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# Master Plan

ADOPTED MAY 10, 2017



**South Suburban**  
PARKS AND RECREATION



*Annual Puppy Paddle at Holly Pool*

Photo: SSPRD

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# Master Plan

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# Acknowledgements

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*Mary Carter Greenway Trail, Littleton*  
Photo: SSPRD

*River View at Willow  
Creek Park, Centennial*  
Photo: Lexi Wilson, Instagram



# PLAN SUMMARY.

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# Plan Purpose

## Introduction

Founded in 1959, South Suburban Park and Recreation District (SSPRD) is a uniquely historic, community-driven organization that provides both indoor and outdoor recreation amenities to six communities and three counties in the southern Denver metropolitan area. The SSPRD boundary encompasses a 42.5 square mile area and multiple jurisdiction boundaries south of Denver, Colorado. By 2021, more than 155,000<sup>1</sup> residents will count on SSPRD to provide close-to-home parks and open space, safe playgrounds for children, convenient trails and vibrant recreation facilities and programs to serve a variety of needs and desires.

The 2017 Master Plan supports a critical opportunity for SSPRD to build off the energy of new leadership, respond to the needs of SSPRD's diverse communities and envision how this award-winning system can find fresh ways to implement the SSPRD mission and serve the community.

## Alignment with Other Planning Efforts

This effort is SSPRD's first comprehensive District-wide Master Plan and builds off recent planning efforts including the 2014 SSPRD Gold Medal Citizens Committee Report and the 2013-2015 SSPRD Strategic Plan, and it supports regional planning efforts including:

- 2030 Douglas County Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan
- 2017 High Line Canal Vision Plan
- 2017 City of Centennial Trails and Recreation Plan
- 2017 Arapahoe County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
- 2016 Foothills Park and Recreation District IGA
- 2015 City of Littleton Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan
- 2014 Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan
- 2014 South Suburban and City of Lone Tree Partnership Opportunities
- 2013 South Platte River Corridor Vision
- 2010 Arapahoe County Open Space Master Plan
- 2008 Lone Tree Trail Master Plan
- 2007 City of Lone Tree Parks, Trails and Recreation Master Plan
- Comprehensive Plans and/or recent planning efforts for Sheridan, Littleton, Lone Tree, Centennial, Bow Mar, and Columbine Valley

<sup>1</sup> Source: US Census Report from ESRI Business Analyst Report 7-28-2016. SSPRD also uses the Conservation Trust Fund (CTF) to estimate current population within the six municipal boundaries and three unincorporated that make up the SSPRD community. In 2016, CTF estimates SSPRD population at more than 155,000 residents.



# Mission

South Suburban Park and Recreation District is a citizen-founded organization with a mission to foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails and open space and by providing recreational services and programs.



# Plan Creation Summary

## Context of Understanding

To develop an understanding of the key factors impacting SSPRD's future, the planning team reviewed regional planning efforts, prepared a detailed inventory, analyzed operation and budget documents, prepared research summaries, conducted facility assessments, calculated current and future level of service benchmarks and looked at trends in capacity and programming. Chapter 2 provides an overview of these findings and the Appendix provides additional details.

## Shared Vision

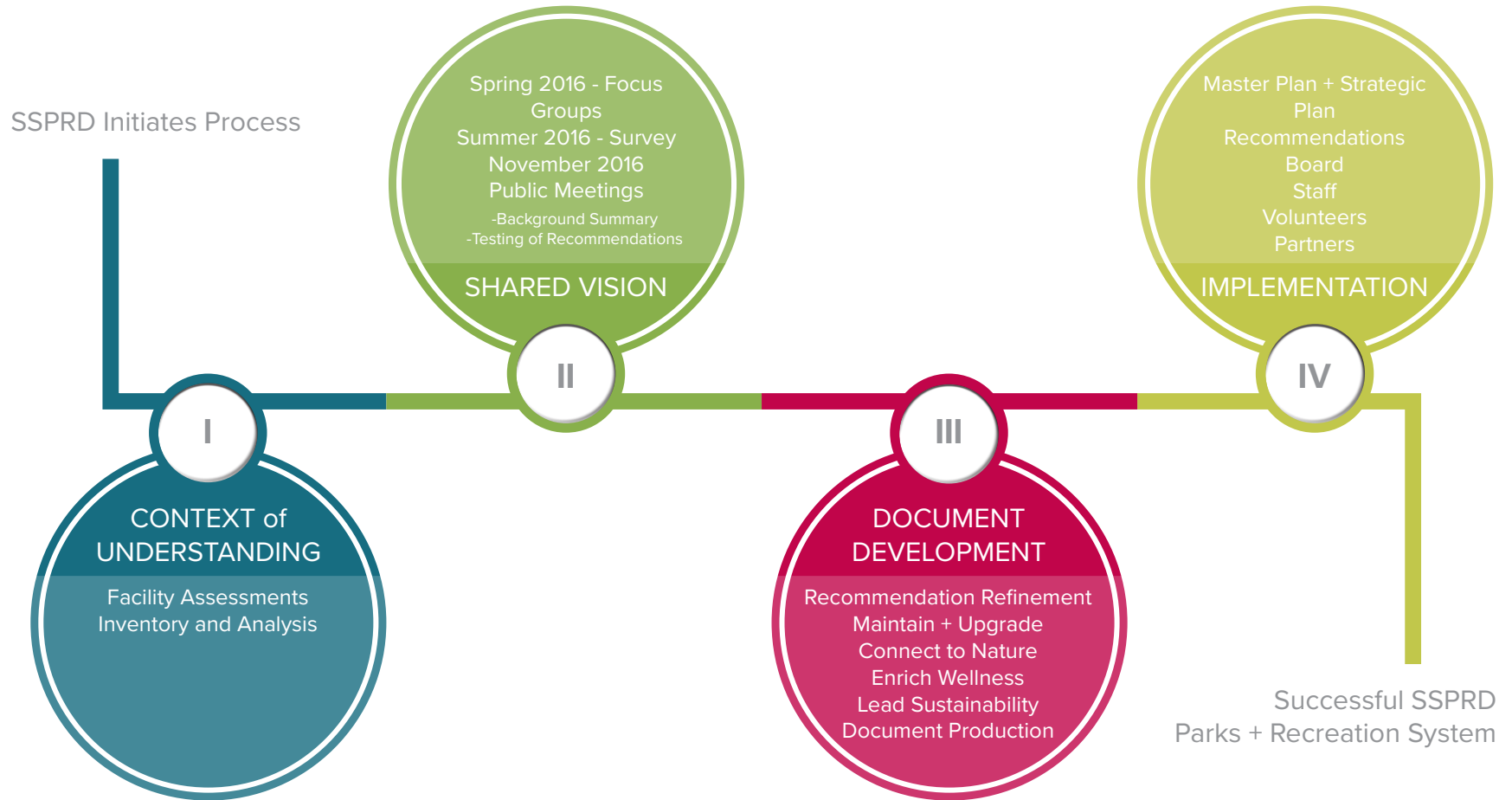
To ensure the community's voice is a strong part of this plan, SSPRD staff and the planning team conducted focus group meetings, administered over 1,800 online and statistically valid mail surveys, and participated in community outreach at events including Sheridan Celebrates and Littleton's Western Welcome Week. This plan's four guiding principles were distilled directly from community input in these outreach efforts.

Community, municipal and county partner advisory committees provided input at key milestones in the planning process, and the SSPRD Board of Directors participated in strategic meetings and briefings. Beyond this planning process, the SSPRD staff and executive team regularly meet and collaborate with municipal and county partners to ensure alignment of needs and investment of available resources.

## Document Development and Implementation

The planning team synthesized the analysis and community input into this plan based on the framework of the guiding principles and prioritization criteria described on page 8. To implement opportunities for improvement over the next decade, the SSPRD community will have to make choices on extending funding through ballot measures, operation efficiencies and grants. Additionally, the community of staff, volunteers and partners will be critical collaborators in implementing future improvements.

Figure 1: Planning Process



# How to Use This Document

## How do the 2017 Master Plan and 2017 Strategic Plan relate?

The 2017 Master Plan is the first building block to establish the foundation of a community-driven vision. The 2017 Strategic Plan update is a complimentary document that will build off this Master Plan and will give measures for implementation and organizational direction. The goals of these documents are to provide prioritized and clear recommendations to guide the SSPRD decision making process over the next 10 years.

## Organized by Guiding Principles

Guiding principles are broad initiatives describing what SSPRD aspires to achieve and have evolved out of community engagement and recent foundational planning efforts of the 2014 Gold Medal Citizen Report and 2013 Strategic Plan. Together with these planning efforts, the mission and guiding principles chart a course toward ensuring SSPRD's long-term sustainability and ability to contribute to the community's physical, emotional and social welfare.

The Master and Strategic Plans share the SSPRD Mission and four guiding principles:

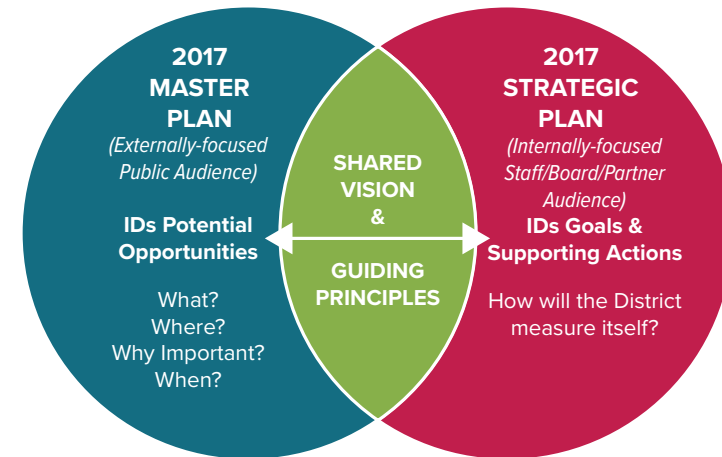
1. Quality First
2. Enrich Wellness
3. Connect to Nature
4. Lead Sustainability

Guiding principles organize the Master Plan recommendations (Chapter 3) and each principle's content is explored using the following framework:

- Why is This Important?
- Community Desires
- Opportunities for Improvement and Potential Steps

Chapter 4 provides implementation considerations including partnership opportunities. The plan Appendix contains more detailed information on the inventory, assessments and community outreach findings.

Figure 2: Strategic and Master Plan Components





## Quality First

We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. Our most important task is to improve the quality of our offerings and customer service.



## Enrich Wellness

We prioritize wellness by offering close-to-home and affordable indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities to a diverse community. Wellness strengthens bodies, engages minds and refreshes a person's spirit. We recognize that within SSPRD, different regions need different recreation opportunities.



## Connect To Nature

We provide access to open space, natural areas and water recreation while balancing stewardship of these natural resources. Recreating in nature fosters healthy living and provides benefits to emotional and physical well-being.



## Lead Sustainability

We support sustainable practices for managing SSPRD's financial, physical and natural resources. Well-maintained amenities require long-term financial investments. Energy and water efficient operations and maintenance increase our capacity to protect natural resources and invest more in our recreation offerings.

# Recommendation Summary

## Recommended Opportunities for Improvement

Opportunities for improvement are overarching recommendations that reflect, at the most general level, the community's aspirations for potential Master Plan improvements. Given SSPRD's unique position in serving multiple municipal and county constituents, great care has been given to providing recommendations that offer direction but also remain flexible to meet the various needs of each community and recognize the finite resources of SSPRD.

## Master Plan Prioritization Criteria

The 2017 Master Plan process led to the development of prioritization criteria that SSPRD can use to evaluate future projects and improvements for implementation. Projects that meet the following criteria shall receive higher priority for funding and timing:

- Opportunities with highest community interest or that relate to the community-driven guiding principles: quality first, enrich wellness, connect to nature, and lead sustainability.
- Opportunities with moderate to low impact on maintenance and operations expenses.
- Opportunities that improve facilities that have reached end-of-life usability.
- Opportunities that align with municipal and county partners' planning efforts.
- Opportunities with the highest impact to address capacity needs.
- Opportunities that offer high return on investment.

## Feasibility

For close to 60 years, SSPRD has provided recreation facilities to the community. As the decades pass, facilities age and need repair. Some facilities and properties are also leased and not owned by SSPRD. With limited funds and Front Range construction costs increasing annually, SSPRD carefully chooses projects for upgrades and repair.

## Top Ten Opportunities

Page 9 lists a summary of the opportunities for improvement and page 11 describes a top ten priority list of potential project types that SSPRD will consider implementing. These projects will require careful coordination with regional partners and continued support from the community for sustaining current levels of funding. See Master Plan prioritization above for information on how these potential projects have been selected.

## Opportunities for Improvement Summary



### Quality First

- 1.1 Meet or exceed current maintenance standards for parks, trails, open space and facilities.
- 1.2 Renew existing facilities and amenities with upgrades or new amenities to reflect the community's expectations, to expand capacity and to support the Master Plan guiding principals.
- 1.3 Invest in replacing assets that can lower long-term maintenance and operations, increase capacity and/or have reached end-of-life usability.



