

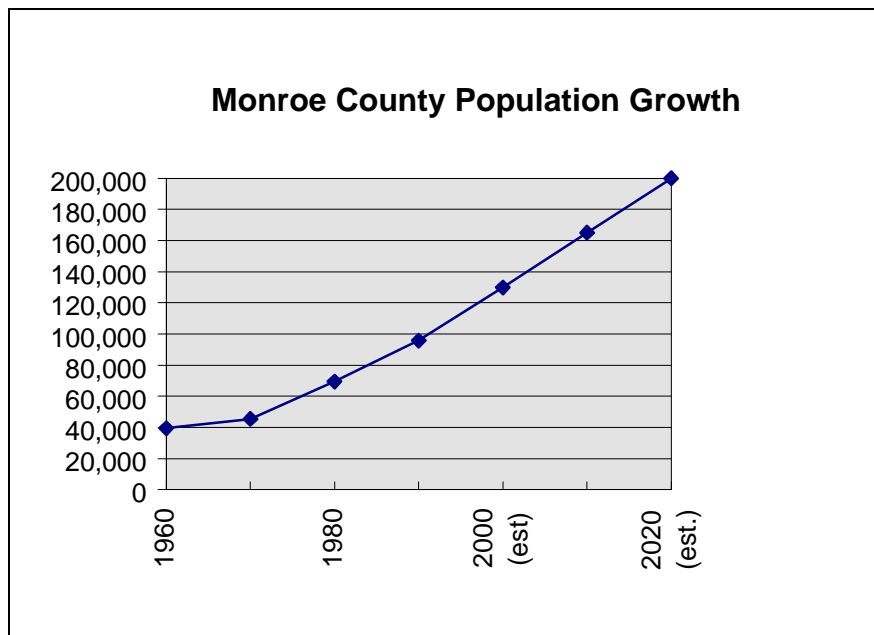
Chapter 2 – Needs Assessment

The People of Monroe County

Two broad areas served to guide the planning process: demographic trends and public opinion. This chapter presents information on the population and the public participation process.

Population

Population growth is the single most important aspect of demographic information about Monroe County. The following chart presents actual and estimated population from 1960 through 2020. Monroe 2020 states that an intermediate projection of 165,000 by 2010 and 200,000 by 2020 be used for planning purposes. In the next twenty years, Monroe County will receive about 70,000 new residents, an increase of more than 50 percent of the current population.



Sources: Monroe 2020, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Pennsylvania State Data Center

Demographics

Socio-economic characteristics have a direct effect on parks and recreation. Age, income, education, and family relationships are associated with recreation preferences and conservation. By looking at these characteristics, one can begin to

forecast recreation demand in the future. The following information about the population of Monroe County is from Monroe 2020, the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau, Monroe County School Districts, the Pennsylvania State Data Center, and the U.S. Census Bureau.

Population Profile

To help determine future recreation needs, the characteristics and anticipated changes in Monroe County's population were studied. The most important facts and trends include the following:

- Monroe County's population forecasts predict an increase from about 130,000 in 2000 to 177,000-220,000 by the year 2020: an increase of greater than 50 percent over the current population.
- The population of school-age children increased faster than the population as a whole in the 1990s, accounting for the large volume of school construction. Growth appears to have stabilized at about 6 percent annually.
- The population of those age 65 years and over increased at twice the rate of the statewide average during the 1980s. It is expected that the U.S. Census in 2000 will show an increase of 80 percent in this age group in the first decade of the millennium. This will increase the number of citizens over 65 from 13,571 in 1990 to 27,900 in 2010.
- The County is an attractive location for young families. The fastest growing population segments in the 1980s were children under 5 (66 percent) and people ages 25 to 44 (66 percent), indicating that families are moving in.
- There is a large influx of seasonal residents
- Resort communities are seeing a changeover from seasonal residence to year-round residence.

Population Characteristics and Implications

Demographic characteristics affect participation in recreation activities. Pennsylvania's Recreation Plan 1991-1997 provided findings on participation in outdoor recreation activities in the Pocono counties. This information was used to formulate the **Implications for Recreation** discussed in the following section on demographic characteristics.

