

RECREATION RESOURCES

Inventory and Analysis

RECREATION RESOURCES¹

I. PORTLAND'S OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

A. Parks and Open Space Inventory

Portland has over 1,500 acres of public open space—1,183 acres on the mainland, 120 acres on islands served by public ferry and 220 acres on Jewell Island. Over 500 acres are undeveloped. Portland's park system includes over 100 individual parks and open spaces. Cemeteries account for over 250 acres of Portland's open space. The City also offers 28 public playgrounds (DOC Data base).

The neighborhoods with the largest amount of publicly accessible open space are Riverton and Deering, both with close to 300 acres. North Deering has 118 acres, which includes the recent acquisition of about 48 acres along the Presumpscot River. East Deering (7 acres) and Oakdale (9 acres) have the smallest amount of public open space for mainland neighborhoods. Until recently, Stroudwater had only 2 ½ acres of city-owned open space, but the City recently purchased 19 acres of land between Rand Road and Westbrook Street and is working with Portland Trails to develop public access. Stroudwater also adjoins the 80-acre Fore River Sanctuary owned by the Maine Audubon Society. On the islands, open space held by private organizations generally exceeds public open space except on Peaks Island where the City owns 110 acres of open space (GSBE, 1994, update 2002).

Open space on the mainland totals 18 acres per 1,000 residents. Open space on the islands increases this ratio to a citywide total of 19.9 acres. Jewell Island adds another four acres to this ratio but the island is not served by public ferry.

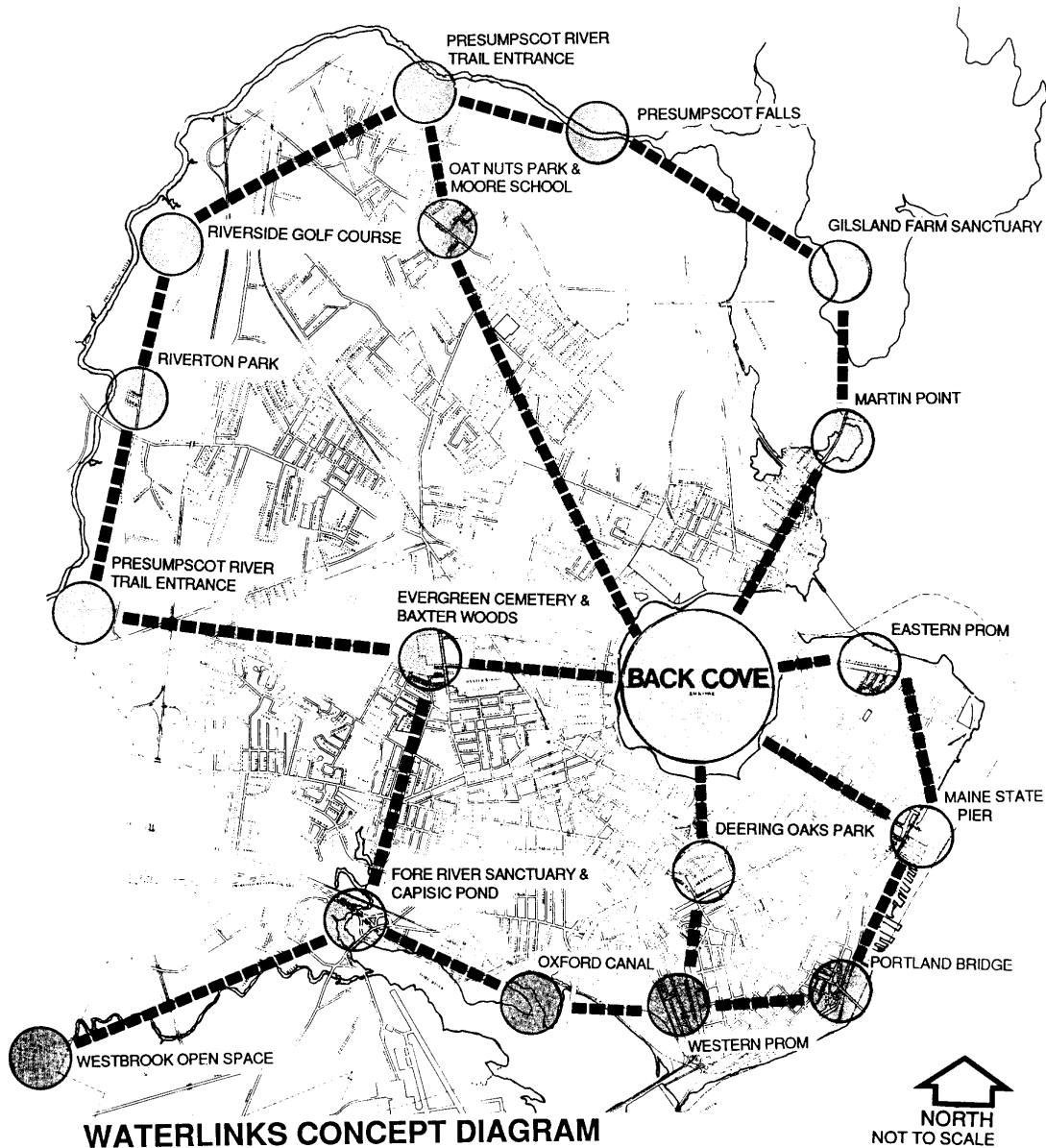
An inventory of all the open space and recreation facilities by neighborhood is included in the appendix. The inventory provides the name, location, facility type, acres, use type, and other facility details. A map of Portland identifying the location of Portland's parks and open space is included as Recreation Map #1.

