

# Wake County Comprehensive PROS Master Plan

## BOC Work Session Update

April 13, 2026



@wakegov    

wake.gov

# **MEETING AGENDA**

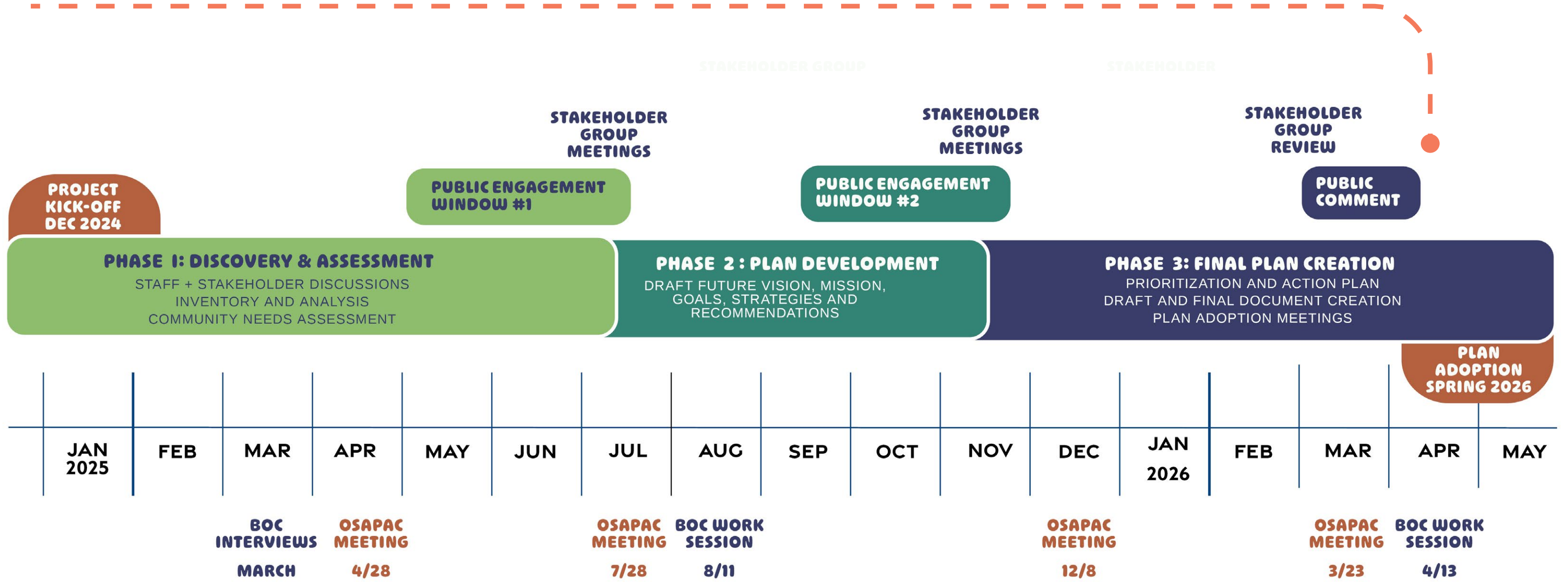
**Project Overview & Process**

**Plan Framework, Vision, Goals, Strategies & Actions**

**Questions & Next Steps**

# THE PLANNING PROCESS

WE ARE HERE!



# WAKE COUNTY PARKS CORE SERVICE AREAS



## Open Space

Lands that preserve natural resources and wildlife and help provide clean air and drinking water. Open spaces help conserve Wake County's natural resources and provide a place for people to enjoy passive recreation such as hiking.



## Recreation and Leisure

Facilities and amenities that allow residents to enjoy more active recreation – trails, volleyball courts, boat rentals, picnic shelters, fishing and more.

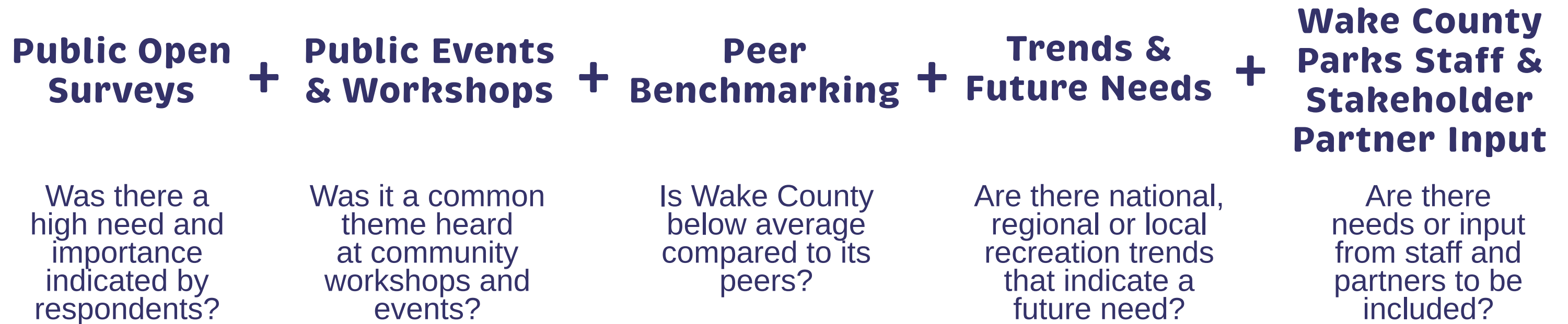


## Education Opportunities

Site-based cultural, environmental and recreational education programs that introduce visitors to the history, natural environments and recreational opportunities of Wake County.

# NEEDS ASSESSMENT

## FACILITIES, AMENITY, AND PROGRAMMING NEEDS ASSESSMENT INPUTS:



# WAKE COUNTY TRENDS



**1.2 MILLION**  
people live here!  
The most residents of  
any county in North  
Carolina!

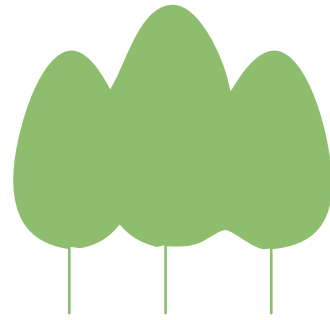


**62.5 NEW  
RESIDENTS**  
on average (net) move  
to Wake County every  
day!



**TREE  
CANOPY**  
in Wake County  
is decreasing.  
Between 2010 and  
2020, Wake County  
lost 3.6% of its total  
tree canopy - more  
than double the  
size of William B.  
Umstead State park.

