Parks and Recreation

This chapter discusses parks and recreation resources with a focus on locally owned parks. The chapter includes a review of typical impacts due to growth. It also includes an analysis of park-to-resident ratios and population and employment proximity to parks and general qualitative analysis of park maintenance, use, and development issues. Some summary highlights are noted below regarding how these resources could serve and be impacted by the growth distribution alternatives.

Privately owned open space and environmentally critical areas are also discussed in several other chapters, including Chapter 5.2 – Land Use and Chapter 5.5 – Ecosystems.

5.8.1 Affected Environment

There are many parks, open spaces and recreational facilities throughout the four-county area, reflecting the diverse range of landforms, ecology, land use, and culture found in the region. These resources are in both private and public ownership, with public resources being operated by local, county, state, and federal agencies. Open space is a broad term used to define different types of privately and publicly owned lands that include environmentally critical areas such as steep slopes, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas, lakes and streams, designated parks and trails, and natural resource lands such as agriculture and forestlands.

A. PHYSICAL SETTING

Local Parks

Local parks consist of parks, trails and greenways, public school, college, and university campuses and facilities, and public rights-of-way alongside streets, roads, and highways.

Local parks are used primarily by people who live relatively close to them, but they can also serve as regional attractions. They are owned and managed by towns, cities, counties, metropolitan parks districts, and Native American tribes. Local parks are diverse in both size and uses, ranging from small urban parks, called “mini parks” or “pocket parks” (like Bergen Park in Seattle’s Ballard neighborhood), to mid-size neighborhood parks (such as Evergreen Park on Bremerton’s waterfront), to athletic field complexes (like Everett’s Kasch Memorial Park), to regionally significant community parks (such as Tacoma’s Point Defiance Park). They are used mostly during the daytime and generally
accommodate both passive uses such as strolling and picnicking, as well as active uses such as sports fields, play areas, water access, jogging, biking, and skating. Local park resources also include arboretums, zoos, and aquariums, which often draw people from a much larger area. Some parks with sports facilities are used at night as well, particularly in communities where demand is high. Local parks may also serve as natural area set-asides, protecting sensitive natural resources, and they may have meeting spaces and facilities for education and the arts.

**Trails and greenways** provide transportation and recreation uses for nonmotorized uses, including walking, jogging, bicycling, horseback riding, and skating. They are owned and managed by local, state, and federal agencies. Trails can be designed and designated for specific uses such as pedestrian-only trails with gravel surfacing, or serve as shared-use paths. The region contains many examples of highly popular trails, such as the Interurban Trail linking Pierce, King, and Snohomish counties, King County’s Burke-Gilman/Sammamish River Trail system, and Kitsap County’s Mosquito Fleet Trail. Greenways are open space corridors that link parks, natural areas, and recreation facilities to form a cohesive open space system. They typically include trails or shared-use paths that provide safe and efficient nonmotorized movement between outdoor recreation facilities. They often include and emphasize the natural environment.

**Public school, college, and university campuses and facilities** often provide open space and athletic fields that are available for use by the general public. These may be the only such facilities in some areas, and they play an important role in communities, especially where organized sports are a central part of social life. The often extensive campuses of institutions like community colleges and state universities are well-used by local residents looking for passive open space activities like strolling, jogging, or dog walking.

**Streets, roads, and highways** also provide for recreational opportunities like sightseeing, pleasure driving, bicycling, jogging, strolling, and skating. An increasing number of the region’s streets and roads have been designed or rebuilt to provide safe and pleasant environments for non-motorized transportation and recreation. These are the most common recreational activities in the region.

**Major Public Lands**

Major public lands provide publicly-owned and operated facilities for parks and recreation uses, as described below:

**National Parks** are owned and managed by the United States Department of the Interior. They are created to protect natural, historic, and cultural features while allowing public access and interpretation. Mt. Rainier National Park, located primarily in Pierce County, is the most notable National Park Service facility in the area. National Parks are also found in urban areas, such as the Klondike Gold Rush unit in Seattle, an example of an interpretive facility that tells the story of a specific event with historical importance.

**National Forest Lands** are operated by the United States Department of Agriculture and managed to accommodate a broad range of uses that include not only recreation, but also grazing, logging, mining, watershed protection, and preservation of wilderness. Recreational uses include camping, hiking, fishing, horseback riding, off-road vehicle use, boating, swimming, and wildlife observation. Ski areas and snow parks are among the only National Forest recreational activities that include developed recreational facilities.

**National Wildlife Refuges** are managed by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as areas for wildlife conservation. Recreation activities are allowed in refuges where compatible with conservation and include hunting, fishing, and lodging. Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge, partially in Pierce County, is a notable example of these facilities.