In general, implications related to the County's open space center on the potential loss of open space as a result of the County's growing population. Given a projected population of 200,000 by the year 2020, that translates to between 70,000-80,000 new residents. Depending on family size, between 30,000 to 40,000 new dwelling units would be required, with a land demand of between 42,000 to 52,000 acres at the average lot size of approved subdivisions in the County between 1990-1997.

Age

Since interests in recreation change throughout a person’s lifetime, it is important to look at age groupings in Monroe County in order to plan for effective parks and recreation services. Table 2.1 presents the County’s population by age group in comparison with the state and nation.

Monroe 2020 uses projections from the Pennsylvania State Data Center for school-age children and the older age groups. These projections show the following:

- The population of school-age children grew at a faster rate than the population as a whole in the 1990s, by 56 percent. Growth will continue but at a slower but significant rate of 40 percent through the next decade. Interviews with the school districts found that growth is higher than state projections: about 5-6 percent annually.

Even greater growth has been seen proportionally among the oldest age groups. The age group over 65 increased in Monroe County at double the state rate from 1980 to 1990. The Pennsylvania State Data Center anticipates that the age cohort of 65+ will increase by 80 percent between 2000 and 2010.

Table 2.1			
1990 Population			
Age Group	Monroe County %	Pennsylvania %	U.S. %
0-4	7.4	6.7	7.4
5-17	17.5	14.2	n/a
Combined under 18	25.9 24.9	23.5 20.9	n/a
18-24	10.3	12.9	n/a
Combined 5-24	36.2 27.8	36.4 27.1	28.9
25-44	32.6	30.8	n/a
45-54	10.0	n/a	51.1
55-64	9.2	n/a	12.6
Combined 45-64	19.2	20.0	n/a
Combined 25-64	51.8	50.8	51.1
65+	13.0	15.4	12.6

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Pennsylvania State Data Center

Fifty-Plus Group

Most people think about demographics, particularly age, when defining client groups. Until recently, the 50-plus group has been lumped into the so-called senior population. While age can provide a reference point, lifestyle characteristics are a better determinant of human behavior. The term “seniors” is not popular among older persons aged 50 years and over, who generally feel fifteen years younger than they are.

With the strong population growth in this segment of the community in mind, it is time to gear up for broader thinking about this age group. People over 50 constitute

as many as four generations. They are a mix of rich and poor, college educated and illiterate, the vibrant and young, and the frail and elderly.

There is great potential for service to this age group in: fitness clubs and groups, travel and tours, educational programs, inter-generational programs, professional services, and volunteer opportunities. Twenty years from now, the over-50 leisure services and fitness market will have grown by 74 percent while the under-50 market will have grown only 1 percent (Rude, 1998).¹

Teens

The group mentioned as being the most in need of services was the teens. Those interviewed brought up the lack of facilities for teens. Planning *with* the teens and not *for* them is the key to success.

Teen Involvement in Recreation Planning

The key to success in teen recreation services is involving the teens in planning. The teen programs that are the most successful are those in which the teens worked on developing the plans, services, and activities. For teen centers, teens are further involved in setting up the operations and management systems. They are the key to self-policing and attracting teens to the site. Teen programs in which adults plan activities and expect the teens to come are typically doomed to failure. Teen recreation services should be explored by the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission in partnership with the regions through the planning process. Vehicles that may be considered for teen recreation planning are the Communities that Care program or the 40 Assets program. Both programs are structured to facilitate teen service planning.

Youth

As shown in the large amount of school construction, growth in this segment of the population is significant. While the growth in school facilities is keeping pace with the school-age population increase, growth in parks and recreation facilities is not.

Implications for Recreation

- Participation in swimming is consistent until age 55, although this trend is changing.
- The group with the highest participation rate in jogging is those over 55.
- The highest participation rate in hiking is among 45-55 year-olds.

Income

Income is directly related to leisure services. Higher levels of income are associated with higher levels of participation, more varied interests, and a greater willingness to pay for services. Monroe County's median income level is higher than for Pennsylvania as a whole. The County's poverty level for families is about 60 percent of the state's rate. Between 1980 and 1990 the poverty levels decreased overall in Monroe County. People over 65 living alone comprise the largest population segment living in poverty.

¹ Rude, John. 1998. *Making the Mature Decision*. Athletic Business, 22(1), 31.

