AC44
ALBEMARLE COUNTY 2044

PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE



GOAL: *Albemarle County will have a connected and accessible network of parks and trails with both active and passive recreation opportunities to improve quality of life, offer active modes of transportation, enhance climate resiliency, and provide access to nature. Parks, trails, and amenities will be welcoming and inclusive and meet the needs of our growing community.*

Objective 1: Plan for the parks and recreation needs of current and future community members through a planning process that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to existing and emerging needs.

Objective 2: Increase County ownership and use of land for parks, greenways, blueways, and recreation facilities, prioritizing recreation opportunities in the Development Areas.

Objective 3: Accelerate the development of urban parks, pocket parks, and greenways in the Development Areas to increase the percentage of community members within the Development Areas that are within a 15-minute walk from a public park and/or public greenway trail.

Objective 4: Increase access to County parks and trails with an emphasis on inclusion, equity, and universal access.

Objective 5: Increase the environmental resilience of County parks and greenways while restoring the health of the natural environment.

Objective 6: Expand and improve the trail networks and blueways in County parks and greenways and increase multimodal connections to parks and greenway trails.

Objective 7: Increase the availability and accessibility of recreation programs, classes, and facilities, including athletic fields.





INTRODUCTION

Albemarle County is known for its natural beauty and sweeping mountain views. We value outdoor recreation and enjoy spending time in nature. Our public parks, recreation, and open space system includes a variety of features and amenities, such as managed parks, greenways, blueways, community centers, nature preserves, and athletic fields. These community assets provide access to nature, support active lifestyles and public health, and preserve our environment. Our managed parks offer athletic facilities for organized sports, playgrounds, and opportunities to spend time in natural areas. Greenways provide multimodal transportation opportunities, connections to key destinations, and habitat for terrestrial species. Blueways (or water trails) provide access to streams, rivers and other waterways for boating and paddling along with habitat for aquatic species. Our blueways also protect natural areas such as steep slopes and vegetated stream buffers.

Albemarle County's parkland is a major element of our community's "green systems" that connect important environmental features such as forested hillsides, streams, and riparian corridors. This same green space preserves valuable environmental assets, like wildlife habitat, tree canopies that sequester carbon and provide shade, and stream buffers which result in reduced erosion and sedimentation and improved water quality. Our current and future parkland preserves natural landscapes and scenic beauty, elevating both the Development Areas and Rural Area by making them more attractive place to live and work.



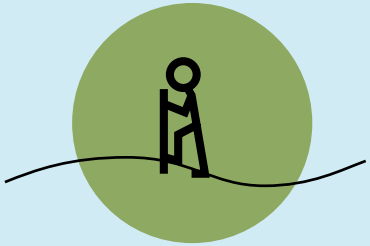
Parks & nature areas provide opportunities to educate the public about local history and the natural environment. Photo: Ivy Creek Natural Area



Facilities like this playground at Woodbrook Elementary School provide opportunties for public recreation access.

Albemarle County Parks and Recreation Department Mission

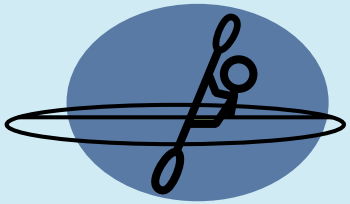
Provide a unique system of parks, trails, and recreational experiences, while being superior stewards of the natural environment.



Greenways

Are linear natural open spaces areas that typically contain public access trails. For example, Old Mills Trail provides approximately 2.5 miles of trail along the Rivanna River.

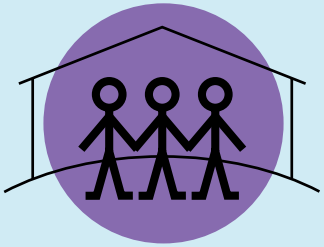




Blueways

Are water trails with river access points, signage, and related amenities for water recreation such as Brook Hill River Park that provides access to an additional 6 miles of Rivanna River.



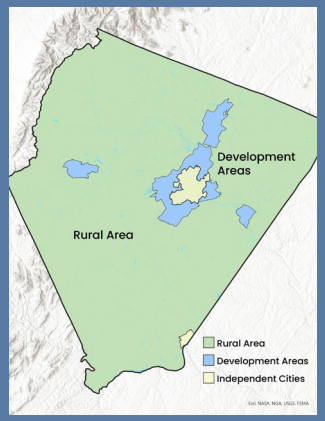


Community Centers

Are buildings and associated outdoor areas offering indoor recreation, classes, and special events.



