

Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2022



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Franklin Regional Council of Governments

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September 30, 2022

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Prepared under Contract Number 114672 in cooperation with the Massachusetts Department of Transportation, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the Federal Highway Administration.

Cover Photo: Kayaking on the CT River. Photo Credit: Clarissa Lyons.

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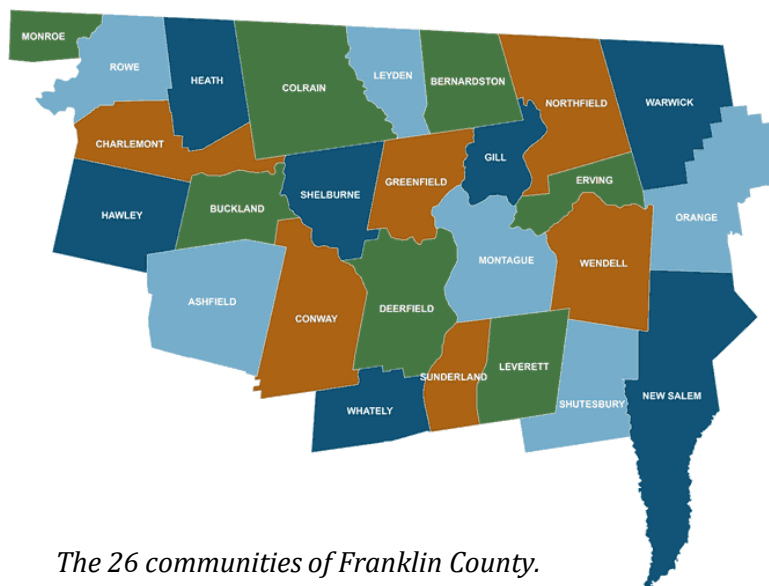
INTRODUCTION

Franklin County is rich in natural resources, scenic landscapes, and protected open space – all of which provide many opportunities for outdoor recreation. The outdoor recreation activities range from whitewater rafting and bicycling to hiking and birdwatching. Open space protection, planning, and access to the outdoors are important to the communities and residents of Franklin County. This plan presents goals and recommendations for improving and expanding outdoor recreation in the county. A strong outdoor recreational sector has many benefits to the region including improving the overall livability, providing an environment for better health outcomes as a result of increased physical activity, and increased economic development opportunities related to tourism-based recreation.

“Outdoor recreation” is a broad term that includes a wide range of activities, facilities, and landscapes. Traditional outdoor recreation includes active pastimes such as camping, hiking, boating, and skiing. Outdoor recreation also includes more passive activities such as birdwatching, picnicking, and nature photography. Additionally, outdoor recreation includes competitive activities, such as bicycle road races and soccer games, and non-competitive, such as snow-shoeing or kayaking. This plan explores the issues and needs relating to outdoor recreational activities that are currently enjoyed in Franklin County and also other activities that have the potential for growth in the region because of the existing natural resources or the increasing popularity of that activity.

The overall goal of the *Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Plan* is to support and improve access to outdoor recreation in the county. The specific objectives of the plan are to:

- Create a comprehensive inventory of the existing outdoor recreation amenities by location and type.
- Evaluate the strengths and challenges of the existing amenities to improve user experience.
- Recommend needed improvements to facilities, marketing, and/or legislation to support recreational opportunities in the county.



The 26 communities of Franklin County.

- Identify access issues and potential initiatives to expand access to recreation.
- Analyze trends to determine future needs.

The intended audience for the Plan includes Franklin County local governments, non-profits, recreation-focused groups, and others that have an interest in outdoor recreation, land protection, and economic development/tourism.

Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Assets Map

The *Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Plan* will be followed by an online, publicly accessible *Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Assets Map*, to be published in 2023. To populate this map, FRCOG staff conducted a countywide field inventory and assessment of outdoor recreation assets in 2021 and 2022. The data collected for this mapping was also used to inform the Inventory and Analysis of Outdoor Activities section of this plan.



Kids hiking on one of the many trails in Franklin County.

PLANNING PROCESS

Public Engagement

As part of the development of the Outdoor Recreation Plan, FRCOG staff conducted outreach through both a broad and targeted approach. The FRCOG conducted an online survey that asked questions about the management of existing recreation facilities. The survey was sent to managers at state and non-profit owned recreational facilities, owners or managers at private recreation establishments, and town administrators. The survey was emailed directly to stakeholders and remained open for three months. A summary of the findings of the facilities survey can be found in the plan appendices.

FRCOG staff also reached out personally by email to approximately 25 businesses and organizations with three questions about the general trends and needs that they have seen within their recreational activity focus area(s). Ten respondents provided thoughtful commentary on the trends and needs they have noticed. The findings are incorporated into the Local Trends section and throughout the Inventory and Analysis of Outdoor Recreation Activities.

State and Regional Emphasis on Recreation

Outdoor recreation has always been important to Franklin County but has increased in prominence as a potential source of economic development for the county. Over the last several years, many State, regional, and local planning projects were initiated to promote outdoor recreation for economic development. The following is a summary of those efforts. Pertinent recommendations from these plans have been incorporated into this recreation plan.

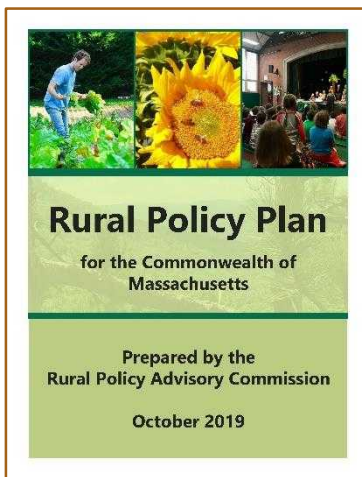
Statewide Planning and Policy Initiatives

State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)

In 2017, the state published the SCORP, a planning document addressing “available recreational resources in the Commonwealth, along with the needs of its residents, and identifies the gap between them.”¹ The plan identifies four primary goals for recreation and open space opportunities statewide, which align with Franklin County’s needs:

- Increase access for underserved populations;
- Support of the statewide trail network;
- Increase the availability of water-based recreation; and
- Support the creation and renovation of neighborhood parks.

Rural Policy Plan



The MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission (RPAC) was created by the legislature in 2015. The mission of the Commission is to enhance the economic vitality of rural communities. In the legislation, “rural” is defined as municipalities with a population density of fewer than 500 people per square mile, which, based on 2010 Census figures, includes all Franklin County communities except Greenfield. In October 2019, the RPAC issued the Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts². The Plan provides an overview of socioeconomic conditions in the rural municipalities of Massachusetts, highlights the unique needs of rural areas, and identified action-oriented policy, financial and regulation recommendations across 14 focus areas.

¹ Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Conservation Services. *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*, 2017: <https://www.mass.gov/files/massachusetts-scorp-2017-for-submission.pdf>

² MA Rural Policy Advisory Commission. *Rural Policy Plan for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*. https://frcog.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Rural_Policy_Plan_10.01.19.pdf

The 2019 Rural Policy Plan (RPP) recognizes the natural beauty and physical landscapes that are conducive to outdoor recreation and tourism as strong assets. The plan identifies that rural economies are different from the economies of the more urban Massachusetts communities, and recommended the creation of an Office of Outdoor Recreation to promote the economic and health benefits of outdoor recreation in Massachusetts.

State Office of Outdoor Recreation

In December 2022, the Rural Policy Plan's recommendation of creating a state-level Office of Outdoor Recreation was implemented. This office will be housed within the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA) Secretariat and will work alongside state agencies, including the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), the Massachusetts Marketing Partnership (MMP), and the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT). According to the Governor Baker administration, the mission of the office will be to "enhance outdoor recreational opportunities throughout the Commonwealth and support the associated economic, environmental, and quality of life benefits they bring."³

Resilient Lands Initiative

The Resilient Lands Initiative of the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs aims to vision, strategize, and implement improved quality of life of Massachusetts communities through land conservation. The vision focuses on eight primary land use themes, including outdoor recreation.

Regional Planning and Policy Initiatives

2020 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan for Franklin County

The Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Plan for Franklin County serves as a roadmap to advance policies and projects that support economic opportunity in the region. This five-year plan was developed using the Economic Development Administration's (EDA) framework. It serves as a roadmap to foster an environment that cultivates business and job growth and enhances opportunity for all. The plan analyzes economic and community development strengths and weaknesses and recommends strategies to build the region's economy. Outdoor/adventure recreation and cultural tourism are identified as one of the region's key industries and regional clusters. Specifically, the creation of a Deerfield River

³ <https://www.mass.gov/news/baker-polito-administration-launches-massachusetts-office-of-outdoor-recreation>

Outdoor Recreation Asset and Economic Development Plan was identified for implementation in the action plan. The 2020-2025 Franklin County CEDS Plan was completed under the guidance of the CEDS Committee in June 2020. Projects and activities in the Action Plan were identified by CEDS program partners and through a solicitation process open to Franklin County municipal governments and 30+ non-profit and governmental entities that support economic development in the region.

Deerfield River Outdoor Recreation Study (2022)

The popularity of boating on the Deerfield River was steadily growing when it increased rapidly during the Covid-19 pandemic. This sudden growth exacerbated existing problems for related businesses, municipalities, the physical environment, and the visitor experience. These issues include crowded and unsafe parking, litter, a scarcity of bathroom facilities along the river, and increased stress on public safety. The *Deerfield River Study* is a comprehensive assessment and plans to recommend strategies for better river access management, infrastructure development, and tourism outreach that will be completed in December 2022.



Kayakers with an audience on the Deerfield River.

Town Open Space and Recreation Plans

Sixteen towns in Franklin County currently have state-approved Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs). Towns with OSRP are eligible for grant opportunities offered through the Division of Conservation Services. OSRPs are a comprehensive inventory and public participation process to assess natural resources, open space, and recreation assets and make prioritized recommendations. Data and recommendations from OSRPs are incorporated into the discussions of recreational activities in the *Franklin County Outdoor Recreation Plan*.

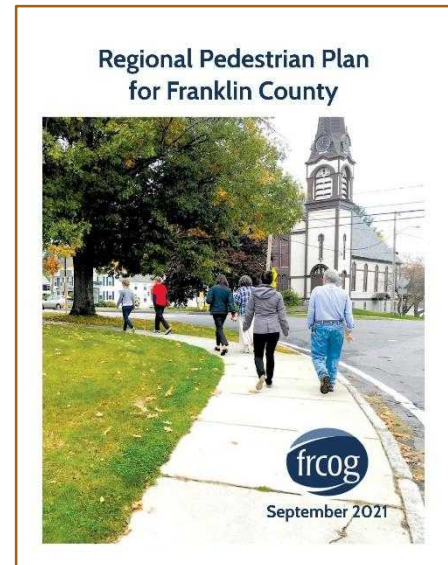
Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) (2020)

The *Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) is a comprehensive accounting of transportation needs, issues, facilities, and potential funding needed for the regional transportation network over a 25-year time horizon. Bike and pedestrian needs are addressed

in the plan, as well as ways transportation infrastructure can support the outdoor recreation tourism industry. The RTP is updated every four years.

Regional Pedestrian Plan for Franklin County (2021)

The FRCOG regularly plans for pedestrian infrastructure by including pedestrian projects and needs in regional transportation planning activities. In 2021, a *Regional Pedestrian Plan for Franklin County* was completed. The plan seeks to promote walking and provide tools to improve pedestrian access and safety. The plan provides a comprehensive resource that identifies resources and strategies for developing pedestrian-related infrastructure improvements in Franklin County. It is intended to inspire and encourage towns to consider pedestrian accessibility whenever feasible. The Pedestrian Plan considers walking for recreation and fitness and includes information about improving pedestrian accessibility.