B. Waterlinks Concept - Trails in Portland

In 1987, the Portland Shoreway Access Plan presented an inventory of open spaces and public access points along water bodies and identified opportunities to expand the City's open space system through an idea called Waterlinks. The Waterlinks Concept expands upon the vision of J.P. Baxter and the General Plan for Park System prepared by the Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects, which sought to link Deering Oaks with the Eastern and Western Promenades. The Waterlinks Concept (see following map)

¹ Green Spaces, Blue Edges: An Open Space and Recreation Plan for the City of Portland, updated 2001.

includes a series of open spaces and public recreation areas within neighborhoods, joined by linkages radiating from Back Cove. The plan identifies public access opportunities throughout the city, while respecting the integrity of existing neighborhoods. The outer ring takes its form from the Stroudwater, Fore, and Presumpscot Rivers, as well as the Portland Waterfront. The plan is a long-range view that addresses the potential for an interconnected park system throughout the City. The Shoreway Access Plan (included as a reference) provides shore way access site plans for four island sites and 19 sites along river corridors, coastline and Back Cove.



Since the adoption of this plan there have been numerous trails and linkages completed in the overall system. Many of these accomplishments are attributable to the creative, collaborative, and diligent work of Portland Trails. Portland Trails is a non-profit trails organization, which uses the waterlinks concept as the base for their master plan. Following is a list of trail accomplishments by the City, Portland Trails and other partners.

1. Completed Trails

- **Back Cove** – now there is a complete loop which follows the circumference of the Cove - Length: 17,455 feet, 3.3 miles
- **Eastern Prom Trail** -extends from the Maine State Pier to Tukey’s Bridge- Length: 9,510 feet, 1.8 miles
- **Tukey’s Bridge Connection** -walkway connection under the bridge connects the Eastern Prom to Back Cove - Length: 4570 feet, 0.9 miles
- **Capisic Pond Trail** – Improvements to trail – Length: perimeter of pond is 5,680 (City owns land around the pond, but the trail is only located on the easterly side)
- **Stroudwater River Trail**- runs from Stroudwater Village to a point north of the Maine Turnpike – Length: 12518 feet, 2.4 miles of river frontage
- **Fore River Trail** off Hobart Street – Length: 975 feet (water edge)
- **Waterfront Trail** – extends down Maine State Pier, through a small park at the ferry terminal, along Commercial Street to Portland Pier and Chandlers Wharf – Length: 3600 feet, 0.7 miles
- **Portland Trails** has added 13 miles of public trails in Portland and has a goal to create 30 miles of trails.²
- **The Fore River Sanctuary**- Maine Audubon Society owns and maintains a network of public trails from Stroudwater Village to Jewells Falls (owned by Portland Trails) with connections to surrounding neighborhoods. Length: 2 miles of trails³

