

# PARKS AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT

## MONTHLY REPORT

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Written by: Stuart Brown, Parks and Recreation Director  
Warren Boling, Parks Manager  
Katrina Kelly, Recreation Manager  
Douglas Gebhart, Recreation Supervisor  
Mark Bell, Program and Facilities Coordinator

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The monthly Parks and Recreation Department Report includes news and updates from the department, along with achievements and action related to the strategies, goals and tasks identified in the 2021 Strategic Workplan.

- A. Department News, Updates & Facility Status
- B. Maintain and Enhance the Town's Recreation Infrastructure
- C. Deliver High-Quality, Innovative, and Affordable Recreation Programming
- D. Strengthen Organizational Systems, Structures and Operations
- E. Advance Team Capacity and Organizational Culture

### DEPARTMENT NEWS AND UPDATES

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#### **Facility Status:**

##### ***Whitmore Pool***

- CLOSED for the season

##### ***Whitmore Recreation Area***

- Whitmore Ball Fields – CLOSED
- Whitmore Track – OPEN
- Whitmore Synthetic Turf – OPEN
- Restrooms – CLOSED (Portable restrooms available)

##### ***Community Center***

- OPEN for programming and private rentals.

##### ***Community Tennis Courts and Playground***

- Tennis Courts – CLOSED for the season
- Pickleball Court (Court 1) – CLOSED for the season
- Restrooms – CLOSED for the season
- Playground – CLOSED for the season

##### ***Shady Rest Park***

- Soccer/ball fields – CLOSED for the season
- Restrooms – CLOSED for the season (Portable restrooms available)

- Playground – CLOSED for the season
- Shady Rest DiscGolfPark® - CLOSED for the season
- Shady Rest Winter Trails – OPEN and groomed
- Shady Rest OSV Trails – OPEN and groomed

***Mammoth RecZone***

- CLOSED for the season

***Mammoth Ice Rink***

- OPEN for the season.

***Mammoth Creek Park - West***

- Restrooms, playground, and parking lot CLOSED for CRC construction

***Mammoth Creek Park – East***

- Restrooms – CLOSED for the season

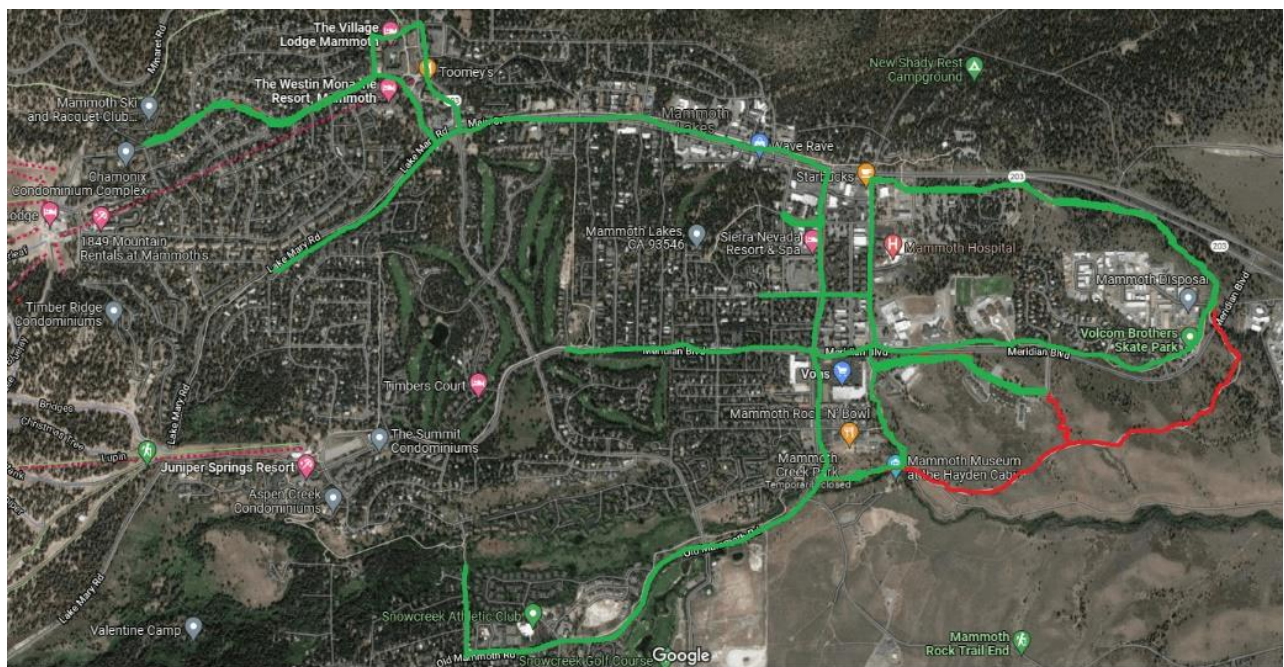
***Trails End Park/Volcom Brothers Skate Park***