**State Parks** are operated by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission. They include a broad range of facilities, mostly consisting of lands with natural resources, along with lands with historic or cultural features. Facilities include campgrounds, picnic and day use areas, shoreline access and boat launches, trails, protected natural areas, commemorative sites, and sites with historic structures.

**State Wildlife Recreation Lands** are managed by the Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, primarily for hunting and fishing. They provide many opportunities for water access and are the largest provider of “put ins” for boats on trailers.
State Trust Lands are owned by Washington state and managed as natural resource lands by the Department of Natural Resources to generate income for education. While the primary use of these lands is the active production and harvest of timber and other natural resources, recreational activities are allowed as long as they do not detract from the lands’ primary purpose and uses. Recreational activities include hiking, biking, and off-road vehicle use. These lands provide recreational opportunities that are similar to those in National Forest lands, but they are generally located closer to towns and cities and are more accessible as a result.

Private Facilities

Privately owned and managed recreational resources range broadly from small “mom and pop” businesses to not-for-profit access to the extensive lands of timber companies and farmers. These include community swimming pools, golf courses, water parks, gyms and sports clubs, marinas, cemeteries, firing ranges, zoos, and aquariums, among other facilities. They accommodate a diverse variety of resources and activities, including fishing, hunting, horseback riding, hiking, swimming, golf, skiing, team sports, and off-road vehicle use. There are also several reserves or estates such as the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island (150 acres) and Lakewold Gardens Estate (10 acres) in Lakewood that include historic properties and landscaped grounds that are open to the public.

B. REGULATORY SETTING

Under the Washington State Growth Management Act, comprehensive plans in Washington state must have a parks element. This requirement was added to the Growth Management Act in 2002, although the requirement depends on state funding and so has not fully taken effect. Nonetheless, many jurisdictions in the region already have a parks element within their adopted plans. Parks elements usually include estimates of demand for a 10-year period, an evaluation of facility and service needs, and an evaluation of opportunities to meet demand, including regional approaches.

Other regulations apply to parks as well, but generally are designed to protect parks from impacts from other actions, such as major transportation corridor improvements.

C. A PRELIMINARY REGIONAL INVENTORY

In order to better understand the extent and nature of the region’s existing publicly owned parks and open spaces, in 2001 PSRC developed a preliminary geographic information system (GIS) database of regional parks and open space (PSRC, 2005). The database was created by identifying Major Public Lands (DNR, 1997) within the region, and by compiling an inventory of parks and open space in local government ownership. The database includes Major Public Lands and Local Parks, as described above under Physical Setting.

Locally-Owned Facilities

Locally-owned facilities consist of a combination of community, neighborhood and some regional facilities, depending on ownership, function and size. For example, locally-owned facilities include both small neighborhood parks owned by individual cities, as well as larger county-owned parks intended for wider regional use. The PSRC Parks and Open Space database contains approximately 104,000 acres of locally-owned and managed neighborhood, community and regional parks and open spaces, which are widely distributed in King, Kitsap, Pierce and Snohomish counties. These are dispersed throughout the region. However, in general they tend to be either inside or close to the region’s urban growth area.

Major Public Lands

Major public lands represent approximately 40 percent of the land within the central Puget Sound region — or just under 2,500 of the region’s approximately 6,300 square miles. Major public lands are by definition regional in nature, and are generally accessible to regional residents within a drive of one to two hours. Many major public lands facilities provide significant opportunities for both passive and active recreation for the region’s residents.
The central Puget Sound region has a significant amount of major public lands that also provide recreational and other opportunities that are located in close proximity to the region’s residents — this is a highly unique recreational asset for which the region is internationally known. These major public lands are generally located outside of designated urban growth areas and are located in the eastern portion of the region and include U.S. National parks, forest service lands, wilderness areas, state parks, lands owned by the State Department of Natural Resources, and other publicly-owned resources.

- **Acres of local parks and residential population in base year 2000**
  
  Available planning guidelines suggest that roughly 25 to 30 acres of local facilities should be available for every 1,000 residents, although other factors can be considered in determining parks needs. Using the region’s year 2000 base population of 3,276,000, at the regional level this amounts to approximately 32 acres of local parks for every 1,000 people. The following figure illustrates the amount of parks and recreation resources in the region as of the year 2000 and estimates the number of acres per 1,000 residents.

**FIGURE 5-8-1: PARKS AND RECREATION RESOURCES IN THE CENTRAL PUGET SOUND REGION**

Source: Puget Sound Regional Council
However, at the local and subregional level, the amount of locally-owned parks and open space available to residents varies significantly in the region.

