



# IMAGINE YOUR PARKS<sub>2</sub>

*Better Parks – Better Living*



**DRAFT**



# Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub>

**DRAFT**

Prepared for the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge

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# Introduction

***East Baton Rouge Parish has a well-established identity as the seat of Louisiana state government and a mecca for college sports. In addition, the Parish is increasingly becoming known as a center for higher education, health research, and industry.***

***Among the considerations that make the Parish attractive to employers, employees, students, and residents is its locally-valued and nationally recognized park and recreation system managed by the Recreation and Park Commission for the Parish of East Baton Rouge (BREC).***

***With 12 community parks built in the last decade as an outgrowth of its 2004 **Imagine Your Parks** strategic plan, BREC has transformed the park and recreation experience in the Parish. Now, BREC is updating its vision for parks and recreation and setting strategic directions for the coming decade.***

BREC's mission is to contribute to a healthier, more vibrant community by providing exceptional parks, open space, and recreation experiences for all of East Baton Rouge Parish.

## Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub>

Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> is a vision and action plan for parks and recreation in East Baton Rouge Parish that builds on the successes of BREC's original Imagine Your Parks plan. It takes into account changes in the park system over the past decade, recent trends in recreation, changes in Parish demographics and economy, and input from the community. Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> establishes BREC's direction for the next decade and lays out an action plan for getting there.

## Mission and Vision

Over the past decade, BREC's stated mission was to provide parks and recreation opportunities for all the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish. While this mission statement is accurate, it became clear during the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process that it falls short of fully conveying BREC's mission by not making explicit the agency's commitment to providing high quality recreational opportunities and to improving the quality of life in the Parish. Thus, Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> updates BREC's mission statement and articulates a long-term vision for the park system. BREC's mission is to contribute to a healthier, more vibrant community by providing exceptional parks, open space, and recreation experiences for all of East Baton Rouge Parish.

BREC's vision is to provide an extraordinary system of parks, open spaces, and facilities that engages the Parish's unique natural and cultural landscape to enrich Parish life by providing diverse and memorable recreation experiences.

## Values

BREC's values reflect the community's expectations and define the way in which it works to fulfill its mission and turn its vision into reality. BREC strives to integrate the following values into all it does:

- **excellence:** striving to provide high quality, state-of-the-art experiences
- **service:** attending to patrons' needs in a courteous, timely fashion
- **engagement:** regularly seeking feedback and direction from the community
- **equity:** delivering comparable experiences across the Parish
- **integrity:** being honest, fair, and objective
- **professionalism:** employing skill, good judgment, and politeness
- **collaboration:** working with community partners to achieve mutual goals
- **fiscal responsibility:** using taxpayer dollars as efficiently as possible
- **safety:** ensuring that park, program, and facility users feel free from harm
- **sustainability:** serving as responsible stewards of the environment



Exploring the great outdoors.  
Greenwood Adventure Camp





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# Trends and Needs

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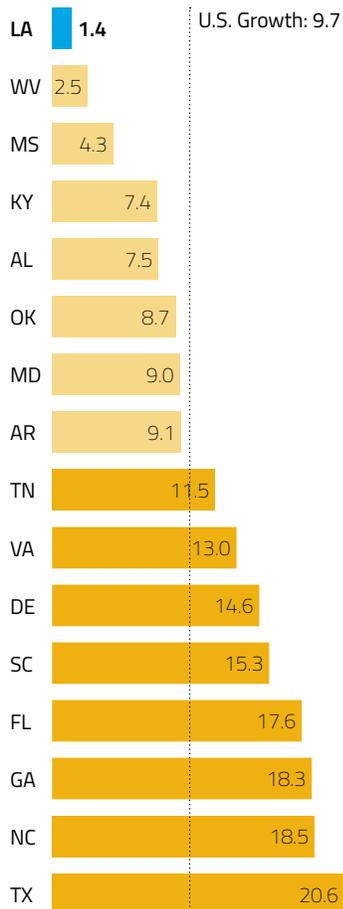


# Demographic and Economic Trends

***BREC provides public park and recreational opportunities for all of East Baton Rouge Parish. To better address the Parish's park and recreation needs, it is important to understand the current demographic makeup of the Parish as well as demographic and economic trends.***

**Figure 1. Louisiana is the slowest growing state in the South.**

Percent Change in Population, 2000–2010



Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Census and Census 2000

## National Trends

Five trends in the United States are changing the way communities are planned and designed, and how people choose where they live:

1. **The Aging of America:** By 2030, 1 in 5 Americans will be over age 65.
2. **The Increasing Diversity of America:** By 2050, there will be no majority race.
3. **The Rise of Single-Person Households:** By the mid-2020s, single-person households will be the predominant household type.
4. **The Stagnation of Household Income:** Median household income has stagnated for the longest period since the government began collecting such data in 1967. Adjusted for inflation, the typical US household had 9% less income in 2012 than it did 13 years earlier.
5. **The Widening Income Gap:** Income gaps are seen across the entire population, within each racial/ethnic group, and by age. Households headed by those 65 and older are faring relatively better since the recession, while younger households are not.

## Louisiana Trends

The South and West regions of the United States (as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau) grew much more quickly (about 14% each) than the Midwest and Northeast (under 4% each) from 2000 to 2010, following a pattern from recent decades. Despite the overall regional growth of the South, Louisiana's growth rate was less than 2% during the same period (Figure 1), among the slowest growing states in the country. Thousands of residents who were displaced by Hurricane Katrina in 2006 did not return to the state.

Louisiana is also the fifth poorest state in the US based on per capita income. Over 18% of Louisianans live in poverty. Louisiana's history of being among the poorest states is a pattern that has continued for decades.

## Metropolitan Area Trends

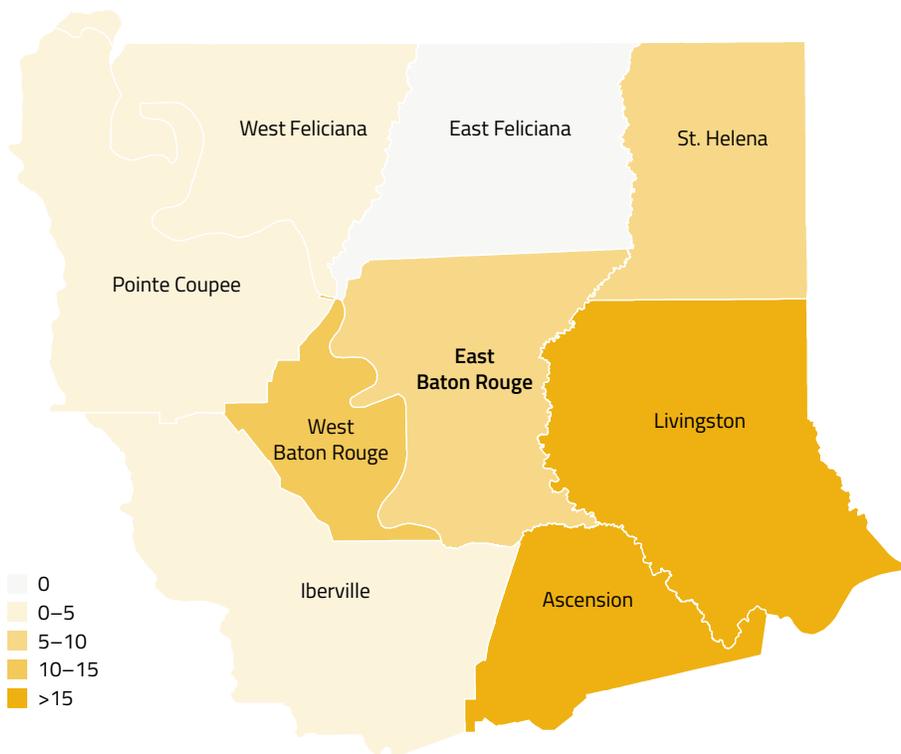
The Baton Rouge Metropolitan Statistical area (MSA), which includes nine parishes, has grown at a faster pace than projected. The MSA's population was 705,973 in 2000. While the MSA's population was not expected to surpass 800,000 until sometime in 2013, the 2010 U.S. Census showed a population of just over 800,000.

During the past three decades, the portion of the region's population living in East Baton Rouge Parish has declined steadily. The Parish's population has grown, but its share of the region's population has declined from 62 to 55%.

The Parish is experiencing out-migration to neighboring parishes. Data show that when residents leave the City-Parish, they most often remain in the area and relocate to another parish in the MSA—typically retaining employment in East Baton Rouge while establishing residence in the other parish. Since 2001, East Baton Rouge Parish has experienced both in-migration and out-migration, but an overall net loss of 2,700 residents per year on average. This was offset by a significant population increase in 2005 and 2006 due to relocation from Hurricane Katrina. The parishes with the highest growth in the Baton Rouge MSA are Livingston and Ascension Parishes to the southeast.

**Figure 2. Growth is moving southeast of East Baton Rouge Parish.**

Percent Change in Population, 2000–2010



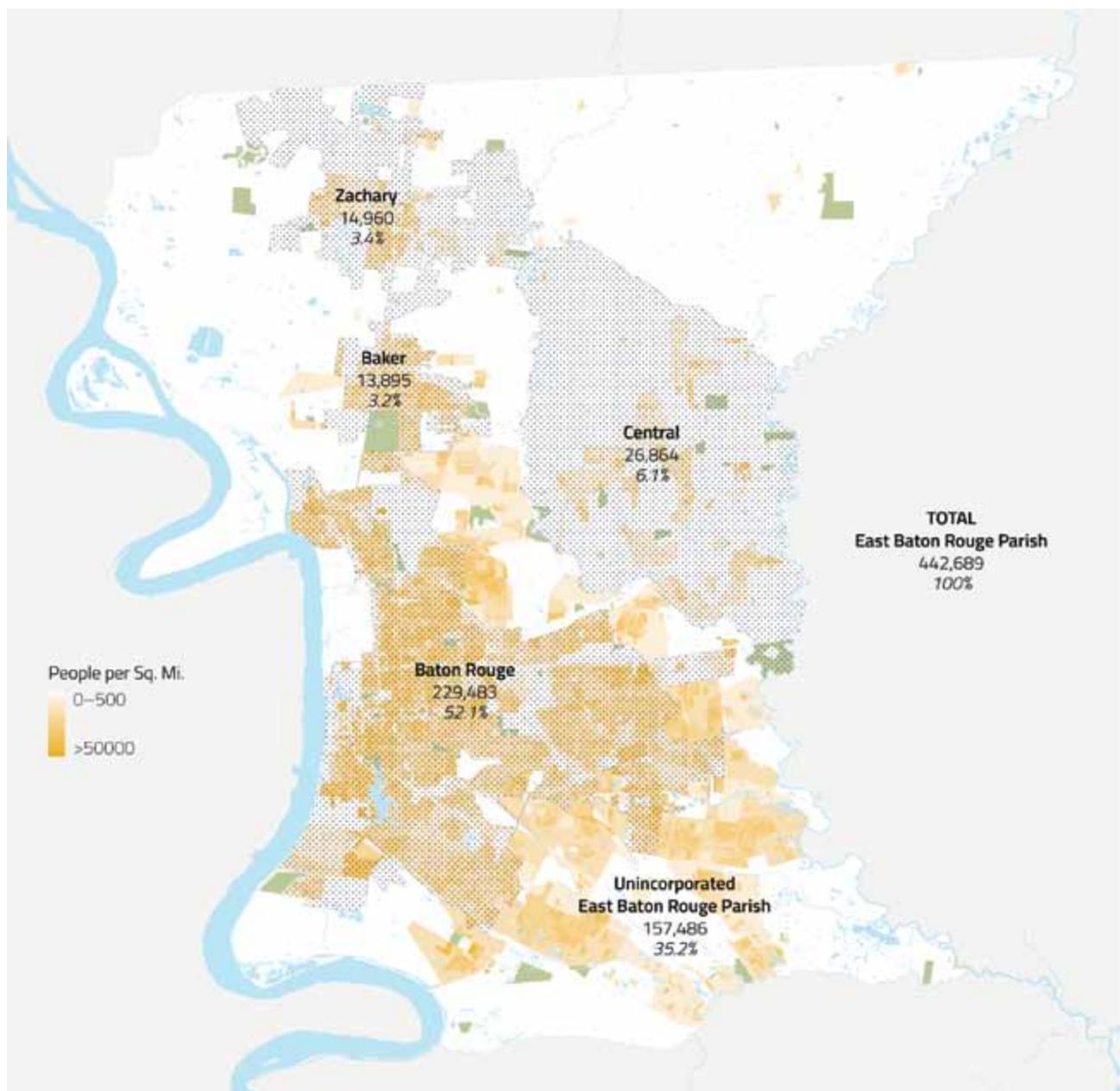
Source: US Census Bureau, 2010 Census and Census 2000

## East Baton Rouge Parish

East Baton Rouge Parish is the most populous parish in Louisiana and includes the cities of Baton Rouge (the State Capital and Parish Seat), Baker, Central, and Zachary. In the last decade, the population of East Baton Rouge Parish has grown 7.2%, from 412,852 to 442,698.

According to the US Census Bureau, population growth in East Baton Rouge Parish is expected to slow significantly over the next decade to less than 2%. The highest population densities in East Baton Rouge Parish are found within the City of Baton Rouge and the southern portion of the Parish.

**Figure 3. Four cities make up nearly two-thirds of East Baton Rouge Parish's population.**  
Percent Density 2010



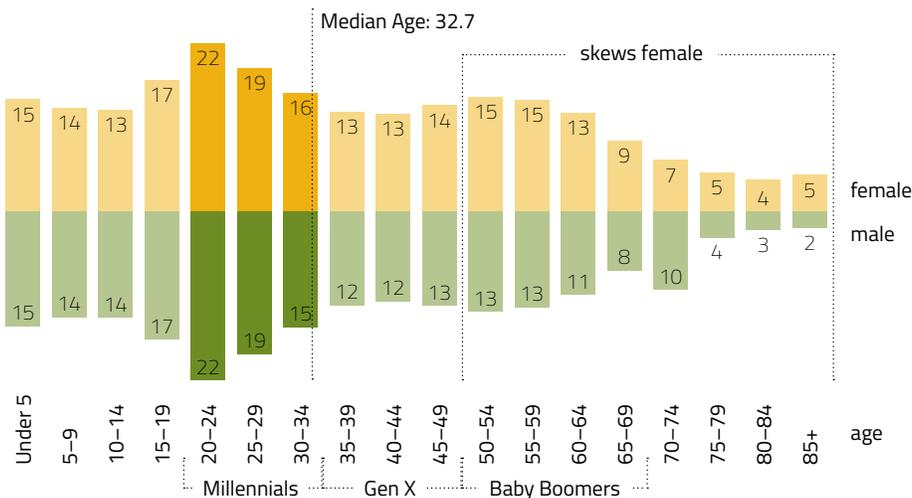
## Gender and Age

Median age provides a quick way of establishing target age groups for which to plan. The median age in East Baton Rouge Parish was 32.7 in 2011, up from 31.5 in 2000.

Currently, slightly more than half of the population of East Baton Rouge Parish is under the age of 35, and the largest single age group in the Parish is the 20–34 generation known as millennials (Figure 4). Millennials represent a significantly higher percentage of the Parish population compared to the rest of Louisiana. This is due, in part, to the presence of Louisiana State University (LSU), Southern University, and Baton Rouge Community College, whose combined enrollment is approximately 43,000.

**Figure 4. Millennials represent the largest generation in East Baton Rouge Parish.**

Thousands of Residents by Age and Gender, 2011



This youthful population, if maintained, lends itself to recreational market opportunities and a wide variety of recreational activities.

East Baton Rouge Parish also has a larger percent female population than the Baton Rouge MSA and the state as a whole. While the population under 50 years old is roughly evenly split between males and females, the population over 50 years old skews female (54%) (Figure 4). These numbers indicate that a potential market exists focused on mature females.

In terms of distribution, the elderly represent a higher percentage of the population in the north-central part of the Parish, while 20–44 year olds make up a large proportion of the population in the southern part of the Parish and around LSU and Southern Universities. Age distribution is a great indicator for housing preferences of various demographic groups. Statistics indicate that young starter families prefer the southern part of the Parish within and outside the city limits of Baton Rouge, though Zachary and Central are also experiencing growth driven by schools.

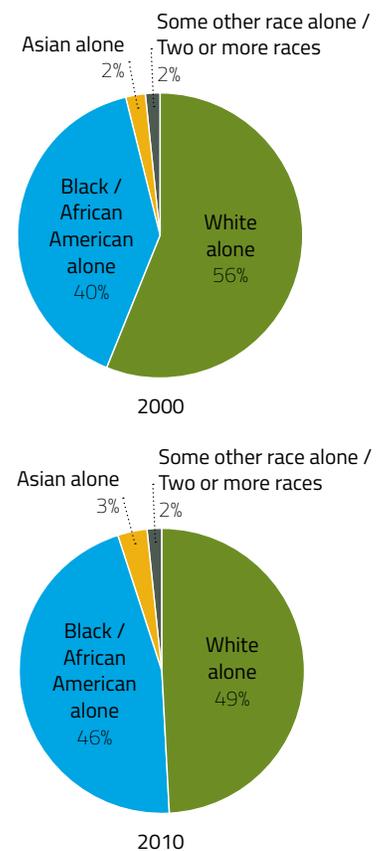
According to state forecasts prepared in 2005, the percentage of the parish’s population over the age of 60 is expected to grow to 25 percent in 2030. This shift reflects national trends as one of the nation’s largest demographic groups (baby boomers born between 1946 and 1966) continues to age and retire in greater numbers.

## Race

Within East Baton Rouge Parish, 49% of the population identifies as white alone and 46% identifies as black or African American alone. This is a significant shift from 2000, when 56% of the population identified as white alone and 40% identified as black or African American alone. These demographic changes have been primarily due to Hurricane Katrina and the out migration of whites to Livingston and Ascension parishes.