- Skateparks – CLOSED for the season
- Restrooms – OPEN WEATHER PERMITTING (currently closed due to snow)
- Playground – CLOSED for the season

***Town-wide MUPs and Sidewalks***

- Please see map below for the status of sidewalks and MUP’s in town. The Lakes Basin paths are CLOSED for the season. Users are reminded to comply with municipal codes requiring all dogs to be on leash and pet waste to be disposed of by owners.

**Town Sidewalk/MUP Status (as of 1/25/2022)**





### ***Mammoth Arts and Cultural Center (MACC) – GF 9***

- In collaboration with the Mammoth Lake Foundation, the Town is engaged with AMS Consulting on the development of an Operating Forecast for the proposed MACC.
- The timeline for completion is April/May, 2022
- Scope of work includes:
  - Project Mobilization – done
  - User and Stakeholder Engagement – Underway
  - Activity Projection
  - Facility Concept and Program Review
  - Exemplars and Scenarios
  - Management and Operating Structure Recommendations
  - Financial Projections
- The project deliverable is an executive summary report.

### ***Shady Rest DiscGolfPark®***

- The Shady Rest DiscGolfPark® Adopt-a-Hole program: As of January 25, one hole remains available for sponsorship.
- The installation of the recreational tee signs and sponsor stickers will be completed in spring 2022. Staff are scheduling a recognition event at the course to coincide with the completion of the course.

### ***Whitmore Recreation Area Planning***

- The long-term goal of the Town is to enhance and expand the Whitmore Recreation Area for Town/County residents and expanded sports tourism uses.
- **LADWP Lease Extension:** On November 30, staff received correspondence from LADWP affirming that they intend to recommend the issuance of a new 50-year lease for the operation of the track and sports complex, subject to approval by its Board of Water and Power Commissioners and the Los Angeles City Council. In addition to expanding the acreage, the proposed lease expansion would be combined with the lease for Whitmore Pool (BL-1093) for a total of 112.75 acres. LADWP also intend to issue a separate business lease to Mono County for the operation of the animal shelter. LADWP indicated that resources are currently very limited, and this proposed expansion will be prioritized along with other projects at LADWP's discretion.

### ***Bike Park/Pump Track Concept – PR 9***

- The bike park concept/pump track is identified in the Town of Mammoth Lakes 2021/22 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP).
- This amenity is identified in FY2022/23, however, funding is not secured for this project.

### ***Mammoth Lakes Bouldering Park – PR 10***

- The Bouldering Park is a complementary amenity to the Bike Park/Pump Track concept and to the CRC and recreation destination concept.
- This amenity is identified in FY2022/23, however, funding is not secured for this project.

