

WASHOE COUNTY HEALTHY PARKS SURVEY - 89502 PILOT PROJECT

Prepared by Washoe County Health District

Chronic Disease Prevention Program

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A. Project Description

A central goal of the Washoe County Chronic Disease Prevention Program is to increase physical activity to reduce the overall chronic disease burden in Washoe County. Focusing on local urban parks and open spaces has been shown to increase community physical activity levels.¹ This can be done with targeted advertising, increased organized activity implementation (e.g. organized sport leagues), or targeted physical activity programs like Walk with a Doc. The 89502 zip code was chosen for this pilot project based on findings from the 2015-2017 Washoe County Health Needs Assessment. This assessment found the 89502 to have a high Community Needs Index (CNI) score. Communities with high CNI scores have elevated mortality rates and increased disease burden for chronic disease such as hypertension and stroke² – burdens that can be reduced with increased physical activity.

The data collection for this project was modeled after the surveys conducted by The Central Park Conservancy on Central Park in New York and the audit tools developed by Active Living Research Organization. Data was collected from mid-March 2017 to early June 2017 by Washoe County staff, a local high school intern from the Truckee Meadows Parks Foundation (TMPF) and an undergraduate student from University of Nevada, Reno School of Community Health Sciences (CHS). To date, there has not been such an extensive survey of park utilization, qualitative data collection and state of parks in Reno or in Washoe County. There has also never been a master plan for City of Reno focused on park or open spaces.³

Parks & Local Assets

Based on Washoe County Assessor's property data, there are 20 urban "parks" in the 89502 zip code which are categorized as a neighborhood park, greenbelt, special use park, community park, or open space based on the National Parks and Recreation Association standard labeling system. Neighborhood parks usually have a radius of ½ mile and serve surrounding homes where as community parks are much larger, usually between 15-50 acres. Community parks usually have more functional areas (e.g. pools, large playgrounds, etc.) and serve the broader community. Special Use Parks are designed for more specific purposes which dictate size. Greenways are usually next to drainage systems, rivers or bodies of water that serve as buffers for development. They serve as connectors and include pedestrian trails or paths. For the purposes of this study the Rosewood Lake Golf Course was not included in this study due to its specific function, nor the Hidden Meadows Open Space due to construction. Here after the term "parks" will refer to all urban parks, open spaces or greenbelts regardless of Assessor's designation.

In the 89502 zip code there are 1,024 acres of park land.⁴ The per capita acreage per 1,000 people is 23 acres which is above the City of Reno per capita per 1,000 people of 14 acres. However, the East and West side of this zip code are very different and the Reno Tahoe Airport serves as a geographic marker in the middle. Even though the per capital average is higher than in the City of Reno in general, the residents West of the airport and

¹ Center for Disease Control.(2011). The CDC Guide to Strategies to Increase Physical Activity in the Community.

² Roth, R. & Barsi, E. (2005). The Community Needs Index. A New Tool Pinpoints Health Care Disparities in Communities Throughout the Nation. *Health Programs*. 2005 Jul-Aug, 86(4):32-8.

³ Phone conversations from Andy Bass, Director of City of Reno Parks and Recreations Department. 2017.

⁴ 2017 Washoe County Assessor's Real Property Data

East of the airport live in different densities and may have lower access to the open spaces as most of these are located on the East side of the airport. Residents in the City of Reno also have lower acreage per capita than compared to similar cities across the nation reducing access to parks.⁵

Table 1. Urban Parks in 89502

NAME	YEAR ACQUIRED	FACILITY TYPE	OWNERSHIP
BRODHEAD PARK	1967	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
FISHERMAN'S PARK #1	1976	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
FISHERMAN'S PARK #2	1976	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
HARRAHS/DILORETO PATHWAY	1980	SPECIAL USE PARK	RENO
HIDDEN MEADOW OPEN SPACE	1996	OPEN SPACE	COUNTY
HIDDEN VALLEY HIGHLANDS OPEN SPACE	1974	COMMUNITY PARK	COUNTY
HIDDEN VALLEY REGIONAL PARK	1968	REGIONAL PARK	COUNTY
HUFFAKER HILLS OPEN SPACE	2003	OPEN SPACE	COUNTY
JAMAICA PARK	1977	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
KUENZLI GREENBELT PARK	1981	TRUCKEE RIVER GREENBELT	RENO
LISTON PARK	1969	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
MIGUEL RIBERA PARK	1991	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
MIRA LOMA PARK	1980	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
PICKETT PARK	1972	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
REGGIE RD EXERCISE AREA	1979	SPECIAL USE PARK	RENO
ROSEWOOD LAKES GOLF COURSE	1993	GOLF COURSE	RENO
STEWART PARK	1943	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
TRUCKEE RIVER GREENBELT	1981	TRUCKEE RIVER GREENBELT	RENO
WILKINSON PARK	1943	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO
YORI PARK	1977	NEIGHBORHOOD PARK	RENO