**Figure 5. East Baton Rouge Parish has seen a shift in its racial composition.**

Percent Share of Race, 2000 and 2010

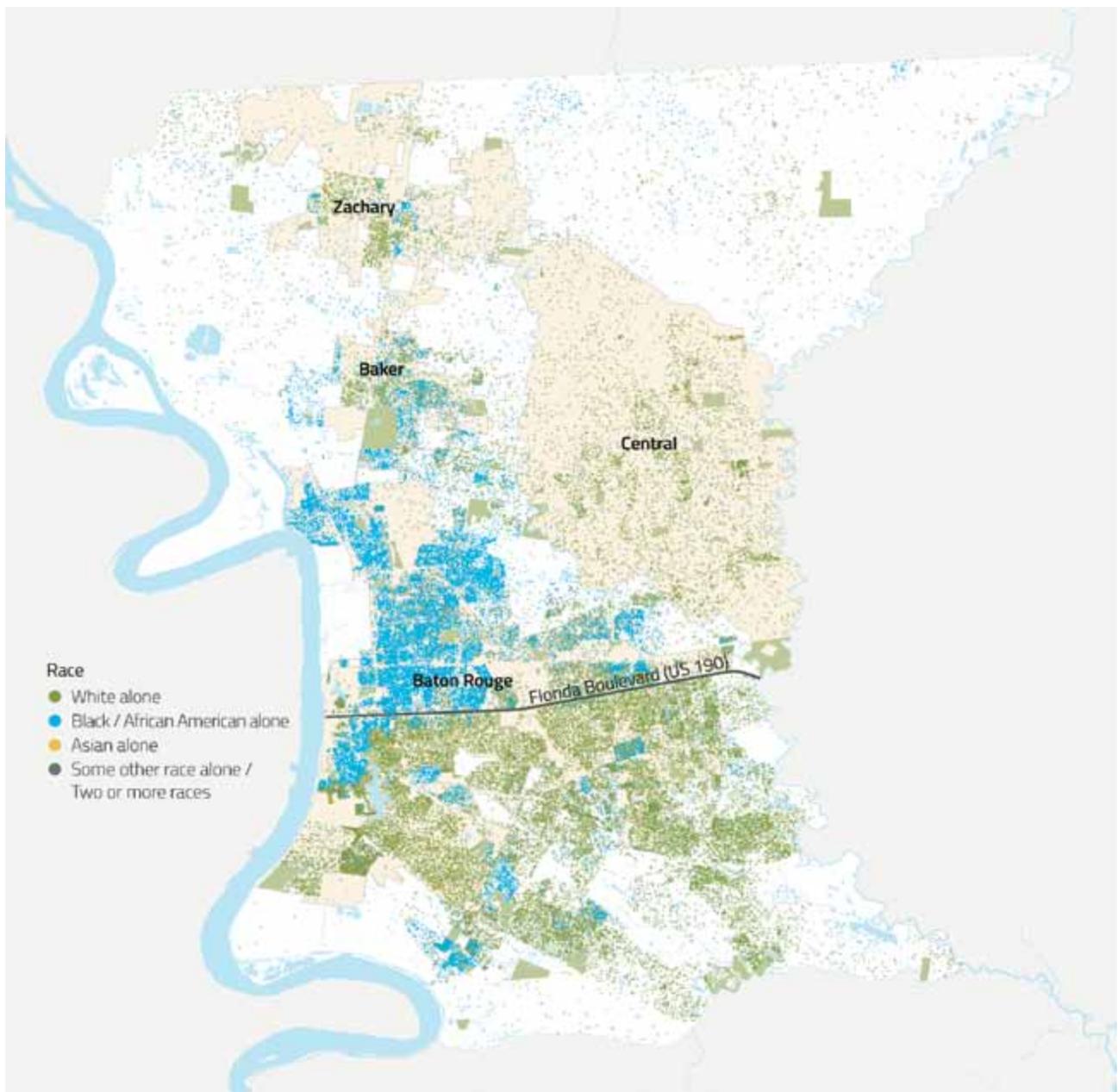


Race is geographically segregated in the Parish. The black and African American population is concentrated primarily north of U.S. Highway 190 (Florida Boulevard). Over half of the black or African American population of East Baton Rouge lives in this area. The white population is heavily concentrated below Florida Boulevard, primarily in the southern part of the Parish.

Among the four incorporated cities in East Baton Rouge Parish, the City of Baton Rouge has the closest balance between black/African Americans and whites. However, there is still a gap of 17 percentage points between the two races. At the opposite end of the spectrum, the City of Central is overwhelmingly white at 82 percent and the City of Baker is overwhelmingly black/African American at 72 percent.



**Figure 6. Florida Boulevard provides a stark racial dividing line.**  
Population Density by Race, 2011



## Education

According to the 2010 Census, the City of Baton Rouge has the highest percentage of educated persons in the State. It also has the highest percentage of those who have less than a high school degree. Parish-wide, education has improved since 2000. However, a racial gap still remains. In 2010, 42% of white parish residents had a bachelor’s degree or higher, while the same was true of only 20% of black or African American residents. Compared to the 2000, these numbers indicate an upward trend of African Americans with a college education. As a whole the percentage of population enrolled in undergraduate and graduate school is higher in the city (45%) than in the Parish overall (39%), the MSA (31%), and the State (26%). All of these numbers have increased since 2000.

## Household Size and Homeownership

The 2010 average household size in East Baton Rouge Parish was 2.49 people, lower than both the national average (2.55) and the state average (2.55).

A significantly lower percentage of housing units in East Baton Rouge Parish are owner-occupied and a significantly higher percentage of housing units in the Parish are renter-occupied when compared to the state and the nation (Figure 7). This suggests that the Parish has either a more transient population or fewer citizens who can afford to buy a home. It can also be attributed, in part, to the large college student population attending LSU, Southern University, and Baton Rouge Community College.

In terms of housing, while there was a drastic drop in residential building permits since 2008 due to the national housing market crash, there seems to be a slow but steady increase in the number of residential building permits. The total permits have increased 17 percent between 2011 and 2012, and single family permits have increased 25% over the same period.

## Household Income

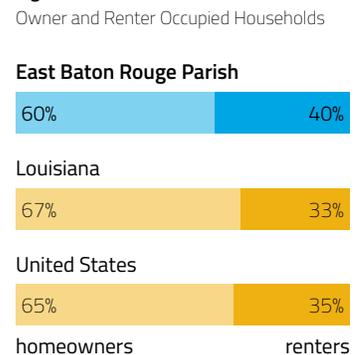
According to the U.S. Census, the estimated 2011 median household income for East Baton Rouge Parish was \$46,356, which is above the Louisiana median household income level at \$41,734 and below the national median household income at \$50,502. Additionally, per capita income for East Baton Rouge is \$24,591, above the per capita income for Louisiana at \$22,882 and below the U.S. at \$26,708.

At the bottom end of the income scale, the percentage of households making less than \$25,000 in East Baton Rouge Parish is lower, at 29%, than Louisiana at 32% but higher than the United States, at 25%. At the top of the spectrum, East Baton Rouge Parish has 19% of households at or above \$100,000, higher than Louisiana, at 16%, but lower than the United States, at 21%.

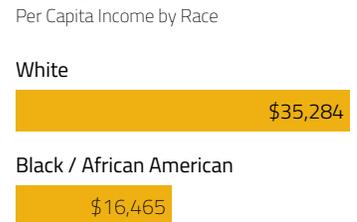
## Health and Obesity

The United Health Foundation ranked Louisiana 49<sup>th</sup> overall in its 2011 State Health Rankings. Over a third of Louisiana’s population was obese in 2011, ranking it 49<sup>th</sup> in obesity as well. Louisiana also ranks 47<sup>th</sup> in terms of physical activity, with only 33.8% of the population being physically active—more than double the inactivity rate (16.5%) of the most physically active state, Colorado. The lack of physical activity presents an opportunity, and a challenge, for the parks and recreation system in the Parish.

**Figure 7. East Baton Rouge Parish has a higher share of renters.**



**Figure 8. East Baton Rouge Parish has an income gap by race.**



49  
Louisiana's Rank  
in Overall Health

49  
Louisiana's Rank  
in Obesity

47  
Louisiana's Rank  
in Physical Activity

## The Baton Rouge Area Economy

The East Baton Rouge Parish economy is diverse, while helps to ensure stability. It is the largest employment center in the nine-parish MSA. The unemployment rate in the Baton Rouge region has remained lower than both the national and state averages.

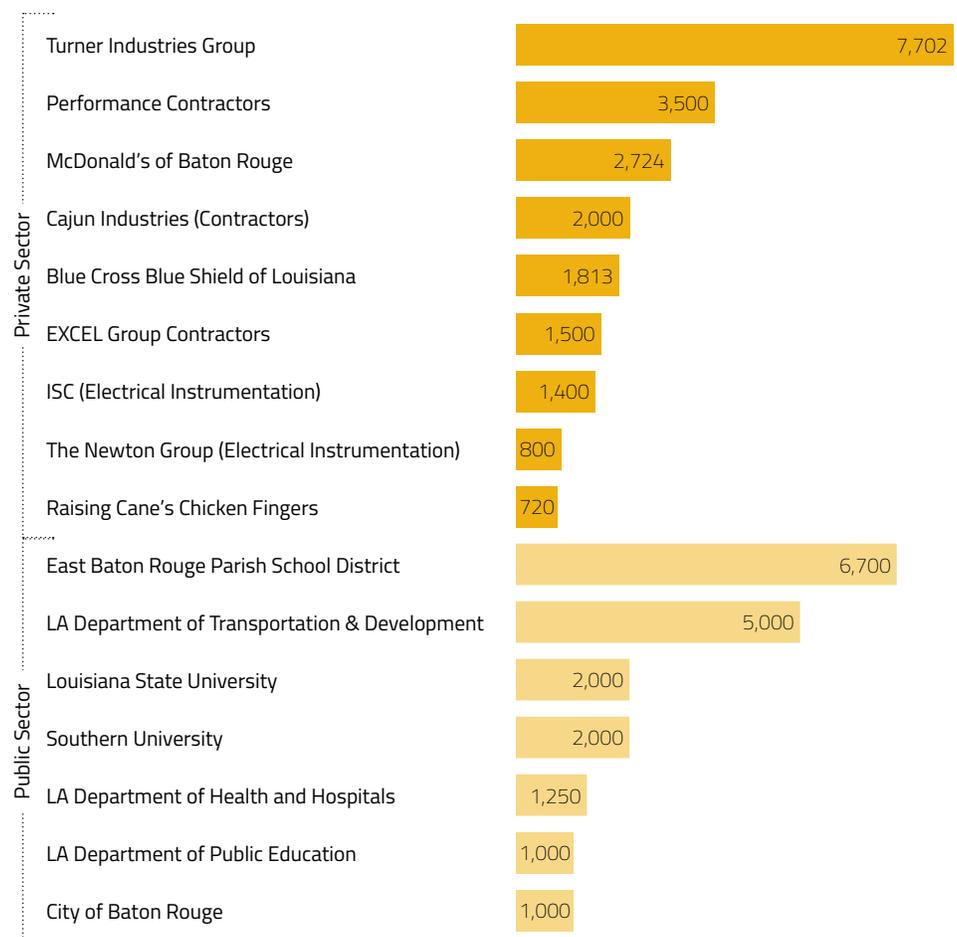
The largest employers in East Baton Rouge Parish are:

- state and local governments
- education, particularly higher education due to the presence of LSU, Southern, and Baton Rouge Community College
- the petrochemical industry
- the medical industry

Major transportation routes, which include the I-10 and I-12 corridors and the Mississippi River, provide the City of Baton Rouge and the entire Parish with key routes to transport goods, services, and people efficiently.

**Figure 9. East Baton Rouge Parish's biggest employers span both the public and private sectors.**

Number of Employees by Employer



Source: the Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce

There remain a number of challenges to East Baton Rouge Parish's economic future, including:

- quality-of-life factors, such as concerns about public safety
- quality of the public K-12 school system
- air and water quality
- a continuing population shift outside of the Parish
- acute economic and racial disparity within the Parish

These factors have broader effects, both direct and indirect, on the local economy. For instance, local university graduates continue to seek employment opportunities and a better quality of life in other southern cities, such as Houston, Charlotte, and Atlanta, rather than staying in the Parish. Employers report difficulty in recruiting and retaining a qualified workforce, which affects the Parish's ability to keep existing businesses and recruit new employers.

### Migration of Young Educated Professionals

According to a New York Times Report, young educated workers will change jobs numerous times over their careers, which make living in a large, diverse labor market more appealing. The same force leads an increasing number of educated two-earner couples to these same sorts of metro areas. Living in a highly educated metro area boosts one's own acquisition of human capital and earning power and leads to better employment outcomes for workers across the education spectrum.

### Louisiana and East Baton Rouge Parish Experiencing "Brain Drain"

Louisiana's economic growth is projected to be somewhat limited between 2010 and 2020 because of the state's "relatively low level of education demand," according to a study by The Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce. Louisiana ranks 50th in the nation when it comes to jobs that demand college graduates, which reflects a lower share of high-wage, high-growth occupations and industries, according to the study.

In addition, Louisiana and East Baton Rouge Parish continue to lose both young educated adults and experienced workers, creating a more difficult challenge for stronger economic growth. In general, less educated mature workers are more likely to leave the Southern states, according to the study. In Louisiana and West Virginia, more educated workers leave.

From 2000 to 2010, Louisiana lost 3,238 workers with at least a bachelor's degree who were between 35 and 64. The other Southern states, with the exception of West Virginia, saw an influx of those workers. Florida added 17,851 college-educated workers who were 35 to 64 over the same time period. Mississippi added 836 of the mature, college-educated workers. On the plus side, Louisiana is expected to add 400,000 jobs between 2010 and 2020. Louisiana is also rapidly expanding younger industries. According to Tech America's 12th annual Cyberstates report, Louisiana is one of the ten fastest-growing states for high-tech industries, due in part to the expansion of digital media, aerospace, and advanced materials.

BREC should pay attention to "extreme and non-traditional recreation for attracting and retaining youth and young professionals."

*public meeting participant*



Volunteering at Greenwood Community Park.  
LSU student volunteers





# Recreation Trends

*Recreation preferences are dynamic, changing with shifts in factors such as demographics, economics, and technological developments. To better anticipate the Parish’s future park and recreation needs, it is important to understand what the current trends in the county are in sports, recreation programming, and facilities.*

## National Trends

### Sports

What does BREC do well? “Progressive! Modern! Following the trends.”

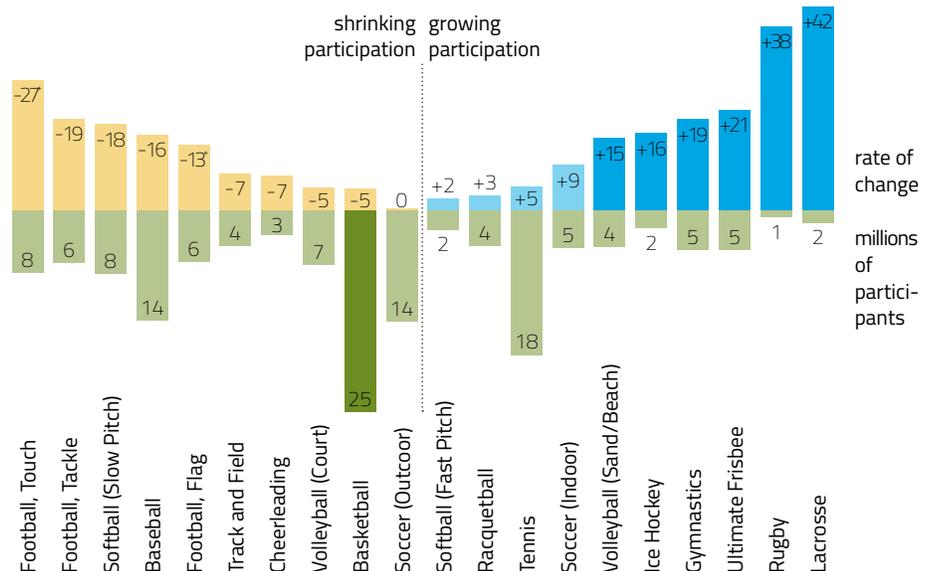
*public meeting participant*

Among traditional “bat and ball” sports, basketball leads in participation, with nearly 25 million estimated participants. Its popularity can be attributed to limited requirements for the number of participants, equipment, and space.

Since 2007, lacrosse and other niche sports like rugby have seen strong growth (Figure 10). Lacrosse has experienced continued growth over the last five years. While rugby has grown overall, it did see a decrease from 2010 to 2011. Other sports with notable growth in participation from 2007 to 2011 were ultimate frisbee, gymnastics, ice hockey, and beach volleyball.

**Figure 10. Smaller niche sports are growing rapidly.**

2011 Participation Numbers and Rates of Change, 2007–2011



\*2008 figures used in place of unavailable 2007 figures

Source: Sports & Fitness Industry Association

From 2010 to 2011, however, the only team sports that grew in participation were gymnastics, ultimate Frisbee, and lacrosse. In that same period, traditional youth “powerhouse” sports, including outdoor soccer and baseball, experienced declines in participation. However, the sheer number of participants (about 14 million each) demands the continued support of these sports.

The growth in youth team sports is now being driven by America’s 13- and 14-year-olds, the peak ages of sports participation for children. Nearly 70% of children (ages 6 to 17) in the U.S. play team sports, and three of four teenagers play at least one team sport, according to the Sports & Fitness Industry Association (SFIA) annual participation study on team sports (2011 edition).

According to the SFIA, only three team sports have had moderate increases in participation since 2010: gymnastics (9%), ultimate frisbee (7%), and lacrosse (6%). Four traditionally mainstream team sports experienced single-digit declines in participation: tackle football (6%), baseball (5%), outdoor soccer (3%), and basketball (2%).

### Aquatics

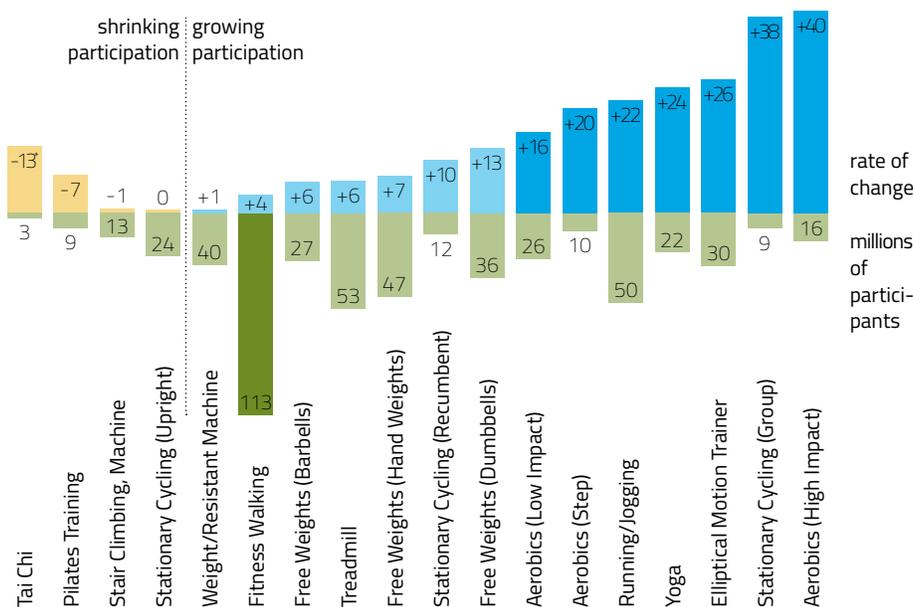
Swimming is unquestionably a lifetime sport. Participation rates in swimming have remained steady over the years, although as with most recreational activities, participation rates have dipped slightly. However, recreational swimming is the absolute leader in multi-generational appeal, with nearly 17 million estimated participants per year.

Aquatic exercise has paved the way for a less stressful form of physical activity, allowing similar gains and benefits to land-based exercise, including aerobic fitness, resistance training, flexibility, and better balance. Doctors have begun recommending aquatic exercise for injury rehabilitation, mature patients, and patients with bone or joint problems due to the significant reduction of stress placed on weight-bearing joints, bones, and muscles, and also the swelling-reducing effect of water pressure on injuries.