**GOAL: Enhance recreation infrastructure utilizing a variety of funding sources to improve the safety, operations and guest experience of the amenities.**

***Deferred Maintenance Program***

Town Council allocated an additional \$300,000 in parks maintenance funds this past May. Combined with existing funds from fiscal year 2020/21, a balance of \$341,000 is available for the deferred maintenance program. Based on input and direction from the Commission, staff have developed the following priority list for deferred maintenance items to be conducted during 2021-22. Based on the consensus of the Recreation Commission, staff have prioritized the following projects:

- Whitmore Recreation Area Softball/Baseball Field Maintenance – PR 8
- Whitmore Recreation Area bleacher replacement - PR 8
- Community Tennis Courts crack repair - PR 3
- Shady Rest Park irrigation system - PR 3
- Whitmore Pool - PR 3

***Parks and Recreation Amenities Enhancement Program***

- Staff, in collaboration with MLTS, identified additional amenity locations adjacent to the MUPs. Staff will finalize an inventory of amenities, locations, and costs this winter, and are also working with Mono County IT to develop a platform within the Town of Mammoth Lakes website that allows for the administration and coordination of the program by department staff. Members of the public who have expressed interest in the program are provided bi-monthly updates.

***Asset Management***

- Staff continue to update the GIS inventory of all amenities across all facilities, and coordinate with Mono County IT on the integration of the data into digital maps.

***Signage and Wayfinding – SS 3***

- Staff are working with PW/Engineering on signage and wayfinding alternatives for Main Street and additional signage in the Lakes Basin.

**GOAL: Develop and Implement sustainable best practices to enhance Town owned or managed pools, parks, fields, and facilities.**

***Maintenance Best Practices***

- Identify NEXT practices
- No action on this item

***Winter Snow Removal***

- Development of digital map
- Analyzing existing snow removal routes/prioritization

## **DELIVER HIGH-QUALITY, INNOVATIVE, AND AFFORDABLE RECREATION PROGRAMMING**

**GOAL: Provide recreation users with high-quality, innovative, and affordable programming in the specified NEW age groups that can lead to an improved quality of life.**

<b>NEW RECREATION PROGRAM AGE GROUPS</b>	
<b>Toddler</b>	<b><u>2 years</u></b>
<b>Preschool</b>	<b><u>3-4 years</u></b>
<b>Grade TK-2</b>	<b><u>5-7 years</u></b>
<b>Grade 3-5</b>	<b><u>8-11 years</u></b>
<b>Middle School</b>	<b><u>12-14 years</u></b>
<b>High School</b>	<b><u>15-18 years</u></b>
<b>Adult</b>	<b><u>16+ years</u></b>
<b>Active Adult</b>	<b><u>55+ years</u></b>
<b>Senior</b>	<b><u>65+ years</u></b>

- Staff are reviewing the 2022 Fee Schedule, which includes the operation of the Community Recreation Center.
- Staff are currently focusing on identifying programming options for Toddler and Preschool age groups.

**GOAL: Provide enhanced community programming by partnering with local organizations, youth sporting groups, individuals, or jurisdictions.**

### ***Additional/Enhanced Recreation Programs***

#### ***Intro to Cheer and Tumbling Programs at the Community Center***

- Tumble into our new 6-week tumbling program! Join Coach Lauren and learn the basics of tumbling maneuvers from bridges to cartwheels and more. Movements covered will depend on the skill of the students - classes will take place on Tuesday evenings at the Community Center. Classes are offered for the following age groups: Grades TK-2, Grades 3-5, and High School, and will commence in February.
- Jump into our new 6-week Intro to Cheer program! Join Coach Lauren and learn the fundamentals of cheer, including jumps, motions, and routines. Movements covered will depend on the skill of the students - classes will take place on Wednesdays (Middle School and High School) and Thursdays (Grades 3-5) at the Community Center, commencing February.

#### ***Youth and Adult Dance Programs at the Community Center***

- Join Coach Ally for a variety of dance and fitness classes at the Community Center, commencing in March. Classes include Youth Hip Hop and Adult Dance Fitness.

*Mono Arts Council partnership for Summer Art Camps*

- Staff are working with Mono Arts Council (MAC) to develop a variety of all day art camps to include in our summer offerings. Camps currently include ‘Exploring with Photography’ (Grades 2-5) and ‘Adventures in Art (Grades 2-5). Camps will consist of a morning art session instructed by MAC staff (assisted by TOML camp counselors) and an afternoon session composed of more traditional summer camp activities.