— **King County**’s 1,737,000 residents in the year 2000 had access to approximately 66,000 acres of locally-owned neighborhood, community, and regional parks and open space, or just under 38 acres per 1,000 residents.

— **Kitsap County**’s 232,000 residents had access to approximately 19,000 acres, or about 80 acres per 1,000 residents.

— **Pierce County**’s 700,800 residents shared approximately 6,000 local park acres, or about 8 acres per 1,000 residents.

— **Snohomish County**’s 606,000 residents had access to approximately 14,000 acres of local parks, or about 23 acres per 1,000 residents.

This rough assessment of the local neighborhood, community and regional park inventory would suggest that while King and Kitsap county residents currently have access to an adequate amount of parks and open space, Pierce and Snohomish county residents may not. Note: this analysis focuses on local parks. Were major public lands included, these determinations would change (in some cases, they would change significantly). Nonetheless, the analysis provides a useful assessment of parks near residents.

**Access to local parks in base year 2000**

In order to assess access to parks and recreation facilities under the alternatives, PSRC analyzed the amount of the region’s existing population (using the 2000 Base Year data) that were within a quarter-mile distance of existing locally-owned parks. This method did not attempt to calculate access to the regional facilities contained in the major public lands portion of the database. As these major resources are largely outside the urban growth area, accessibility was assumed to be the same for each alternative. The following figure illustrates the current population and employment that is located within ¼ mile of these facilities.
5.8.2 Analysis of Alternatives (Long-Term Impacts)

A. IMPACTS COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

All of the alternatives will distribute growth in ways that would affect access and use of parks, open spaces, and recreational facilities. Affects on existing local recreational resources generated by population increases would primarily relate to demand. Parks would experience additional use, and in some locations users might experience crowding. There would be a higher demand for jurisdictions to develop, operate and maintain new facilities and recreational programs, which would increase capital expenses. There could also be increased conflicts between different types of recreational users, degradation of natural resources, displacement of undeveloped open space, and diminished convenience of access.

Acres of Parks Per Residential Population

The definition of the alternatives did not include the identification of additional new locally-owned parks and open spaces facilities. Considering the current amount of parks and open space facilities in local ownership, and the addition of approximately 1.7 million additional people and 1.2 million jobs to the region between 2000 and 2040, it is expected that total acres of locally-owned neighborhood, community and regional parks and open spaces per 1,000 residents in the year 2040 will be reduced unless new parks are added. The following figure shows the amount of parks available per 1,000 residents for all of the alternatives.

**FIGURE 5-8-4: CONCEPTUAL ESTIMATE OF ACRES OF LOCALLY-OWNED PARKS AND OPEN SPACES PER 1,000 RESIDENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Base Year 2000</th>
<th>Preferred Growth Alternative</th>
<th>Growth Targets Extended Alternative</th>
<th>Metropolitan Cities Alternative</th>
<th>Larger Cities Alternative</th>
<th>Smaller Cities Alternative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>King</td>
<td>65,500</td>
<td>1,737,000</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2,461,000</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2,440,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitsap</td>
<td>18,700</td>
<td>232,000</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>381,000</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>386,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pierce</td>
<td>5,800</td>
<td>701,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1,094,000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1,097,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snohomish</td>
<td>14,100</td>
<td>606,000</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,052,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1,065,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Region</td>
<td>104,100</td>
<td>3,276,000</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4,988,000</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4,988,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Totals may not sum consistently due to rounding. Source: PSRC Parks and Open Space Database, 2001

With an increase in regional population of approximately 1.7 million residents by the year 2040 in all the alternatives, the regional ratio of acres of locally-owned parks per 1,000 residents drops from 32 in the year 2000 to 21 in the year 2040. Under the different alternatives, the distribution of growth affects the amount of available parkland at the subregional level. Facilities in Pierce and Snohomish counties would appear to be put under particular strain from increased demand. In any alternative, additional park and open space facilities could be needed in these counties.

Access to Local Parks

To generally compare the alternatives in terms of the ease of access to existing local parks and open space for future populations, PSRC considered the potential for each alternative to distribute population and employment within ¼ mile of local parks and open space facilities using the Parks and Open Space database. PSRC calculated the number of regional residents and jobs in each alternative that would be expected to have access to existing locally-owned resources. This method did not attempt to calculate access to the regional facilities contained in the major public lands portion of the database. As these major resources are largely outside the urban growth area, accessibility was assumed to be the same for each alternative.
B. ANALYSIS OF EACH ALTERNATIVE

Preferred Growth Alternative

In the Preferred Growth Alternative, the metropolitan cities are envisioned to accommodate 32 percent of regional population growth and 42 percent of regional employment growth, which could result in higher activity levels in existing parks and recreational facilities, as well as increased demand for new facilities and programs. Growth would also be distributed to unincorporated urban and rural areas, but at levels lower than under existing plans (the Growth Targets Extended Alternative).