### Fitness

National participation trends in general fitness have experienced strong growth in recent years. Many of these activities have become popular due to an increased interest among people to improve their health by engaging in an active lifestyle. These activities have very few barriers to

**Figure 11. General fitness participation experiencing strong growth.**  
2011 Participation Numbers and Rates of Change Between 2007 and 2011



\*2008 figures used in place of unavailable 2007 figures

Source: Sports & Fitness Industry Association

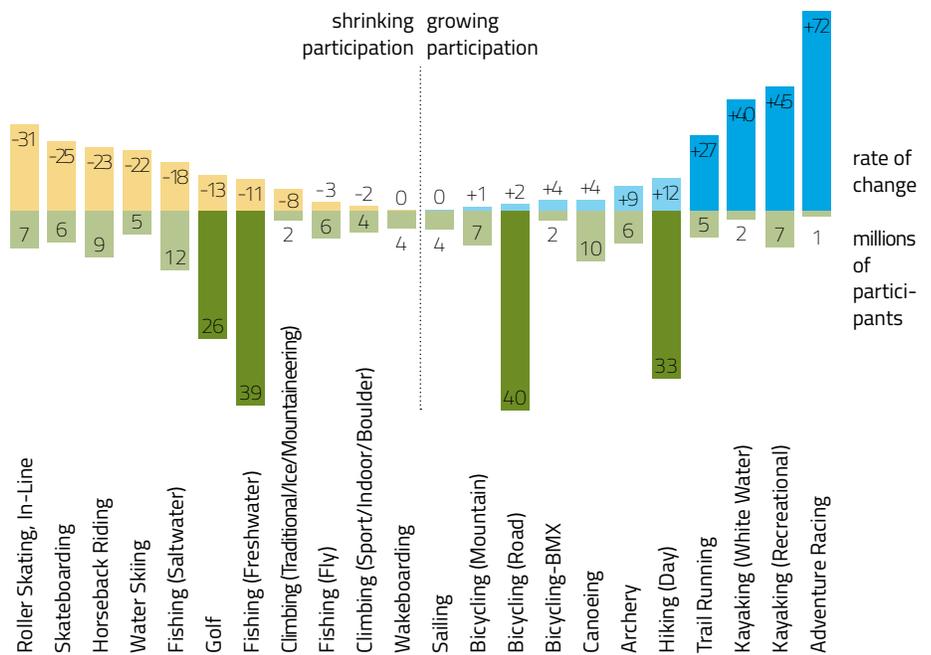
entry, which provides a variety of activities that are relatively inexpensive to participate in and can be performed by nearly anyone with no time restrictions.

The most popular fitness activity by far is fitness walking, which had over 112 million participants in 2011 (Figure 11). Other leading fitness activities based on number of participants include the treadmill, running/jogging, and hand free weights. From 2007 to 2011, the activities that grew most rapidly were high impact aerobics, group stationary cycling, and the elliptical motion trainer. Yoga, running/jogging, step aerobics, and low impact aerobics have also seen significant growth in recent years.

### General Recreation

Results from the SFIA’s Topline Participation Report indicate increased popularity in activities that encourage an active lifestyle, can be performed individually or with a group, and are not limited by time restraints. The most popular activities in the general recreation category include road bicycling, freshwater fishing, day hiking, and golf (Figure 12). From 2007 to 2011, general recreation activities that have seen the most rapid growth are adventure racing, recreational kayaking, white water kayaking, and trail running. In-line roller skating and skateboarding have seen a substantial drop in participation.

**Figure 12. Activities that encourage an active lifestyle are gaining in popularity.**  
2011 Participation Numbers and Rates of Change Between 2007 and 2011



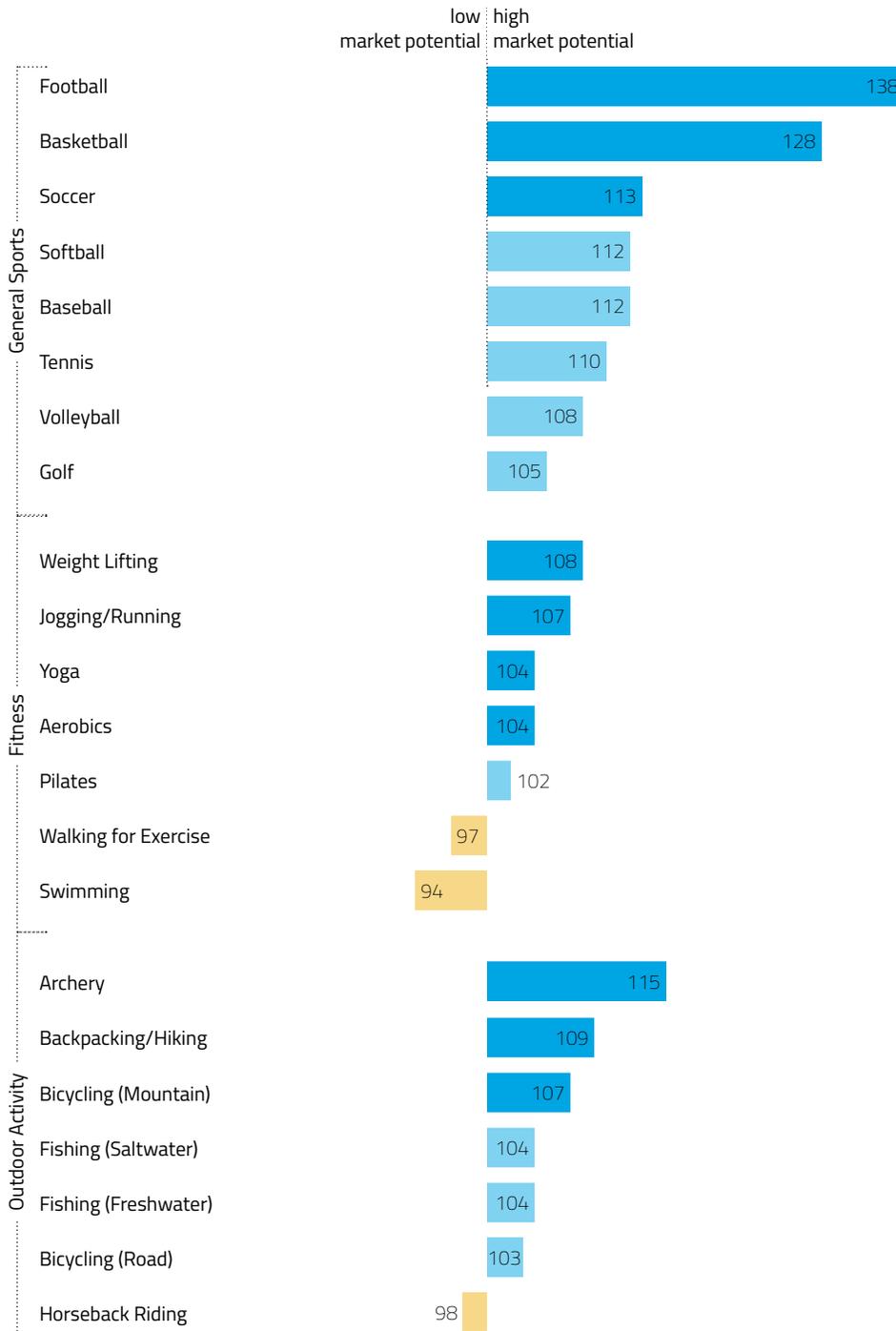
Source: Sports & Fitness Industry Association

## Local Sport and Market Potential

The Market Potential Index (MPI) measures the relative likelihood that an adult resident of East Baton Rouge Parish will participate in an activity compared to the U.S. national average, indicating probable demand for that activity. Comparisons are made in four categories: general sports by activity, fitness by activity, outdoor activity, and money spent on miscellaneous recreation. The parish shows high MPI numbers in all categories (See (Figure 13) and (Figure 14)).

**Figure 13. East Baton Rouge Parish has high market potential across recreation categories.**

Market Potential Index for Participation



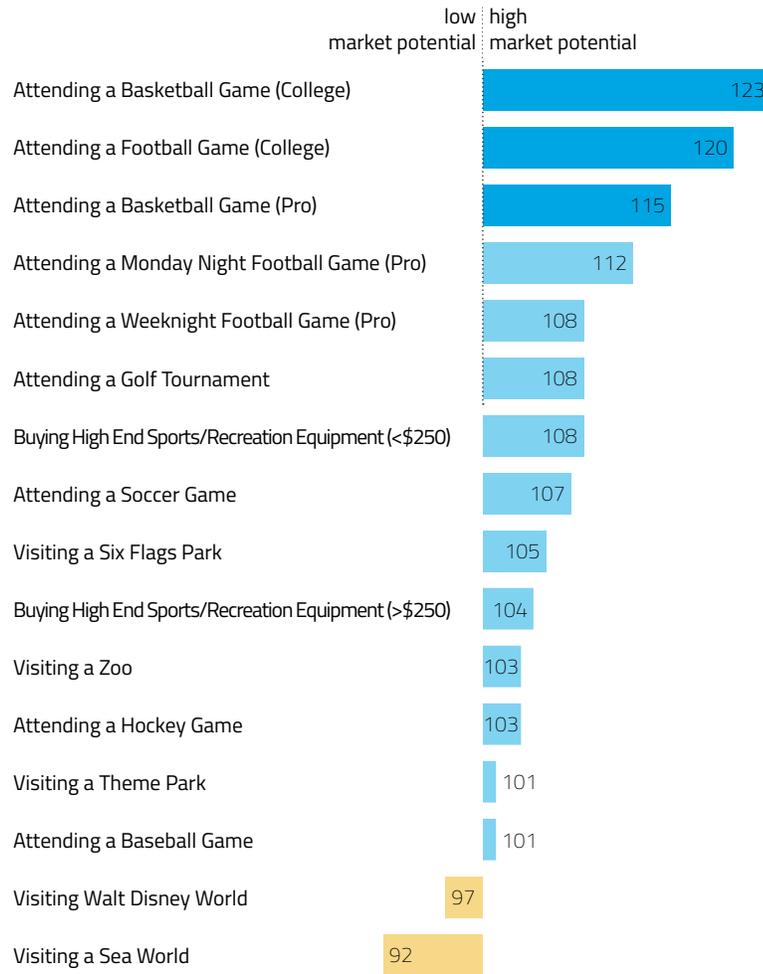
Source: ESRI



Enjoying Friday night football.  
Olympia Stadium

**Figure 14. College sports offer the highest spending potential**

Market Potential Index for Money Spent



Source: ESRI



# Citizen and Stakeholder Input

***BREC’s mission is to provide recreational opportunities for the community. It is essential to maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Parish community about what its recreational interests are and how BREC is doing at meeting the community’s needs. As a result, BREC regularly seeks feedback and direction from the community.***

## Methods of Outreach

As part of the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process, BREC used multiple forms of engagement to gather input from citizens across the parish. In addition, partner organizations and other key stakeholders were interviewed about their aspirations for parks and recreation in the Parish, and opportunities for BREC to pursue in the next 10 years.

### Public Meetings

As part of the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process, two parish-wide meetings were held at Independence Park Theatre and 33 neighborhood meetings were held at locations around the parish. The meetings started with a brief presentation, followed by activities to gather input from participants. At the first parish-wide meeting, participants provided input by writing comments and indicating preferences on large format printouts. At the neighborhood meetings and the second parish-wide meeting, participants provided input by writing comments and using electronic keypad voting devices.

#### **Voting on the importance of particular facilities.**

Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> First Parish-Wide Meeting



## Online Public Forum

Throughout the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process, the online platform MindMixer was used to allow members of the community to contribute ideas and provide feedback from their own homes and on their own schedules. In this way, BREC was able to engage a broader audience than with public surveys and meetings alone.

## Stakeholder Interviews

Public, nonprofit, and private sector stakeholders were interviewed during the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process. Stakeholders included elected officials, government departments and agencies, natural resource advocates, trail enthusiasts, recreation and program providers, economic development organizations, BREC Commission members, and BREC staff.

## Public Surveys

BREC routinely conducts statistically valid surveys to identify needs and help establish priorities for the future development of parks and recreation facilities, acquisition of open space, programs, and services (Figure 15).

The most recent public survey, conducted in 2013, received over 450 mail and phone responses out of a random sample of 2,000 households. The results represent a statistically valid cross-section of the Parish's population. Other recent surveys were conducted in 2012, 2010, and 2009.

**Figure 15. Trails among the highest priority parks and facilities, programs, and actions in the 2013 public survey.**  
Five Highest Priorities for Parks and Facilities, Programs, and Actions, 2013 Survey

Parks and Facilities	Programs	Actions
Walking and Biking Trails 28%	Youth Learn to Swim 16%	Improve Existing Neighborhood Parks 34%
Neighborhood Parks 27%	Water Fitness 14%	Improve Trails that Connect Parks 25%
Playground Areas 21%	Cultural Special Events 14%	Develop New Outdoor Pools/Aquatic Centers 20%
Fitness and Exercise Facilities 19%	Adult Continuing Education 12%	Develop New Trails that Connect Parks 15%
Family Picnic Areas 17%	Indoor Space for Small Events 12%	Improve Existing Athletic Fields 14%
		Purchase Land to Preserve Natural Areas 14%

## Common Themes

Across the various methods of outreach employed by BREC, six common themes emerged. At the second parish-wide meeting, the public was asked to prioritize these themes, and they are presented below in order of priority.

### Health and Wellness

Over half of respondents to the 2013 survey identified health and fitness as the most significant benefits of BREC parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services, and nearly a quarter noted improved mental health and reduced stress as among the most significant benefits. In addition, fitness and exercise facilities were among the top 5 highest priority parks and facilities. In the public meetings, the concept of parks being used to support active lifestyles and address public health concerns rose to the top of the list of trends considered important. Participants also indicated a preference for facilities where they can be active and engaged in fitness. These preferences are in line with national trends that show increasing interest in fitness (page 18) and are particularly important considering Louisiana's poor public health rankings (page 12).

54% of residents identified health and fitness as the most significant benefits of BREC parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services.

*2013 public survey*

## What does BREC do well? “Solicit input, act on input”

*online forum top idea*



**Bringing BREC to neighborhoods.**  
BREC on the Geaux



**Learning bird-watching techniques.**  
A Walk With the Birds by the Baton Rouge Audubon Society at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center

### Community Involvement and Ownership

Citizens and stakeholders made clear throughout the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process that they appreciated the opportunity to be involved in setting the vision for the future of BREC. They also made clear that they are ready and eager to be involved in the design and implementation of the parks and facilities in their own neighborhoods. BREC has a successful track record of involving the community in park planning, and recent successful partnerships show that by leveraging community resources, BREC is able to provide even better outcomes than it can by itself. Many stakeholders noted that small improvements, such as lighting for fields and the addition of scoreboards, could go a long way to enhance use and increase a sense of community ownership.

### Connectivity

Walking and biking trails rose to the top of list of the parks and facilities that are most important to households in the 2013 survey and rose to the top of the list of most important amenities in the online forum. Of the top five highest priority actions that respondents thought BREC should move forward with, two related to trails—improving trails that connect parks and developing new trails that connect parks. The Parish-wide and neighborhood meetings, as well as the online forum, echoed these preferences. This is in line with national trends that show fitness walking to have the most participation by far among fitness activities (page 18). Stakeholders and the public indicated that trail connections for bikers, runners, and walkers are important, particularly connections to parks and employment locations.

### Innovation

BREC is recognized for excellence, having won, among other awards, the National Recreation and Park Association’s Gold Medal Award. Citizens and stakeholders commented on the innovative facilities and programs BREC offers—from Liberty Lagoon to the velodrome, and from BREC on the Geaux to Swamp Stompers—and encouraged BREC to continue creating unique recreational opportunities and adding new types of facilities. For example, zip-lining was identified as second only to trails when public meeting participants were asked what recreation trends interest them. New types of play and innovative park design and structures rose to the top of the design innovations public meeting participants wanted to see.

### Learning

In the public meetings, citizens identified the concept of developing and programming parks as learning environments as second only to the concept of designing parks to encourage active lifestyles to improve public health. This is in line with a national trend of using parks to expand knowledge and stewardship with hands-on, in-the-field experience and integrating environmental education and stewardship with the recreational experience. Among the top five programs that survey respondents listed as high priorities were youth swim instruction and adult continuing education programs.

### Water and Nature

Stakeholders made clear that the Parish’s natural resources—particularly its rivers—are key attractions that are currently underutilized and under-appreciated. Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center was the most highly rated special use facility in the BREC system in the online forum, and the second most highly rated special use facility in both the survey and the public meetings. Natural and conservation areas were second only to trails in terms of the amenities that participants in the online forum ranked as most important. Also, among the highest priority actions from the survey was the desire to purchase land to preserve natural areas.

In addition, there was a clear message from the public and stakeholders that swimming skills are vital. Youth swim programs were the highest priority programs identified in the community survey, and developing new pools or family aquatic centers was among the community’s highest priority actions.



DRAFT

The background of the page is a photograph of a lake. In the foreground, there is a wooden pier extending into the water. In the background, there is a building with a covered walkway and some trees. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter.

# Strategic Directions

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# Fiscal Responsibility

## **Strategic Direction 1:**

**Continue to place a priority on the wise use of taxpayer dollars.**

*Money for financing land purchases, construction of facilities, maintenance, and the operation of many varied programs comes from taxes approved by the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish and from income generated by facilities, concessions, and programs. Other funds come from local governmental agencies, the Federal Government, donations from local businesses and civic organizations, and the BREC Foundation. BREC strives to make the best use of taxpayer dollars.*

## BREC's Funding

BREC's Capital Improvements Program (CIP) is funded by a two mill property tax levied across the parish. This tax was originally passed in 1964 and has been renewed every ten years.

In 2004, voters passed an additional twenty year, 1.753 mill tax for capital improvements that stemmed from BREC's 2004 Imagine Your Parks plan. This tax allowed BREC to borrow \$58 million to renew the park system. Much of this funding went into transforming 12 parks into signature Community Parks. The majority of this funding was spent in the first ten years. Funding in the remaining ten years will be primarily used to pay off the borrowed funds. Sixty-one percent of the funds for park renovation and construction in the 2005–2014 cycle came from the additional tax. BREC will return to a much lower level (39%) of capital improvement funding in 2015–2024.

BREC has been able to save or avoid nearly \$1.7 million in costs by employing multiple measures to increase efficiency.

## System Efficiencies

With fiscal responsibility in mind, BREC has taken a number of actions to make the system more efficient so that its funding can be stretched even further. Together, the following measures have saved or avoided nearly \$1.7 million in costs:

- changes in vehicle use policy
- in-sourcing of previously contracted information technology services
- Early Retiree Reinsurance Program and Retiree Drug Subsidy
- Workers Compensation Administration
- restructuring of executive staff
- refinancing 2005 general obligation bond series
- privatization of mowing services for small parks

- re-naturalization of areas
- modernization of mowing equipment
- demolition of low use, old structures
- reductions in landfill disposal
- reduction in park operation fuel usage
- improvements in fuel distribution
- implementation of dumpster contracts

## Cost Recovery

Cost recovery is the recoupment of some or all costs of providing services. BREC currently tracks cost recovery for some, but not all, program areas. Cost recovery standards exist for several departments, but methodologies for calculating cost recovery are not consistent.