B. Data Collection

Data collection comprised of three parts: 1) park utilization counts, 2) qualitative surveys of park attendees, and 3) park audits. Data was categorized based on the day and time it was collected to capture different usage populations. Data was grouped by traditional work days (Monday through Friday, 8 am to 5 pm), evening weekdays (Monday through Friday, 5 pm to 7pm) and on weekends (Saturday through Sunday, 8 am to 5pm). Data was not collected on days with inclement weather or below 50 degrees due to limited staff resources and because it was assumed utilization would be lower in parks during those weather conditions. As this was one of the wettest springs on record in northern Nevada, weather was a hindering factor during March and April of the project. Due to the size and different functionality, three of the parks were broken into multiple sections including Mira Loma (three sections), Hidden Valley Regional Park (two sections) and Miguel Ribera (two sections). Each Section was labeled by section area and reported individually.

⁵ The Trust For Public Lands (2016) City Park Facts. Retrieved from https://www.tpl.org/sites/default/files/2016%20City%20Park%20Facts_0.pdf

Audits

Audits contain information about park assets (e.g. equipment, signage, etc.), condition of park and equipment, park aesthetics and presence of negative factors (e.g. gangs litter, etc.). Both negative and positive attributes of a park can be compared to domestic and international research related to park utilization. Access to park assets or functional areas (e.g. playgrounds) have been correlated to increased park usage, while presence of adult males and graffiti reduce perceived safety of parks and reduce usage.^{6,7} At least one Weekday audit was completed for all parks. If any graffiti, vandalism or dangerous activity (e.g. fighting or needles, etc.) was observed during an audit or count, the City of Reno parks department or police were contacted immediately. On average, audits took 37 minutes to complete.

Table 2. Completed Park Section Counts

Park Name	Weekday	Evening	Weekend
BRODHEAD	X		X
FISHERMAN'S 1	X	X	X
FISHERMAN'S 2	X	X	X
H-D PATHWAY	X	X	X
HIDDEN VALLEY OS	X		
HIDDEN VALLEY RP 1	X	X	
HIDDEN VALLEY RP 2	X	X	X
HUFFAKER HILLS OS	X		X
JAMAICA PARK	X	X	X
KUENZLI GB	X	X	
LISTON	X	X	X
MIGUEL RIBERA 1	X	X	X
MIGUEL RIBERA 2	X	X	X
MIRA LOMA 1	X	X	X
MIRA LOMA 2	X	X	X
MIRA LOMA 3	X		X
PICKETT	X	X	X
REGGIE RD	X		
STEWART	X		X
TRUCKEE RIVER GB	X		
WILKINSON	X	X	X
YORI PARK	X	X	

Surveys

There were over 93 surveys conducted during the course of this project. Park attendees were asked a variety of questions about transport to the park, frequency of utilization, and open-ended questions concerning the likes and dislikes of the respective park being audited. Demographic information was also collected in addition to activities performed in the park. For individuals who did not want to be surveyed or who ignored requests (e.g.

⁶ Hilborn, J.(2009). Dealing With Crime and Disorder in Urban. Parks. *US Department of Justices*.

⁷ The Trust for Public Land. (2011). From Fitness Zones to the Medical Mile: How Urban Park Systems Can Best Promote Health and Wellness.

on a bike), a short demographic survey was completed to potentially show if there was a difference between those who agreed to be surveyed and those who declined. However, if there was an organized sporting event (e.g. soccer game) or practice, these individuals were not approached for surveys or non-participant surveys.

Counts

In order to measure park utilization, counts were conducted at all park sections at least once during the weekday, 65% of park sections had evening counts completed, and 73% of park sections had weekend count completed (Table 2.). The number of park attendees was measured for an hour, which included those who were already at the park at the beginning of the count and passerbys. If there was an organized sport practice, all members of the activity were also included in the count.