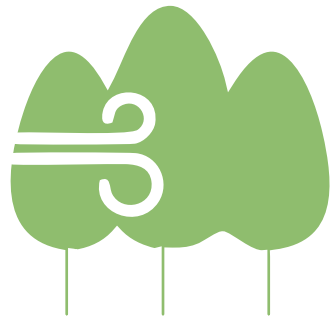
# WAKE COUNTY PARKS AND OPEN SPACE BENEFITS



**74%**  
Tree Canopy Cover  
at Wake County Parks and  
Preserves



**9,500+ ACRES**  
of Permanent Open Space  
acquired for protection by  
Wake County since 2003



**2 TO 9  
DEGREES F**  
Air Temperature  
Reduction  
from tree canopies on  
average



**\$6.3+ MILLION**  
Additional Tax Revenue  
per year created by  
Wake County Parks and  
Preserves.



**1.76  
MILLION**  
Visitors to Wake  
County Parks and  
Preserves in 2024

# WHO WE'VE HEARD FROM ENGAGEMENT WINDOW 1

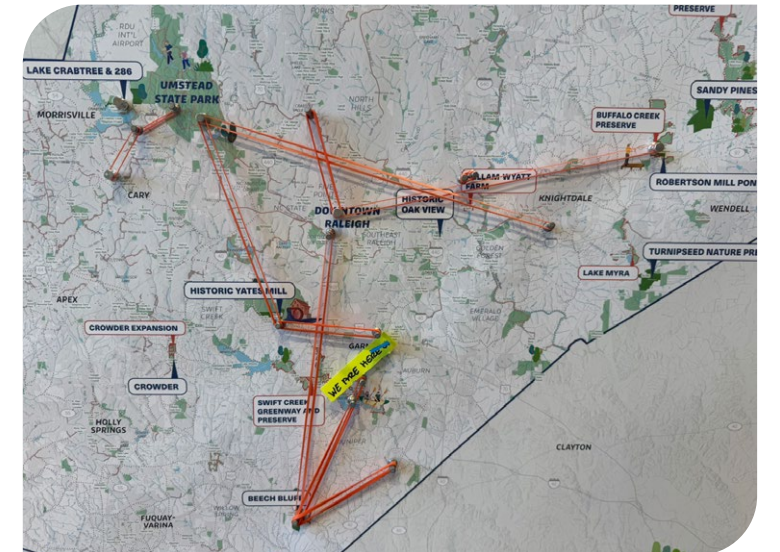
**1010**  
Online Survey  
Participants

**436+**  
Pop-Up Event  
Attendees

**~400**  
Comments From Open  
House Events

**8**  
Pop-Up Events

**5**  
Open House Events



# WHO WE'VE HEARD FROM ENGAGEMENT WINDOW 2

**~1,016**

Attendees engaged across  
7 pop-up events

**1,107**

Responses + comments  
across pop-up events

**108**

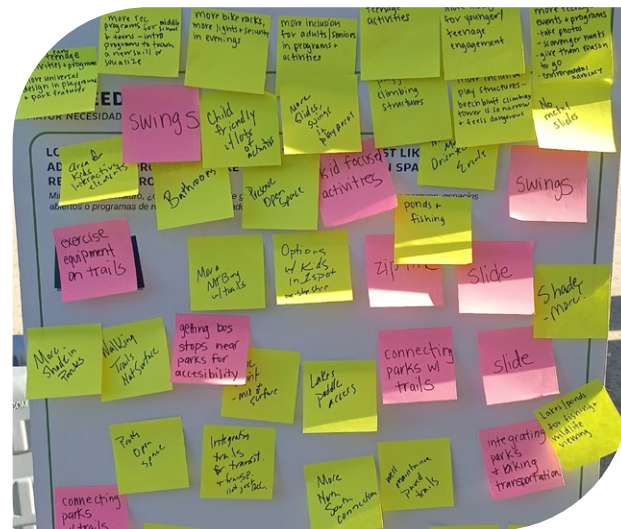
Online Survey  
participants

**~24**

Virtual Public Meeting  
Attendees

**3,408**

Project Webpage Views  
from 2,196 viewers to date



# TOP 5 REQUESTED AMENITIES....



**NATURE /  
INTERPRETIVE  
TRAILS**



**BICYCLING /  
MOUNTAIN  
BIKING**



**RESTROOMS**



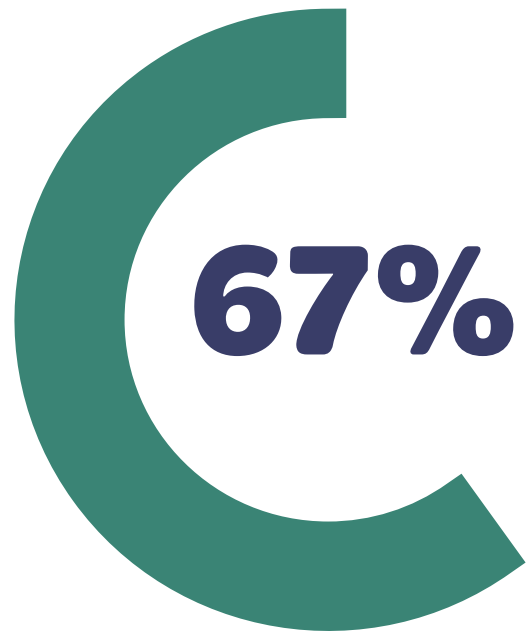
**NATURE PRESERVES /  
WILDLIFE HABITATS**



**WALKING /  
HIKING TRAILS**



## **SURVEY RESPONDENTS SAID...**



They visit Wake County Parks **at least several times a month**



Of the **Wake County Parks mission and core service areas**, they ranked **“Preserving Open Space” as Very Important**



They rated Wake County parks **quality as good or excellent and safe or very safe**

# WHAT WE'VE HEARD

UNFORTUNATELY, WITH THE CLOSING OF CRABTREE, THERE ARE NOW LIMITED MOUNTAIN BIKING OPPORTUNITIES. I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE TRAILS SPECIFICALLY FOR MOUNTAIN BIKING.

-SURVEY COMMENT

SAVE MORE OPEN SPACE PLEASE!

-GARNER WORKSHOP

EVERYONE SHOULD BE ABLE TO GET OUTSIDE AND EXPLORE THE WORLD, NO MATTER THEIR RESOURCES OR IDENTITIES.

-NORTHEAST REGIONAL WORKSHOP

TRAIL CONNECTIVITY FROM PARK TO PARK WOULD BE AMAZING.

-SURVEY COMMENT

THE SOUTHEASTERN PART OF WAKE COUNTY NEEDS MORE PARKS! WE HAVE THE FEWEST NUMBER OF PARKS AND LIBRARIES AND HAVE TO DRIVE THE FURTHEST TO FIND NICE, LONG NATURAL HIKING TRAILS.