Each program area should have cost recovery targets, and cost recovery should be tracked by program area as well as for the organization as a whole (Figure 16). Targets should reflect the degree to which the program area provides a public versus private good. Programs that provide public benefits should be subsidized more, while programs that provide private benefits should seek to recover costs or generate revenue for other services. Generally, non-core programs, which are less critical to BREC’s mission, should aim to yield a higher cost recovery rate to sustain themselves, leaving limited tax-based appropriations to fund core programs.

**Figure 16. Cost recovery should increase as public good decreases.**

Cost recovery and subsidy program categories

Category	Description	% EBR Served	Cost Recovery	Subsidy
Core-Essential	part of BREC’s mission		0–20%	 80–100%
Important	important to the community		50–80%	 20–50%
Value-Added	enhanced offerings		80–100%	 0–20%

## Program Pricing

Program pricing should be set by program area or specific event based on the cost of service and strategically adjusted according to market factors or policy goals. Currently, BREC uses several pricing strategies for each core program area (Figure 17).

BREC currently uses residency-based pricing (i.e. one price for those who live within the parish and another price for those who do not) in nearly all program areas. Residency-based pricing should be expanded to all program areas except community events (since a common objective for events is to attract non-residents into the community). BREC should also factor in cost recovery goals in setting prices for all program areas, recognizing that occasionally a stated goal will call for no cost recovery.

Overall, the degree to which BREC currently employs pricing strategies is healthy. However, staff should continue to monitor the effectiveness of the various strategies and make adjustments as necessary within BREC’s overall pricing philosophy. It is especially important for yearly competitor and other service providers to be benchmarked, shopped, and evaluated to monitor changes and track how other providers’ pricing compares with BREC’s pricing.

Annual mini business plans (2–3 pages) for each core program area should build on elements that are currently successfully and effectively articulated in BREC’s annual marketing plan to include an evaluation of service costs and cost recovery and a pricing strategy for the following year. If developed regularly and consistently, mini business plans can be effective tools in developing and justifying budgets.

Nearly two-thirds of residents are satisfied with the fees charged for recreation programs.

*2013 public survey*

**Figure 17. BREC has an opportunity to expand its pricing strategies.**

Pricing Strategies by Core Program Area

Core Program Area	Pricing Strategies									
	Age Segment	Family / Household Status	Residency	Weekday / Weekend	Prime / Non-Prime Time	Group Discounts	Location	Competition (Market Rate)	Cost Recovery Goals	Ability to Pay
Adult Leisure			+				✓		+	
Aquatics			✓		+	+		✓	✓	✓
Athletics	✓		+					+	✓	
Baton Rouge Gallery			✓		+			✓	+	
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center	✓		✓		✓			✓	+	
Community Events									+	
Extreme Sports			✓		+				✓	✓
Farr Park Equestrian Center			✓			✓	✓		+	✓
Fitness, Health, and Wellness	✓		✓						+	
General Recreation	✓		✓				✓		+	
Golf	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	+	✓
Highland Road Park Observatory			✓					✓	+	
Inclusive Recreation	✓		✓						+	
Independence Park Theatre & Cultural Center	✓	✓	✓		+	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Magnolia Mound Plantation	✓		✓		+	✓			✓	
Outdoor Adventure and Recreation			+				✓		+	
Tennis	✓		+		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

✓ strategy already used by BREC  
 + strategy BREC should explore

## Action Plan

- 1.1. Continue to approach planning, delivery, and maintenance of Recreation programs and facilities in an equitable and balanced manner.

*BREC is most effective when it uses all information at its disposal to make decisions. Public input, demographic data, scientific surveys, needs assessments, inventories and analysis of existing parks and facilities, and trends in parks and recreation are all tools BREC employs to set direction for the future.*

- 1.1.1. Integrate scientific needs index surveys with other relevant information to help in decision making for programing and planning.

- 1.2. Develop and implement a fees and charges policy with a pricing philosophy, and update it periodically.

*Each program area serves a different segment of the East Baton Rouge Parish population. Program pricing and cost recovery should be based on whether the program serves the many or the few and whether it is central to BREC’s mission.*

- 1.2.1. Set cost recovery targets for each core program area based on full direct and indirect costs and whether it is a core essential, important, or value-added service.
- 1.2.2. Align the organization to reach cost recovery targets, with consistent methods of calculating cost recovery, across the organization.

- 1.2.3. Create annual mini business plans (6-8 pages) for each core program service area to evaluate and set participation, service cost, cost recovery, market share, pricing, and marketing strategies for the following year.
- 1.2.4. Expand residency-based pricing (parish residents pay less than non-residents) to appropriate program and facility rental areas.
- 1.2.5. Train facility managers in using a business and capacity management approach to maximize the value of these facilities to program users and visitors.
- 1.2.6. Develop business plans for each facility to determine how to optimize its value, efficiency, and revenue capability.

**1.3. Increase consideration of costs and benefits along with design standards in operations, maintenance, and capital decisions.**

*The number of improvements necessary to address the needs at BREC's park and recreation facilities far outweigh the funding available. BREC should target investments where they can have the greatest impact.*

- 1.3.1. Set productivity standards, including earned income targets, for park and recreation facilities.
- 1.3.2. Develop skills and capacity of site-level managers for evaluating costs and benefits of existing facilities and for using that information in decision-making.
- 1.3.3. Evaluate whether park and recreation facilities that do not meet productivity standards can be brought up to standards in a fiscally responsible way (See 3.2.3.) or if they should be reduced or repurposed. Update and implement the obsolete land and facility study.
- 1.3.4. Use site-level analyses to inform system-wide decisions.
- 1.3.5. Optimize operations, program and maintenance standards to ensure financial sustainability.

**1.4. Track and report revenues, direct and indirect costs, and participation associated with BREC's services.**

*BREC provides integral services to the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish, and those services have an associated value. This value should be widely understood not only among BREC's executive management, but at all levels of the organization and in the community.*

- 1.4.1. Develop skills and capacity of site-level managers for tracking and reporting revenues, costs, and participation and for using that information in decision-making.
- 1.4.2. Annually benchmark BREC's revenues, costs, and participation against similar providers.
- 1.4.3. Communicate the value that BREC parks, facilities, and programs provide to the parish.

**1.5. Continue to explore new ways of doing business that create system-wide efficiencies.**

*Modeled after the best practices of other organizations, using better tools and making better use of available information can allow for more effective decision-making and make BREC's operations more efficient, ensuring the best use of taxpayer dollars.*

- 1.5.1. Utilize training and study of best practices to refine and improve on BREC delivery models.
- 1.5.2. Increase availability of financial information through better software.

**Cooling off with a dip in the water.**  
Summer Camp trip to Liberty Lagoon



- 1.5.3. Improve real time or near real time budget information.
- 1.5.4. Develop business plans for each facility to determine how to optimize its value, efficiency, and revenue capability.
- 1.5.5. Train facility managers in using a business and capacity management approach to maximize the value of these facilities to program users and visitors.





# Programs

## **Strategic Direction 2:**

**Continue innovation in recreation programming, while incorporating health and wellness into program design and development.**

*Innovation in recreation programming and health and wellness are two common themes that emerged from public and stakeholder input. Within its broad program offerings, BREC should put a particular emphasis on these two themes.*

## Breadth of Programs

BREC provides a wide variety of activities and services to the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish. Recreation Department staff are responsible for the management and implementation of recreation programs, special community-wide events, and the operation of multiple facilities. Employees are engaged year round in planning, implementing, conducting, and evaluating programs and events.

All functions within the Recreation Department combine to provide hundreds of programs in the areas of fitness, athletics, aquatics, nature, outdoor adventure, youth camps, history, and special events. The Recreation Department also operates an unusually large number (60) of recreation centers and specialized facilities such as the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center, Baton Rouge Gallery, Farr Park Equestrian Center, Highland Road Park Observatory, Independence Park Theatre and Cultural Center, and Magnolia Mound Plantation. An assessment of recreation facilities is found in [Appendix XX](#).

In addition to the provision of services provided directly by BREC at its facilities, partnerships with other organizations are utilized throughout the service area. Through formal and informal cooperative relationships, partners assist with delivering select programs, training of BREC staff, granting access to specialized facilities, and providing supplies and materials to programs.

## Core Programs

It is important to identify core programs based on current and future needs to create a sense of focus around specific program areas of greatest importance to the community. Public recreation is challenged by the premise of being all things to all people, especially in a community such as East Baton Rouge Parish. Identifying core programs assists staff, policy makers, and the public in focusing on what is most important.

58% of residents are satisfied with the variety of programs offered by BREC.

*2013 public survey*

## BREC's Core Programs

Programs are considered core programs for BREC if they meet a majority of the following:

- has been provided at least 4–5 years
- is expected by the community
- consumes at least 5% of BREC's budget
- is offered at least 3 seasons per year
- has wide appeal
- has a tiered level of skill development
- has full-time staff
- has specific facilities to support it
- makes up at least 20% of the local market

### Adult Leisure

BREC's 17 adult leisure centers offer a variety of recreational and social activities for adults of East Baton Rouge Parish and surrounding parishes. They cater to the healthy lifestyle of aging individuals who stay active in the community. Each center offers a variety of activities—including crafts, sewing, ceramics, card playing, games, quilting, exercise classes, and painting. The facilities also promote better quality of life with exercise programs like pickle

ball, volleyball, badminton, and chair aerobics. Social and special events include tea dances, luncheons, and day trips.

### Aquatics

Aquatics programs provide swimming education and recreational opportunities. BREC offers a wide variety of programs for the public including swimming lessons, recreational swim time, fitness classes, and kayak lessons as well as facility rentals. Liberty Lagoon, a signature aquatic facility, is open from the first weekend in May through Labor Day weekend. BREC also operates three pools (Brooks, Howell, and Anna T. Jordan) in partnership with the YMCA. The Aquatics Department also operates three splash pads—at Greenwood, Forest, and City-Brooks community parks. Additional splash pads are planned for North Sherwood Forest, Jackson, and Zachary Community Parks.

### Athletics

BREC Athletics provides a variety of leagues, camps, programs, tournaments, and clinics.

**Learning the right hitting technique.**  
Baseball Clinic



Adult leagues are for individuals 18 and older and target keeping people active in a competitive lifestyle on a recreational basis and level. Junior leagues serve ages 4–17 and work to introduce youth to healthy competition and a variety of athletic opportunities. Some of the sports offered include baseball, softball, youth tee ball, basketball, flag football, and junior tackle football. In addition, BREC offers sport clinics to teach children and teens sports fundamentals. League play locations depend on the preference of registered participants and field availability. Sites include BREC community parks, BREC recreation centers, local high schools, or other partner facilities.

### Baton Rouge Gallery

Baton Rouge Gallery (BRG) is a contemporary art gallery located in BREC's historic City Park Pavilion. The Gallery is a cooperative gallery and offers monthly contemporary art exhibitions featuring the current works of its artist members, as well as special themed exhibitions. The Gallery hosts special events and programs like Art in the Park, the Sundays@4

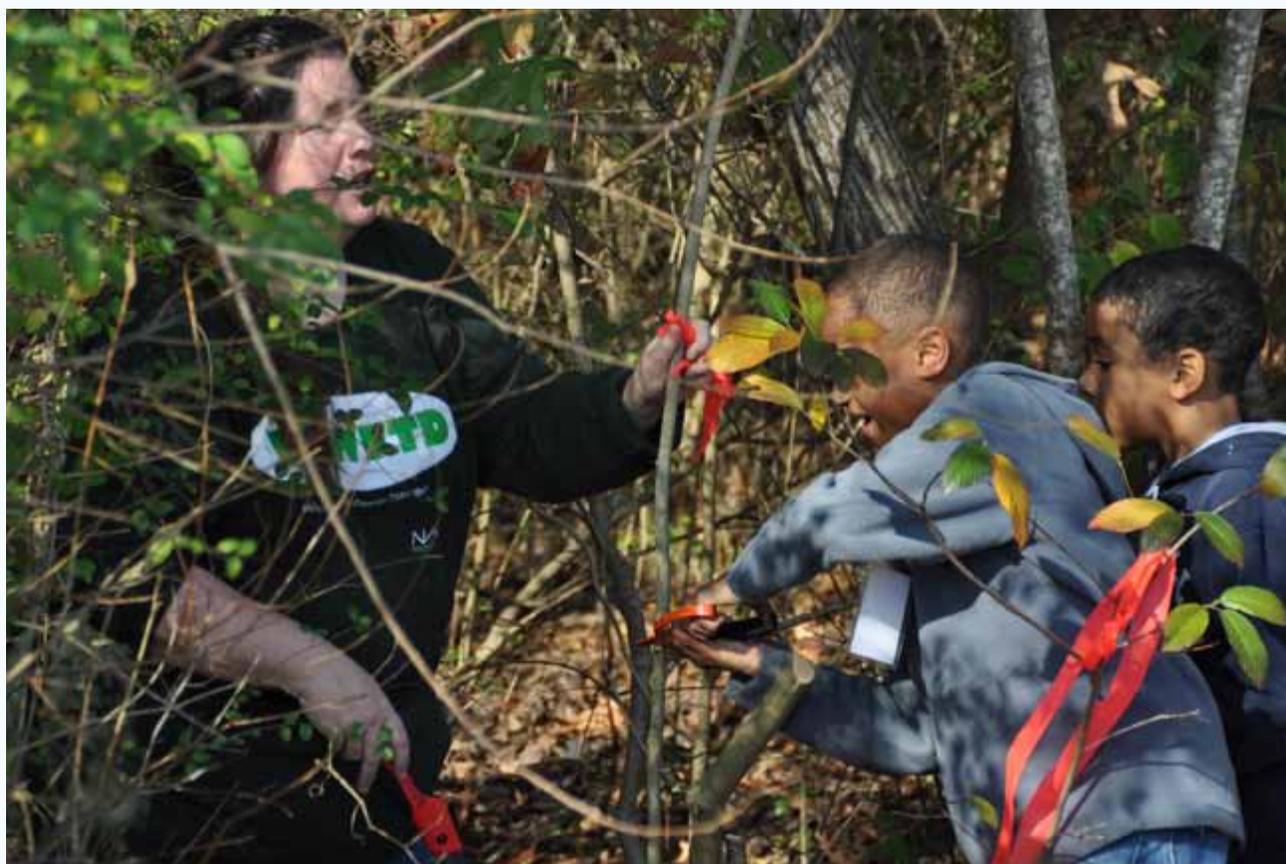
Articulate series, the Movies & Music on the Lawn series, Venus Envy and the Surreal Salon Soirée, and studio art lectures and classes for all ages. Individuals or organizations may also rent the gallery for special occasions.

### Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center

The Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center is a 103-acre facility dedicated to connecting people to nature through conservation, education, recreation, and tourism. It houses a 9,500-square-foot building filled with live animal exhibits; photographic presentations of the site's flora and fauna; natural artifact and mineral displays; and a sizeable, vintage waterfowl decoy carving collection. Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center periodically features ecology and art exhibits. It also conducts nature programs and environmental education throughout the year including educational group tours, live animal encounters, holiday and summer day camps, toddler activities, birding walks, field trips, and special events. In addition, staff members disseminate information to the public about local flora and fauna.

#### Getting in touch with nature.

Winter Camp at Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center



### Community Events

BREC hosts events that serve participants of all ages. BREC's seeks to provide affordable and safe social activities, create new relationships, contribute to a sense of community, and to showcase park and facility amenities and features. Examples of community events include the Blues and Heritage Festival, Father Daughter Dance, Juneteenth Festival, Halloween Carnivals, Santa Road Shows, Zippy Zoo Fest, Movies in the Park, Red Ribbon Youth Fest, Family Campout, and Arbor Day Celebration.

### Extreme Sports

The Extreme Sports Division operates a number of specialized facilities in addition to providing programs and services. Facilities include a velodrome, three skate parks, a BMX track, an air gun range, disc golf courses, and mountain bike trails. The BMX track hosts weekly American Bicycle Association (ABA) sanctioned races on Sunday afternoons. This facility also hosts birthday parties and a BMX 101 class, which teaches basic handling, bike positioning, jumps, passing, and other techniques. The skate park offers public skate times, rentals, and basic boarding classes, which focus on basic balance, correct stance, general riding skills, and park safety. The air gun range holds monthly informal target matches and houses two field courses and a covered site-in range. BREC's disc golf courses at Highland Road Community Park, Greenwood Park, and Flanacher Park are 18-hole courses that hold

monthly tournaments. The department also holds workdays on the Comite and Hooper Road mountain bike trails in conjunction with the Baton Rouge Area Mountain Bike Association (BRAMBA).

### Farr Park Equestrian Center

The Farr Park Equestrian Center and RV Campground offers a variety of opportunities for horse enthusiasts, including riding lessons for all ages, a therapeutic riding program for people with disabilities, children's camps, and horse boarding. The center hosts a number of equestrian events throughout the year, including horse shows and rodeos. Facilities include a newly renovated indoor arena, a lighted outdoor arena, 256 stalls, a cross-country event course, horse trails, and an RV campground with 108 sites. Individuals or organizations may rent the facilities on an hourly or daily basis for personal riding or private functions.

### Fitness, Health, and Wellness

BREC provides health and wellness programming to residents at sites throughout the parish, including gym services, personal training, aerobics classes, senior citizen programs, and programs for people with disabilities. BREC operates four fitness centers: the Milton J. Womack Fitness Center, North Sherwood Forest Family Center, Santa Maria Golf Course Fitness Center, and Webb Park Group Exercise and Fitness Training Center. Monthly memberships are available for \$30



#### Staying fit.

Body Blast Fitness Class at North Sherwood Forest Community Park



**Putting artistic talent on display.**

Saturday Studio Art Class at Baton Rouge Gallery

per month, allowing guests to visit any of the four facilities with no annual contract required. Weekly and daily fees are also offered. The facilities have an array of fitness equipment including treadmills, weight machines, elliptical machines, and free weights. The North Sherwood Forest Family Center houses an indoor walking/running track, meeting rooms, aerobic rooms, and a play area. Womack Park, Santa Maria, North Sherwood, and Webb Park have locker rooms and showers.

For teenagers, BREC holds youth intervention programs at BREC's Belfair Free Dreams Teen Center and Baker Recreation Center that provide positive reinforcement activities for youth ages 13–18. For younger children, BREC implemented a mobile recreation program sponsored by Blue Cross Blue Shield and the BREC Foundation called BREC on the Geaux.

### General Recreation

The Recreation Department provides a wide variety of general recreational programs and services throughout the BREC system. These programs include dance classes and programs, arts and crafts, karate and other

martial arts, cultural educational programs, piano lessons, aerobics, playgroups, camps during the summer and holidays, and many other programs. Recreation programming also includes interactive game rooms at Womack Park and North Sherwood Family Center that incorporate fitness and recreation for all ages.

### Golf

The Golf Department operates and maintains seven golf courses, staffed by full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. Volunteers and contract instructors also provide services. These facilities include two premier public courses, Santa Maria and Beaver Creek, and five public courses: Historic City Park, Webb Memorial, Howell Park, Dumas Memorial, and J.S. Clark Golf Course. J.S. Clark Golf Course also serves as the home of The First Tee of East Baton Rouge Parish, a nationally recognized youth development program. Player development programs at each BREC golf course offer a variety of instruction that provide newcomers, latent, and core golfers with skills and motivation to participate in BREC golf. BREC employs three PGA professionals and seeks to associate with PGA player development

programs within Play Golf America. Primarily conducted at Santa Maria Golf Course, but with seasonal programming at BREC's public courses, independent contractors offer individual private lessons and clinics. Staff offer programs for all skill levels and have been able to reach all demographics.