C. Quantitative Data Findings

Park Utilization

Utilization counts of parks were taken during the day on traditional work days, evenings, and weekends. Utilization was highest in the evenings and lowest during the work week based on overall count averages as seen in Table 3. The larger parks or regional parks usually had the highest utilization, which may be due the versatility of the space and the availability of space for more organized sporting events or practice. Both Fisherman's parks were the lowest utilized parks across the board. Though this is not completely understood, it may due to the high prevalence of transients and distance from residential areas.

Factors that can affect park attendance include presence of litter, graffiti, numbers of adult males and juveniles and number of families.⁸ While the former two items were measured in the park audits, the latter were not included during the audits or count. For future utilization counts it may be advantageous to collect this information including perceived age of people counted at parks. Anecdotally, the parks with highest number of adult or juvenile males during all counts include Fisherman's Park 1 & 2, Yori Park, and most of the parks bordering the river. Based on the observational data, all Mira Loma Sections, Jamaica, Pickett, and Miguel Ribera sections had the most diversity of attendees in regards to gender, age, and being in a group or with a family. It is recommended that Section IX of the audit be done with the count to better collect information on the composition of people utilizing parks.

Park Audits

Audits were the most comprehensive pieces of data collection and included 71 questions. Many of the items measured can be used to monitor assets in parks (e.g. facilities), have an inventory of physical features (e.g. sculptures, canopy coverage, etc.) and monitor variables that can attract or deter park utilization.

⁸ Hilborn, J.(2009). Dealing With Crime and Disorder in Urban. Parks. *US Department of Justices*.

Table 3. Park Counts Based On Time

Day Counts		Evening Counts		Weekend Counts	
Park	Count	Park	Count	Park	Count
TRUCKEE RIVER GB	0	FISHERMAN'S PARK 2	0	FISHERMAN'S PARK 1	1
HIDDEN VALLEY OS	1	LISTON	16	LISTON	2
FISHERMAN'S PARK 1	3	HIDDEN VALLEY RP 1	21	FISHERMAN'S PARK 2	6
FISHERMAN'S PARK 2	3	FISHERMANS 1	22	MIGUEL RIBERA 1	7
JAMAICA	3	MIRA LOMA 2	31	JAMAICA	9
BRODHEAD	4	KUENZIL GB	35	MIGUEL RIBERA 2	9
STEWART	4	HARRAHS/DILORETO PW	37	HUFFAKER HILLS OS	14
WILKENSON	4	PICKETT	37	HARRAHS/DILORETO PW	15
LISTON	4	YORI	37	STEWART	16
MIGUEL RIBIERA 2	4	WILKENSON	38	PICKETT	19
HUFFAKER HILLS OS	5	JAMAICA	50	WILKENSON	20
HIDDEN VALLEY RP 1	7	MIGUEL RIBERA 1	50	BRODHEAD	22
MIRA LOMA 2	7	MIGUEL RIBERA 2	50	MIRA LOMA 2	26
YORI	8	HIDDEN VALLEY RP 2	52	HIDDEN VAL RP 2	27
REGGIE RD EXERCISE AREA	9	MIRA LOMA 1	73	MIRA LOMA 3	57
MIRA LOMA 1	9	Average	36.6	MIRA LOMA 1	92
PICKETT	10			Average	21.38
MIGUEL RIBIERA 1	12				
MIRA LOMA 3	16				
HARRAHS/DILORETO PW	22				
HIDDEN VALLEY RP 2	24				
KUENZIL GB	27				
Average	8.45				

Signage & Transportation

A high proportion of parks have signage related to the identification of the park, rules, and facility information. However, only 36% of park sections had distance or mileage markers, and very few had educational signs, park maps, or event information. Increasing walkability of parks and trails has been shown to increase park and/or trail utilization.⁹ This can be achieved a variety of ways including installation of mileage markers and having more park maps at park locations or throughout surrounding areas to show park locations. Having more events at parks may increase park utilization, and increasing the public’s access to local event information may encourage more people to come back to parks for specific events.