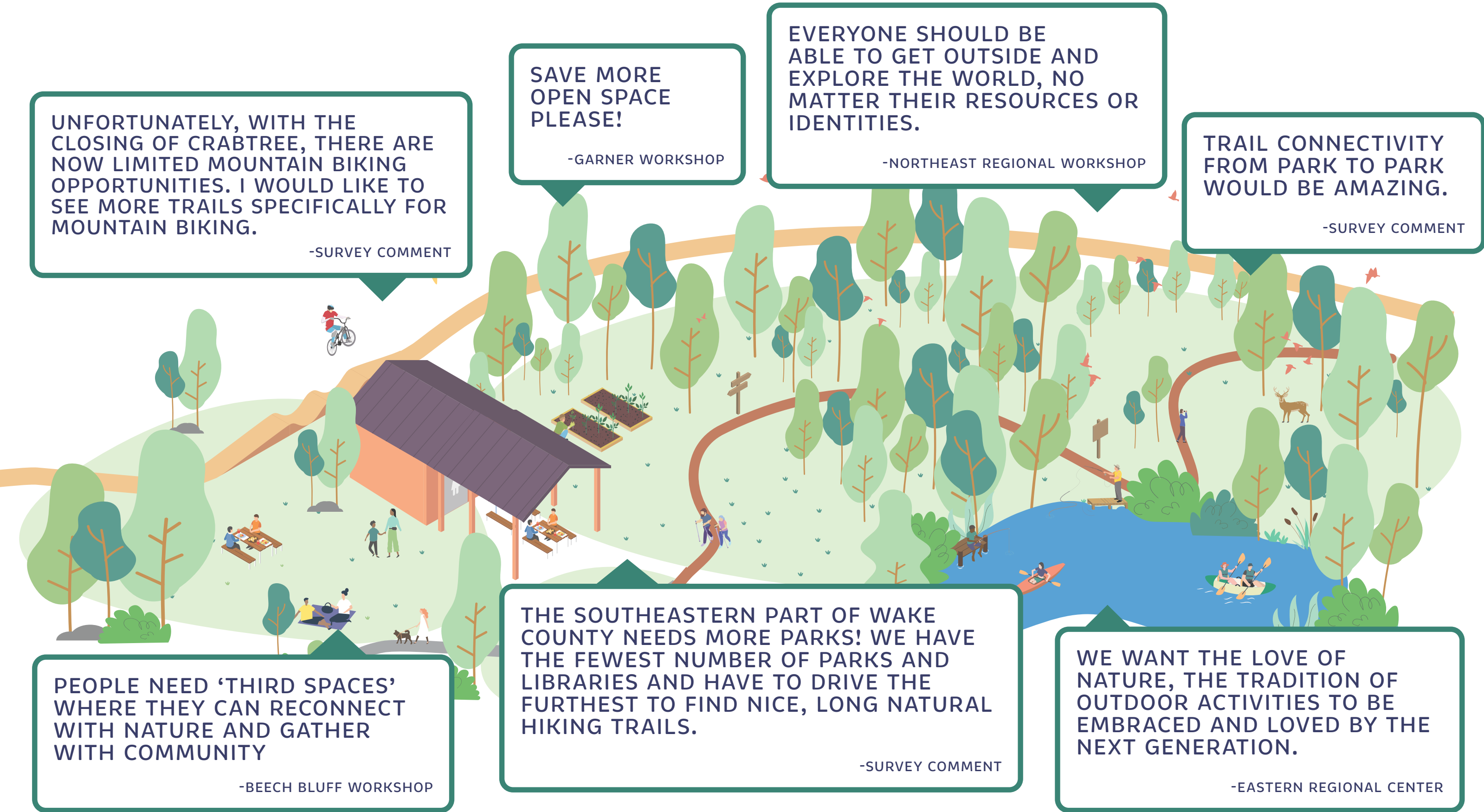
-SURVEY COMMENT

WE WANT THE LOVE OF NATURE, THE TRADITION OF OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES TO BE EMBRACED AND LOVED BY THE NEXT GENERATION.

-EASTERN REGIONAL CENTER

PEOPLE NEED 'THIRD SPACES' WHERE THEY CAN RECONNECT WITH NATURE AND GATHER WITH COMMUNITY

-BEECH BLUFF WORKSHOP



# KEY TAKEAWAYS

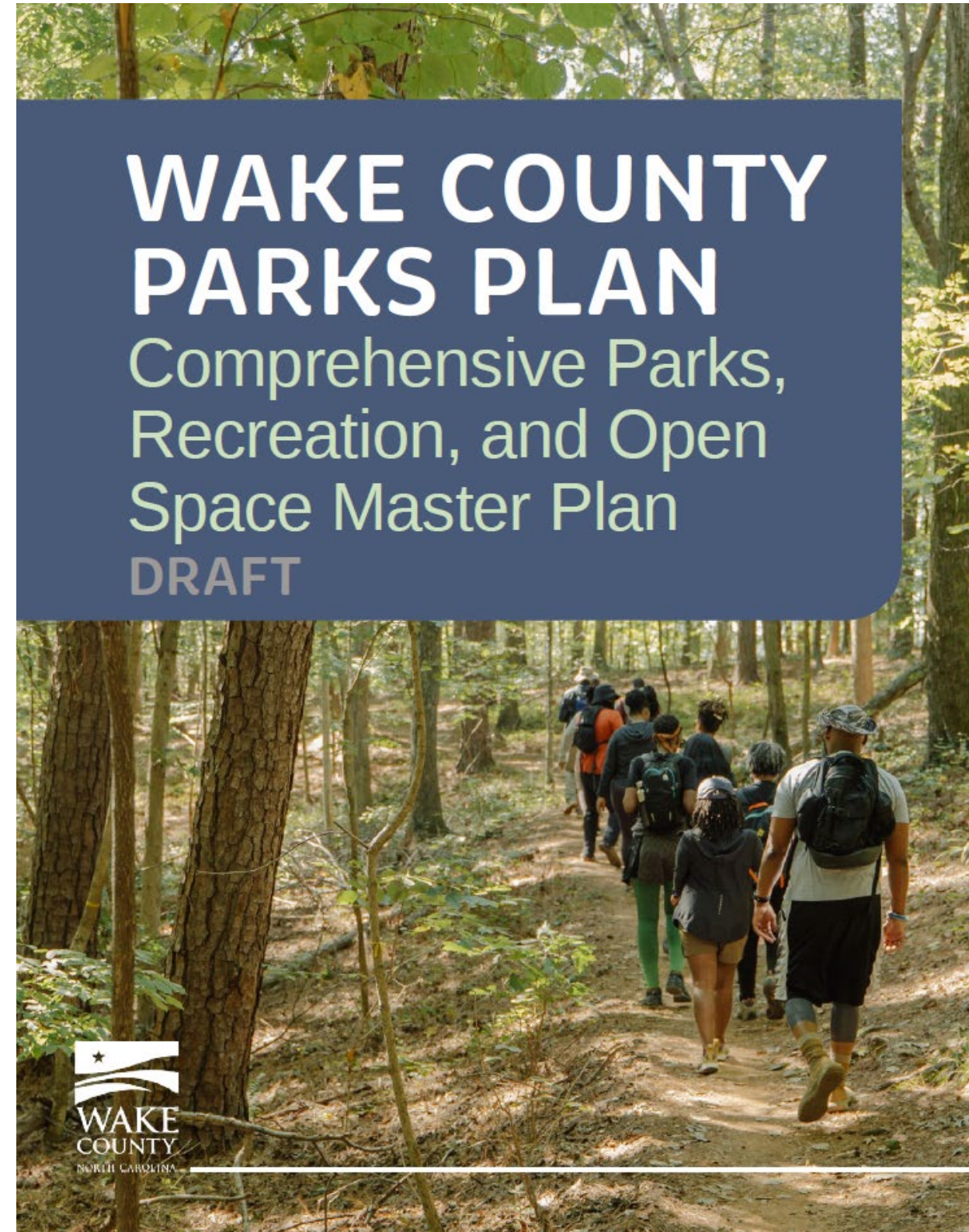
- » **Natural resource protection and expand recreation access goals** ranked the highest priority though all goals were broadly supported.
- » A sense of **urgency to preserve open space**, including proactive land acquisition and expanding parks in high-growth areas.
- » **Trails and greenways** continue to dominate the engagement feedback.
- » **Water access** through more boat launches, paddle trails, rentals, and creek access is a common request.
- » Improved pedestrian and bicycle **access**, better parking and more greenway and bus connections were mentioned frequently.
- » **Youth and teen needs** expressed through connections to schools, playground features and outdoor recreation for teens.
- » Desire for **more inclusive and sensory features** for all abilities, ages and including those with chronic illnesses (beyond ADA).
- » More **shade, shelter from sun and heat** and **places to rest** and hydration stations along trails.

