



*El Paso County's Ascarate Park has many of the characteristics of a regional park*

### III. Regional Parks Needs

El Paso has few regional parks because of prior difficulties in acquiring land. Large regional parks, if well distributed throughout the city, can become the center of major activities for each planning area. Their size allows for more efficient maintenance operations, and also should provide room for expansion as the population of the area grows.

#### Key Desirable Characteristics of Regional Parks

True regional parks are typically the largest parks in the municipal system. Examples in Texas include McKenzie Park in Lubbock, Zilker Park in Austin, Brackenridge and McAllister Parks in San Antonio, and Hermann Park in Houston. Each of these parks is at least 350 acres in size, and many are closer to 500 acres. All have a wealth of facilities as well as undeveloped natural areas.

Regional parks are also known as metropolitan parks, since they strive to become a regional or citywide center of activity. Consider the many activities and events, as well as everyday events that happen in Zilker Park in Austin. The true metropolitan park becomes synonymous with its community.

**Size** – For El Paso, regional parks should increase from a typical size of 100 acres to a minimum of 250 acres. Development of regional parks in El Paso should be more compact to ease watering needs, but should still reserve land for future unforeseen facilities that will be needed by a rapidly expanding population.

Regional parks must be located adjacent to major thoroughfares to provide easy access from many parts of the city. Because of the potential for traffic, noise and bright lights at night, regional parks should be buffered from adjacent residential areas. Most importantly, regional parks are very often the center of activities for visitors to the city, so they must be attractive and well maintained.

#### Existing Regional Park Context in El Paso

The City of El Paso currently only has two developed regional parks, and both of these are small by regional park standards. Blackie Chesser, in the Mission Valley has 55 acres, and the Northeast Regional Park in the Northeast Planning area includes 58 acres. Other parks that are classified as regional parks include Washington, which is now largely consumed by the El Paso Zoo, Nations Tobin, which is really a large community park, and the new Westside or Three Hills Park, which is also a large community park.

A 90 acre undeveloped tract is owned by the city on the East Side, and when developed would become the first real regional park in the city.

**Ascarate Park**, owned and operated by El Paso County, is the city's real regional park at over 300 acres. However, the park is in a state of disrepair, and no longer has the types of attractions that would bring residents from all over the city to the park.

**Chamizal National Monument**, operated by the National Parks Service, is a large museum, performance and grassy amphitheater located in Central El Paso.



Regional Park service areas in El Paso.

### Distribution of Regional Parks in El Paso

The map on the following page illustrates the location and service areas of regional parks in the city. The circles illustrate a general service radius ranging from 2 to 4 miles.

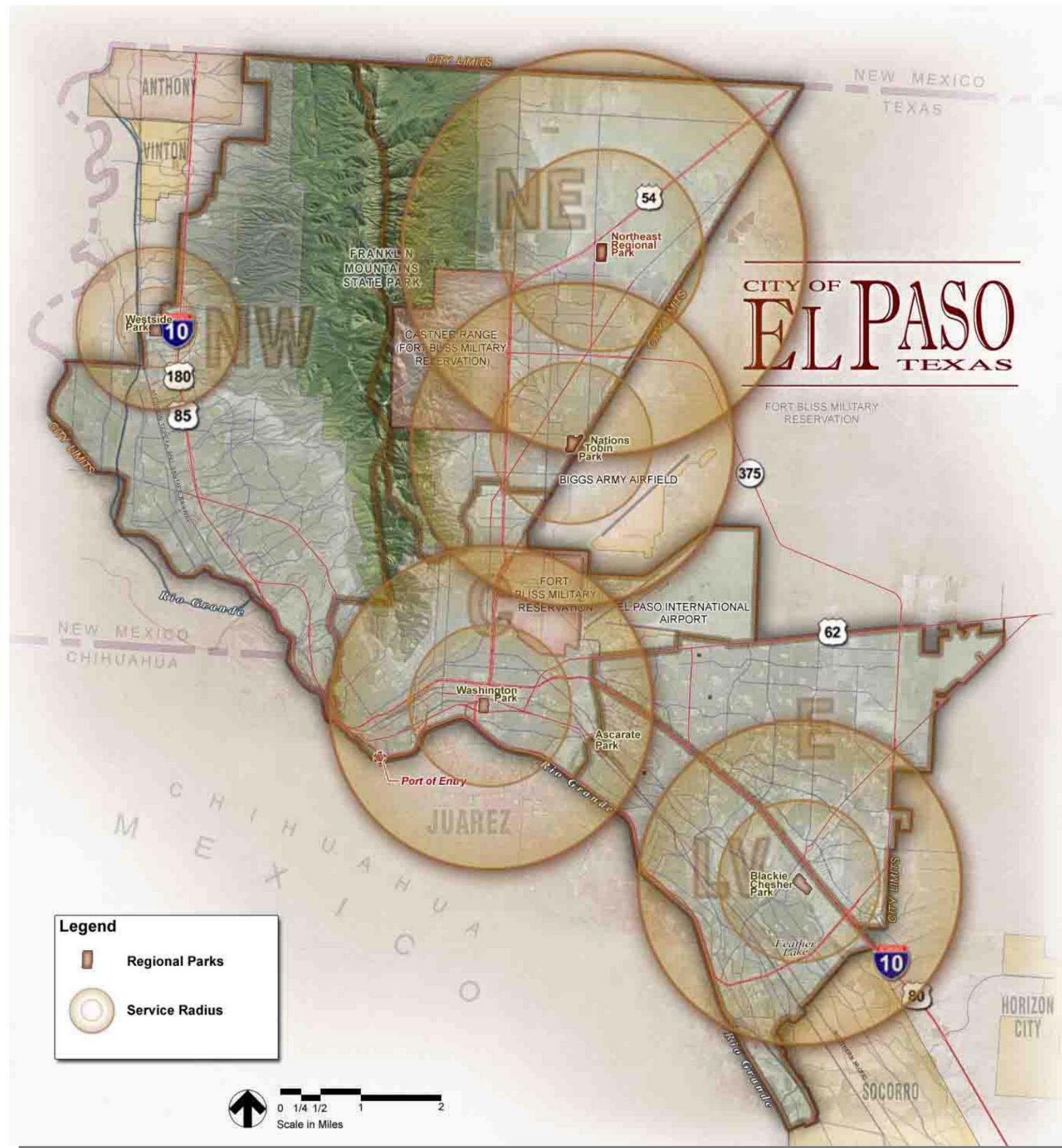
### Existing Level of Service – Regional Parks