### Highland Road Park Observatory

Highland Road Park Observatory houses a state-of-the-art 20-inch telescope and an accessible 16-inch reflecting telescope. The observatory is sponsored jointly by BREC, Louisiana State University, and the Baton Rouge Astronomical Society. The Astronomical Society serves as the observatory's volunteer corps, with membership open to the public. The observatory allows the public to view the skies from its telescopes during open viewing hours. It hosts a wealth of programming, including a Friday night lecture series, followed by a night sky observation; the Saturday Morning Science Academy for children ages 8–12 to explore hands-on science- and astronomy-related activities; as well as solar viewings every other Saturday. In addition, the observatory hosts rocket camps for children.

### Inclusive Recreation

Inclusive recreation provides opportunities for individuals with and without disabilities to participate in recreation activities together. For individuals with disabilities to participate

as fully as possible, BREC provides reasonable accommodations like individualized techniques and resources used to enhance program participation without fundamentally altering a program. BREC partners with the Arc Baton Rouge, Baton Rouge Soccer Association, and the Baton Rouge Kickball Association to offer inclusive sport leagues for ages 3 and older, including tee ball, coach's pitch, softball, soccer, kickball, and basketball. Through a partnership with Families Helping Families of Greater Baton Rouge, BREC offers monthly Sunshine Socials for adults with disabilities and their friends and family. In addition, BREC offers inclusive community events, recreation classes, and summer camps.

### Independence Park Theatre and Cultural Center

Independence Park Theatre has hosted hundreds of events including concerts, plays, musicals, dance recitals, graduations, lectures, seminars, workshops, and conferences. The theater can be rented by professional performers, non-profits, schools, businesses, and various community events. Independence Park Theatre is one of the few performing arts facilities in the Baton Rouge area that offers free parking along with a seating capacity of over 750, as well as the most off-stage wing space. These features have allowed the theater to become a premier venue in Baton Rouge for dance competitions and large seminars. The venue is also developing a youth drama program.



**Putting on a show.**  
Independence Park Theatre Camp

### Magnolia Mound Plantation

*Magnolia Mound Plantation is a rare survivor of the vernacular architecture influenced by early settlers from France and the West Indies. This landmark is unique in southern Louisiana because of its age, quality of restoration, and outstanding collections. Through educational programs, workshops, lectures, festivals, and other special events, Magnolia Mound's mission is to illustrate and interpret the lifestyle of the French Creoles who formed the local culture. Tours of the plantation home and outbuildings are offered daily. Educational exhibits are displayed quarterly. A number of special events are held throughout the year, including a French Creole Christmas Tour and Black History Month. The plantation also hosts an historical society and occasional workshops and demonstrations on arts and crafts such as quilting, lace tatting, and open-hearth cooking.*

### Tennis

*BREC operates five staffed tennis facilities with pro shops and a total of 58 lighted courts. Staff provide tennis instruction, programs for all levels and ages, tournaments, leagues, workshops, and a variety of other services. BREC also involves selling retail tennis merchandise, snacks, and beverages and offers stringing services, ball machines, and racquet demonstrations. Courts are rented for public use as well as to other tennis organizations. Programs are aimed at providing low cost, quality tennis programs for new and experienced tennis players ages 3 and older. They introduce the sport as an affordable, enjoyable, and healthy lifetime sport to the public. Certified tennis teaching professionals provide instruction to a wide variety of users. No membership fee is required. Participants pay as they play.*

### Outdoor Adventure and Recreation

*Outdoor adventure programs promote active, outdoor lifestyles by providing recreational opportunities that revolve around the outdoors. These programs include activities such as kayaking, canoeing, paddleboarding, climbing, hiking, biking, fishing, camping, and land navigation. Programs also promote environmental awareness and ethical practices. BREC offers an Outdoor Outreach Program that works with at-risk youth. Outdoor recreation programming is dedicated to reaching out to all demographic groups.*

#### Hiking through the woods.

Adventure Camp at Hooper Road Park



## Program Life Cycles

Recreation programs typically go through a seven-step life cycle, from their initial introduction to their elimination (Figure 18). Having an effective mix of programs in different life cycle stages allows BREC to try new programs, build on successes of existing programs, and recognize when programs are no longer meeting needs. Therefore, a life cycle review should be conducted on an annual basis to ensure an effective distribution is maintained.

Overall, BREC has a fair balance of all programs across the life cycle (Figure 18), including ample new programs to align with trends and help meet the evolving needs of the community. BREC should include an annual performance measure for each program area to track the percentage of new programs offered as a way to incentivize for additional innovation and program alignment with community trends.

**Figure 18. BREC has fewer mature programs than is recommended**

Stage	Description	BREC's Distribution	Recommended
Introduction	new, modest participation	19%	59%
Take Off	rapid growth	14%	
Growth	moderate, consistent growth	26%	
Mature	slow growth	25%	40%
Saturation	minimal growth, extreme competition	7%	16%
Decline	declining participation	9%	
			0–10%

It is also important to have a stable core segment of programs that are in the mature stage. Currently, BREC has about 25% of its programs in this category, while 40% is typically recommended to provide stability to—without dominating—the overall program portfolio. Mature programs should be tracked for signs that they are entering saturation or decline. BREC has an ongoing process to evaluate program participation and trends to ensure that program offerings continue to meet the community's needs.

A total of about 16% of BREC's programs are currently in the saturation or decline stages. Programs in these stages must be closely reviewed to evaluate the need to either reposition or eliminate them. Not all declining programs need to be eliminated. Some of these programs can be modified and begin a new life cycle. BREC already has plans underway to modify some programs in the saturation and decline stages to refresh content or to otherwise increase capacity for growth.

## Action Plan

### 2.1. Strengthen BREC's commitment to improving public health and wellness through recreation for all segments of the community.

*Over half of the respondents to the 2013 survey identified health and fitness as the most significant benefits of BREC parks, recreation facilities, programs, and services. In addition, the trend of parks designed to promote active lifestyles and address public health concerns rose to the top of trends considered important at public meetings. With this mandate, BREC should focus on how to help meet health and wellness goals.*

- 2.1.1. Work with health service providers and other partners to identify community health and wellness needs.
- 2.1.2. Evaluate existing programs for their contribution to health and wellness, and identify key performance indicators to increase that value.
- 2.1.3. Highlight the health and wellness benefits of individual BREC programs.
- 2.1.4. Work with health service providers and other partners to monitor and assess the effectiveness of BREC programming on public health over time.



**Kayaking for the heart.**

BREC and the American Heart Association's Strokes for Strokes Clinic for Stroke Survivors and Those Interested in Heart Health

What does BREC do well? "Excellent programs for kids."

*public meeting participant*

What does BREC need to improve upon? "More elderly and special needs activities."

*public meeting participant*

**2.2. Develop an integrated, regional and system-wide program plan that aligns provided programs with market demand and the needs of underserved populations.**

*Programs are useful as long as they attract participation from the community, and the best way to attract participation is to ensure that programs align with the community's needs.*

- 2.2.1. Determine BREC's role in parish service delivery (core/essential, important, and value-added), factoring in other programming provided by municipalities, the Parish, non-profits, and others.
- 2.2.2. Undertake a demand and capacity analysis of existing programs offered within East Baton Rouge Parish.
- 2.2.3. Develop a phased implementation plan to remove under-performing programs, modify existing programs, and roll out new programs over 2-3 years that meet the changing needs of patrons.
- 2.2.4. Increase partnerships with service providers (e.g., schools, nonprofits) to help meet demand. (See Strategic Direction 7.)
- 2.2.5. Institute an outcome-based monitoring program to track the need to modify existing programs and implement new ones over time.
- 2.2.6. Monitor national recreation trends, and incorporate new and innovative recreational programs to sustain community engagement.
- 2.2.7. Conduct annual recreation program summits or charrettes to assess and implement new program innovations.

**2.3. Enhance special events programming (e.g., tournaments, festivals) targeted at parish, regional, and national audiences.**

*Stakeholders noted that special events are a good way to enliven parks. Not only do special events attract parish residents who might not otherwise use BREC parks, they also bring visitors from outside the parish. This raises the profile of BREC parks within and outside the parish, improves quality of life, generates revenue, and contributes to the regional economy.*

- 2.3.1. Work with event providers and citizens to determine special event facility needs and identify opportunities for new events.
- 2.3.2. Develop a specialized marketing plan to market BREC facilities for regional or national events and film venues.
- 2.3.3. Determine BREC's role in providing the identified events, and ensure organizational and partner support. (See Strategic Direction 7.)
- 2.3.4. Track the economic impacts of special events provided within the BREC system.
- 2.3.5. Track the costs to BREC for providing special events.
- 2.3.6. Work with local agencies and partners to share costs for special events that have strong tourism benefits.

**2.4. Implement best practices in program life cycle management to maintain a culture of quality program delivery and increase benefits as compared to costs.**

*While BREC continues to innovate in recreation programming, as can be seen with the numbers of programs in the introduction and take off stages, BREC needs to improve on monitoring mature programs to make sure they continue to adequately serve the community.*

- 2.4.1. Ensure a beneficial mix of programs in the introduction, take-off, and growth (50–60%); mature (50%); and saturation and decline (0–10%) stages.
- 2.4.2. Annually review staff goals for program areas (e.g., policy, financial and registration performance, customer issues, future plans) with management.
- 2.4.3. Document the program development process to reduce service variation and assist in training new staff.
- 2.4.4. Update key customer requirements (i.e. service attributes that are most important to a customer) for each program area on an ongoing basis.
- 2.4.5. Annually review programs provided by BREC, key competitors, similar providers, and nationally renowned agencies to continuously improve programming and reduce duplication of services.
- 2.4.6. Annually report on each program's participation, finances, and outcomes.
- 2.4.7. Conduct surveys in schools to understand what programs children and their parents want to attend for the following season.
- 2.4.8. Develop and implement innovation metrics to evaluate staff's creativity and new ideas.

Over 14,000 people attended BREC-sponsored community events in \_\_\_\_\_.



**Celebrating East Baton Rouge culture.**  
Multicultural Neighborhood Bash at Red  
Oaks Park





# Parks and Facilities

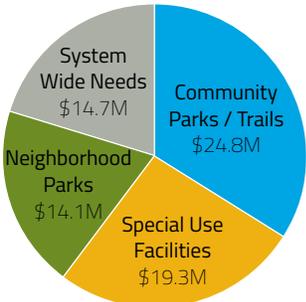
**Strategic Direction 3:**  
**Continue to raise the standard for parks and recreation facilities, and ensure equitable access to park and recreation experiences across the parish.**

*With the establishment of 12 community parks through the Imagine Your Parks program, BREC has already raised the standard for parks and recreation facilities in the parish. However, implementation of the vision for each of those parks is not complete. In addition, residents identified improving existing neighborhood parks as the highest priority action for BREC to take, signaling a desire to raise the standard at the neighborhood level as well. With BREC’s current budget, identical parks and facilities cannot be replicated everywhere. Instead, BREC should focus on making similar experiences available across the parish.*

## A Robust System

The BREC park system encompasses over 6,000 acres across 181 parks. BREC parks are broadly organized in three groups: community parks, neighborhood parks, and special use facilities. Amenities available throughout the system include recreation centers, senior centers, tennis courts, basketball and multi-use courts, beaches and lakefronts, trails, swimming pools, splash pads, skate parks, nature parks, picnic areas, golf courses, athletic fields, playgrounds, and dog parks. BREC also operates special amenities such as the Liberty Lagoon family aquatic center, golf courses, a BMX track at Perkins Road Community Park, and the Farr Park Equestrian Center.

**Figure 19. BREC’s capital improvements program is allocated by park type.**  
 Percent Share of Funding, 2015–2024 CIP



## Capital Improvement Program

The 2015–2024 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) allocates funding by category of park—community, neighborhood, special use—along with another category that contains system wide needs (Figure 19). This ten year Capital Improvement Program is anticipated to be funded the first year with approximately \$7.3M, and the total program is built on a \$73M budget.

Dollar amounts are first-year dollars, and yearly adjustments for inflation will be made if possible. The program is “pay as you go,” with approximately one tenth of the program completed each year. Typically, tax growth has kept pace with inflation. Improvements made in year ten typically cost significantly more than the same improvements made in year one. Tax growth historically has been enough to fund the higher budgets needed as years progress, but rolling back millage counteracts this and hurts BREC’s ability to provide improvements fairly throughout the parish.

## BREC's Parks

### Community Parks

As a result of *Imagine Your Parks*, BREC developed 12 community parks. These parks are generally larger and have multiple experiences that can occupy a day's worth of activity.



### Neighborhood Parks

BREC has 151 neighborhood parks that serve local neighborhoods.

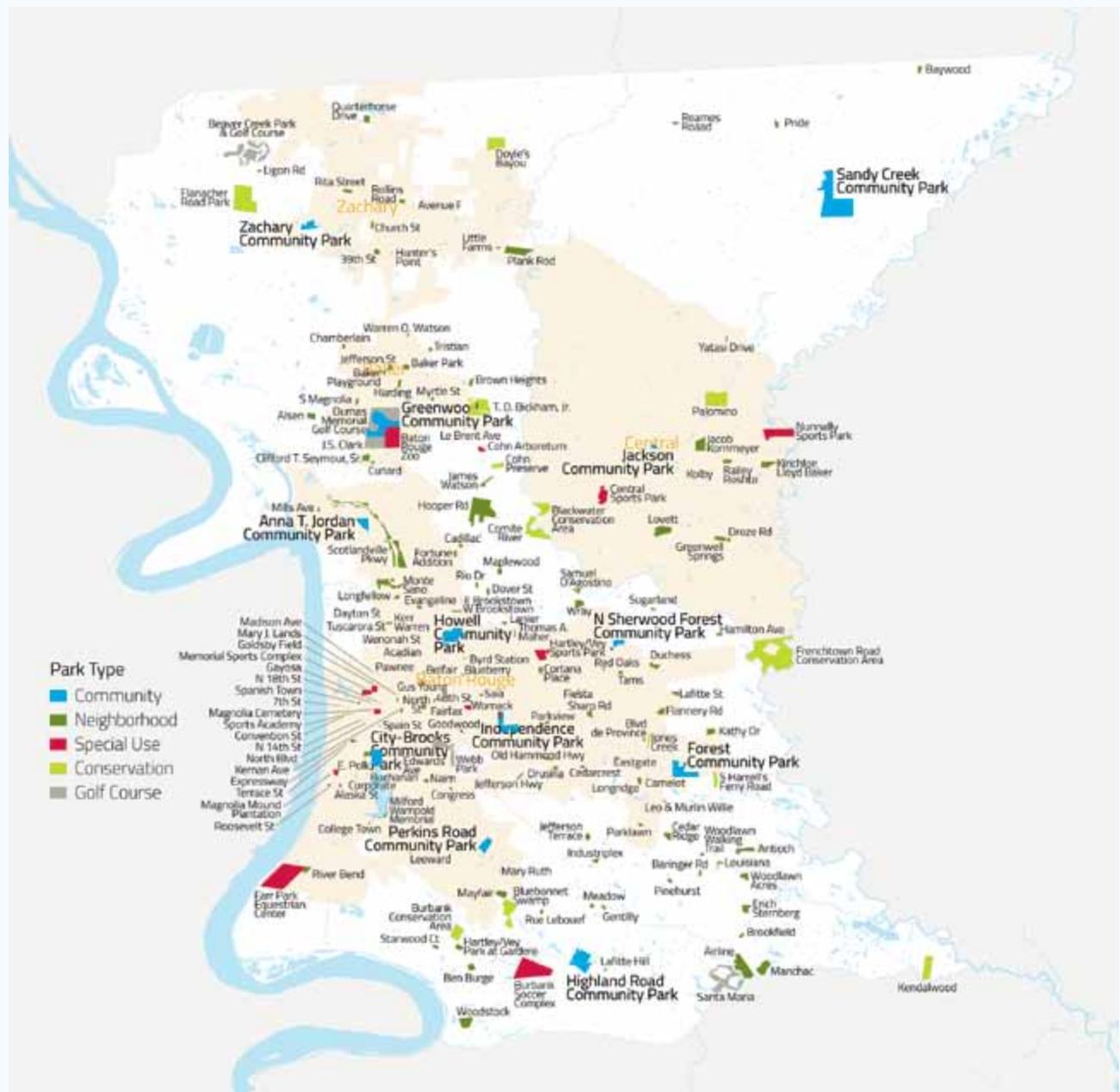


### Special Use Facilities

Special use facilities include facilities that serve a single, specialized purpose, such as the Baton Rouge Zoo, sports parks, golf courses, Cohn Arboretum, Farr Park Equestrian Center, Magnolia Mound Plantation, and Magnolia Cemetery.



Figure 20. BREC's 12 community parks are distributed throughout the parish. BREC Park System Map



## Historic and Cultural Resources

**Protecting and making the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish aware of and knowledgeable about its cultural and historic resources provides the citizenry and visitors with a sense of the Parish's history and maintains an important continuity with its heritage.**

### East Baton Rouge History and Culture

East Baton Rouge Parish has a long and varied history. From early indigenous people to the era of French, English, and Spanish colonization and from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Era, the Parish is an important center of history and culture for Louisiana and the nation.

The richness of Parish heritage can be seen in a wide range of structures and landscapes within BREC parks and special use facilities, such as a French-Creole plantation house dating back to 1791, Civil War battle sites and encampments, depression-era parks and golf courses, and civil rights-era points of interest.

Historic resources are important assets in a park system. Visitors to a park or special use facility can learn about local history and the past and present value of the space while gaining a better understanding of the relationship between human historical activity and the natural environment. By conserving, interpreting, and complementing historic resources through park and facility improvements, BREC enhances users' experiences, adds an additional layer of educational and cultural enrichment, and demonstrates the importance of sharing local history with people of all ages and backgrounds.

Historic significance can occur at the individual facility level or the system-wide level. Therefore, a resource's historic significance must be carefully considered. BREC facilities are an integrated system in which the individual parks, playgrounds, historic buildings, and facilities contribute to the fabric of the Parish. The way an individual park contributes to BREC's overall system history can be an important part of its own historic significance. Thus, while some

parks and facilities are clearly significant in their own right and worthy of landmark designation, other parks may be significant because they have performed an important role in the BREC system as a whole throughout BREC's history.

Historic resources within BREC jurisdiction vary both in terms of the historic period which they represent and the type of facility. In some cases, such as the Magnolia Mound Plantation, robust educational and interpretive programming already exists to bring historic context to life for visitors. In others, programming is less visible or has not been established. This section describes the existing historic resources managed by BREC and the educational and interpretive programs associated with each.

### Magnolia Mound Plantation

Magnolia Mound Plantation is a rare survivor of the vernacular architecture influenced by early settlers from France and the West Indies. The sixteen-acre complex includes an original early plantation house, an original outbuilding, and several historic outbuildings that were relocated to the property. The Friends of Magnolia Mound own the collection of early furniture and artifacts in the museum buildings. The Museum is accredited by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM) and listed on the National Register.