# HOW THE DRAFT PLAN RESPONDS

- » Updated vision language to emphasize “protect and steward” as a core foundation
- » Strengthened positioning of Wake County PROS as a system focused on conservation, habitat protection, and nature-based recreation
- » Refined planning framework mapping to include conservation priority and connectivity framework
- » Expanded guidance on user experience in parks and greenways, including
- » Reinforced the County’s unique role in conservation and passive recreation

**96%**

Participants say the vision statement mostly or completely reflects their vision



# PLAN VISION & GOALS

## Vision Statement

This plan will guide bold, collaborative action—preserving land before it is lost, sustaining and enhancing existing facilities, expanding opportunities for outdoor recreation, and supporting municipalities to bridge service gaps—so that every resident can benefit from healthy, inspiring, and inviting outdoor spaces now and into the future.

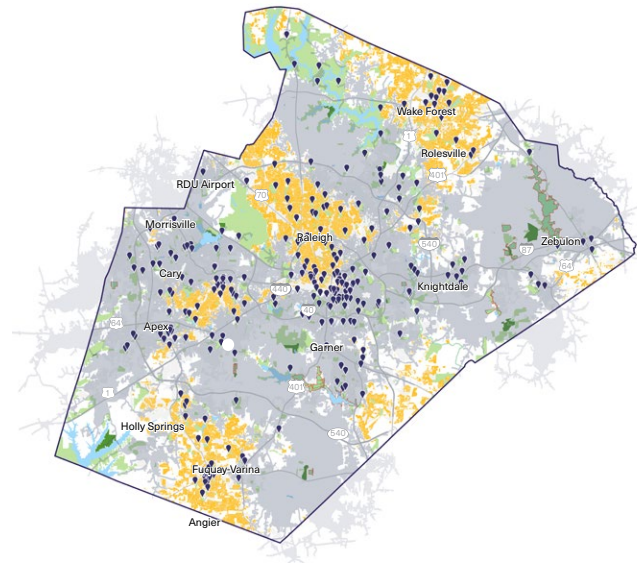
**Wake County PROS will steward a connected, welcoming, and resilient system of parks, open spaces, and greenways that protects and restores natural habitats, supports biodiversity, promotes health, inspires learning, and strengthens community.**



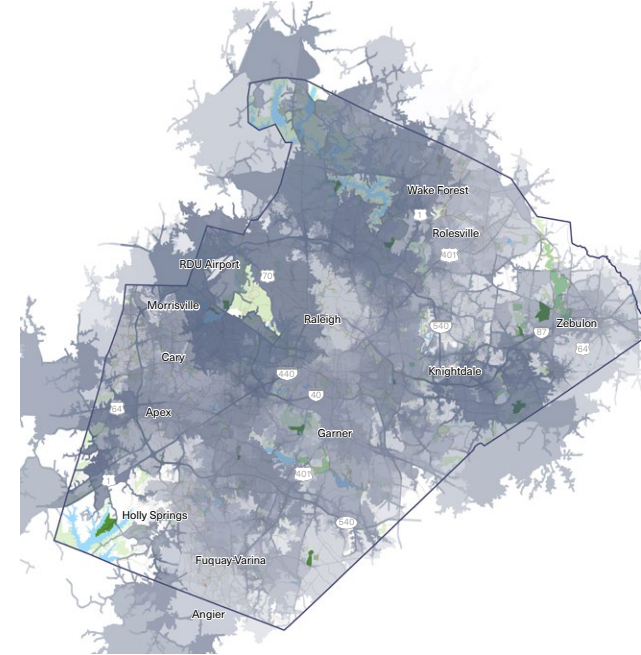
# VISION FRAMEWORK MAP CRITERIA

The Vision Framework guides Wake PROS investments by evaluating how potential projects advance the county's recreation, conservation, connectivity, and equity priorities. Together, these criteria help identify where parks, preserves, open space, and greenway investments can most effectively expand access to nature and recreation, strengthen ecological resources, improve regional connectivity, and ensure the park system serves all communities within the county.