MassTrails Western MA Mountain Biking Trails Project (2022)

The Western Massachusetts Mountain Biking Trails Project was funded through a MassTrails Grant from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) worked with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC), and the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) to develop maps for the mountain biking trails at Greylock Glen (Berkshire County), Kenneth Dubuque Memorial State Forest (Franklin County), and Mount Holyoke Range State Park (Hampshire County) which are all state parks that allow mountain biking. The maps were developed with input from DCR and are intended for distribution at the park sites and online. The project also included research and outreach to determine where and how mountain biking trail networks could be improved and what would be required to successfully promote western Massachusetts for recreational mountain biking.

Woodlands Partnership (MTWP)

The Woodlands Partnership (formerly known as the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership) was formed in 2013 to bring recognition and additional financial and technical resources to the 21 municipalities in northwestern Massachusetts. In Franklin County, the towns in the partnership

are Ashfield, Buckland, Charlemont, Colrain, Conway, Hawley, Heath, Leyden, Monroe, Rowe, and Shelburne. During the development of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Plan, the towns identified four focus areas as priorities, and natural resource-based economic development is one of the areas. It was recognized that maintaining recreational sites and balancing the various demands is a challenge and that enhancing the network of recreational offerings will require a strategy for ensuring maintenance is sustainable over the long term. Participants at the community meetings expressed the need to better market the region to tourists. Keeping recreational tourists in the area longer to support local businesses, and improving tourism infrastructure and access to some recreational sites were also identified as needs. It was also noted that some communities were concerned that an influx of tourists would impact the character of their town and that the towns cannot deal with emergencies, traffic, and other issues that may arise from more visitors.

Woodlands Partnership Recreation Inventory (2021)

The Woodlands Partnership Recreation Inventory was intended to support the goals and objectives of the partnership by creating an inventory and online map of the recreational assets within the MTWP region. The project was intended to be a starting point for identifying needs and recommendations for improving the recreational facilities and resources in the MTWP area. The FRCOG worked with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission to compile a comprehensive inventory and online map for the recreational assets within the 21-town Woodlands Partnership region of western Franklin County and northern Berkshire County. The information, map data, and recommendations compiled were incorporated into the Regional Recreation Plan.



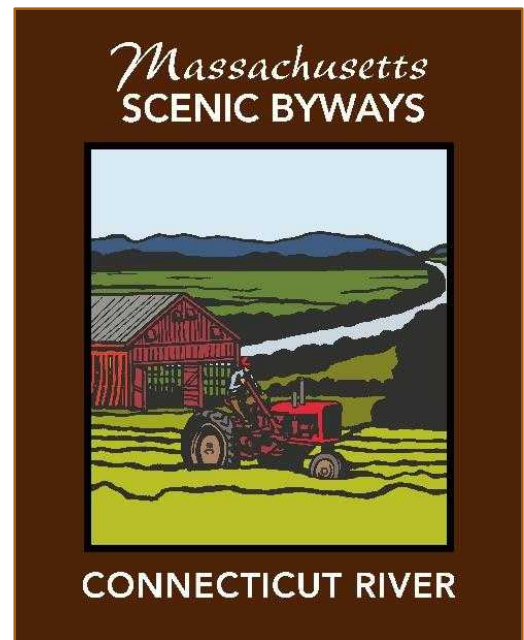
Franklin County Bikeway wayfinding sign.

Franklin County Bikeway Plan Update (2009)

The 2009 Franklin County Bikeway Plan Update identified shared roadway routes and potential off-road facilities throughout Franklin County. Planning work to identify locations for the installation of Franklin County Bikeway logo signs on the routes is completed and will expand the number of trailblazed miles to approximately 240. The signs will be fabricated and installed in 2023.

Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plans

The National Scenic Byway Program is a federal transportation program that recognizes and celebrates scenic roads throughout the country. Scenic byways that are either state-designated or federally-designated are eligible to participate in the program. The designation is primarily honorary, but there are also opportunities to apply for discretionary grant funding. In Massachusetts, eligible roads can become state designated scenic byways through an act of the Legislature. National scenic byway designation is a higher level of recognition made through a National Scenic Byway nomination process. There are five state-designated Scenic Byways in Franklin County: Connecticut River (Routes 63 and 47), Mohawk Trail (Route 2), Route 112, Route 116, and Route 122 Scenic Byways. Additionally, there are two nationally designated scenic byways, the Connecticut River and the Mohawk Trail Scenic Byways. Recreational resources are one of the six intrinsic qualities considered an important part of the scenic byway. There are Corridor Management Plans (CMP) for each of the scenic byways and the CMPs include inventories and recommendations related to recreational assets in the towns along the scenic byways. This information is in the plan. Additionally, improvements to a scenic byway that will enhance access to an area for recreation and the protection of recreational resources in an area adjacent to a scenic byway are two of the activities that are eligible for funding as part of the National Scenic Byway Program discretionary grants.



Connecticut River Scenic Byway wayfinding sign.

Sustainable Franklin County (2013)

In 2013, *Sustainable Franklin County: Franklin County's Regional Plan for Sustainable Development*⁴ was completed by the multi-stakeholder Sustainable Communities Consortium. The plan is a long-term guide for Franklin County that identifies issues and recommendations in a range of subject areas. One of its recommendations is to enhance natural and cultural-based tourism that would improve access to outdoor recreation.

⁴ <https://frcog.org/program-services/land-use-planning-zoning/sustainable-franklin-county-2013-plan/>

OVERVIEW OF FRANKLIN COUNTY

Physical and Social Characteristics

Franklin County is located in western Massachusetts on the border of Vermont and New Hampshire. It is part of the four county region known as Western Massachusetts (Western MA), which also includes Berkshire, Hampden, and Hampshire Counties. It is the most rural county in the Commonwealth with a total population of 71,015 spread out over twenty-six towns. Greenfield, located along Interstate 91 in the middle of the county, is the county's population center with 17,652 residents.⁵



A view of the Deerfield River from a Picnic Area in Charlemont.

The population of Franklin County has decreased slightly over the past two decades. The county's population is predominantly white (94%) and skews toward being older, with 52% of the county's residents aged 45 or older and 22% aged 65 or over. Around one-fifth of households are families with children under 18 years of age. The population's educational attainment level (93%) is slightly better than the state's at the high school level, but residents are less likely to have bachelor's degrees than the state as a whole. Franklin County's poverty rate is close to the average for the state as a whole and has a median annual household income of \$61,198.

Most Franklin County towns are characterized by small, typical New England village centers with a dispersed population over a landscape that is predominately forest or farmland. The Connecticut River flows directly south through the center of the county. On each side of the river, the wide Connecticut River Valley contains rich farmland and beautiful pastoral scenes. To the east and west of the valley are the "hilltowns," where the landscape quickly becomes more hilly, rugged, and interwoven with rivers and streams and small or medium lakes, ponds, and wetlands.

⁵ US Census Bureau: 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

Cold winters, mild summers, and precipitation year-round characterize the region's climate. Annual precipitation has typically ranged around 45 inches, generally evenly distributed throughout the year. The precipitation falls as steady rain or intense thunderstorms in summer and as snow and sleet in winter.⁶

Approximately 33% of the land in Franklin County is permanently protected through a combination of state, municipal, and private conservation efforts.⁷ While not all of the 154,000 acres are publically accessible for recreation, much of it is. In addition to permanently protected land, there are also municipal and private properties throughout Franklin County expressly available for recreational purposes, such as ballfields, bike paths, ski resorts, and sportsman's clubs.

Prominent Landscape Features

Berkshires Mountains and Foothills

The Berkshire Mountains and Berkshire foothills run along the western border of Franklin County and feature a wild and scenic stretch of the Deerfield River. The range's steep topography means that it is less developed and provides excellent opportunities for downhill skiing, hiking, and impressive scenic views. The town of Charlemont is located here, which has been nicknamed the "Adventure Capital of New England" because of the year-round recreational activities available in and around



A scenic view of the Berkshire Foothills.

the town. It is estimated that Charlemont-based businesses of Berkshire East, Crab Apple Whitewater, and Zoar Outdoor collectively attract between 120,000 to 145,000 visitors annually for downhill skiing and snowboarding, mountain biking, snow tubing, zip lines, white water rafting, kayaking and canoeing instruction, and the retail store and lodging.⁸

⁶ Resilient MA Climate Change Clearinghouse for the Commonwealth, accessed December 27, 2021

⁷ MassGIS, "Protected and Recreation Open Space" data layer. August 2020.

⁸ FRCOG. 2013. *Sustainable Franklin County: Franklin County's Regional Plan for Sustainable Development*. <https://frcog.org/publication/sustainable-franklin-county/>

Connecticut River

The Connecticut River begins in Vermont and flows southerly through Franklin County. As it passes through the county, several hydroelectric stations utilize the river's power. One station is located in Turners Falls and its dam has created Barton's Cove, which is a popular place for kayaking and canoeing as well as ice fishing during the winter months. Another hydroelectric station is the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage project, in which water from the river is pumped uphill and then released to generate electricity. The owner, FirstLight Power, provides many recreational opportunities at the Northfield Mountain facility, including cross-country skiing, boat tours, camping, and hiking.



A view of the Connecticut River from Mount Sugarloaf in Deerfield.

Connecticut River Valley

The Connecticut River Valley is a flat, fertile region that follows the river as it flows through the central portion of Franklin County. The flat nature of the topography means that this area, in addition to being a prime area for agriculture, is excellent for ballfields and cycling. A third of the Franklin County Bikeway can be found winding its way around the valley's pastoral landscape.

Deerfield River

The Deerfield River begins just north of the Franklin County border in Vermont and flows southeast down from the western hilltowns before it joins the Connecticut River. The presence of several hydroelectric stations along its reach in Franklin County creates the opportunity for controlled releases of water that allow whitewater enthusiasts and private recreational tourist companies to schedule activities on the river around the releases. In addition to whitewater rafting, people also enjoy the river by kayak, canoe, and tube. The Deerfield River is also a well-known location for angling and fly fishing.



A paddler on the Deerfield River.

Quabbin Reservoir



A view of the Ouabbin Reservoir from New Salem.

The Quabbin Reservoir is located in the easternmost part of Franklin County. The Quabbin Reservoir is one of the largest unfiltered water supplies in the United States. It is also the largest inland body of water in Massachusetts. Along with the Wachusett Reservoir and Ware River, it is the source of high quality water for the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority water supply system. The 412 billion gallon reservoir covers 39 square

miles with 181 miles of shoreline. Recreational activities are regulated and limited by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to protect 3 million people's drinking water. However, hiking, fishing, boating, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and hunting are allowed under certain conditions. A large amount of protected land around the Quabbin allows for excellent wildlife viewing and scenic views.

Outdoor Recreation as an Economic and Cultural Resource

As previously noted, recreational assets and opportunities provide benefits to residents and attract visitors. The broad opportunities for recreation and access to nature are a cultural and economic benefit to the region. Easy access to open space and a wide range of outdoor recreation options enriches the quality of life for Franklin County residents. Generally, residents appreciate and take advantage of the wide array of available recreational opportunities. This can be a reason why people choose to move to or continue to live in Franklin County.

Massachusetts ranks 12th in the U.S. for direct economic impact from travel and tourism.

