

Spartanburg County
Rapid Parks
Assessment

March 2006

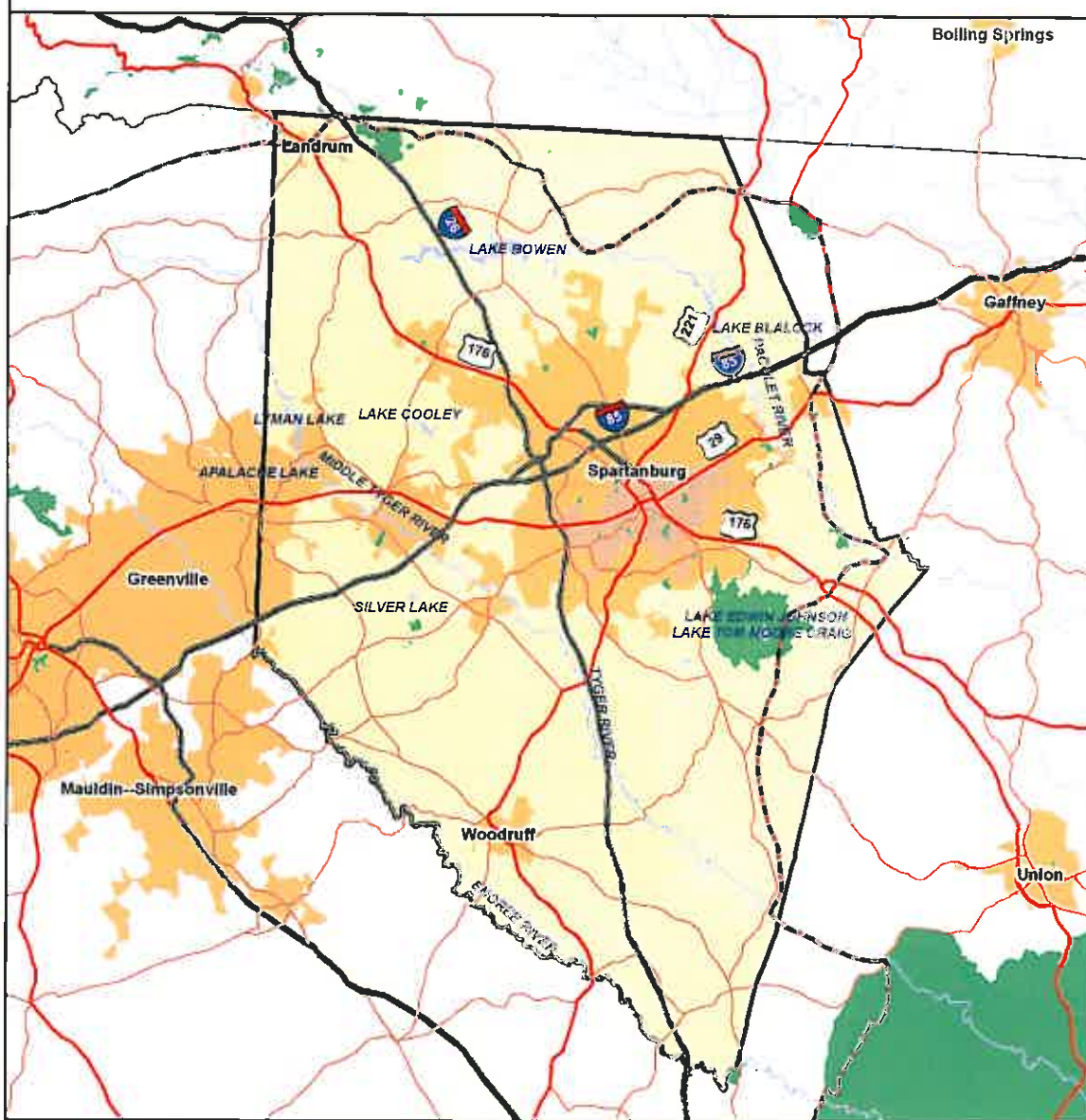
— a publication of Upstate Forever — Spartanburg and The Conservation Fund

Upstate Forever



Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment

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Assessment Base Map

- Recreation**
 -  Palmetto Trail
- Roads**
 -  Interstates
 -  State Highways
 -  Major Roads
- Hydrography**
 -  Major Streams
 -  Lakes and Reservoirs
- Protected Lands**
 -  Parks and Open Space
- Urbanized Areas**
 -  Cities and Towns
 -  City of Spartanburg

Map Prepared by
The Conservation Fund
February 2006

Data Sources for All Assessment Maps

Spartanburg County
Spartanburg Area Transportation Study
SC Dept of Natural Resources
SC Dept of Health and Environmental Control
ESRI Street Map
US Geological Survey
US Census Bureau

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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Conservation Fund (the Fund) and Upstate Forever - Spartanburg (UFS) have completed a Rapid Parks Assessment for Spartanburg County, South Carolina. The rapid assessment facilitates identification and prioritization of parkland, greenway, and greenbelt protection opportunities that advance the goals of local park and active living advocates as well as published recreation needs assessments, greenway plans, and active living assessments developed for the City and County of Spartanburg.