### Enrich Wellness

- 2.1 Reinforce parks, open spaces, trails and recreation facilities as destinations for physical activity and opportunities for all ages and abilities to practice healthy lifestyles.
- 2.2 Emphasize accessible, diverse and engaging parks, open spaces, trails and programming for all ages.
- 2.3 Identify local health organizations, schools, employers, non profits, etc. working toward improved community wellness and collaborate with these current and/or potential partners to position parks, open spaces, trails and recreation programs as vital components to SSPRD's mission of healthy living.



### Connect to Nature

- 3.1 Improve access to nature for all people, seeking to overcome the challenges they experience to spend time in nature.
- 3.2 Encourage nature to thrive by providing green spaces throughout the suburban area and utilizing ecologically sound management practices.
- 3.3 Provide programs that connect people to places to encourage discovery, exploration, stewardship, play, admiration and social opportunities.



### Lead Sustainability

- 4.1 Identify and implement water and energy efficiency improvements to help parkland and facilities meet or exceed industry and peer standards.
- 4.2 Communicate and celebrate sustainability achievements.



*Tree Climbing Program at  
South Platte Park, Littleton*  
Photo: SSPRD

# Top Ten Opportunities





RECREATION FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS



ACTIVE ADULT AMENITY AND PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS



AQUATIC UPGRADES AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPROVEMENTS



SUSTAINABLE ENERGY FOR RECREATION CENTERS



INDOOR ATHLETIC FIELDS



COMMUNITY PARK AND MULTI-PURPOSE FIELD IMPROVEMENTS



CONSERVATION OF OPEN SPACE AND WATER RESOURCES



PLAYGROUND RENEWAL



TRAIL CONNECTIONS UPGRADES AND SIGNAGE



EXPAND NATURE RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

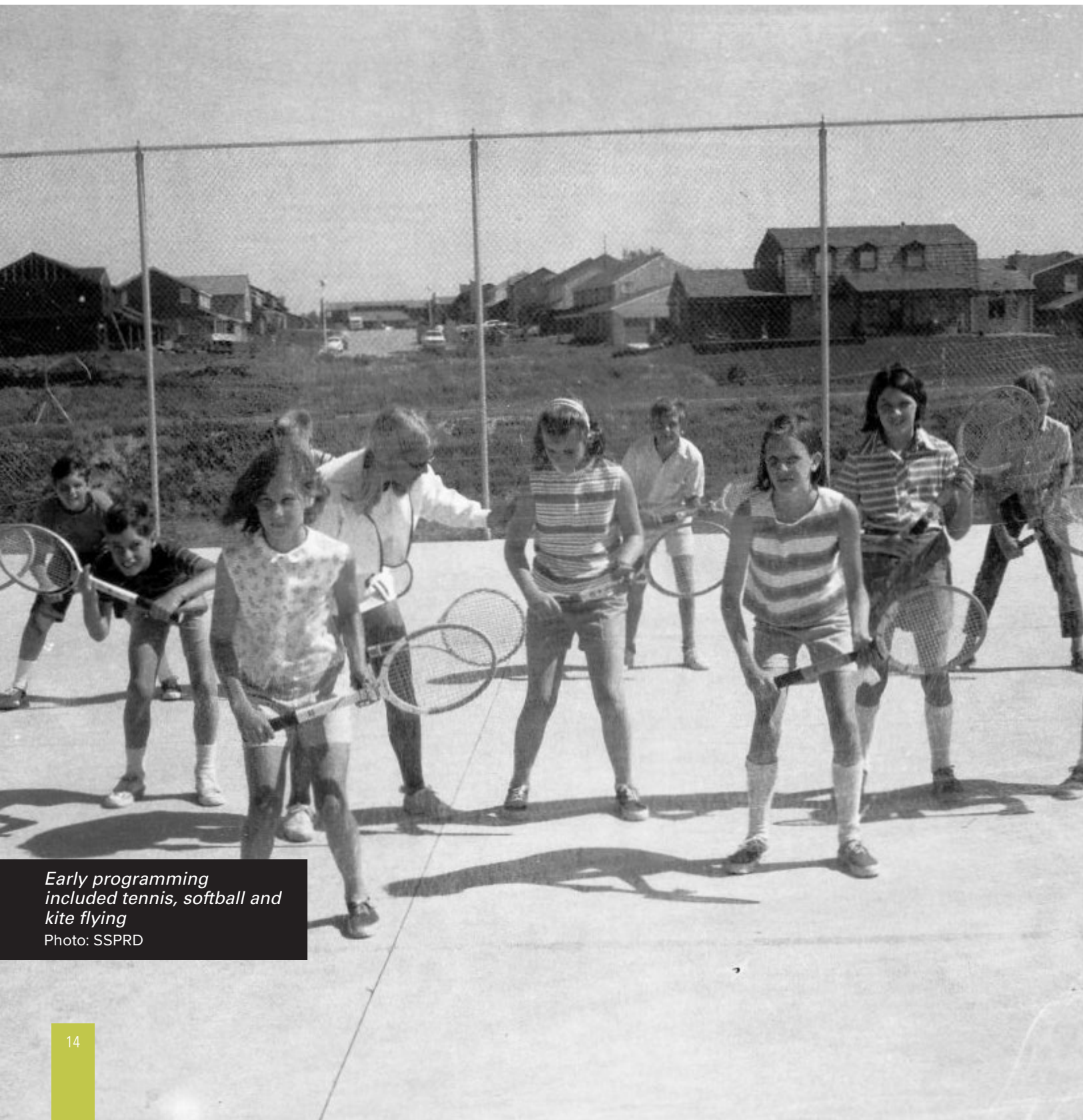


*Abbott Park, Centennial  
Historic Photo*  
Photo: SSPRD

02.

# **BACKGROUND.**

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*Early programming  
included tennis, softball and  
kite flying*

Photo: SSPRD

## District History

To understand SSPRD's purpose, it is important to know why it was originally formed. SSPRD was created in 1959 by a citizen committee comprised of residents that imagined a parks and recreation organization supported by citizens residing within the boundaries of their community. This parks and recreation organization would plan and construct additional public parks and develop recreational programs for the enjoyment and benefit of residents within the growing community.

Recreational programming and events were developed primarily on school grounds until SSPRD began acquiring land through partnership or purchase. Softball, horsemanship, baseball, baton twirling, kite flying, soccer, tennis, square dancing, playground activities and an "over 50 club" were some of the programs offered in the early years. SSPRD also utilized the pools from local schools to offer classes for swim lessons as well as open swim for the public.

## Providing Recreation Since 1959

In its first decade, SSPRD partnered with the Denver Water Board to open a hiking trail along the High Line Canal, beginning the foundation of SSPRD's 100-mile plus trail network. 1959 marked the construction of the first built facility, Harlow Pool, followed by the South Suburban Ice Arena that opened in 1969. Other early amenities include South Suburban Golf Course, Sheridan Recreation Center, Goodson Recreation Center, and Holly Pool and Tennis Courts.

From the historic High Line Canal trail to more recent facilities like Lone Tree Recreation Center and Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center, SSPRD has fostered partnerships and collaborations to achieve its mission of improving residents' quality of life through parks, trails, open space and recreational facilities and programs.



*Bird Watching at South Platte  
Park*  
Photo: SSPRD

# Community Identity

# Unified in Recreation

Nationally, regionally and within SSPRD, individuals recognize that a community's parks and recreation system is a unifying amenity that improves the quality of life.

SSPRD's trails and open spaces are where we exercise, bicycle to work, walk the dog and connect with nature. SSPRD's sports fields and facilities are where our children get introduced to team activities leading to a foundation of life-long health and a gateway to intermediate and competitive sports. SSPRD's recreation centers, parks and pools provide neighborhood and regional destinations for picnicking, splashing, playing, strengthening, relaxing and connecting to each other.

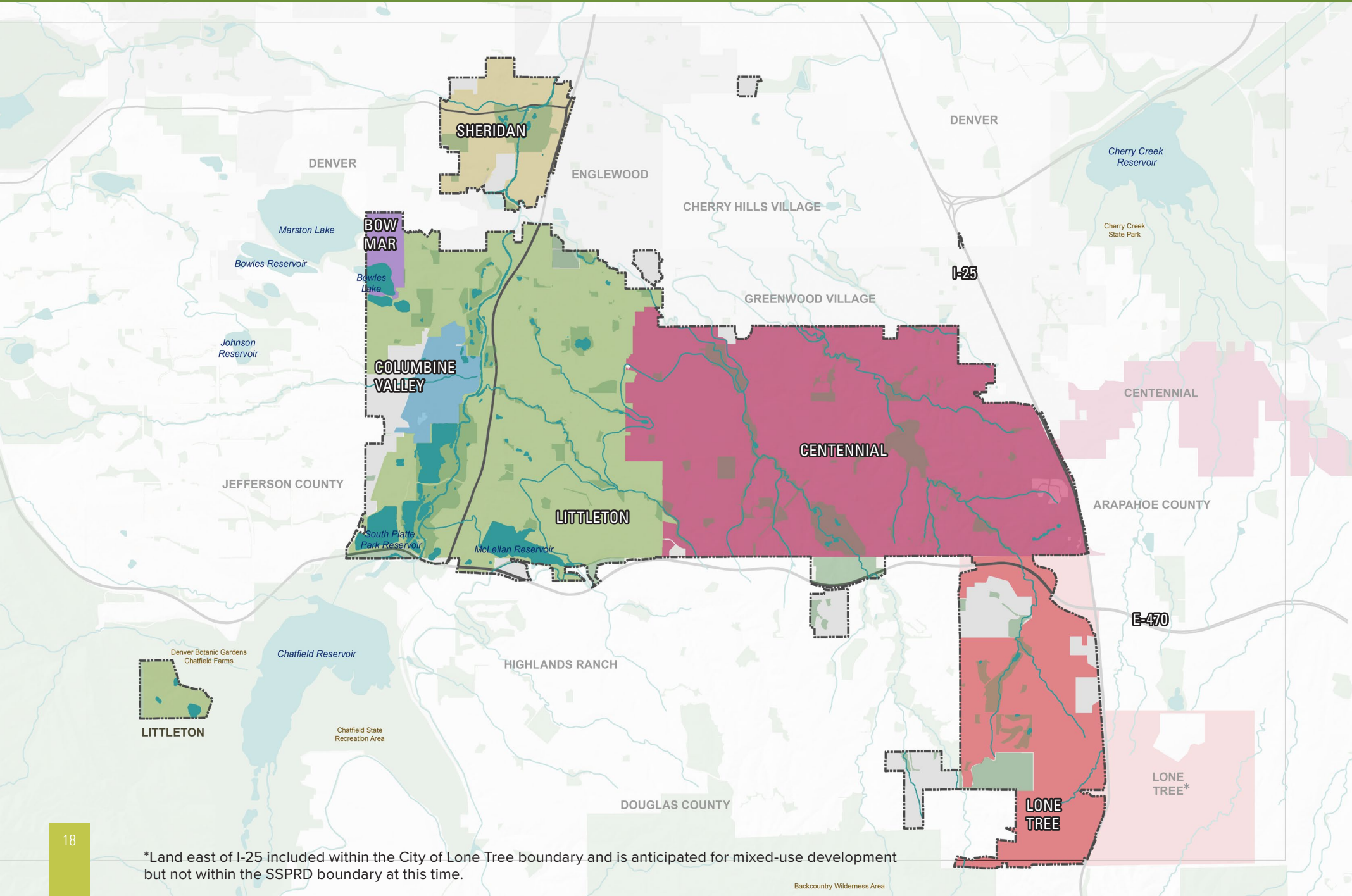
SSPRD serves a network of diverse suburban communities within its borders and over 50 DRCOG-identified employment centers (areas of concentrated employment)<sup>1</sup>. Day and night, SSPRD's amenities must meet the needs of the community while balancing available resources and building key partners to help deliver parks and recreation services.

SSPRD includes the Town of Bow Mar, Town of Columbine Valley, City of Littleton, City of Sheridan, City of Centennial west of 1-25 and City of Lone Tree west of 1-25, and unincorporated portions of Douglas County, Jefferson County and Arapahoe County. The land east of 1-25 is included within the City of Lone Tree boundary and anticipated for mixed-use development but it is not within the SSPRD boundary at this time.

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<sup>1</sup> Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG) is a regional planning agency for the eight-county Denver metropolitan area of nearly 2.2 million residents.

# Communities We Serve



\*Land east of I-25 included within the City of Lone Tree boundary and is anticipated for mixed-use development but not within the SSPRD boundary at this time.



## Community Development & Growth

SSPRD provides recreation to residents within historic Colorado municipalities of Sheridan and Littleton (both founded in 1890) and newer communities of Bow Mar (1958), Columbine Valley (1959), Lone Tree (1996) and Centennial (2001), plus unincorporated areas of three counties (Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson counties). Reflecting state-wide growth, population within SSPRD will rise within the next five years with highest growth rates in portions of Littleton, Centennial, Lone Tree and Sheridan. SSPRD must consider how to prepare for serving the anticipated increase in population.