Acres of Parks Per Residential Population

Planning guidelines suggest that roughly 25 to 30 acres of local facilities should be available for every 1,000 residents. The following list details available park acreage by county in 2000 and 2040.

- **King County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 38 acres in 2000 to 27 acres in 2040, at the midpoint of the standard recommended range.
- **Kitsap County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 81 acres in 2000 to 49 acres in 2040, still above the suggested standard. This was the alternative with the lowest ratio for Kitsap County.
- **Pierce County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 8 acres in 2000 to 5 acres in 2040, well below the recommended range.
- **Snohomish County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 23 acres in 2000 to 13 in 2040, below the recommended range.

Access to Local Parks

At the regional level in 2040, approximately 3,927,000 residents and jobs in the Preferred Growth Alternative would be likely to be located within ¼ mile of an existing local park or other open space contained in the Regional Council Regional Open Space Database. This compares to 2,574,000 residents and jobs in the year 2000.

- **King County.** Approximately 2,682,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Kitsap County.** Approximately 170,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Pierce County.** Approximately 511,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Snohomish County.** Approximately 564,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
**Impacts**

Parks and recreation facilities of metropolitan cities in particular would likely experience a higher level of use (and at levels higher than under current plans) that could affect the quality of the average visitor’s experience, unless these cities expand programs or facilities. Increased use of more developed urban open spaces such as green streets, boulevards, plazas, and squares, created as part of infill and redevelopment projects, could also help serve additional demand. Greater numbers of users could also increase the scope and budget of parks and recreation facilities. Increased use of existing facilities might result in conflicts between user types, such as joggers and bicyclists or boaters and wildlife watchers, or between organized sports and other uses. Some of the likely increased demand for parks, recreation, and open space in the Preferred Growth Alternative could be addressed by acquiring land and developing it into a variety of new local facilities, including neighborhood mini parks or larger community facilities.

Core cities are envisioned to receive 21 percent of the region’s population growth and 29 percent of the region’s employment growth under the Preferred Growth Alternative. Increased use could negatively affect some visitors’ experiences in parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces. However, land in these regional geographies could still be relatively available, and the inventory of existing parks, trails, sports fields, and open space in these cities could be expanded to accommodate the growing population. Significant levels of planning and funding would be required to design and construct these new facilities and to ensure that maintenance keeps pace with increasing use.

Growth in larger cities, under the Preferred Growth Alternative, would be moderate, but at slightly higher levels than under Growth Targets Extended. Parks and recreational facilities in the larger cities would likely experience increased use, but existing and planned facilities could probably absorb this growth to the extent that it would not significantly affect the quality of the average user’s experience.

Unincorporated urban growth areas are estimated to receive 21 percent of the region’s forecasted population growth and 9 percent under the Preferred Growth Alternative. Typically, these geographies have few local parks, but rather rely on schools for sports fields and county, state, and private lands, as well as facilities in neighboring suburban cities, for other types of outdoor recreation. The levels of growth could increase demand for the development of new neighborhood parks and athletic complexes. While land for these facilities could be available, it could place additional pressure on counties to develop, operate, and maintain these facilities. This would represent a reversal of current trends, which show that a lack of county resources available for parks have led county governments to increasingly rely on local jurisdictions for the provision, operation, and maintenance of local parks and recreational facilities.

In addition, growth in unincorporated urban growth areas would likely increase the use of parks and facilities operated and maintained by neighboring jurisdictions. While these jurisdictions may be able to satisfy demand, residents living in unincorporated areas will not contribute to the local taxes generated for operation and maintenance. Outdoor recreation that relies on access to relatively undeveloped or undisturbed natural areas might be affected by displacement of these resources, and increased population could cause a higher level of use that might impact the quality of some visitors’ experiences. Conversely, others might enjoy the increased activity.

The Preferred Growth Alternative represents the middle of the range of the alternatives in terms of overall growth in rural and unincorporated urban growth areas. For both areas, the majority of the growth is population. In some rural areas increased demand on existing facilities might exceed their capacity. Increased demand could be addressed by developing additional facilities, presumably to be administered by the counties. This would represent a reversal of current trends, which show that current resources have forced county governments to increasingly rely on local governments for the provision, operation and maintenance of local parks and recreational facilities.