With input from a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the Fund performed analysis using a geographic information system (GIS) that graphically represents suitable locations for potential additions to the parkland, greenway, and greenbelt systems of Spartanburg County. Based on this suitability analysis, the rapid assessment includes a ranking system and supporting information to permit UFS to both proactively identify new opportunities and evaluate requests that arise from City and County residents. As part of the rapid assessment, UFS also received a customized GIS system designed by the Fund's Strategic Conservation Program.

UFS hopes that this rapid assessment will help garner support for more parks and protected open space in Spartanburg County and will complement its efforts to support policies that encourage active living for County residents.

Key Goals from Spartanburg County Planning Documents

Spartanburg County Recreation Needs Assessment, 1999-2009

- ⇒ Acquire parkland for future recreation use.
- ⇒ Coordinate land purchases with school districts for shared use.
- ⇒ Pursue use of conservation easements as a means for perpetual protection of unique natural resources, including riparian zones.
- ⇒ Consider greenbelts to link recreational resources.

City of Spartanburg Recreation Needs Assessment, 2004-2014

- ⇒ Link all parks with bike and pedestrian paths.
- ⇒ Upgrade existing parks.

Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment, 2005

- ⇒ Implement 70 recommendations including the linking of open space dedicated in development proposals to existing and planned park/greenway systems.
- ⇒ Require that streets be designed with pedestrians and cyclists in mind.
- ⇒ Encourage recreational use of school facilities.

Spartanburg Area Transportation Study (SPATS) Long-Range Transportation Plan, 2005-2025

- ⇒ Implement the 10-Year Enhancement Master Plan for Alternative Mobility.
- ⇒ Pursue improved bicycle, pedestrian, and transit infrastructure to include bike lanes, signage, bike racks at destinations and on buses, accessible pedestrian signals, crosswalks, and sidewalks.

"A Greenway for Spartanburg" Comprehensive Plan element, 1979

- ⇒ Develop 18 greenway trails within the City of Spartanburg.
- ⇒ Develop a greenway system that will connect and encircle the city.
- ⇒ Link greenway system to businesses, shopping centers, and subdivisions.

STUDY PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

A key step in the Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment was a thorough review and understanding of previous planning efforts. The box on page 2 provides a snapshot of selected overarching goals from each planning document. In addition, there are more specific goals that lend themselves to using GIS analysis to help achieve these goals. For instance, the *Spartanburg County Recreation Needs Assessment* proposed the addition of three regional parks, four regional recreational complexes, a community park, 38 neighborhood parks (4 +/- acres), and a greenbelt system to help meet the County's recreation needs by 2009. *The City of Spartanburg Recreation Needs Assessment* proposed linking all parks with bike and pedestrian paths. *A Greenway for Spartanburg* recommends 18 greenway trails within the City of Spartanburg that are designed around existing parks and open spaces, while the *Spartanburg Area Transportation Study (SPATS) Long-Range Transportation Plan, 2005-2025* prioritizes potential greenways in its Alternate Mobility Master Plan. The *2005 Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment* supports a cohesive system of parks and trails that encourage healthy living and advocates for accessible open space within one mile of every residence within the urbanized portion of Spartanburg County.

Synthesizing these efforts provided a first step in developing an appropriate methodology for the rapid assessment analysis. The primary goal of the assessment was to facilitate identification of new parkland (i.e. new park sites, existing park expansions, greenway trails, greenbelt system) that would fulfill the objectives outlined in the reviewed planning documents. A key consideration was to incorporate input from park and active living advocates on the criteria for identifying suitable park, greenway, and greenbelt locations.

Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment

Stakeholder Advisory Committee

City of Spartanburg Parks and Recreation Department

Hatcher Garden

Mary Black Foundation

Pacolet Area Conservancy

Palmetto Conservation Foundation

Partners for Active Living

Spartanburg Area Conservancy

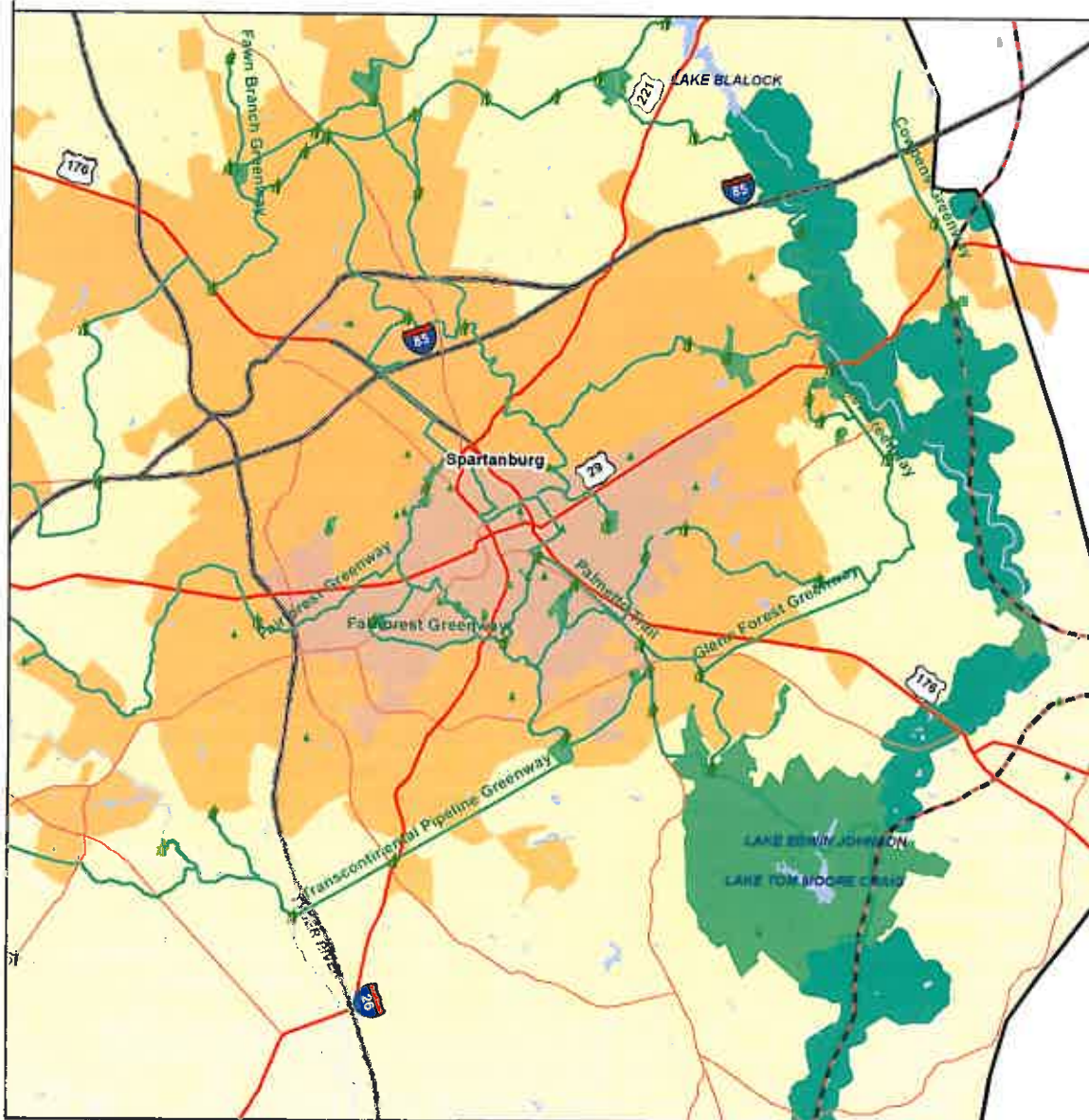
Spartanburg Area Transportation Study (SPATS)

Spartanburg County Parks and Recreation

In October 2005, UFS hosted a meeting of the Assessment's Stakeholder Advisory Committee to obtain stakeholder input on the assessment. At the meeting, the Fund first provided an overview of the rapid assessment process, reviewed relevant planning goals, presented some initial base maps, and solicited feedback on the project methodology and available data. The stakeholders then participated in a "scaling exercise" where they reviewed and prioritized mapping criteria and provided input on the development of an objective scoring system for land parcels. The stakeholder input was subsequently incorporated into the GIS suitability analysis to help identify and rank parkland protection opportunities.

Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment

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Potential Greenbelt Segment

Recreation

- Palmetto Trail
- SPATS Greenway Trails
- SPATS Greenway Trailheads
- Potential Greenbelt Segment