Figure 3: Population Growth



Source: US Census Report from ESRI Business Analyst Report 7-28-2016. SSPRD also uses the Conservation Trust Fund (CTF) to estimate current population within the six municipal boundaries and three unincorporated counties that make up the SSPRD community. In 2016, CTF estimates SSPRD population at more than 155,000 residents. CTF does not provide population projections, therefore, US Census data used for this figure to show population projections to 2021.

# Understanding Community Trends

## Changing Demographics

The age distribution of residents within SSPRD provides insight into how programs and offerings can be tailored to meet needs of residents now and into the future. Currently 78 percent of SSPRD residents are over the age of 18. This percentage is anticipated to increase to 80 percent by 2021. Within these numbers, the 65+ age group will be expanding the most. Coined the “Silver Tsunami,” this demographic change is accompanied by the trend of “aging in place,” or the ability of a person to live in the residence of their choice, for as long as they are able, as they age. These trends will have profound impacts on tax revenues, residential development, transportation and land use patterns.<sup>1</sup>

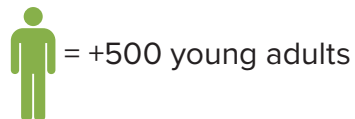
<sup>1</sup> <http://www.denverpost.com/2014/03/29/colorados-cities-and-counties-prepare-for-the-silver-tsunami/>, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyplaces/terminology.htm>

Figure 4: Changing Demographics

### PEOPLE 25-34 YEARS OLD



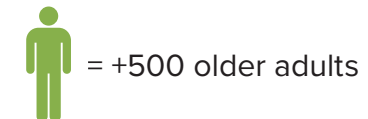
We are experiencing slow growth in the number of young adults.



### PEOPLE 65+ YEARS OLD



We are experiencing rapid growth in the number of older adults.



Source: US Census Report from ESRI Business Analyst Report 7-28-2016. Colorado Conservation Trust Fund (2016). US Census Demographic data used for level of service calculations and projected calculations (2021).

91%

Of survey respondents agree that SSPRD should provide recreational opportunities to underserved residents

## Different Communities & Different Needs

Within the SSPRD boundaries, there are notable differences in economic resources and inherent needs for SSPRD’s services. An indicator of this difference is illustrated in the demographic comparison between Sheridan and Littleton youth (see Figure 5). One example of a specific social service provided is the Sharing with Sheridan Food Bank at the Sheridan Recreation Center. SSPRD strives to adapt to the different needs of residents in its various geographic areas. This master plan recommends that further outreach, partnerships and assessment of the different communities’ needs continue and potential improvements are identified. For example, SSPRD is currently participating in a Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) Inspire Initiative planning process to connect Sheridan youth and families to nature.

Figure 5: Free and Reduced Lunch Comparison



Source: <http://www.chalkbeat.org/posts/co/2016/08/26/a-stark-income-divide-along-the-border-of-two-colorado-school-districts/> and “Fault Lines: America’s Most Segregating School District Borders,” produced by the nonprofit group EdBuild.



*Swimming*

Photo: Dalton Reed Flickr

# Summary

South Suburban Park and Recreation District owns, operates and maintains a wide variety of parks, open space, recreation and trail properties, facilities, and golf courses including over 3,000 acres of parkland and greenways.















SSPRD maintains over 100 linear miles of regional and local trails located within parks and open space properties. Eleven regional trails are located within South Suburban. SSPRD partners with others in managing nearly 50 miles of regional trails. A few examples of regional trails include Big Dry Creek, Columbine, High Line Canal, Lee Gulch, Mary Carter Greenway, Little Dry Creek, and Willow Creek. SSPRD provides 19 trailheads to access the regional trails.

SSPRD offers a variety of outdoor recreation amenities including new pickleball courts at the regional Cornerstone Park, miniature golf at Colorado Journey and outdoor swimming at Holly Park Pool, Ben Franklin Pool, Harlow Pool and Cook Creek Pool. Two skate parks, two BMX tracks, 50 tennis courts, 61 playgrounds, and two nature play destinations including Lee Gulch Overlook and Creekside Experience offer outdoor recreation to the young at heart, while passive recreation opportunities exist on trails that are found in open spaces and parks like South Platte Park and Willow Spring Open Space.



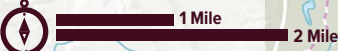
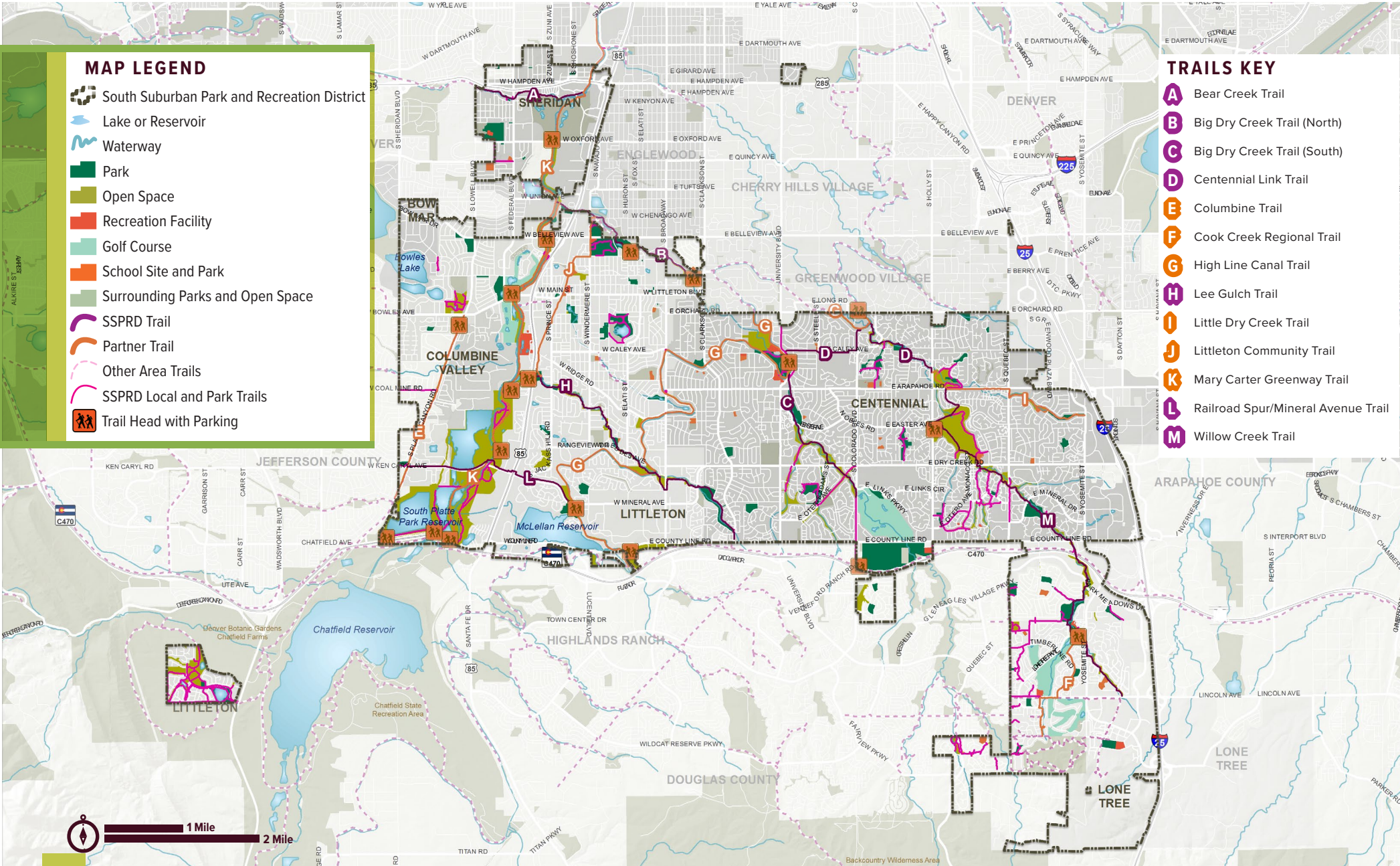
# MAP 1 South Suburban Parks and Recreation System Map

## MAP LEGEND

-  South Suburban Park and Recreation District
-  Lake or Reservoir
-  Waterway
-  Park
-  Open Space
-  Recreation Facility
-  Golf Course
-  School Site and Park
-  Surrounding Parks and Open Space
-  SSPRD Trail
-  Partner Trail
-  Other Area Trails
-  SSPRD Local and Park Trails
-  Trail Head with Parking

## TRAILS KEY

- A** Bear Creek Trail
- B** Big Dry Creek Trail (North)
- C** Big Dry Creek Trail (South)
- D** Centennial Link Trail
- E** Columbine Trail
- F** Cook Creek Regional Trail
- G** High Line Canal Trail
- H** Lee Gulch Trail
- I** Little Dry Creek Trail
- J** Littleton Community Trail
- K** Mary Carter Greenway Trail
- L** Railroad Spur/Mineral Avenue Trail
- M** Willow Creek Trail





*Creekside Experience Park,  
Littleton*  
Photo: Amanda Jeter

# Parks and Open Space Level of Service

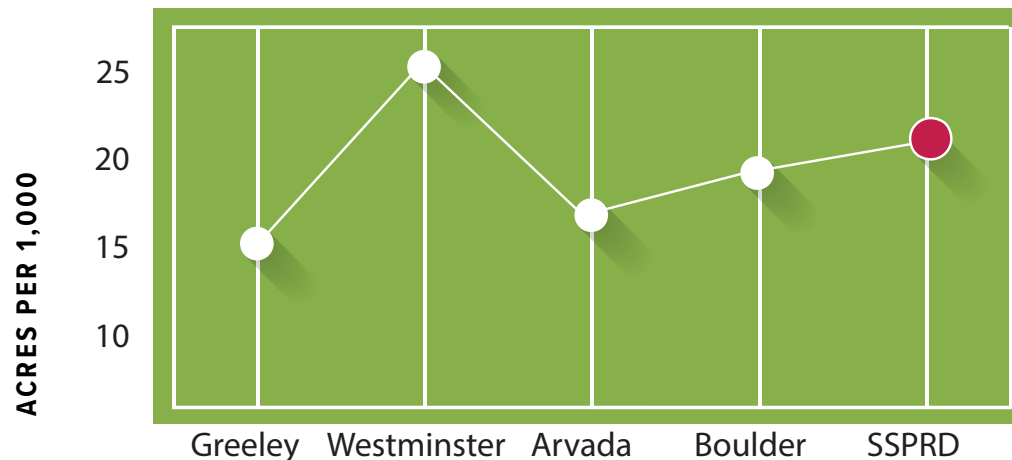
## What is Level of Service?

Level of service (LOS) is a standard measure that national parks and recreation providers use to monitor the amount of services provided to their communities. Used in conjunction with community outreach, this tool can help determine quantity and quality gaps in the system and how services are distributed. Each community must “determine the appropriate LOS required to meet the specific needs of its residents.”<sup>1</sup> The planning team looked at acres per capita and access distance LOS evaluations to help determine service gaps. Ultimately, SSPRD is doing well in offering competitive amounts and close-to-home access to recreation opportunities. Previous plans and community outreach revealed that improving quality and adding capacity to existing amenities is the top need for SSPRD’s five to ten-year outlook.

Figure 6 shows that SSPRD is providing above-average acreage of parks and open space when compared with other Colorado Front Range communities. The planning team also developed access maps using GIS Network Analyst to study true walking distances—considering sidewalks, street crossings, park entries, trails and barriers like streams, roads and rail roads—from SSPRD households to opportunities for recreation (see Appendix). The geographic distribution analysis and reports from Tri-County Health Department reveal that 98 percent of residents are within .5 mile or less of a recreation opportunity. The appendix provides information on parkland classification, site characteristics and service areas of SSPRD parks and open space.