**Growth Targets Extended Alternative**

Metropolitan cities are envisioned to accommodate 25 percent of regional population growth and 45 percent of regional employment growth in Growth Targets Extended, which would result in higher activity levels in existing parks and recreational facilities, as well as increased demand for new facilities and programs. A substantial amount of growth would also be directed to unincorporated urban growth and rural areas.

**Acres of Parks Per Residential Population**

Planning guidelines suggest that roughly 25 to 30 acres of local facilities should be available for every 1,000 residents. The following list details available park acreage by county in 2000 and 2040.
• **King County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 38 acres in 2000 to 27 acres in 2040, at the midpoint of the standard recommended range.

• **Kitsap County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 81 acres in 2000 to 48 acres in 2040, still above the suggested standard. This was the alternative with the lowest ratio for Kitsap County

• **Pierce County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 8 acres in 2000 to 5 acres in 2040, well below the recommended range.

• **Snohomish County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 23 acres in 2000 to 13 in 2040, below the recommended range.

**Access to Local Parks**

At the regional level in 2040, approximately 4,032,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended would be likely to be located within ¼ mile of an existing local park or other open space contained in the PSRC Regional Open Space Database. This compares to 2,574,000 residents and jobs in the year 2000.

• **King County.** Approximately 2,826,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

• **Kitsap County.** Approximately 179,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

• **Pierce County.** Approximately 474,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

• **Snohomish County.** Approximately 553,000 residents and jobs in Growth Targets Extended could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

**Impacts**

Parks and recreation facilities of metropolitan cities in particular would likely experience a higher level of use that could affect the quality of the average visitor’s experience, unless these areas expand programs or facilities. Increased use of more developed urban open spaces such as green streets, boulevards, plazas, and squares, created as part of infill and redevelopment projects, would also help serve additional demand. Greater numbers of users would also increase the scope and budget of parks and recreation facilities. Increased use of existing facilities might result in conflicts between user types, such as joggers and bicyclists or boaters and wildlife watchers, or between organized sports and other uses. Some of the likely increased demand for parks, recreation, and open space in Growth Targets Extended could be addressed by acquiring land and developing it into a variety of new local facilities, including neighborhood mini parks or larger community facilities.

In Growth Targets Extended, population growth in suburban geographies would be moderate. Parks and recreational facilities in suburban cities would likely experience increased use, but existing and planned facilities would probably absorb this growth to the extent that it would not significantly affect the quality of the average user’s experience.

Unincorporated urban growth areas are predicted to receive 24 percent of the region’s forecasted population growth under Growth Targets Extended. Typically, these geographies have few local parks, but rather rely on schools for sports fields and county, state, and private lands, as well as facilities in neighboring suburban cities, for other types of outdoor recreation. The predicted level of growth would increase demand for the development of new neighborhood parks and athletic complexes. While land for these facilities would be available, it would place additional pressure on counties to develop, operate, and maintain these facilities. This would represent a reversal of current trends, which show that a lack of county resources available for parks have led county governments to increasingly rely on local jurisdictions for the provision, operation, and maintenance of local parks and recreational facilities.

In addition, growth in unincorporated urban growth areas would likely increase the use of parks and facilities operated and maintained by neighboring incorporated jurisdictions. While these jurisdictions may be able to satisfy demand, residents living in unincorporated areas will not contribute to the local taxes generated for operation and maintenance. Outdoor recreation that relies on access to relatively undeveloped or undisturbed natural areas might be affected by displacement of these resources, and increased population could cause a higher level of use that might impact the quality of some visitors’ experiences. Conversely, others might enjoy the increased activity.
Growth Targets Extended represents the second largest amount of overall rural area growth (the highest for population), and the second highest amount of growth in unincorporated urban growth areas (with the majority being population). In some rural areas increased demand on existing facilities might exceed their capacity. Increased demand could be addressed by developing additional facilities, presumably to be administered by the counties. This would represent a reversal of current trends, which show that current resources have forced county governments to increasingly rely on local governments for the provision, operation and maintenance of local parks and recreational facilities.

**METROPOLITAN CITIES ALTERNATIVE**

In the Metropolitan Cities Alternative, the metropolitan cities of Seattle, Tacoma, Bellevue, Everett, and Bremerton are envisioned to receive 40 percent of forecast regional population growth, along with 45 percent of forecast regional employment growth. The region’s core cities are envisioned to receive 25 percent of forecast regional population growth and 30 percent of forecast regional employment growth.

**Acres of Parks Per Residential Population**

- **King County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents would fall from 38 acres in 2000 to 24 acres in 2040, just under the standard recommended range. This was the alternative with the lowest ratio for King County.