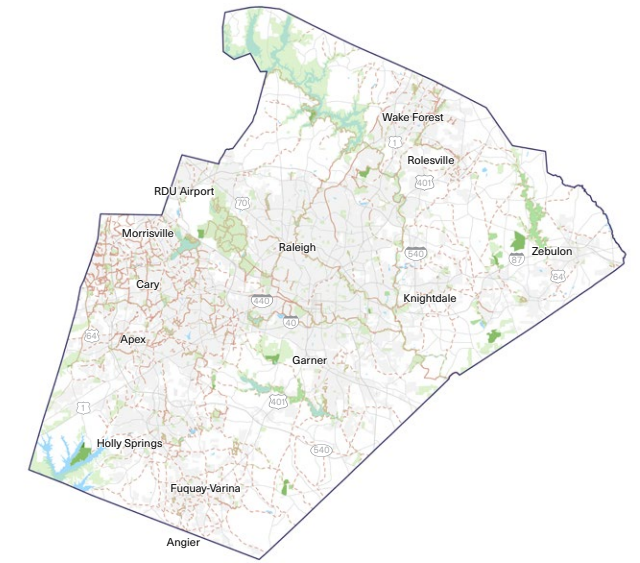
**CLOSE ACCESS SERVICE GAPS?**



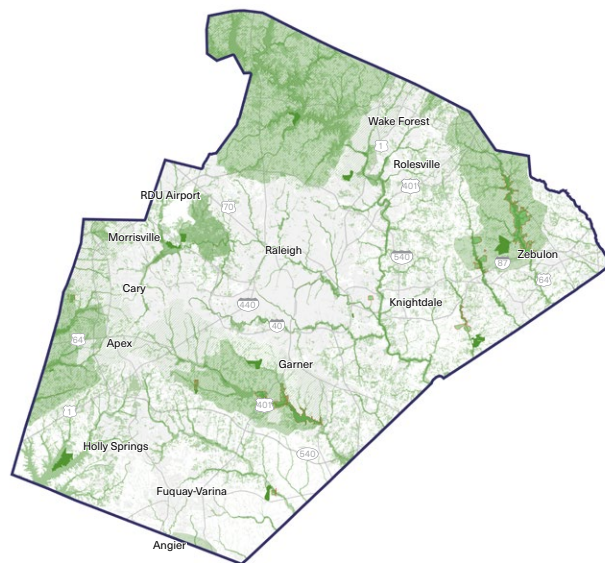
**FILL AN EXPERIENCE GAP?**



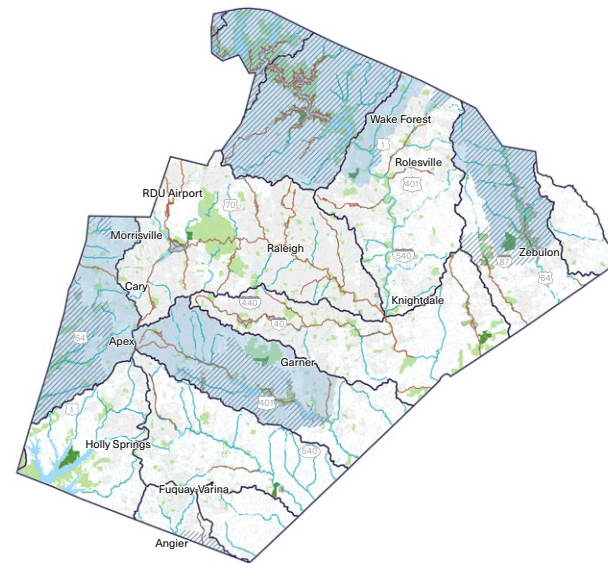
**COMPLETE GREENWAY LINKAGE?**



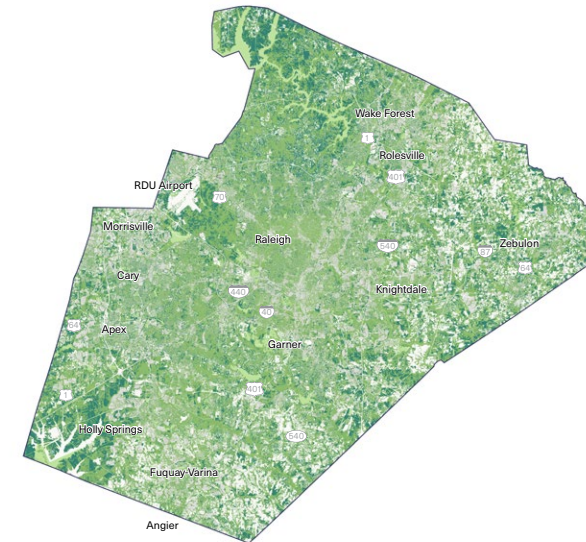
**CONSERVE PRIORITY HABITATS?**



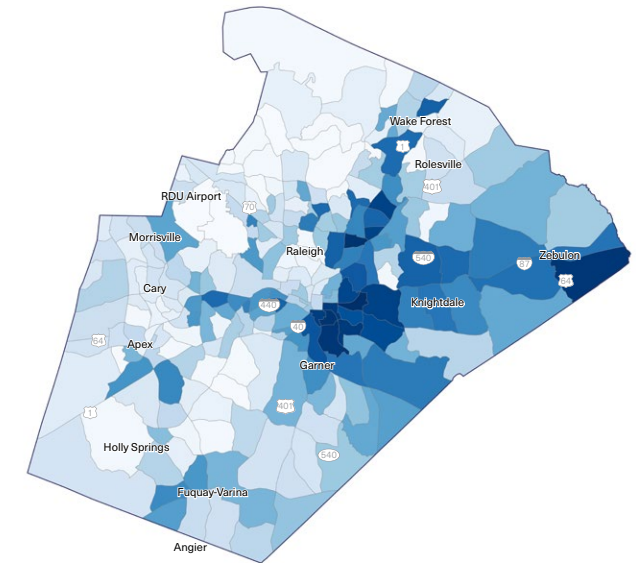
**PROTECT EXISTING AND FUTURE WATER SUPPLY?**



**EXPAND TREE CANOPY COVERAGE?**



**SERVE MORE VULNERABLE RESIDENTS?**



# FRAMEWORK PLAN - SEARCH AREAS

## The Vision Framework Search Areas

The Vision Framework Search Areas Map illustrates a countywide strategy for expanding and strengthening Wake County's parks, recreation, and open space system through a tiered approach to investment and land acquisition.

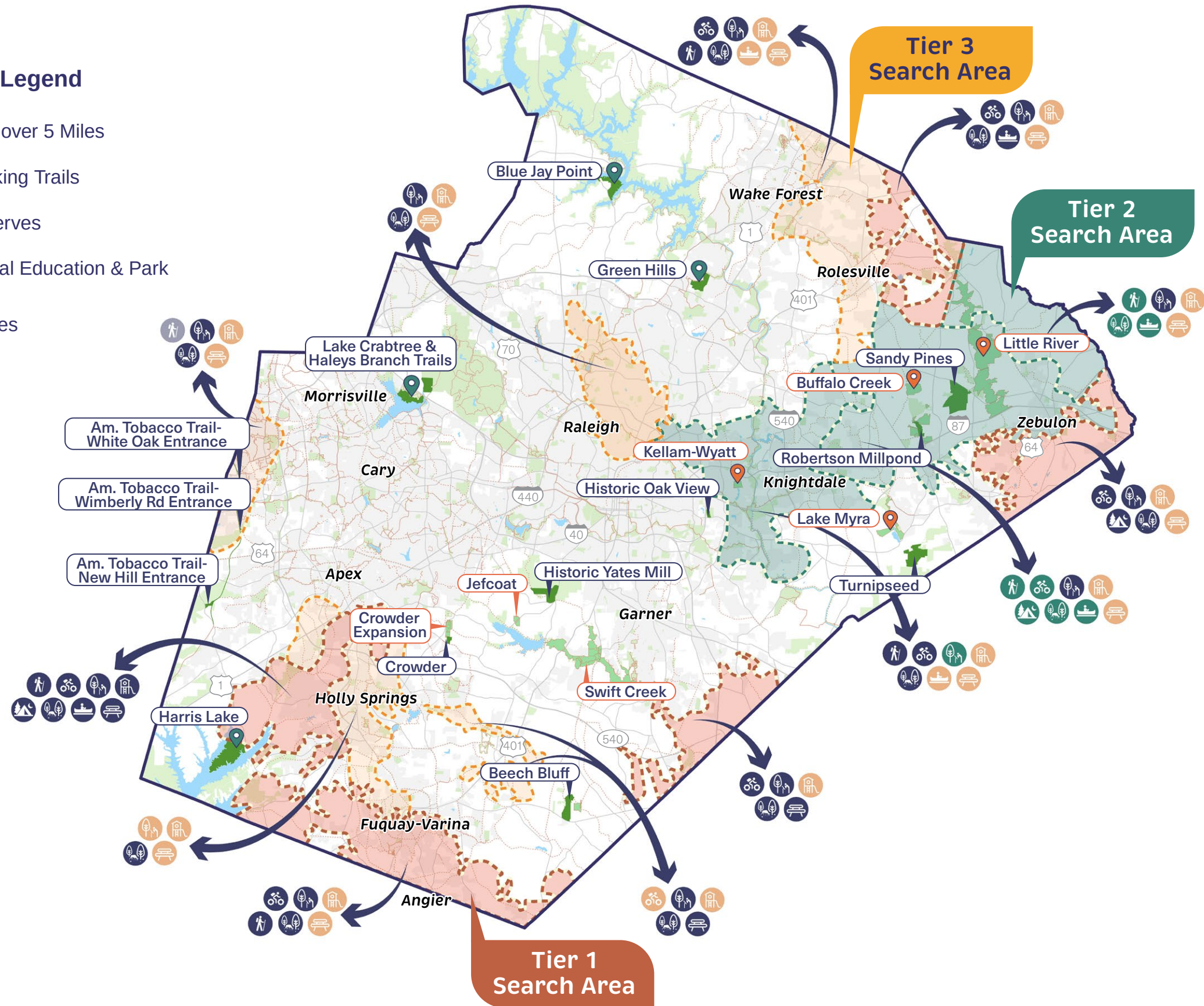
### Park Amenities Legend

- Hiking Trails over 5 Miles
- Mountain Biking Trails
- Nature Preserves
- Environmental Education & Park Centers
- Boat Launches
- Camping
- Playgrounds
- Picnic Areas

