

Administrative Structure

Kent County Parks was established in 1924 and is one of the oldest parks departments in the state. The Department has historically concentrated on acquiring and managing land rich in natural resources. Over the years it has grown to include 41 sites covering 6,333 acres, and 22 miles of paved recreation trail, making Kent County Parks one of the largest park systems in the state.

Governing Body

The Kent County Parks Department manages the daily operations and development of the park system. The Department is overseen by the County Administrator's office which, in turn, reports to the elected County Board of Commissioners.

Kent County is divided into nineteen voting districts. Voters from each district elect one Commissioner. This nineteen-member board is responsible for conducting the general business of the County, including approving budgets and contracts and setting major policies. Two standing committees advise the Board of Commissioners. These committees develop information, alternatives and recommendations on County operations. They are the Finance Committee and the Legislative and Human Resources Committee.

The Department has a long history of operating quality parks. This is accomplished through established policies and procedure regarding operations and maintenance, and through rules governing the conduct of park visitors.

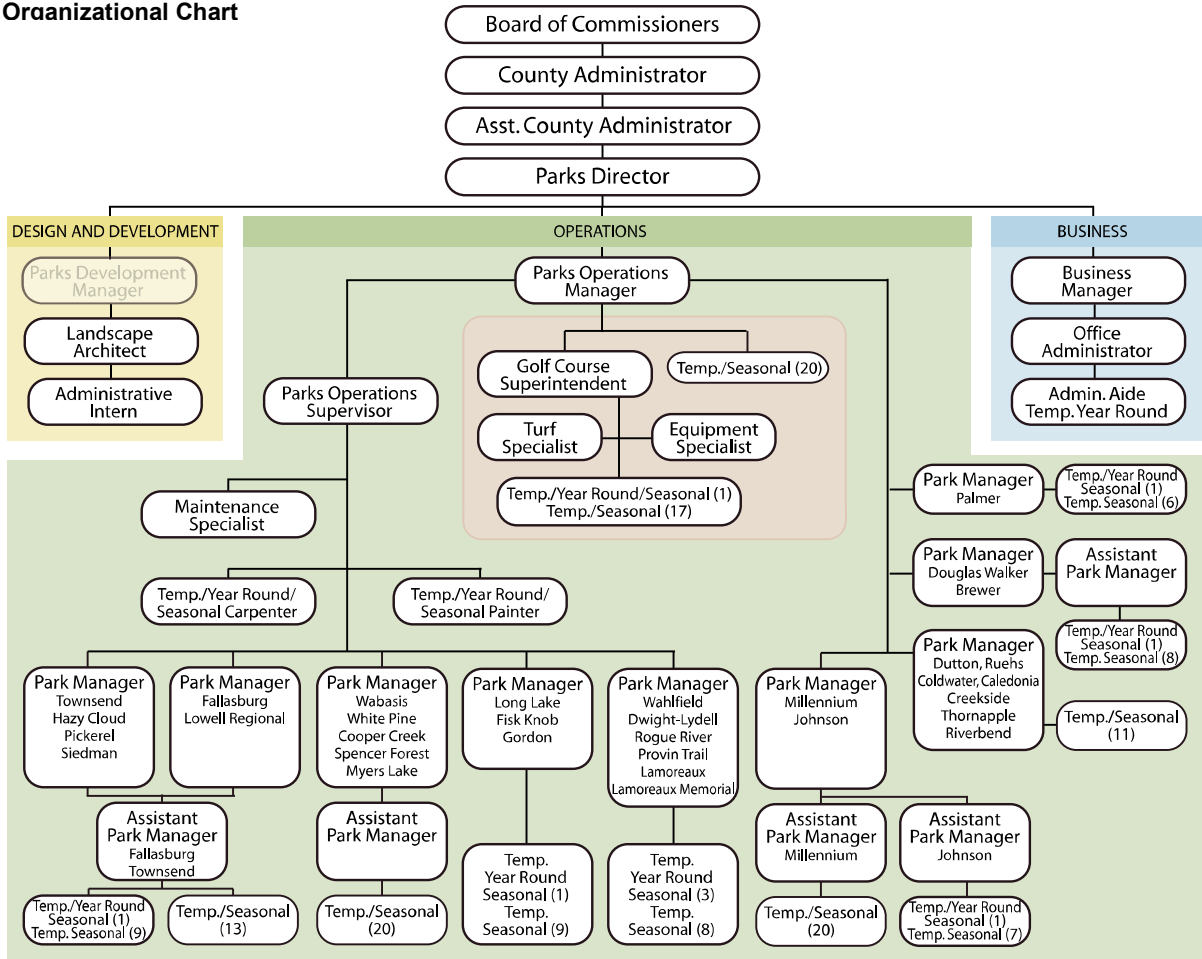
Department Staffing

The Department is divided into three main divisions, Design and Development, Operations, and Business, with each reporting to the Parks Director. Because most parks are open from April 1 to October 31, the Department relies heavily on temporary employees during its primary season.