Daily guided tours, which give an overview of early Louisiana history focusing on French Creole life and culture, are offered hourly. Unguided walking tours, which include maps and a written narrative, are also available. Tours are also offered in French. Educational curriculum for school children is based on state requirements and features hands-on activities. Additional educational programs include periodic family programs, Fall and Spring History Day Camp, and eight-week Summer History Camp.

In December 2014, a new 4,300 sq. foot visitor center will open that includes a new museum shop, small theatre, and a meeting space. The existing visitor center will be re-purposed into an education center with additional office space.

### Highland Road Community Park

Highland Road, along which Highland Road Community Park sits, was part of a plantation supply road for early settlers. Dutch Highlanders, as a group of Pennsylvania Dutch settlers were locally known, farmed the land south of Highland Road. They named Siegen Road, just down Highland Road from Highland Road Community Park, after a city in Germany. After a series of floods in the 1780s, the settlers retreated west from their original settlement Bayou Manchac to the bluffs near the Mississippi River.

### City-Brooks Community Park

In April 1924, the City of Baton Rouge purchased the 100-acre tract along Perkins Road which was then being used as the LSU Dairy Farm. American Park Builders, a leading design firm from Chicago, provided the first design for the park, including a golf course, zoo, and 50-acre lake. The golf course was the second constructed in the city of Baton Rouge and the first public course.

In June 1947, the United Negro Recreational Association of Baton Rouge led by Reverend Willie. K. Brooks purchased four and a half acres for the site of the city's first swimming pool for African-Americans. Funds for the purchase price of \$75,065 were raised by prominent business leaders, black and white, in Baton Rouge. The pool and recreational center were dedicated on October 9, 1949, and were named "Brooks Park" in honor of Reverend Brooks..

### Sandy Creek Community Park

Sandy Creek Community Park has a natural, forested landscape. It is located in the vicinity of Sandy Creek Settlement, an active settlement around 1790 or 1800. A post office with the name of Sandy Creek existed during the early 1830s. Civil War soldiers camped in the vicinity as well. This area is also close to the settlement of Indian Mound.

Watching a cooking lesson from the 1880s.

Magnolia Mound Plantation





**Preserving history, memories, and public space.**

Magnolia Cemetery

### *Frenchtown Road Conservation Area*

*Although this is a nature preserve located at the confluence of the Amite and Comite Rivers, it is in close proximity to the site of Camp Cobb, a Civil War encampment, and other activities related to the battle of Baton Rouge. Camp Cobb was established in 1855 by the US Government for a Baton Rouge Garrison during a yellow fever outbreak. Confederate troops rested at Camp Cobb before marching into Baton Rouge in August 1862. Frenchtown Road Conservation Area is also in close proximity to Benton Ferry Landing, a ferry that was operated in the 1800s at the Amite River near the spot where the US 190 highway bridges are today. Several Civil War skirmishes were fought in the vicinity of Benton's Ferry.*

*Frenchtown Road Conservation Area includes 500 acres of bottomland hardwood forest habitat. The site also has an ancient earthwork mound that has potential for cultural and historical interpretation.*

### *Magnolia Cemetery*

*Magnolia Cemetery, listed on the National Register, is the city's first public burial ground for residents, containing approximately 16 acres, and laid out in 1852 at the former eastern border of the city. Used primarily for burials of both white and black residents, the cemetery was also used at times as a de-facto public park area. Newspaper clippings indicate the cemetery's use for picnics, political speeches*

*on national holidays, and public concerts. The cemetery was the site of pivotal fighting during the Battle of Baton Rouge on August 5, 1862.*

### *Convention Street Park/Victory Park*

*Victory Park was once Baton Rouge's principal public park. In 1919 the people of Baton Rouge passed a bond issue for \$100,000 for improvements in the park, which occupied the old Louisiana State Prison State property. The amenities included a pergola, flower beds, memorial fountain, fishpond, and bandstand, and later a public pool and bath house. In the 1950s BREC built a recreation center. The 8-acre park was heavily used, offering concerts and dances. Over time, the park was taken for non-recreational land uses, such as the old library, post office, and old court house. I-110 took the eastern end in the early 1960s. In 1989, the park had dwindled in size to 2.4 acres. At that time, BREC, without compensation, relinquished the last portion for the new federal court house and parking lot. BREC has interpretive signage at Convention Street Park about the history of Victory Park.*

### *Webb Park/Westdale Country Club*

*Started in 1924 as the Westdale Golf and Country Club, the original 50-acre tract included a nine-hole golf course, tennis courts, swimming pool, and a Mediterranean style club house. The original founding members were Standard Oil of Louisiana executives and*

prominent members of the Baton Rouge Jewish community, groups which were generally prohibited as members of the older Baton Rouge Country Club. During the Depression, the Baton Rouge Country Club opened its membership, and most Westdale members moved to older Golf Club. In 1936, Louisiana State University acquired the property for a student/faculty golf course. BREC acquired the property in December 1956, and the following year, the park was named Jesse L. Webb, Jr. Memorial Park in memory of the former Baton Rouge mayor who died in a plane crash in April 1956.

### Greenwood Community Park

During World War II, the federal government built an ammunition depot on what is now Greenwood Community Park to store aircraft ammunition. Pilots trained at the nearby Harding Army Air Field, now Baton Rouge Metropolitan Airport. Three ammunition bunkers remain in the park. Interpretive signage about the military installation can be

found along the Cypress Bayou trail. The park pavilion and amphitheater also reflect the military aviation theme.

### North Sherwood Forest Community Park

North Sherwood Forest Community Park sits on the Federal Sharp Station Depot used during World War II. Over the years, the federal government has released the land at different times to BREC for use as a park. Today, some of the land is still owned and managed by the federal government.

### Anna T. Jordan Community Park

The Lockheed F-80C Shooting Star at Anna T. Jordan Community Park has an established place in Air Force history as the first aircraft to exceed 500 mph in level flight; the first American jet airplane manufactured in large quantities; and the first jet used in combat. The Shooting Star became a reliable frontline fighter in the Korean War. BREC recently worked closely with Higher Graphics to return the aircraft to nearly original condition.

#### Preserving a piece of aviation history.

Shooting Star at Anna T. Jordan Community Park



Project funding is allocated in this plan, but it is not always tied to specific work. The funding allocated will allow for limited work in each park but does not typically represent all outstanding needs. BREC will engage the public to find out the citizens' priorities for spending the funds. This method has proven extremely successful over the life of the 2005–2014 plan. In some cases, the BREC Foundation or other sources of funds have become available to extend what can be done.

## Action Plan

### 3.1. Efficiently and effectively implement the 2015–2024 Capital Improvement Program.

*The Capital Improvement Program is an outline of funding allocated to park and facility improvements. Completing the vision for community parks and raising the standard across the parish should be priorities for the use of this funding. BREC should embrace residents' and stakeholders' desire to be involved in and take ownership of the planning and implementation of improvements.*

- 3.1.1. Continue to engage citizens, user groups, and staff in planning for renovations and new park improvements.
- 3.1.2. Plan for and conduct improvements in a fair, equitable, and balanced manner considering time and the geography of the parish.
- 3.1.3. Monitor and track progress, and disseminate information to commissioners, staff, and the public.

**Weighing in on future park improvements.**  
Public Meeting at Flannery Road Park



3.2. Develop an asset management plan with a life cycle replacement schedule to govern capital investment in existing parks and facilities.

*Just as it is important to monitor where recreational programs are in their life cycle to ensure parish residents' needs are being met, it is equally as important to monitor where parks and facilities are in their life cycle. The benefits of investments in parks and facilities that are not working effectively may or may not outweigh the costs. Employing a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) approach can help BREC better understand what locations in the parish are in need of new or upgraded facilities.*

- 3.2.1. Develop a standardized GIS-based inventory for Planning and Engineering staff to deliver facility improvement projects of the highest quality within the resources provided, within budget, on schedule, and that meet the needs of citizens.
- 3.2.2. Develop and apply cost-benefit criteria for investing in deferred maintenance of parks and facilities.
- 3.2.3. Evaluate underutilized assets for opportunities to either incorporate new uses that are consistent with the BREC mission or to remove from the inventory based on cost-benefit analysis. (See 1.3.3.)
- 3.2.4. Allocate sufficient funding in the capital improvements program to address existing park and facility needs in accordance with the cost-benefit criteria.
- 3.2.5. Monitor replacement needs over time, utilizing the GIS management system (See 3.2.1.), and adjust planning accordingly.

3.3. Upgrade or provide new parks and facilities to address shortcomings and meet changing user needs in line with level of service standards.

*The highest priority actions that households across the parish are most willing to support with their tax dollars are in line with the parks and facilities they find most important: improving existing neighborhood parks, improving and developing new trails, and developing new pools or aquatic facilities. Ensuring equitable access to recreation experiences across the parish should be a priority.*

- 3.3.1. Identify new minimum design and maintenance standards for upgraded or new parks, recreation centers, and other facilities to meet program needs (See 2.2.) and further other strategic directions.
- 3.3.2. Study quality examples of park and recreation design to help improve BREC offerings.
- 3.3.3. Develop and implement a new plan and model for larger, multi-use, efficient recreation centers in community parks that includes facilities, operations, and air-conditioned gyms.
- 3.3.4. Selectively improve recreation centers at neighborhood parks based on cost and available space to ensure equitable access to improved facilities across the parish.
- 3.3.5. Consider theming of recreation centers to reduce duplication of services.
- 3.3.6. Continue to build new parks to serve growing parts of the parish, including a new community park in the southeast portion of the Parish, either through new land acquisition or utilizing existing BREC-owned land.
- 3.3.7. Support opportunities to leverage BREC's funding with neighborhood-based funding in coordination with the BREC Foundation and other partners. (See Strategic Direction 7.)
- 3.3.8. Monitor existing upgrade needs and new park and facility needs over time.

“Parks are used by young professionals too. Not everyone has children.”

*public meeting participant*

**3.4. Improve design and construction and maintenance guidelines for BREC facilities.**

*Clear construction and maintenance guidelines set expectations and reduce confusion for staff, contractors, and citizens alike, while ensuring consistency and equity of experiences.*

- 3.4.1. Develop BREC design guidelines for parks and facilities addressing, among other topics: materials, layout, safety, maintainability, environment, stormwater management, site furnishings, trees and vegetation, trails, lighting, sports fields, courts, and playgrounds in addition to ASTM standards.
- 3.4.2. Develop BREC standard site construction and maintenance details for all baseline site improvement needs.
- 3.4.3. Clarify differences among community, neighborhood, and special use park types, including service areas, design, amenities, and operation.
- 3.4.4. Review best practices in park planning, design, and operation from other park systems, and incorporate those best practices into BREC's guidelines.

**3.5. Capitalize on existing historic and cultural resources in BREC parks, and evaluate the potential of protecting additional historic and cultural resources that have recreational value.**

*Cultural and historic resources often complement recreational activities. BREC should only play a primary role in the preservation of resources when there is synergy between preservation and recreation that furthers BREC's mission.*

- 3.5.1. Inventory historic and cultural resources in BREC parks to identify facilities that may be eligible for local landmark or national register designation.
- 3.5.2. Identify resources of potential historic significance that may need protection and have potential educational and interpretive components.
- 3.5.3. Establish historic and cultural resource design guidelines for the treatment of BREC historic and cultural resources, and implement a design review process that is consistent with historic and cultural resource design guidelines.
- 3.5.4. Establish an interpretive and education program plan and guidelines for individual facilities.
- 3.5.5. Use objective criteria to evaluate whether potential historic or cultural resources should be added to the BREC system (see Appendix XX).

**3.6. Implement BREC's strategic plan for golf.**

**3.7. Implement the strategic plan for BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo.**



Getting hands on with animals.  
BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo



# Natural Resources

## **Strategic Direction 4:**

**Strengthen and increase natural resource related recreational opportunities.**

*East Baton Rouge Parish has many outstanding natural features that are not only scenic but great reservoirs for natural wildlife and plant life, such as bayous, wetlands, the Mississippi River, Comite River, Amite River, and Bayou Manchac.*

92% of residents support conserving natural areas in East Baton Rouge Parish as part of the park system for outdoor recreational activities.

*2011 public survey*

## BREC's Commitment to Natural Resources

Since the development of its Natural Resources Management Plan in 1994, public surveys have revealed a strong mandate for BREC to manage areas that include unique forms of natural beauty. In a public survey, nearly 92% of respondents supported conserving natural areas in East Baton Rouge Parish as part of the park system for outdoor recreational activities.

Surveys of the natural habitats of East Baton Rouge Parish indicate large amounts of habitat are being lost to land development. East Baton Rouge Parish has many outstanding natural features that are not only scenic but great reservoirs for natural wildlife and plant life, such as bayous, wetlands, the Mississippi River, Comite River, Amite River, and Bayou Manchac.

The most significant achievements in the area of natural resource management since 1994 are the acquisition of land and development of the BREC Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center in 1997; the partnership between BREC, the city of Baton Rouge, and the US Army Corps of Engineers to acquire and mitigate the Blackwater conservation area in 2003; and the acquisition of the Frenchtown Road conservation area by BREC in December of 2009.

## Benefits of Natural Resources

A balanced ecosystem should have natural areas throughout the landscape, preferably connected together by greenways or linear parks. Intact natural systems perform multiple critical services beyond public enjoyment such as providing breathable air, drinkable water, a stable climate, and habitat; recycling waste; pollinating food crops; reducing negative stormwater, noise pollution, flooding, and greenhouse gas impacts; and lowering energy costs. Studies done by the National Recreation and Park Association (2010) and the Trust for Public Land (2009) have revealed that natural areas also provide economic benefits to communities that invest in them.

## Aquatic Resources

Comprised of over 437 miles of rivers, bayous, streams, creeks and canals, East Baton Rouge's waterways present opportunities for new recreational experiences. The waterways include some of the Parish's most defining natural features. Within the parish, only three species currently listed as threatened or endangered in East Baton Rouge Parish by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are aquatic wildlife (Inflated Heelsplitter, Pallid Sturgeon, and the Manatee).

### Mississippi River

The Mississippi River, the most significant natural feature of the parish and the State of Louisiana, defines the ever-changing western border of East Baton Rouge Parish. North of Southern University, the river is contained by tall bluffs forming the eastern edge of its floodplain. South of Southern University, levees keep the river from inundating the parish.

Recreational opportunities include the multi-use path atop the levee from Downtown to Farr Park. Efforts are underway to expand the path beyond the southern boundary of the Parish to New Orleans. Public access to the river is limited to the landing at downtown Baton Rouge.

### Comite River

From LA 10 near Clinton to the confluence with Whites Bayou, the Comite River is listed as a state scenic river. The Comite River corridor is primarily defined by upland hardwood forests, scattered blocks of bottomland hardwoods, mixed pine hardwoods and highly scattered open pastures. Fish and wildlife diversity is high. Four prehistoric Native American sites and a historic cemetery have been found along the Comite River. Substantial development along the lower stretches of the river impact scenic quality.

Given the nearly constant water level along the Comite River and opportunities for fishing and paddling, the river is ideal for the initial development of a canoe trail. Existing BREC parks along the Comite River include Plank Road Park, the Blackwater Conservation Area, Comite River Park and the Frenchtown Road Conservation Area and could provide the public access for canoeing and kayaking. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Waddill Outdoor Education Center also fronts Comite River and has expressed interest in partnering with BREC to develop a canoe launch.

### The Amite River

In East Baton Rouge Parish, the Amite River is approximately 52.9 miles long and defines the parish's eastern boundary. Significant mining operations along the river in the northern parts of the parish has led to degraded water quality and reduced habitat for the threatened Inflated Heelsplitter. Limited habitat for the Inflated Heelsplitter remains in the lower Amite River.

The Amite River is popular for fishing and outdoor recreation but opportunities are limited by a lack of public access to the river. At the confluence of the Comite and Amite Rivers, BREC has acquired the 496 acre Frenchtown Road Conservation Area. The park has the potential to provide access to the rivers and nature trails. Future conservation areas along the Amite River could be considered for acquisition to allow for development of a blueway.

### Bayou Manchac

Forming the border between East Baton Rouge Parish and Iberville and Ascension Parishes to the south, Bayou Manchac has largely been converted from forest to agricultural fields. West of I-10, the Bayou is wooded on both sides for about two miles and is actively used by a nesting pair of bald eagles. If acquisition of land in this area is feasible, a partnership between parishes could create a major conservation area on both sides of the Bayou.

Bayou Manchac also has extraordinary historical significance. Around 6000 BC, early hunter-gatherers arrived in the rich Bluff Swamp near Alligator Bayou, Spanish Lake, and Bayou Manchac. The area where Alligator Bayou joins Bayou Manchac was named Anatamaha ("Fish Place") and served as a Native American seat of power and trade between 500 BC and 1500 AD. The first recorded European use of the Bayou Manchac and Amite River route to the Gulf was in 1699 by Pierre le Moyne. William Bartram, famous naturalist and botanist, traveled Bayou Manchac in 1775 and described the area as a "grand forest: the trees of first order in magnitude and beauty". In 1814, General Andrew Jackson ordered Bayou Manchac closed where it joins the Mississippi so that it would be impossible for the British to navigate it.