<sup>1</sup> David Barth, “Alternatives for Determining Parks and Recreation Level of Service,” American Planning Association PAS Memo (May/June 2016)

Figure 6: Parks and Open Space LOS Benchmark compares the number of acres of parks and open space per 1,000 people



Source: 2016 Master Plan Study, 2011 Boulder Benchmark Report



98%

Of residents are within 1/2  
mile or less of a recreation  
opportunity



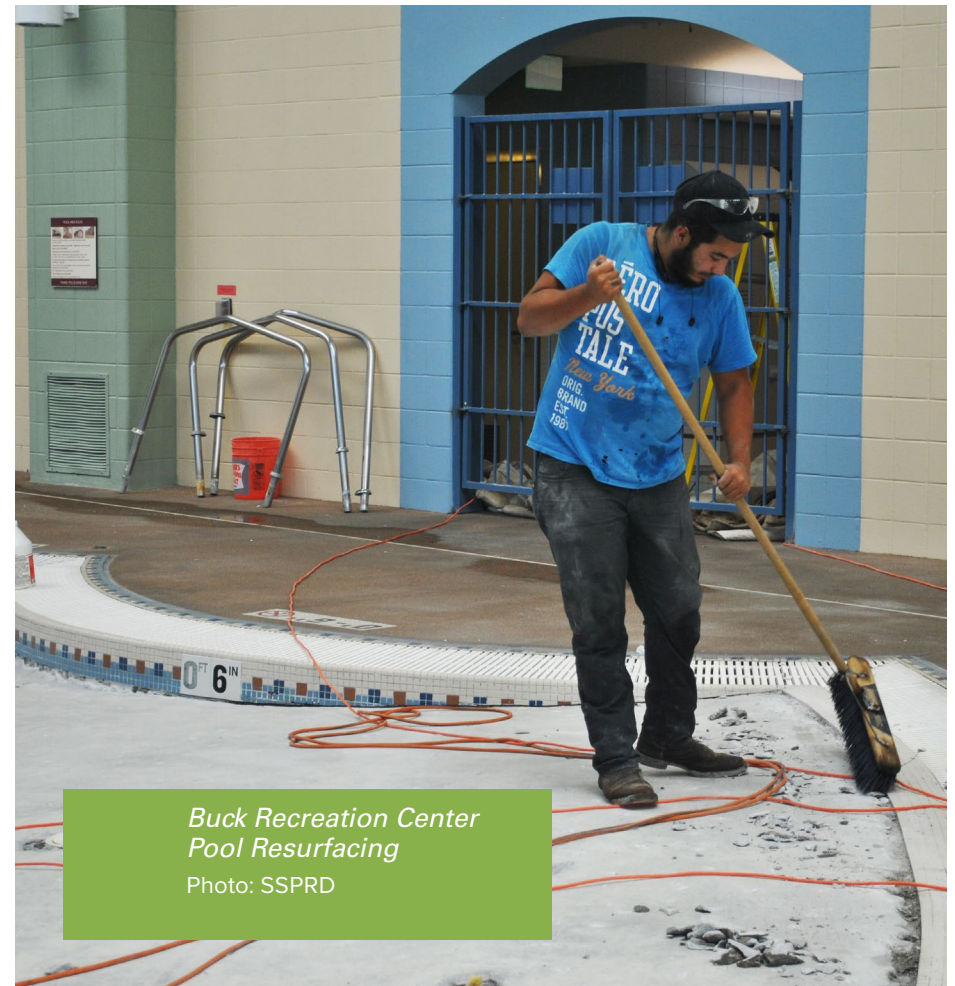
*Sunset over South Platte Park*  
Photo: John Todd

# Facility Assessments

## Facility Conditions and Characteristics

As an additional measure to determine potential improvements and priorities, planning team consultant Barker Rinker Seacat Architects and SSPRD staff completed facility assessments through self-evaluation and site visits. Facilities were graded based on the quality of exterior and interior characteristics, including building equipment and quality of finish. Table 1 gives an overall grade score rating for facilities selected for assessment, with an assessment score ranging from poor to excellent.

<b>TABLE 1</b>	
<b>2016 FACILITY ASSESSMENTS</b>	<b>ASSESSMENT SCORE (as of 2016)</b>
Ben Franklin Pool	FAIR
Carson Nature Center	GOOD
Cook Creek Pool	EXCELLENT
Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center	GOOD
Family Sports Center	FAIR
Family Sports Dome	POOR
Goodson Recreation Center	FAIR
Harlow Park Outdoor Pool	POOR
Holly Pool Building	EXCELLENT
Holly Outdoor Pool	FAIR
Holly Tennis Center (building)	FAIR
Littleton Golf and Tennis Center	POOR
Lone Tree Golf Clubhouse and Hotel	POOR
Lone Tree Recreation Center	GOOD
Tennis Center at Lone Tree Golf Club	EXCELLENT
Sheridan Recreation Center	POOR
South Suburban Administration Building	POOR
South Suburban Service Center	FAIR
Willow Spring Service Center	POOR



*Buck Recreation Center  
Pool Resurfacing*  
Photo: SSPRD

## Capacity Assessment

Capacity is the available space for participation in a program, sport or activity. To understand capacity, the planning team reviewed program data, interviewed stakeholders in focus group interviews and collected comments in the surveys and public outreach events. The following is a summary of capacity findings.

Program participation is tracked annually by SSPRD Staff. The 2015 and 2016 Budget, cited the following increases in participation from previous year:

- Adult hockey increased from 41 to 52 teams
- Active Adult Program Revenues increased by 64 percent (Goodson) and 44 percent (Lone Tree)
- Athletic sport year to date participation surpassed year to date 2014 numbers with growth in youth lacrosse, t-ball, BMX Champs Camps and races, outdoor basketball, spring volleyball and tennis court reservations
- Batting Cage rentals saw a 58 percent increase
- Gymnastic class participation grew by 26 percent
- Lone Tree Recreation Center pass sales increased \$11,000
- Pickleball attendance doubled
- Specialty Fitness class registration grew by 38 percent

Stakeholder outreach and foundational plans revealed the following:

- Indoor recreation centers and sports facilities are at capacity at peak use times. Several have limited room to expand or are at the end of their life cycle.
- Staff, recreation and sports group providers indicated the potential for programs including field sports, ice hockey, gymnastics, and indoor aquatic programs to expand if more space or upgrades were possible.
- The 2014 Gold Medal Citizen Report found that “A wide variety of SSPRD programming is held on the multipurpose fields and many of these programs are filled to capacity.”
- The public and focus group interviews revealed that popular trails like the Mary Carter Greenway are popular amenities, but safety conflict between cyclists, runners and walkers is increasing as popular trail use increases.

## ANALYSIS SUMMARY

Overall, SSPRD is providing above average level of service for parkland compared with Front Range communities and 98 percent of residents are within .5 mile or less recreation opportunity. SSPRD has been providing facilities and amenities for close to 60 years, and the facility assessment reveals that aging assets are in need of upgrades or improvements. Additionally, the parks and recreation system is serving a high capacity of residents and as the population increases this trend is likely to increase as well. SSPRD serves many communities with a wide range of demographic backgrounds and priorities. Careful prioritization and communication with the community and municipal and county partners is essential to provide improvements over the next ten years.



*Nature Education Event at  
South Platte Park*

Photo: SSPRD

# Community Input

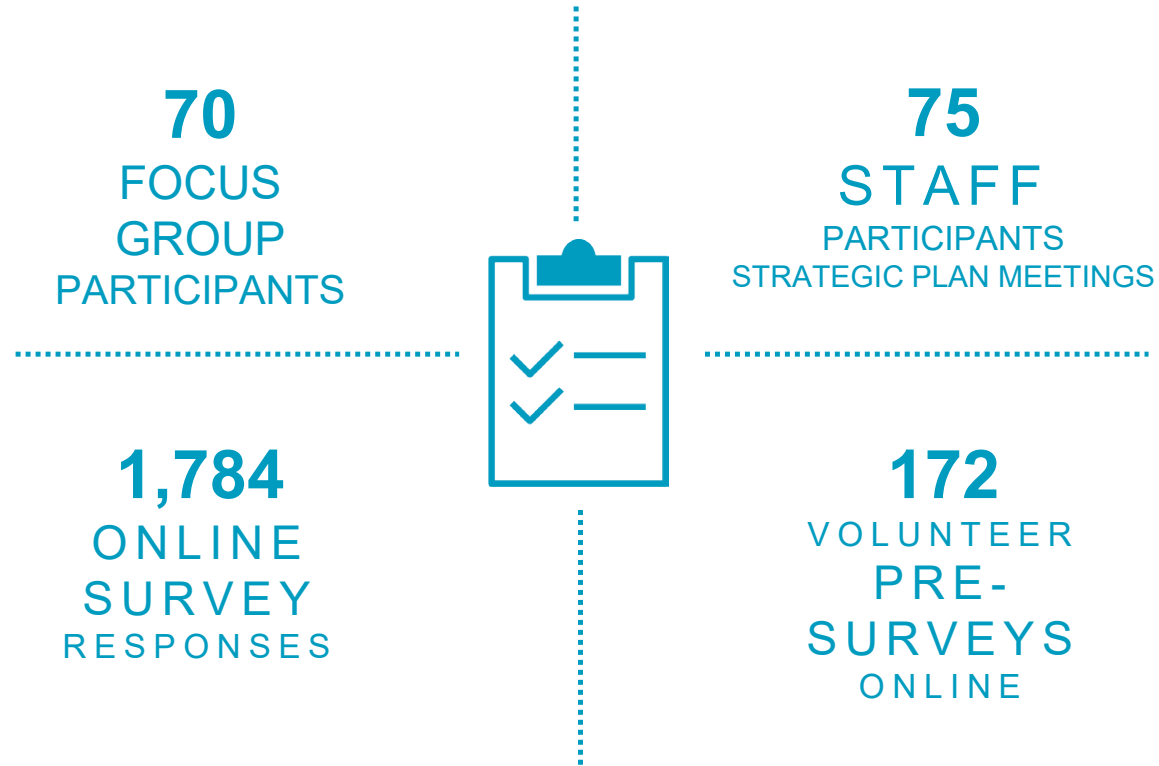
Starting in the spring of 2016, the Master and Strategic Planning process kicked-off robust community engagement efforts to understand citizen's recreation needs and interests. Community engagement included online surveys, a statistically valid survey, focus group interviews, Board and staff interviews, two advisory groups composed of citizens and municipal partners, outreach at special events like Sheridan Celebrates and two public meetings (November 10 and 17, 2016). The investment in this engagement underlines SSPRD's commitment to align with community desires and identify opportunities for improving the parks and recreation system. Additionally, previous staff and community-led planning efforts, including the 2014 Gold Medal Citizen Report and the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan, provided building blocks for this planning efforts.

Describing SSPRD's intended direction over the next five to ten years, the four guiding principles (Quality First, Enrich Wellness, Connect to Nature, Lead Sustainability) evolved directly out of these planning efforts and community input.



Of survey respondents agreed that SSPRD should improve the quality of life.

# Community Participation



## COMMUNITY COMMENTS

“Let’s make our facilities new again.” 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results

“As a long-time South Suburban resident, we would really like to see more pickleball courts – the Cornerstone courts are great – but this is a popular sport and growing and could use more.” November 10, 2016 Public Meeting Comment

“We would encourage a look into adding an indoor soccer field/sports complex that boosts family involvement and therefore builds community.” 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results

STATISTICALLY  
**VALID**  
**MAIL**  
**SURVEY**



**Sent to 1,800**  
**randomly**  
**selected**  
**households**  
**throughout**  
**SSPRD**

“Maintain and improve existing facilities” 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results

“We should improve upon the East-West trail connectivity and District-wide signage.” Citizen Advisory Committee

“I believe it (the High Line Canal Trail) should be a top priority to maintain, update and expand the trail.”  
2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results

# Survey Results

## Regional Differences

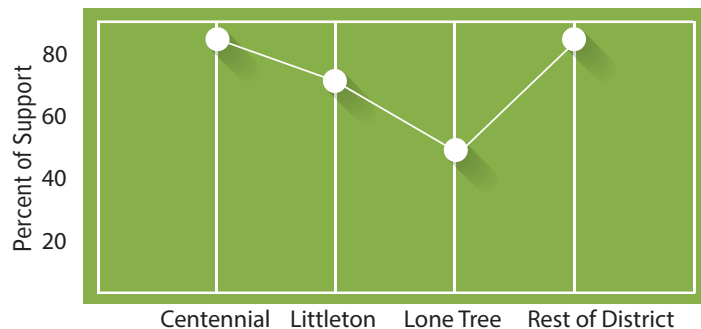
Within the 2016 statistically-valid survey, four significant geographies were broken out to identify potential improvements that have system-wide support and those that are important to specific regions. Top survey results that have system-wide support include:

- Maintaining and upgrading amenities
- Connecting to wellness opportunities through recreation, nature and trails
- Adding basic amenities (benches, restrooms, drinking fountains)
- Improving energy and water use efficiency

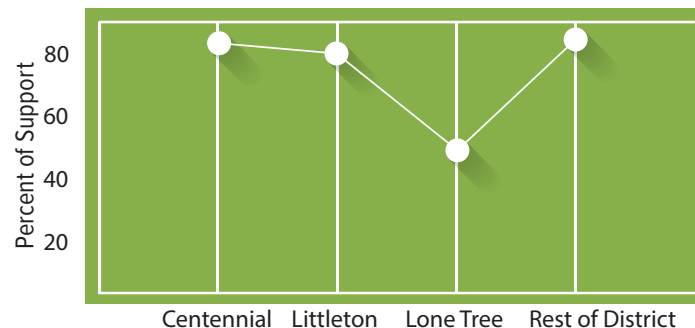
The four break-out regions included Centennial, Littleton, Lone Tree and the “Rest of District” (including Sheridan, Bow Mar, Columbine Valley and unincorporated portions of Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson counties). The comparison figures below provide a glimpse to the different needs expressed in the survey by region.