### LEGEND

- Wake County
- Municipalities
- Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Planned Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Open Space
- Waterbody
- Roads
- Existing Greenways
- Planned Greenways

- Improvements at Existing Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Planned Wake County Parks/Preserves that fill Access Gaps
- Amenity Needed to Fill Access Gap
- Amenity to be Provided Planned Wake County Park/Preserve
- Amenity Provided by Wake County Park/Preserve
- Amenity Provided by Non-Wake County Park



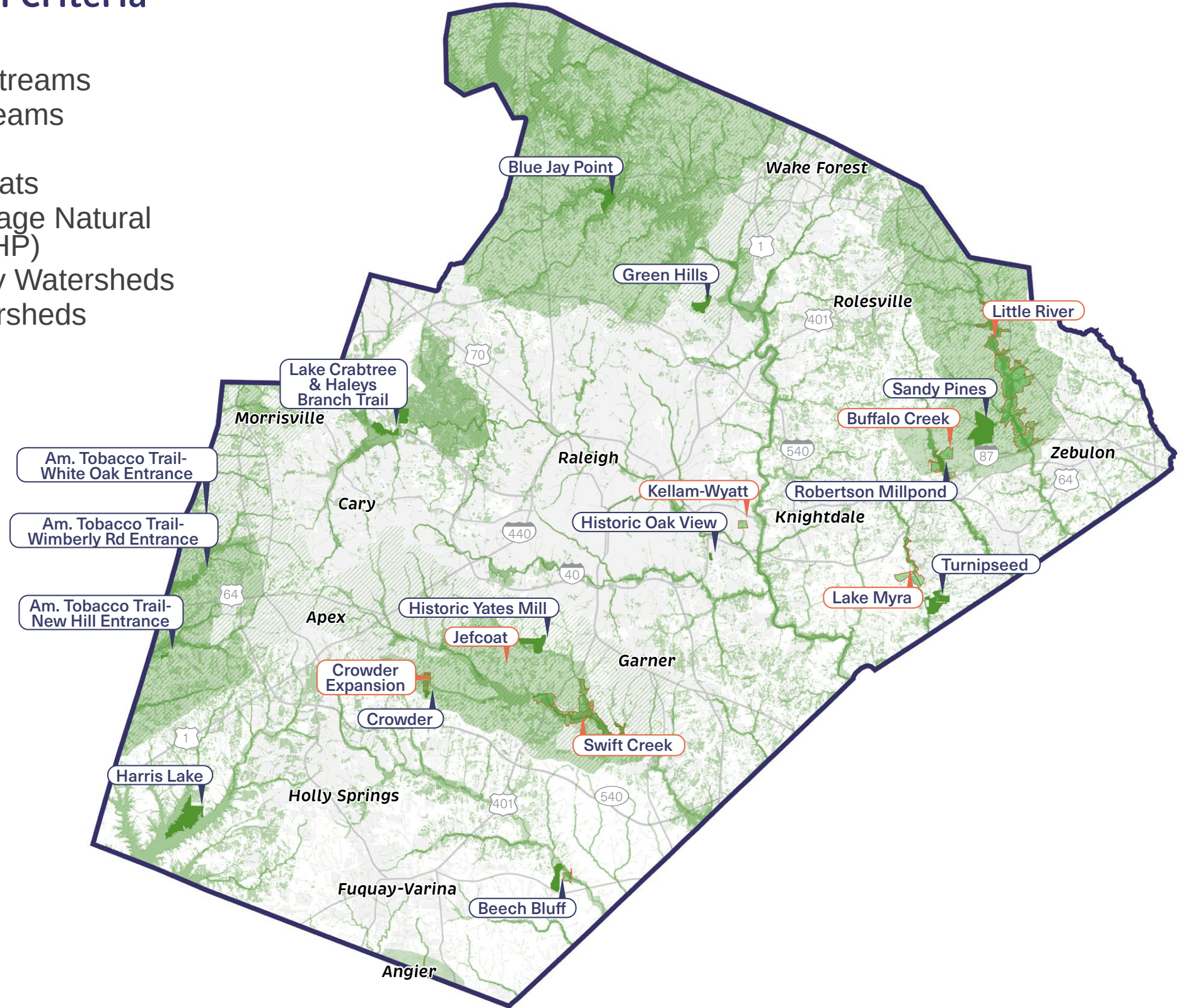
# FRAMEWORK PLAN - CONSERVATION PRIORITY

## Prioritizing Conservation

This map identifies areas with the highest conservation value across Wake County by combining multiple natural resource and water protection factors. It highlights lands that are critical to protecting water quality, reducing flood risk, supporting wildlife habitat, and preserving ecologically significant landscapes. These conservation priority areas can also inform greenway planning and open space acquisition, helping to ensure that future investments advance both recreational connectivity and long-term ecological goals.

## Conservation Criteria

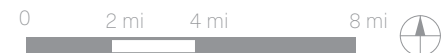
- Waterbodies
- Rivers and Streams
- Impaired Streams
- Floodplains
- Priority Habitats
- Natural Heritage Natural Areas (NCNHP)
- Water Supply Watersheds
- Critical Watersheds