The National Trail Systems Act, passed by Congress in 2009, authorized the Department of Interior to evaluate trails for possible inclusion



Admiring the stillness of the Amite River.  
Frenchtown Road Conservation Area



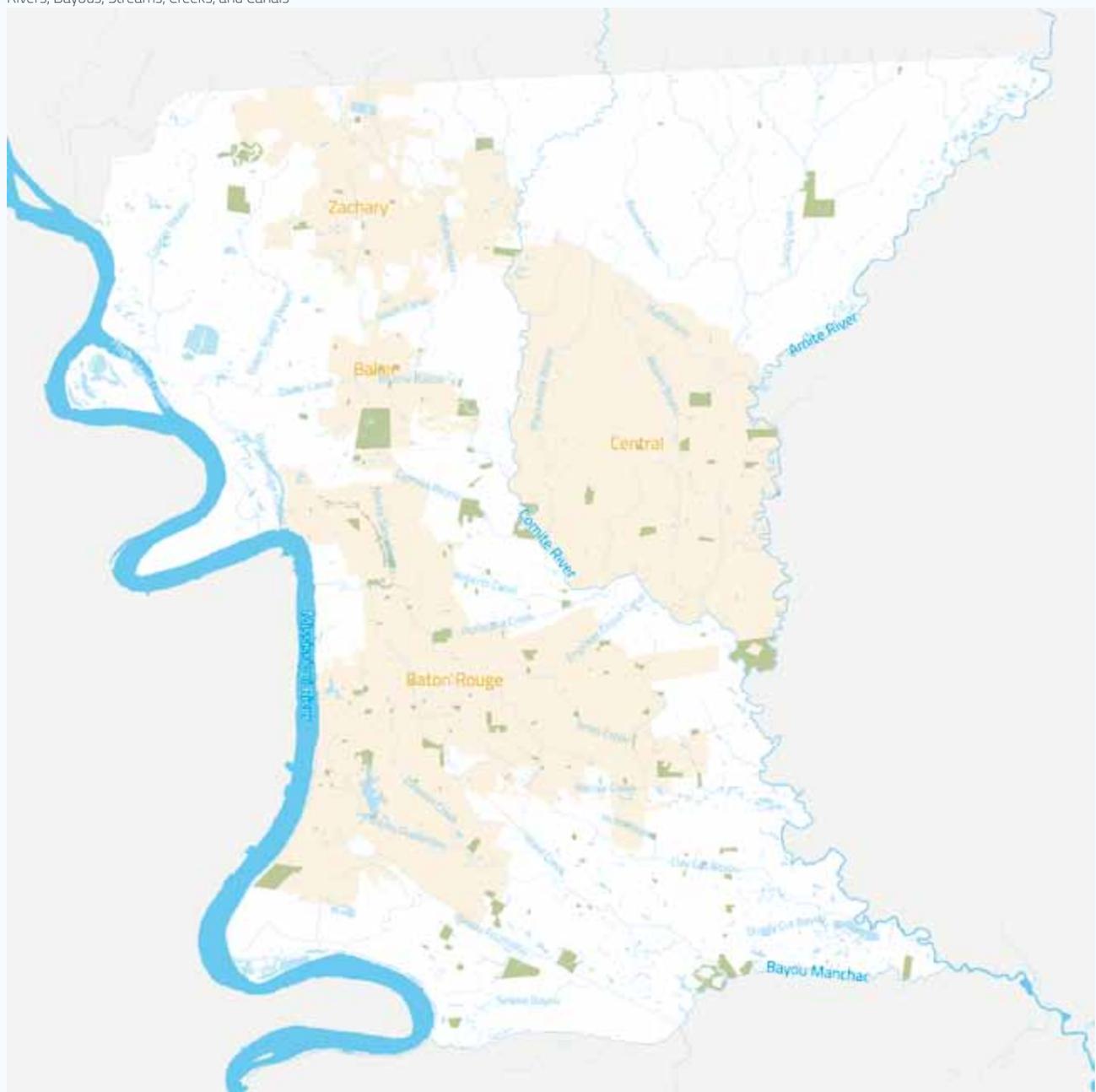
Exploring Bayou Manchac.  
BREC Explores at Airline Highway Park

as National Trails, including the William Bartram Trail, for the purpose of determining the feasibility and desirability of designating other trails as national scenic or national historic trails. The study will determine if the trail or route which was established by historic use is historically significant, is of national significance with respect to any of several broad facets of American history, and if it has significant potential for public recreational

use or historic interest based on historic interpretation and appreciation.

The Bayou presents the potential for a long distance canoe or kayak trip from the Mississippi River to Pass Manchac. Opportunities could range from competitive races to long distance events building on potential partnerships with other Parishes to develop canoe launches and facilities along the Bayou.

**Figure 21. East Baton Rouge Parish’s network of water resources is anchored by four main water bodies.**  
Rivers, Bayous, Streams, Creeks, and Canals



## Terrestrial Habitats

Historically, East Baton Rouge Parish has had one of the most diverse vegetative habitats parishes in the state. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is the state agency responsible for the development and implementation of the state Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy, a blueprint guiding the state's management actions for Louisiana's fish and wildlife species with emphasis on conservation concern and associated vegetative habitats they depend on. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries and the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program have identified seven natural vegetation communities that occur in East Baton Rouge Parish that are rare. State and Global Rank are as follows:

### Bottomland Hardwood Forest

Bottomland Hardwood Forests are ranked globally as demonstrably secure globally, although it may be quite rare in parts of its range, and ranked in the state as imperiled in Louisiana because of its rarity or because of some factor making it very vulnerable to extirpation. The habitat type is found throughout Louisiana but are predominant in the Mississippi River Alluvial Plain. Clearing for agricultural production has largely led to bottom hardwood forest's fragmentation and decline. Statewide, bottomland hardwood forest loss is estimated to be 50 to 75% of the original pre-settlement acreage. Most remaining large tracts are either second or third generation stands.

### Cypress-Tupelo Swamps

Cypress-Tupelo Swamps are ranked globally as either very rare and local throughout its range or found locally in a restricted range or because other factors make it vulnerable throughout its range, and ranked in the state as apparently secure in Louisiana with many occurrences. Although the historic extent of these swamps have shrunk considerably, sizeable areas of Cypress-Tupelo swamps remain throughout Louisiana. Governor Kathleen Blanco convened a 2005 Science Working Group to study the state's coastal wetland forest sustainability. The report concluded that massive changes in hydrology have greatly impacted Louisiana's Cypress Forests ability to regenerate - nearly 80% of the Cypress habitat will not be able to naturally regenerate.

### Prairie Terrace Loess Forest

The Prairie Terrace Loess Forest is ranked as imperiled globally because of rarity or because of some factor making it very vulnerable to extinction throughout its range, and ranked in the state as critically imperiled in Louisiana because of extreme rarity or because of some factor making it especially vulnerable to extirpation. The forest's range is limited to the East Gulf Coastal Plain in Louisiana occurring in a very narrow range in Livingston, East Baton Rouge, and perhaps Ascension Parish. Pre-settlement acreage was estimated at 500,000 to 1,000,000 acres with only 1 to 5% currently remaining. Following initial conversion to agricultural uses and recent clearing for residential, commercial and industrial development, intact areas of the Prairie Terrace Loess Forest are relatively rare.

### Small Stream Forest

Small Stream Forest is ranked globally as very rare and local throughout its range or found locally in a restricted range or because other factors make it vulnerable throughout its range and ranked in the state as rare and local throughout the state or found locally in a restricted region of the state, or because of other factors making it vulnerable to extirpation. Agricultural uses, timber harvesting, and extreme susceptibility to damage has led to loss, degradation and fragmentation. Only 25 to 50% of Louisiana's original small stream forests remain intact.

### Spruce-Pine Hardwood Flatwood

Spruce-Pine Hardwood Flatwood is ranked globally as critically imperiled globally because of extreme rarity or because of some development factors making it especially vulnerable to extinction, and ranked in the state as critically imperiled because of its extreme rarity and because of development factors making it especially vulnerable to extirpation. The habitat type is restricted to the East Gulf Coastal Plain in Louisiana and occurs in East Baton Rouge Parish. Conversion to commercial and residential present the habitat's biggest threat. Only 10% of the 50-100,000 pre-settlement acres remain.

### Shortleaf Pine/Oak-Hickory Forest

The Shortleaf Pine/Oak-Hickory Forest habitat is ranked globally as imperiled globally



**Changing Cow Oak and Beech fall colors.**  
Frenchtown Road Conservation Area



**Taking a migration break.**  
Hummingbirds at St. Francisville



**Hiding in its shell.**  
Turtle Found During Winter Camp at  
Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center

because of rarity and because of conversion to agriculture making it especially vulnerable to extinction, and ranked in Louisiana as imperiled because of rarity and due to conversion to agriculture making it very vulnerable to extirpation. Historically, there was 4 to 6 million acres of this community in Louisiana, only 5 to 10 % of these remain today.

### Additional Terrestrial Habitats

Historically, the longleaf pine community was found in East Baton Rouge Parish. Although no longleaf pine forest remains in the parish, the community was historically found in the parish's northeastern portion. The longleaf pine forest was harvested and replaced with a slash and spruce pine community.

### Native Wildlife

Animal species are largely dependent on habitats available. While many species are adapted to living in "edge" habitats, other species require larger territories of anywhere from 25 wooded acres to over 75 acres of contiguous woodlands. Species dependent on larger territories are experiencing declines in population due to reduction of large forested areas.

Habitat loss is the most significant cause of loss of species diversity. Development in East Baton Rouge Parish has caused a reduction in the diversity and density of animals in the parish. The loss of longleaf pine habitat has resulted in hundreds of species of plants and animals becoming extinct in the parish. While coyotes, bobcats, red foxes and deer are still found in the parish, black bears are rarely seen, and panthers and wolves are no longer found in the parish.

Conservation of large forested areas and preservation of other natural areas, such as swamps or marsh lands, will provide necessary acreage for the diverse animal species associated with these types of habitats.

After discovering a pair of Bald Eagles nesting at the BREC Farr Park Equestrian Center in early 2012, BREC consulted with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and have since implemented best management practices recommended for landowners in the National Bald Eagle Management Guidelines. Several species that are listed as in peril by the Louisiana Natural Heritage Program are known to occur at several BREC Conservation Areas, including the

Prothonotary Warbler, Painted Bunting, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Northern Parula, Prairie Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, Kentucky Warbler, and the Hooded Warbler. The Baton Rouge Audubon Society documents birds by month and year on the eBird website. At Bluebonnet Swamp, the Baton Rouge Audubon Society has documented the presence of the following rare birds: Redhead, Clapper Rail, Northern Parula, Prothonotary Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, and Painted Bunting at the Blackwater Conservation Area.

Bluebonnet Swamp also provides habitat to the Seminole crescent Butterfly, which is listed as a species that is possibly in peril in Louisiana, but whose status is uncertain due to a lack of information.

Members of the North American Field Herpetology and Louisiana State University have studied reptiles and amphibians at BREC's Frenchtown Road Conservation Area since 2010. Researchers have identified 21 species of amphibians and 29 species reptiles, including six species of native salamander; fifteen species of frogs and toads; nineteen species of lizards and snakes; and ten species of turtles.



**Learning about wildlife.**  
Bluebonnet Swamp Swamp Camp

## Programs

Founded in 1997, the Bluebonnet Swamp Nature Center has served as BREC's center for environmental education and interpretive programs. At the center, BREC has primarily provided educational programs for school group tours and summer camps. Throughout the summer, Bluebonnet staff facilitate week-long summer camp programming. For the past five years, Nature Center attendance has averaged just over 20,000 and continues to steadily increase.

Bluebonnet staff have expanded their reach beyond Bluebonnet to engage thousands of participants through off-site programs, including Louisiana Earth Day, Boy Scout and Girl Scout programs, East Baton Rouge school science fairs, Ocean Commotion at LSU, International Astronomy Day, National Hunting and Fishing Day, and LSU classes.

## Research and Outreach

As BREC's first managed conservation area, Bluebonnet Swamp is the center of its conservation efforts and is BREC's most studied conservation area. Through partnerships with the Baton Rouge Audubon Society and BREC, the Bluebonnet Bird Monitoring Program was founded by LSU's School of Renewable Resources. Monthly bird banding has resulted in detailed demographic analysis and has taught children about conservation, ornithology, and ecology.

In addition to Bluebonnet Swamp, Frenchtown Road conservation area and Blackwater conservation area have been studied and surveyed by local scientists and professors at LSU.

Blackwater Conservation Area and Burbank Soccer Complex have also been surveyed for local fauna with the help of LSU professors and students.

## Stewardship

The BREC Conservation Department has partnered with schools, nonprofit organizations, individuals, local universities, scouts, and others interested in the environment to create a culture of conservation in East Baton Rouge. In 2011, the BREC Conservation Department hosted 13 conservation stewardship events or projects that benefitted BREC conservation areas where over 400 volunteers donated their time to plant native tree seedlings; assemble and install benches and fishing line recycling stations; remove bags and larger pieces of garbage from lakes, bayous, and rivers; control invasive Chinese Privet and Tallow Trees; and raise money to support Gulf oil spill animal rescue and rehabilitation efforts.

**DRAFT**

## Action Plan

- 4.1. Implement BREC's Natural Resources Management Plan.
- 4.2. Develop and implement a land acquisition and easement program focused on creating a connected parish-wide network of natural resources, particularly greenway and blueway corridors.

*Land-based and aquatic resources are part of interconnected natural systems. Ensuring that connected greenways and blueways are preserved allows these systems to function better as habitat, healthy watersheds and riparian buffers, and nature-based recreation. A number of public and stakeholder comments emphasized the desire for multiple water access points along traversable blueway corridors.*

- 4.2.1. Convene a working group of land owners, environmental organizations, trusts, greenway and waterway user groups, and policy makers to develop a strategy for greater protection of natural resources and providing public access to key river and stream corridors.
- 4.2.2. Update and prioritize lands for BREC acquisition or easements based on defined criteria (e.g., habitat value, stormwater management, adjacency to existing parks or open space corridors, recreational value, connectivity) as outlined in BREC's Natural Resource Management Plan.
- 4.2.3. Develop a canoe launch at Airline Highway Park, Plank Road Park, and Frenchtown Road Conservation Area. Study other areas for additional launches including working with adjacent parishes.
- 4.2.4. Meet the demand for a blueway system to provide access for active canoeing, kayaking, and stewardship projects primarily on the Comite River, Amite River, and Bayou Manchac.

What does BREC need to improve upon?

"Canoe/kayak launches"

"Waterway access for paddle sports"

"Bayou blueways"

*public meeting participants*

- 4.3. Use a holistic approach to managing natural resources within BREC parks.

*Protecting land and water resources from development and other uses is only part of ensuring that natural systems are preserved and function correctly. Neighbors, visitors, and staff must all be aware of the impact their actions have on BREC's natural resources.*

- 4.3.1. Develop management plans for each conservation area.
- 4.3.2. Educate BREC staff in all divisions on natural resource management objectives.
- 4.3.3. Integrate staff and department practices including operations, natural resource management, and park planning to ensure protection of natural resources.
- 4.3.4. Work with partners to inventory baseline conditions of natural communities within parks using GIS, and identify areas of concern within local catchment areas that negatively affect those resources.
- 4.3.5. Continue to establish ecological performance measures for systematic long term monitoring and assessment of key terrestrial and aquatic resources.
- 4.3.6. Consider limiting or restricting access to parts of parks that have high natural resource values as part of the park master planning process.
- 4.3.7. Proactively educate and develop cooperative solutions with surrounding property owners and others to address their impacts on natural resources within the parks.
- 4.3.8. Educate and involve community partners (volunteers, community groups, conservation organizations, universities, youth programs, etc.) in natural resource restoration and management activities.
- 4.3.9. Provide BREC Rangers with information on policies and regulations regarding the protection of natural resources to increase enforcement.

4.3.10. Continue the use of best management practices and pilot projects for cleaning waterways through public education. If pilots are successful, work with partners to implement practices parish-wide.

**4.4. Integrate natural resource interpretation as a key component of programming in BREC parks.**

*Interpretation is a tool for connecting people with nature. Through these connections, people are more likely to support and become involved in stewardship of these resources and less likely to engage in activities that threaten natural resources.*

- 4.4.1. Develop a system-wide natural resource interpretive plan.
- 4.4.2. Educate additional BREC staff on fundamentals of natural resource interpretation.
- 4.4.3. Work with community partners (volunteers, community groups, conservation organizations, universities, youth programs, etc.) to develop and implement interpretive programs. (See Strategic Direction 7.)
- 4.4.4. Implement interpretive signage in relevant parks about water pollution and unlawful hunting, fishing, or other consumption of natural resources.
- 4.4.5. Improve on basic messaging about the physical and mental health benefits of the natural environment.
- 4.4.6. Work with research partners to measure the benefits of BREC's natural resources and conservation areas, and communicate these benefits to staff and to the public.

**4.5. Foster, develop, and promote nature-based education and recreation programming across ages and skill levels.**

*An interest in the environment is often borne out of exposure to and understanding of natural resources. There is potential to have the greatest impact on instilling an environmental ethic at a young age. By providing nature-based education and recreation programming across ages and skill levels, BREC has the opportunity to develop the next generation of environmental stewards.*

- 4.5.1. Explore nature-based pre-school and after school interpretive opportunities.
- 4.5.2. Continue to foster and expand the BREC Out program with local schools.
- 4.5.3. Model additional programs on the success of the Paddle Up! program, which has multiple levels of development and takes advantage of multiple BREC facilities.
- 4.5.4. Promote outdoor leadership training to better connect teens and young adults to nature.

**4.6. Promote conservation stewardship volunteerism that provides opportunities for individuals and organizations to leave a positive legacy in the park system.**

*BREC is not alone in working to promote environmental stewardship. Aligning BREC's efforts with those of partners can allow existing resources to generate a bigger impact.*

- 4.6.1. Identify opportunities for conservation stewardship activities, such as recycling at large BREC events, removing garbage from lakes or parks, planting trees, or removing invasive plants.
- 4.6.2. Expand efforts to develop collaborative relationships and partnerships with community groups, businesses, service clubs, and other groups that are not currently engaged in conservation stewardship activities.
- 4.6.3. Maintain a list of specific conservation projects that are achievable by volunteers that support meaningful efforts consistent with management plans for BREC conservation areas.



**Interpreting classes of bugs.**  
Outdoor Adventure Campers at Frenchtown  
Road Conservation Area



4.7. Build on BREC’s “Geaux Green” movement to strengthen sustainability policies across the organization.

*Resource consumption has a direct impact on natural resources within the parish and beyond. Incorporating best sustainability practices into BREC’s “Geaux Green” movement can decrease BREC’s environmental footprint, reduce costs, and serve as a model to other organizations and citizens for how to change their own practices.*

- 4.7.1. Develop, or strengthen, and implement policies that target waste reduction, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, reduced energy usage, reduced water consumption, and light pollution.
- 4.7.2. Study effective procedures and activities that could benefit BREC and the public, and conduct pilot projects to determine effectiveness for system-wide application.
- 4.7.3. Communicate progress throughout the BREC system to staff and to the public.

What does BREC need to improve upon? “Capped and sheilded lighting. Save money and [the] night sky.”

*public meeting participant*

**Having fun and promoting environmental stewardship.**  
Frenchtown Road Conservation Area





"Geauxing green" by reusing barrels as recycling bins.  
Burbank Park



# Trails

## **Strategic Direction 5:**

**Enhance connectivity by improving the network of multi-use trails to, within, and between parks and community assets.**

*Above all facilities and actions that BREC could take moving forward, the public and stakeholders in East Baton Rouge Parish resoundingly asked for a network of walking and biking trails. This follows a national trend in trails being the most desired amenities. While BREC already has an established and growing system of trails internal to its parks, there is not yet a cohesive, safe system of trails to link parks together across the parish. The Capital Area Pathways Project (CAPP) is BREC's nascent program to develop such a system.*

## Capital Area Pathways Project

BREC's Capital Area Pathways Project (CAPP) is an initiative to identify routes and build a network of trails and greenways throughout East Baton Rouge Parish, including planning for linking into surrounding parishes. BREC held public workshops to identify possible trail corridors.

### Wards Creek Trail

The site selected for the first multi-modal linear park trail is a corridor along Wards Creek. The BREC Commission unanimously approved the project concept in January 2008. This trail corridor was chosen because it is in a highly visible location, the land owners are in support of the project, the project links many destinations and serves many different land uses, construction can be quickly accomplished, and it has potential for future growth.

Phase one of the 2.2-mile trail is nearly complete. The 12-foot-wide concrete pathway is designed for walking, jogging, and cycling and will extend from the Mall of Louisiana at Bluebonnet Boulevard to Siegen Lane. Future plans are to expand the trail and develop a 7.4-mile loop to connect to two regional hospitals, BREC's Perkins Road Community Park, Pennington Biomedical Research Center, the LSU Rural Life Museum and various retail centers.

What does BREC need to improve upon? "Connectivity. Easy access from surrounding neighborhoods... [and a] park to park trail system."