Figure 7: Survey Result Sample by Region

Percent Who Strongly Support Adding Recreation Programs for Youth Under 19

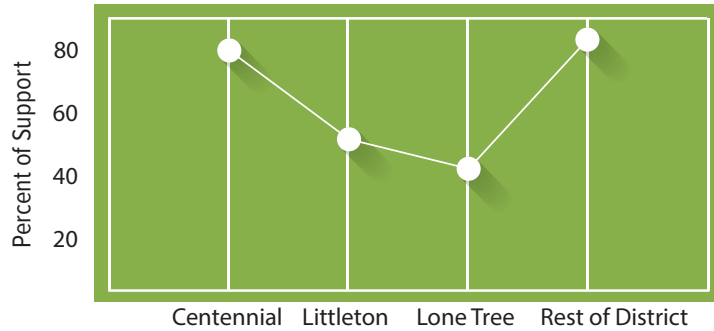


Percent Who Strongly Support Adding Recreation Programs for Adults Over 65





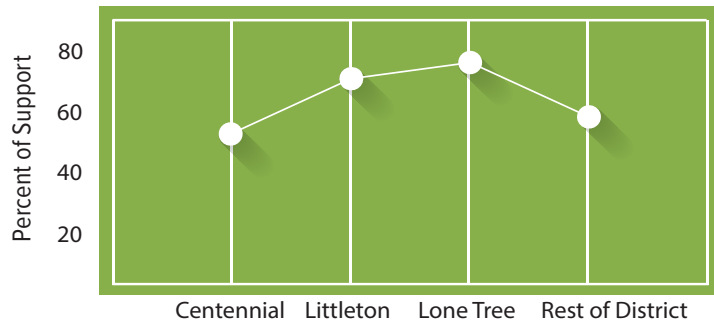
Percent Who Strongly Support Building Multi-Purpose Fields



Percent Who Support Acquiring Additional Open Space/ Natural Areas



Percent Who Support Adding More Opportunities For Water Activities/Sports



## CONCLUSION

There are overarching improvements that all residents showed support for in the survey (e.g., maintaining and upgrading amenities). Within specific survey results, geographic areas of SSPRD have different priorities. Survey results are focused on how residents currently view the park and recreation system. Continued dialogue with residents and municipal and county partners should continue to ensure the community's desires for priorities are understood over the next ten years.



*Kids Fitness Van*  
Photo: SSPRD

03.

# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT.**

---

# Overview

## Information Organization

Four guiding principles structure this chapter around specific topics:

### **QUALITY FIRST**

- We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. Our most important task is to improve the quality of our offerings and customer service.

### **ENRICH WELLNESS**

- We prioritize wellness by offering close-to-home and affordable indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities to a diverse community. Wellness strengthens bodies, engages minds and refreshes a person's spirit. We recognize that within our District, different regions need different recreation opportunities.

### **CONNECT TO NATURE**

- We provide access to open space, natural areas and water recreation while balancing stewardship of these natural resources. Recreating in nature fosters healthy living and provides benefits to emotional and physical well-being.

### **LEAD SUSTAINABILITY**

- We support sustainable practices for managing the District's financial, physical and natural resources. Well maintained amenities require long-term financial investments. Energy and water efficient operations and maintenance increase our capacity to protect natural resources and invest more in our recreation offerings.

Opportunities for improvements and potential steps address priorities specific to each guiding principle. A list of definitions is provided in Table 2 to clarify the terms used in the document and their relationship to one another. Each guiding principle's content is explored using the following framework:

- Why is This Important?
- Community Desires
- Opportunities for Improvement and Potential Steps

Chapter 4 provides implementation considerations including partnership project opportunities and the plan Appendix contains more detailed information on the inventory, assessments and community outreach findings.

Figure 8: Master Plan Structure



<b>TABLE 2</b>	
<b>TERM</b>	<b>DEFINITION</b>
<b>DISTRICT MISSION</b> <i>(WHAT WE DO)</i>	Mission statement guides SSPRD in their role and vision (To foster healthy living through stewardship of the environment, parks, trails and open space and by providing recreational services and programs).
<b>GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b> <i>(WHAT WE ASPIRE TO ACHIEVE)</i>	Guiding principles are broad initiatives describing what SSPRD aspires to achieve and have evolved out of this plan's community engagement and recent foundational planning efforts of the 2014 Gold Medal Citizen Report and 2013 Strategic Plan. The Guiding Principles are: Quality First, Enrich Wellness, Connect to Nature and Lead Sustainability.
<b>OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT</b> <i>(WHAT TYPE OF ) IMPROVEMENT)</i>	Opportunities for improvement are overarching recommendations that reflect, at the most general level, the community's aspirations for potential master plan improvements.
<b>POTENTIAL STEPS</b> <i>(WHERE AND WHEN)</i>	These are more detailed steps to help achieve potential opportunities for improvement.



## Guiding Principle

We aim to consistently create positive experiences for our community. Our most important task is to improve the quality of our offerings and customer service. The 2017 Strategic Plan delves further into internally-focused customer service recommendations, while this master plan section goes into detail on improving quality facilities and amenities.

## Why is this Important?

As a unifying District woven throughout six municipalities and three unincorporated areas, SSPRD's parkland and facilities provide a sense of place and community connections. If high standards of quality are not met, it diminishes the perception of our community.

Aging and well loved, our parks, trails and facilities need renewal or replacement. Continued investment in the parks and recreation system has proven benefits to encouraging wellness and economic value. The National Parks and Recreation Association (NRPA) cites several studies that link the quality of parks and recreation to a community's economic value and ability to attract business.<sup>1</sup> Studies also show that a quality parks and open space system can increase nearby property values by 20 percent.<sup>2</sup>

SSPRD annually updates and renews existing parks, trails and facilities. But weathering the recent recession and the Front Range's semi-arid climate has led to a long list of deferred maintenance in the 50-plus year old system. Capital improvements are also costly, as the 2016 Mortenson Construction Cost Index cites the Denver region as one of the busiest in the nation. Therefore, it is important to prioritize future investments with an understanding of what residents value most.

<sup>1</sup> NRPA, "Why Parks and Recreation are Essential Public Services." January 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Crompton, John L., "The Impact Of Parks On Property Values: Empirical Evidence From The Past Two Decades In The United States." *Managing Leisure*, 10, 203-218, 2005.

## RECENT IMPROVEMENTS EFFORTS INCLUDE:

- Facilities:
  - Douglas H. Buck Community Recreation Center Therapy Pool Improvements
  - Family Sports Center Painting and Carpet
  - Family Sports Center Roof Replacement
  - Fitness Sounds Systems
  - Goodson Recreation Center Pool Deck and Fitness Equipment
  - Goodson Recreation Center Roof Replacement
  - Lone Tree Recreation Center Cardio Equipment
  - South Suburban Golf Course Clubhouse Remodel
- New Parks:
  - Creekside Experience (nature play destination)
  - Lee Gulch Overlook (nature play destination)
  - Oxbow Point
- Sport Courts
  - Cornerstone Regional Park Pickleball Courts
  - Gallup Park Tennis Courts

- Trails:
  - Centennial Link
  - High Line Canal Bridges
  - Highlands 460
  - Littleton Community Trail Mary Carter Greenway East Bank
  - Willow Creek Trail and Bridge
- Playgrounds:
  - Arapahoe Park
  - deKoevend Tot Lot
  - Hunter's Hill Park
  - Province Center Park
  - Willow Creek Park
  - Writer's Vista Park

## Master Plan Prioritization Criteria

During the course of the master plan process, the planning team and staff defined criteria to help determine priority projects to improve the quality of parks and recreation amenities. Projects that meet one or more of the following criteria shall receive higher priority for implementation:

- Opportunities with highest community interest or that relate to the community-driven guiding principles: quality first, enrich wellness, connect to nature, and lead sustainability.
- Opportunities with moderate to low impact on maintenance and operations expenses.
- Opportunities that improve facilities that have reached end-of-life usability.
- Opportunities that align with municipal and county partners' planning efforts. SSPRD will work with partners to prioritize future projects that overlap and align with regional planning efforts.
- Opportunities with the highest impact to address capacity needs.
- Opportunities that offer high return on investment.

A list of top ten opportunities for improvement is highlighted on pages 10-11. These opportunities have the highest community interest, moderate to low-impact on operations and maintenance/or high return on investment, and highest impact to address capacity needs and improve quality.



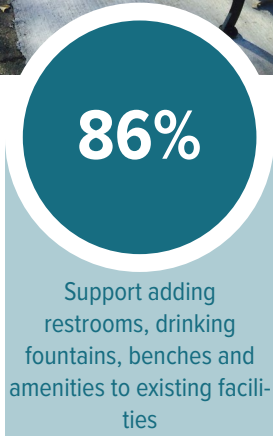
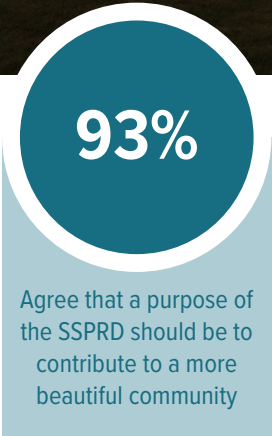


# Quality First

## What Does the Community Desire?

Nine in ten households surveyed have visited a SSPRD trail, facility, program, park or natural area.

As the SSPRD population increases by over 9,000 people in the next five years, and more people are encouraged to use amenities, more wear and tear on existing facilities will result. Given the emphasis on improving existing amenities, three opportunities for improvement are outlined on the following pages and can help improve quality over the next ten years.



Source: 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results, National Research Center, inc.





*Mature trees provide shade  
along the High Line Canal*

Photo: SSPRD



Meet or exceed current maintenance standards for parks, trails, open space and facilities.

### POTENTIAL STEPS

Measure	Time Frame
Continue Gold Medal Report recommendation to expand development of automated preventative maintenance program.	Short-Term
Seek national accreditation for quality assurance and quality improvement through the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies (CAPRA).	Mid-Term
Promote maintenance achievements for parkland, trails, playgrounds and recreation facilities. For example, revisit facility assessments every one to three years to track progress over time and develop historical data. This could be co- led by a staff and volunteer resource and involve community input.	Long-Term
Invest	Time Frame
Consider impact of operations and maintenance costs before construction of any new facilities or amenity and prioritize those with lower impacts.	Ongoing
Build community support aimed at permanently extending financing for operations and maintenance to ensure sufficient resources are available to support a high-quality parks and recreation system.	Short-term
Collaborate	Time Frame
Identify parkland or facilities that could be managed and maintained by another entity (e.g., HOA, schools).	Long-Term
Work with organizations like South Suburban Park Foundation and South Platte Park volunteers to expand open space and trail upgrades with a list of top volunteer opportunities. Promote opportunities on social media and host volunteer celebration events.	Long-Term

Opportunity for Improvement  
1.2

Renew existing facilities and amenities with upgrades or new amenities to reflect the community’s expectations, to expand capacity and to support the Master Plan guiding principals.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

Upgrades	Time Frame
Upgrade equipment and venues (i.e., sports fields) to support facilities and programs that can increase participation.	Ongoing
Focus short-term upgrades on improving building aesthetics and function of recreation facilities and increasing spaces for growing programs (e.g. active adult, youth programs).	Short-Term
New Amenities	Time Frame
Strategically invest in providing amenities at key parks and trailheads. Examples include amenities at trailheads (i.e. restrooms, drinking fountains, benches, bicycle tuning stations, maps and signage), and at community parks (upgrade playgrounds, shelters, restrooms and multi-purpose fields).	Short-Term

Opportunity for Improvement  
1.3

Invest in replacing assets that can lower long-term maintenance and operations, increase capacity and/or that have reached end-of-life usability.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

Prioritize	Time Frame
Use master plan prioritization criteria on page 41 in conjunction with current capital project criteria to prioritize projects for replacement.	Ongoing
Measure and conduct user group outreach to understand demand and capacity for amenities and facilities. For example, use SSPRD website to conduct public online surveys every one to three years.	Ongoing
Leverage	Time Frame
Identify long-term replacement needs and work with partners to save, fund-raise and garner land donations to help realize new amenities.	Long-term
Co-locate new assets with new or existing facilities including schools, libraries and areas of concentrated employment to share construction and maintenance costs, provide efficient delivery of services and create multi-purpose destinations.	Long-term



*Lone Tree Golf Course*  
Photo: Amanda Jeter



## Guiding Principle

We prioritize wellness by offering close-to-home and affordable indoor and outdoor recreation opportunities to a diverse community.

## Why is this Important?

Wellness strengthens bodies, engages minds and refreshes a person's spirit. We recognize that within our District, different regions need different recreation opportunities. Wellness is an active process through which people become aware of, and make choices toward, mental and physical wellbeing.

- Wellness is positive and affirming.
- Wellness is a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential.
- Wellness is multidimensional, encompassing mental and physical well-being and the environment.