2. Trails Currently Being Planned

- **Presumpscot River Property** – recently bought 48 acres along the Presumpscot River with the financial assistance of Land for Maine’s Future: Length of river frontage: 709 feet
- **Trail through Bayside** to connect Eastern Prom Trail and Deering Oaks Park
- **Trails along the Capisic and Fall Brooks**

² Nan Cummings, Executive Director, Portland Trails, May, 2002.

³ Bob Savage, Property Manager, Maine Audubon Society, June 2002.

3. Other Publicly Owned Water Frontage

- **Riverton Trolley Park** – Length of Presumpscot River frontage: 1013 feet, 0.2 miles
- **Riverside Golf Course** – Length of Presumpscot River frontage: 10,470 feet, 2.0 miles

II. TRENDS IN RECREATION

A. General Trends

The need for more parks and open space has increased in Portland over time, however it's not population growth that is fueling this change. Portland's population has increased slightly over the last 20 years and has remained relatively constant since 1990.

Table 3. Portland's Population

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u> ⁴	<u>Portland School Enrollment</u> ⁵
1980	61,572	8600
1990	64,358	7468
2000	64,249	7914

However, Portland's Athletic Fields Task Force (2001) documented a doubling of scheduled athletic field use between 1983 and 2000. This was largely attributed to more girls and boys participating in sports, putting increased demand on Portland's athletic fields. Below is a summary of the report findings (b. Athletic Fields).

Another significant trend in park use has been the availability of private funding for several projects. Several components of the Deering Oaks Master Plan have been funded through private donations. These include \$330,000 to restore the Deering Oaks ravine and \$330,000 to date, to refurbish the Castle in the Park. The Athletic Facilities Task Force envisioned raising private funds to augment work funded through the City's capital improvements plan.

Finally, the character of Portland's population is changing and becoming more diverse. Pockets of ethnicity exist within the City, providing a rich difference to the community. These different ethnic groups have different requirements from the parks and recreational spaces within Portland.

⁴ 2000, 1990, 1980 – US Census

⁵ Patrick Dow, Maine Dept of Education, Personal Communication, June 2000.

B. Athletic Fields

In 2001, Portland Athletic Fields Task Force reported that Portland public schools and recreational sports leagues are major users of Portland athletic field and their use is growing. Their findings include:

- The number of school teams has increased from 35 to 63 since 1983 and is expected to expand to 90 teams by 2005.
- Recreational teams have expanded from 274 to 364 since 1983 and are projected to expand to 414 teams over the next five years.
- This growth has occurred in large part because of the tremendous increase in women's and girls' participation in sports.
- Soccer continues to grow, lacrosse is gaining popularity, and new sports such as ultimate Frisbee are taking hold. Little League continues to be popular in East Deering and Deering Center. It has increased steadily in North Deering, but declined in the West End.
- The scheduled use of Portland's athletic fields has almost doubled since 1983 from 10,378 to 21,563 hours. Much of this growth has been in sports that use rectangular or multi-purpose fields.

While the demand for athletic field time has almost doubled, the city has lost a baseball field, a multipurpose field and 4 softball fields. More teams playing on fewer fields translate into overused and deteriorating playing fields. Most of Portland's athletic fields are not constructed to today's standards. The soil profiles are variable and drainage is poor. This affects the quality and resilience of the turf particularly when they are used intensively and at inappropriate times.

