 months, more than 70,000 adults in Adams County were expected to spend a certain amount of money on sports and recreation equipment provides an opportunity to continue to educate residents and visitors on the importance of these spaces, encouraging volunteer and conservation efforts, and providing opportunities for people to spend even more time outdoors. Utilizing public/private partnerships to support and enhance outdoor recreation is another opportunity to provide a safety net when and if one type of

Table 27: Residents' Expenditure on Sports/Recreation Equipment in the last 12 months since they took the survey

SPENDING RANGE	EXPECTED # OF ADULTS	PERCENT	MPI
\$1-99	21,718	5.8%	99
\$100-\$249	21,441	5.7%	102
\$250+	27,253	7.3%	99

Source: ESRI Business Analyst Sports + Leisure Market Potential Report and Recreation Expenditures Report

funding for parks and open spaces might not be available.

The economic findings of spending in the future 2024-2028 SCORP may show a dramatically different reality and projection of spending based on the unanticipated outcomes of COVID-19, with more people spending time recreating close to home, but also taking up new recreational pursuits or upgrading existing ones. For example, bicycle sales and repairs to older bicycles soared in 2020, which is not represented in the data reported.

The Impact of COVID-19

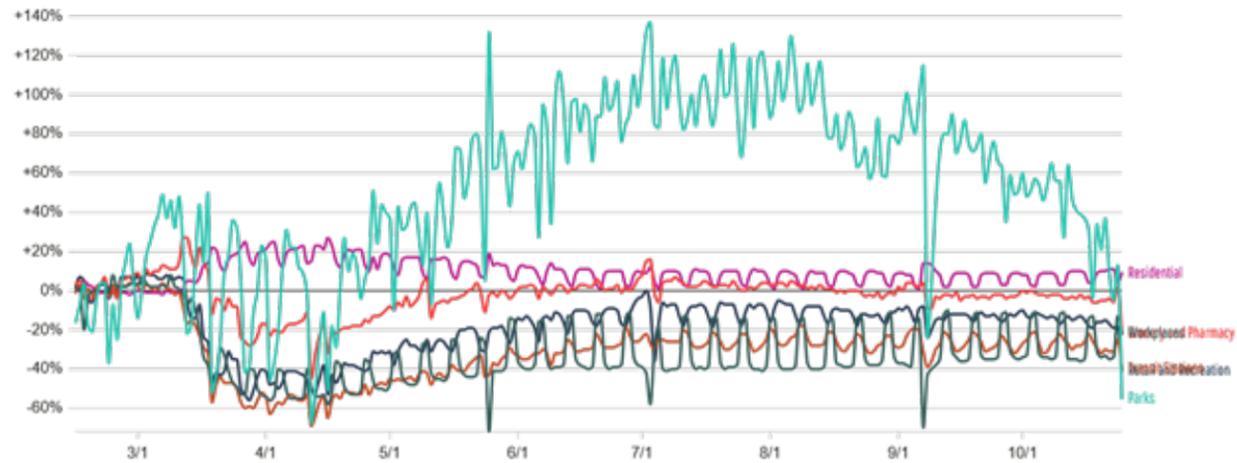
The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will have a lasting impact on people and how they have come to rely heavily on close-to-home access to nature and outdoor recreation, and there will be an on-going evolution of understanding the impact and impression of the virus on the public as it relates to public spaces. Parks and trails act as critical infrastructure to the public, serving physical, mental, and emotional needs, and as such, opportunities for the County exist for public services. Opportunities to respond to the lingering affects of the pandemic include:

- flexible, adaptive and expansive outdoor spaces for classes and programming that cannot safely be provided indoors;
- trails to fill gaps in public transportation;
- addressing overcrowding by expanding resources in high demand areas and raising awareness of and spreading the love to less popular locations;
- distanced activities and addressing social isolation for vulnerable populations; and
- youth being disconnected from sports and athletics, fear in managing physical interactions in youth sports, and underserved populations facing the inability to 'pay-to-play'.

Figure 58 shows movement trends throughout Colorado from March 1 to October 1, 2020. It shows that parks have experienced the most significant change in movement trends than categories such as retail, recreation, groceries and pharmacies, transit stations, workplaces, and residential.

