



BREC is the largest and oldest park system in Louisiana, celebrating its 75<sup>th</sup> birthday in October 2021. BREC enjoys a very high level of community involvement and support to keep the park system vibrant and relevant to meet the ever-changing needs of the community and the challenges provided by nature and man-made events.

In 2004, BREC launched the Imagine Your Parks strategic/master plan to transform what had become an aging, neighborhood-based park system with special use facilities into more of a 'hub and spoke' model park system with twelve (soon to be thirteen) large, staffed community parks, serving as a hub for programming activity, with other surrounding neighborhood parks as well as parish-wide special interest facilities. Community parks contain enough amenities to entertain guests for an entire day; neighborhood parks serve the needs of their respective neighborhoods; and special interest facilities serve specific interests of all parish residents, regardless of location.

In 2014 BREC updated its vision for parks and recreation for the coming decade. Imagine Your Parks 2 considers changes in the park system over the prior decade, new trends in recreation, changes in parish demographics and economy, and input from the community. It establishes eight strategic directions and an action plan for success. Below is a summary of the goals and progress report:

### **FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY**

#### **Strategic Direction 1: Continue to place a priority on the wise use of taxpayer dollars.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** In 2017, BREC's executive leadership embarked on a project to completely modernize BREC's administrative processes by implementing software systems to replace manual and paper-driven processes. Several implementations, including the financial and human capital management system and new Golf and Zoo sales software systems, were underway when the COVID-19 pandemic began. BREC's IT team was able to move quickly to equip staff with the technology needed to continue the implementations through remote meetings. The new Golf and Zoo sales system as well as the new financial and human capital management systems went live in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Additionally, BREC's Planning & Engineering team secured over \$12 Million in grants for building greenways and implementing green infrastructure design practices to assist with localized flooding.

**2022 & Beyond:** Other software implementations, including a new asset management software system that integrates with GIS and a new capital project management software are currently in implementation. The systems will allow the agency to make more data-driven decisions, be more transparent, and save paper as well as fuel.

### **PROGRAMS**

#### **Strategic Direction 2: Continue innovation in recreation programming**

**2020/2021 Progress:** BREC commissioned an updated parish-wide needs assessment survey, the results of which were used to develop annual program and event calendars by aligning them with new trends, market demands and community-wide needs. In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of all indoor facilities and cancellation of in-person events for the first half of the year. Recreation quickly adapted, creating virtual camps, programs, and events to serve the community until socially distanced in-person events and programs could resume. Throughout 2020 and in 2021, BREC continued offering a mix of virtual and in-person offerings.

**2022 & Beyond:** The Recreation Department has a new data division to track usage and survey responses and to spot trends to better serve customers, report to and advise BREC leadership, and tell the story of how BREC serves diverse populations across East Baton Rouge Parish.

### **KEEP QUALITY AND ACCESSIBLE 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.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** The seventh year of Imagine Your Parks 2 closed with 88 capital improvement projects under construction, out to bid, in the design phase or completed despite the pandemic. BREC's Planning and Engineering department worked with partner agencies to gain approval for a parish-wide bike/pedestrian master plan aimed at creating 450 miles of connectivity trails, over 200 of which will be BREC greenways. To date, 24.79 miles of greenways have been built with 20 more miles currently in planning or construction. BREC's Planning & Engineering team secured more than \$7 million in grants for a trail to connect Downtown to an underserved area. Additionally, a

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7-mile trail that will connect multiple BREC parks throughout a disadvantaged area of town is currently in planning with a great deal of community engagement from local grass roots organizations. Construction began on a historical \$40M project to revitalize BREC's Baton Rouge Zoo and surrounding park located in an economically disinvested area of the parish.

**2022 & Beyond:** BREC is currently working with the local public school system, which is one of the largest school systems in the state, to plan more joint use of public land for recreational purposes, beginning with a new 'school in a park' that is currently in planning. Other large-scale projects include the largest single project in BREC's history to renovate the Zoo and the surrounding Greenwood Community Park; adding a 13<sup>th</sup> community park to the BREC system; a new multi-million-dollar nature center at its largest conservation area; an elevated swimming pool and recreation center in an underserved community greatly impacted by the Historic Flood of 2016 and much more.

### **STRENGTHEN NATURAL RESOURCES**

**Strategic Direction 4: Strengthen and increase natural resource related recreational opportunities.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** After NRPA conservation consultants reviewed BREC's growing program, the BREC Commission approved separating nature programming and natural resource management into two separate divisions with increased staffing. BREC created the Conservation Outdoor Recreation and Education (CORE) division in its Recreation department and the Natural Resource Management Division in its Planning & Engineering department. This has more than doubled the staff responsible for natural resource management, which is also bolstered by the creation of the Green Force trained volunteer corps that helps with the creation of natural trails, the elimination of invasive species, and other natural resource management initiatives.