The recreational resources in Franklin County provide economic development opportunities. Outdoor/adventure recreation and cultural tourism are economic drivers in Franklin County that the local communities would like to encourage.⁹ Massachusetts ranks 12th in the U.S. for direct economic impact from travel and tourism. In 2017, almost \$600 million was spent by travelers to Berkshire and Franklin Counties which supported 4,800 jobs in the region. Surveys conducted in 2016 of travelers to western Massachusetts identified the top three activities for visitors to be entertainment (79%), art & culture (70%), and nature/outdoor activities (66%). Nature and outdoor activities along with sports and recreation activities were higher in western than in eastern Massachusetts in the survey. The top reasons for visiting Western MA were scenic beauty (61%), relaxation/activity balance (56%), and convenience (54%).¹⁰ According to *Sustainable Franklin County: Franklin County's Regional Plan for Sustainable Development*, communities that are host to outdoor/adventure recreation attractions are seeking ways to generate greater economic activity from visitors (such as visitors spending money on dining, shopping, and accommodations) and create a supportive infrastructure for visitors without negatively impacting the community character or natural resources themselves.

Given the importance of outdoor recreation resources to both the local quality of life and the local economy, there is an established effort to market outdoor recreation in Franklin County. State agencies provide information online about state parks, state forests, and wildlife management areas—both location information and user guidelines. Many towns, regional organizations, and clubs also promote their hiking and biking trails and use guidelines on their websites. Other kinds of activities and locations are mostly promoted through the area's clubs on websites or Facebook groups.

⁹ FRCOG. 2020. *2020-2025 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Five-Year Plan for Franklin County, MA*. Adopted June 11, 2020.

¹⁰ Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) 2019. Sourced from the Woodlands Partnership (formerly MTWP) June 2019 newsletter update.

Changing Trends in Outdoor Recreation

The recreation needs of Franklin County communities are changing with shifting trends in technology, preferences for how people (especially youth) spend their time, demographics, climate, and the impact of Covid-19 on activities such as public gatherings and employment.

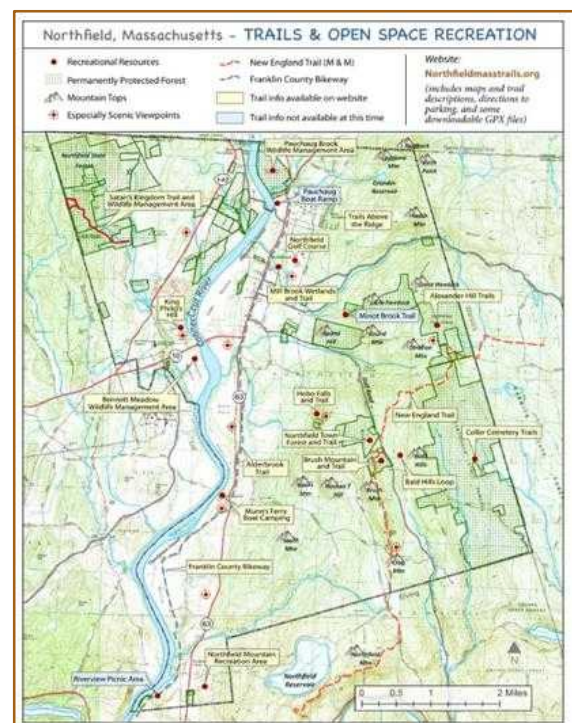
National Trends

Nationally, outdoor recreation activities have become more popular and more diverse since the 1960s, though the mix of preferred activities is always changing. During the first year of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020, outdoor recreation rates were the highest of all time in the United States, with 53% of the population doing some kind of outdoor activity. Much of this increase is attributed to casual participation, while the overall number of outings per person has continued to decline since that peak.

A 2016 United States Forest Service (USFS) study¹¹ found that adult participation in the following activities increased from 1999 to 2009 and is projected to continue to increase through 2030:

- Visits to developed sites and interpretive sites
- Hiking/backpacking
- Birding/wildlife viewing and photography
- Fishing
- Swimming
- Off-highway vehicle driving
- Motorized water sports, especially water skiing
- Canoeing and kayaking

Participation in big game hunting and fishing increased nationally, but it is not projected to increase as fast as many other activities. Migratory bird hunting is generally on the decline. Also, overall participation in snow-dependent outdoor activities such as snowmobiling, downhill skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing, and snowshoeing is projected to decrease as a result of shrinking snow cover.



A Northfield Mountain trail map.

¹¹ https://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/pubs/pnw_gtr945.pdf

The Outdoor Foundation’s 2021 Outdoor Participation Trends Report found that in 2020, fishing was the most popular outdoor recreation activity for those with lower incomes and hiking is the activity of choice for those with higher incomes. When broken out by age, kids and teens preferred basketball, bicycling, camping, and fishing.¹³

Nationally, the long-term downward trend in youth sports participation became more dramatic during the first year of the pandemic. According to the USFS report, youth sports participation declined from 45% in 2008 to 38% in 2018. In their 2021 *State of Play* report, the Aspen Institute reported that in June 2020, interest in sports had bottomed out at 19%, but had rebounded to 28% as of September 2021.¹⁴

Table 1: Preferred Outdoor Recreation Activities in Franklin County¹²

1. Hiking
2. Walking
3. Swimming
4. Nature Observation
5. Boating
6. Biking
7. Cross-country Skiing and Snowshoeing
8. Gardening
9. Running
10. Fishing

Local Trends

A statewide survey conducted as part of the development of the 2017 SCORP found that users generally participate in two categories of activities: water-based recreation and trail-based recreation. These users would most like to see funding channeled into either a) trails (for hiking, biking, paved walkways, accessible trails, and mountain biking); b) water sports (beaches, swimming pools, canoe/kayak access, and fishing areas); or c) playgrounds (including playgrounds designed for people with disabilities).

A review of Franklin County municipal OSRP surveys also shows that passive trail and water related activities are the most popular type of outdoor recreation. Table 1 shows the popularity ranking of outdoor activities among Franklin County residents, though these rankings may show bias toward the preferences of older adults and seniors, as they tend to respond to the OSRP surveys more often than younger age groups.

According to Franklin County OSRP surveys that asked a question about residents’ desires for expanding recreation facilities, local communities continue to be in consensus about the

¹² Source: Survey of 13 Franklin County OSRP surveys conducted by FRCOG staff

¹³ <https://outdoorindustry.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/2021-Outdoor-Participation-Trends-Report.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.aspenprojectplay.org/state-of-play-2021/introduction>

expansion of trails for hiking, biking, and cross-country skiing and snowshoeing, as well as access to water for swimming, boating, and nature observation.

Survey data from current OSRPs, the open-ended survey responses of recreation businesses and community organizations for this plan, recent projections for analogous rural areas,¹⁵ and climate projections were used to predict the growth or decline trends for a broad suite of recreation activities shown in Tables 2-4.

Table 2: Outdoor Recreation Activities Projected for <u>Increased</u> Demand (+)	
ACTIVITY	NOTES
Biking	E-bikes, mountain biking, and gravel biking technology is improving and price points have decreased to facilitate entry
Visiting a dog park	Interest in dog parks has increased
Boating (non-motorized)	Cheaper entry price points for the purchase of canoes and kayaks have increased participation
Swimming	The popularity of swimming is increasing as more people seek out cooling activities during hot weather, though the accessibility of swimming is slow to improve
Paddle boarding	The popularity of paddle boarding continues to increase as a low-intensity, low-risk way to be on the water
Rock climbing	The proliferation of indoor rock gyms has made outdoor rock climbing more popular
Nature observation (birding, wildlife photography)	Birdwatching and wildlife photography has dramatically increased in popularity among baby boomers, assisted by internet-based information sharing
Pickleball	Baby boomers and others are increasingly interested in this alternative version of tennis

¹⁵ Wood County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan – 2018. Wood County has a population density of 94 inhabitants per square mile, compared to Franklin County’s 102 per square mile.

Table 3: Outdoor Recreation Activities Projected for <u>Stable</u> Demand (=)	
ACTIVITY	NOTES
Hiking	Consistently high interest
Walking	Consistently high interest
Running	Consistently high interest
Fishing	Consistently moderate interest
Gardening	Consistently moderate interest
Picnicking	Consistently moderate interest
Camping	Demand for camping may have increased slightly, but supply has not increased in a few decades
Field sports (football, soccer, lacrosse, field hockey)	Fueled by school programming, participation is likely stable; although a decline in Franklin County school enrollments has led to decreased options for school-based teams in some cases
Horseback riding	Consistent, though may have seen a small jump during the Covid-19 pandemic
Skateboarding	Interest in the development and use of skate parks in Franklin County has remained consistent for a decade
Motorboating	Demand for motor boating may be increasing but barriers to access have not changed
Racing	The popularity of road races, triathlons, and adventure races stabilized after years of growth

Table 4: Outdoor Recreation Activities Projected for <u>Decreased</u> Demand (-)	
ACTIVITY	NOTES
Downhill skiing/snowboarding	Becoming more difficult with less consistent snow and more frequent freeze/thaw cycles, although snowmaking technology has improved
Ice skating	Becoming more difficult when outdoors, with more frequent freeze/thaw cycles
Snowmobiling	Becoming more difficult with less consistent snow and more frequent freeze/thaw cycles
Cross-country skiing/snowshoeing	Becoming more difficult with less consistent snow and more frequent freeze/thaw cycles
Baseball/softball	The popularity of baseball and softball is decreasing among both youth and adults
Hunting	Likely that this sport struggles with generational loss and increasingly restricted land access to private property in the region

Aging Population

Over half of Franklin County's population is over the age of 45 and the proportion of older residents continues to grow, reflecting national trends. The retired population continues to be very active as they age, consequently increasing the demand for easily accessible, mobility-friendly recreation opportunities. One outdoor recreation organization interviewed for this plan that provides year-round recreational activities for people with disabilities and their family and friends explained that older adults are an important segment of the recreation population and that older adults are seeking out disability-friendly programs to meet their access needs.

Recreational areas can be designed and programmed to continue to welcome users well into older age. Informative signage, accessible parking, and age-friendly public programs are key to enabling use by older residents across all types of recreation areas in the county. For parks, AARP and The Trust for Public Land recommend designing parks to be comfortable, as quality seating encourages people to use parks more often and for longer periods.¹⁶



Strawberry picking is a great activity for all ages to enjoy the outdoors.

"The biggest trend I notice is older adults seeking to continue being active in the face of mobility limitations, fear of falling, fear of being alone on trails, etc. We have some senior-specific programs that are well attended; additionally, our seniors often seek to attend our programs for those with disabilities because their interest in participating is so high."

- Recreation Plan Interview Respondent

¹⁶ AARP and The Trust for Public Land: "Creating Parks and Public Spaces for People of all Ages," 2018.

Functioning water fountains and clean, safe restrooms are important amenities; older users also benefit from pedestrian paths with marked distances and fitness structures suited to gentle exercise.

As many current facility managers age, they are expressing concern about how to manage facilities in the future: “Who will do the physical work in the future? Building a year-round user base that can be tapped to volunteers seems key to the future.” The retired population is very often invested in recreation resources and seeing them adapted to the aging population, making them a good volunteer resource.

The Trust for Public Land states that dog parks, community gardens, splash pads, pickleball courts, and walking and hiking trails are the top five park features that will attract people of all ages.