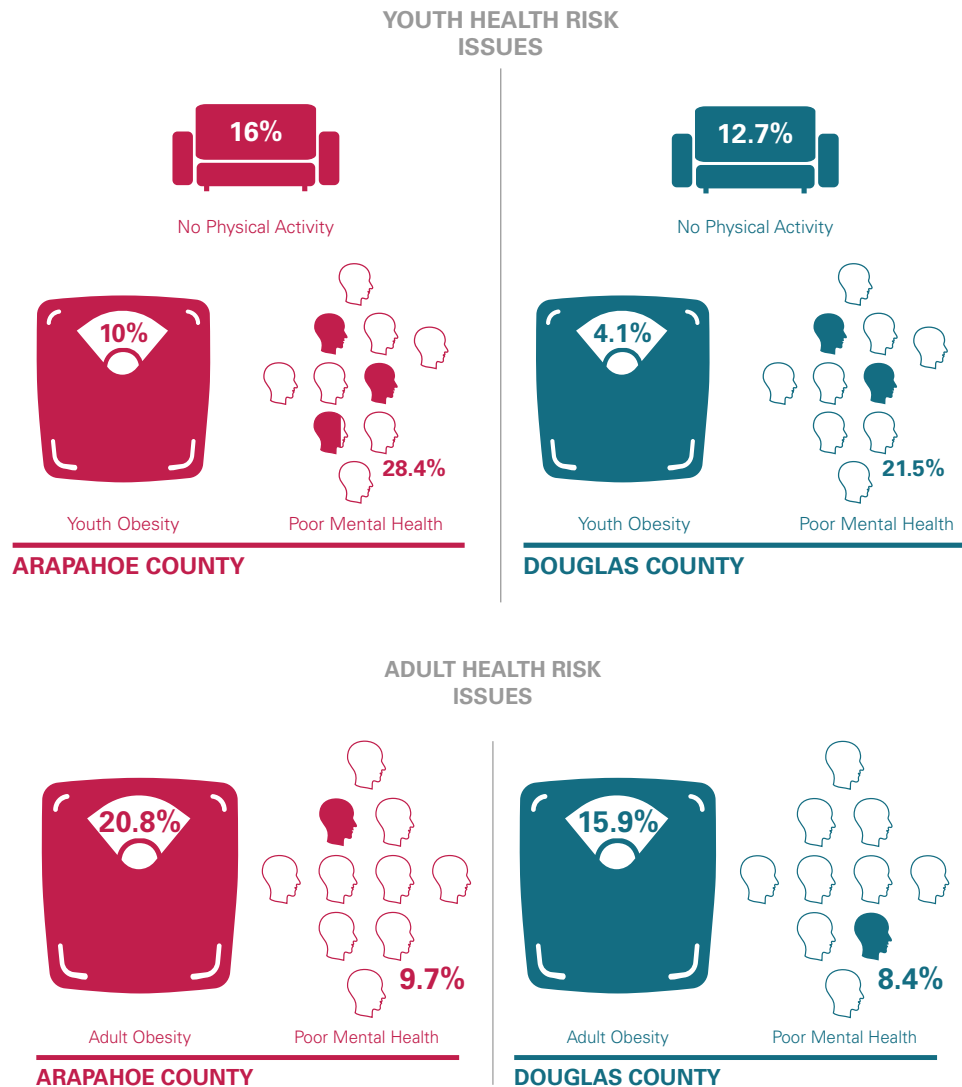
Nationwide, rates of U.S. adults living with a chronic disease and poor mental health is increasing, while activity levels are decreasing. Within SSPRD boundaries, over 20 percent of youth suffer from poor mental health and over 12 percent of youth get no physical activity (see Figure 9). Public health and wellness initiatives are refining their focus on the important link between mental and physical health and chronic disease and injury prevention particularly among older adults<sup>1</sup>. Increasing people's physical activity levels, exposure to natural experiences and access to diverse programs can significantly reduce their risk of chronic diseases and contribute to continual health and mental wellness.<sup>2</sup>

Residents within SSPRD are active, with physical inactivity levels hovering right around the State average of 15 percent. SSPRD is an important provider of the facilities and amenities that maintain and improve the health of residents. Overwhelmingly, 99 percent of survey participants feel the purpose of SSPRD is to provide places for residents to maintain and improve their health. This is echoed by concurrent planning studies like The High Line Canal Vision Plan, which found exercise is the community's top desire for using this important corridor that runs through SSPRD. By providing opportunities for wellness, SSPRD offers a vital public service that can improve mental and physical health.

<sup>1</sup> "Outdoor physical activity and self-rated health in older adults living in two regions of the U.S." Kerr J, Sallis JF, Saelens BE, Cain KL, Conway TL, Frank LD, King AC. International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity. 2012 Jul 30;9:89.

<sup>2</sup> Source: "Step It Up!" The Surgeon General's Call To Action To Promote Walking And Walkable Communities

Figure 9: Youth and Adult health risk issues for counties within SSPRD. By offering recreation opportunities, SSPRD can help improve wellness for the community.



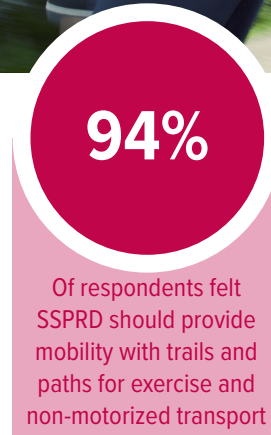
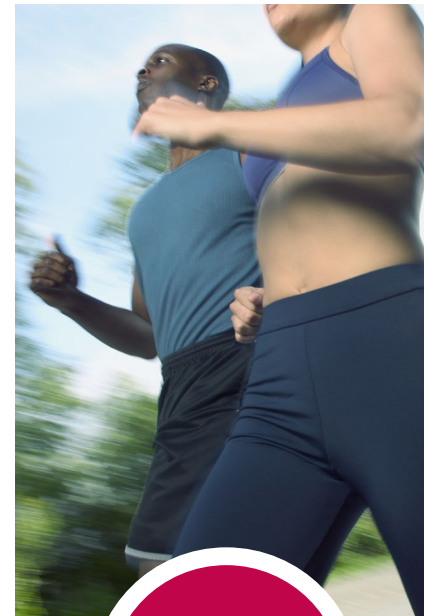
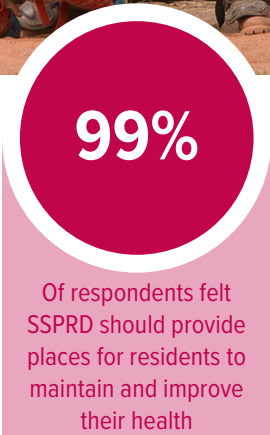
Source: Tri-County Health 2016 County Health Fact Sheets



## What Does the Community Desire?

Survey results reveal that the community values opportunities for improving wellness.

SSPRD's offerings integrate physical activity, natural experiences and diverse programs for all ages throughout the communities it serves, allowing residents to make choices to support wellness goals. For example, SSPRD annually coordinates 140 athletic fields for community youth sports organizations and the SSPRD fitness division has seen a 38 percent increase in fitness classes.<sup>1</sup>



Source: 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results, National Research Center, inc.

<sup>1</sup> 2016 SSPRD Budget





*High Line Canal 5K Run*  
Photo: SSPRD

Opportunity for Improvement  
2.1

Reinforce parks, open spaces, trails and recreation facilities as destinations for physical activity and opportunities for all ages and abilities to practice healthy lifestyles.

## POTENTIAL STEPS

Attract	Time Frame
Keep current with resident needs and desires. Work with communities to assess and provide appropriate amenities and programs to ensure parks, open spaces and recreation centers are resources the residents will use.	Ongoing
Recognize that connectivity and safe access are important factors of a healthy park system. Work with partners to prioritize connectivity improvements for sidewalks and routes that provide access to the SSPRD's park system to encourage residents to engage in leisure time physical activities.	Ongoing
Market and illuminate the role of SSPRD offerings in contributing to the wellness of residents. Coordinate marketing materials with partners and other organizations to maximize the reach of the message.	Short-Term
Design	Time Frame
Plan and design parks and open spaces to be integrated into communities and inspire physical activity, relaxation, healthy lifestyle behavior and a sense of connection.	Ongoing
Strategically locate entrances to parks, open spaces, trails, and facilities to encourage alternative modes of transportation to and from recreation opportunities.	Ongoing
Design flexible spaces and install amenities to allow parks and open spaces to serve as community gathering spaces and support participatory programs like yoga in the park.	Ongoing
Provide more trail loops within parks and open spaces to encourage close-to-home walking recreation, especially as the SSPRD's population ages.	Long-Term
Safety	Time Frame
Keep pace with commuter demands and identify routes appropriate for higher speeds to areas of concentrated employment. Provide safe routes or trail connections to schools, libraries and retail areas and complement with wayfinding and regulatory signage.	Short-Term
Locate soft-surface and recreational trails adjacent to high-use trails that typically see higher user speeds to accommodate a variety of users.	Short-Term



Emphasize accessible, diverse and engaging parks, open spaces, trails and programming for all ages.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

Accessibility	Time Frame
Identify unsafe roads and deficient walkways as possible barriers to accessing parks, open spaces, trails and recreation centers. Work with municipal partners to provide safer crossings.	Short-Term
Encourage alternative modes of active transportation, such as walking or biking to recreation destinations, by ensuring every household is connected to a recreation opportunity within a half-mile walking distance.	Long-Term
Diversity	Time Frame
Provide trail programs to attract a spectrum of athletic abilities and mode speeds.	Long-Term
Promote continual multigenerational wellness through programing and amenities that address older age groups, youth and singles.	Long-Term
Engaging	Time Frame
Install amenities in parks and open spaces and along trails that promote social interactions and serve as a gathering place for community members.	Ongoing
Periodically review program offerings versus community desires and demographics to ensure program participation of all ages and abilities.	Ongoing

Opportunity for Improvement  
2.3

Identify local health organizations, schools, employers, non profits, etc. working toward improved community wellness and collaborate with these current and/or potential partners to position parks, open spaces, trails and recreation programs as vital components to SSPRD’s mission of healthy living.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Maintain strong connections and joint-use agreements with school districts and youth program providers to support youth wellness initiatives and lessen youth health risk issues.	Ongoing
Coordinate and support parks, open spaces, trails improvements with the planning efforts of local municipalities and counties to meet community and regional goals.	Ongoing
Encourage and assist SSPRD municipalities to evaluate existing resources and understand community strengths and deficiencies that contribute to healthy successful aging. Consider using DRCOG’s Boomer Bond Assessment Tool as a resource.	Long-Term
Consider taking part in future Community Health Assessments and Public Health Improvement Plans.	Long-Term
Encourage workplace wellness through partnerships with SSPRD employers and health care providers with programs targeting worksite walking and physical activity.	Long-Term
<b>Measure</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Establish a list of wellness indicators and evaluation metrics and tools to monitor SSPRD and its partners’ progress in enriching wellness and positioning parks, open spaces, trails and recreation programs as vital components to healthy recreation, healthy park environments, healthy foods and access.	Short-Term



*Morning Cycling at  
Lone Tree Rec Center*  
Photo: SSPRD



# Connect to Nature

## Guiding Principle

We provide access to open space, natural areas and water recreation while balancing stewardship of these natural resources. Recreating in nature fosters healthy living and provides benefits to emotional and physical well being.

## Why is this Important?

There is a growing concern that humans are becoming less connected to nature as people spend more time indoors and green space becomes more urbanized. The Children's Nature Network states that today's average youth spend just four to seven minutes in unstructured outdoor play each day and much more time in front of screens, leading to increases in health impacts like myopia, diabetes and obesity.<sup>1</sup> Contrarily, the benefits of recreating in nature are positive. The Children's Nature Network cites studies that show "living in areas with green space has a long term positive impact on children's weight and, thus, health."<sup>1</sup> Studies have also shown that active adults who exercise outside spend up to 30 minutes more per week exercising than those who recreate indoors.<sup>2</sup>

The "Connect to Nature" guiding principle addresses the need for continued stewardship and ecological management of conserved open spaces, as well as the importance of providing diverse outdoor experiences. Our community values opportunities to experience nature and spend time outdoors in the scenic spaces SSPRD provides. We recreate, bicycle and hike on pathways and open spaces surrounded by natural landscapes, gardens, rivers and water bodies filled with birds and wildlife. SSPRD programs provide critical nature education and exploration opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Children's Nature Deficit: What We Know – and Don't Know, September 2009 by Cheryl Charles, Ph.D., and Richard Louv, Children's Nature Network.

<sup>2</sup> "Outdoor physical activity and self-rated health in older adults living in two regions of the U.S." Kerr J, Sallis JF, Saelens BE, Cain KL, Conway TL, Frank LD, King AC. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*. 2012 Jul 30;9:89.



*Tree Climbing*  
Photo: Sage Ross Flickr



# Connect to Nature

## What Does the Community Desire?

The community passionately expressed the desire to conserve and connect to nature in survey and public meeting comments. This echoed results from regional planning efforts including the High Line Canal Vision plan which found a top desire from the community is to exercise outside along this regional greenway.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [http://highlinecanal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PublicMeeting2\\_Feedback\\_Summary\\_lowres.pdf](http://highlinecanal.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/PublicMeeting2_Feedback_Summary_lowres.pdf)



95%

Of respondents believe SSPRD should encourage people to spend time outdoors and in nature



94%

Of respondents agree a purpose of SSPRD should be to provide green and natural spaces



92%

Of respondents believe a role of SSPRD should be to protect the natural environment

Source: 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results, National Research Centre, inc.