The Sports and Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) survey of membership in June of 2020 showed that 72% of respondents expect individual sports and 66% anticipate outdoor sports to be the two top product categories to return to health post-COVID-19. Only 37% of respondents anticipate that the

Figure 59: COVID-19 Community Mobility Report for the State of Colorado (March – October 2020)



Source: Google LLC "Google COVID-19 Community Mobility Reports"

return of youth sports will return in 2021 or later.³² The NRPA Youth Sports at Park and Recreation Agencies report also stated that 90% of park and recreation professionals report that the pandemic had a significant detrimental impact on their agencies' youth sports programming during the summer and fall of 2020.³³

RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

Trends in Priorities

Adams County will also be taking cues from SCORP and identify its own priorities for outdoor recreation, potentially aligning with the state's goals. A SCORP survey requested outdoor recreation agencies/ organizations to rank priorities for

³² Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA). COVID-19 Industry Impact Report June 2020 Results
³³ National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). 2020 Youth Sports at Park and Recreation Agencies.

the future. More than half (56%) of respondents listed expanding community trail systems as an important priority and 49% identified connecting regional trail systems. Developing neighborhood, community or special use parks or facilities was of importance to a slightly lesser percentage (43%).

The variety of densities in the County may warrant different standards of park and open space access. In the urbanized western areas of the County, residents would ideally be within a walkable distance, 1/4 mile or (5-minute walk) from a neighborhood park or a 1/2 mile (10-minute walk) from a community or regional park. In the rural agricultural areas of the central and eastern County, land-use patterns do not support comparable standards for access to parks. In the central area along the I-70 corridor, a standard of living within one mile of

a park may be a more realistic goal for rural communities. Park service areas should be linked to densities, as different neighborhoods call for different standards for access to parks and open space.

In order to meet recreation demands, key partnerships with municipal agencies and special district providers, such as Hyland Hills, may be able to support increased access to recreation facilities and offer programming.

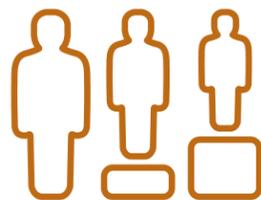
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND TRAILS

The existing conditions evaluated within this report point to a range of opportunities for more exploration in the second phase of the master plan process along with identification of strategies and actions. The summary of issues and influences that follows is organized according to the Core Value Lenses of Equity, Sustainability, and Livability.

EQUITY

Equity: Equity is just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. Equitable park offerings means "ensuring everyone receives the appropriate investment for where they are", understanding that "some communities need more investment

EQUITY



Equity: Just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

Figure 60: Equity Value Lens

because they have historically been underserved" (NRPA 2020 equity definition). The opportunity exists throughout this master plan to establish diverse spaces for outdoor recreation, community gathering, connectivity, and experiences in nature. One way to address this is to critically consider the service gaps indicated in this study, recognizing that groups that have been traditionally underserved include racial and ethnic minorities, low-income populations, teenage girls and young women, and seniors. The master plan presents an opportunity to plan for locating future parks to be within a reasonable walking distance of residents.

Another opportunity to address equity is considering how parks are to be inclusive and welcoming to all. This brings up a key issue of unsheltered people experiencing homelessness for Adams County to consider best management methods for open spaces, parks and trails.

HOMELESSNESS

Understanding what homelessness is and who experiences it is key to understanding the issue and the role of parks and recreation providers. Someone experiencing homelessness is someone without stable housing and can be an individual or a family. Homelessness is related to other societal issues like income inequality, the lack of affordable housing, and barriers to accessing mental health care. Homelessness is incredibly complex and there are many paths

into homelessness, including personal, structural, and societal constraints.

Homelessness is an issue that can only be mitigated when involving a range of stakeholders, which oftentimes includes park and recreation agencies. Adams County has several organizations, initiatives, and resources in place that assist homeless individuals and those who are at risk of becoming homeless. Under the Department of Community Safety and Wellbeing (CSWB), the County has five programs in place to reduce poverty and homelessness, these are the Adams County Day Works, Homelessness Outreach, Mobile Shower and Mobile Laundry Services, Point-in-Time (PIT) Count, and Severe Weather Activation Plan (SWAP). The Parks, Open Space & Cultural Arts Department of the County works to help individuals experiencing homelessness get connected to the resources of CSWB. They do this through the ranger program, which supports outreach and first contact with individuals within the county's park, open space and trail system.

