

RECREATION, OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS ELEMENT GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND POLICIES

GOAL R-1: DEVELOP A RECREATION, OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS SYSTEM AS AN INTEGRAL COMPONENT OF AN OVERALL, COUNTY-WIDE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY.

Objective R-1.1: Walton County shall provide ecotourism attractor facilities for permanent and seasonal residents.

Policy R-1.1.1: Walton County shall seek support from citizens', environmental and ecotourism groups in the designation, acquisition, and maintenance of county parks, recreational facilities, and state greenway systems.

Policy R-1.1.2: The Tourist Development Council shall target a marketing effort to support green/sustainable tourism project and programs.

Policy R-1.1.3: Walton County shall coordinate with the Tourist Development Council and the Walton County Chamber of Commerce to promote the area's rare natural resources recreational opportunities, and historical attributes to attract eco-tourists while benefiting economic development.

Policy 1.1.4: Walton County through partnership with the Tourist Development Council shall provide, maintain, and improve existing beach access, coastal dune lake access, and Choctawhatchee River and Bay System access, and boat launching facilities for all visitors and residents of Walton County. These facilities will be identified and mapped in a Geographic Information System (GIS) supporting the comprehensive plan.

GOAL R-2: PROVIDE AN ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL SYSTEM THAT MEETS THE NEEDS OF PERMANENT AND SEASONAL RESIDENTS OF WALTON COUNTY.

Objective R-2.1: Ensure that parks and recreation facilities are provided.

Policy R-2.1.1: Walton County shall acquire open space, natural areas, parks and recreational facilities through local, regional and state funding programs and where appropriate, partner with public / private organizations for such acquisitions.

Policy R-2.1.2: Walton County and the Tourist Development Council shall coordinate to improve existing deficiencies in parks and recreational facilities.

Policy R-2.1.3: Walton County shall establish alliances and partnerships with a variety of public and private entities such as Walton County School Board, municipalities, natural resource organizations and park management agencies to meet Walton County's recreational demand.

Policy R-2.1.4: Walton County shall continue the acquisition of beach and shoreline access through fee simple purchase and the recreational land dedication provisions of the Land Development Code.

Policy R-2.1.5: The Tourist Development Council shall continue its program of beachfront access and park development, including the construction of parking facilities.

Policy R-2.1.6: Walton County, in coordination with the Tourist Development Council and private groups shall explore opportunities for a beach jitney/trolley to provide access to the beaches, especially along CR30-A.

Policy R-2.1.7: Design standards for development of new recreation sites and redevelopment of existing recreation sites shall be consistent with applicable local, regional, state, and federal codes.

Policy R-2.1.8: Walton County shall continue to explore funding sources for recreation.

Policy R-2.1.9: Walton County shall continue to require developers to dedicate a minimum of 5% of the gross area of a residential development or mixed use development with a residential component for public recreation purposes, which may include public beach access ways. Developers shall have the option of providing land off-site that is of similar value that is usable for park and recreational facility development and that is located within a one mile radius of the proposed development. Alternatively, the developer of a residential development or mixed use development with a residential component shall pay cash in an amount equal to 6% of the assessed land value, as provided by the Walton County Property Appraiser, of the unimproved land.

Policy R-2.1.10: The level of service for recreation shall be composed of a “core system” of parklands, with a minimum of 6.25 acres of recreation and open space per 1,000 population. More specific requirements as addressed to specific locations, population centers, and needs of age groups inhabiting those population centers will be addressed in the design standards to be developed and included in the Land Development Code.

Policy R-2.1.11: Walton County shall make parks a part of community design through its Land Development Code. Parks shall connect to multi-use paths and greenways with mandatory linkage in development if bikeways and greenways exist.

Policy R-2.1.12 Walton County shall annually designate target areas that are deficient in recreational opportunities.

Policy R-2.1.13: Walton County shall coordinate with the Tourist Development Council, municipalities, and the Walton County School Board to solicit input regarding recreational needs of visitors and residents of Walton County, in order to target funding for the recreational facilities development and construction.

Policy R-2.1.14 Community parks shall be located to serve several neighborhoods or a village, and they should link to a greenway or other open space, if applicable.

Policy R-2.1.15: Walton County shall prioritize use of the parkland dedication funds to encourage and facilitate the development of community parks within the County.

GOAL R-3: ESTABLISH A PERMANENT OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAY SYSTEM AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO COMPLEMENT THE NATURAL RECREATIONAL FEATURES OF WALTON COUNTY.

Objective R-3.1: Walton County shall provide for a permanent open space and greenways system.

Policy R-3.1.1: Walton County shall support an acquisition and disposition strategy that creates permanent open space, recreation, and greenway areas.

Policy R-3.1.2: Walton County shall seek state, federal and private funding to improve recreational facilities and acquire recreational and conservation lands within the greenway system.

Policy R-3.1.3: Walton County shall permit neighborhood, village, and town center developments adjacent to the established open space and greenway system utilizing urban planning principles.

Policy R-3.1.4: Walton County shall identify greenway systems and ecological corridors necessary to support ecotourism, environmental education, recreational opportunities, and habitat protection in a Geographic Information System (GIS) database.

Policy R-3.1.5: The Walton County Land Development Code (LDC) shall contain innovative provision for greenways and trails, including but not limited to authorization for density bonuses in exchange for the public dedication of greenway corridors in a GIS-based map.