Hydrography

- Major Streams
- Lakes and Reservoirs

Protected Lands

- Parks and Open Space
- City and County Parks

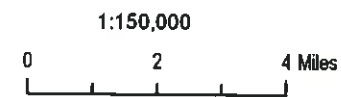
Urbanized Areas

- Cities and Towns
- City of Spartanburg

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ANALYSIS

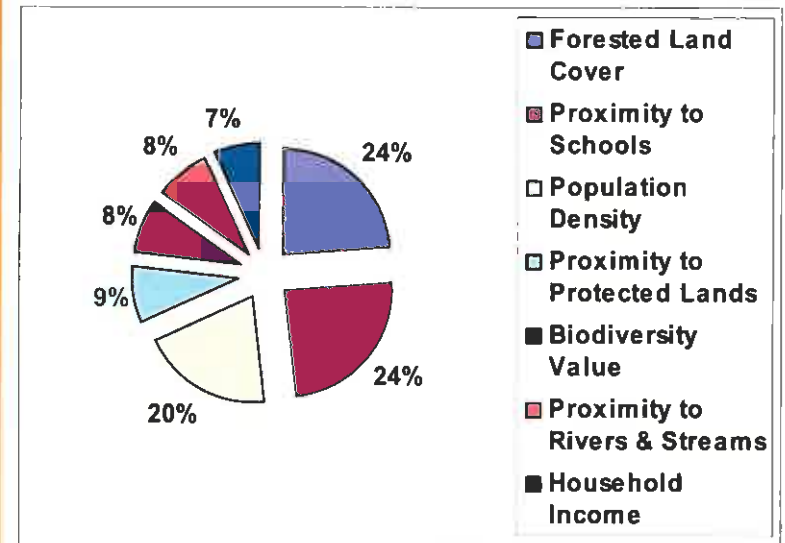
Using the input received from the Stakeholder Advisory Committee and relevant planning documents, the Fund assigned numerical scores to parcels for their suitability as new park sites and as expansions to existing parks. The Fund also assigned attributes (e.g. land use, ownership type) to parcels that would help rank them and narrow the universe of suitable candidates for parks, greenways, or greenbelts. Below is a summary of the analysis completed as part of the rapid assessment.

New Parks: The rapid assessment identified about 43,000 +/- acres (1,300+ parcels) of potential prospects within the 5.2 million +/- acre project study area that included 1.3+ million land parcels in the City and County of Spartanburg. Of these, there are about 4,000 +/- acres (280+ parcels) of top prospects most suitable to fulfill the County Master Plan's goal of 1,000 - 1,500 acres of new parkland by 2009. Further evaluation of these parcels will identify willing sellers and those who may be willing to donate properties for parkland and may identify developers that own these properties who could be approached to set aside a portion of the property for public open space purposes.

Park Expansions: The rapid assessment has narrowed the universe of top prospects for existing park expansions to 5,724 +/- acres (480+ land parcels). Further evaluation of these parcels with help fulfill the goals outlined in multiple planning efforts to expand existing parks and leverage park investments with the school system. The analysis can be integrated with the City and County recreation needs assessments to determine which existing parks should be expanded first.

Greenway Trails / Active Living Nodes: The rapid assessment identifies parcels that are within or adjacent to proposed greenway corridors outlined in *A Greenway for Spartanburg and the SPATS Long-Range Transportation Plan, 2005-2025*. In addition, the rapid assessment identifies parcels that are adjacent to significant linear natural and

Rapid Parks Assessment Suitability Factors and Weights from Stakeholder Advisory Committee Feedback