*Mammoth Youth Hockey*

- Teams continues to train at the Mammoth Ice Rink. Upcoming events include the PeeWee Jam Tournament (February 4-6) and the Mite Jam Tournament (February 19-21).

*Eastern Sierra Nordic Ski Association*

- Upcoming events include the Mammoth Classic (February 4), the Allan Board Memorial (February 6) and Mammoth Nordic Ski-A-Thon Fundraiser (March 26) at the Tamarack Ski Center.

*The DSES Ski PE*

- The program has had a slow start with the recent MUSD school closures. With MUSD now having returned to in-person learning, and full transportation now available, DSES expects to host up to 14 children each week from MUSD, as well as providing weekly lessons to students from LVES, Bishop, Round Valley and Owens Valley schools.

*MMS and MHS Skate PE*

- Students will commence a 4-week skating program at the Mammoth Ice Rink on February 2.

*MES Skate PE*

- Staff are examining options for MES to hold Skate PE sessions at the Mammoth Ice Rink.

*Mono County Little League*

- Staff is working with Mono County Little League to finalize their 2022 Facility Use Agreement.

**GOAL: Create and deliver scalable and sustainable signature summer camps, programs and community events aligned with the core program areas and the resource capacity and capabilities of the Parks and Recreation Department.**

***Core Program Areas:***

- Summer Youth Camps and Programs
  - Staff are currently finalizing camp products and itineraries for Summer 2022, in addition to completing USFS and Yosemite Special Use permits.
- Youth After-School Programs

- Youth Skating Lessons continue at the Mammoth Ice Rink
  - Chowhounds Cooking Series: ‘Baked’ will commence at the Mammoth Community Center on February 2. Children will be collected from school and transported to the Community Center. The 6-week course for Grades 3-5 will cover the basics of baking, with an emphasis on cleanliness and safe food handling practices.
  - Hot Shots Basketball will commence at the Mammoth Middle School Gym on February 1. This is co-ed league is geared towards teaching elementary students the basic skills and game play basketball, preparing them for the MMS Basketball program. The first two sessions will be open drill sessions. Following this, teams will be announced, with practices on Tuesdays and games on Thursdays. Parent volunteers are required to serve as team coaches.
  - Intro to Cheer and Tumbling at the Community Center (see above for details)
  - Dance Programs at the Community Center (see above for details)
  - Employment Opportunities for High School students are now available. We are currently seeking Recreation Interns (Gymnastics) and Officials in Training (Basketball).
  - Following the recent MUSD school closure, staff quickly developed a supervised Open Rink Play program to help support parents and families. 16 children attended to two sessions offered, and a further 21 children were registered for sessions that were ultimately cancelled due to the return of in-person learning. In response to positive feedback and attendance, staff are now developing an after-school program with a similar concept at the new Community Recreation Center.
- **Adult Activities**
    - Adult Skating Lessons continue at the Mammoth Ice Rink.
    - The Adult Hockey League continues at the Mammoth Ice Rink.
    - The Adult Curling League continues at the Mammoth Ice Rink.
    - The 100 Mile Winter Fitness Challenge was launched in early January. Participants pledge to complete 100 miles of activity (skiing, snowboarding, XC skiing, ice skating, walking/running/snow-shoeing, biking) before March 31. Results are updated weekly, and prizes will be awarded in all categories, with a \$100 gift card awarded for the most cumulative ‘winter’ miles. Every participant who completes 100 miles will have their name entered into the draw for a ‘lucky finisher’ prize.
  - **Community Events/Activities**
    - US Figure Skating Month – January*
    - The Mammoth Ice Rink celebrated US Figure Skating Month by offering FREE First Time Skate Assist lessons on January 21 and January 28. These 20 mins lessons provide first-timers with the basics to get them moving on the ice.