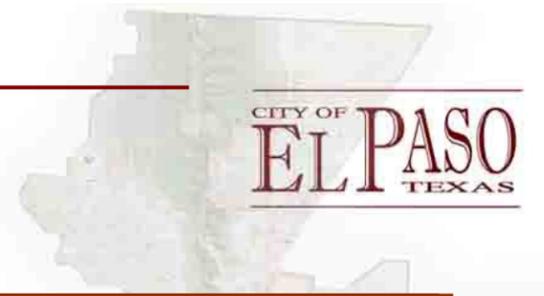
The existing level of service for regional parks is shown in the table on the following page. **Citywide, the current level of service is just over 0.6 acres for every 1,000 residents.** In four out of the five major planning areas, the level of service is less than 1 acre per 1,000. **The citywide total is only 25% of the desired amount of regional park land.**

### Proposed Target Level of Service – Regional Parks

Providing a significant increase in the amount of regional park lands is the single highest priority of this master plan. Major deficiencies in neighborhood and community park lands exist, but will be difficult and highly expensive to address. New very large regional parks, consisting of at least one in every planning area and one to two citywide “metropolitan” parks are recommended to provide reliever park space.

*To meet this goal and the future parkland needs of the city, a target level of 2 acres of regional park lands for every 1,000 residents is recommended by this plan.*





Regional Parks												
	Existing Park Acres	Year 2000	Acres per 1000 residents	Year 2006	Acres per 1000 residents	Percent of Target L.O.S.	Year 2016	Acres per 1000 residents	Percent of Target L.O.S.	Year 2020	Acres per 1,000 residents	
Central	15.00	123,858	0.12	120,094	0.12	6%	125,132	0.12	6%			
East (note - park shown is undeveloped, resulting in actual service level of 0% until park is developed)	92.00	153,194	0.60	197,463	0.47	24%	240,584	0.38	19%			
Mission Valley	70.40	103,001	0.68	101,450	0.69	35%	109,117	0.65	32%			
Northeast	100.00	92,761	1.08	91,349	1.09	54%	115,128	0.87	43%			
Northwest	35.00	90,848	0.39	105,555	0.33	17%	148,332	0.24	12%			
Fort Bliss				6,663			8,854					
Hueco				12,287			15,923					
<b>Citywide</b>	<b>312.40</b>	<b>563,662</b>	<b>0.55</b>	<b>634,816</b>	<b>0.49</b>	<b>25%</b>	<b>763,070</b>	<b>0.41</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>796,000</b>	<b>0.39</b>	

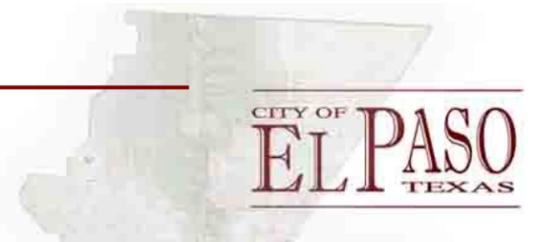


### Regional Park Priorities and Summary of Key Recommendations

Based on the areas by area needs, regional park priorities are shown below. Projected costs include allowances for land and development, as well as an administrative and design factor.