The Parks, Open Space, and Trails Master Plan along with supporting management plans, regulations, site plans and policies can address questions such as:

- What can be done to increase visitation to park, open space and trail assets by everyone to build civic trust?
- How can the departments support inclusion and create opportunities for social connections among diverse groups?

- How can parks departments link unsheltered populations to services and avoid the type of enforcement mitigation of displacement and loss of possessions that has proven to complicate and exacerbate poverty and health conditions?
- How to reduce discomfort some people feel from viewing the circumstances of unhoused individuals that may cause them to be dissatisfied with a space or not visit it? What physical characteristics would reduce association with high-risk environments?
- What actions can be taken to discourage and respond to behavior that is anti-social unsafe, or a criminal act? How maintenance standards can be upheld?

Homelessness in Parks

Adams County, like many localities, has rules and regulations surrounding camping or trespassing in parks and open spaces, assembly, obstructing passage, storing personal property in public spaces, and solicitation. The County's Parks, Open Space and Trail Rules and Regulations includes different sections that effect homeless individuals seeking to find shelter in these spaces. These include limiting hours of operation, limiting parking and overnight camping, and rules for resource protection that make it unlawful to tamper with natural and man-made objects. There are also rules prohibiting open fires, possessing glass containers, and littering and dumping.

Within Adams County and the region, coordinated and thoughtful enforcement approaches are needed

as a management tool. Various law enforcement groups, impact teams, and agencies all may play a role of enforcement, and ensuring they all are following the same protocols or set of policies is critical in addressing homelessness as a regional issue. Enforcement policies and methods must consider how criminalization of homelessness exacerbates the situation because it does not help the condition of those experiencing homelessness or get them better access to services.

The Adams County Parks, Open Space, and Cultural Arts Department recently enacted a ranger program to provide visitor safety and resource protection, education and interpretation amongst the county's park, open space and trail resources.

Understanding Encampments

Encampment is a term used to describe the cluster of informal dwellings of homeless individuals. Encampments can be found in different locations and can take up many forms. They can be tent cities, homeless settlements, or homeless camps; and they can be located under freeways, in parks, open spaces, sidewalks, and even trails. These spaces can become a real and perceived hurdle not only for the people dwelling in them but for the context and community around them.

In Denver, two homeless sites (at the National Western Complex and the Denver Coliseum) have been

created as other homeless areas have been swept from within the city. Adams County has been challenged by homeless individuals taking shelter within the Clear Creek and South Platte River corridors. These locations offer well-connected trail infrastructure for the homeless population, but they have initiated conflicts with concerned neighbors and residents about safety. In addition, floodplains are generally not safe locations for displaced individuals to inhabit. The hazards of floods are dangerous to life and property within these zones, and disease, contamination and unsanitary conditions are also proliferated during flood events.

As park agencies plan for management of open spaces, they need to pre-emptively design for the potential of a homeless population moving in and establishing camping sites. No agency wants to see their new project or restoration work immediately damaged, particularly before ecological establishment.

The Costs of Not Taking Action

It is critical that parks and recreation providers take a problem-solving approach to homelessness and work as part of a collaborative response to this issue. Parks and recreation providers need to focus on community education, training, design of their assets and working with service providers.

SUSTAINABILITY

Sustainability: By committing to improved internal operations and property maintenance methods (i.e. efficient irrigation, water-wise landscapes) as well as conservation and enhancement of natural resources, sustainability will be part of Adams County's identity.

SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Adams County has the opportunity to lead in environmentally sustainable practices through its operations and maintenance approaches to parks, open spaces and trail resources. The County is currently undertaking a sustainability audit and plan creation for their internal operations. Areas to address environmental sustainability for parks, open space, and trails include water conservation, green infrastructure and energy conservation.

SUSTAINABILITY



Sustainability: The practice of creating and maintaining conditions to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability to meet the same needs elsewhere or in the future.

Figure 61: Sustainability Value Lens

Water conservation can occur in daily facility operations. Irrigation technology such as centralized control systems that monitor weather conditions and evapotranspiration rates applied broadly can reduce the use of water throughout the county's park assets. Reducing the use of potable water in irrigation use also supports this goal. Utilizing and understanding native plant communities and landscape typologies can help build resilient landscapes that are native appropriate for the Colorado climate. Green infrastructure provides a network of resilient landscape strategies utilizing vegetation, soils, stormwater management, and other elements to protect water quality and build healthy environments.