ADA Accessibility

Approximately 12% of Franklin County’s population under the age of 65 is recognized to have a disability¹⁷. Franklin County’s goal is to increase handicap accessibility at parks, recreation, and conservation lands, increase the variety of accessible facilities, and provide disabled populations with the same range of recreational opportunities available to the general population. Potential actions to take include reducing tripping hazards and obstacles on pedestrian pathways in parks and recreation areas, installing accessible seating extensions on at least one table in each recreation area with picnic tables, and installing electrical charging devices usable by power wheelchairs and scooters in convenient locations. Also of importance is to support programs such as All Out Adventures, which promotes health, community, and independence by providing programs that use adaptive equipment to broaden recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

There is an increased awareness surrounding the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion when it comes to outdoor recreation. Given the abundance of outdoor recreational opportunities available across Franklin County, it is important to be cognizant of steps and actions that can be taken to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion when it comes to outdoor recreation. Local organizations such as the Western Massachusetts Appalachian Mountain Club have prioritized making outdoor recreational spaces in western Massachusetts accessible, safe, and inviting to all people¹⁸. Here in Franklin County, steps could be taken such as providing multi-lingual trail maps and information, providing public transportation options to popular outdoor recreational

¹⁷ US Census Bureau: 2017-2021 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates

¹⁸ <https://www.amc-wma.org/diversity>

areas across the county, and providing hiking, camping, and other outdoor recreational equipment for loan through the local library or other community centers throughout Franklin County.

Impacts of Climate Change

Historically, winter precipitation has sustained adequate snow cover for enough weeks or months in winter to support a variety of winter sports; substantial rain in spring and summer (along with winter's snow melt) has provided adequate water levels for water-based sports; and mild summer temperatures have allowed people to recreate whenever they choose. Climate change is increasingly altering normal precipitation and temperature patterns in ways that are changing the recreation landscape: seasons are changing for certain activities and sports thereby changing peoples' preferences for activity and place. As one example, snowmobilers living in Franklin County are increasingly traveling north for better trail conditions in winter. Another example is the interest in and the safety of energy-intensive sports such as baseball or mountain biking decreases during hot weather, and events are increasingly being canceled due to high temperatures.

Impacts of the Covid-19 Pandemic

Before vaccinations were widely available during the Covid-19 pandemic, outdoor recreation became a popular way to spend downtime and gather with people outside of the household. Even when lockdowns were not in effect, many outdoor recreation activities saw dramatic changes in participation.

Organized events and activities where people could be close, including school sports, races, or guided tours, were canceled. Participation in activities in which it was possible to stay socially distanced grew, such as river tubing, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, and outdoor rock climbing.

Outdoor facilities, such as parks and swimming areas, also became important gathering places. As one survey respondent said, "With COVID, we noticed at least a doubling in the numbers of people participating as outdoor activities were considered a safe way to spend time with friends." While some local recreation providers experienced limited impacts from the pandemic, many experienced challenges with overcrowding. The unpredictability of event cancellations, disruptions in supply chains, trouble recruiting volunteers, staffing shortages, and

"With COVID, we noticed at least a doubling in the numbers of people participating as outdoor activities were considered a safe way to spend time with friends."

- Recreation Plan Interview Respondent

limitations on inside gatherings were problematic and impacted businesses. Transportation, dining, and lodging were challenges during this time. One survey respondent shared this comment about the recent nature of their business: “Honestly, because of COVID I still don't know what a normal year should look like.” Of all of these challenges, adequate staffing continues to be very difficult post-pandemic. On the positive side, many businesses and organizations experienced new or renewed interest in their sport and discovered alternative ways of managing their recreation activities, such as through online programming.

INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS OF OUTDOOR RECREATION ACTIVITIES

The following section describes outdoor recreational activity in Franklin County, examines the associated strengths and challenges, and provides recommendations for improvement if needed. Multiple private boarding and day schools in Franklin County have a range of recreational facilities that are not listed here unless they are open to the public.

Athletic Facilities

Baseball/Softball

With one or two exceptions, every town in Franklin County has a public baseball and/or softball field. Ballfields tend to be maintained well and funding is available for upgrades because baseball and softball are often popular school sports and towns have vibrant youth leagues. However, easy and safe access to the ballfields can further encourage participation. For example, the softball field complex at Murphy Park in Greenfield is located on Leyden Road, which is close to the Riverside Greenway off-road bike path. However, there is no sidewalk on Leyden Road, a busy road that connects the fields, the bike path, and nearby residential areas complexes. The lack of sidewalks on Leyden Road makes access to the site difficult for pedestrians and bicyclists.



Basketball

Outdoor basketball remains a popular sport among youth, especially teenagers, and particularly in the county's larger towns where the population is greater and can accommodate pick-up games. Full- or half-court basketball courts are found in almost every town, often at the elementary or secondary school.

Football

Each of the seven district high schools has a football program and football field, except for Turners Falls High School, which has a field in excellent condition but in recent years has participated in a cooperative program with another regional school due to the lack of enough players to have its own team.

Ice Skating

The Collins-Moylan Memorial Rink, located in Greenfield, is the only public ice rink in Franklin County. It is a public/private partnership because it is owned by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and operated by a private company. The rink has a robust program schedule that includes public skating hours, learn to skate, team ice time, and figure skating lessons. Overall, demand for the indoor rink is high. Town parks and recreation committees, fire departments, or groups of volunteers often sponsor outdoor rinks in years when temperatures allow ice to stay frozen and easy to maintain. Outdoor rinks require significant upkeep and winter weather is often not conducive to creating optimal skating conditions.

Skateboarding

Skateboarding is less common in Franklin County than in other parts of the state due to the relative absence of an urban landscape. However, there is a popular purpose-built skate park in Turners Falls at Unity Park and a second skate park is currently planned for downtown Greenfield. The Unity Skate Park is well used by skateboarders and other trick riders using scooters, bikes, rollerblades, and roller skates. Greenfield residents have long advocated for the skate park, which was in the design phase in 2022.



Skateboard parks are popular and desired recreational resources.

Soccer/Ultime Frisbee

Soccer continues to be a popular sport and fields are widespread. Most soccer fields are located at public schools, but a few town parks have large fields that function well for soccer. Ultimate Frisbee is also a popular sport in the region and is typically played on soccer fields. Both soccer and Ultimate Frisbee are played at the school level and are common pick-up sports organized for adults.

Tennis/Pickleball

Tennis continues to be a popular sport in Franklin County and tennis courts are available at all of the high schools and in public parks in many of the larger towns in Franklin County. Tennis courts are also being used for the increasingly popular pickleball, a game similar to tennis, played on a badminton-sized court. When asked, OSRP survey-takers in Franklin County have shown a strong interest in pickleball.

Shared Use Sports Facilities

As the popularity of team sports declines as school enrollments decrease, few towns see the need to develop new athletic facilities. At the same time, many community members feel frustrated when they do not have access to public facilities, such as indoor gyms or tracks that exist in their town. The term “joint use,” also known as “shared use” or “community use,” refers to the concept of opening local buildings and grounds at times when they are usually closed for residents to exercise. Joint use agreements are tools that communities can use to safely open unused spaces to the public. Maintenance, access, and accessibility to athletic facilities have to be funded for existing infrastructure to best serve the community. As one Town Administrator pointed out, “Before expanding, we need to implement maintenance for facilities.”

Facilities Recommendations

- Support the maintenance and upkeep of existing recreational facilities.
- Improve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility at athletic facilities.
- Increase amenities such as restrooms at athletic facilities.
- Promote joint use or shared use or agreements for municipal buildings with recreational resources, such as schools.
- Support interests in emerging and new recreation activities that can use or retrofit existing facilities to accommodate multiple purposes--such as the creation of pickleball courts on existing tennis courts or other paved areas.

Bicycling (Road & Mountain Biking)

Road and Touring

Bicycling is a popular activity in Franklin County and includes many opportunities for both road cycling and mountain biking. The rural character of Franklin County roads attracts cyclists to the scenic and varied terrain. There are options for flat rides through the Connecticut River Valley and also more challenging climbs through the foothills in east and west counties. The Franklin County Bikeway is a county-wide regional bicycle network that was planned by the region's bicycle enthusiasts over 25 years ago. The Bikeway consists of both shared roadway routes and off-road multi-use paths and provides options for a variety of skill levels. The Franklin County Bikeway has routes that extend for a total of 240 miles covering 18 towns. Most of the Franklin County Bikeway is shared on-road routes, but there are two off-road multi-use paths, the Canalside Trail and the Riverside Greenway. The 3.6-mile Canalside Trail is a rail trail that connects McClelland Farm Road in Deerfield to Unity Park in the village of Turners Falls. The section of the trail in Turners Falls is next to the Connecticut River Canal. The 1-mile Riverside Greenway multi-use trail is located in Greenfield and connects Riverside Drive to Nash's Mill Road. This path connects Greenfield Community College, the Greenfield Swimming Area, downtown Greenfield, and neighboring residential areas.

Two bike/pedestrian bridge connections are key parts of the

Franklin County Bikeway. The East Mineral Road Bridge was reconstructed for use as a bicycle and pedestrian bridge. The former vehicle bridge crosses the Millers River from East Mineral Road in Montague to River Road in Erving and provides bicyclists, pedestrians, and equestrians access north and south without having to cross Route 2 at grade, which is a challenging route because of the high vehicle volumes and speeds. Additionally, the Greenfield Road Bicycle/Pedestrian Bridge replaced a former vehicle bridge over the B&M Railroad that was



A bicyclist crosses the bridge over the CT River on the Canalside Trail.

removed. The bridge is on the Connecticut River Route, a shared roadway route that travels along the Connecticut River from Montague to Sunderland.

“If there was ever a way to link up North Adams, Charlemont, Shelburne Falls, and Greenfield with a rail trail or bike trail, I feel that would be a huge boon to bike touring.”

- Recreation Plan Interview Respondent

A review of the input provided in the recently completed Franklin County Open Space and Recreation Plans indicates that many communities would like to create more on-road and off-road bicycling routes or paths. There are several off-road trail connections that are regional priorities. These proposed connections have been noted in both local plans

and also Franklin County Regional Transportation Plans. The Erving – Wendell Path would provide an off road option to bypass busy Route 2 in Erving and connect Erving Center to Farley. In Greenfield, the Meade Street Bike Path would provide an off road connection from River Street and Mill Street to Deerfield Street. The path is close to downtown Greenfield and offers a better connection to the Franklin County Bikeway by providing an alternative to traveling on the busy northern section of Deerfield Street (Route 5/10). A Route 5/10 Bypass in Deerfield was noted in the Deerfield Master Plan (April 2000) and recommended the construction of an off-road bike path to the south of the Cheapside Bridge and the west of Route 5/10. Additionally, the Athol-Orange Greenway connecting downtown Athol and Orange has been another long-term project. In 2021, a MassTrails grant was awarded to prepare the design, engineering, and permitting of a 5.2-mile greenway between the Orange Riverfront Park and the Alan E. Rich Environmental Park in Athol. In addition, a 2022 MassTrails grant was awarded to the towns of New Salem and Athol to complete a feasibility study to develop the Rabbit Run Rail Trail to connect Athol Center to the biking areas at the North Quabbin Reservation.

Road cycling is already very popular in Franklin County and a way to further encourage it, and its associated economic development is to promote bicycle tours throughout the region. The tours would visit multiple towns and destinations with common themes, such as breweries, local food, or history.

Mountain Biking

Mountain biking in Franklin County continues to grow in popularity. There are mountain biking trail systems throughout Franklin County. Some of the developed mountain biking trail systems are located in state forests that are managed by DCR, and there are also popular trail systems on private lands, such as along the Pocumtuc Ridge in Deerfield. In addition, there is a gravity downhill mountain bike park called Thunder Mountain that is operated by Berkshire East Mountain Resort which is the only professionally designed and pay-to-bike park in the county.