- **Kitsap County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from 81 acres in 2000 to 57 acres in 2040, still above the suggested standard. This was the alternative with the highest ratio for Kitsap County.

- **Pierce County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from 8 acres in 2000 to 6 acres in 2040. This was the alternative with the highest ratio for Pierce County.

- **Snohomish County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from 23 acres in 2000 to 16 acres in 2040. This was the alternative with the highest ratio for Snohomish County.

**Access to Local Parks**

At the regional level in 2040, approximately 4,180,000 residents in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space. This compares to 2,574,000 residents and jobs in the year 2000.

- **King County.** Approximately 2,960,000 residents and jobs in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Kitsap County.** Approximately 169,000 residents and jobs in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Pierce County.** Approximately 479,000 residents and jobs in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Snohomish County.** Approximately 571,000 residents and jobs in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

**Impacts**

The effects of increased growth in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative would largely be of the same type described under Growth Targets Extended and to some extent the Preferred growth Alternative, however, the level of impact would be greater in the region’s metropolitan cities (and to some extent also in core cities) and reduced in unincorporated urban growth and rural areas.

Increased population would intensify competition for available open space land in metropolitan and core cities, making it less available and affordable for development as new neighborhood and community parks, athletic fields, and trails. Crowding in existing facilities might reduce the quality of visitor experience for some users, whereas others might enjoy the increased activity. Increased numbers of visitors would necessitate significant increases in planning and funding for capital projects and maintenance for both existing and new parks facilities. Conflicts between different types of recreation could become a serious source of friction between facility users. Demand for parking could be greater than the capacity of available land to accommodate it. Acquisition of land for public use, and provision of new parks and open spaces concurrent with large scale redevelopment and infill projects, would become increasingly important to maintain quality of life in densely developed urban areas. Linear urban parks, redeveloped boulevards and greenstreets,
public plazas and squares would be important parts of the parks system, but larger scale parks and recreational facilities would also be in high demand.

Core cities are envisioned to receive 25 percent of the region’s population growth and 30 percent of the region’s employment growth under the Metropolitan Cities Alternative. Increased use could negatively affect some visitors’ experiences in parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces. However, land in these geographies could still be relatively available, and the inventory of existing parks, trails, sports fields, and open space in these cities could be expanded to accommodate the growing population. Significant levels of planning and funding would be required to design and construct these new facilities and to ensure that maintenance keeps pace with increasing use.

Larger and small cities would experience moderate population increases under the Metropolitan Cities Alternative. Increased demand for parks and recreation facilities could likely be met by acquisition and development of relatively available and affordable land, financed by an expanded tax base from growing population and employment, or through developer contributions. As density of development increases in these geographies, privately owned open space would likely be displaced in some areas, altering the availability of outdoor recreation that requires undeveloped land or natural areas.

Unincorporated urban and suburban areas would see only modest population and employment increases under the Metropolitan Cities Alternative. Parks and recreation facilities would probably experience little or no effect from these changes.

**Larger Cities Alternative**

Larger and core cities are each envisioned to accommodate 30 percent of the region’s forecast 2040 population growth in the Larger Cities Alternative, along with 30 percent of the region’s employment growth.

**Acres of Parks Per Residential Population**

- **King County.** The ratio of parks to 1,000 residents falls from 38 acres in 2000 to 24 acres in 2040, just below the standard recommended range.

- **Kitsap County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from a regional high of 81 acres in 2000 to 56 acres in 2040, still above the suggested standard.

- **Pierce County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls well below the recommended range, from 8 acres in 2000 to 6 acres in 2040.

- **Snohomish County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls below the recommended range, from 23 acres in 2000 to 15 acres in 2040.

**Access to Local Parks**

At the regional level in 2040, approximately 4,216,000 residents and jobs in the Larger Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space. This compares to 2,574,000 residents and jobs in the year 2000.

- **King County.** Approximately 2,917,000 residents and jobs in the Larger Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Kitsap County.** Approximately 182,000 residents and jobs in the Larger Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Pierce County.** Approximately 472,000 residents and jobs in the Larger Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

- **Snohomish County.** Approximately 644,000 residents and jobs in the Larger Cities Alternative could be located within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
**Impacts**

Similar impacts to parks in core cities and higher impacts to larger cities would be expected as are described in the Metropolitan Cities Alternative. Increased population and employment levels would be accompanied by a corresponding demand for parks, sports fields, trails, natural areas, and water access where possible. Core and larger cities would need to respond to this demand by acquiring properties and planning, funding, and providing primarily neighborhood parks, community parks (where available land permits), and sports fields concurrent with new development. Even with these additions to the outdoor recreation facility inventory, impacts from the predicted growth in population may detract from the overall experience of some users, whereas others might enjoy the increased activity. Additionally, increasingly dense development may displace existing open space, diminishing recreational opportunities that require or benefit from undeveloped land or natural areas.