Energy conservation can be expressed through renewable energy sources, upgrades to energy efficient fixtures, LED lighting retrofits, and automation controls, to name a few. The Parks, Open Space and Cultural Arts department can consider utilizing electric vehicles amongst their maintenance fleet. Building practices can be evaluated for efficiencies, including water serving and energy conserving fixtures and equipment. Facilities can consider means for waste reduction.

Other critical areas of this plan inherently address sustainability. Increasing connectivity through trails assists the county in meeting sustainability goals by providing alternatives to single occupancy

vehicles. Focusing on the protection and conservation of critical ecologically important lands, as well as agricultural lands, contribute to protecting the county's delicate ecosystems, local food sources, and help in building resilient landscapes in the face of natural disasters or events. Open Spaces are also a place to encourage green renewable energy production when impacts to wildlife, scenic views, and other ecological functions is avoided.

The Sustainable Adams County 2030 Plan outlines the county's adopted philosophies towards sustainability, placing equal value and importance on environmental protection, social responsibility, and fiscal management.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Understanding the extent and potential magnitude of climate change impacts provides the County with future-thinking opportunities to plan for and make reasonable decisions in both adapting to and mitigating these climate impacts. Adapting to these impacts will involve specific planning for unavoidable impacts and the flexibility to anticipate responses to a range of potential outcomes. The mitigation role involves focusing on reducing impacts on future climate change that are within the control of the County.

Colorado Climate Impacts

Climate change in Colorado is likely to be characterized primarily by increased heat, which has multiple

environmental consequences, both directly and indirectly. Earlier spring runoff, increased drought, more extreme weather events, and increased heat waves are all projected for Colorado as a state and will all come into play in Adams County. Indirect impacts of climate change are likely to exacerbate the negative impacts of other trends such as overconsumption of resources, wildfire fuel loading due to forest management decisions, and air quality degradation from industry and transportation.

In addition to drought, climate change in Adams County will exacerbate the impacts of discrete extreme weather events such as wildfires and flooding. While wildfire risks are generally low in Adams County, there are areas of higher fire risk generally concentrated around the more urbanized parts of the County that may see those risks increase with higher temperatures and less summertime precipitation. With the increase in extreme precipitation events anticipated over time, there is a correlated increased risk of flooding.

Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies to Tackle Climate Change

To plan for Climate Change in Adams County most effectively, a dual focused approach is needed. Anticipating the coming climate changes will allow the County to prioritize applicable adaptation strategies to ensure community

members are able to continue to enjoy a high quality of life as environmental challenges are magnified. At the same time, by recognizing the impacts of high versus low emissions scenarios, Adams County can take steps to reduce the future impacts by focusing on greenhouse gas emissions reduction mitigation strategies and other practical measures to minimize negative impacts proactively. Cooperative growth also puts a clear emphasis on similar values of environmental stewardship, regional cooperation, increased green spaces and increased conservation of resources that will help the county trend towards a more sustainable future. The County can address climate change through land use strategies and through the built environment it manages.

The Adams County Parks, Open Space and Cultural Arts Department can help to mitigate climate change in the following ways:

LAND USE STRATEGIES

- Be proactive in fire planning amongst county-owned resources.
- Be proactive in flood prone areas to minimize risks to the community.
- Actively encourage more green space and drought tolerant shade plantings to combat increased temperatures.
- Coordinate with agricultural providers on land use accommodations that can help them adapt to anticipated changes in the climate.
- Water conservation measures can be employed at various scales, from xeriscaping requirements to

the application of plantings used on county-owned properties.

- Support local agriculture by addressing regulatory barriers to allow more crops for local consumption. This will build resilience, decrease emissions, and provide more connections of community members to their sustenance.
- Ensure there are no land use restrictions to allow both agriculture and renewable energy, for solar often referred to as agrivoltaics, would enable additional income streams and capitalize on Adams County's solar resources and agricultural heritage.
- Support electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure within County-owned parking lots.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Consider third-party certification such as LEED, Envision, the Living Building Challenge, WELL, or SITES to encourage projects that meet sustainability goals.
- Employ green infrastructure and Low Impact Development (LID) strategies that can manage stormwater effectively while creating more natural spaces and allowing more water to be treated on site rather than collecting with other water and increasing runoff.
- Water conservation techniques, from smart irrigation to low water use fixtures, can ensure water is available more broadly and enable better performance in a water constrained future.
- Include requirements for light colored roofs and using light colored materials for hardscapes in projects to help reflect the additional heat from these surfaces back into the atmosphere and reduce the urban heat island effect.