*SSPRD offers water programs like canoeing at South Platte Park.*  
Photo: SSPRD

Opportunity for Improvement  
3.1

Improve access to nature for all people, seeking to overcome the challenges they experience to spend time in nature.

### POTENTIAL STEPS

Access	Time Frame
Continue to provide more programming opportunities connecting people with outdoors.	Ongoing
Support the grant programs that connect residents to nature. For example, the Great Outdoors Colorado grant effort aims to improve connections for youth and families to the outdoors in the Sheridan area along Bear Creek Trail.	Short-Term
Provide more soft surface trails. Soft surface trails located in natural settings often encourage moving at a slower pace and pausing to gaze at scenic views, wildlife, wildflowers and vegetation.	Short-Term
Create mobile programs to bring nature-based outreach to neighborhood and community parks.	Short-Term
Add more points of public access to water, waterways and water-based recreation (rafting, paddle boarding, canoeing, fishing, water play, bird watching).	Short-Term
Increase the number of nature-based or adventure play activities and amenities (i.e., provide shade).	Medium-Term
Inform	Time Frame
Raise awareness about human/wildlife conflicts and strategies (i.e. coexisting with wildlife or coyotes).	Ongoing
Create nature-themed marketing materials. For example an online map of nature locations could help educate residents on all the natural features and outdoor programs SSPRD offers.	Short-Term
Provide educational and interpretive signage.	Medium-Term
Study the ecological sensitivity of natural areas to determine if public recreation can be expanded without causing negative impacts.	Medium-Term

Opportunity for Improvement  
3.2

Encourage nature to thrive by providing green spaces throughout the suburban area and utilizing ecologically sound management practices.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

Stewardship	Time Frame
Continue to identify areas appropriate to be managed as grasslands with minimal mowing practices.	Ongoing
When possible, acquire or partner to conserve additional open space.	Long-Term
Protect and increase the amount of vegetation and wildlife habitat throughout existing and future parks, trail corridors and open spaces by using South Platte Park grassland restoration as a stewardship model. Consider adding this focus to current staff resources, expanding position or creating volunteer coordinator focused on stewardship activities.	Long-Term
Develop ecological ratings of system offerings and measure ecosystem improvements over time (i.e. South Platte Park).	Long-Term
Support restoration efforts outlined in existing master plans (e.g., 2021 wetland restoration identified in Hudson Gardens Facility Master Plan).	Long-Term

Opportunity for Improvement  
3.3

Provide programs that connect people to places to encourage discovery, exploration, stewardship, play, admiration and social opportunities.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

<b>Activate</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Provide public education and volunteer opportunities at SSPRD gardens and natural areas.	Ongoing
Develop nature based programs at existing destinations (South Platte Park, Creekside Experience, Hudson Gardens nature play areas) and work with partners to overcome the challenges (e.g., costs, transportation, awareness, social connections) residents experience that prevent them to spending more time outdoors.	Ongoing
<b>Collaborate</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>
Collaborate with schools to encourage use of SSPRD properties as learning landscape educational opportunities. Identify close-to-home field trip and nature education opportunities.	Ongoing
Participate in Front Range stewardship and nature groups (e.g. consider becoming a member of the Metro Denver Nature Alliance also known as mDNA).	Short-Term



*Along the Big Dry Creek*  
Photo: Amanda Jeter



# Lead Sustainability

## Guiding Principle

We support sustainable practices for managing SSPRD's financial, physical and natural resources. Well maintained amenities require long-term financial investments. Energy and water efficient operations and maintenance increase our capacity to protect natural resources and invest more in our recreation offerings.

## Why is this Important?

Sustainability can encompass different ideas for different communities. At its root, sustainability is defined as using resources in a responsible manner to preserve opportunities for the next generation. For our stakeholders, improving energy and water efficiencies are core aspirations. The monetary savings over time and the conservation of valuable resources help SSPRD fulfill our mission as stewards of the environment.

## What are Recent Improvements?

Across the country, parks and recreation providers are incorporating robust sustainability goals into their operations and SSPRD is keeping abreast of this best practice with a history of water and energy conservation actions.

For the past two decades, the South Suburban Parks and Open Space division has enacted water conservation practices that have received accolades from Denver Water for their efficiency. SSPRD continues to be very conservative with our water practices (12 gallons per square foot or 20 inches of annual irrigation). Of SSPRD's 99 irrigation systems, 95 are on a centralized control system, which allows for tailored adjustments to weather conditions and monitoring of water use. Additionally, clear communication with other departments and park users on turf conditions ensures a balance of high quality recreation conditions and efficient water use. Maintenance staff perform weekly inspections and the team includes a Certified Irrigation Auditor.

In 2013, SSPRD hired an energy service company to do an analysis of 21 SSPRD facilities and make recommendations for energy saving measures including transition to LED lighting. These upgrades are projected to save SSPRD over \$400,000 in utility and operational costs annually. The project leveraged \$215,931 in rebates and incentives to implement several measures including boiler and chiller upgrades and replacements, LED lighting retrofits, water conservation measures, building envelope improvements, new building automation controls and the implementation of an occupant engagement program. The measures would help to lower the energy use intensity overall, and in some buildings by up to 49 percent. In addition, SSPRD purchased 725 solar panels in two local solar gardens to further offset the district's energy use; to date, these solar panels have produced over 300,000 kWh and \$320,000 in cost avoidance. SSPRD also conserves resources by participating in the Colorado Proud (local food) program in its hospitality offerings and has an active Sustainability Committee.



### ENERGY

Building retrofits have **lowered** energy use by up to **49%**



### ELECTRIC

The District has **reduced** electricity consumption by **19%** over 3 years



### SOLAR

**725** solar panels have **saved** the District **\$342,574** over 3 years



### WATER

The District has a **low** annual irrigation target of **12 gal. per ft<sup>2</sup>**

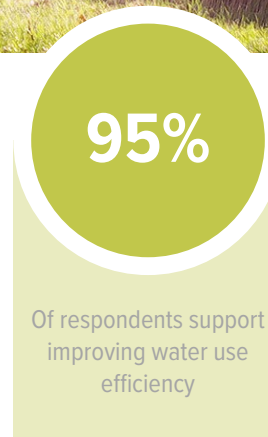
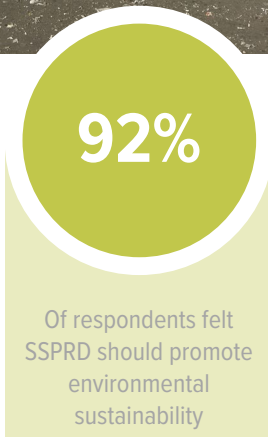
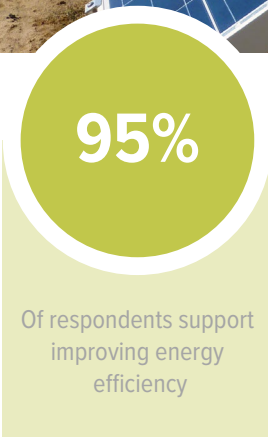


# Lead Sustainability

## What Does the Community Desire?

Residents are well-informed on this topic and strongly support making energy and water efficiency improvements to SSPRD facilities and amenities. Sustainability measures garnered some of the strongest support in the statistically valid survey and were echoed by staff and focus group participants.

SSPRD is a leader in energy and water efficiency measures. Over the next decade, additional improvements can push the dial even further in reducing resource use and preserving funds for recreation offerings.



Source: 2016 Strategic and Master Plans Resident Survey Report of Results, National Research Center, inc.  
Photos: SSPRD and Design Workshop





Synthetic Turf at David  
A. Lorenz Regional Park,  
Centennial  
Photo: SSPRD

Opportunity for Improvement  
4.1

Identify and implement water and energy efficiency improvements to help parkland and facilities meet or exceed industry and peer standards.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

**Water**

**Time Frame**

Continue to invest in equipment, staff resources and practices to improve irrigation system efficiencies using evapotranspiration rates. Continue to use mill levy funds approved by voters to convert park irrigation systems to renewable, non-potable water sources.

Ongoing

Evaluate transitioning blue grass sports fields to synthetic turf to conserve water and lower maintenance needs.

Ongoing

Expand conservation lawns, xeriscape or low-water landscapes and gardens. For example, take advantage of Denver Water (a major supplier of tap water to SSPRD) incentives for conversion of park irrigation from tap water sources to non-potable sources of water.

Ongoing

Work to establish water rights and integrate those rights through a water augmentation plan adjudicated through Colorado’s water court system.

Ongoing

**Energy**

**Time Frame**

Encourage local food purchase and production in SSPRD to celebrate the region’s resources and lower food transportation energy use. For example, continue to participate in the Colorado Proud program while considering expansion of food gardens for herbs and other ingredients at hospitality venues.

Ongoing

Complete pool energy efficiency improvements (e.g., updating the lighting systems, and installing variable speed controllers on the pool pumps).

Mid-Term

Invest in additional solar farms to increase additional solar energy-powered capacity for recreation centers.

Long-Term

Consider transitioning maintenance and operations fleet to electric vehicles to reduce energy use.

Long-Term



Communicate and celebrate sustainability achievements.

**POTENTIAL STEPS**

**Celebrate**

**Time Frame**

Work with SSPRD Sustainability Committee to annually promote awareness of sustainability improvements.  
Continue to measure savings garnered from implementing sustainability improvements.

Ongoing

Consider presenting sustainability improvements at regional and national conferences like National Recreation and Park Association’s annual conference.

Mid-Term

Consider promoting sustainability improvements with on-site signage and education programs (e.g. temporary signs showing water conservation in sports fields during programs and activities).

Long-Term



*Park Tree Planting Improvements*

Photo: SSPRD

# **IMPLEMENTATION.**

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# Implementation Considerations

## Overview

The 2017 Master Plan is intended to be a long-term vision to help SSPRD grow and become more sustainable over the next decade. Recommended opportunities for improvement will evolve over the next ten plus years as SSPRD aims to improve quality, enrich wellness, connect communities to nature and be sustainable. This implementation chapter will be supported by the 2017 Strategic Plan that offers an internally-focused plan on how SSPRD will identify and overcome challenges to implementing recommendations and how SSPRD will measure progress over time. This chapter provides an overview of:

- SSPRD Financial Outlook
- Funding Opportunities and Challenges
- Maintenance and Management Considerations
- Partnership Opportunities
- Celebrating Achievements and Next Steps

## Financial Outlook

The District has traditionally operated in a conservatively fiscal manner. SSPRD staff look for ways to decrease expenditures and improve revenue and efficiencies on an ongoing basis. For close to 60 years, SSPRD has provided parks and recreation opportunities to benefit the communities it serves. Weathering the 2008 Great Recession, SSPRD has emerged intact through fiscally conservative management of financial resources. Due to that conservation and the overall age of many of SSPRD assets, several facilities, parks and trails have deferred maintenance needs.

Through the Master Plan process, the community has shown strong support for improving quality District-wide. To make these improvements, continued and additional funding is needed as well as prioritization of improvements. In prioritizing amenities for upgrades, SSPRD board and staff consider many factors including facility condition, capacity, community desires and long-term impact to capital investment (see Master Plan prioritization criteria page 41).



*Grassland Revegetation near  
Carson Nature Center, Littleton*  
Photo: Design Workshop

# Implementation Considerations

## Funding Opportunities and Challenges

SSPRD is funded through a variety of revenue streams including user fees, levies and grants. The 2016 SSPRD budget equaled a little over \$67 million and recent funding opportunities include:

- Increased tax collection due to an improved economy with higher valuation in residential and commercial properties. Previously SSPRD's original operating property tax revenue had been stagnant for over ten years.
- Grant opportunities like the recent Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) \$1 million grant to complete East Bank segment of Mary Carter Greenway Trail.
- The new operating mill tax revenue that was approved by the voters in November 2014.
- Investments in revenue-generating amenities (e.g. Apex Field House in Arvada features indoor athletic fields and operates in the black, providing revenue to Apex Park and Recreation District).
- Continued collaboration with municipal and county partners on projects that align with the 2017 Master Plan and partner planning efforts.

Funding challenges include:

- Increase in Front Range construction and maintenance costs.
- Increase use and resulting wear and tear as more people use the SSPRD facilities, trails, parks and open spaces.
- Arapahoe County Open Spaces Program funding expires in 2023 (need voter approval to extend).
- Expiration of current levels of operating mills.

To ensure SSPRD provides sustainable and quality parks and recreation for another 60 years, the community must address future funding. Table 4 shows how 49 percent of current revenue streams provided by mill levies will sunset unless voters and partners extend funding and the reissuance of debt. These measures, particularly those that support operations, should be considered for extension into perpetuity to ensure the level of quality the community has voiced support for during this Master Plan process.

TABLE 3	
TERM	DEFINITION
<b>MILL LEVY</b>	The tax rate paid per dollar of assessed value of a property. Based on the District's current mill levy of 8.643 mills, a homeowner pays \$69 per year for each \$100,000 of assessed value.



49%

Of current SSPRD tax funding will sunset within the next ten years.