**Upcoming Events:**

- FREE Friday Night Skate – February 4
- Curling Clinics and Match Play TBD
- Recreation Expo – March 30
- Spring Egg Hunt at Shady Rest Park – April 15
- Parks and Recreation Month – July
- Fourth of July Fireworks Spectacular
- Haunted Rink and Skate Party at CRC



- Community Tree Lighting Ceremony at MCP – December 2
- Skate with Santa at CRC – December 15
- Diverse, Inclusive and Equitable Programs
  - Staff are reviewing registration forms and waivers to ensure inclusive language is used.

## **STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL SYSTEMS, STRUCTURES AND OPERATIONS**

**GOAL: Develop and implement a standardized department-wide system that describes what operational excellence is, how it will be implemented, who will implement it, and how it will be measured.**

### *Top 3 Core Standards of Excellence*

- Mammoth Ice Rink – (1) Fast Greeting, (2) Clean Amenities, (3) Rink Supervision
- Staff are currently evaluating summer programming.

**GOAL: Continually improve the delivery of community events, camps, activities, programs, facility operations and parks maintenance efforts by constantly measuring, evaluating and improving performance.**

### *Recreation Program Evaluation and Improvement*

- The Customer Satisfaction survey has been reset for 2021/22 programming and is being sent to all program participants.

### *Park/Facility Evaluation and Improvement*

- The Customer Satisfaction survey has been reset for 2021/22 facility rentals and is being sent to all facility renters.

### *Enhanced Reservation Platform*

- Staff continue to conduct research on web-based registration and facility reservation software that meets and/or exceeds the current and future needs of the department.

**GOAL: Update program/facility policies and procedures, promote social equity throughout our facilities, and deploy sufficient staffing levels and standards to maintain a safe, clean, accessible and welcoming environment.**

### *Parks and Recreation Department Manual*

- Staff are currently reviewing the Parks and Recreation Department Manual and providing annual edits and updates. Staff are also prioritizing the inclusion of additional sections and creating an annual workplan for such additions.

### *Social Equity*

- The Tony Colasardo Scholarship Fund continues to remain open for donations.
- Staff met with MES staff in December to discuss scholarship opportunities and promotion through MUSD. MES staff are excited to partner with the Parks and Recreation Department on this program and are currently reviewing concepts internally. Staff will meet with MES staff again in February to review and implement a scholarship merit award program. Staff

also discussed partnering with MES during our registration period and MES has committed to providing technological (access to computer lab) and language (Spanish translators) assistance. Interestingly, MES staff have previously identified transportation home post after-school activities as an obstacle for some students. Staff have now taken this into consideration when developing after-school programming.

**GOAL: Implement a fully integrated communication plan that effectively and in a cost-effective manner, disseminates information and encourages engagement about ‘core’ community parks and recreation programs, services and facilities.**

*Recreation This Week*

- Current users: 921 (+5)

*Communication Plan*

- Staff will finalize in the spring for summer implementation.

*Social Media*

- Staff are focusing on a weekly 100 Miles Winter Challenge results update post, in addition to a weekly participating athlete profile post.

*Accessible and Informative Outreach*

- Staff have sourced a reliable translation service and are reviewing best practices for disseminating information on our programs and events.

**ADVANCE TEAM CAPACITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

**GOAL: Integrate the Town’s culture into the Parks and Recreation Department where both year-round and seasonal staff are valued, recognized and appreciated for their efforts.**

*Strengthen Organizational Culture*

- Celebrate our High Achievement
- Develop Efficient and Effective Teams
- Communicate and Promote Respect
- Culture ‘Integration’ Evaluation

**GOAL: Integrate a TEAM culture aligned with a single vision and unifying purpose by integrating the 5 C’s into daily operations to achieve extraordinary results.**

*Integrate the 5 C’s into daily operations*

- Staff continue to integrate the 5C’s into our daily operations.

**GOAL: Provide valuable and relevant job-specific education, training and certification opportunities for employees to improve productivity, efficiency and job satisfaction.**

*Professional Development Plans*

- Staff are working to schedule professional development courses/events for staff.

*Education and Networking*

- Staff will be attending the upcoming CPRS Conference in Sacramento.
- Due to escalating COVID-19 cases, staff withdrew from the annual CJPIA Parks and Recreation Academy.