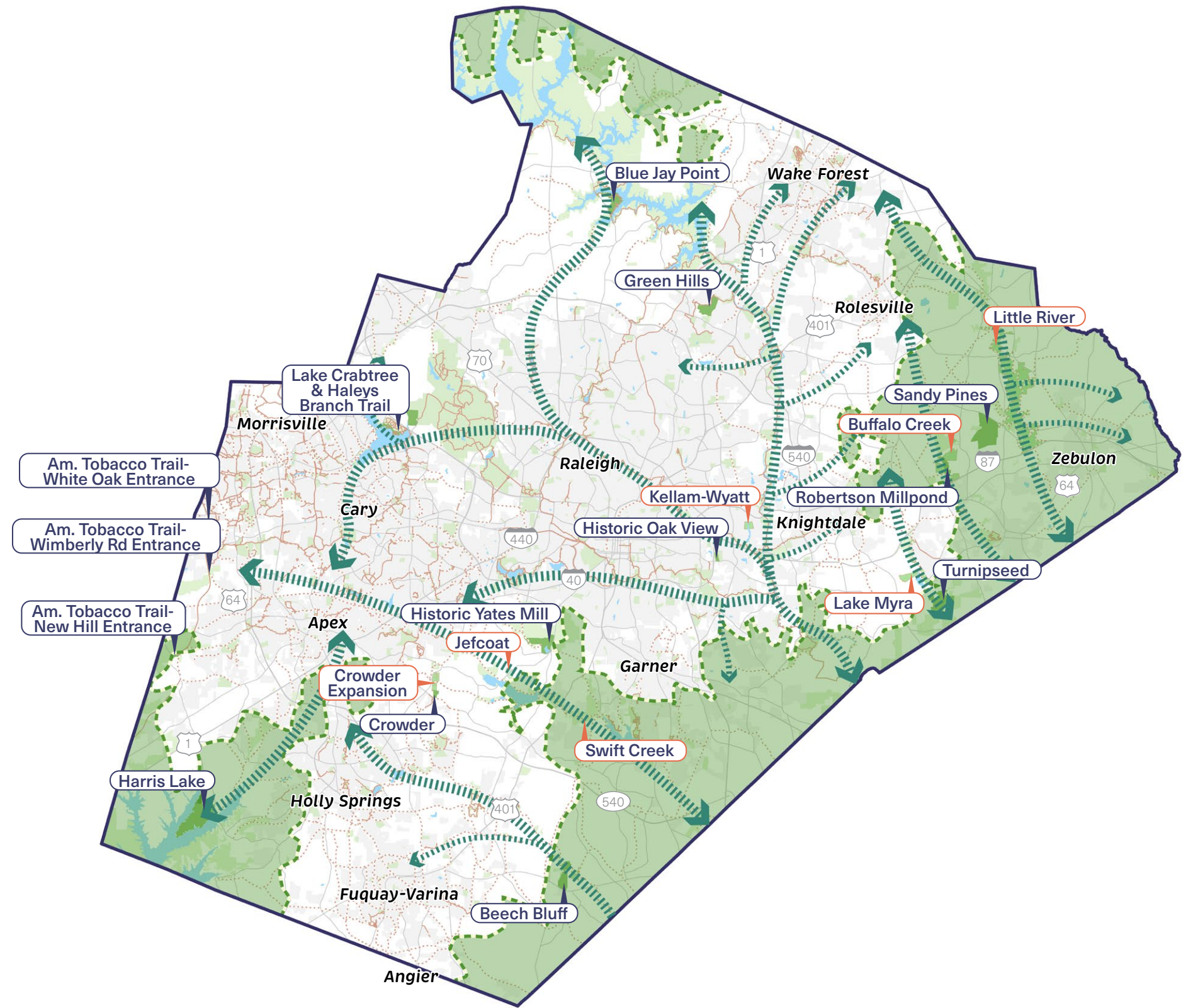
### LEGEND

- Wake County
- Municipalities
- Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Planned Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Roads
- Conservation Priority**
  - Higher Priority
  - Lower Priority

Design Workshop, Wake County, North Carolina  
Natural Heritage Program



# FRAMEWORK PLAN - CONNECTIVITY PRIORITY



## LEGEND

- Wake County
- Municipalities
- Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Planned Wake County Parks/Preserves
- Open Space
- Waterbody
- Roads
- Existing Greenways
- Planned Greenways
- Areas With No Greenway Access at a Park
- Enhanced Connectivity

# PLAN FRAMEWORK - STRATEGIES & ACTIONS

## GOALS



### PROTECT NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES (NC)

Conserve natural areas, water, biodiversity, working lands, farmland, and culturally significant landscapes to support environmental health, climate resilience, and a deeper connection to Wake County's natural and cultural heritage, supported by programs that foster stewardship, education and care of these resources.



### EXPAND RECREATION ACCESS (RA)

Invest in parks, programs, facilities and experiences that are welcoming, accessible and responsive to the needs of all residents.



### CONNECT PEOPLE & PLACES (CP)

Expand the greenway system, close gaps, and coordinate across jurisdictions to create a connected network that supports both ecological corridors and a seamless experience for walking, biking, rolling, and exploring nature.



### PROMOTE HEALTH, WELL-BEING & BELONGING (HB)

Design and program spaces that support physical and mental health, social connection, and a sense of belonging through welcoming and experience-rich park and nature environments for all community members.



### SUSTAIN & INVEST IN THE FUTURE (SI)

Anticipate population growth by aligning land acquisition, development, operations, and partnerships with long-term community needs and financial sustainability. This includes investment in staff, training, equipment, and maintenance and improvement of facilities to ensure the system remains safe, resilient, and high-quality.

## STRATEGY SUMMARIES

NC1: Protect and restore priority natural areas  
NC2: Expand nature and cultural education and stewardship opportunities  
NC3: Enhance sustainable land management practices  
NC4: Preserve, interpret, and integrate significant cultural and historic landscapes  
NC5: Coordinate conservation partnerships

RA1: Identify and address gaps in access  
RA2: Improve accessibility  
RA3: Collaborate with municipalities and local partners  
RA4: Provide programs that reflect community interests and cultures  
RA5: Enhance visibility and awareness of Wake County Parks places and program opportunities

CP1: Complete priority trail and greenway connections  
CP2: Coordinate a countywide greenway and ecological corridor network  
CP3: Enhance safety, comfort, and ecological function along trail corridors  
CP4: Coordinate planning, design, and maintenance

HB1: Strengthen partnerships that position parks, preserves, greenways, and open space as community health infrastructure  
HB2: Expand wellness, comfort, and sensory engagement in parks and preserves  
HB3: Activate parks, preserves and greenways year-round through welcoming programs, events, art, and cultural expression  
HB4: Track and communicate the health, environmental, and community benefits of parks and recreation

SI1: Develop a long-range investment and reinvestment plan  
SI2: Plan ahead for open space land acquisition and facility expansion  
SI3: Invest in appropriate and adequate staffing, training, and equipment  
SI4: Leverage partnerships and explore diverse funding sources  
SI5: Integrate sustainability and innovation  
SI6: Integrate climate-responsive planning, design, management, and operational practices  
SI7: Foster interdependent coordination  
SI8: Enhance customer satisfaction and overall system performance



# PROTECT NATURAL & CULTURAL RESOURCES

Conserve natural areas, water, biodiversity, working lands, farmland, and culturally significant landscapes to support environmental health, climate resilience, and a deeper connection to Wake County's natural and cultural heritage, supported by programs that foster stewardship, education and care of these resources.

## Key Strategies

- NC1:** Protect and restore priority natural areas that support water quality, habitat biodiversity and connectivity, climate adaptation, resilience and hazard mitigation.
- NC2:** Expand nature education and stewardship opportunities through volunteer programs, interpretive initiatives, and partnerships, such as with schools, libraries, and community organizations that connect residents to local landscapes through lifelong learning and outdoor exploration.
- NC3:** Promote sustainable land management practices such as native planting, soil restoration, tree conservation and invasive species control, and support working landscapes that enhance ecological health, local food systems, and rural heritage through regenerative land management.
- NC4:** Preserve, interpret, and integrate cultural and historic landscapes by honoring diverse histories and perspectives, which strengthen sense of place and connect cultural heritage to the surrounding natural environment. Preserve and steward living cultural landscapes that reflect the ongoing relationship between people, land, and heritage.
- NC5:** Coordinate conservation partnerships with land trusts, cultural organizations, and resource agencies to align goals, share knowledge, and maximize public benefit across the county and region.
- NC6:** Advance climate adaptation and mitigation by using natural systems as resilient infrastructure and tracking measurable conservation outcomes.

## Community Guidance

**Over 90%**  
of survey respondents  
said it was Important or  
Very Important to preserve  
open space and promote  
environmental stewardship.

## NC1: Protect and Restore Priority Natural Areas

**Protect and restore *priority natural areas* that support water quality, habitat biodiversity and connectivity, climate adaptation, resilience and hazard mitigation.**

### KEY ACTIONS

- NC1.1** Update criteria and regularly maintain with the latest available data a countywide, priority lands conservation map identifying lands critical for water quality, flood mitigation, habitat biodiversity and connectivity, climate resilience, and forest condition/ wildfire considerations where relevant, building on watershed priorities and recommendations from the County's One Water Plan.
- NC1.2** Advance land acquisition, easements, and partnerships in priority areas to protect and connect large, intact natural systems, strategic green corridors, and working lands that safeguard water resources, strengthen climate resilience, support biodiversity, sustain agricultural livelihoods, and deliver equitable community benefits, building on the priorities and recommendations of the Farmland Preservation Plan.
- NC1.3** Implement targeted restoration projects within County-owned parks, preserves and greenways, such as stream stabilization, wetland restoration, and forest health improvements, that enhance ecological function, support hazard mitigation, and foster long-term resilience.