Due to budget limitations, full-time, permanent staffing is somewhat reduced from levels seen a decade ago. At the same time, operational expectations for the Department have increased significantly, most notably with the opening of the 1,500 acre Millennium Park.

Figure 2 on the following page show the current staffing structure for the Kent County Parks Department.

Figure 2.
Kent County Parks Department
Organizational Chart



Annual Budget (2009)

For 2009, the Department's operations and maintenance budget is \$4,318,161. This is a decrease from the \$4.74 million originally appropriated for 2007 and the \$4.48 million appropriated for 2006. This decline in funding is attributable to a combination of county-wide budgetary limitations and lower expectations for park revenues.

Capital improvement projects (C.I.P.s) are separately budgeted, falling into several general categories.

Annual C.I.P.s funded entirely through the County General Fund

Historically, the Parks Department has received funding for specific projects from the County's annual allocation for Capital Improvement Projects (C.I.P.s). However, for 2009, the County did not appropriate any capital improvement funding to the Parks Department. In 2008, the last year for which such funding was provided, the

County appropriated a total of \$358,907 in general fund dollars for three Parks Department capital improvement projects.

C.I.P.s funded through private gifts and other sources

In 2008, the Department initiated a three-year trail development project in Millennium Park funded by more than \$5 million in private gifts. The development of the Fred Meijer 4 Mile Trail (2008-2010) and the Fred Meijer M-6 Trail (2007-2010) also is being supported by \$600,000 in private gifts.

Federal Transportation Enhancement funding is provided by the Michigan Department of Transportation also is supporting the development of multi-jurisdictional trails, including the Fred Meijer 4 Mile Trail (\$1,920,000), the Fred Meijer M-6 Trail (\$2,600,000) and the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail (\$867,500).

Private gifts and grants from various sources also support acquisition of parkland. In 2008, nearly \$200,000 in private funding contributed to the purchase of land expanding Fallasburg and Chief Hazy Cloud parks.

Capital Project funded through a reconstruction fund

Kent Trails will undergo significant reconstruction beginning in 2009 and anticipated to cost close to \$1,000,000. Support is anticipated to come from an amortized reconstruction fund and other sources.

Parkland Acquisition and Development Fund

The Department continually seeks to acquire key parcels of land to expand existing parks or set aside significant natural resources for future enjoyment. In 1998, the County Board of Commissioners approved a subcommittee report that called for an annual CIP appropriation of \$500,000 for land acquisition, from 1999-2008. However, funding over this period has not been consistent and the land acquisition fund established by this action is likely to be depleted in 2009 or 2010. Funds for future acquisitions will need to be allocated as needs and opportunities arise.

Funding Sources

In 2008, funding from all sources for all Parks Department activities is estimated to total \$7,118,097. Figure 3 below shows the distribution of these funding sources.