### *Customer Service Training*

- Staff continue to explore customer service training opportunities for staff

### **GOAL: Strategically recruit, retain, and recognize our employees to sustain recreation programs**

#### *Build Team Capacity*

- Staff are recruiting Basketball Officials-In-Training and Rec Interns for the new Intro to Cheer and Tumbling programs scheduled to commence in February.
- Staff are studying for their class B license exam.

#### *Recruitment Plan*

- Staff are finalizing recruitment plans for summer seasonal staff and hope to hold some information evenings with MMSA staff in February.
- <https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2022/february/recruiting-and-retaining-young-adults-to-the-park-and-recreation-workforce/>

#### *Recognition Plan*

- Staff are reviewing recognition opportunities for seasonal staff.

### **GOAL: The department will embrace emerging recreation trends, including product, program, amenity and facility innovations within the Parks and Recreation industry and broader Outdoor Recreation Industry.**

#### *Trend Implementation*

### **Top Trends in Parks and Recreation for 2022**

*NRPA December 16, 2021, Feature, by Richard J. Dolesh*

It is once again time for the Top Trends in Parks and Recreation — an eclectic, sometimes cheeky collection of observations and predictions about what will be the most significant trends to emerge in the field and industry of parks and recreation in 2022 and beyond. So let's get down to it.

#### **Parks as Infrastructure**

The American Society of Civil Engineers rates the state of the nation's infrastructure in its quadrennial report to Congress and the president. The 2021 report states that parks support economic prosperity, prevent damage from stormwater and build healthy communities, but that despite increased popularity, "State parks and local parks face a \$5.6 billion and \$60 billion deferred maintenance backlog, respectively."

#### *A Golden Age of Park and Recreation Infrastructure?*

With the passage of the Great American Outdoors Act in 2020 that permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Act at \$900 million annually, and the recent passage of long-sought infrastructure funding in the INVEST in America Act, there will be billions of dollars available for land acquisition, park and recreation planning, and infrastructure maintenance, repair, and development. Agencies that are prepared will be able to tap into funding

for roads and bridges, climate change resiliency, renewable energy utilization, waste reduction and recycling, and even “tree equity.”

## **Climate Change**

### **The Role of Parks in Reducing Urban Heat Islands**

One of the more pernicious effects of climate change is the trapping of extreme heat in dense urban areas. Often, these highly developed areas contain little heat-absorbing natural cover and have high percentages of impervious heat-collecting surfaces, which amplify extreme heat in the daytime and then radiate it in the night hours. The concentration of waste energy, air pollution and loss of tree canopy cover all magnify the negative health impacts as well, which affect vulnerable and low-income populations the most. Not surprisingly, New Orleans; Newark, New Jersey; New York City; Houston; San Francisco; Boston; Chicago; Miami; and Baltimore have the highest urban heat indexes, according to the Climate Central report, *Hot Zones, Urban Heat Islands*.

Parks and green spaces are proving to be among the most effective tools to combat the effects of urban heat islands, and cities and urban counties are looking to maximize the benefits of their park systems to combat urban heat island effects.

## **Macroeconomics of Parks and Recreation**

### *Where Are All the Workers?*

The Great Resignation has been identified as one of the most significant trends caused by the pandemic. Many have speculated on why people are quitting their jobs at a higher rate than ever before. While some factors are evident, such as lack of affordable childcare, others may include dissatisfaction with pay, unacceptable working conditions, and a desire for greater purpose in the jobs they choose.

Whether it is an effect of The Great Resignation or not, agencies are suddenly without vitally needed part-time staff who work as lifeguards and provide after-school programming and childcare, to name two examples. Barbara Heller, who leads the park and recreation practice for BerryDunn, a national consulting firm based in New England, says, “The biggest pain point is the recruitment and retention of part-time staff. This trend is off the hook. I am basing my findings on feedback from every agency we work with. This year, it is clearly salary. Parks and rec agencies are competing against Starbucks, Amazon and other private-sector companies that provide better salary and benefits. Fifteen dollars per hour is now the standard, and many park and rec agencies are nowhere near that.”