As noted previously the FRCOG is working with the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission (BRPC) and Pioneer Valley Planning Commission (PVPC) on a project to examine mountain biking in Western MA through a project that is funded by the MassTrails grant program. As part of that project, FRCOG and PVPC surveyed 300 mountain bikers in early 2022. The findings showed that riders are excited about the regional growth of the sport and the potential for continued development as a destination for bike tourism, but also have a variety of concerns about the accessibility and management of trails. The project research revealed that most of the county's existing mountain bike trail networks were developed piecemeal and there is often not a comprehensive plan for layout and management. In many cases, the trail managers such as DCR struggle to manage use and upkeep. Trail degradation and unsanctioned trail building are a concern. The Mountain Biking Project survey also found that the riders are very interested in having local bike skills parks and/or pump tracks. The recommendations below include draft recommendations from the Western MA Mountain Biking Project. The Western MA Mountain Biking Trails Project will be completed in December 2022 and will include the results of the survey and a summary of the other research completed as part of the project.

Bicycling Recommendations

- Continue to support efforts to increase safety for on-road bicycling in Franklin County.
- Increase parking and public restroom facilities throughout the county.
- Install additional bicycle repair stations throughout the county to support bicyclists.
- Continue to investigate the feasibility of creating off-road bicycle paths in Deerfield, Greenfield, Erving, New Salem/Athol, and Orange/Athol.
- Develop resources about best management practices for the maintenance and management of mountain biking trails.
- Support existing or new organizations to assist with trail maintenance, management, and/or promotion of the region's mountain biking resources.
- Support the Franklin County Bike Friendly Business Program and encourage businesses to participate.

Birdwatching and Wildlife Viewing

Wildlife viewing and photography are popular activities in Franklin County because of the intact and connected forest tracts, a patchwork of diverse ecosystems, and the range of elevations that are conducive to a diversity of fauna and flora. The Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1997 to conserve and protect the wildlife and ecosystem of the Connecticut River Watershed. As part of the Refuge, critical lands are protected from New Hampshire and Vermont, through Massachusetts to Connecticut, and support bird migration and habitat for diverse bird types. Many spots along the Connecticut River in Franklin County are known to be prime for birding, including the Turners Falls Power Canal and Barton's Cove, which together host the largest diversity of bird species in Franklin County according to eBird hotspot data.¹⁹ Similarly, the Quabbin Reservoir is a popular birdwatching location. The Hampshire Bird Club is a large community of bird lovers in the region that organizes educational events and trips.



Residents and visitors value the county for outdoor recreation in part because it is common to encounter wildlife while doing any number of outdoor activities. Larger animals such as wild turkeys, beavers, moose, bobcats, and black bears are more common in Franklin County than in many other parts of the state. In winter, wildlife viewing and tracking are popular everywhere, especially when there is snow cover. In summer, wildlife enthusiasts are drawn to breeding and nesting areas, wetlands, and sandy areas where tracks are visible.

Franklin County is a significant area for birdwatching and wildlife viewing. There is often snow throughout the winter at upper elevations, making the area a relatively reliable place for tracking enthusiasts. There are also many skilled birdwatching and track instructors in the area. These activities have a low barrier to entry and minimal impact on the environment. Popular summer tracking sites, however, are subject to large fluctuations in river levels, translating to unpredictable conditions and difficulty in planning tracking events.

Bird and Wildlife Recommendations

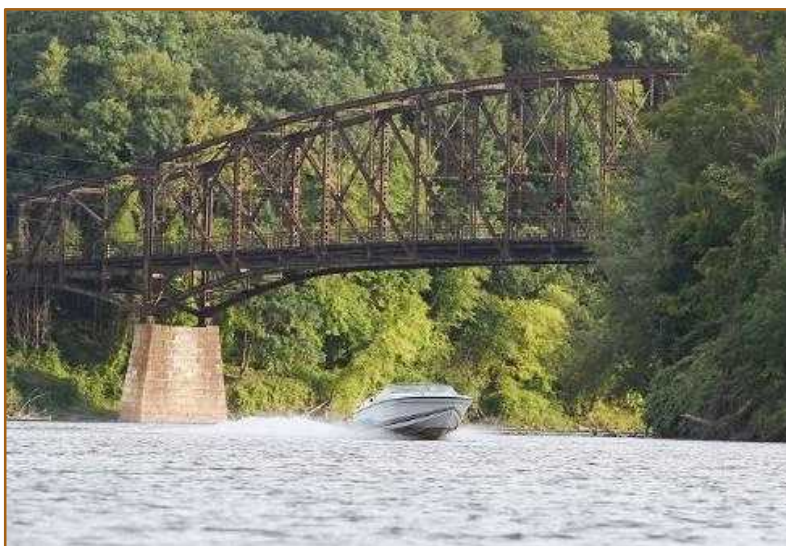
- Create a centralized list of certified wildlife programs and instructors in the area.
- Include Franklin County bird hotspots in publicity about bird watching in the county.
- Increase awareness of the services offered by the Hampshire Bird Club, and connect smaller bird clubs in Franklin County with it.

¹⁹ <https://ebird.org/hotspots>

Boating (Motorized and Non-Motorized) and Paddling

There are different types of waterbodies in Franklin County that are ideal for outdoor enthusiasts to kayak, canoe, raft, tube, and motorboat. The Connecticut River and several lakes are conducive to motorized boating. The many ponds, lakes, and rivers located throughout Franklin County are very popular for kayaking, canoeing, and paddle boarding. Most large lakes and ponds in the county have ramps for boats, although not all are in good condition.

The Connecticut River has three formal public boat ramps for motorized boats within Franklin County. They are: the Pauchaug Public Access Boat Launch in Northfield, the Gill Public Access Boat Ramp on Barton's Cove, and the Sunderland Public Boat Launch. The Franklin County Boat Club also runs a private marina on Barton's Cove. In local OSRPs, survey respondents have noted the



Boating on the CT River.

need for additional and improved boating access points to the Connecticut River. According to a survey respondent from DCR, boating usage in Northfield and Gill has increased over time, as has public use of those boat launches for picnicking and wading. To meet the increasing demand, additional boating access in the Gill/Montague area is needed, as well as more parking and designated picnicking, beach, and wading areas.

Motorboating is available in four lakes in the eastern half of the county. This includes the Quabbin Reservoir, which has some boating restrictions. There are no public ramps for motorized boats in the western half of the county. In the summer, the power company FirstLight runs 90-minute public river cruises on the CT River through the French King Gorge.²⁰

In conjunction with other outdoor activities, rafting, tubing, and boating on the Deerfield River support an adventure tourism/outdoor recreation economy in western Franklin County. The Deerfield River has excellent conditions for whitewater paddling because of the scheduled releases of water by the power companies that own the dams on the river. The dam-controlled water releases on the Deerfield River provide whitewater conditions for individuals and private recreational tourism businesses. Sections of the river are also very popular for canoeing,

²⁰ https://www.firstlightpower.com/recreation/?location_id=391



Rafters put in on the Deerfield River at Monroe Bridge.

kayaking, and tubing. The Deerfield River also serves as a blue-way section of the Mohican-Mohawk Trail between East Charlemont and the Shunpike Rest and Picnic Area in Charlemont, 9 miles west. River-related businesses and other river stakeholders have recognized the need for a comprehensive recreation management and economic development plan for years, as more lodging, fuel, food, and local emergency staff are needed to better support the tourism economy.

In the eastern part of the county, the Millers River provides opportunities for canoeing and kayaking. The Millers River Blue Trail offers six miles of year-round flat-water paddling between Athol and Riverfront Park in Orange.²¹ Boat rentals are available on the Millers River in downtown Orange, on the Connecticut River at Barton Cove Campground, and the Deerfield River from the various outdoor adventure businesses located there.



A view from the put-in at the Orange Boathouse.

²¹ <https://millerswatershed.org/blue-trails/>

Some towns in Franklin County have programs that provide access to non-motorized boating. The Towns of Ashfield and Leverett have public kayak racks at Ashfield Lake and Leverett Pond so that paddlers do not have to haul their boats each time they want to use these public waters. The Town of Shutesbury has kayaks available for checkout through its library for use on Lake Wyola. This is a great way to increase access to boating, particularly for disadvantaged populations.

Opportunities for boating are well distributed throughout Franklin County for those using non-motorized boats on both rivers and lakes/ponds. Motorized boating is more accessible in the eastern part of the county than in the western. However, local OSRPs often cite the need to develop boat launches, swimming, and fishing access to their rivers. Much of this need is along the Connecticut River, but towns along the Millers, Deerfield, and Green Rivers have also identified this need. Several communities also noted the desire for improved accessibility at access points and boat storage. Local and tourism-based recreation needs in the western county will begin to be better addressed with the completion of the *Deerfield River Study*, whose principal recommendations are included below, and the formation of a Deerfield River Management/Stakeholder Group.

Boating and Paddling Recommendations

- Maintain and improve existing boat ramps.
- Improve access to boat ramps at key locations.
- Augment existing motorized and non-motorized boat launch areas with facilities for picnicking, swimming, and beach activities.
- Provide ADA accessible restroom facilities at key boat ramps.
- Increase the amount of parking for car-top boating at the Gill Public Access Boat Ramp.
- Create additional water access points for motorized and non-motorized boats throughout Franklin County.
- Increase locations for renting, loaning, and storing kayak/boat/stand-up paddles (SUP), particularly in Environmental Justice areas.
- Follow the recommendations of the Deerfield River Study and Deerfield River Management Stakeholder Group, including creating a comprehensive recreation management and economic development plan.
- Promote boating opportunities in Franklin County.

Camping

Franklin County has several state-owned and private campgrounds. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) operates campgrounds at the Daughters of the American Revolution State Forest (half of which is located in the Franklin County town of Ashfield), Erving State Forest (27-site campground), and the Mohawk Trail State Forest (46 drive-in campsites, 6 car-free campsites, 1 group campsite, and 6 rustic cabins). FirstLight manages a tent-camping campground on the Connecticut River at Barton's Cove and a boat-access-only campsite at Munn's Ferry. There are six additional privately owned campgrounds located in Franklin County that allow RVs and tents.



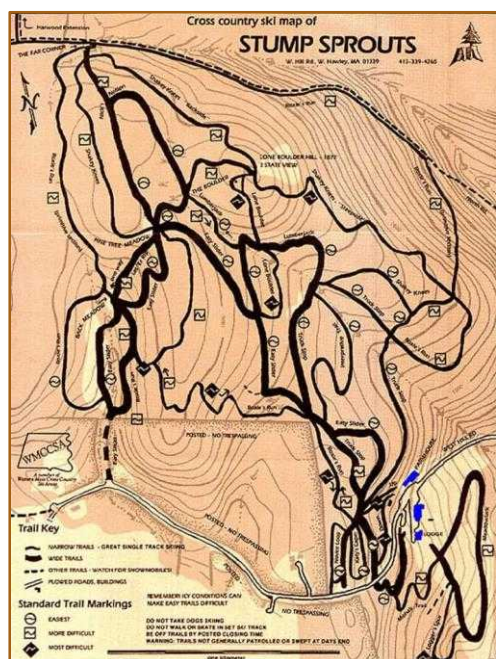
Camping at a Franklin County campground.

