



Park Operations & Maintenance Levels of Service Update

Following FY19 Budget discussions, an initiative was launched to evaluate and define levels of service (LOS) related to the operation and maintenance of the County's parks. LOS help define and communicate shared expectations among staff, leadership, the public, and the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (BCC).

This report provides a high-level overview of findings to date from the Park and Conservation Resources (PCR) LOS initiative and offers recommendations for immediate action based on currently available data. Further collection of accurate mowing acreage and in-field verification of the park rangers' time study is still required to inform decision-making on LOS for parks operations and maintenance. Recommendations presented in this report support a phased approach to allow immediate action to be taken to address gaps while data collection is completed to support a full analysis and comprehensive recommendations, anticipated in July.

Park Operations and Maintenance LOS Analysis

Current Level of Service

Currently, the only Board-approved LOS for PCR is documented in the County's Comprehensive Plan, under Recreation and Open Space Strategy 2.1.1.1 which defines the adopted LOS standard as 14.0 acres of parks and environmental lands available for every 1,000 residents. Pinellas County currently has 21.7 acres of parks and environmental lands for every 1,000 residents.

This network of 37 parks, environmental lands, boat ramps, and beach access points serves the County's 974,996 residents, welcomes more than 18 million visitors annually, and spans 21,110 acres. The County's parks include regional, community, neighborhood, and linear parks as well as special use facilities, environmental land management areas, and preserves located across the County. PCR is responsible for operating, maintaining, and patrolling each of the County's parks supported by a staff of 181 FTEs and a total operating budget of \$21,697,220. The focus of this analysis is centered on LOS standards related to the operation and maintenance of the County's parks.

Park rangers as well as trades and horticulture staff each have roles in maintaining and operating the County's parks and environmental lands. Park rangers oversee the day-to-day park operations, which include but are not limited to cleaning restrooms, shelters, and tables; removing waste and litter; trimming small branches¹; inspecting playgrounds; spraying for weeds; and making minor repairs². Horticulture provides larger branch

¹ Park rangers are expected to trim tree and bush branches that are six inches or less in diameter. Anything larger is to be handled by Horticulture or Public Works.

² Repairs that take 30 minutes or less are expected to be fixed by park rangers. All others and specialty repairs require a Trades' staff member.

trimming and mowing. Trades makes repairs for moderate to severe issues and provides specialty services for electrical, plumbing, masonry, and carpentry. These documented responsibilities, including what tasks need to be completed and how often, serve as the baseline LOS standards for the purpose of this analysis.

Peer Comparison

A review of ten Florida counties³ found an average of 30 acres of parks and environmental lands per 1,000 residents, yet nationally, the Trust for Public Lands states the median park acreage for high-density cities is 6.9 acres per 1,000 residents. As the most densely populated county in the state, it can be difficult to make direct comparisons to other counties however, by comparing the average FTEs per park, average acres per FTE, and average cost per acre across counties, we can put such differences between localities into context and identify peers that we can look to for what's working well.

County	Average FTEs per Park	Average Acres per FTE	Average Cost per Acre
Pinellas	4.9	117	\$1,027.82
Average	3	111	\$2,635.98

When compared to peers, Pinellas County maintains more FTEs per park but has more acres per FTE and less funding dedicated to support their operations. Follow-up analysis is being done to examine these differences in more detail to understand what we may be able to learn from the experiences and strategies of our peers.

Park Ranger Time Study Analysis

Based on preliminary data from an in-progress time study of park ranger tasks, current park ranger staffing levels are inadequate to meet existing maintenance and operations management standards (see *PCR LOS Attachment I*) under the current operating model. In FY19, PCR was budgeted for 85 park rangers, or 176,800 FTE hours. Based on currently available data, an estimated 588 FTEs or 1.2 million FTE hours per year would be required to meet the documented LOS standards for park ranger tasks under the current operational model. This leaves a deficit of over one million FTE hours annually, or 503 FTEs. Due to resource constraints, park rangers' capacity to perform routine tasks such as patrolling, engaging park visitors, and preventative maintenance has been reduced.

This preliminary analysis shows that the documented LOS for park ranger tasks cannot be met under the current operating model and staffing levels. In phase II recommendations, there are opportunities for PCR to review current park ranger tasks and their frequencies to identify opportunities to align documented LOS with appropriate staffing strategies.

Recommendations

Phase 1 - Operational Shifts:

Recommendation: Develop and implement chief ranger work order review process that includes daily park inspections and clarifies defined responsibilities for chiefs and park rangers.

Justification: Through focus group interviews, it was identified that park rangers currently submit requests directly to the Trades section sometimes resulting in resources being diverted to address requests unnecessarily. Changing the workflow to allow chiefs to review requests prior to

³ Peer counties include Broward, Duval, Hillsborough, Lee, Marion, Martin, Palm Beach, Pasco, Sarasota, and Seminole Counties. These are historically used for PCR peer comparisons due to size, budget, or within close geographic range.

submission will allow Trades staff to focus on addressing critical issues and preventative maintenance.

Recommendation: Implement a “Pack It In, Pack It Out” program⁴ on the Fred Marquis Pinellas Trail and reduce the number of waste cans to minimize park ranger transit time.

Justification: Waste management and transport is a time commitment of approximately 936 hours annually that could be refocused on patrolling and maintaining the Pinellas Trail.

Recommendation: Increase the Sawgrass regional park network from 3.0 to 4.0 FTEs by relocating a park ranger from another regional park system.

Justification: The 3,703.7 acres and 435,314 annual visitors of Weedon Island currently has limited capacity for active patrol and monitoring. The 3.0 FTEs that are part of the Sawgrass regional park system are responsible for Sawgrass Park, Lealman Neighborhood Park, Ray Neri Community Park, and Weedon Island Preserve. Fort De Soto, Phillippe, and Anderson Parks⁵ offer the greatest opportunity for park ranger relocation to Sawgrass Park.

Recommendation: Relocate 1.0 General Maintenance Trades FTE from the central Trades office in Largo, FL to Fort De Soto Park full-time.

Justification: Fort De Soto Park accounts for approximately 22% of all Trades work orders among all regional park systems at any given time. The drive from Largo is approximately 1.5 hours round trip for Trades staff, resulting in an estimated 800 hours annually spent on driving to Fort De Soto alone. This comes at a cost to the County of an estimated \$28,000 annually.

Phase 2 – Further analysis to support establishing defined LOS

- Advertise a Request for Information (RFI) for common operations and maintenance tasks to establish point of comparison for evaluating cost of service.
- Complete park ranger task time study and evaluate tasks and their frequencies.
- Review PCR’s operational model to identify additional opportunities for efficiencies through the restructuring of North and South Park Operations and Horticulture.
- Complete mapping process of mow and no-mow zones and work with SPM to digitize physical maps in GIS. Without clear indication of how much land is mowed and maintained, it is challenging to evaluate cost-effectiveness.

⁴ Pack It In, Pack It Out is an international program that promotes outdoor ethics by encouraging park guests to pack up and take anything they brought to the park with them out of the park. This program is utilized by the National Park Service, Boy Scouts of America, the Outer Banks Beaches of North Carolina, the Pacific Coast Trail, and Sarasota County.

⁵ The park rangers at Sawgrass Park have a ratio of 1,374.9 acres of land for every one park ranger or 312,611 visitors for every one park ranger. Fort De Soto Park currently has one park ranger for every 49 acres or 96,181 visitors. Philippe Park currently has one park ranger for every 23 acres or 256,203 visitors. Anderson Park currently has one park ranger for every 34 acres or 164,637 visitors.