- Due to the increasing renewable fuel content of electric energy generation, switch to electric power sources amongst fleet vehicles and equipment to reduce long term emissions.
- Encourage or require renewable energy, either on site or via certified offsets to reach certain carbon targets.

WATER RESOURCES PROTECTION

Water resource protection is important in Adams County for providing critical wildlife habitats, maintaining a balanced stormwater runoff system at a regional scale, buffering development impacts, and protecting floodplains for flood control.

Waterways provide opportunities for public use and experiences. The South Platte River and Clear Creek Corridors represent two significant waterways in the county. They provide diverse ecological systems and critical wildlife habitat, scenic amenities, recreational and mobility assets, and opportunities for economic development and restoration. This plan will outline ways to protect water resources, limit excessive water use, and implement low-water landscaping opportunities. This theme ties back to the Comprehensive Plan and the Sustainable Adams County 2030 Plan. The Comprehensive Plan outlines the possibility of a county-wide Water Plan that would address how water is used and planned for on a regional scale. This water resource planning should occur at regular intervals to

be kept up-to-date with changes in the overall system, not irregularly and infrequently as has been the case in the past.

LIVABILITY

Livability: Parks, open space and trails are major contributors to the quality of life in Adams County, and livability is enhanced through provision of these places within close proximity and easy access to where people live, work, and go to school. This plan will help to further enhance livability through the thoughtful integration of artful placemaking strategies, cultural events/programs and parks design best practices that celebrate the culture of Adams County and further contribute to livability.

ARTS, CULTURE, EVENTS AND PROGRAMS

Adams County is dedicated to the growth and evolution of the arts in its communities with a vision to be an inclusive community where everyone can enjoy a rich diversity of arts and cultural experiences. The opportunity exists to integrate arts and culture into all aspects of parks, open space and trail planning. In doing so, citizens feel connected and included in public spaces, a sense of place is defined, amenities are visually attractive, and experiences that are offered are diverse and build community - all contributing to the overall quality of life.

Community-based arts and events foster a sense of respect and caring

for public spaces. Diversity can be celebrated through performance, food, visual arts, and cultural events. The annual County Fair is one example of an event that brings together the regional community and celebrates the unique qualities and the rich heritage of the county. The County can support more outdoor recreation programming, cultural events, and naturalist programming, and look for ways to disperse this type of activity throughout the county geography.

DIVERSE RECREATION NEEDS

Special opportunities and challenges exist within the county for outdoor recreation. The county is culturally and linguistically diverse, and residents are enthusiastic about outdoor recreation in many forms. The senior population desires outdoor experiences that go beyond walking, while youth are looking for specialized play experiences including connecting with nature and inclusive and accessible environments. Self-directed recreation is increasing in popularity. Nature based activities such as birdwatching, fishing, and nature exploration are seeing an increase in participation. Trails and regional connections are critical to the population for both recreation and transportation. Some of the unique opportunities that exist in the County include expanding agritourism, particularly in the Historic Splendid Valley, and offering a quintessential “Colorado Experience,” close to home by connecting people to lakes, rivers and nature. A goal identified in this plan is to ensure

residents have close access to places for recreation, to help in the connection of the population to health, fitness, and nature experiences.

FOOD ACCESS AND AGRICULTURAL SUPPORT

Agriculture has historically been an economic staple for the County and provides the rural atmosphere character that residents associate with. Utilizing open space funds to preserve working farms, ranches and agrarian lands is critical in both preserving this rural character and traditions of the county, but it is also important in filling gaps in food access that may exist for some populations. The Historic Splendid Valley planning work has set up a framework for highlighting some of the county’s agricultural resources. The County endeavors to promote and support the local food economy through strengthening the public’s awareness of the local food system, educating

LIVABILITY



Livability: sum of the factors that add up to a community’s quality of life — including the built and natural environments, economic prosperity, social stability and equity, educational opportunity, and cultural, entertainment and recreation possibilities.