*public meeting participant*

## Action Plan

### 5.1. Take a lead role in facilitating the development of a complete parish-wide multi-use trail network.

*Trails are a unique type of facility in form and function. Trails require rights-of-way or easements that cross properties with different owners, and they serve multiple purposes, including recreation and transportation. As such, the development and maintenance of trails is often split among many entities. In East Baton Rouge Parish, planning, transportation, and public works partners have stakes in trails along with BREC. However, to date, no single entity has taken a leadership role. BREC has the capacity and expertise to assume a leadership role in the development of a parish-wide trail network plan and work with its partners to facilitate its implementation.*

- 5.1.1. Complete development of a parish trail network plan.
- 5.1.2. With priority on existing Capital Area Pathways Project initiatives, support and advocate for the implementation of ongoing trail efforts such as the Mississippi River levee trail, the Downtown Greenway, the Medical Loop, and the Highway 19 rail trail.
- 5.1.3. Name major spine trails and secondary trails so they have identities that can be used in marketing the trail network.
- 5.1.4. Work with municipal public works departments, the Capital Region Planning Commission, and other partners to prepare an implementation plan that assigns responsibilities for developing and managing segments of the parish trail network.
- 5.1.5. Involve trail user groups in the planning, implementation, and maintenance of the parish trail network.
- 5.1.6. Develop an informational piece for potential land owners that informs about recreational land corridors.
- 5.1.7. Under Planning and Engineering, hire a trail planner to spearhead greenway and blueway trail development.

“We need more hiking / biking paths... to connect parks and stores and living areas”

*public meeting participant*

“Work with the city-parish to designate routes.”

*online forum participant*





Providing paths for walking and biking.  
Woodlawn Park

## 5.2. Continue to expand trail experiences within parks.

*Though the focus in Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> is on developing a parish-wide trail network, BREC should continue to enhance its intra-park trails. Providing multiple trail experiences within a single park and ensuring that visitors know what experiences are available can help increase park usage.*

- 5.2.1. With practicality and efficiency, develop park trail plans to provide experiences that appeal to a variety of skill levels and modes. Consider a combination of loop and linear trails and reducing conflicts between modes.
- 5.2.2. Ensure clear signage in parks that alerts users to available trails, their hierarchy, and destinations that can be reached.
- 5.2.3. Develop a BREC trail management plan that addresses maintenance, safety, cost recovery, marketing, and a planning/decision-making process.

## 5.3. Improve connections to and between BREC parks.

*A trail network that connects BREC parks has the opportunity to greatly expand the experiences available to residents of the parish. Not only does the trail itself provide a new experience, but the connections make experiences at multiple parks more accessible. And, ensuring that there are clear, safe connections from neighborhoods to parks makes nearby neighbors more likely to use the BREC system.*

- 5.3.1. Identify, develop, and manage priority segments of the parish trail network that link two or more BREC parks.
- 5.3.2. Work with partners to secure funding for better trail, bike lane, and sidewalk connections between neighborhoods and BREC parks.
- 5.3.3. Connect to adjacent trail systems beyond the parish.

## 5.4. Establish a trail use monitoring methodology.

*As the East Baton Rouge Parish trail network starts to take form, it is critical to learn what is successful about segments that are built and what can be improved upon moving forward.*

- 5.4.1. Build upon the infrared trail counter system being implemented on the Wards Creek trail, and expand this system to other trail segments to gather consistent long-term data.
- 5.4.2. Continue to develop and implement a trail use observation procedure to be used by staff and volunteers (e.g., trail use form, schedule, safety measures, surveys).
- 5.4.3. Use gathered trail data to help guide the trail system planning process, secure outside funding, and garner support for future trail development.

## 5.5. Develop trail standards for parish trails.

*Trail standards ensure a degree of consistency in experience from one trail to the next. Whether BREC or one of its partners implements a trail in the parish, it should meet these minimum standards. Standards are typically flexible enough to allow some degree of tailoring to individual trail identity or environmental conditions.*

- 5.5.1. Define signage / branding standards.
- 5.5.2. Define construction standards.
- 5.5.3. Define maintenance standards.

If you could change one thing about our parks, what would it be? "Connect them!"  
*online forum top idea*

"BREC should have signs for bikers, walkers, and drivers letting them know how to get to the park."

*public meeting participant*

- 5.6. Provide the community with materials and information that demonstrates the many benefits of a good recreational (and transportation) trail system.

*Even in the face of a public groundswell of support for additional trails, BREC should be prepared for questions from some members of the community about trail locations, usage, and safety.*

- 5.6.1. Taking advantage of broadly available research as well as data gathered through the monitoring of BREC's own trails, compile descriptions of the many benefits of trail systems.
- 5.6.2. Disseminate answers to frequently asked questions about trails and their benefits across different media (e.g., on the BREC website, in written materials, for presentations, and for staff educational pieces).

#### Implementing clear signage for parish trails.

Levee Trailhead at Farr Park





# Marketing and Communication

## **Strategic Direction 6:**

**Increase local awareness of BREC's programs and facilities and the overall value of BREC.**

*BREC provides integral park and recreation services for the citizens of East Baton Rouge Parish. In the 2009 public survey, over 86% of respondents said that BREC parks and recreational facilities benefited them directly. Yet, throughout the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process, citizens and stakeholders frequently indicated they were unaware of the myriad of parks, facilities, and programs that BREC offers.*

## Action Plan

### 6.1. Annually update BREC's marketing plan.

*BREC's offerings, public interests, and communication tools are constantly evolving. Marketing strategies should be regularly updated to ensure the most current messages are being disseminated using the most effective tools available.*

- 6.1.1. Incorporate marketing research into annual marketing strategies, including sharing results with the staff and using the information to make informed decisions.
- 6.1.2. Reevaluate marketing methods to increase visitation where appropriate, reach a broader audience, and generate more income from key revenue-producing attractions.
- 6.1.3. Update marketing-related priorities, performance measures, and outcomes to be achieved within appropriate timelines given the staff resources available.
- 6.1.4. Within industry standards, determine a marketing operational budget sufficient to meet desired outcomes, including new revenue sources to support marketing related services.
- 6.1.5. Continue to evaluate revenues and levels of use of attractions, programs, and facilities in relation to outlays for marketing, communications, and advertising.
- 6.1.6. Ensure fairness and equitability in distributing marketing resources.
- 6.1.7. Evaluate the "It All Starts with BREC" tag line to determine if it should continue to be used or replaced.

**6.2. Develop new marketing and communication materials that highlight the benefits of BREC programs, facilities, and services and inspire users to participate more often.**

*Marketing and communication materials should not just inform current and potential users about what BREC has to offer but inspire them to participate.*

- 6.2.1. Continue to review the most effective uses of electronic and social media for marketing and informational purposes.
- 6.2.2. Highlight health and wellness benefits of BREC programs in all informational materials.
- 6.2.3. Develop new information about all facilities and experiences available system-wide, with an emphasis on special use facilities.
- 6.2.4. Continue to seek outside funding sources to support promotional materials and advertising costs.

**6.3. Proactively engage communities (residents, businesses, schools, health centers, religious communities, etc.) adjacent to BREC parks and facilities about the benefits of BREC programs, facilities, and services and inspire users to participate more often.**

*Some marketing and communication strategies work parish-wide. However, the most frequent way parish residents learn about the services offered by BREC is from friends and neighbors, indicating the effectiveness of tailored local communication.*

- 6.3.1. Identify existing and potential user groups and partners for each park, coordinate programs, and determine targets for focused engagement to increase use and awareness of facilities and services.
- 6.3.2. Adapt strategies developed in the system-wide marketing plan (See 6.1.) and new informational materials (See 6.2.) to reach identified communities around each park.
- 6.3.3. Coordinate with local municipal and community organizations and institutions to disseminate information to and gather feedback from target communities on BREC programs and facilities.
- 6.3.4. Establish a strategy for each park, facility, and program area to increase volunteer activity and support as part of the community engagement strategy.

**6.4. Work with regional tourism and economic development organizations to market BREC parks and facilities as destinations for visitors from the region and beyond.**

*BREC's parks and facilities offer affordable, high caliber experiences that receive positive feedback from users. An opportunity exists to capitalize on BREC's value and quality to attract visitors to the parish, recoup costs, and stimulate the local economy.*

- 6.4.1. Work with Visit Baton Rouge and the Baton Rouge Area Chamber of Commerce to strengthen BREC's contribution to regional marketing efforts.
- 6.4.2. Develop new special events and recreation opportunities offered by BREC as part of a regional economic strategy.
- 6.4.3. Cross-market BREC destinations, including BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo, with other regional attractions to encourage visitors to spend time and money in the Parish.
- 6.4.4. Enhance and extend the BREC brand through effective signage, wayfinding, and communication on a regional and state-wide basis.
- 6.4.5. Work with the Department of Public Works and the Department of Transportation and Development to place highway and street signs to direct residents and visitors to BREC parks and special facilities.
- 6.4.6. Reach out to, partner with, and proactively collaborate with other public agencies and non-profits to facilitate BREC's mission and vision.

The most frequent way parish residents learn about the services offered by BREC is from friends and neighbors.

*2013 public survey*

6.5. Evaluate and enhance BREC's online and social media presence.

*With the growing use of online and social media by the public and the quickness with which those media evolve, BREC should continue to improve the way in which it engages with and takes advantage of these tools.*

- 6.5.1. Continue to evaluate the BREC website's ease of use, intuitiveness, searchability, and informational quality.
- 6.5.2. Incorporate an interactive map of the parish into the BREC website, with links to each park.
- 6.5.3. Consolidate all information about each park on a single page (e.g., events, construction, updates, plans, fees).
- 6.5.4. Evaluate the quality of search results from major search engines with regard to BREC's website and social media.
- 6.5.5. Cross-promote BREC offerings on partners' websites and social media accounts, including those of local governments and community organizations.

Highlighting why parks are important.  
BRE Website

Providing quality parks and recreational opportunities for the residents of East Baton Rouge Parish

8+1 | 21 | 249 | 643 | Share

YOUR INTERESTS | EVENTS | PARKS | ABOUT BREC | Search the Site

## WHY ARE PARKS IMPORTANT?

**B** BALANCE: LIFE WELL & PLAY  
**E** ESSENTIAL FOR HUMAN DEVELOPMENT  
**N** NEIGHBORHOOD MARKING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS  
**E** ENDLESS LEARNING IN LIFE'S OUTDOOR CLASSROOM  
**F** LIFETIME OF FULFILLMENT  
**I** IDENTIFYING WITH YOUR COMMUNITY  
**T** THE SPIRIT OF TOGETHERNESS  
**S** SAVING OUR HISTORICAL & CULTURAL ASSETS

### Why Are Parks Important?

Whether large or small, they connect us to nature, preserve open space, provide health/wellness opportunities and connect people across the community. Parks make our communities safer, drive economic development and create quality of life. Click here to read more about why parks are essential to our community.

BENEFITS OF BREC

### Upcoming Events

SEPTEMBER 2014

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	1	2	3	4

PHOTO: BREC's Liberty Lagoon

### Imagine Your Parks – Better Than You Imagined.

Featuring projects from BREC's 2005-2014 Imagine Your Parks Capital Improvement Program

FEEDBACK



# Partnerships

## **Strategic Direction 7:**

**Work with partners and the BREC Foundation to achieve common goals and leverage resources.**

*Public, private, and nonprofit institutions, including park and recreation agencies, are increasingly looking to partnerships to deliver more efficient and effective services to customers. By strengthening existing partnerships and identifying common goals with new partners, BREC can leverage its resources to make limited funding stretch further.*

## Public Expectations and Support

While BREC, a special district with its own taxing authority, has not been greatly impacted by the reduction in traditional sources of funding for parks and recreation from the federal, state, and local governments, BREC has not been immune from a decrease in citizen support for government taxes. As resources become more limited and scrutinized, park and recreation agencies need to have access to a broad spectrum of skills, tools, and information—many of which are located outside of the agency itself. These and other factors have encouraged the growth of partnerships.

## Example BREC Partnerships

BREC should continue to partner with public, private, and nonprofit organizations that have common goals and whose complementary resources can result in mutual benefits. The following are examples of successful BREC partnerships.

### Public/Private Partnerships

In 2012, BREC partnered with the Team Automotive Group and the Baton Rouge Basketball and Volleyball Association to build a new 30,000 square foot recreation complex in BREC's Perkins Road Community Park. The complex is the largest indoor basketball complex in Baton Rouge and the largest indoor volleyball complex in all of Louisiana.

### Public/Nonprofit Partnerships

In 2014, BREC partnered with the nonprofit Cancer Services and its affiliate group the Lauren Savoy Olinde Foundation to provide sun shade structures over a playground at Perkins Road Community Park. The nonprofit provided the funds to purchase and install the structures, and BREC provided the initial labor required for the footings of the shade structures as well as the location for the project.

## Public/Public Partnerships

BREC partners with the local school district for use of the district's athletic field to host BREC junior tackle football. BREC makes its recreational facilities available for students after school to complete their homework and participate in recreational activities.

BREC recently renovated three of its swimming pools and partners with the YMCA to operate them.

## Community Partnerships

Community partnerships involve residents of local communities to jointly address how BREC can contribute to solving local park and recreation issues. BREC has recently increased its efforts in this area by engaging community partners and citizens to serve as community councils for individual park and recreation centers.

## Partnership Opportunities

### Programming

Cooperative programming efforts include innovative joint programming for special events and reoccurring programs and activities.

### Joint Use Facilities

Joint use facilities are can be used by BREC and its partners through a cost-sharing agreement. Examples include the regular use of athletic fields by sports associations.

### Expertise

BREC can offer its expertise—for example, in health and wellness programs—in exchange for the expertise of its partners.

### Funding

Financing partnerships span a range of opportunities, including sponsorship, naming rights, capital subsidy, and usage fees.

### Information

BREC has valuable information about needs and trends and valuable input from the public and key stakeholders from the Imagine Your Parks<sub>2</sub> process. As BREC continues to move in the strategic directions outlined, BREC should look to leverage this information and its resources with potential partners to help achieve its goals.

## Action Plan

### 7.1. Support and strengthen BREC's robust volunteer program.

*BREC's volunteers are playing a growing role in parks, taking on responsibilities that free up BREC's resources for other purposes. As the volunteer program grows, clear policies and tracking should be employed to ensure beneficial experiences for BREC, volunteers, and park users.*

- 7.1.1. Involve volunteers in cross-training to increase their skill set and allow for flexibility of work assignments.



**Recognizing partnerships with clear messaging.**

BREC Howell Place Gym at the ExxonMobil YMCA

**Volunteering to beautify Independence  
Community Park.**

CohnReznick Volunteer Project at  
Independence Botanic Gardens



**“Engage volunteers  
from user groups.”**

*public meeting  
participant*

- 7.1.2. Develop a reward and recognition system for volunteers, and summarize volunteer recognition policies in the BREC volunteer policy document.
- 7.1.3. Regularly update volunteer position descriptions and life-cycle procedures.
- 7.1.4. Add end-of-life-cycle process steps to the BREC volunteer policy to track resignations and terminations and their reasons.
- 7.1.5. Categorize and track volunteers by type and extent of work (e.g., regular volunteers, special event volunteers, episodic volunteers, volunteer interns, community service volunteers).
- 7.1.6. Encourage BREC employees to volunteer themselves in the community.
- 7.1.7. Periodically identify, evaluate, or revise tactics of the volunteer services program to better support BREC’s mission.

**7.2. Ensure BREC and its partners have fair and equitable relationships.**

*Partnerships are only successful when parties have common goals, missions, and interests; objectives and expectations are clearly stated; there is clear and frequent communication; and each party is contributing in kind funding, services, or expertise.*

- 7.2.1. Formalize and continually maintain partnership agreements that define equitable public, not for profit, and private partner contributions and desired outcomes of each party, and monitor them at least annually, or as needed.
- 7.2.2. Assign a liaison from BREC to work with each partner, and ensure each partner has a liaison identified to work with BREC.
- 7.2.3. Track and regularly share costs and measurable outcomes of partnership agreements. Post these as part of the annual report process.
- 7.2.4. Define conditions for recognition of BREC’s involvement in a partnership and for use of BREC’s logo.
- 7.2.5. Define when financial data from partners must be provided to BREC to regularly track costs and measurable outcomes of partnership agreements.
- 7.2.6. Develop a partnership manual that defines thresholds for formal and informal partnerships, which volunteer efforts need screening, and policies on sponsorship, naming, and tree donation.

- 7.2.7. Continue ongoing efforts to identify prospective partners and evaluate whether their mission, goals, objectives, and image are compatible with BREC's.
- 7.2.8. Encourage BREC commissioners and staff to invite new partnerships.
- 7.2.9. Establish appropriate and balanced exclusivity agreements, where appropriate and consistent with mission and vision.

**7.3. Streamline the processes of identifying areas in need of donor support and reaching out to donors to provide support.**

*As resources generally become more limited, BREC is not alone in looking for outside funding support. In collaboration with the BREC Foundation, BREC should develop a clear understanding of what existing and potential donors are available, what areas need donor support, what other entities will be contacting those donors, and how to best to leverage other partnerships to strengthen donor requests.*

- 7.3.1. Identify and prioritize capital improvement projects, programs, and special events that could benefit from donor support, based on costs and benefits, and update the list of projects at least every five years.
- 7.3.2. Develop sponsorship proposals to help underwrite and offset operating cost for programs and services.
- 7.3.3. Identify and prioritize programs that need scholarship support.
- 7.3.4. Work with organizational partners and supporters to develop protocols for when and what can be done by each entity to solicit support from the limited donor base.
- 7.3.5. Develop a donor outreach strategy, including informational materials tailored to donors.
- 7.3.6. Track the accomplishments of donors.



Providing after school space for homework and recreation.  
Youth 360 After School Program



# Maintenance and Operations

## **Strategic Direction 8:**

**Ensure that BREC's parks and facilities are operated and maintained efficiently and according to best practices and to defined standards for park types.**

## Internal Values

BREC's internal values define the way in which it supports its staff's professional growth and development:

- **pride:** feeling gratified by one's individual contributions and BREC's work
- **trust:** believing in others' character, abilities, and commitment to BREC's mission
- **respect:** treating others with consideration
- **recognition:** acknowledging work done well
- **collaboration:** working with others to achieve mutual goals
- **engagement:** seeking feedback and direction from BREC employees
- **empowerment:** enabling individual responsibility and accountability
- **accountability:** accepting personal responsibility for one's actions
- **responsibility:** taking ownership of a set of duties or obligations

## Action Plan

- 8.1. Review staffing annually to ensure that staffing levels are in line with operational and maintenance needs.
- 8.2. Provide regular training to ensure that staff have the skills to effectively operate and maintain BREC facilities.
- 8.3. Continue to consider operational and maintenance requirements as critical factors in park planning and design.
- 8.4. Pursue increased funding for major maintenance activities, replacement of aging infrastructure, and equipment.
- 8.5. Identify and dispose of surplus and under-utilized parklands to allow resources to be invested more productively.
- 8.6. Continue to search for improved methods of maintaining the system that will better utilize resources or increase quality.





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# Action Plan

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# Appendices

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