It is important to note that a small segment of the population is disadvantaged economically. As a public service, it is important that recreation opportunities be available to all citizens equitably. Provisions for people to pay for services through alternative means could be explored. Table 2.2 presents a comparison of Monroe County's income and poverty levels.

Table 2.2			
Income and Poverty Levels, 1990			
	Monroe County	Pennsylvania	U.S.
Per capita income	\$13,630	\$14,068	\$14,420
Median household income	32,465	29,069	30,056
% of families in poverty	5.1%	8.2%	10.0%

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Pennsylvania State Data Center

Implications for Recreation

- Over half of the people in the middle income group picnic.
- Swimming participation is popular among all income groups except the very lowest income groups.
- Over half of all people in the middle income categories fish.
- The higher income groups in the 35-44 age group have the highest boating participation rates.
- Lower level income groups camp more.
- Participation in skiing, tennis, and golf occurs among higher income groups.
- Income level is not related to participation in horseback riding.

Education

Educational level is the strongest indicator of an individual's income potential, attitudes, and spending habits. The trend nationally is toward higher levels of education. Table 2.3 presents Monroe County's educational attainment levels. Reflecting a higher educational level in comparison with the state overall, Monroe County has a higher percentage of high school graduates and a lower proportion of people with bachelor's degrees or higher.

Table 2.3			
Educational Attainment			
for Persons 25 Years and Older, 1990			
	Monroe County	PA	U.S.
% High school graduates or higher	78.0%	74.7%	75.2%
% Bachelor's degree or higher	17.6%	17.9%	20.0%

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census

Another indication of educational level in a community is the percentage of high school graduates who are college bound. Table 2.4 presents information about college-bound high school graduates in public and private schools in 1995-1996 (the most current figures available). The table shows that Monroe County has a higher rate of college-bound high school graduates than the state as a whole. The state average is 67.5 percent with a range of 45.8 percent in Forest County to 78 percent in Monroe County.

Table 2.4 College-Bound High School Graduates, 1995-1996		
	Monroe County	PA
Public School	70.6%	67.5%
Private, Non-Public Schools	93.5%	85.1%

Source: Pennsylvania State Data Center

Implications for Recreation

- Higher participation in jogging and bicycling is associated with higher educational levels.
- Educational level does not play a role in participation in basketball.
- People with lower educational levels tend to participate more in off-road motor sports than those of college and graduate level.

Race and Ethnicity

Monroe County is a homogeneous community with a population of 95.2 percent Caucasians. However, cultural diversity in Monroe County is increasing. A significant influx of people with diverse ethnic backgrounds moved into the county in 1980 as shown in Table 5.5. Such trends are expected to continue as America diversifies.

Table 2.5 Racial Composition by Percentage of Population				
	Monroe County %	% Change 1980-1990	Pennsylvania %	U.S. %
White, non-Hispanic	95.2	35.1	88.5	80.0
Black, non-Hispanic	1.7	72.5	9.2	12.0
American Indian	.1	132	.1	.8
Hispanic	2.1	271.8	2.0	2.8
Asian	.7	166.3	1.2	2.9
Other	.07	-40.3	1.0	1.5

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Pennsylvania State Data Center

Housing

Housing is an indicator of affluence. Generally, those who can afford to own their own homes are more affluent than those who rent. The median housing value in Monroe County is about 70 percent higher than that of Pennsylvania's median house value (See Table 2.6, below). There are more owner-occupied homes and fewer renters in Monroe County in comparison with the state. The median rent is higher here than in the state overall.

Table 2.6			
Housing Information 1990			
	Monroe County	Pennsylvania	U.S.
% Owner occupied	75.7	70.6	n/a
% Renter occupied	21.5	29.4	n/a
Median house value	\$116,500	\$69,700	\$79,100
Median gross rent	\$432	\$407	\$447

Sources: U.S. Bureau of the Census, Pennsylvania State Data Center

Households

Monroe County is a community of families. Three out of every four households is comprised of families. About half of the families have children. About 12 percent of the families have a single, female head of household; this is a 43 percent increase over 1980.

Implications for Recreation

- Families need recreation programs.
- Family programs need to be scheduled at times convenient to families such as Sunday afternoons.
- Support for single parent households should be considered; for example, provision of childcare when different age group activities for youth and parents are held.