The DCR-operated campgrounds are very popular and continuously booked throughout the camping season. DCR campgrounds open mid-May and many close mid-October, limiting the lodging options available for recreational tourists visiting during the shoulder seasons. DCR has been short-staffed since the Covid-19 pandemic, limiting its ability to expand or extend camping services.

Camping Recommendations

- Develop more camping capacity in Franklin County as feasible.
- Advocate with DCR to extend the campground season, particularly later into the Fall.
- Promote camping opportunities in Franklin County.

Cross-Country Skiing and Snowshoeing



Trail map for Stump Sprouts Cross - Country Ski Center.

Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are popular ways to exercise in the winter. There are many opportunities for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing throughout Franklin County. Skiers and snowshoers can use local public trails or private trails with landowner permission. Snowshoeing is an easy-to-access and generally affordable recreational activity because it is possible to snowshoe on most walking or hiking trails when there is snow. There are also many easy-to-access locations to cross-country ski when there are favorable winter weather conditions. The Western Massachusetts Cross Country Ski Area Association maintains a website with information on cross-country ski areas in the broader western MA region.²²

There are two formalized cross-country ski centers. Stump Sprouts Guest Lodge and Cross Country Ski Center in Hawley maintains 15 miles of trails free for public use. Stump Sprouts also offer lodging, food, and space for special events. This facility has also diversified into mountain biking and winter fat biking. The Northfield Mountain Ski Center in Northfield is owned and operated by FirstLight. FirstLight maintains 25 miles of trail for skiing and snowshoeing and provides rental services for both activities. State forests are popular places for snowshoeing and skiing. The Wendell State Forest headquarters maintains a warming hut. The variability of the amount of snow is a threat to the viability and enjoyment of cross-country skiing and snowshoeing.

Skiing and Snowshoeing Recommendations

- Promote cross-country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in Franklin County.
- Encourage town libraries or other entities to make ski and snowshoe loans available.

²² <https://www.xcskimass.com/>

Golf

There are seven golf courses in Franklin County. Two of the courses are municipally owned 9-hole and five are privately owned and include both 9 and 18-hole courses.²³ The majority of the golf courses are located in the central part of the county, but there are a few courses in the western hilltowns. At the state and local level, golf grew in popularity at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, especially for families and beginners, and participation appears to



be stable at that higher level.²⁴ Golf course businesses have been challenged by recent weather conditions, such as droughts or very wet seasons, and equipment sourcing issues in the past few years. Golf courses in the county are generally handicapped accessible, including the clubhouses.

There are three disc golf courses in Franklin County which are all privately owned. Disc golf courses are lower maintenance and often have very low use fees or are free. They are often maintained by owners or volunteers. In Franklin County, the Highlands of Conway has a \$5 fee, Oak Ridge in Gill also has a \$5 fee, and Westy Acres in Greenfield has a suggested \$5 donation per player. The donations at Westy Acres are accepted via Venmo, Paypal, or cash at the welcome hut.

The high cost of traditional golfing (both equipment and fees) can hinder participation. Volunteer-run disc golf courses can vary in their maintenance, especially during the summer when foliage grows very fast.

Golf Recommendations

- Provide rental golf clubs available at libraries or golf courses to reduce costs and encourage participation.
- Provide discounted or free lessons through municipal recreation programs.
- Seek additional locations to set up disk golf in public parks, school fields, or other locations with appropriate access.

²³ <https://franklincc.org/play/the-great-outdoors>

²⁴ <https://www.massgolf.org/news/22-amgo-trending-up/>

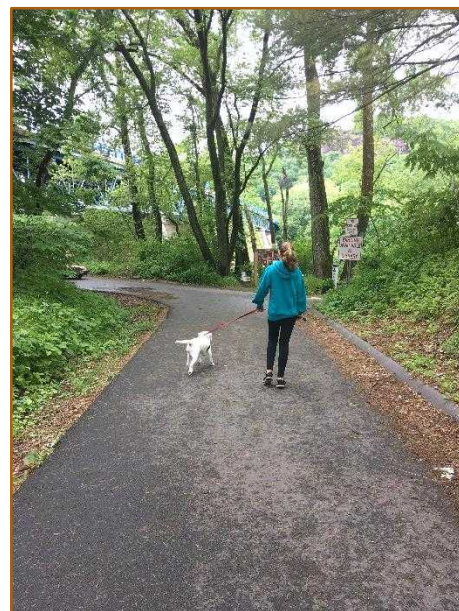
Hiking

According to both the Massachusetts SCORP and municipal OSRP surveys, hiking is one of the most popular recreational activities. It is easy to access and has no financial barriers to participation. There are hundreds of hiking trails throughout Franklin County, many of which have beautiful scenic views or wildlife viewing opportunities. Formal hiking trails can be found in the many state forests, town conservation areas, and lands owned by private land trusts. Trail running is also a popular activity, and snowshoeing during the winter. Two long-range hiking trails pass through Franklin County. The Mohican-Mohawk Trail is a non-continuous trail that follows the Deerfield River between Deerfield and Williamstown, located west of Franklin County. The New England Trail runs north-south in the eastern part of the county and offers multiple access points and shelters.

There are many hiking clubs in the region catering to a variety of audiences. The clubs provide hiking information and sponsor events.

The conditions of the hiking trails range from well-marked with excellent parking amenities, restrooms, and signs, to poorly marked trails with no amenities. Survey respondents overwhelmingly said that better trail maintenance is needed, as well as improved access and trailhead visibility, mapping, and improved signage and blazing. There are a few ADA accessible walking trails in Franklin County. With the senior population of the county increasing, a focus on increasing the accessibility of hiking is important.

Many of the towns that have recently completed OSRPs expressed the desire to develop new trails or expand existing hiking trails, with a focus on connecting the existing trails to larger networks. Some towns are considering creating a Trail Plan as the first step in this effort.



A pedestrian on the Sunderland Riverside Park.

Hiking Recommendations

- Improve existing trailheads by adding signage, parking, restrooms, and waste management.
- Create more ADA accessible trails and parking.
- Support the expansion of interconnected, long-distance trails in the county.
- Improve recreational trail markings to make them more consistent and visible.
- Seek funding for trail maintenance and sustainable trail infrastructure.

Hunting and Fishing

There are many opportunities for hunting and fishing in Franklin County. The numerous publicly owned and managed wildlife management areas (WMAs) and state forests are open to hunting, fishing, and trapping. Detailed information about the rules and regulations on hunting and fishing are provided on the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MASSWILDLIFE) website:. Most municipally-owned and land trust land is publically accessible for hunting. Hunters often develop relationships with private landowners that allow them to hunt private lands.

The most popular hunting season in Franklin County is fall deer season, but hunting for various species is allowed throughout the seasons. Pheasants are stocked in several of the wildlife management areas (WMAs), such as the Bennett Meadows WMA in Northfield and the Montague Plains WMA in Montague. There are also many privately run sportsman's (a.k.a. rod and gun) clubs in Franklin County that provide shooting ranges, hunter safety instruction, and other kinds of programming.

Franklin County is a popular destination for freshwater fishing in Massachusetts, and MassWildlife's stocking program greatly enhances the fishing experience. The Connecticut River is popular for shad fishing during the spring migration. However, the county is best known for fly fishing on the Deerfield River, and to a lesser extent the Millers River. The Deerfield River has a national reputation, as it is one of only a few major rivers in Massachusetts with a fairly large population of wild, naturally reproducing trout that provide a more challenging fishing experience for anglers. Furthermore, it is anticipated that changes to minimum flow requirements on the Deerfield will improve native trout reproduction in the future. A small industry has formed in Franklin County around fly fishing, with several private companies specializing in fly-fishing equipment and guided tours.

There are two fish hatcheries located in Franklin County. The Bitzer Fish Hatchery in Montague raises trout for stocking throughout the state. The Cronin National Salmon Station in Sunderland raises Atlantic salmon for restoration to the Connecticut River and its tributaries.

Hunting and fishing remain popular outdoor activities in Franklin County, despite challenges associated with land access.

Hunting and Fishing Recommendations

- Continue to protect contiguous tracts of land to support wildlife and their habitats.
- Promote fishing in Franklin County as a regional and national asset.

Picnic Areas

Tables and benches for picnicking can be found in every town in the county and are commonly located at lakes, state forests, and municipal parks or schools. A few picnicking areas are positioned for users to enjoy iconic views, such as the top of the Mount Sugarloaf State Reservation in Deerfield overlooking the Connecticut River, or Unity Park in Montague overlooking Barton's Cove. Managed by a wide range of entities, the county's picnic areas vary in quality and state of repair.



Northfield Mountain picnic area on the CT River.

There are at least seven pavilions in Franklin County available free for use or rent. Pavilions are popular locations for outdoor parties, as they protect from rain and are often located near other park features and amenities.

A handful of towns cited a need to develop picnic areas in their recent OSRPs. Often, picnic areas serve as a way to activate a park, so a stated need for picnic areas may be a reflection of towns with public open space that they want to draw people to more so than an undersupply of picnicking areas.

Picnic Area Recommendations

- Promote the availability of picnic areas in Franklin County.
- Develop more picnic areas close to water, especially boat launches.
- Improve ADA accessibility of picnic areas where possible.
- Construct more covered pavilions for larger multi-family gatherings.

Playgrounds

Playgrounds in the county are often at elementary schools and town parks. Greenfield and Montague (Turners Falls village) each have a splash pad associated with a municipal park.

In their updated OSRPs, at least ten different towns have recently identified the need to develop or improve their playgrounds. In some communities, the only playground in town is located at the elementary school, so there is nowhere for very young or homeschooled children to play while school is in session. In most towns, playgrounds do not meet ADA accessibility standards. The cost to upgrade the play equipment and surfaces can be quite expensive for small towns.



Playgrounds provide opportunities for children to enjoy the outdoors.

"I wish Franklin County had something like the Ithaca Children's Garden in Ithaca, New York. My children love visiting there – especially their "Anarchy Zone." They can play in the dirt, move pipes, build forts, and use their imagination!"

- Recreation Plan Survey Respondent
(<https://www.ithacachildrengarden.org/>)

Playground Recommendations

- Improve playgrounds that are in poor condition.
- Upgrade all playgrounds to full ADA accessibility compliance.
- Develop more play areas for children to use when school is in session.
- Construct playgrounds with natural, unstructured features to inspire creative, nature-based play and learning.

Rock Climbing



Rock climbing has grown in popularity in Franklin County.

There are at least 12 commonly known crags and bouldering areas in Franklin County that have become destinations for rock climbers. The most popular is Farley Ledges in Erving. The sites are often managed by the landowners and the Western Massachusetts Climbers' Coalition (WMCC). WMCC supports the development and safety of parking, trails, amenities, and climbing routes and works to address landowner concerns. Memberships with WMCC help fund site planning, land acquisition, and improvement projects at rock climbing sites.

The popularity of outdoor rock climbing has grown tremendously since the establishment of indoor rock gyms in the larger region. During the Covid-19 pandemic when there was a need for activities to be outside, the number of visitors to the outdoor crags and bouldering locations at times exceeded the sites' capacities and over-crowded the parking and climbing. In

addition, the visitors to the sites had less stewardship experience. Crag and resource management have become a much more critical need, as well as the need to provide proper tools and education to climb safely outdoors.

Rock Climbing Recommendations

- Educate climbers about the safe and sustainable use of outdoor rock climbing areas and land stewardship.
- Continue to work with landowners offering the WMCC as a resource to help manage and steward climbing resources.
- Establish best practices for resource management at the crag and bouldering locations to ensure that rock climbing areas are not degraded before further marketing sites to visitors.

Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding

Berkshire East Mountain Resort in Charlemont is a multi-season activity park with downhill skiing and snowboarding as its primary focus. Berkshire East is the only ski resort in the Connecticut River Valley region and attracts users from the county and wider region. The ski mountain maintains approximately 40 trails, lifts, a snowmaking system that can cover the mountain in 24 hours, ski and snowboard rental, and lessons. The mountain also permits snow tubing in three tubing lanes. Dining is available onsite.



Ski slopes at Berkshire East in Charlemont.

Franklin County is fortunate to have a downhill skiing and snowboarding facility given the area's relatively low elevation and terrain. Skiing and snowboarding tend to have high equipment costs and user fees, which tends to make access to these sports difficult for the less advantaged.

Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding Recommendations

- Promote downhill skiing and snowboarding opportunities in Franklin County.
- Improve public transit so that skiers can ride the bus from the John W. Olver Transit Center to skiing destinations, such as Berkshire East or Northfield Mountain.
- Encourage connections from Amtrak rail service to the ski locations so that visitors can make the last mile connection.

Snowmobiling

Seven local snowmobile clubs maintain an interconnected series of trail networks on public and private land in Franklin County. While snowmobiling is eligible to receive funding through the State's Recreational Trails Program/MassTrails program, in general, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts supports snowmobiling infrastructure far less than other states, requiring low registration fees and leaving snowmobile clubs to generate most of the funds to do trail building, management, and maintenance. Sustained primarily by membership fees, these organizations typically work with landowners on trail access, to mark and groom trails, regulate the use of trails based on the snowpack, and troubleshoot issues. DCR grooms snowmobile trails on DCR-designated trails. Snowmobilers also sometimes use local roads, farm fields, and trails not managed by a club. Use of club-maintained trails by cross-country skiers, snowshoers, walkers, and horseback riders is usually tolerated. The Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts (SAM) supports local clubs and works to maintain an interconnected snowmobile trail system.

Snowmobiling is more encouraged on private and public land in Franklin County than off-road vehicle use because of its minimal environmental impact. However, Franklin County is not seen as a destination for snowmobiling because of the lack of resources for maintaining trails, the difficulty of crossing the Connecticut River, and the lack of fueling stations and places to stop for food and drink.

Snowmobiling Recommendations

- Support the passage of recently proposed legislation to establish a snowmobile maintenance fund (S1870) and to create a policy of snowmobiling on new and existing recreational trails (S538).
- Support the creation of an interconnected snowmobile trail system.

Swimming

Residents and visitors take advantage of the county's lakes, ponds, and rivers for swimming. There are approximately eight public beaches in the county, many of which are lifeguarded, have picnic areas, or have bathrooms. These beaches are popular with young families, who often come from outside of the county to use them. Dozens of other official and unofficial swimming areas have varying degrees of access and amenities. Many ponds and lakes are popular with adults for long-distance swimming.

Swimming in rivers is also popular, although water quality issues in the Connecticut River often deter potential swimmers. Beach play and wading, especially among children, are becoming increasingly common at public boat launches.

An outdoor swimming pool at the Buckland Recreation Area is currently under reconstruction. The Greenfield YMCA has the only public indoor pool available for swimming in the winter. Unity Park in Turners Falls and Hillside Park in Greenfield have accessible summertime splash pads popular with young children.

"We need community pools or river access for swimming and cooling off as the temperatures continue to climb. We need safe places to swim."

- Montague Comprehensive Plan
Survey Respondent

Increasing average temperatures and very hot days associated with climate change are driving increased demand for swimming, and with it, the challenges associated with increased usage (e.g., noise, trash, and bank degradation). Nine communities in Franklin County with updated OSRPs have identified wanting to increase access to swimming, either by constructing or rehabilitating a pool, creating a public beach, or simply creating an access point. Two towns have identified the need for a full, town-scale assessment of needs and opportunities around access to swimming. There needs to be equitable access to swimming across the county and region to provide respite to residents as hot temperatures become more frequent.

Swimming Recommendations

- Conduct swimming access studies & create action plans at town & county levels.
- Construct more public indoor and outdoor swimming pools or splash pads in Franklin County.
- Increase access to and safety of rivers, lakes, and ponds for swimming. This includes both safe water quality conditions and safe swimming access conditions.
- Create an online source of information for current water quality conditions in local waterbodies so that swimmers know when it is unsafe to swim.

Other Outdoor Activities

There are also unique outdoor recreation activities in Franklin County that provide more niche activities. The creation of distinctive outdoor adventures has diversified the offerings at many recreational businesses. For example, Berkshire East Mountain also has ziplining, canopy tours, and a mountain coaster in summer. Mike's Maze in Sunderland is an 8-acre corn maze on a working farm.

There are also annual recreational competitions that draw residents and visitors for specific events. At least a dozen races take place in Franklin

County, ranging from 5k runs, triathlons, and endurance races to multi-stage races that involve several sports. The annual Berkshire Highlands Pentathlon includes five events - a 4.2-mile road/trail run, a 16-mile cycling leg, a 2-mile kayak, a 2-mile adventure run, a 1-mile hike to the top of the mountain, and a downhill ski/board to the finish. The D2R2 draws participants to bicycle on dirt roads through Franklin County to raise money for the Franklin Land Trust. These events are popular among county residents but also attract large crowds from outside the county and state.

Publicly accessible undeveloped open space is also commonly used for outdoor camps and programs. Adventure and team-building, environmental education, and nature connection and earth skills programs run by local businesses are popular enrichment activities in Franklin County and are highly dependent on public open space, as many of these businesses do not have access to private land.

Horseback riding has had a steady popularity. Most riding happens at private facilities or on private land. However, in Franklin County, the rural nature of most of its roadways means that riders are often able to safely ride on the road to connect to publicly owned trails that allow equestrian use.

Dog owners seek out both official and unofficial areas to exercise their dogs in Franklin County. There are dog parks at the Orange Municipal Airport and Green River Park in Greenfield. There is also a dog playfield at Unity Park in the Turners Falls village in Montague.



Participants at the start line of the annual Mug Race 5.5 mile road race held in Montague Center.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

Tourists in rural areas are increasingly looking for a broader experience that combines outdoor recreation with quality accommodations, shopping, and cultural opportunities. Access provided by sufficient infrastructure including roads, trails, parking, and signage must be in place, as well as supporting businesses including lodging, restaurants, and equipment stores or rental services. Marketing and promotion activities are needed including web-based materials, maps, guidebooks, and advertising. In addition, area businesses may also need training to support and capitalize on the recreation industry.

Place-Based Recommendations

Deerfield River

The Deerfield River is an important anchor for the west county's economy. The Deerfield River and its environs is Franklin County's recreation tourism hub. The river and the cluster of outdoor recreation opportunities around the town of Charlemont including skiing, mountain biking, and rafting make it a popular recreation destination.

Municipalities, businesses, and other stakeholders have expressed concern regarding a lack of resources to deal with the increasing recreational activities. This has led to a straining of the local management capacity, tourism infrastructure, and river natural resources. Many businesses note that both staff and visitors struggle to find lodging in the area and that tourists often find themselves stranded when they arrive without making a reservation in advance. Food, gas, and groceries can also be challenging to find in this area, and represent potential economic development opportunities.

Deerfield River Recommendations

Improvements to the outdoor recreational experience in the Deerfield River sub-region could focus on:

- Improving the infrastructure and the management of resources to better support the outdoor recreation economy.
- Improve public transportation options for visitors and staff traveling from central Franklin County to west county, particularly on the weekends.

Connecticut River

The majority of Franklin County's population lives in the towns bordering the Connecticut River. These communities enjoy greater access to developed outdoor recreation areas such as sports fields, playgrounds, and picnic areas, but less access to safe swimming and fishing areas. Residents of this area are also generally closer to motorized boat launches.

Connecticut River Recommendations

Improvements to the outdoor recreational experience in the Connecticut River sub-region could focus on:

- Improving access to swimming, fishing, and non-motorizing boating.
- Improving access to free, local recreation assets such as water, trails, and playgrounds for the local community.

Millers River

East Franklin County and the Millers River is generally a quieter recreation area, despite having similar richness in recreation opportunity to the other parts of the county. Much of the county's best boating, rock-climbing, hunting, and hiking is in this area. Through the surveys completed for this plan, East county residents and business owners state that they often experience feeling forgotten in funding and marketing in the county, so recreation opportunities are not always visible to others in the county or outside tourists.

Millers River Recommendations

Improvements to the outdoor recreational experience in the Millers River sub-region could focus on:

- Directing more funding and marketing efforts to outdoor recreation opportunities in this sub-region.
- Improving access to free, local recreation assets such as water, trails, and playgrounds for the local community.

Topical Recommendations

Infrastructure

Infrastructure Recommendations

- Increase public transit connections from Amtrak to destinations throughout the county to provide improved “last mile” transportation options for visitors.
- Advocate for increased funding for transit to provide for “last mile” connections between Amtrak and recreational designations country-wide.
- Improve public transportation for outdoor recreational tourism workers to commute to work.
- Develop infrastructure to support recreational tourism and enhance the region's assets, including parking, public bathrooms, boat ramps/put-in areas, and wayfinding and directional signage.
- Improve the cellular service in areas of the region where it is currently limited.
- Ensure that pedestrian and bicycle access to recreational facilities is safe and accessible, particularly in more populated communities.
- Support provisions for housing for seasonal workers.

Legislation & Policy

Legislation and Policy Recommendations

- Support the Massachusetts Office of Outdoor Recreation.
- Support the Massachusetts Legislature’s Trails Caucus and its efforts.
- Advocate for additional funding to promote outdoor recreation through the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce and other public or private groups.
- Work with the state to allow economic development funds to be spent on outdoor recreation that does not meet the job creation requirement.
- Advocate for additional funding to support staffing, maintenance, and enforcement on state lands and facilities.
- Promote “joint/shared use agreements” with local municipalities and school districts to increase the availability of recreational facilities.

Marketing & Promotion

Marketing and Promotion Recommendations

- Create a comprehensive website listing information on all outdoor recreation resources.
- Establish a county-level Outdoor Recreation Committee, in partnership with the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce, to coordinate the marketing of natural resource-based tourism opportunities, attractions, and events for a broader market, including visitors using passenger rail service.
- Enhance the promotion of bicycle touring in the region.
- Coordinate the availability of tourism information at John W. Olver Transit Center for use by transit and passenger rail travelers.
- Increase marketing and promotion of east county recreational resources and facilities.
- Improve the information about town-owned recreational facilities on town websites. Town websites have limited information about recreation, and it is often difficult to determine use rules, hours of operation, and if sites are open to the public.
- Develop information about recreational areas in Franklin County that are age-friendly and/or accessible.

General Recommendations

General Recommendations

- Engage with State Outdoor Recreation Office.
- Create a comprehensive recreation management and economic development plan for Franklin County.
- Encourage the development of facilities that are ADA accessible and age and dementia friendly.
- Support municipalities and organizations looking to recruit and retain volunteers, recognizing that they play an instrumental role in the maintenance of many trails and other recreational resources in the county.

SUMMARY

Franklin County has a wealth of recreational resources. The many choices provide options for all ages and ability levels. Outdoor recreation is beneficial to the communities in Franklin County because it improves overall livability, provides an environment for better health outcomes as a result of increased physical activity, and increases economic development opportunities related to tourism-based recreation. The natural and recreational resources create a conducive place for a growing tourism sector.