<b>TABLE 4</b>				
<b>FUND NAME</b>	<b>MILL AMOUNT</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>START DATE</b>	<b>SUNSET DATE</b>
2014 Two Operating Mills	2.000	General operating and other purposes; approved in November 2014, tax began being levied in 2015.	2014	<b>2024</b>
2010 One Mill Levy	1.000	Parks, Open Space and Trails Acquisition, development and maintenance; approved in 2010, tax began being levied in 2011.	2010	<b>2020</b>
Operations	4.417	Funds to support the General Operating Fund of SSPRD.	1999	No Sunset
Abatements	0.063	This mill varies from year to year and is allowed to be levied based on the revenue lost in previous year based on abatements.	No start date	No Sunset
General Obligation Debt	1.163	The District's General Obligation bonds are subject to debt limitation as described in the Colorado Revised Statute Section 32-1-1101 (6) (a) "The total principal amount of general obligation debt of a special district issued, on or after July 1, 1991, shall not at the time of issuance exceed the greater of two million dollars or fifty percent of the valuation for assessment of the taxable property in the special district, as certified by the assessor." This mill levy is set based on the annual obligation of General Obligation debt in the next year.	The current debt issue was approved in 2000	<b>MATURES IN 2019</b>
<b>CURRENT TOTAL SSPRD MILLS</b>	<b>8.643</b>			

# Implementation Considerations

## Maintenance & Management Considerations

South Suburban Park and Recreation District features a variety of parks, trails, natural areas, and community facilities. Maintenance standards should reflect the desired aesthetics and usage of the different places and facilities, e.g. an athletic park will have different standards than naturalized area. The standards should serve as guidelines for achieving quality maintenance, and should be adjusted as needed.

The goal of parks and facility maintenance is to provide the highest quality of maintenance to ensure that amenities are clean, attractive, and usable for visitors at all times and during all seasons. To achieve the highest levels of service for maintenance, several principles should guide maintenance work: classifying maintenance standards, having an effective management and maintenance process, and ensuring that those performing maintenance and repair have the needed skills and equipment for the tasks.

The standards of care for maintenance of any public space directly affect the annual maintenance budget and influence perceptions of safety and use. For example, a maintenance plan in which all tasks are carried out at or above recommended best maintenance practices may create a pristine landscape but may ultimately prove to be unsustainable due to cost. Alternatively, a maintenance plan in which tasks and repairs are carried out at minimal levels may reduce annual budgets, but will likely result in high capital costs required for replacement or repairs that could have been prevented with regular care.

Maintenance needs are also influenced by intensity of use – areas of higher use typically require greater maintenance. However, use is also affected by the level of maintenance: a well-maintained site will attract visitors, whereas a poorly maintained site discourages visitors and often invites misuse, creating an unsafe environment for users. Given this relationship between use and the standards of care, it is important to develop a maintenance plan that balances fiscal considerations with maintenance needs to provide a sustainable, high-quality visitor experience.



*Aeration at Littleton Golf Course*  
Photo: SSPRD

## Network of Partnerships

SSPRD has a strong network of partners who have helped craft recent plans and who have participated in this planning process through focus groups and advisory committees. Individual interest groups and municipalities can be partners for upgrades or new facilities that support the community's desires, Master Plan guiding principles or specific sports (e.g. ice hockey, lacrosse, soccer). Below is a list of partnerships to deepen existing relationships or seek out new collaborations.

### **FUNDING & VOLUNTEER PARTNERS-SSPRD is supported by funding and volunteer partners including:**

- Recreation participant user fees
- Community tax payers
- Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson Counties (e.g. specific ownership tax portion of vehicle registration, Douglas County grant support of STAR)
- Arapahoe County Open Spaces Grants
- Great Outdoors Colorado Grants
- Local grants, Intergovernmental agreements and local government matches (e.g. City of Littleton, City of Centennial, City of Lone Tree, City of Sheridan Matching Grants)
- Conservation Trust Fund
- Volunteers efforts (e.g. South Suburban Park Foundation, Sustainability Committee, SSPRD Youth Commission, South Platte Park Volunteers)
- Joint fundraising efforts
- Sports leagues and recreation groups
- Trust for Public Lands

- South Metro Land Conservancy

### **REGIONAL PLANNING PARTNERS-This plan supports and aligns with regional planning efforts including:**

- 2030 Douglas County Parks Trails and Open Space Master Plan
- 2017 High Line Canal Vision Plan
  - Support further steps of the High Line Canal Conservancy Vision Plan.
- 2017 City of Centennial Trails and Recreation Plan
  - Support resulting vision and future steps of the ongoing Centennial Trails and Recreation Plan update. Support Centennial's ongoing interest in connectivity and aging in community.
- 2017 Arapahoe County Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan
  - Support Arapahoe County's Bike and Pedestrian Master Plan vision to encourage alternative modes of transportation through increased trail use.
- 2016 Foothills Park and Recreation District IGA
- 2015 City of Littleton Parks, Recreation and Trails Master Plan
  - Support Littleton's recent Master Plan themes including communications, signage, visibility of volunteer opportunities, water recreation, age-targeted recreation, participation support for working families (child-care, scheduling), multi-purpose space, destination recreation elements and ADA improvements.

- 2014 Jefferson County Open Space Master Plan
- 2014 South Suburban and City of Lone Tree Partnership Opportunities
- 2013 South Platte River Corridor Vision
- 2010 Arapahoe County Open Space Master Plan
- 2008 Lone Tree Trail Master Plan
- 2007 City of Lone Tree Parks, Trails and Recreation Master Plan
- Comprehensive Plans and/or recent planning efforts for Sheridan, Littleton, Lone Tree, Centennial, Bow Mar, and Columbine Valley
- Continue efforts like the Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) nature initiative in Sheridan

**DISTRICT PLANNING PARTNERS-This plan supports partners and planning efforts within the District:**

- Urban Drainage
- Southeast Metro Stormwater Authority (SEMSWA)
- School Districts ( Littleton, Cherry Creek, Sheridan , Douglas County)
- Continue to reference the 2014 SSPRD Gold Medal Citizens Committee Report to provide direction for additional open space acquirements, trail access and connectivity, upgrades and trail extensions.
- Continue to implement the engineering and infrastructure, education and encouragement and enforcement

recommendations for the Mary Carter Greenway Trail and pursue partnership opportunities to address areas of concern and trail conflicts identified in the ‘Be Cool: Share the Path Campaign’.

- Continue to enforce the South Platte River Corridor as a recreational and open space destination for the entire region by supporting the 2013 South Platte River Corridor Vision and South Platte Working Group.
- Support Hudson Gardens Facility Master Plan recommendations (e.g. nature-themed improvements and programs).
- Continue joint-use agreements with elementary and middle school sites within SSPRD to provide spaces for programming and play.
- Work with existing partners like Littleton, Lone Tree, Sheridan, Bow Mar, Columbine Valley, Centennial, Arapahoe County, Douglas County and Jefferson County to conserve and provide public access to open space within the District (such as corporate campus, transitional industrial areas and riparian corridors/canal connections).

**PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERS-This plan supports public and private partnerships:**

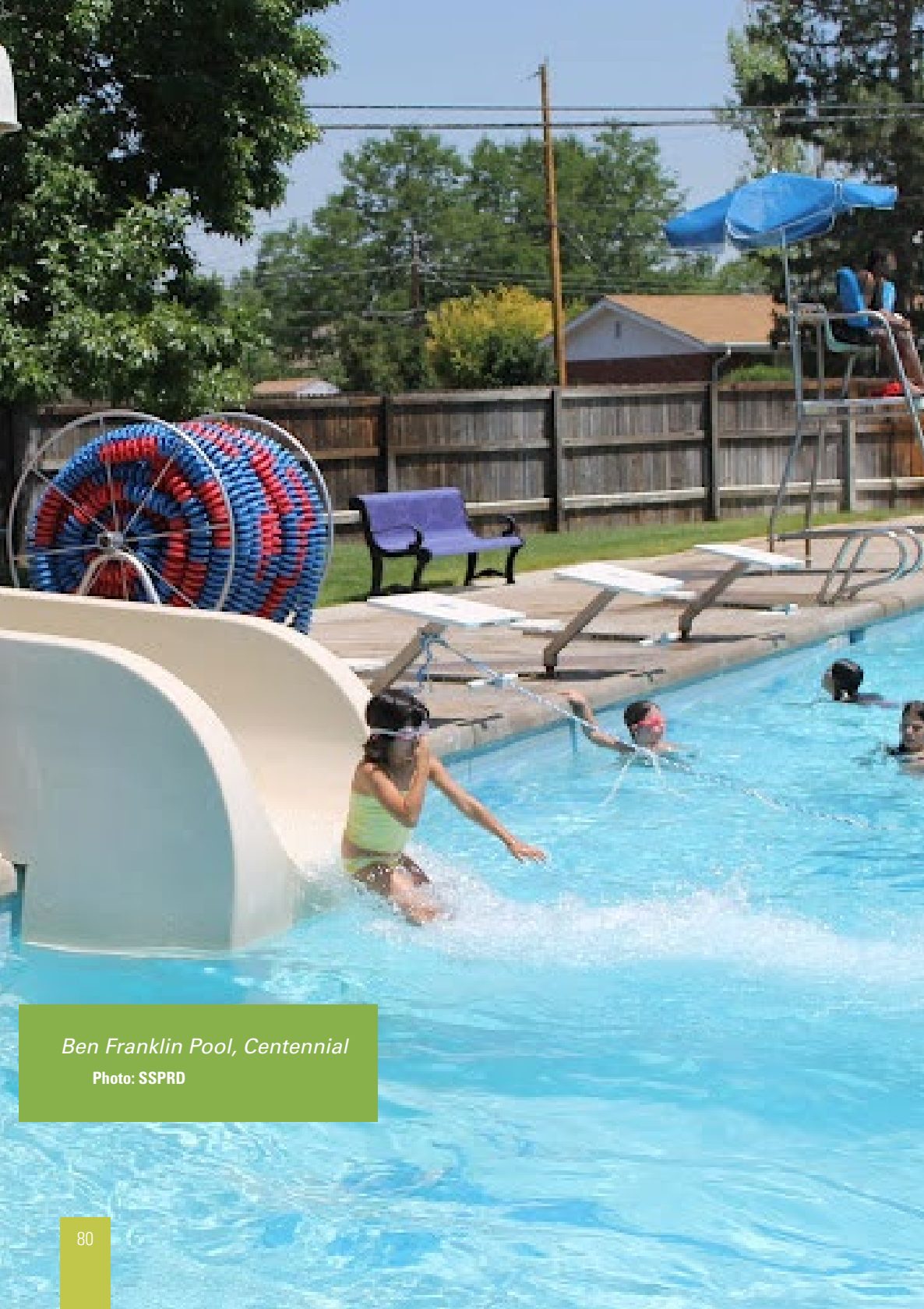
- Partner with SSPRD employment centers, social, public health and cultural groups to help provide exciting programs and

affordable transportation to access nature (i.e., South Platte Park Nature Van).

- Work with volunteers, environmental organizations and staff to conduct stewardship activities and annually measure:
  - Number of people participating in nature programs
  - Amount of publicly accessible natural areas
  - Increase the amount of wildlife habitat
- Engage local employers and areas of concentrated employment to understand how SSPRD can support work site wellness initiatives.

**SUSTAINABILITY PARTNERS-Reach out to a variety of partners and organizations to use as models to help achieve sustainability practices including:**

- Denver Water
- Colorado Water Conservation Board
- Solar Power Providers
- Charge Ahead Colorado-Clean Air Fleets
- Colorado Proud
- U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC)
- Sustainable Sites Initiative™ (SITES®)
- NRPA’s Great Urban Parks Campaign
- Colorado Parks & Wildlife



*Ben Franklin Pool, Centennial*

Photo: SSPRD

# Celebrating Achievements

# Next Steps

Since 1959, SSPRD has achieved great accomplishments for the parks and recreation system including:

- Providing over 3,000 acres of parkland to the community
- Providing a recreational experience within .5 miles or less to 98 percent of residents
- Increasing the foundational High Line Canal trail established in the 1960s to a District-wide trail network over 100-miles long
- Lowering energy use in buildings by 49 percent and reducing electricity consumption by over 19 percent over 3 years

SSPRD will continue to experience growth and this community-led plan lays out opportunities for improvement to the parks and recreation system while providing access to quality amenities, enriching wellness, connecting to nature and leading sustainability for the growing community. The four guiding principles of the 2017 Master Plan (see page 7) have been crafted with support of the community, Board, staff and municipal and county partners. It will be important for SSPRD staff to continue communicating plan progress and celebration of achievements over the next decade of improvements.

The 2017 Master Plan is part of a larger planning effort that includes the 2017 Strategic Plan and an additional effort to craft a three-year financial plan. The directions charted in these planning efforts will begin implementation in 2017 and for several years following. The 2017 Strategic Plan will lay out specific ways SSPRD staff will measure progress. As in this planning effort and previous efforts including the 2014 SSPRD Gold Medal Citizens Committee Report, support from volunteers, committees and partners will be essential for the long-term growth and prosperity of the District.



# 2017 Master Plan

[www.ssprd.org](http://www.ssprd.org)