Occupation

According to the United States Census Bureau, Monroe County has a work force that is primarily white collar, with nearly seven out every ten citizens occupied in managerial, sales, or service positions. Only 1.4 percent worked in farming.

Public perceptions about employment and classification of the work force differs from the census information. Residents have provided anecdotal information based upon their observations on day-to-day life in the County. Their perceptions are that year-round residents struggle to get good paying jobs. They often work more than one job and are sometimes without benefits. They view the jobs that have been created in the County as lower-paying jobs in the service industry.

Interviews with the Monroe County Job Center present a different picture, one in which many of the new jobs created by the new businesses attracted to Monroe County are higher paying positions. The higher wages have forced the resorts to start increasing their wage structures in order to compete with the new businesses moving into the County. Many businesses are starting to look into benefits such as day care, transportation, and other fringe benefits that do not show up on wage statements as ways to attract workers.

Employment

The most significant employment trends are:

- 61.4 percent of females with children work;
- The number of families with two or more workers nearly doubled in the 1980s.
- Employment in the service industry nearly doubled;
- The unemployment rate is at an all-time low. According to the Monroe County Job Center, unemployment rate varies by season here because of the tourism-based economy. For example, March unemployment rates may be somewhat higher than for the state as a whole because March is a transition month: too warm for skiing, too cold for golf. Unemployment rates have been at about 5 percent this year overall, on par with the state overall.

Seasonal Population

Monroe County receives a high volume of seasonal visitors. Estimates of the seasonal population are not available. According to observation alone, this number is surely very significant given traffic congestion, development of shopping centers such as the Crossings, and the number of resort communities. The most common reference regarding large numbers of visitors is the Pocono 500 race. Attendance figures are not available from any source, including the Raceway, the Vacation Bureau, or Monroe County. Media estimates were reported on television news broadcasts at about 135,000 for the June 2000 race.

The significance of the seasonal residents and visitors cannot be overstated. The seasonal residents and visitors are likely to be affluent, well educated, and family-oriented. Tourism is the basis of the local economy.

Overnight Leisure Traveler Profile

According to the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau, overnight leisure travelers visiting the Poconos tend to be younger, college-educated couples who are employed in professional occupations and have household incomes of \$55,000. They most often travel for getaway weekends by car from New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, stay in hotels or motels, and participate in outdoor activities. On average, the travelers spend \$83 per person per day.

Source: D.K. Shifflet & Associates, LTD for the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau

Implications for Recreation

- County recreation services are geared primarily to year-round residents; public opinion in the Monroe County Community Recreation Survey ² supports this.
- Seasonal residents must be considered in planning facility development. County parks will attract seasonal residents.

² Monroe County Community Recreation Survey, 1998.

- Interviews indicate that while there are many Homeowner Associations. However, not all of them have facilities and services nor do the ones with facilities have all of the facilities that seasonal residents would use.

Year 2000 Census

The information on population and housing matters should be reviewed after the detailed year 2000 federal census is released, which should be around 2002. At that time, the goals and objectives of the Open Space Plan should be discussed and revised as needed.

Public Participation

The Open Space Plan planning process incorporated a strong public participation component. The public participation process included seven parts:

1. Monroe County Recreation and Parks Survey had been conducted as part of the County's greenway study in 1998. The public participation process supplemented the survey findings of 1998;
2. Open Space Advisory Board;
3. Key person interviews;
4. Focus groups;
5. Work sessions with the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission and staff, including an all-day field work session with the Open Space Committee regarding open space and resource protection;
6. Public Outreach Meetings included outreach meetings for greenways and trails, recommendations, and a final public hearing prior to adoption of the plan; and
7. Incorporation of findings from the Monroe 2020 public outreach effort.

County Recreation and Parks Survey

As part of the *Greenway Project Feasibility Study*, Monroe County conducted a countywide survey in 1998. The purpose of the survey was to determine the citizens' preferences and opinions about parks, recreation, and greenways. The survey findings were used as the basis for designing the public participation process for the Open Space Plan. Using the findings from this survey, the planning team tailored the interview questions and established topics for public forums. The findings from the public participation process were consistent with the findings of the survey.