PARKS BY LOCATION



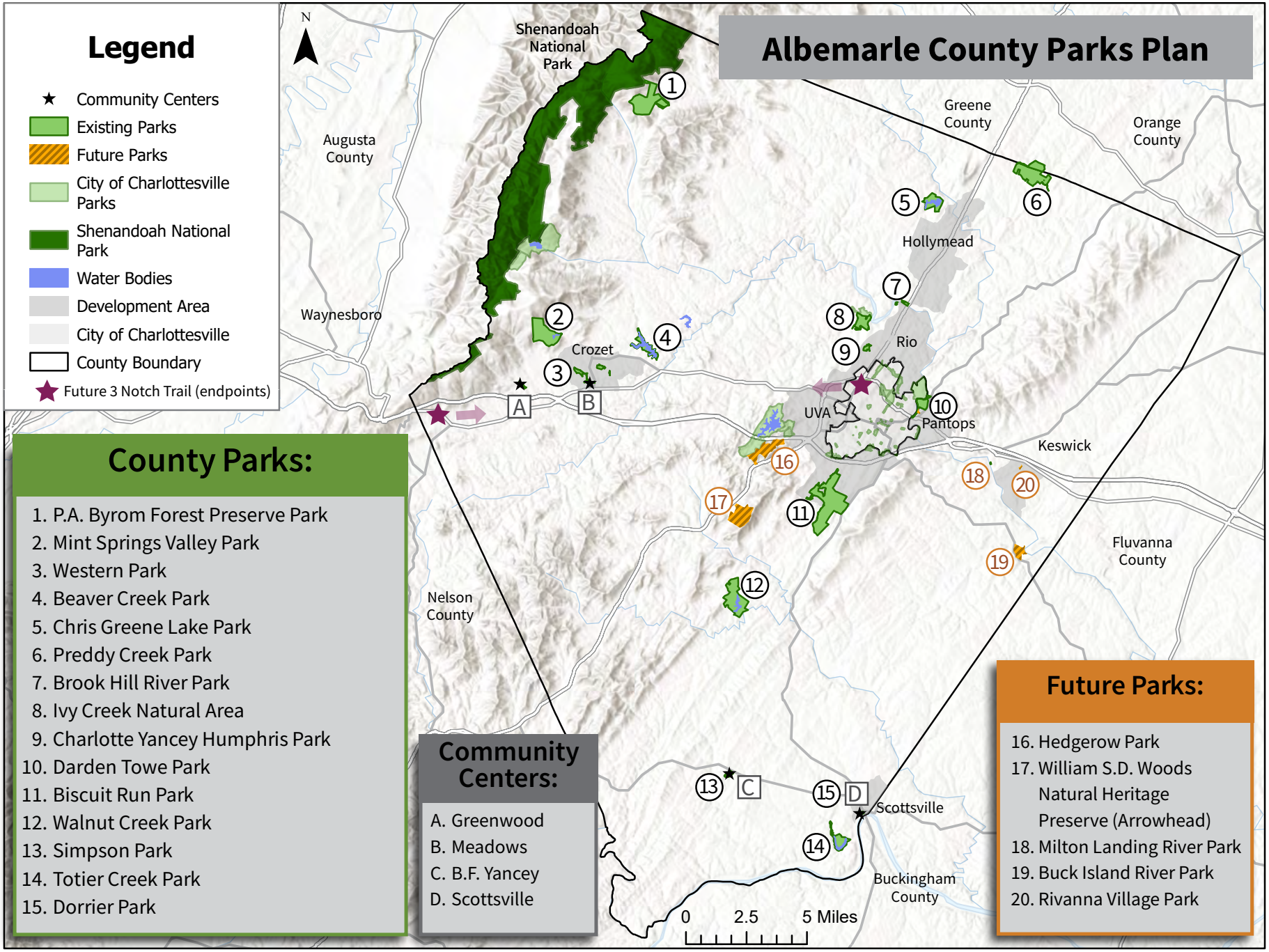
Parks in the Rural Area typically have different amenities and features than parks in the Development Areas. Rural Area parks are primarily intended as recreation opportunities with scenic and natural resources, such as mountains, streams, and forests. These parks are usually geared toward hiking, walking, biking, paddling, fishing, and equestrian uses. Parkland provides an opportunity to increase multi-cultural and historic awareness. Interpretative signage and other physical and digital media can educate visitors about Albemarle County's cultural heritage, including especially less frequently known histories. In the Development Areas, park sizes tend to be smaller and have amenities like playgrounds, athletic fields, and indoor recreation facilities. While many of the actions in this chapter apply throughout the county some are specific to either the Development Areas or Rural Area.







Albemarle County Parks Plan



County Parks:

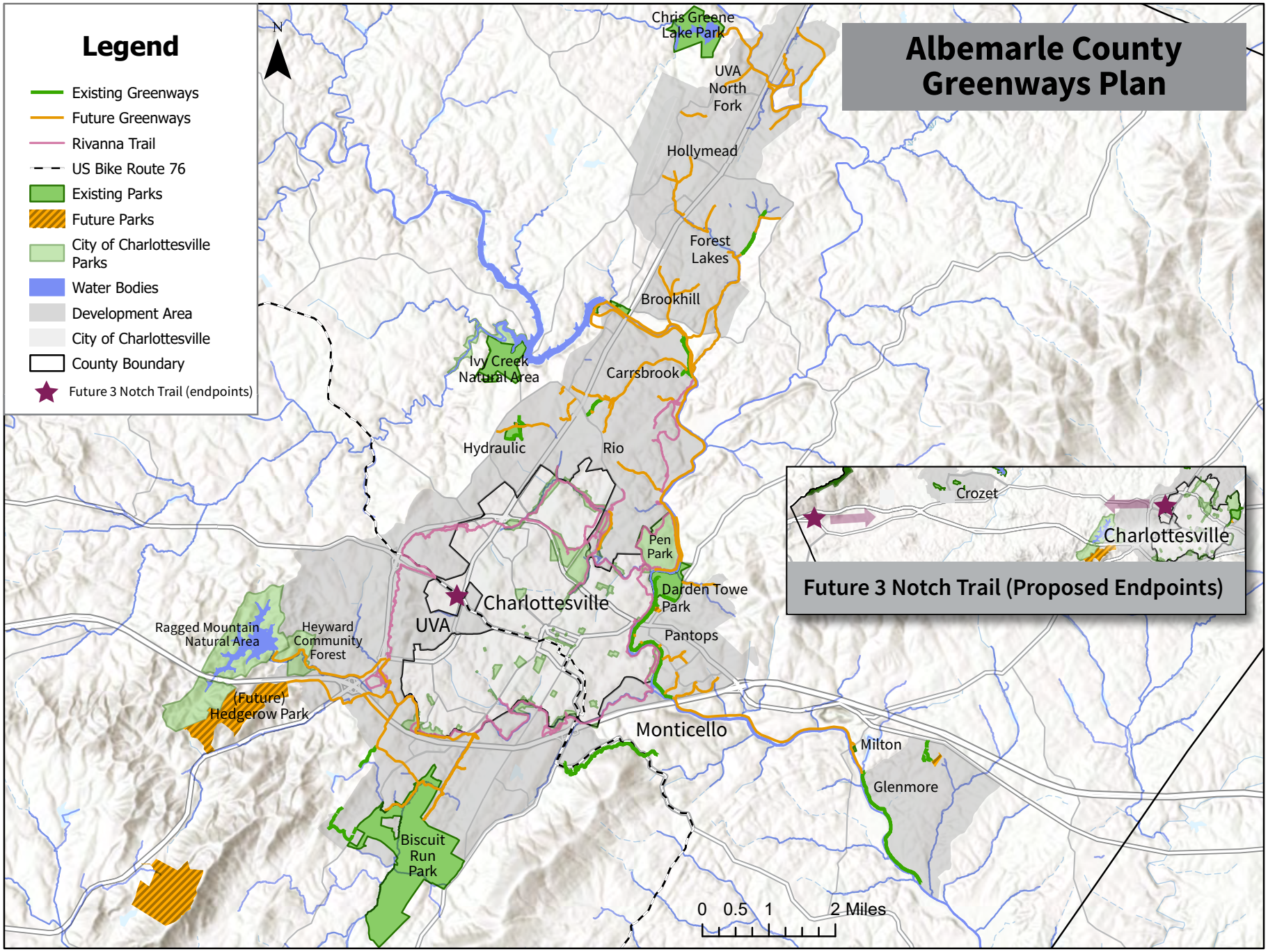
1. P.A. Byrom Forest Preserve Park
2. Mint Springs Valley Park
3. Western Park
4. Beaver Creek Park
5. Chris Greene Lake Park
6. Preddy Creek Park
7. Brook Hill River Park
8. Ivy Creek Natural Area
9. Charlotte Yancey Humphris Park
10. Darden Towe Park
11. Biscuit Run Park
12. Walnut Creek Park
13. Simpson Park
14. Totier Creek Park
15. Dorrier Park

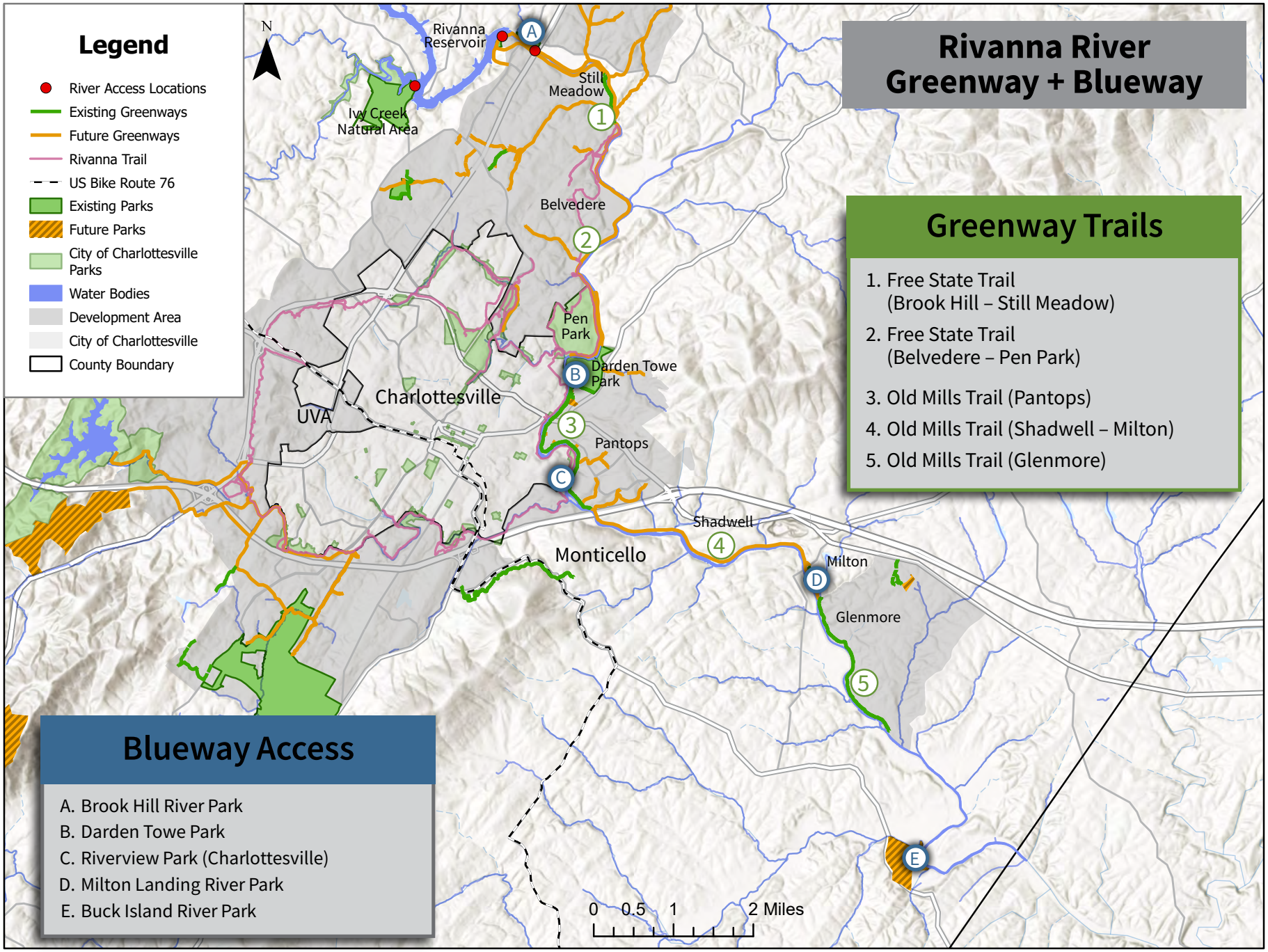
Community Centers:

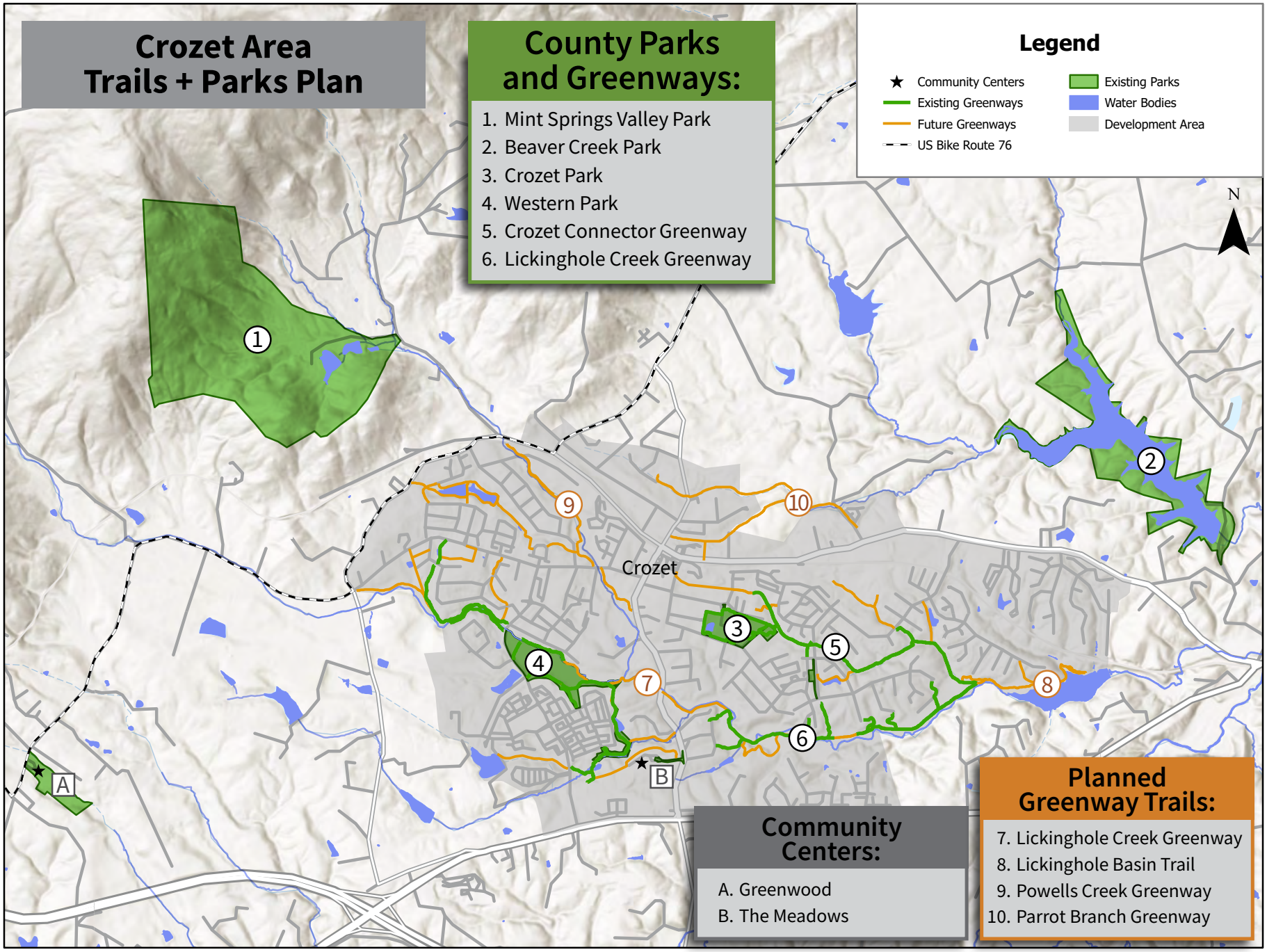
A. Greenwood
B. Meadows
C. B.F. Yancey
D. Scottsville