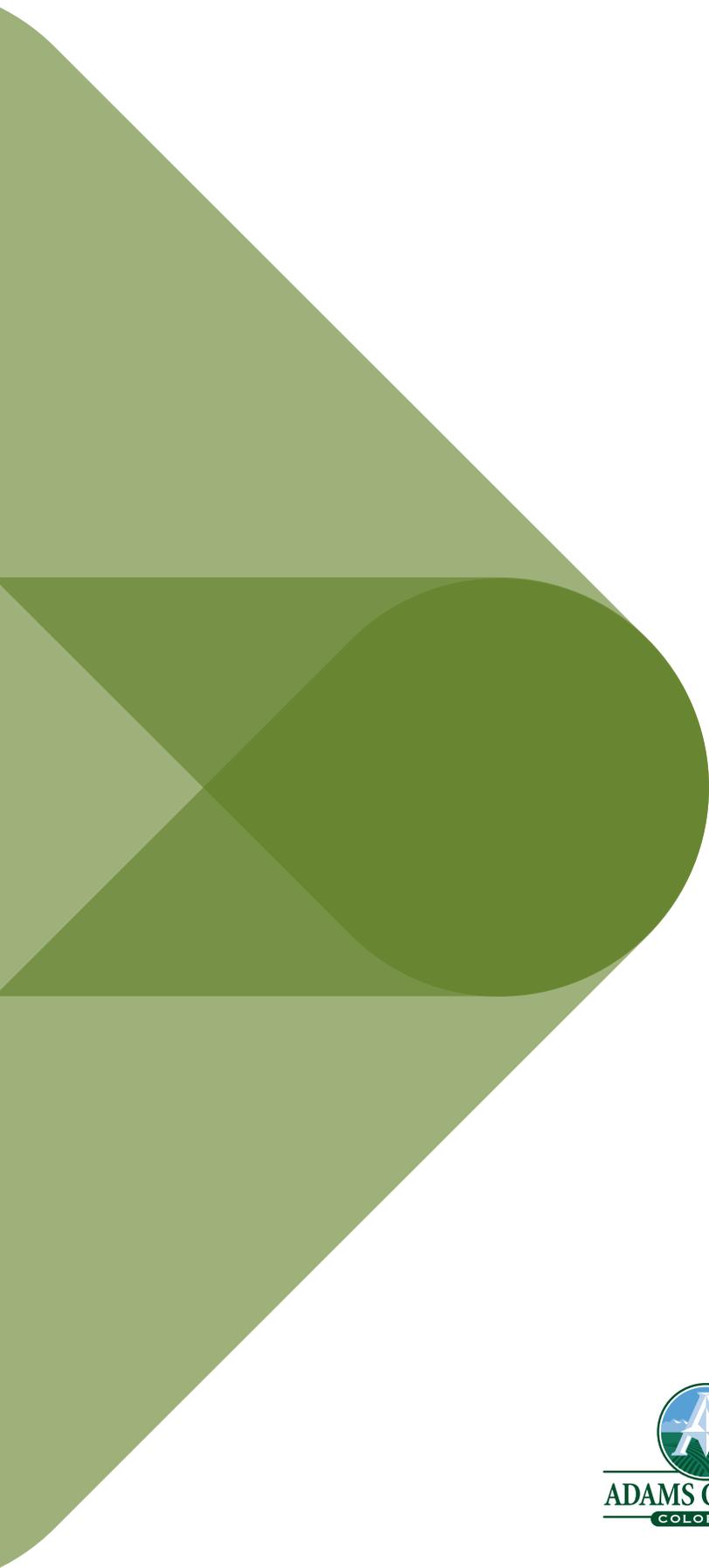
Figure 62: Livability Value Lens



youth, and celebrating the county's rich heritage and resources.

REGIONALISM

Collaboration across the regional landscape that Adams County sits within is important to furthering objectives within this master plan. Working with local agencies, adjacent counties, and regional entities creates a cooperative setting for which to support big visions, programming and budgetary efficiencies, environmental stewardship, and connect trail corridors. Existing efforts include the South Platte River Coalition, Clear Creek Coalition, E-470 Trail connection planning, and considerations for connecting Riverdale Regional Park to the National Western with a multi-purpose trail that supports equestrian use.



ADVANCING **ADAMS**
PLANNING FOR A SHARED FUTURE