The public participation process provided more detailed information on which to develop the open space plan. For example, the survey asked for public opinion on service to client groups. The public participation process studied how that service should be delivered in terms of roles and responsibilities for facilities, parks, resource protection, and operation and management.

Survey Findings

The survey findings focused on five areas: greenways, recreation interests, level of service, blocks to participation, and parks and recreation facilities

Greenways

Support for greenways in Monroe County is very strong:

- Nine out of every ten respondents support the “Godfrey Ridge” Greenway (the specific greenway segment examined in the *Greenway Project Feasibility Study*);
- About seven out of ten respondents would like to see greenways developed throughout the County. Over half would like to see them developed with multi-purpose trails and for environmental protection.

Recreation Interests

More than half of the respondents participate in activities related to nature enjoyment, music, exercise, swimming, special events, arts and crafts, and hiking. It is interesting to note that music emerged as the second-most frequently cited recreation activity, with 65 percent of the respondents participating. The top five activities in which respondents would like to participate include self-improvement programs, biking, special events, exercise, and organized recreation programs.

Parks and Recreation Facilities

Public lands are important for recreation in Monroe County. About seven of every ten respondents indicate that they use public lands for recreation seasonally. More than half use the nature centers.

Open space with natural features and trails were identified as the two most important characteristics of a park system that the respondents would use in comparison with active recreation and organized programs. The top five facilities that the respondents wanted to see developed include:

1. Picnic areas
2. Areas for quiet enjoyment
3. Walking/running paths
4. Hiking
5. Nature center

A striking finding is the immediacy with which the respondents want facilities developed. Over half of the respondents wanted to see the preceding improvement along with bike paths, fishing areas,

playgrounds, and swimming facilities developed immediately. Less than one-third listed five years as a time frame for development.

Respondents appear to want facilities close to home. While most people had no preference as to park type, parks close to home emerged as the most preferred type of park. For families with children, this type of park is the most important.

Level of Service

Table 2.7 presents the respondent ratings for the level of parks and recreation services to client groups. Over half of the respondents indicated that the level of service to people with disabilities, working adults, families, the retired, year-round residents and young adults was not enough. The level of service to children and youth is perceived as about right. About one in five respondents felt that the level of service for seasonal residents and tourists was too high. This is a striking finding compared to the fact that less than two percent of the respondents rated the level of service as “too high” for any other group.

Table 2.7			
Ratings of Level of Service for Client Groups			
	Not Enough %	About Right %	Too Much %
People with disabilities	60%	39%	2%
Working adults	56	44	-
Families	56	44	-
Retired adults	55	44	1
Year round residents	55	45	-
Young adults	52	47	1
High School students	48	50	2
Pre-schoolers	48	50	2
Junior High students	43	55	2
Middle school students	42	56	2
Elementary students	40	58	2
Seasonal residents	22	60	18
Tourists	16	63	21

Blocks to Participation

Most people reported that they are too busy to participate in leisure activities. It is important to note, however, that the second-most important block to participation respondents cited is not knowing about programs. Also significant is the finding that the price of services was not an issue for about nine out of every ten respondents. Table 2.8 shows the ranked order for blocks to participation for recreation activities.

Reason	% of Respondents
Too busy with responsibilities	50%
Don't know about programs	45%
Programs are not available	23%
Too busy with other free time activities	22%
Facilities are too crowded	12%
It's too expensive	12%
Physically not able	9%
Not interested	6%
Enrolled in school or private programs	5%
Don't know how to do the activity	5%
No transportation	3%
Other	9%

Survey Implications

Clearly, greenways are important in Monroe County. People support them whether they would use them or not. The survey findings also have important implications for planning and service delivery. People appear to want facilities developed as soon as possible. Proximity to the areas where people live is important. Protecting natural resources is extremely important. There is a great interest in leisure services, especially those geared toward year-round residents. Promoting the service and getting the word out about programs and facilities should be high on the County's parks and recreation priority list.