Effects to parks and recreation facilities in metropolitan cities in the Larger Cities Alternative would be similar to those described under Growth Targets Extended and to a lesser extent the Preferred Growth Alternative, and effects to resources in smaller cities, unincorporated urban growth areas, and rural areas would be similar to those described under the Metropolitan Cities Alternative.

**Smaller Cities Alternative**

Under this alternative, smaller cities and unincorporated urban growth areas are envisioned as accommodating 30 percent and 35 percent of the region’s population growth respectively, along with 30 and 35 percent of the region’s employment growth. Rural areas are allocated the most growth, and metropolitan, core, and larger cities the least growth, under this alternative.

**Acres of Parks Per Residential Population**

- **King County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from 38 acres in 2000 to 27 acres in 2040 at the midpoint of the standard recommended range. This was the alternative with the highest ratio for King County.
- **Kitsap County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls from a regional high of 81 acres in 2000 to 51 acres in 2040, still above the suggested standard.
- **Pierce County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls well below the recommended range, from 8 acres in 2000 to 5 acres in 2040. This was the alternative with the lowest ratio for Pierce County.
- **Snohomish County.** The ratio of parks per 1,000 residents falls below the recommended range, from 23 acres in 2000 to 13 acres in 2040. This was the alternative with the lowest ratio for Snohomish County.

**Access to Local Parks**

At the regional level in 2040, approximately 3,719,000 residents and jobs in the Smaller Cities Alternative would be projected to be within ¼ mile of a local park or other open spaces. This compares to 2,574,000 residents and jobs in the year 2000.

- **King County.** Approximately 2,483,000 residents and jobs in the Smaller Cities Alternative are projected to be within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Kitsap County.** Approximately 189,000 residents and jobs in the Smaller Cities Alternative are projected to be within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Pierce County.** Approximately 477,000 residents and jobs in the Smaller Cities Alternative are projected to be within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.
- **Snohomish County.** Approximately 569,000 residents and jobs in the Smaller Cities Alternative are projected to be within ¼ mile of a local park or other open space in 2040.

**Impacts**

Small cities are envisioned to accommodate 30 percent of the region’s population growth in the Smaller Cities Alternative. Today, these jurisdictions typically rely on schools for sports fields and on neighboring, larger cities and county, state, and private lands for other types of outdoor recreation. To accommodate the envisioned levels of growth, these geographies will need to acquire available property and plan, fund, and provide new neighborhood and community parks, trails, waterfront access where appropriate, and athletic complexes. Increased population in smaller incorporated jurisdictions would intensify competition for available undeveloped land in small cities, making it less available and affordable for development as new neighborhood and community parks, athletic fields, and trails. Increased demand for limited existing
facilities might cause overuse and reduce the quality of visitor experience for some users, whereas others might enjoy the increased activity.

Increased numbers of visitors would require significantly increased local resources to plan and fund capital projects, and to operate and maintain both existing and new parks facilities. Provision of new parks and open spaces concurrent with large scale redevelopment and infill projects would become increasingly important to maintain quality of life in more densely developed urban areas. Linear urban parks, redeveloped boulevards and greenstreets, and public plazas and squares would become even more important parts of the public realm used for both passive and active recreation. Because small cities currently have few developed recreational resources, these additions would be largely beneficial. However, outdoor recreation that relies on natural resources, such as undeveloped private land or undisturbed natural areas, may be affected by displacement of these resources by new land uses and higher levels of density.

Unincorporated urban growth areas are predicted to receive 35 percent of the region’s forecast population and employment growth under the Smaller Cities Alternative. As stated above, these geographies often do not have local parks, but rather rely on schools for sports fields and county, state, and private lands, as well as facilities in neighboring incorporated cities for other types of outdoor recreation. The envisioned level of growth would increase demand for the development of new neighborhood parks and athletic complexes. While land for these facilities would be available, it could place additional pressure on counties to develop, operate, and maintain these facilities. This would represent a reversal of current trends, which show that current resources have forced county governments to increasingly rely on local governments for the provision, operation, and maintenance of local parks and recreational facilities.

Growth in unincorporated urban growth areas would likely increase the use of parks and facilities operated and maintained by neighboring incorporated jurisdictions. While these jurisdictions may be able to satisfy demand, residents living in unincorporated areas typically do not contribute to the local taxes generated for operation and maintenance, and programs may need to be developed to address this interjurisdictional issue. Outdoor recreation that relies on access to relatively undeveloped or undisturbed natural areas may be affected by displacement of these resources. Because increased population brings a higher level of use, it might impact the quality of some visitors’ experiences.