With increased demand for use on Portland's athletic fields, maintenance of fields is vital. Fields must be well maintained to support the intensive use they currently receive. While the city has increased the funding level for the Ballfield Division over the last four years, maintenance is still not adequate for the intensity of use. Additional seasonal staff is required, even with the current number of fields. However, over the long term, adding more fields, upgrading fields and using new technologies in some locations can lower maintenance costs per hour of use.

III. CHANGING NEEDS

Coupled with changes in how Portland views and uses its open spaces and park lands and the needs that have already been identified, the coming decade will provide a host of opportunities and challenges for Portland's Department of Parks and Recreation. Portland's population is aging and growing more ethnically diverse. A brief listing of opportunities and challenges are included below.

Opportunities

- The City has and should continue to attract private funding to enhance recreation and open space goals.
- The Department should foster partnerships with nonprofits that have similar goals. This sector is growing in Portland.
- Now that park needs and projects have been identified and articulated through master plans, the Department may be able to build on projects done by other City Departments and organizations.

Challenges

- Reduced funds available for the Capital Improvements Plan will hamper efforts to upgrade Portland’s parks and open spaces.
- More athletic field space is needed to accommodate the growth in scheduled field use.
- Resources are needed to upgrade existing athletic facilities and infrastructure to current standards, for health and safety as well as to support the high intensity of use.
- The competing demands of a more diverse community create challenges. The changing needs of Portland’s population translate into need for such things as off-leash areas, multi-purpose fields, and other facilities.
- The Parks and Recreation Department needs to consolidate their space, so that all divisions are within the same building. Currently, the Department operates out of two separate locations.

IV . MASTER PLAN APPROACH TO PARKS

Another major change in Portland’s management of parks over the past decade has been a shift from developing incremental projects at individual properties to a master planning approach for each park, greenway, and cemetery. Currently, the Department of Parks and Recreation develops comprehensive, long-term plans for each parcel. Master plans integrate a site’s history, resources and community needs with a vision for the future. Master plans have been completed and approved for 8 properties to date and 5 are underway (Table 2). Following is a summary of completed master plans to highlight how those plans envision the future of those properties.

Park and Cemetery Master Plans Completed

Property	Year
Evergreen Cemetery	1994
Deering Oaks	1994
Baxter Boulevard	2000
Payson Park	2000
Dougherty Fields	2001
Western Cemetery	2001
Capisic/Fall Brook Greenway	2001
Athletic Fields	2001
Tommy’s Park	In Process
Reiche School Rec Space	In Process
Riverton Trolley Park	In Process
Lincoln Park	In Process
Fort Sumner	In Process

A. Evergreen Cemetery

The Evergreen Cemetery Master Plan tried to balance the primary function of the cemetery with a range of recreational uses that attract people there. A National Endowment for the Arts grant received by the Friends of Evergreen Cemetery funded the work. The primary issues addressed by the plan were the definition, preservation and strengthening of the cemetery's visual character; burial and memorial options that respect and enhance the character of the landscape; accommodation of appropriate forms of passive recreation; and strengthening the cemetery's financial support.

B. Deering Oaks

The 54-acre Deering Oaks Park is a focal point for Portland's Park system. The master plan, adopted in 1994, has as its goals the improvement of the image and safety of the park, preserving the historic design intent, facilitating use of the park, restoring the park's horticultural beauty and ecological health, and strengthening maintenance and management programs. A series of recommendations have been phased in over time with additional work still to come. To date the tennis courts and basketball courts have been moved and redeveloped, landscape features such as the ravine have been restored, and renovation of the castle is underway.

C. Baxter Boulevard Improvement Plan

Baxter Boulevard is a 100-foot wide roadway and linear park that skirts Back Cove. It is a cultural and natural resource that offers bird-watching, jogging, walking, biking, in-line skating, kite flying and sun bathing. It is the most heavily used park within the Portland park system. This Master Plan recommends developing well-defined entrances and connections for the Boulevard, improving and coordinating pedestrian and bicyclist amenities, improving care and maintenance of the existing linden trees, replacement and infilling of declining linden trees, efforts to protect and enhance wildlife habitat along the shoreline, maintaining and improving the walkways, traffic safety recommendations, and site-specific recommendations. The Portland City Council has not yet adopted this master plan.