**2022 & Beyond:** BREC implemented its first of what will be on-going prescribed burns of a natural grow area in order to return nutrients to the respective soil and increase the production of wildflowers, which attract pollinators, save maintenance costs in parks, and attract natural wildlife. Continued implementation of the newly completed Natural Resource Management Plan, and the completion of the new nature center at BREC's Frenchtown Road Conservation Area.

### **CONTINUE ENHANCING TRAIL CONNECTIVITY**

**Strategic Direction 5: Enhance connectivity by improving the network of multi-use trails to, within, and between parks and community assets.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** BREC played a lead role in the creation of a 450-mile, multi-agency comprehensive trails network to create connectivity across the entire parish. BREC's current system includes more than 200 miles of multi-use trails, concrete walking paths, walking loops, an indoor walking track, hiking trails, nature trails, mountain bike trails and equestrian trails. See here for a full list: <https://www.brec.org/index.cfm/page/TrailsAndTracks#greenway>. BREC received a \$3.7-million Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality trail grant which will ultimately connect the HBCU Southern University in the northern part of the parish to Louisiana State University in the south. The seven-mile trail will connect to other trails, creating connectivity in the urban core of the parish. BREC's partnership with the e-bike sharing company Gotcha Bikes was pivotal during the pandemic as bike riding and trail usage saw a significant increase during the pandemic.

**2022 & Beyond:** Implementation of the parish-wide bike-pedestrian master plan is in full swing with BREC's Assistant Director of Urban Trails securing several land donations/land use agreements and conducting intensive public engagement for an iconic park that will serve as the trailhead at the start of the 7-mile CMAQ trail Construction, which should begin in 2022 along with several other sections of the plan.

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## **CONTINUE MARKETING AND COMMUNICATING BREC'S VALUE AND SERVICES**

**Strategic Direction 6: Increase local awareness of BREC's programs and facilities and the overall value of BREC.**

### **2020/2021 Progress:**

In March 2020, BREC Communications had a three-day notice that all events and programs would be canceled due to the pandemic. While preparing to work remotely, staff created the "Play it Safe" campaign, urging residents to safely use green spaces and trails to remain healthy and active while other areas of the park system were closed and "Refresh Outdoors + Online" which created 70+ behind the scenes video experiences and how-to videos as well as 24 activity sheets (in English and Spanish). The campaigns contributed to a 41% increase in use of trails and green spaces, and golf courses and the Zoo set records for attendance. BREC's social media pages also saw a spike with a 172% increase in reach on the main Facebook page alone. In 2021, BREC's Communications department underwent an external audit of processes and procedures and issued an RFP for an update of BREC's website.

**2022 & Beyond:** BREC Communications will implement recommendations from the audit, launch its updated website, and use newly developed event debrief reports and monthly reports on the usage of dept. Services to make more data-driven decisions about marketing.

## **STRENGTHEN AND LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS**

**Strategic Direction 7: Strengthen and create new partners, including the BREC Foundation to achieve common goals and leverage resources.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** BREC worked with Pros Consulting to create an action plan for maximizing and strengthening existing partnerships and discovering opportunities where strategic partnerships can optimize BREC's services to the community, which led to the creation of a Partnership and Development division of BREC to create policies and procedures governing partnerships and sponsorships and streamline fundraising efforts in an effort to better leverage community resources to meet BREC's mission and community needs.

**2022 & Beyond:** The new division is evaluating all current partnerships and creating new innovative partnerships, working with a national consultant to identify valuable sponsorship opportunities throughout the park system, and is currently conducting extensive community engagement outreach to create new policies and mechanisms to gain more on-going community input about BREC parks.

## **EFFICIENT & BEST MANAGEMENT OF FACILITIES & OPEN SPACES**

**Strategic Direction 8: Ensure that BREC's parks and facilities are operated and maintained efficiently according to best practices and to define standards for park types.**

**2020/2021 Progress:** BREC's Park Operations Department updated the standards of service for each classification of park: community, neighborhood, and special use facility. Trained maintenance staff are required to meet those standards on a weekly basis. Throughout 2020, Park Ops staff focused on sanitizing parks and facilities (closed or open), not only to ensure the community felt safe, but to also respond to higher usage of BREC parks and amenities and ensure that social distancing guidelines were followed. In 2021, BREC's Park Operations staff not only dealt with the impacts of the pandemic but also with those of an ice storm and multiple hurricanes that damaged all nature trails, many trees, and pipes, and caused debris to be spread throughout all parks.

**2022 & Beyond:** Park Operations is implementing the use of technology through the creation of dashboards that allow real time tracking of the progress made toward achieving maintenance standards by measuring mowing cycles, staff leave time, weather conditions, and equipment downtime to measure the impacts. Park Ops will also track staff training, fleet management and employee turnover and will continue utilizing volunteers to evaluate parks on cleanliness, safety, and other maintenance issues.

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