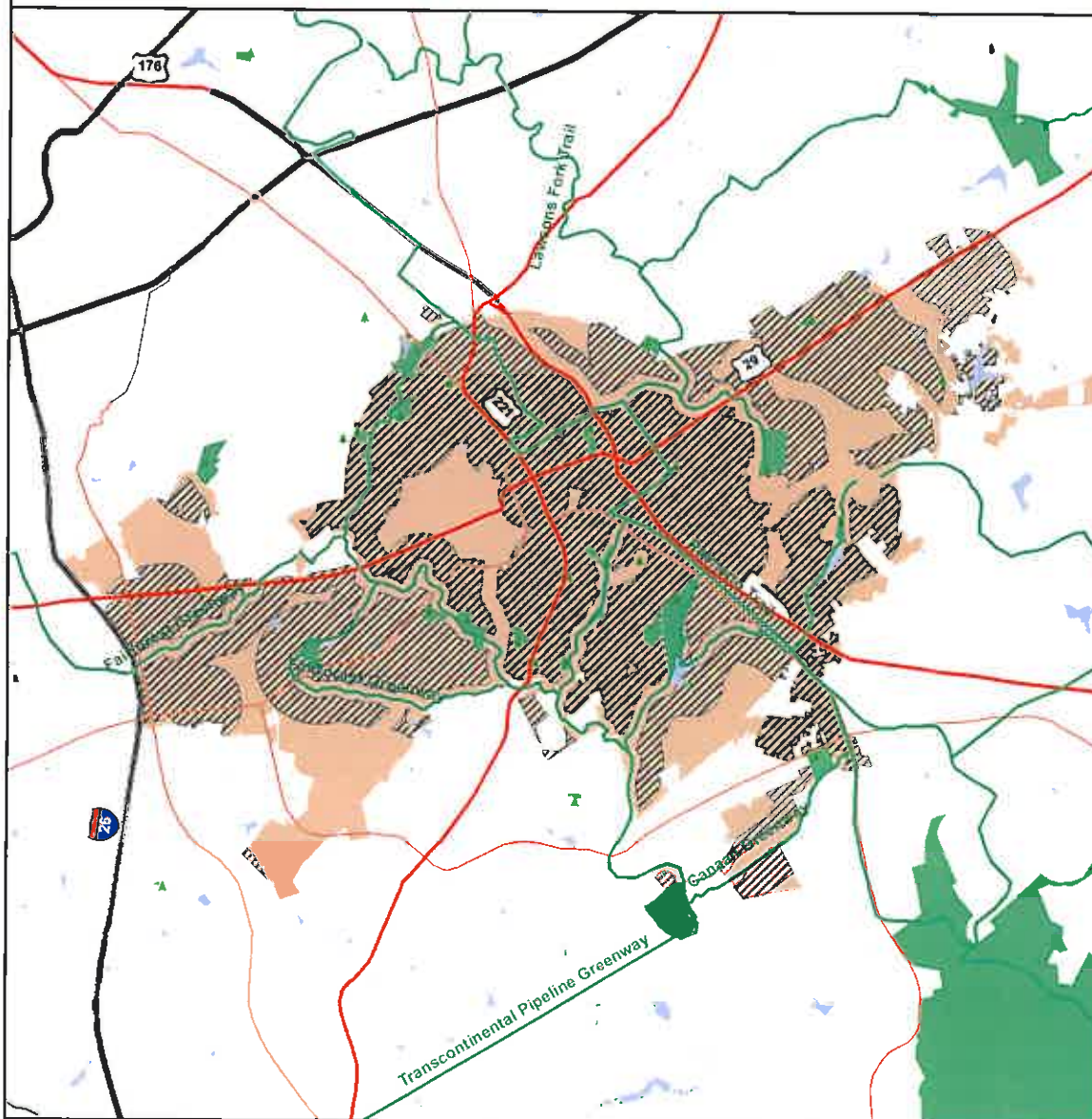


recreational features, including riparian corridors, the 100-year floodplain, suggested bike lanes, and the Palmetto Trail. The rapid assessment also identifies other community facilities and nodes of activity that could be incorporated into a broader active living program that promotes pedestrian connections from residential neighborhoods to an array of active and passive recreational opportunities.

Potential Greenbelt: The rapid assessment delineates a potential greenbelt encompassing close to 200,000 acres (350+ parcels) that are primarily undeveloped agricultural land and riparian areas. While this potential greenbelt mostly follows the Palmetto Trail through the northern and eastern parts of the county, it also could link the Pacolet River from Lake Blalock to the Tyger River at the County line via the Palmetto Trail, Croft State Park, and the Pacolet River Heritage Preserve. Protection of this greenbelt would almost exclusively be in the form of conservation easements that could be used to expand the Trail, protect river corridors, and maintain agricultural production activities.

Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment

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Potential Overlay Zone

-  Potential Overlay Zone
-  City of Spartanburg
-  SPATS Greenway Trails
- Hydrography**
-  Major Streams
-  Lakes and Reservoirs
- Protected Lands**
-  Parks and Open Space
-  City and County Parks

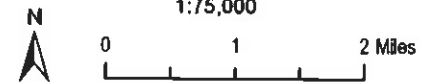
Potential overlay zone derived using the following criteria

- Within existing City of Spartanburg zoning jurisdiction
- Within 1/2 mile of existing parks
- Within 1/4 mile of proposed SPATS greenway trails
- Within 1/4 mile of existing K-12 public schools
- Excludes FEMA 100-year floodplain areas
- Excludes areas within 100 meters of a stream

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Securing new parks and open space and expanding active living opportunities in Spartanburg County will require a variety of strategies that enhance existing public policy related to City zoning, City and County planning, and institution capacity. The fundamental principles that underlie these recommendations include an emphasis on incentive-based public policies in conjunction with private sector and voluntary approaches to expand parkland and active living areas. All of the