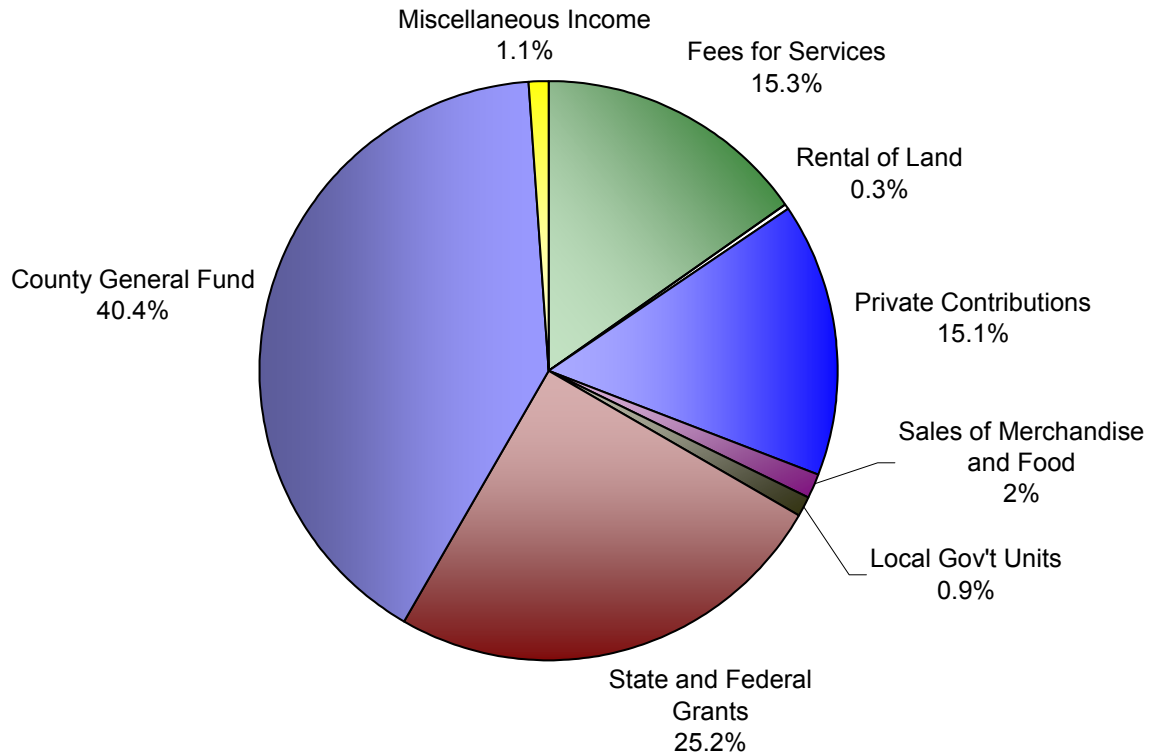


Figure 3. Funding Sources

General operations and maintenance expenses are projected to account for \$4.2 million of the overall \$7.1 million described above for 2008. Funding for this portion of department activities comes primarily from County general fund dollars appropriated by the County Board of Commissioners (64%). The remaining funds for operations and maintenance are derived primarily from park user fees at Kaufman Golf Course in Palmer Park, the campground at Wabasis Park, beach admission fees at Millennium Park and shelter/site rentals throughout the system.

Routine capital improvement projects typically are funded by County general fund dollars, although private contributions, grants and contributions from local units of government may also play a part, as described above.

Land acquisition and major capital projects generally are funded through a combination of private gifts, foundation support, general fund dollars, and grants provided by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Enhancement Grants.

In the past, the Kent County Board of Commissioners appropriated one-quarter mil from the general fund for the purpose of parkland acquisition and development in response to a study of the long-term funding needs of the Department. This study highlighted the need for long-term steady funding to support a stable land acquisition program needed to meet future needs of the county's growing population. However, due to budget limitations, no new funding has been appropriated for land acquisition since 2005.

Role of Volunteers

Currently volunteers provide sporadic support in some county parks, but the Parks Department does not have a centrally organized volunteer program. Developing a strong program of recruitment, coordination, training, and recognition of volunteers is a high priority for the Department. During the five-year period covered by this plan the Department will actively develop and implement an effective volunteer program to support the county park system.

Partnerships

Relationships with Local Governments

The Kent County Parks Department works with officials from municipalities and townships throughout the County. This includes working with local Parks and Recreation Departments. In some areas, local units of government provide funding for park acquisition or development, or management of county park lands.

Relationships with School Districts

The Kent County Parks Department has working relationships with several school districts and encourages districts to utilize county parks and trails for educational and recreational activities.

Relationships with Groups

The Kent County Parks Department has good working relationships with many park user groups and planning groups, including:

- West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition
- West Michigan Recreation and Park Association
- Michigan Association of County Parks and Recreation Officials
- Grand Valley Metropolitan Council

Relationships with Neighboring Counties

The Kent County Parks Department works with neighboring counties to coordinate planning near county borders. A significant amount of this interaction takes place in

forums that involve other groups (i.e. West Michigan Trails and Greenways Coalition).

Relationships with Federal and State Agencies

The Kent County Parks Department has a good relationship with Federal and State agencies, including the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ)

The Department has received funds from the Transportation Equity Act for the Twenty-first Century (TEA-21), the Land and Water Conservancy Fund (LWCF), the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) and the Clean Michigan Initiative (CMI).