Workers who have multiple opportunities for jobs with better pay and more flexible hours may like the purpose-driven aspects of park and recreation work, but they may find better pay, better benefits and more flexible hours in other jobs of the gig economy.

Kevin Roth, vice president of research, evaluation and technology at NRPA, says, “Parks and recreation is facing the same pressures that retailers, service industries and other employers are in finding qualified workers.” The pressures pushing up wages are not necessarily only a result of the pandemic, he says. These are market forces, and many park and recreation agencies cannot keep up. “Cities and agencies may not be able to offer the same range and amount of services to the public that they have in the past,” he says. “And, this is not going away in a few weeks or months, either.”

Despite the great need and intentions of some agencies to expand out-of-school time programming, there could paradoxically be more agencies getting out of before-school and after-school programs, day care, and summer camps due to a lack of qualified and available workers. “This has huge implications for the future,” says Heller. “It is really important to quantify the implications and provide this information to elected officials now.”

## **Technology**

### *Drones, Bots, Mowers and More*

Kirk Floyd, founder and owner of Kdrone Services in Maryland, flies midsize drones to apply insecticides and fungicides for horticultural and arboricultural purposes and seeds landscape areas with pinpoint accuracy. “Drones can economically reach areas that are inaccessible by any other vehicle, even [all-terrain vehicles],” he says. Floyd

says that commercial drones will be utilized in parks. They can fly low-altitude grids to seed pollinator meadows, apply herbicides with precision control, and do inspections of buildings within a centimeter of accuracy.

The \$105 billion commercial mowing machine market is rapidly evolving with implications for parks and recreation. In June, Forbes reported on the introduction to the market of fully autonomous commercial mowers by Scythe Robotics of Boulder, Colorado. Other equipment manufacturers, like John Deere and Clean Scapes, are working on similar fully electric, zero emission mowers that are projected to require far less maintenance than internal combustion-powered mowers that often require replacement after just a few short years.

Kiwibot, Starship Technology and a half-dozen other robotics companies already have deployed pedestrian robots that will traverse sidewalks and public paths for deliveries and other services. Amazon and FedEx are now in final stages of testing their delivery bot fleets. Ten states have adopted robot-friendly regulations that appear to be giving bots legal rights as pedestrians. As Axios reports earlier this year, Greg Lynn, CEO of Piaggio Fast Forward, says that some companies want to deploy their bots in bike lanes where they can travel at greater speeds than on sidewalks. Imagine your park rangers attempting to write a citation for a bot involved in a collision with a pedestrian or cyclist.

## **Recreation Program Trends**

### *Decline in Youth Sports Participation*

Multiple studies have found that there has been a sharp and continuing decline in youth sports participation. Concurrently, there also has been a steady decline in physical activity by youth. The Aspen Institute's Project Play State of Play 2021 report shows that before the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, participation in youth sports declined from 45 percent in 2008 to 38 percent in 2018. Most kids ages 6 to 12 playing a team sport quit by age 11, and since the pandemic, three in 10 kids who previously played say they are no longer interested in playing again.

These statistics have alarmed youth sports organizations and child health experts alike. One way some agencies are addressing these issues is by hosting sports sampling programs. These specifically designed programs are held over a day or a weekend, during which sports trainers, players and leaders give kids an opportunity to try a variety of sports out for an hour or two and then move on to another sport. Rachel Banner, director of park access for NRPA, believes that we will see considerable innovation in how sports programs are offered and that there will be a return to community-based sports. "Park and recreation agencies are ideally positioned to be the multi-sports providers," she says.

Josh Medeiros, superintendent of Parks, Recreation, Youth and Community Services in Bristol, Connecticut, says his agency has seen the same decline in participation in youth sports and is now looking at some non-traditional sports. For example, they are supporting mountain biking for youth and have partnered with Bike Bristol, a nonprofit volunteer group, to build a pump track for kids and teens.

Medeiros says that they have instituted pop-up parks in neighborhood parks around the city where they host mini-golf days, family game nights and other recreational activities for kids who most likely have never experienced these games and sports before. He agrees they have seen a big drop off in participation in youth team sports. "[COVID-19] didn't help, either," he says.