The plan identifies challenges and provides recommendations for improving and expanding outdoor recreation in the county. Open space protection, planning to support the facilities, and improving access to the outdoors are important to sustaining the recreation assets. Additionally, there are a growing number of recreationally based businesses that need support. There are some challenges but by working together, strategically and methodically, we can continue to expand outdoor recreation as a significant contributor to the Franklin County economy and further improve the assets that make Franklin County a nice place to live.

**We thank the following individuals and organizations
for their contributions to the development of this plan:**

- All Out Adventures
- Berkshire East
- DCR
- Edgehill Golf Course
- Frontier Cycling
- Hampshire Birding Club
- Recreation Survey respondents (anonymous)
- Stump Sprouts
- Trotting Fox Programs
- Trout Unlimited
- Western Massachusetts Climbers Coalition
- Zoar Outdoor

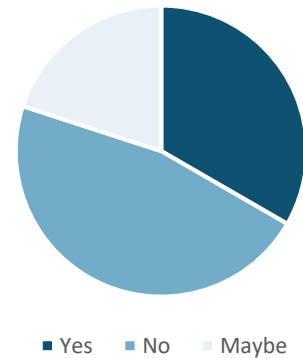
APPENDIX 1: SURVEY RESULTS

The following section highlights the responses received from surveys conducted as part of this plan that was sent to state and non-profit recreation providers, private recreation providers, and town administrators. Responses with a * represent open-ended responses with a high rate of mention.

Do you have trouble getting the word out about what you have to offer, including information about facilities, hours, location, or amenities?

Reasons for trouble getting the word out:

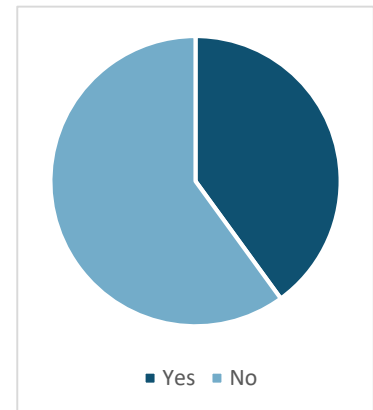
- Low visibility of access point
- Maps are a primary type of marketing and it is hard to keep them stocked
- Poor internet presence
- Competition from other tourism



Do you have trouble maintaining your facilities?

Reasons for trouble maintaining facilities:

- Not enough staff
- Not enough funding
- Difficulty cooperating with private landowners



What is the biggest challenge about running your facilities?

Operations and Maintenance:

- Not enough staff*
- Reliance on volunteers*
- Lack of a dedicated entity
- Costs
- Poor user behavior
- Management aging out with no succession plan
- Having enough product

Marketing and Communication:

- Low visibility
- Lack of advocacy

What is working well in running your facilities?

Operations and Maintenance:

- Good volunteers*
- Cooperation/help from the DPW
- Having a recreation coordinator
- Coordination among Town departments
- Partnership with the FRCOG
- Stakeholders who keep an eye on the properties

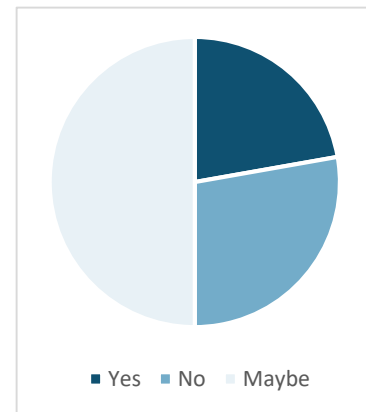
Marketing and Communication:

- Public/customer appreciation for the facility
- Good word of mouth
- Longstanding reputation
- The popularity of the sport and expanding to include new sports
- The uniqueness of the resource

Do you have an interest in expanding your facilities?

Needs to expand:

- Land*
- Indoor space*
- Funding*
- Project coordinator
- Capacity for maintenance
- Publicity
- Inventory
- Support of Town Planning Board



How were your facilities or their management impacted by Covid-19?

- Users increased
- Had to shut down/cancel
- Users declined
- Minimal
- Had to be more vigilant about overcrowding
- Received requests to hold private events
- Decreased inspections/maintenance
- Associated lodging decreased
- Difficulty with safe transportation
- Had to change the protocol
- Bookings and cancellations are more last minute

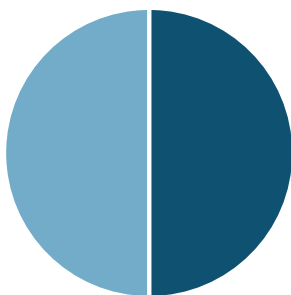
If anything about your facilities or the management of your facilities has changed (temporarily or permanently) as a result of Covid-19, please describe:

- Forced more intense monitoring (to keep unauthorized users out)
- Increased need for management
- More cleaning of equipment
- Difficulty sourcing equipment
- The unpredictability of event cancelations
- Difficulty staffing due to the need to quarantine
- Parts of the business that takes place inside had to downsize
- Started doing online programs

Are there other challenges you face in maintaining your recreational facilities?

- Volunteer recruitment*
- Funding
- Land access/tenure
- Permitting barriers
- Equipment supply chain
- Locations are diverse and all need a different management approach
- Doing more outdoor business transactions
- Limiting lodging options, including limited camping season

Do you have a business network that you rely on or participate in?



■ Yes ■ No

APPENDIX 2: FULL RECOMMENDATION LISTING

Facilities

- Support the maintenance and upkeep of existing recreational facilities.
- Improve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility at athletic facilities.
- Increase amenities such as restrooms at athletic facilities.
- Promote joint use or shared use or agreements for municipal buildings with recreational resources, such as schools.
- Support interests in emerging and new recreation activities that can use or retrofit existing facilities to accommodate multiple purposes--such as the creation of pickleball courts on existing tennis courts or other paved areas.

Activity-Based

Bicycling

- Continue to support efforts to increase safety for on-road bicycling in Franklin County.
- Increase parking and public restroom facilities throughout the county.
- Install additional bicycle repair stations throughout the county to support bicyclists.
- Continue to investigate the feasibility of creating off-road bicycle paths in Deerfield, Greenfield, Erving, New Salem/Athol, and Orange/Athol.
- Develop resources about best management practices for the maintenance and management of mountain biking trails.
- Support existing or new organizations to assist with trail maintenance, management, and/or promotion of the region's mountain biking resources.
- Support the Franklin County Bike Friendly Business Program and encourage businesses to participate.

Birding and Wildlife

- Create a centralized list of certified wildlife programs and instructors in the area.
- Include Franklin County bird hotspots in publicity about bird watching in the county.
- Increase awareness of the services offered by the Hampshire Bird Club, and connect smaller bird clubs in Franklin County with it.

Boating and Paddling

- Maintain and improve existing boat ramps.
- Improve access to boat ramps at key locations.

- Augment existing motorized and non-motorized boat launch areas with facilities for picnicking, swimming, and beach activities.
- Provide ADA accessible restroom facilities at key boat ramps.
- Increase the amount of parking for car-top boating at the Gill Public Access Boat Ramp.
- Create additional water access points for motorized and non-motorized boats throughout Franklin County.
- Increase locations for renting, loaning, and storing kayak/boat/stand-up paddles (SUP), particularly in Environmental Justice areas.
- Follow the recommendations of the Deerfield River Study and Deerfield River Management Stakeholder Group, including creating a comprehensive recreation management and economic development plan.
- Promote boating opportunities in Franklin County.

Camping

- Develop more camping capacity in Franklin County as feasible.
- Advocate with DCR to extend the campground season, particularly later into the Fall.
- Promote camping opportunities in Franklin County.

Skiing and Snowshoeing

- Promote cross-country skiing and snowshoeing opportunities in Franklin County.
- Encourage town libraries or other entities to make ski and snowshoe loans available.

Golf

- Provide rental golf clubs available at libraries or golf courses to reduce costs and encourage participation.
- Provide discounted or free lessons through municipal recreation programs.
- Seek additional locations to set up disk golf in public parks, school fields, or other locations with appropriate access.

Hiking

- Improve existing trailheads by adding signage, parking, restrooms, and waste management.
- Create more ADA accessible trails and parking.
- Support the expansion of interconnected, long-distance trails in the county.
- Improve recreational trail markings to make them more consistent and visible.
- Seek funding for trail maintenance and sustainable trail infrastructure.

Hunting and Fishing

- Continue to protect contiguous tracts of land to support wildlife and their habitats.
- Promote fishing in Franklin County as a regional and national asset.

Picnicking

- Promote the availability of picnic areas in Franklin County.
- Develop more picnic areas close to water, especially boat launches.
- Improve ADA accessibility of picnic areas where possible.
- Construct more covered pavilions for larger multi-family gatherings.

Playgrounds

- Improve playgrounds that are in poor condition.
- Upgrade all playgrounds to full ADA accessibility compliance.
- Develop more play areas for children to use when school is in session.
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- Educate climbers about the safe and sustainable use of outdoor rock climbing areas and land stewardship.
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- Improve public transit so that skiers can ride the bus from the John W. Olver Transit Center to skiing destinations, such as Berkshire East or Northfield Mountain.
- Encourage connections from Amtrak rail service to the ski locations so that visitors can make the last mile connection.

Snowmobiling

- Support the passage of recently proposed legislation to establish a snowmobile maintenance fund (S1870) and to create a policy of snowmobiling on new and
- existing recreational trails (S538).
- Support the creation of an interconnected snowmobile trail system.

Swimming

- Conduct swimming access studies & create action plans at town & county levels.
- Construct more public indoor and outdoor swimming pools or splash pads in Franklin County.
- Increase access to and safety of rivers, lakes, and ponds for swimming. This includes both safe water quality conditions and safe swimming access conditions.
- Create an online source of information for current water quality conditions in local waterbodies so that swimmers know when it is unsafe to swim.

Place-Based

Deerfield River

- Improve the infrastructure and the management of resources to better support the outdoor recreation economy.
- Improve public transportation options for visitors and staff traveling from central Franklin County to west county, particularly on the weekends.

Connecticut River

- Improve access to swimming, fishing, and non-motorizing boating.
- Improve access to free, local recreation assets such as water, trails, and playgrounds for the local community.

Millers River

- Direct more funding and marketing efforts to outdoor recreation opportunities in this sub-region
- Improving access to free, local recreation assets such as water, trails, and playgrounds for the local community.

Place-Based

Infrastructure

- Increase public transit connections from Amtrak to destinations throughout the county to provide improved “last mile” transportation options for visitors.
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- Ensure that pedestrian and bicycle access to recreational facilities is safe and accessible, particularly in more populated communities.
- Support provisions for housing for seasonal workers.

Legislation and Policy

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- Support the Massachusetts Legislature’s Trails Caucus and its efforts.
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- Work with the state to allow economic development funds to be spent on outdoor recreation that does not meet the job creation requirement.
- Advocate for additional funding to support staffing, maintenance, and enforcement on state lands and facilities.
- Promote “joint/shared use agreements” with local municipalities and school districts to increase the availability of recreational facilities.

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- Create a comprehensive website listing information on all outdoor recreation resources.
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- Develop information about recreational areas in Franklin County that are age-friendly and/or accessible.

General

- Engage with State Outdoor Recreation Office.
- Create a comprehensive recreation management and economic development plan for Franklin County.
- Encourage the development of facilities that are ADA accessible and age and dementia friendly.
- Support municipalities and organizations looking to recruit and retain volunteers, recognizing that they play an instrumental role in the maintenance of many trails and other recreational resources in the county.