Most park goers either drove to the park or walked with the former being the most popular. Only 40% of the park sections had a bus stop accessible and only 22% had nearby bike lanes. Even less of the park sections had

⁹ Kaczynski, A., Potwarka &L., Saelens, B. (2008). Association of Park Size, Distance, and Features With Physical Activity in Neighborhood Parks. *American Journal of Public Health*. 2008 August, 98(8):1451-1456.

bike racks, but anecdotally all of them were empty at the time of the audits. Staff from the City of Reno Parks and Recreation Department said they will install bike racks based on requests, but find they are never utilized. On a positive note, for all the parks that did have bike lanes near the park, 80% had marked lanes which can increase safety for cyclists.¹⁰

Table 4. Percentage of Park Sections with information or transportation attributes

General Information	72.7%	Bus Stop	40.9%
Hours	68.2%	Bike Racks	13.6%
Contact Information	68.2%	Sidewalks	72.7%
Facility Information	77.3%	Bike Lanes	22.7%
Distance Markers	36.4%	Marked Bike Lanes	80.0%
Park Rules	77.3%	Share the Road Sign	0.0%
Education Signs	18.2%		
Park Map	9.1%		
Event Information	4.5%		

Over 70% of the parks audited had sidewalks, and when the open spaces parks are removed from the audits, that number is closer to 80% with sidewalks. Increasing the linear distance of sidewalks in parks has been shown to increase walkability as it increases walking surfaces.¹¹ This is not an issue for the open spaces, but for parks such as Pickett Park, this may be beneficial as there is not a sidewalk around the entire park for walking.

Sporting Assets

The 89502 has two large regional parks, Miguel Ribera and Mira Loma, which provide a number of specific functional areas (e.g. skate park) but also provide large lawn areas. Table 5 shows a list sporting assets, most of which were shown to be in good repair. There is also one badminton court in the Hidden Valley Regional Park and various horseshoe pits that are captured in the “Other” category for this question, but are worthy of mention.

Table 5. Sporting Assets in 89502 Zip code

	No.
Baseball Field	6
Basketball Courts	2
Tennis Courts	3
Volleyball Courts	1
Fitness Stations	16
Skate Park	1
Lawn	17

¹⁰ United States Department of Transportation. Bureau of transportation Statistics. *Special Reports and Issue Briefs. No. 11*. Retrieved from https://www.rita.dot.gov/bts/sites/rita.dot.gov.bts/files/publications/special_reports_and_issue_briefs/issue_briefs/number_11/html/entire.html. April 15, 2017.

¹¹ National Recreation and Park Association. *Safe Routes to Parks: Improving Access to Parks through Walkability*. Retrieved from <https://www.nrpa.org/contentassets/f768428a39aa4035ae55b2aaff372617/park-access-report.pdf>. April 21, 2017.

Public Facility Assets

Public Facility Assets include public restrooms, toilets, and picnic tables can potentially be a draw for public both in the access to sanitary locations but may also increase time spent at parks. Benches and picnic tables were more prevalent than public restrooms or drinking fountains, which may be due to the increased cost and maintenance. The restrooms and drinking fountains also had a lower average condition score, which is an average number of the parks with these facilities that were rated as being in good condition (one being the best score and zero being the worst). Shade coverage was also rated with most parks only having 25% of the overall park being shaded either by trees or artificial canopy. Having more shaded walking areas or places for physical activity may increase park utilization or physical activity in these areas, especially in areas that include playground equipment for children.

Table 6. Public Facility Assets

	Percentage	Avg. Condition Score
Toilet	45.5%	0.40
Drinking Fountain	45.5%	0.20
Benches	86.4%	0.90
Picnic Tables	68.2%	0.87
Trash Cans	81.8%	NA

Park Utilization Variables

Perceived safety can affect park utilization. Parks with higher number of adult males, vandalism, graffiti and worn equipment can reduce perceived safety.¹² Aesthetic features such as landscaping, sculptures and flowers can increase perceived safety of parks and be a draw for visitors. Contrary to previous research, some of the parks with the highest prevalence of graffiti or removed graffiti had some of the highest utilization. This includes Wilkinson and Miguel Ribera Park which are located in higher density sections of the 89502 zip code.

Most parks audited had some form of graffiti or removed graffiti, but vandalism was not observed. Very few parks had artistic or educational features, and around half had landscaping, which is good considering five of the 22 park sections were open spaces. Though few people said in the surveys said they came to parks for the landscaping or fauna, increasing the aesthetic features in the parks may increase utilization and create more a draw for parks to be a place for physical activity and relaxation.