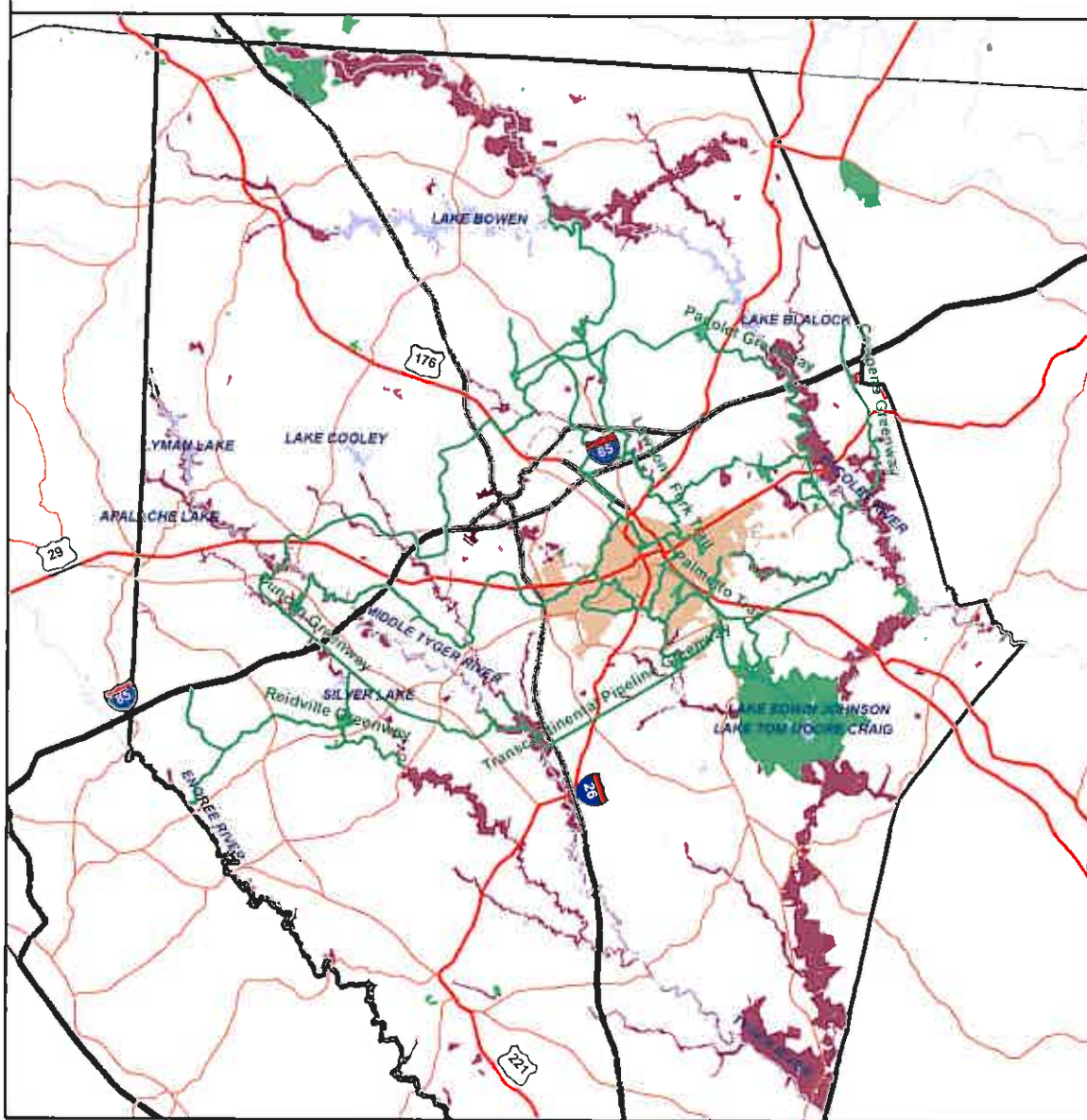
following policy recommendations support the goal of more parks and open space in Spartanburg County, promote development that supports active living, and complement the goals and recommendations of existing planning documents, in particular the *2005 Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment*.

Policy Recommendations:

- ⇒ Establish an **Active Living Overlay Zone** to promote higher density development within appropriate areas of the City of Spartanburg. The map on page 7 provides an example of how an overlay zone could be designed (and eventually refined by the City), with a focus on increasing residential density near parks, greenways and schools while avoiding sensitive areas like riparian corridors and floodplains. This overlay zone could also support a key goal of the *Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment* by promoting accessible open space within one mile of every resident living within the urbanized portion of the County. Appropriate locations for residential development within the overlay zone would be eligible for the types of density bonuses outlined below.
- ⇒ Support **density bonuses** for residential development within the Active Living Overlay Zone under the following scenarios: donation of at least four acres for a publicly accessible neighborhood park, purchase of development rights within a County designated "Sending Area", development of a mixed-use park and greenway system. The donation program would be subject to whether the proposed development area needs a neighborhood park, while the purchase of development rights program would be contingent upon the creation of a City-County process to manage the program. The mixed-use development option and payment in lieu system are recommended in the *Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment*. The City will need to set out the exact details of the program.
- ⇒ Establish a **Spartanburg Parks and Greenways Board** that will encourage voluntary parkland donations and facilitate private financial contributions for park and greenway development. The Board could be a separate incorporated nonprofit, similar to the Houston Parks Board, or a program within an existing non-profit with its own Board of Directors appointed by City and County elected officials. The Board could complement existing City and County efforts by providing a fiscal agent for private cash donations, facilitating land donations to the public park and greenway system, and utilizing revolving loan fund capital to support park and open space acquisitions while awaiting public funding. This Board also could take the lead in a public information campaign to educate landowners how to take advantage of state conservation tax credits offered through the Conservation Incentives Act or regarding other planned giving options (e.g. annuities, trusts, bequests, stock transfers).

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Potential PDR Program Areas

-  Potential PDR Sending Areas
-  City of Spartanburg
-  SPATS Greenway Trails
- Hydrography**
-  Major Streams
-  Lakes and Reservoirs
- Protected Lands**
-  Parks and Open Space

Potential Purchase of Development Rights (PDR) Program Areas derived using the following criteria

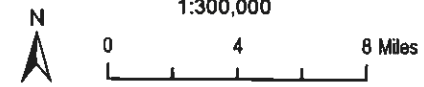
- Outside existing City of Spartanburg municipal boundary
- Includes potential greenbelt areas
- Includes highly ranked new park areas by rapid assessment
- Includes FEMA 100-year floodplain areas
- Excludes isolated areas less than 10 acres in size