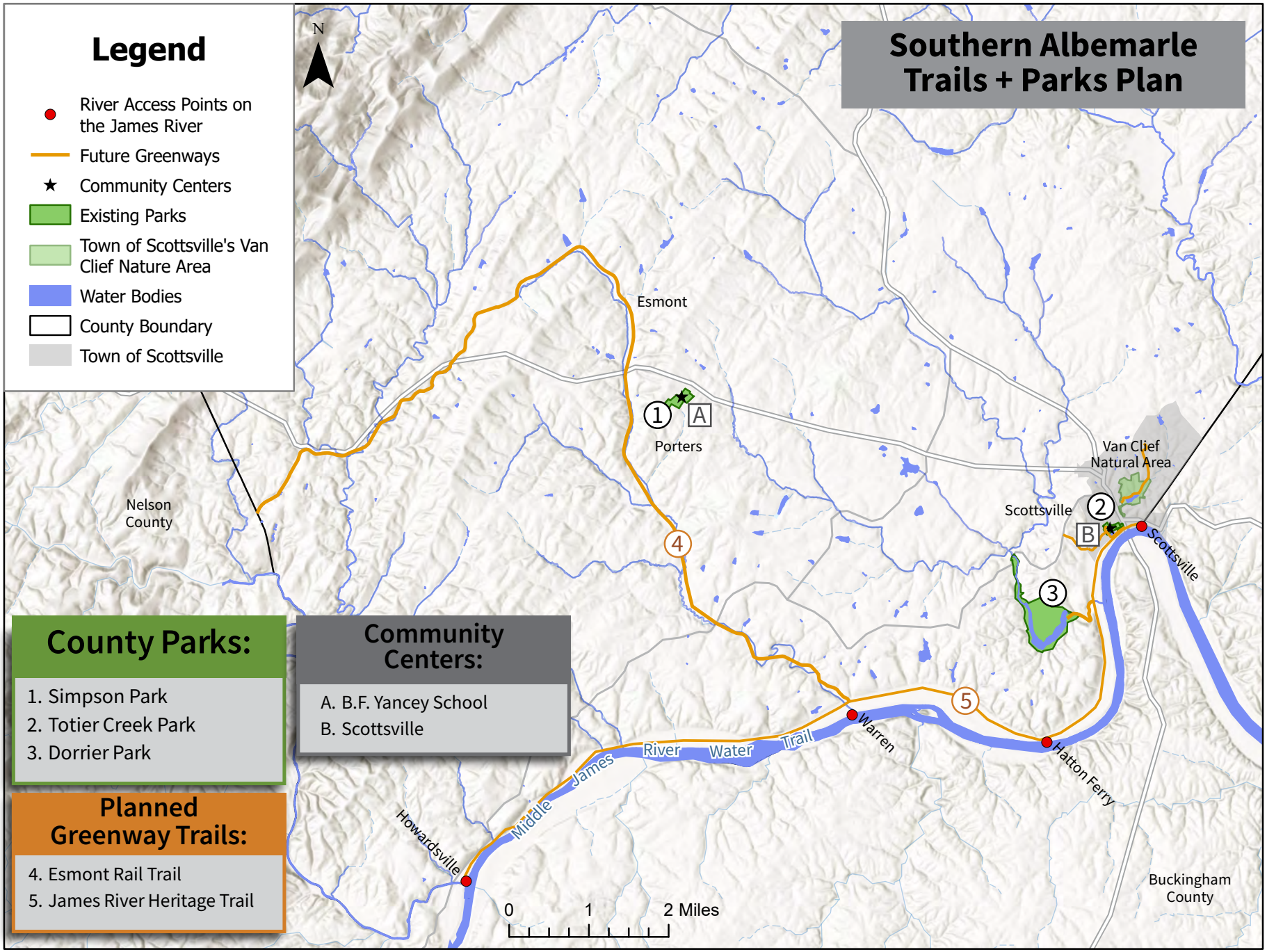
Future Parks:

16. Hedgerow Park
17. William S.D. Woods Natural Heritage Preserve (Arrowhead)
18. Milton Landing River Park
19. Buck Island River Park
20. Rivanna Village Park

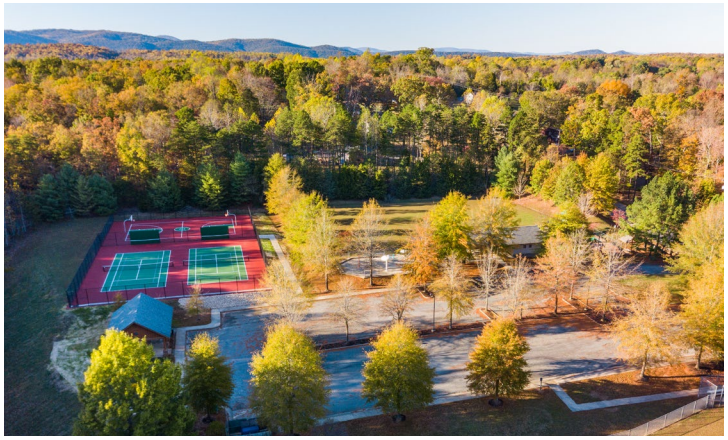

Albemarle County Greenways Plan
Legend
Existing Greenways
Future Greenways
Rivanna Trail
US Bike Route 76
Existing Parks
Future Parks
City of Charlottesville Parks
Water Bodies
Development Area
City of Charlottesville
County Boundary
Future 3 Notch Trail (endpoints)
N
Chris Greene Lake Park
UVA North Fork
Hollymead
Forest Lakes
Brookhill
Carrsbrook
Ivy Creek Natural Area
Hydraulic
Rio
Pen Park
Darden Towe Park
Pantops
Charlottesville
UVA
Ragged Mountain Natural Area
Heyward Community Forest
(Future) Hedgerow Park
Biscuit Run Park
Monticello
Milton
Glenmore
Crozet
Charlottesville
Future 3 Notch Trail (Proposed Endpoints)
0 0.5 1 2 Miles