¹² National Recreation and Park Association. Parks & Recreation in Underserved Areas: A Public Health Perspective. Retrieved from http://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/Parks-Rec-Underserved-Areas.pdf April 15th, 2017.

Table 7. Park Features

	Percentage
Graffiti	72.7%
Covered Graffiti	31.8%
Vandalism	0.0%
Litter	31.8%
Threatening Personnas	0.0%
Transients	31.8%
Excessive Litter	31.8%
Landscaping	50.0%
Artistic Features	9.1%
Educational Features	13.6%

D. Surveys

Almost 90 surveys were completed over the course of the project. There were two factions of people in parks that were not included in the surveys; people less than 18 years of age or those who were strictly Spanish-speaking due to limitations of the staff conducting interviews. Future surveys should include staff who can fluently speak Spanish to ensure this population is better represented in the data collection.

A higher proportion of the respondents were male than female and the average age was 43 years, which is higher than the 37 median age of Washoe County residents based on the 2010 US Census report. Survey respondents were more likely to be in a group which included family or friends than survey non-respondents. However, the race composition of the survey respondents is very representative of Washoe County as a whole. The 89502 zip code has a higher proportion of Hispanic or Latino residents, which may have been represented better in the data had the surveys been available in Spanish. Survey non-respondents were more likely to be male and perceived to be Hispanic. In addition, 40% of survey non-respondents were during evening times and were eight times more likely to be on a bike.