D. Payson Park

The Edward Payson Park Master Plan was developed over two years and adopted in 2001. The goals of the plan are to:

- Minimize the impact of vehicular traffic on the park by relocating the heavily used road that currently bisects the park to the northern boundary. This allows the park to function as one larger uninterrupted parcel.
- Enhance the relationship between active and passive uses of the park while improving the condition, safety and efficiency of the facilities. Uses of the park are organized around a large central, multi-purpose space. Several athletic fields are reoriented and reconstructed with the net loss of one athletic field.

- Improve the pedestrian circulation system within and through the park. Internally, a small network of interconnected paths will ultimately connect to Baxter Boulevard and Ocean Avenue’s walking and biking trails.
- Expand the Longfellow Arboretum as a resource for the park. New plantings around the new proposed multi-purpose space will better integrate the Arboretum into the park.
- Make the park accessible to all users. The plan calls for a substantial increase in parking spaces, from 230 to 420 spaces. Strategically placed parking will provide more convenient access for park users and safer pedestrian conditions.

E. Western Cemetery

Western Cemetery, a 12-acre 19th century historic cemetery, sits atop the Western Promenade and offers spectacular views to the south. It was used for several decades as a sanctioned off-leash dog park. It is popular because it is large, with varied topography and vegetation, and mostly fenced. Conflicts arose over societal values of respect for the dead and the popularity of the area as a dog run. The Western Cemetery master plan recommends restoration and rehabilitation of the property in a contemporary context, reinforcement of an overall image, improving accessibility and maintenance, and increased educational and passive recreational opportunities. The Portland City Council has in turn, discontinued the use of this area as an off-leash dog park.

F. Dougherty Fields

The Dougherty Fields Master Plan is a three or four phase plan developed to minimize disruption of the many programs that already use the facilities, while upgrading the overall capacity of the site. Dougherty Fields are heavily used and the loss of space and fields during reconstruction and renovation will be hard to replace. Phase I includes upgrading the pool to make it more family-oriented, secure, and updated. It also includes moving and reorienting the Little League fields. The second phase of the plan involves reconstructing and reorienting the rectangular fields so that an additional multi-purpose field can be fit into the existing space. Parking issues and other problems also are addressed as part of the plan.

G. Fall/Capisc Brook Greenway Master Plans

Fall Brook and Capisc Brook are drainage ways through Portland’s northern and eastern portions respectively. The City of Portland has entered into a consent decree with the US Environmental Protection Agency and the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to reduce combined sewer overflows to Casco Bay. These waterways are part of the City’s strategy to comply with this decree. Portland plans to modify large portions of the Capisc and Fall Brook corridors to naturally accommodate more stormwater. Engineering improvements focus on reducing flooding and stormwater backup, improving water quality and controlling erosion and debris accumulation.

The master plans for these two waterways combine goals for developing their use as greenways while improving wildlife habitat and hydrological characteristics. The plans build off existing and planned water management improvements for the streams. Recommendations address water quality improvement, wildlife habitat enhancement and the provision of a trail along the length of the greenway.

H. Athletic Fields Task Force

In 1999, the City Council appointed an Athletic Fields Task Force to develop a set of recommendations to improve the quality and quantity of Portland's athletic fields. This group met for two years, examining the trends and issues concerning Portland's athletic fields. Their work documented a doubling of the scheduled use of Portland's athletic fields between 1983 and 2000. This tremendous increase took place at the same time that the number of athletic fields in Portland decreased. Portland's athletic fields are not built to the standards required to support this intensive use and the quality of the fields suffers. Their findings are summarized above in Section B Portland Athletic Fields.