Policy R-3.1.6: Walton County shall seek to establish and/or maintain greenway systems in South Walton through a north/south connection between the Gulf and Bay for wildlife and recreational purposes; and an east/west connection between Topsail Hill and the State Forest south of US 98 to provide habitat and resource protection and promote environmental education through partnership with appropriate agencies.

Policy R-3.1.7: Walton County shall seek public input regarding the greenway development, and the protection of greenways by stakeholders, through Walton County’s website and long range planning programs.

Policy R-3.1.8: Walton County shall promote, participate, and coordinate with the Florida Greenways and Trails Council in its efforts to create a statewide network of greenways.

Policy R-3.1.9: Walton County shall promote preservation of greenways and ecological corridors to facilitate wildlife movement and protect designated Strategic Habitat Conservation Areas as designated by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC).

Policy R-3.1.10: Walton County shall support limited land clearing for the purpose of passive recreation and access ways for maintenance, preservation and restoration of native vegetation in established greenways.

Policy R-3.1.11: Walton County shall work with public land managers, historians, and citizens in developing signs to aid interpretation of the greenway’s historic and natural sites and to provide continuity along the greenway.

Policy R-3.1.12 Walton County shall continue to evaluate and pursue acquisition of any State lands that are deemed surplus lands that would enhance and further the goals of connecting public or privately owned greenway corridors.

Policy R-3.1.13: Walton County shall investigate alternative methods of acquisition and grant programs in an effort to assist the State in connecting the greenways and trails.

Policy R-3.1.14: Walton County shall coordinate with the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NFWFMD) to use mitigation alternatives to conserve the greenways.

Policy R-3.1.15: Walton County shall work with the Walton County School Board and others to incorporate into local education programs an environmental natural resources component outlining the importance of conserving greenways as opportunities arise.

Policy R-3.1.16: Walton County shall work with state and federal natural resource management agencies utilizing the South Walton Trust Plan in planning, designating, acquiring, and developing enhancements to the existing greenway system in Walton County.

Policy R-3.1.17: Walton County shall pursue connection of existing dedicated open space areas, trails, pedestrian pathways and, where appropriate, utility corridors to form a greenway system.

Policy R-3.1.18: The following uses shall be specifically allowed within the linked open space system, consistent with other provisions of the comprehensive plan:

- a. Wetlands
- b. Wetland mitigation
- c. Stormwater retention/detention
- d. Passive recreation
- e. Greenways
- f. Wildlife corridors
- g. Floodplains
- h. Coastal Dune lakes;
- i. Karst Springs
- j. River and bay systems
- k. Steephead Ravines

Objective R-3.2: Establish linked recreation, open space, and greenway system as development occurs throughout Walton County.

Policy R-3.2.1: Walton County shall encourage the linkage of public and private greenways and open space through site plan review and approval.

Policy R-3.2.2: Walton County's Land Development Code shall require and encourage creation of linked systems which provide environmental protection, open space, recreation space, and special ambience while ensuring that the natural environment is preserved, enhanced and made usable for the natural and man-made environment. The surface water buffers, protection zones, habitat and vegetative communities shall be interconnected both within development sites and between adjacent properties, as well as public and private conservation lands, in order to create linked systems. The dimensions of these connections shall be sufficient to facilitate the movement of affected wildlife species to the maximum extent possible.

Policy R-3.2.3: Where applicable, all developments in Walton County shall conform to a linked open space system consisting of the wetlands and uplands including a connected bikeway/pedestrian system. Bicycle or pedestrian facilities that are dedicated for public use shall be required within the linked open space system, both within and between development projects, except where it is determined by a wildlife biologist that such activity would cause significant harm to the protection of listed species. These bicycle and pedestrian facilities shall be linked to the greenway system and to public conservation and recreation lands, wherever feasible.

Policy R-3.2.4: Walton County will continue, through the development review process, to require the developers to provide reasonably convenient access from all occupied structures to common open spaces to preserve valuable site amenities such as dunes, natural land forms, and beach access.

Policy R-3.2.5: Walton County shall coordinate with the State to utilize the State Forest lands and park holdings as a core open space system oriented toward resource protection.

Objective R-3.3: Functional wildlife corridors shall be retained where practicable for those species occurring in reasonably sustainable populations.

Policy R-3.3.1: Walton County shall request state and federal resource management agencies to conduct an Urban Wildlife Survey to assess the functional assistance needed in the area. This survey and its recommendations will be considered during construction of private and public development. Creation of functional habitat through vegetative buffering and protected greenways that would assist in sustainability of the species will be used for mitigation as preferred alternative to area-based mitigation efforts.

Policy R-3.3.2: Walton County shall coordinate with regional, state, and military agencies to implement strategies that support the retention of any identified crossing points for wildlife corridors and investigate the best possible manner to ensure their functionality.

Policy R-3.3.3: Wildlife crossings within public rights-of-way for species of primary management interest shall be identified in the Walton County GIS as it comes available.

Policy 3.3.4: Three primary habitat patterns should have protective priority:

1. The high-dry longleaf pine/turkey oak habitat;
2. An area along the beach dune line paralleling the coast; and
3. A corridor along the stream lines and associated wetlands and floodplains, which generally run north-south. The stream line corridor should include the stream, the associated shrubby-brushy area adjacent to the stream line and a strip of the upland that is amenable to easy fire management. The widths of these stream line corridors should be evaluated based on the studies of wetland and surface water buffer zones that have been prepared by National Wetlands Inventory.