

Snapshot of Recreation in New Castle County



Introduction

New Castle County's diverse park system consists of parks ranging in size from less than one-quarter acre to more than 860 acres. The system encompasses neighborhood parks accessible to residents within a one-quarter mile walking distance, district parks located within a two-mile radius, and regional/reservation parks located within a 30-minute drive. County parks include a range of amenities supporting active and passive recreation, including small play areas, sports fields, family picnic areas and pavilions, fields, meadows and forests. Ponds, streams and rivers, as well as greenway trails, loop trails, and mountain biking trails, complement the county's parks. In addition, the county's parks and recreational offerings include historic buildings, museums, adult centers, community centers, and Police Athletic League centers. County staff and a volunteer corps make possible the implementation of youth, senior, adult and sports league activities and grassroots assistance at the parks.

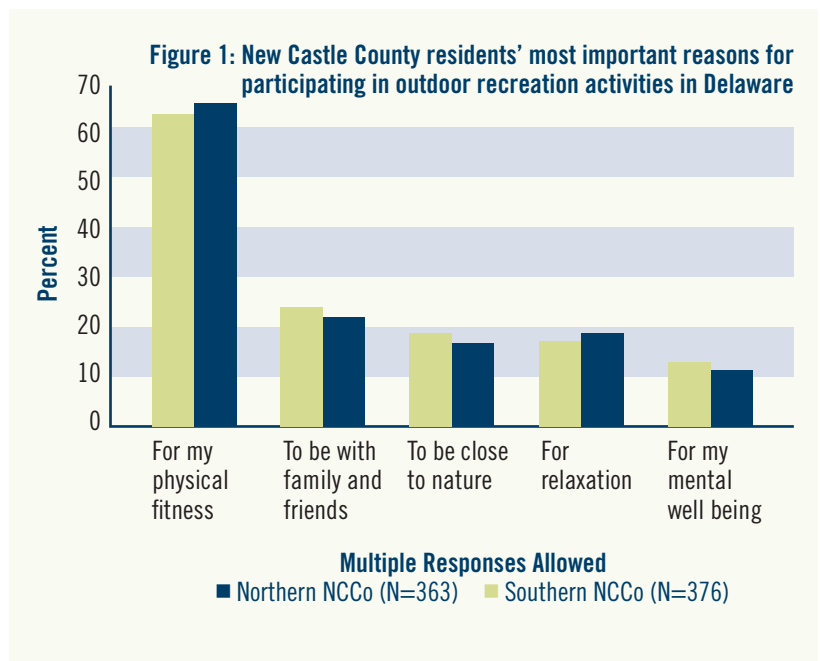
Our Residents' Needs and Opinions

The 2008 Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends Survey (ORPTS)¹ provides valuable information on New Castle County residents' recreation preferences and needs. Additionally, survey results allow comparison of responses for residents living in the northern and southern portions of the county, which have been designated as separate regions to aid in data collection and analysis and planning.²

Recreation Preferences

The majority of county residents (92% in both northern and southern New Castle County) responding to the survey indicate that outdoor recreation is important to them personally. Additionally, survey results show similarities in the activities that residents of both regions participate in most frequently. The top two activities for residents in both areas were walking or jogging (49% in northern and 52% in southern New Castle County) and bicycling (19% in northern and 20% in southern New Castle County). Figure 1 illustrates the most commonly cited reasons for participating in outdoor recreation activities.

When survey respondents were asked about their main reasons for visiting a particular outdoor recreation area, large percentages identified living nearby (65% in northern and 64% in southern New Castle County) and the existence of facilities for activities of interest (28% in northern and 27% in southern New Castle County).



Survey responses revealed different preferences among residents in the northern and southern portions of New Castle County regarding desired park facilities. Table 1 shows the facilities cited most often by those responding to the survey question about additional facilities for community parks.

Access to Recreation Opportunities

The majority of survey respondents (86% in northern and 76% in southern New Castle County) agree with the statement: “There are parks and/or outdoor recreation areas in or near my neighborhood that are easy to get to.” Proximity is important because large percentages of county residents (47% for northern and 63% for southern New Castle County) responding to the survey identified more outdoor facilities closer to home as likely to encourage them to participate more actively in outdoor recreation activities. Residents in both areas of the county identified the same top three items for what would encourage them to participate more actively in outdoor recreation activities. Following more outdoor facilities closer to home were more information about facilities and opportunities (38% for northern and 47% for southern New Castle County) and more opportunity to participate in organized activities (34% for northern and 39% for southern New Castle County).

Table 1: Facilities New Castle County residents would like to see added to community parks

Facility additions	Percent
For Northern New Castle County (N=131)	
More, cleaner, better bathrooms	17
Playgrounds for children ages 2–5	14
Hiking/walking trails	13
Playgrounds for children ages 6–12	13
Biking paths	11
Paved walkways	11
For Southern New Castle County (N=140)	
Outdoor public swimming pools	15
Biking paths	14
More, cleaner, better bathrooms	14
Hiking/walking trails	13
Public tennis courts	11

Park Maintenance

More than three-fourths of county residents (81% in northern and 78% in southern New Castle County) responding to the survey rate the overall upkeep of parks and outdoor recreation areas in their community as “excellent” or “good.”

Funding Priorities

Since the majority of respondents consider outdoor recreation important to them personally, it’s not surprising that nearly all survey respondents from New Castle County (97% from northern and 95% from southern New Castle County) think that funding for public parks should be an important priority for state and local policy makers. Similarly, 89% of northern and 88% of southern New Castle County residents thought acquiring more land for parks and open space should be an important priority.

Parks and Recreation Can Help Address Challenges Facing Our Residents

Parks and recreation programs provide a means for children and their families to be physically active and live a healthy lifestyle. This is critical given the childhood obesity epidemic nationally and in Delaware. Data from 2008 reveal that 39.7% of children ages two to 17 in Delaware and 40.3% of children ages two to 17 in New Castle County are overweight or obese.³ Parks and recreation programs provide children an outlet for engaging in positive activities.

Initiatives

New Castle County is planning to implement a number of important initiatives that need funding and support. The county has plans in place to expand its recreational offerings for county residents. These include constructing Glasgow Regional Park Phase III, establishing additional linear greenway trails, developing a skate park and planning additional skate spots, constructing additional libraries and rebuilding the Delcastle Softball Quad, which is a major competition sports complex. Planned initiatives requiring funding include constructing a spray park (an interactive water playground) at Glasgow Regional Park and land preservation.

References

1. The Outdoor Recreation Participation and Trends Survey (ORTPS), a statewide telephone survey, informs development of the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). The Parks Resource Office, Division of Parks and Recreation, Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control manage the SCORP. For more information on the SCORP, visit <http://www.dnrec.delaware.gov/parks/Information/Pages/scorp.aspx>.
2. The boundary between northern and southern New Castle County runs south of Newark to the Delaware River between historic New Castle and Delaware City.
3. Nemours Health and Prevention Services. 2008 Delaware Survey of Childrens’ Health.