Figure 1. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Gender

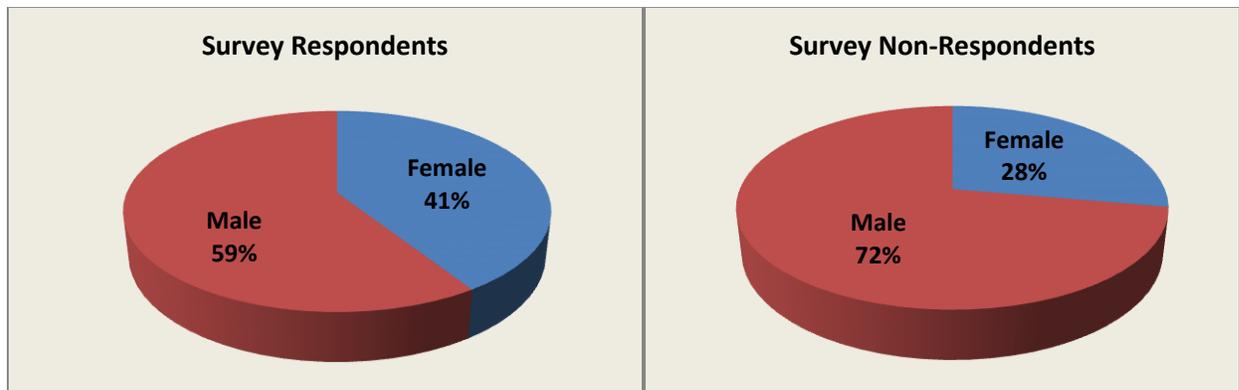


Figure 2. Survey Respondents and Non-respondents by Race

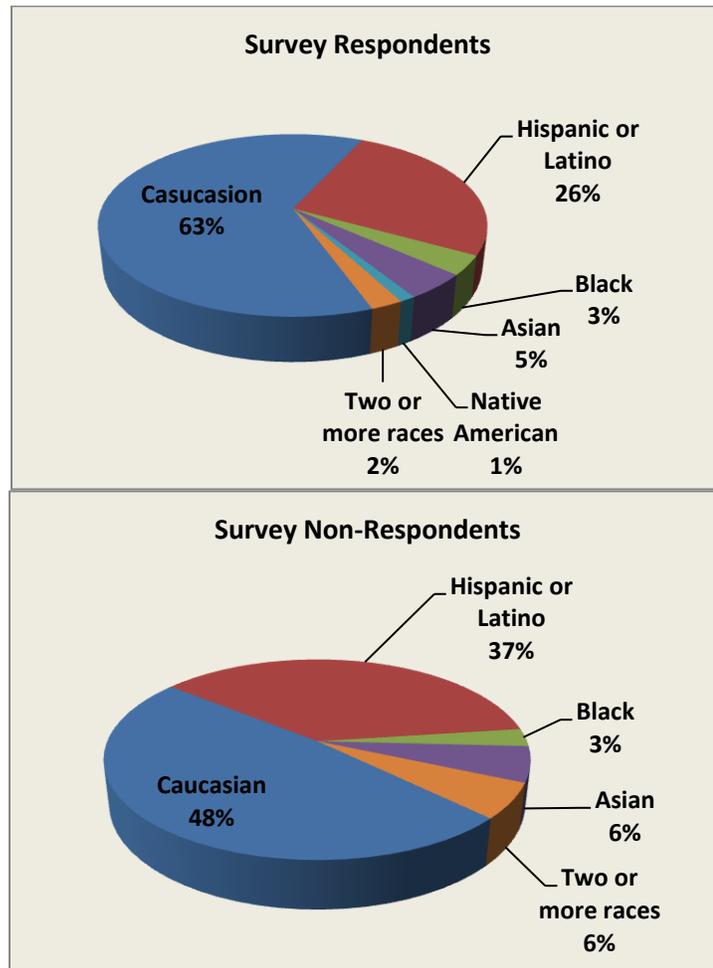
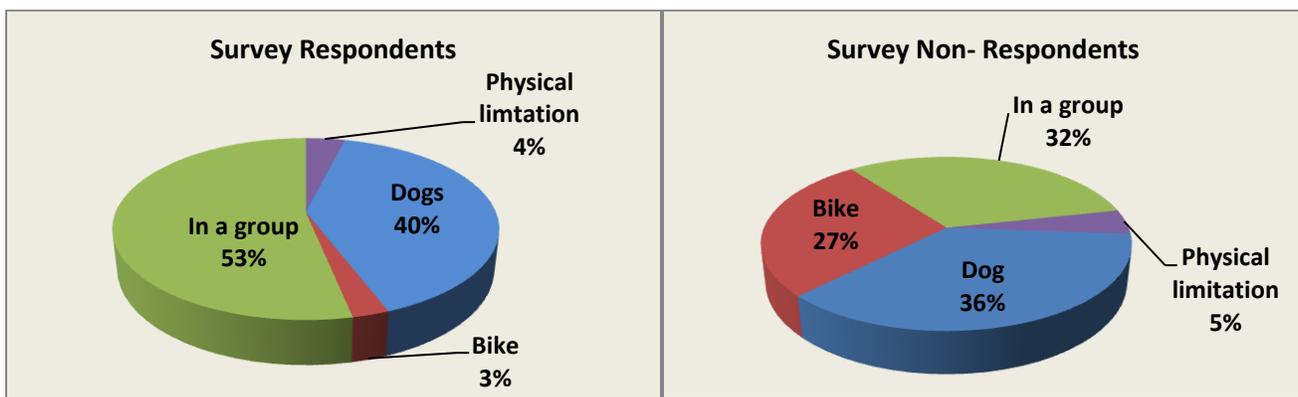


Figure 3. Survey respondents and Non-respondents by Other Factors

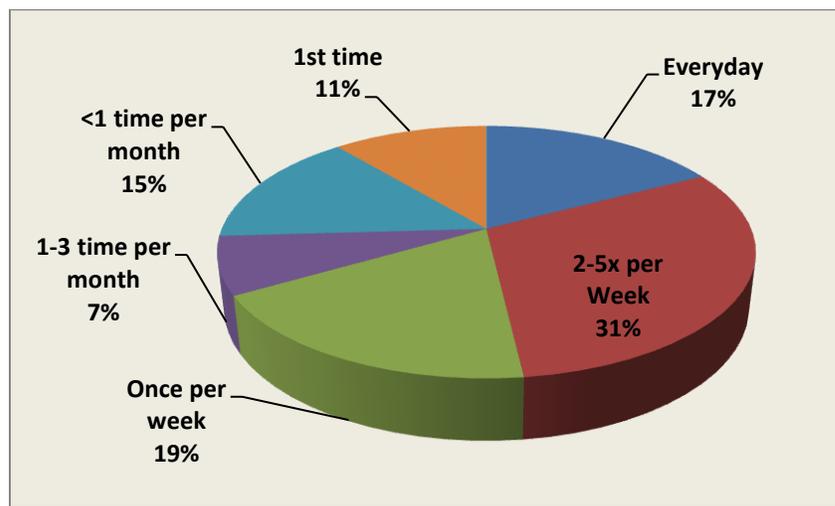


Survey respondents were relatively homogenous in regards to transportation and activity. Most people either walked to the park or drove (31% and 60% respectively) with the latter being the most popular mode of transportation; few other forms of transportation were utilized (e.g. rollerblading). There was a mix of people who came by themselves, just with dogs or in groups. Again, this data does not include surveys by people in

organized sporting events or practices. Many of the people surveyed frequent the respective parks relatively often so increasing park utilization will require targeting the people who visit parks infrequently or not at all. It will be important to determine barriers or possible incentives to get them to parks more often or inform them of local parks and their assets.