#### Regional Park Priority Recommendations

Priority	Action	Park Zone	Projected New Acres	Acquisition Potential Cost Range		Development Potential Cost Range		Rationale for Need
				Low Cost Range	High Cost Range	Low Cost Range	High Cost Range	
<b>Short Term Actions – The Plan for Today</b>								
1	Develop East Side Regional Park (initial phase). Consider acquiring area lands to expand the park if feasible. Consider joint venture with adjacent YWCA lands and other privately owned lands in the area.	E-5, E-6, E-7, E-8	90	\$0	\$0	\$4,000,000	\$7,000,000	Very few large parks in this area, land is available in an area with rapid population growth. Development of a significant portion of the park is recommended. Recreation center and aquatic facilities are also recommended for this site, with costs shown in other sections.
2	Study feasibility of developing Keystone retention areas and other lands as a major regional park. Combine with existing natural features to create a true regional destination park for the west side.	NW-1 to NW-7	60	\$0	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$5,000,000	Consider acquisition of supplemental lands to increase size. Ensure fit with adjacent existing wetlands and arroyo areas. Improve access and signage from IH 10. Costs shown are for initial phase, may be followed by additional phases.
3	Expansion of Northeast Regional Park – add floodplain lands to the park for ball fields, trails, and other amenities that can be built in flood prone areas.	NE-4 to NE-8	100	\$0	\$0	\$1,500,000	\$3,000,000	Land available to add to park, cost shown are for an initial phase only.
4	Acquire and re-develop Ascarate Park as a Regional and Metropolitan park for El Paso	Citywide	300	\$0	\$0	\$10,000,000	\$20,000,000	Potential transfer from El Paso County, and should consider additional County operational support. Redevelopment cost range shown is for order of magnitude purposes only, and will require additional study. Some portions of the park may be privatized, but overall control should remain with the City.
<b>Estimated Total - Short Term - Plan for Today</b>			<b>550</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>\$2,500,000</b>	<b>\$18,000,000</b>	<b>\$35,000,000</b>	



**Regional Park Priority Recommendations**

Priority	Action	Park Zone	Projected New Acres	Acquisition Potential Cost Range	Development Potential Cost Range (initial phase only)	Rationale for Need
<b>Medium to Long Term Actions-Plan for A Bright Future</b>						
5	Acquire and develop a far Northwest regional park north of Trans Mountain. <u>Note that land acquisition and preservation should be an immediate priority.</u>	Far Northwest	150 to 300+	\$0 - \$2,500,000	\$2,500,000 - \$5,000,000 (initial phase)	Development already beginning, addresses need earlier on than previously done on the east side. City cost is to supplement development construction
6	Continue development of the Eastside Regional Park.	Eastside	0	\$100,000 - \$500,000	\$2,000,000 - \$4,000,000	Addresses poor soils in the park, but maintains the park area as an important asset for the Central area which has few large parks.
7	Continue development of the Northeast Regional Park	Northeast	0	\$0 - \$0	\$2,500,000 - \$5,000,000	Expansion of facilities in flood prone area, development of other park infrastructure
8	Acquire additional land for a long range regional park for the far East and Mission Valley portions of the city.	East Side, Mission Valley	200	\$0 - \$2,500,000	\$2,000,000 - \$5,000,000	Acquire land for long range parks as the area grows. Growth patterns in the area should be considered to place park for most use in the future. Can be combined with open space needs.
<b>Estimated Total - Long Term Plan for A Bright Future</b>			<b>350 to 500</b>	<b>\$100,000</b>	<b>\$5,500,000</b>	<b>\$9,000,000</b>   <b>\$19,000,000</b>



**Ascarate Park**

Ascarate Park has been the largest in-town park in El Paso for many years. The recent re-location of the Western Playland Amusement Park out of Ascarate in 2006 leaves the park without a major attraction, and the cost of operating and maintaining the park has become a significant burden for El Paso County. The opportunity for the City of El Paso to take over operation of the park from the County may be available in the immediate future.

The park is well located and accessible for much of El Paso, and has the size to accommodate many regional recreational uses. The lake in the park is a rare and unique feature in dry El Paso, and the golf course is readily accessible and serviceable as a municipal course.

The park does have major infrastructure challenges. Lack of adequate watering and overuse has left many of the ball fields in poor condition. Road and parking infrastructure has not been improved, and the existing pool has leaks that will

*Ascarate Park may be one of the few opportunities for revenue generation in the local parks system, but will require a significant up-front investment. Allowing the park's revenue potential to be allocated to private sources should be discouraged until other alternatives have been explored.*

require repair. Lake water quality must be improved and aeration added, and the golf course and clubhouse should be upgraded.

The suggestion has been made to turn the entire park over to private entities to

restore it and operate the park for profit. Such a strategy has the benefit that the city or county would not have to provide much or possibly even any revenue for renovations in the park. However, the city may lose significant opportunities for much needed positive revenue generation. Establishing the park as an enterprise zone should also be considered, with some portions of it developed by private sources, and other portions remaining as public access areas.

A business plan is recommended immediately to investigate the costs and revenue potential associated with the park. The estimated cost of this study is \$25,000. As a follow-up, a conditional analysis and master plan that considers a full program of both public and private sector recreational uses for the park is recommended prior to taking any action regarding the park.

*Proposed Regional Park service with recommended actions in place.*