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- ESRI Street Map
- US Geological Survey
- US Census Bureau

1:300,000



FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Securing new parks and open space and expanding active living opportunities in Spartanburg County will require a significant increase in conservation capital available for land protection. The recommendations outlined below promote a measured level of local public investment that is politically feasible and is able to maximize the leverage of other public

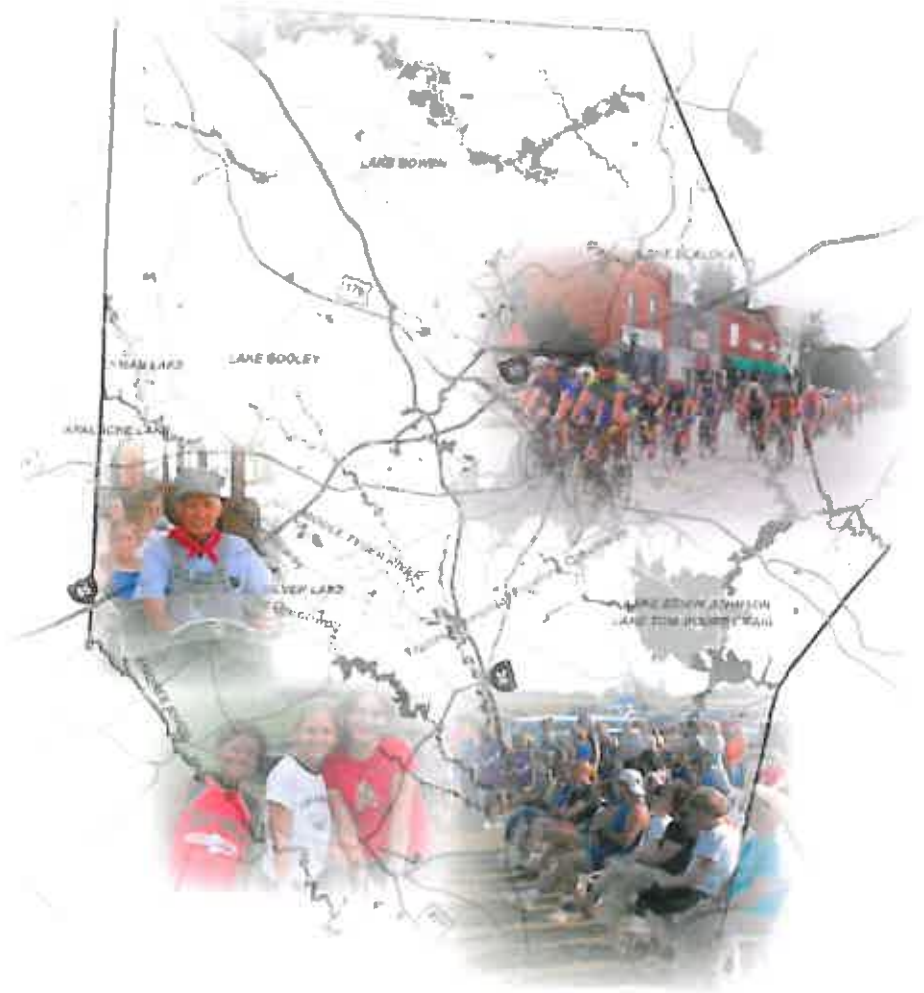
and private funding sources. This funding includes acquisition capital for the purchase properties as well as revolving loan fund capital to take advantage of opportunities as they arise while acquisition capital is secured.

Funding Recommendations:

- ⇒ Evaluate the feasibility of a successful **City and County ballot initiative** through a review of Chapter 4 of the book *Land Conservation Financing* by Mike McQueen and Ed McMahon. Counties and municipalities in South Carolina have approved almost \$300 million in bonds and sales tax increases for conservation since 1998. Most of these successful initiatives, however, have been in urbanized, coastal regions of the state. While a thorough evaluation is beyond the scope of this assessment, a set of preliminary recommendations outlined below provides a framework for further investigation.
- ⇒ Consider commissioning a poll to gauge voter interest in the expansion of the City and County parks and greenway system. An initial **\$10 - \$20 million parks bond** is suggested based on the historic results of South Carolina voters, who have not approved large bonds and sales tax increases for conservation (i.e. \$50 million and above). In addition, bonds are less regressive than sales tax increases and are more likely to pass than a property tax increase, which has never been approved for conservation funds in South Carolina. The parks bond also should include a combination of acquisition funding as well as park maintenance to address the priorities outlined in the *2004-2014 City of Spartanburg Recreation Needs Assessment*. A companion **\$20 million pedestrian and bike paths bond** also should be explored to link existing parks and community facilities. This approach may be able to leverage additional state and Federal funds from the Department of Transportation. The bonds could then be cross-promoted among both parks and transportation constituents as an active living bond package.
- ⇒ Utilize the Spartanburg Parks and Greenways Board to help maximize the use of funds available from the **South Carolina State Conservation Bank**. Of the 31 transactions completed statewide thus far, only one 41-acre transaction has occurred in Spartanburg County. While county and municipal governments are not eligible for Bank funds, nonprofit entities are eligible. The Board or its authorized acquisition agents should apply for matching funds for all privately initiated land acquisition projects in Spartanburg County.
- ⇒ Establish a **revolving loan fund** for land purchases that allows private acquisition agents to move quickly to secure acquisition opportunities. The fund could be initially capitalized through a leadership grant from a private foundation or corporation. Through the proposed Parks and Greenways Board, cash and planned giving donations from private landowners and other organizations could provide additional capital to the fund. While the Board would make decisions on the use of the loan fund, an organization experienced in managing a revolving loan fund for conservation projects should be utilized for the audited financial transactions.