Legend
River Access Locations
Existing Greenways
Future Greenways
Rivanna Trail
US Bike Route 76
Existing Parks
Future Parks
City of Charlottesville Parks
Water Bodies
Development Area
City of Charlottesville
County Boundary
N
Rivanna Reservoir
Ivy Creek Natural Area
Still Meadow
Belvedere
Pen Park
Darden Towe Park
Charlottesville
UVA
Pantops
Monticello
Shadwell
Milton
Glenmore
0 0.5 1 2 Miles
Rivanna River Greenway + Blueway
Greenway Trails
1. Free State Trail (Brook Hill – Still Meadow)
2. Free State Trail (Belvedere – Pen Park)
3. Old Mills Trail (Pantops)
4. Old Mills Trail (Shadwell – Milton)
5. Old Mills Trail (Glenmore)
Blueway Access
A. Brook Hill River Park
B. Darden Towe Park
C. Riverview Park (Charlottesville)
D. Milton Landing River Park
E. Buck Island River Park


Crozet Area
Trails + Parks Plan
County Parks and Greenways:
1. Mint Springs Valley Park
2. Beaver Creek Park
3. Crozet Park
4. Western Park
5. Crozet Connector Greenway
6. Lickinghole Creek Greenway
Legend
Community Centers
Existing Greenways
Future Greenways
US Bike Route 76
Existing Parks
Water Bodies
Development Area
N
Crozet
Community Centers:
A. Greenwood
B. The Meadows
Planned Greenway Trails:
7. Lickinghole Creek Greenway
8. Lickinghole Basin Trail
9. Powells Creek Greenway
10. Parrot Branch Greenway


Legend
River Access Points on the James River
Future Greenways
Community Centers
Existing Parks
Town of Scottsville's Van Clief Nature Area
Water Bodies
County Boundary
Town of Scottsville
N
Southern Albemarle Trails + Parks Plan
Esmont
Porters
Nelson County
Van Clief Natural Area
Scottsville
Warren
Hatton Ferry
Howardsville
Buckingham County
James River Water Trail
Middle
0 1 2 Miles
County Parks:
1. Simpson Park
2. Totier Creek Park
3. Dorrier Park
Community Centers:
A. B.F. Yancey School
B. Scottsville
Planned Greenway Trails:
4. Esmont Rail Trail
5. James River Heritage Trail







COMMUNITY GATHERING SPACES

Parks, trails, and community centers provide important public gathering spaces. They are a cost-free opportunity to recreate, to connect with nature, and to gather with family, friends, and other social groups. These gathering spaces create a space for good-natured, informal conversations, to build relationships and empathy for others, and offers opportunities for increased community contacts and connections. Maintaining and enhancing equitable public access to these important community-building spaces that do not require admission fees or retail purchases is a community priority.

The County's parks and trails system should be welcoming and accessible for all community members and visitors. For example, community input highlighted the need for more facilities and programs for teenagers in our community. Designing parks and amenities for a variety of users and experiences ensures that there are a variety of ways to recreate, play, and connect with nature and with one another. Universal access to parks means designing spaces to be usable and inclusive for all, regardless of age, ability, or mobility. Accessibility provides greater opportunities for recreation and social gathering, including for a person using a wheelchair, a parent pushing a stroller, a person using crutches, or a person with arthritis. To support these needs, this chapter recommends improving universal access to parks and trails, including ADA-accessible trails and facilities and improving transit access.

Albemarle County has...



15 County Parks



4 Community Centers



Over **85** miles of trails

and is home to parts of...



Shenandoah National Park



The Appalachian Trail



US Bike Rt. 76

INTEGRATING WITH TRANSPORTATION

There is a strategic need to integrate multimodal planning and parks and greenways planning when increasing the total miles of trails and greenways to meet demand. Trails and greenways of all types provide opportunities for recreation and access to nature. Those that are improved to a higher standard, such as a shared use path, can provide important linkages in the multimodal transportation network. Trail systems can connect community members and visitors to Activity Centers, employment districts, parks, schools, and other key destinations, providing an alternative to driving. To enhance connectivity and meet community demand, recommendations in this chapter include increasing miles of trails, accelerating greenways and blueways delivery, and actively coordinating with the public and private sectors on development and transportation projects.

RESTORING THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Parks and trails are an opportunity to showcase, protect, and restore the local natural environment, while increasing community resilience and mitigating the impacts of climate change. Mature native forests found in our parklands improve air quality, mitigate urban heat island effects, provide stormwater management functions, and reduce flood impacts. Since parkland is publicly owned and maintained, local public parks are a great opportunity for the County to demonstrate environmentally sustainable practices. These practices may include managing and removing invasive species, using native plants and trees, careful siting of trails, protecting and restoring stream banks, and designating 'no mow zones'. There are also many opportunities for community members to get involved through partnerships and volunteering. Additional recommendations are included in the Environmental Stewardship chapter of this Plan.