Open Space Advisory Board

The OSAB (Open Space Advisory Board) was formed in an advisory capacity as an offshoot of the Monroe 2020 planning process. The Board contributed guidance, ideas, and concerns; challenged thinking; provided feedback; reviewed the plan and participated in public discussions about the open space plan. They also identified community contacts to include in the process. Committee members represent diverse interests and a broad cross-section of the larger community. Also, a special subcommittee of the board meets monthly with the consulting team in an even more focused workshop setting. The Monroe County Planning Commission also supported the Board. The Monroe County Director of Parks and Recreation and the Open Space Coordinator were present and participated in all meetings and workshops. Over twenty meetings were held with the Advisory Board and sub-committees.

Key Person Interviews

Over 30 individuals and organizations were interviewed for the plan to ascertain their ideas and opinions about open space, conservation, greenways, trails, parks, recreation facilities and services, partnerships, and funding and organizational support in Monroe County. Interviews were tailored to the specific groups and individuals involved. They included selected representatives of:

- Municipalities;
- Homeowners Associations;
- Conservation Districts;
- Environmental Groups;
- Watershed Associations;
- Business Community;
- Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau;
- School District Superintendents;
- School officials;
- Sports groups;
- Cyclists;
- Equestrians;
- Monroe County Arts Council;
- Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources;
- Delaware Water Gap Advisory Commission;
- Pocono Outdoor Club;
- State Parks;
- State Forests;
- Fish and Boat Commission;
- National Park Service;
- YMCA;
- Realtors;
- Resorts;
- County staff;
- Parks and Recreation and Park Commission;
- General citizenry.

The purpose of the interviews was to obtain ideas, concerns and suggestions from people throughout the County who represent a wide variety of interests.

Interview Findings

A summary of opportunities and challenges as identified in the interviews is shown below.

Opportunities

- The beauty and natural resources of Monroe County need to be protected;
- There is urgency about getting open space before it is lost to development;

- While people acknowledge that open space is expensive, it is cheaper than it will ever be and it is most important to get it now;
- Keep as much open space as possible;
- Create trails and pathways for people to walk, run, and bike safely;
- Provide year-round indoor recreation;
- Plan for additional sports facilities throughout the County;
- Develop light recreation facilities such as trails and picnic facilities.

Concerns

- Open space is being lost too quickly;
- It is important to get large parcels before they are lost;
- Monroe County is losing its scenic beauty and charm to development;
- There are not enough trails for people to walk, bike, and cross-country ski;
- Since there is no provision for motorized recreation vehicles outside of state forests, people go where they can and ride illegally;
- There are not enough parks and recreation facilities; especially sports fields;
- There are not enough gyms or indoor recreation facilities;
- The population segment of most concern: teens;
- We need to provide for the year-round residents;
- How will the County pay for parks and recreation improvements?
- Traffic congestion.

Focus Groups

Although one to two focus groups had been targeted at the outset of the project, the consulting team actually held five. The five focus groups were held to address both conservation and recreation. The focus groups were designed as work sessions in which the participants provided information and direction to the plan.

Natural Areas Focus Groups

A group of over forty individuals with specialized knowledge regarding the natural resources of the County participated in a workshop to identify and evaluate natural area criteria. The consultant team facilitated the workshop. It consisted of a presentation on “smart conservation” followed by a series of exercises designed to familiarize participants with potential criteria that can be used for the identification of natural areas, and then had them assign importance and rank to these criteria. Additional criteria were also identified and ranked by participants. See *Appendix D – Natural Area Focus Group Exercises & Participant List* for an example of the workshop forms used. This effort is further explained in Chapter 3 below.

Recreation and Parks Focus Groups

The recreation forums were located in three “super-regions.” The super regions combined all 20 municipalities into three groups with meetings held in Paradise, Pocono, and Stroud Townships. The Monroe County Director of Parks and

Recreation, the Open Space Coordinator, and many members of the Open Space Advisory Board and Recreation and Park Commission members participated in the forums. Over 100 people participated in the recreation forums. They included elected and appointed officials and the general citizenry interested in conservation, recreation, and open space. The results of the discussions are summarized below.

Recreation Focus Group Findings

The focus groups explored parks and recreation needs in Monroe County, the County's role in parks and recreation, the municipal role in parks and recreation, concerns, and an open discussion about topics of the participants' choice.

Parks and Recreation Needs in Monroe County

County parks and recreation needs emerged as four categories: facilities, preservation of the County's treasured features, trails, and public service.