Impacts to parks and open space facilities in rural areas in the Smaller Cities Alternative would be similar to those described in Growth Targets Extended and the Preferred Growth Alternative.

5.8.3 Cumulative Effects

As population and employment in the four-county area and beyond increases, the region would experience other changes to its overall physical and cultural environment. Some of these changes affecting parks and recreation would include related efforts for transportation, utilities, commercial development, planned communities, and changes in zoning. Other changes relate to trends in the way that people in the region live, work, and recreate. Demographics may change, and there will be other factors beyond just how many new residents join us over the next few decades, such as how close we live to our workplaces, and what we do with our spare time. Cumulative effects to parks could include the following:

- Population-generated increased levels of development may limit land available for development for recreation in some areas.
- Population growth may cause intense competition for available land, which could result in high land costs in some areas and make it difficult to develop sufficient park space to provide adequate levels of service.
- Infrastructure and facilities that serve growing populations (e.g., stormwater facilities, power and communication lines, sewer, water, gas lines) may intrude on existing or potential recreational lands.
- The increasing number of residents above the age of 65 with free time is expected to cause higher levels of park use or change the types of uses.
- Increased travel demand may increase travel time to regional recreational resources associated with major public lands and may require the development of alternate means for people to travel to these recreational facilities.
- Development of undeveloped open space and natural areas may impact wildlife habitat and plant communities at the heart of many recreational facilities.
- Development of rural areas may increase casual use in currently hard-to-reach state and federal lands or introduce recreational uses that conflict with current active natural resource uses.
- Increased development may conflict aesthetically with nearby existing open space and parks and recreational facilities.
5.8.4 Potential Mitigation Measures

Mitigation of the effects of population growth on parks and recreation could take many forms, ranging from high-level regional planning to techniques for improving the physical properties of specific parks resources. Measures could include the following:

- Develop level-of-service guidelines for parks and recreation facilities that help the region and its communities evaluate facility needs, determine land needs for recreation facilities, and relate recreational needs on a more regional level.
- Commit to planning, funding, and constructing recreational facilities to achieve high levels of access and quality of service.
- Develop a comprehensive program for acquiring land for public use that will meet the projected needs of growing populations. Site facilities, when possible, where they will be most valuable to the public.
- Adopt local development impact fees for parks as authorized under the state Growth Management Act.
- Commit funding for maintenance and enhancements of existing facilities.
- Adopt local park development, enhancement, and maintenance levies.
- Preserve and enhance access to and interpretation of natural features.
- Redevelop brownfield sites, closed mining sites, landfills, and inactive industrial areas as public recreation facilities.
- When developing new infrastructure and facilities that serve growing populations (e.g., stormwater facilities, power and communication lines, sewer, water, gas lines), explore the possibility of joint recreational use. Examples include use of utility rights of way as trails (Chief Sealth Trail) and seasonal stormwater detention ponds as dog parks.
- Ensure that neighborhood parks are located near the greatest number of people possible (e.g., some local jurisdictions have planning guidelines for park development that suggest a goal for locating parks within 1/2 mile of dense communities for ease of access and convenience of use).
- Include bike lanes, broad sidewalks, and shared-use paths in the comprehensive planning for new transportation and recreation development and redevelopment.
- Plan for and provide public transportation, sidewalks, and trails systems that enhance convenient access to recreational facilities.
- Provide incentives and ordinances that encourage private developers to provide active recreation and passive open space concurrent with development projects, along with safe and efficient nonmotorized connections between recreational resources.
- Plan recreational resources on a regional or statewide scale to provide a comprehensive understanding and approach to regional parks and recreation resources.
- Expand the use of joint operating agreements between schools and local jurisdictions.

5.8.5 Significant Unavoidable Adverse Impacts

Effects on recreational resources generated by population increases are many and varied and could include crowding, need for increased maintenance, increased capital expense, conflicts between different types of recreational users, degradation of natural resources, displacement of undeveloped open space, and diminished convenience of access. The intensity and distribution of these impacts at the local level would tend to correspond with population growth. Small increases could likely cause minor to moderate impacts, whereas higher levels of growth would be anticipated to cause more significant impacts.

Increased use of natural area resources could conflict with goals to preserve sensitive areas and natural resources. It is possible that more active use of existing facilities could act as a disincentive for recreation for some users. Increased demand for adequate parks and recreational facilities will place increased pressure on local governments to acquire additional financial and human resources to fund, plan, develop, maintain, and operate new and existing facilities.