CONCLUSION

The Spartanburg County Rapid Parks Assessment provides a useful framework for expanding the parks, greenway, and greenbelt system within the City and County. It complements existing planning goals and incorporates public input on priorities for locating future park sites, expansions of existing parks, greenway trails and active living nodes, and a potential greenbelt. The assessment also provides a series of policy and funding recommendations on how to increase the capacity of public and private entities to enhance existing parklands and promote a more active living lifestyle. Upstate Forever - Spartanburg will be able to utilize this report in conjunction with a GIS system developed by The Conservation Fund as part of the assessment to build public support for more parks, strategically identify new park sites, advocate for planning and zoning policy changes, highlight private and voluntary conservation efforts, and expand conservation capital available for parkland acquisition in Spartanburg County.



acknowledgements

The Conservation Fund and Upstate Forever would like to thank the Mary Black Foundation for its financial support of the project as well as the members of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee for their input and sharing of GIS data.

Upstate Forever — Spartanburg promotes sensible growth and the protection of special places in the Upstate region of South Carolina through education, advocacy, and land trust programs. Upstate Forever – Spartanburg, with support from the Mary Black Foundation, advocates for policies and regulations that encourage active living in Spartanburg County. (http://www.upstateforever.org/programs_ufs.html)

The Conservation Fund forges partnerships to conserve America's legacy of land and water resources. Through land acquisition, sustainable programs, and leadership training, the Fund and its partners demonstrate balanced conservation solutions that emphasize the integration of economic and environmental goals. Since 1985 The Conservation Fund and its partners have permanently protected more than 5 million acres of important wildlife habitat, working landscapes, and recreation areas. (<http://www.conservationfund.org>)

All photos are courtesy of Spartanburg County Parks and Recreation Department

For more information on the rapid parks assessment, please contact:

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additional information

Planning Document References

- "A Greenway for Spartanburg" Comprehensive Plan element, 1979
- City of Spartanburg Recreation Needs Assessment, 2004-2014
- Spartanburg Area Active Living Assessment, 2005
- Spartanburg Area Transportation Study (SPATS) Long-Range Transportation Plan, 2005-2025
- Spartanburg County Recreation Needs Assessment, 1999-2009

Recommendations Section References

- Houston Parks Board (<http://www.houstonparksboard.org>)
- McElfish Jr., James M. *Nature Friendly Ordinances: Local Measures to Conserve Biodiversity*, Environmental Law Institute, 2004.
- McQueen, Mike & Ed McMahon. *Land Conservation Financing*, Island Press, 2003.
- Nolon, John R. *Well Grounded: Using Local Land Use Authority to Achieve Smart Growth*. Environmental Law Institute, 2001.
- South Carolina Conservation Bank website (<http://sccbanc.sc.gov/GrantsMap.html>)
- The Conservation Fund Revolving Loan Fund services (<http://www.conservationfund.org/article=2016>)
- Trust for Public Land - LandVote™ Database (<http://www.tpl.org/landvote>)

GIS Data Sources used in Suitability Analysis

- *Biodiversity Value* — Species richness layer provided by the South Carolina Gap Analysis Program (<http://www.dnr.sc.gov/water/nrima/gisdata/gap/scgaphome.htm>)
- *Forested Land Cover* - Vegetation layer provided by the SC Gap Analysis Program
- *Land Ownership* - Parcel layer provided by Spartanburg County
- *Population Density* - Derived by Household by Census Block centroid layer provided by ESRI Data & Maps CD
- *Proximity to Protected Lands* - Distance to protected lands from multiple sources, including Spartanburg County, South Carolina DNR (http://www.dnr.sc.gov/pls/gisdata/download_data.login), Upstate Forever, Spartanburg Area Conservancy, Pacolet Area Conservancy
- *Rivers and Streams Buffer* - 100-meter buffer around streams/rivers combined from two layers, County Streams from Spartanburg County and Rivers from the ESRI Data & Maps CD (National Hydrography Dataset)
- *Proximity to Schools* - Distance from K-12 Public School layer provided by Spartanburg County
- *Household Income* - Median household income by census tract provided by US Census Bureau
- Other South Carolina map data also available from SC Department of Health & Environmental Control (<http://web05.dhec.sc.gov/gis/>)