# EXPAND RECREATION ACCESS

Invest in parks, programs, facilities, and experiences that are welcoming, accessible, and responsive to the needs of all residents.

## Key Strategies

- RA1:** Identify and address gaps in access to parks, outdoor recreation amenities, greenways and open space using population growth trends, service areas, and community feedback to ensure all Wake County residents have access to Wake County PROS places and programs.
- RA2:** Improve accessibility through design upgrades, adaptive programming, and amenities that support access, navigation, and usability for a range of ages, abilities, and interests within County parks, greenways and preserves.
- RA3:** Collaborate with municipalities and local partners to expand recreation opportunities through shared-use agreements, joint planning, and coordinated funding.
- RA4:** Provide programs that reflect community interests and cultures, including activities for families, youth, older adults, and new residents.
- RA5:** Enhance visibility and awareness of Wake County PROS places and program opportunities through signage, digital tools, and community outreach.



# CONNECT PEOPLE & PLACES

Expand the greenway system, close gaps, and coordinate across jurisdictions to create a connected network that supports both ecological corridors and a seamless experience for walking, biking, rolling, and exploring nature.

## Key Strategies

- CP1:** Complete priority trail and greenway connections that link communities, parks, nature preserves, and priority ecological corridors.
- CP2:** Coordinate a countywide greenway and ecological corridor network across jurisdictions to support habitat connectivity, watershed health, and a consistent, connected system.
- CP3:** Enhance safety, comfort, and ecological function along trail corridors to support people of all abilities while protecting and restoring natural systems.
- CP4:** Coordinate planning, design, and maintenance with towns, regional agencies, and state partners to ensure a consistent and connected network.



# PROMOTE HEALTH, WELL-BEING & BELONGING

Design and program spaces that support physical and mental health, social connection, and a sense of belonging through welcoming and experience-rich park and nature environments for all community members.

## Key Strategies

- HB1:** Strengthen partnerships that position parks, preserves, greenways, and open spaces as essential community health infrastructure, working with public health, schools, libraries and wellness organizations to align programs, outreach, and investment around shared health and well-being goals.
- HB2:** Expand wellness, comfort, and sensory engagement in parks and preserves by incorporating shaded walking trails, rest areas, nature play, tactile features, and universally accessible elements that invite exploration and support well-being.
- HB3:** Activate parks, preserves and greenways year-round throughout the year with welcoming programs, events, art, and cultural expression that encourage outdoor activity, learning, and community gathering while celebrating shared experiences across Wake County.
- HB4:** Track and communicate the health, environmental, and community benefits of parks and recreation through data, storytelling, and engagement.



# SUSTAIN & INVEST IN THE FUTURE

Anticipate population growth by aligning land acquisition, development, operations, and partnerships with long-term community needs and financial sustainability. This includes investment in staff, training, equipment, and maintenance and improvement of facilities to ensure the system remains safe, resilient, and high-quality.

## Key Strategies

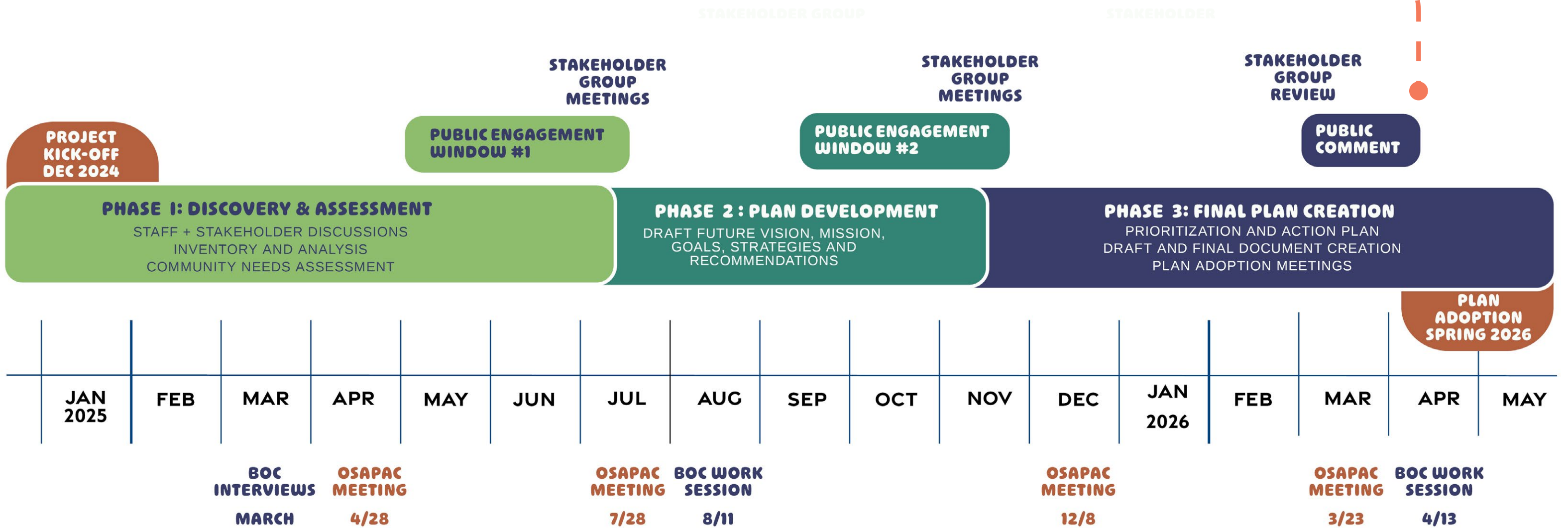
- SI1:** Develop a long-range investment and reinvestment plan to guide funding priorities for maintenance, upgrades, new development, and land acquisition across the park system, ensuring resources are aligned with community needs and long-term system sustainability.
- SI2:** Plan ahead for open space land acquisition and facility expansion in areas experiencing growth or with limited access to outdoor recreation experiences, while prioritizing lands and sites that contribute to climate resilience, watershed protection, and long-term system sustainability.
- SI3:** Invest in appropriate and adequate staffing, training, and equipment to expand operational capacity, maintain high-quality parks, open space, greenways and programs, and keep pace with increased demand and as climate conditions change.
- SI4:** Leverage partnerships and explore diverse funding sources including grants, sponsorships, and volunteer programs to support future needs.

- SI5:** Embed sustainability best practices and encourage innovation into design, construction, and maintenance standards to ensure long-term resilience.
- SI6:** Integrate climate-responsive planning, design, management, and operational practices into land acquisition, capital projects, maintenance, and partnerships to ensure parks, preserves, and greenways function as resilient natural and community infrastructure that reduce hazard impacts and support emergency response and recovery.
- SI7:** Foster interdepartmental coordination to align mission and goals for Wake County PROS.
- SI8:** Enhance customer satisfaction and overall system performance by consistently gathering, analyzing, and responding to feedback from park users, partners, and residents, and using that information to inform operations, maintenance, programming, and investment decisions.

**NEXT STEPS**

# THE PLANNING PROCESS

WE ARE HERE!



# **NEXT STEPS**

**Finalize Actions with Responsibilities, Partners & Timelines**

**Finalize edits responding to comments & review**