The most popular activities of respondents were walking, dog walking, and enjoying multiple attributes of the park including walking paths and playgrounds. Frequently cited activities under the “other” category included playing with kids, using the playground, disc golf and watching organized sport practice. Only 36% of respondents were with kids, suggesting that the installation of more playgrounds may increase utilization by parents and increase physical activity in kids and young children.

Figure 4. Frequency of Park Visitation by Survey Respondents



Qualitative Responses from Surveys

There were three open-ended questions asked on the survey questionnaire. Respondents were asked what they liked and disliked about a particular park and if there were any areas they would avoid and why.

Not all respondents had specific items related to parts of the park they avoided or parts they disliked. The presence of transients or homeless was a frequent comment, especially for Pickett Park and the parks along the river. Most people were not fearful of them, but did wish they could be removed from the parks. For dog owners, concern with weeds and presence of puncturevines (goat head weeds) in the off-leash dog parks, in the open spaces, and parks that had unmaintained dirt patches. Many owners were also excited that parks with open grassy areas did not use pesticides to control weeds as they felt this was better for kids and dogs playing in these areas. Lastly, the presence of dog feces was a concern of many respondents in parks with open, grassy areas. Though dog owners should pick up after their dogs while in public spaces, this issue may be mitigated if more dog bags dispensers were available to the public and properly stocked (only 40% of park sections audited had bags available for dog waste removal).

Most people were very complementary of the parks, the facilities and the maintenance. Access to large grassy areas was popular in most parks regardless of where the parks were located, both for personal use and use of

dogs. Below is a list of representative quotes from the surveys answering the question, **“In one sentence, what do you like most about this park?”**

Brodhead Park: “The River” “Peace and Quiet”

Fisherman’s Park 1: “The River”

Harrah’s-Diloreto Pathway: “Everything, the walkways”

Hidden Valley Regional Park (Section 1 & 2): “The views and playground” “Best park for dogs in Reno”

Huffaker Hills Open Space: “Nice trail, clean & dog friendly”

Jamaica Park: “Big trees, well developed park, the diversity of people who use the park”

Kuenzil Greenbelt: “The river since this is where I fish”

Liston: “Playground area”

Miguel Ribera (Sections 1 & 2): “Everything!” “Open park, basketball courts in good repair”

Mira Loma (All sections):

“Openness, all of the grass, likes the external walking path” “Easy access, big park, nice people”

“Grass, wildlife, kids, open clean area” “Outdoors, skating field”

Pickett:

“Open, can see all of the surroundings, equipment in good shape” “No fences, seems more welcoming”

Reggie Rd. Exercise Area: “Water, ducks, nice walkway “

Stewart: “Quiet” “Relaxing, fresh”

Wilkinson:

“Big play area (grassy area), enough room for everyone” “Well maintained big grass lawn”

Yori: “Peaceful even when there are a lot of people” “Swings, jungle gym “

E. Recommendations

- Conduct focus groups or surveys with members of the public who do not frequent local parks to determine barriers, disincentives, or determinants for visiting local parks
- Increase linear distance of sidewalks or maintained walking trails in parks to increase walkability
- Install distance markers or wayfinder signs in parks to increase walkability
- Increase the number of parks with bus stops in the general vicinity
- Increase the number of community events held in neighborhood parks or encourage local promoters to use neighborhood parks for events (e.g. farmer's markets)
- Increase the shade canopy over sidewalks, walking paths, and playground equipment
- Install and maintain dog waste bag dispensers to promote clean-up of large grassy areas in parks
- Promote the pesticide free parks in the 89502 zip code to general Washoe County population
- Conduct similar studies on parks throughout Washoe County to determine the specific barriers, needs or incentives for local residents to increase utilization of parks and increase overall physical activity