Facilities Needed in Monroe County

The need for more parks and recreation facilities throughout the County was underscored. Generally, participants expressed that Monroe County is lacking in recreation facilities. While there is significant acreage in national and state parks, games and forests, there are few parks and recreation facilities for the daily needs of County residents. Facilities needed include:

- County parks that feature active and passive facilities;
- County and local parks;
- Year-round facilities;
- Indoor recreation for people of all ages in one setting;
- Pools and gyms; family aquatic centers;
- Trails for biking, hiking, walking, cross-country skiing; consider ATV's and determine strategies for meeting needs; connections between parks and public destinations;
- Roller sports;
- Access for fishing and boating;
- Primitive camping;
- Maximum use of school facilities;
- Balance of active and passive parks with facilities to meet a broad range of interests and abilities from quiet relaxation to active recreation and sports;
- Nature study areas: birding, gardens;
- Golf courses; consider for spray irrigation.

Preservation of Treasured Features

The need to maintain the unique environmental and cultural resources of Monroe County emerged as a key finding.

- Undisturbed open space and Monroe County's scenic beauty;
- Historic preservation;

- Natural resource conservation;
- Scenic areas;
- Guidelines for scenic roads and vistas;
- Reserve land for future generations;

Trails

Connections and linkages were high priorities in the focus groups.

- Bike lanes on roads, highways, abandoned rail road beds and creek beds;
- Nature trails with interpretive signage;
- Equestrian trails;
- Trail network for hiking, biking, and other uses;
- Information about trail locations;
- System of common symbols for trail blazing.

Public Service

Issues related to providing parks and recreation varied among a wide range of topics as shown below.

- Public awareness programs about parks and recreation and one contact point;
- Park security;
- More environmental educators;
- Public transportation for recreation;
- Use volunteers.

Monroe County's Role in Parks and Recreation

There was consensus that Monroe County needs to take a strong role in parks and recreation. The majority of the participants presented ideas for such a role. A minority of participants expressed the opinion that the County should do nothing, leaving the responsibility to each municipality.

Facilities the County Should Provide

- Large County-operated parks to meet ALL needs;
- County cultural center;
- Recreation complex for indoor and outdoor year-round recreation for people of all ages, interests, and abilities;
- Develop and manage countywide greenway system.

County Recreation and Park Services and Planning

Most of the discussion about the County's role addressed County services and planning.

- Strong County role, based on what the County is doing now;

- Set standards and take the lead on parks, recreation, and open space planning;
- Help municipalities: parks, recreation, planning, zoning, facilities, locations, programs, and services;
- Provide information and on-going communication to municipalities;
- Serve as a clearinghouse and provider of technical assistance;
- Promote parks and recreation; get the smaller newspapers to attend meetings;
- Help with grant applications and information about funding sources;
- Determine how to support municipalities on purchasing, insurance, and other areas where regional cooperation may be effective and cheaper;
- Involve private, commercial, and non-profit organizations in parks and recreation.

How Monroe County Could Support the Municipalities in Parks and Recreation

- Stimulate regional cooperation;
- Help with GIS coordination;
- Coordinate with municipalities in joint planning efforts.
- Provide matching funds for development of parks and recreation;
- Involve municipalities in decision-making on County plan.
- Establish County standards which municipalities could follow.

Municipal Parks and Recreation Roles

The groups discussed the potential roles for the municipalities in Monroe County regarding parks, recreation, greenways, and trails.

Municipal Parks and Recreation Facilities

- Provide neighborhood parks;
- Focus on local open space;
- Provide recreation facilities for close-to-home recreation use;
- Identify areas for joint use with municipalities.

Municipal Park and Recreation Planning

- Identify *local* parks and recreation needs.
- Coordinate with other municipalities.
- Work on local ordinances and sub-division regulations that affect parks, recreation, and open space;
- Participate in planning and prioritizing County parks, recreation, and open space planning items.

Programs and Services as a Function of the Municipalities

- Provide local parks and recreation programs.
- Focus on youth and teen programs.
- Meet twice a year with citizenry about parks and recreation.

Concerns About Parks and Recreation

The regional recreation focus groups discussed concerns they had regarding parks and recreation. The discussions dealt with facilities and services and planning.