### *Pickleball Ascendant*

When does a niche recreational sport go big time? Just trace the history of pickleball since its inception in 1965. Now named as the fastest growing sport in America by The Economist, pickleball is estimated to have more than 4 million people playing it annually. With its exponential growth has come stories and videos of celebrity players and pickleball influencers. The best part about pickleball is its universality. Virtually anyone can play, and schools and recreation centers are expanding opportunities for youth to play in a variety of indoor and outdoor settings.

### *Is This a Thing? Smashing Pumpkins in Parks?*

In October and November, recreation programmers on NRPA Connect expressed keen interest in pumpkins — smashing pumpkins, that is.

Brad Muckenhirn, recreation supervisor in Cottage Grove, Minnesota, says his agency's first-ever Pumpkin Chuckin Party was an unqualified success. "We were blown away by the support from the community. We encouraged the public [to] dress up in their Halloween costumes and bring their after-Halloween pumpkins to the party. We set up the event on a hill and had bowling pins to knock down, jumps to jump and a repurposed playground slide to launch pumpkins into the air. The whole point was just to enjoy watching your pumpkins smash. We took two one-ton trucks full of smashed pumpkins to our town compost facility at the day's end. We are already talking about how we might close down a city street next year and have pumpkin races — like pinewood derbies, you know — pumpkins with wheels."

Kristen Herndon, facility and aquatics coordinator for Greensboro, North Carolina, says they held their first Pumpkin Smash this year on the first Saturday after Halloween. They had participants bring their pumpkins to smash with a hammer or sledgehammer, (small hammers for little kids, of course), or shoot them from a giant slingshot they had erected at the site. "We signed people in, had them sign waivers, and gave them info on what they could do with their pumpkins. It was a great success! We are looking at adding food trucks and music and a firepit next year." How can you top smashing pumpkins for fun? Plan an event for next year.

### **Quick Takes**

#### *Smart Dog Parks*

Dog parks are no longer just for dogs and dog owners, says Beth Cherryholmes Miller, CEO and founder of Wagtown, a national nonprofit based in Dayton, Ohio, that advocates for dog-friendly communities. "Dog parks need to be cooperatively planned from the outset," she says, "involving the entire community, government agencies and dog owners."

Miller believes that in the same way that we look for enrichment activities for our children, dog owners look for the same for their dogs. "Our relationship goes from 'you own your dog, your dog is family, your dog is your child,' to 'your dog is your soulmate.'"

Thirty-eight percent of people now travel with their dog, according to research by the National Association of Realtors. Sixty-eight percent of people say that pet-friendly policies influenced their decision to buy or move, 43 percent believe that their dog's opinion matters on where they live, and 13 percent of people would consider moving if their dogs are not happy with where they live! Maybe one way to take this trend seriously is to just imagine dogs as taxpayers and consider their preferences accordingly when planning new dog parks.

#### *Glow in the Dark Plants to Light Trails*

A team of chemical engineers at Massachusetts Institute of Technology has made astonishing progress in producing light-emitting plants. Professor James Stranos says they inserted a solution containing light-storing and light-emitting nanoparticles into the spongy layer of leaves, called the mesophyll, in several common plant species. The research is ongoing, but it could lead to being able to landscape trails and park pathways with chemiluminescent plants that would remain lit all night, thus reducing energy costs and lighting infrastructure.

#### *Parks Everywhere*

The advent of green roofs is offering new opportunities to site innovative parks. The trend is best exemplified in the Dutch city of Rotterdam, which built DakPark, a rooftop park that adorns a 4,000-foot-long building complete with play courts, gardens, a kiosk selling refreshments and even sheep that graze contentedly. Parks will be everywhere humans can find a spot for peaceful reflection — underground, underwater and on the tops of buildings. Space is the next frontier for parks.

<https://www.nrpa.org/parks-recreation-magazine/2022/january/top-trends-in-parks-and-recreation-for-2022/>