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

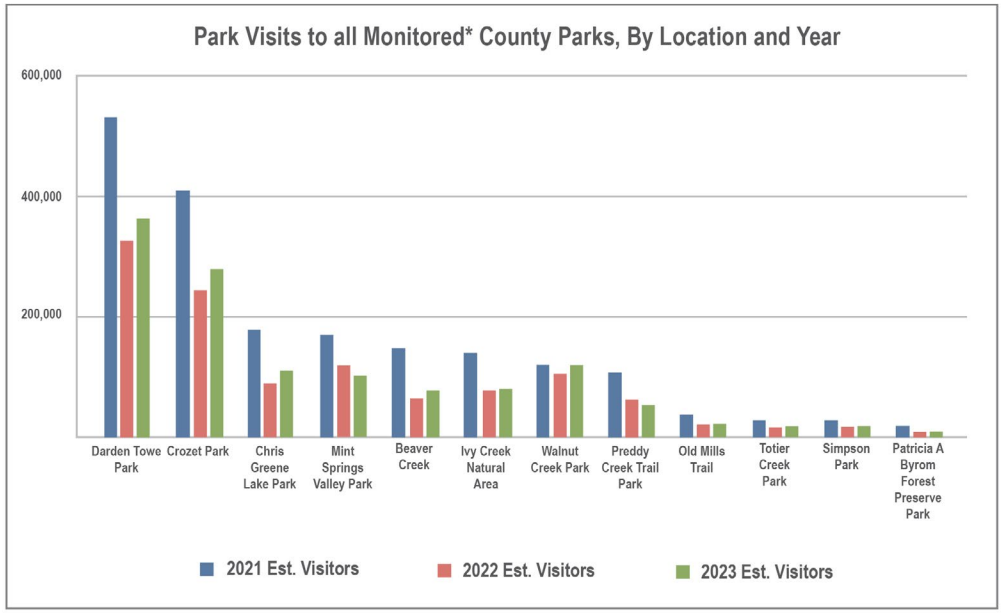
Per the July 1, 2023 United States Census estimates, 115,676 community members live in the county. ABy 2044, the Weldon Cooper Center of the University of Virginia projects Albemarle will gain approximately 31,000 more people. These trends and projections equate to increasing demand for the county's parks, trails, water recreation, athletic fields, and recreational programs, especially in the Development Areas. The growing demand and use are partially reflected through the park visitation data that ACPR staff have collected at most (but not all) county parks and facilities. To meet increasing demand, ACPR is actively planning, designing, and developing multiple additional parks and other recreation amenities in different areas of the county. Future County Parks will be developed and operated for public access and recreational use when funding and other resources are available. Recently, the Board of Supervisors, the community, several County departments and VDOT worked together to create the Free Bridge Promenade pilot program by coordinating signage, gates, and public outreach to close Free Bridge Lane to vehicular traffic and allowing pedestrians and cyclists to enjoy the area car-free. This project is one innovative way the County is meeting the growing demand for safe and accessible trails.

Parkland is currently acquired through the County's Capital Improvement Plan, grants, proffers, and the Albemarle County Parks Foundation. The recommendations in this chapter support accelerating the delivery of urban parks and recreation to meet these needs. Other key priorities are increasing accessibility to parks and trails for all community members, ensuring park planning and maintenance preserves and restores the natural environment, and integrating trails and greenways with multimodal transportation planning.

TOTAL VISITS TO COUNTY PARKS

YEAR	TOTAL* PARK VISITS	CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
2019	1,450,765 Total* Park Visits	N/A
2020	1,682,180 Total* Park Visits	15.9% increase over previous year
2021	1,914,509 Total* Park Visits	13.8% increase over previous year
2022	1,895,243 Total* Park Visits	1.0% decrease over previous year
2023	2,061,931 Total* Park Visits	8.9% increase over previous year

**Exludes Charlotte Y Humphris Park, Dorrier Park, Brook Hill River Park, Milton Landing, Crozet Greenway trails, and Glenmore section of Rivanna Greenway trail.*







Currently residents and visitors are using existing boat launches and river access points at levels which exceed existing capacity and infrastructure. Recommended projects include the implementation of planned enhancements and new amenities for the Rivanna River Greenway and Blueway, the expansion of County Greenways and Blueways along other waterways, and the provision of additional recreation opportunities at lakes and reservoirs. Additionally, the 2018 Albemarle County Parks & Recreation Community Needs Assessment and recent community input highlighted the need for more athletic fields and recreational programs. As the Needs Assessment is over 6 years old and parks and recreation demands continue to grow, the Parks and Recreation Department is initiating a Parks and Open Space Master Planning process to clarify needs and interests. However, based on recent trends and current demands, future offerings may include more community events each season (such as Trunk or Treat, Dances, and Movie Nights), and maintaining a summer swim program from Memorial Day through Labor Day, seven days a week, at each of the three designated county parks (Walnut Creek Park, Mint Springs Valley Park, and Chris Greene Lake Park).