Facilities

- Duplication of facilities;
- Lack of knowledge and information about facilities;
- Inaccessibility of parks and recreation facilities: location and design barriers;
- Balance and diversity of facilities;
- Administration of parks and recreation and who will do it;
- Financing, development, and operations;
- Important that open space not get lost in discussion of recreation;
- Vandalism;
- Security – especially without local police force.

Services and Planning

- Whether the County will continue to keep municipalities involved;
- Appoint municipal representatives to County parks and Recreation and Park Commission;
- Lack of knowledge about open space planning;
- Need to educate public about natural resource protection;
- Political support vital;
- No County dictatorship: County needs to collaborate, not dictate;
- Local and County planning needs to be complementary;
- Resource protection: major concern over long term.

Forum Observations

The most pressing concern is open space protection. This is followed by the need to develop parks and recreation facilities that are well distributed throughout the County and balanced in design to meet the needs of a broad base of park visitors. There was consensus that the County should take a strong role in parks, recreation, and open space as well as in stimulating/supporting regional collaboration among the

municipalities. Participants clearly expressed the opinion that the County should take the lead on large regional recreation complexes and parks.

Work Sessions

Six work sessions were held with the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission, management and staff. An all day field trip via bus focused on natural resources and open space in the County. About 50 people representing broad environmental perspectives participated. The work sessions dealt with the mission, recreation and park delivery system, and creating a vision for a countywide system of parks.

Public Outreach Meetings and Hearing

Three public outreach meetings were held, including two to obtain public input and a final public hearing (to be held) for plan adoption.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions are based upon the demographic studies and the public participation process.

Conclusions

1. Monroe County is the second fastest growing county in Pennsylvania. Rapid growth will continue over the next two decades, adding another 80,000 people. Development pressure is intense. There is only a short window of opportunity to protect land and resources in the County.
2. Open space and natural resource protection is the top priority.
3. There is overall support for the development of greenways throughout Monroe County.
4. There is consensus on the need for parks that achieve a balance of recreation opportunities for people of all ages, interests, and abilities in all areas of the County. There was emphasis on the need to serve year-round residents.

Recommendations

Based upon demographic trends and the citizen participation process, the following recommendations provide a framework for public opinion regarding open space, resource protection, parks, recreation, and services.

1. Establish planning districts based on school district boundaries. This is consistent with Monroe 2020 as well as the consensus of opinion established in the recreation forums. Since schools serve as the hub of community activity, organizing parks and recreation around the schools makes sense. The school districts should serve as service areas with Pocono Area being divided in half due to its size. This would be a total of five service areas.

2. Plan to meet the needs of present and future year-round residents. Address client group needs which are perceived by the public as needing more services including people with disabilities, adults, and families.
3. Establish the role for County parks and recreation organizations. Public opinion as shown in the public participation process supports a strong County role. An official County policy on the mission and direction of the Monroe County Recreation and Park Commission needs to be adopted in answer to questions and issues raised in the public participation process.
4. Establish the role of the municipalities in parks and recreation through the regional planning process.
5. Balance the provision of services for year-round residents with a well-planned program for eco-tourism. This would help to protect the resources as well as to stimulate economic development through tourism. An eco-tourism plan should be formulated through a public private partnership of Monroe County and the Pocono Mountains Vacation Bureau.
6. Begin an aggressive program of open space protection using the bond funds as the catalyst. Show some early wins to get the program geared into action.
7. Determine how to provide parks and recreation facilities within the framework of protecting open space. Clearly, public opinion supports open space protection as the highest priority. The need for recreation facilities is also pressing. While the bond money should be spent on open space, other methods and means need to be developed for recreation facility development and operation.
8. Provide year-round indoor recreation opportunities. Explore how year-round facilities and services can be offered to citizens of all ages and interests throughout the County.
9. Provide on-going, current information to the municipalities about County planning efforts. Include the municipalities in the decision-making process for this plan. Consider geographic/municipal representation when making appointments to the Recreation and Park Commission.
10. Conduct planning studies that address questions about the County's demographic composition and related issues raised in the public participation process. Questions on seasonal visitation, attendance for large-scale events, the economic status of year-round residents in Monroe County, and an accurate picture of employment and income for residents were all questions that aroused much debate with differing perceptions emerging. The census alone does not capture this kind of information. These questions may have planning implications for leisure service delivery.