

The development of the *2011 Ottawa County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan* is the summation of many ongoing planning efforts initiated since 2000. The various tasks were performed by a range of participants including the Parks and Recreation Commission, parks staff, numerous consultants and the general public.

Overall, the development of this document evolved around a six-phase planning process. The first phase involved the gathering of base data pertaining to Ottawa County. This base data consists of two broad categories. The first involves information which provides a profile of the Ottawa County area including both social and physical elements. This data covers a range of topic areas from demographic and socioeconomic information to natural resource and transportation elements. The second category of data gathering involves information pertaining to recreation facilities throughout the County. This data includes elements of federal, state, county, city and township recreation facilities as well as private and commercial recreation providers.

The second phase of the document preparation involved the analysis of the gathered data, and in particular, identification of recreation deficiencies in the County. Attention was directed at specific recreation activities as well as broader issues including quality of services and ease of access. Input on recreation deficiencies was obtained through a variety of methods including a park user survey, a survey of county residents, public meetings, comment cards located in the parks, and input from a plan advisory committee.

Third, upon reaching an understanding of the recreation needs in the County parks and recreation system, the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed its mission statement and updated its goals, objectives and strategies to guide its efforts and further development of the plan. This, the fourth phase of the document preparation, sets the guidelines for developing specific actions to improve the delivery of recreation services in Ottawa County.

The fifth phase of the study involved the development of a comprehensive list of recommended actions aimed at addressing the plan goals and objectives. A capital improvement plan is then presented which assigns costs and relative priorities to the actions based on current budget and time parameters. Sixth, the Plan concludes with a discussion of administrative and operational concerns.

As a final note of introduction, it should be recognized that the Plan is not an end in itself but a decision-making tool in a continuing process of study as the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission strives to serve the present and future needs of Ottawa County residents.