The work of the Task Force culminated with a phased strategy to improve the quality of existing fields, increase the number of playing fields to meet community needs, and support maintenance strategies that keep the fields in good condition in a cost-effective manner. The Task Force developed a set of phased recommendations to upgrade, expand and improve the athletic fields within the city. These recommendations cover a ten-year period and would cost about \$10 million. It is expected that private money will be raised to cover the cost of some of these improvements. The initial phase of these recommendations is being implemented and is included in the proposed capital improvements plan.

V. PORTLAND PARTNERS: CITY COMMISSIONS AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS

A. Portland Commissions

1) Land Bank Commission

In 1999, the City Council created the Land Bank Commission, elevating the status of open space protection within the City. The Commission's charge is to insure the conservation and preservation of open space that has important wildlife, ecological, environmental, scenic or outdoor recreational values. The Commission was charged with developing an inventory of privately and publicly held open space to prioritize acquisition efforts, to act as a liaison to other organizations and agencies involved with open space conservation, and to cooperate with other agencies in wetland mitigation projects. The Commission also has a fund to accept gifts and funds to acquire properties.

The Land Bank Commission has inventoried open space and recreational property within the City, developed a priority list of properties for acquisition in the North Deering, Stroudwater and Riverton areas, established an account to accept donations and gifts, and recommended zoning changes to clarify open space and preservation status of several parcels.

2) Friends of the Park Commission

In 1983, the City Council created the Friends of the Park Commission, although it was not operating until 1989. Thirteen members, including a member of the City Council, comprise the Commission. The official duties of the commission include: encouraging and accepting private contributions to the park system, maintaining inventories of parks and recreational needs, encouraging public educational programs, and undertaking activities to enhance the parks and the recreational programs of the City. The Commission is a good sounding board for policies of and actions by the Department of Parks and Recreation.

B. Private Organizations

Private organizations with goals of improving recreational resources and publicly accessible open space have grown within the City over the past decade and their strength has been a boon to Portland. Several of these organizations are outlined below.

1) Portland Trails

The 10-year-old Portland Trails organization is working to create a 30-mile network of multi-use trails within Greater Portland. The group also serves as an advocate for the protection of and access to natural places within the region. Current projects include the Presumpscot River, Stroudwater River Trail and the Fore River Trail. Portland Trails has a strong volunteer base, and is able to fund-raise and solicit grants to enhance Portland's trail network.

2) Maine Island Trails Association

MITA provides stewardship and education for some of Maine's undeveloped islands. They have developed the Maine Island Trail, which identifies campsites and accessible areas for recreationists. Jewell Island is one of their sites.

3) Ripple Effect

Ripple Effect is an adventure-based youth development organization based in Portland. Ripple Effect offers leadership and esteem-building programs for youth at risk. These programs use sea kayaks and rope courses to encourage healthy risk-taking. The organization has recently purchased 26-acre Cow Island, in cooperation with Maine Coast Heritage Trust, to use as an experiential and environmental outpost.

C. Friends Organizations

Several parks in Portland have loosely organized support groups who act as land stewards and help the Department focus on issues involving specific properties.

1) Friends of Deering Oaks

Organized in 1997 to identify a series of physical and program initiatives to be undertaken, this group has been instrumental in raising private funds to rehabilitate the ravine and restore the castle.

2) Stewards of Western Cemetery

This group has helped the City define the issues and obtain grants to address conflicts and uses at Western Cemetery. They are managing a volunteer base to work with the Forestry Section to implement maintenance portions of the master plan.

3) Friends of Riverton Trolley Park

Since 1997, this organization has organized memorabilia for the park and conducted tours.

4) Friends of Evergreen Cemetery

This organization secured funds for an Arts Heritage Conservation Grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to identify and preserve historic resources at Evergreen Cemetery. Founded in 1991, this group conducts tours of the Cemetery, advocates for preservation and had input into the master plan.

5) Friends of Capisic Pond

This group, now inactive, was formed in 1989 when a parcel near the pond was slated for development. This group successfully advocated for acquisition of the parcel and helped identify needs for the pond.