IMPLEMENTATION

OBJECTIVE	Parks 1. *Plan for the parks and recreation needs of current and future community members through a planning process that is equitable, inclusive, and responsive to existing and emerging needs.*
ACTION	
1.1	Regularly update the countywide Parks and Recreation Inventory and Needs Assessment.
1.2	Perform robust community engagement with multiple venues for community input during the planning for parks and recreation facilities.
1.3	Develop a county-wide Parks and Open Space Master Plan with an emphasis on increasing equitable access and responding to existing and emerging needs. Include an analysis to identify communities with lower access to recreation opportunities and open spaces.
1.4.	Lead parks and greenways planning with local and regional partners.
1.5.	Develop a funding resources plan for countywide development, expansion, and enhancement of parks, greenways, community centers,and other recreation amenities and destinations.
1.6	Identify and pursue alternative funding sources and partners for new facilities, amenities, and infrastructure, such as grants, tax revenues, or public bonds.
1.7	Provide public art in County parks through the creation and funding of an arts in public places program featuring local artists.
OBJECTIVE	Parks 2. *Increase County ownership and use of land for parks, greenways, blueways, and recreation facilities, prioritizing recreation opportunities in the Development Areas.*
ACTION	
2.1	Develop and implement a parks and greenways Land Acquisition Policy with an emphasis on providing equitable and safe access to parks and greenways.
2.2	Establish interim parkland management plans for undeveloped County parklands addressing environmental features, historic and cultural resources, public access, and environmental stewardship best practices.
2.3	Expand public private partnerships and increase resources that accelerate the implementation of County parks projects through joint efforts with the Albemarle County Parks Foundation.

OBJECTIVE	**Parks 3.** *Accelerate the development of urban parks, pocket parks, and greenways in the Development Areas to increase the percentage of community members within the Development Areas that are within a 15-minute walk from a public park and/or public greenway trail.*
ACTION	
3.1	Evaluate and update requirements for new development, zoning, and change in land use projects to contribute and connect to the countywide parks and recreation system.
3.2	Provide additional and equitably distributed public parks and trails in the Development Areas, prioritizing areas that improve safe and convenient walking or biking access to parks/open space and higher density residential areas.
OBJECTIVE	**Parks 4.** *Increase access to County parks and trails with an emphasis on inclusion, equity, and universal access.*
ACTION	
4.1	Complete an assessment of universal accessibility at County parks, greenways, blueways, and community centers. Incorporate the Equity and Climate lens in the evaluation process.
4.2	Implement universal access enhancements and facilities to improve and expand accessibility, including providing ADA-accessible trail segments and ADA-compliant recreational amenities near trailheads at all County parks and greenway trailheads where feasible.
4.3	Expand vehicular access and parking options, including electric vehicle charging infrastructure, at parks, greenways, and blueways trailheads and access locations.
4.4	Collaborate with Albemarle County Schools, Facilities, and Environmental Services to enhance the role of current and future public schools in the parks and recreation system, including public access, planning and design of new schools, and connecting public schools to public parks.
4.5	Increase public transportation access to County parks as outlined in the County's transportation chapter of AC44.
4.6	Provide additional recreation facilities and services to reach underserved visitors including teens, seniors, and people with special needs.
4.7	Provide public accessible restrooms at all County parks.

OBJECTIVE	Parks 5. *Increase the environmental resilience of County parks and greenways while restoring the health of the natural environment.*
ACTION	
5.1	Increase the use of environmentally sustainable practices through the planning, development, and management of County parks and greenways, such as using native canopy trees, managing invasive species, conserving and restoring native plant communities, and creating opportunities for nature-focused recreational experiences.
5.2	Conduct natural resource inventories and resource management plans for County parks, greenways, blueways, and undeveloped parklands. Update inventories and plans on a regular established schedule.
5.3	Implement best practice lake management strategies to reduce harmful algae blooms and improve water quality in county lakes.
5.4	Provide interpretive signage in County parks with information on the natural environment and historic and cultural resources.
5.5	Sustain and increase partnership projects and programs with organizations that primarily focus on environmental conservation, sustainability, and resilience.
5.6	Coordinate volunteer teams and crews to support parks and greenways including through removal of invasive species and sustainable land management.
OBJECTIVE	Parks 6. *Expand and improve the trail networks and blueways in County parks and greenways and increase multimodal connections to parks and greenway trails.*
ACTION	
6.1	Construct and maintain sustainable new trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding, providing a variety of trail options for different trail users.
6.2	Update open space requirements for development to prioritize the usability and accessibility of open and recreational space and to require connections to the existing or planned public open space network of trails and parks.
6.3	Accelerate the development of the planned Rivanna River Greenway + Blueway improvements, including greenways and blueways along the Rivanna River and other key destinations for water-oriented recreation.
6.4	Improve and expand river access facilities and amenities in coordination with partner agencies such as the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources, the Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation, and the Rivanna Conservation Alliance.
6.5	Support the use of the Three Notched Trail study funded by a RAISE grant to accelerate the development of the paved Three Notched Trail.
6.6	Continue to sustain volunteer trail maintenance partnerships and service activities to support the efforts of County staff and provide opportunities for community engagement and participation.

OBJECTIVE	Parks 7. *Increase the availability and accessibility of recreation programs, classes, and facilities, including athletic fields.*
ACTION	
7.1	Expand schedule options for recreation classes, programs, and other activities
7.2	Evaluate field surface and outdoor lighting options that support both environmental stewardship and community use for new and upgraded athletic fields.
7.3	Develop partnerships to provide special events, cultural programs, and educational opportunities in County parks and community centers.