

FY 2022 - 2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



CHARLESTONCOUNTYPARKS.COM

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Executive Director Kevin Bowie

Dear Friends,

I am happy to share the Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission 2022 – 2023 Annual Report. This was a landmark year for our agency as we recorded serving well over 3 million visitors. We are privileged to welcome so many of our neighbors along with people from around the world to our beautiful parks, exciting events, and educational programs.

This past year we also had an opportunity to hear from many of you while we developed our *2033: Parks & Recreation for All!* comprehensive plan. This is a plan that will guide our strategic growth over the next 10 years. Input from our community and staff was invaluable as we developed it, and we look forward to putting the plan into action to continue creating a first-class parks and recreation system.

I hope you enjoy learning about many of our accomplishments this past year as you read this report. I am so proud of everything our team has achieved and am very thankful to our community for their continued support and passion for Charleston County Parks.

I look forward to seeing you in your parks!

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kevin F. Bowie".

Kevin Bowie  
Executive Director

# MISSION

The Charleston County Park & Recreation Commission will improve the quality of life in Charleston County by offering a diverse system of park facilities, programs, and services.

# VISION

To be distinguished as a nationally accredited and financially sustainable park and recreation agency through our commitment to preserving our natural, historical and cultural resources, offering a clean, safe, and exceptional visitor experience that is accessible to all.

# CORE VALUES

## COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT

Enabling lives through education and programs

## STEWARDSHIP

Preserving and conserving cultural, natural and historical resources

## FUN

Delivering fun to customers

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Creating a park system that reflects the diversity of our community

## ACCESSIBILITY

Removing barriers to make programs and facilities accessible for all

## QUALITY

Striving for quality throughout the park system

## HEALTH & WELLNESS

Providing and promoting healthy lifestyle opportunities

## EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE

Always focusing on you

## SAFETY

Ensuring safe and secure environments

## LEADERSHIP

Providing professional staff development

## BUILDING A LEGACY

Maintaining a vision for the future while sustaining a healthy park system



# FISCAL YEAR 22-23 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Eduardo Curry  
Chair



Brad Taggart  
Vice Chair



Michelle Brandt  
Secretary-Treasurer



Collin Bruner  
Commissioner



Lisa S. King  
Commissioner

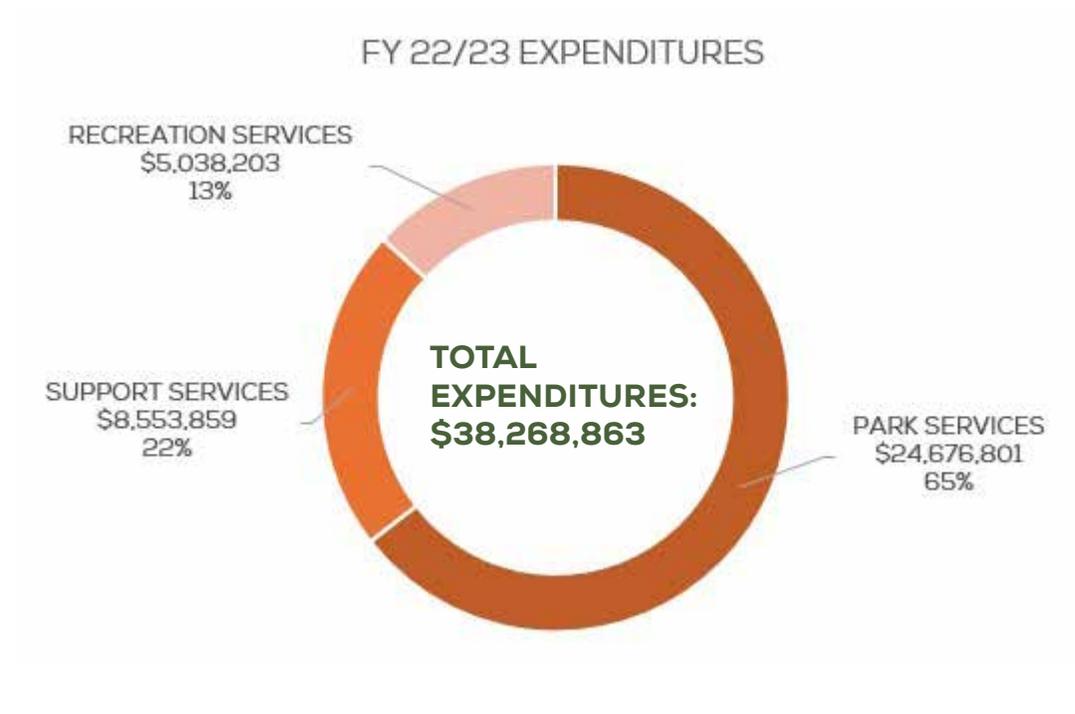


Mattese Lecque  
Commissioner



Devon Andrews  
Commissioner

# YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK



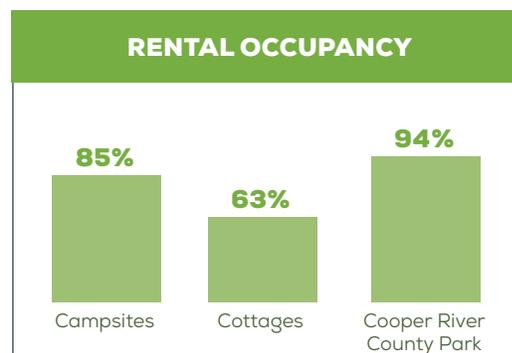
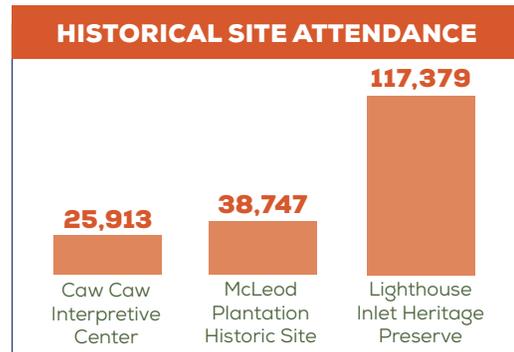
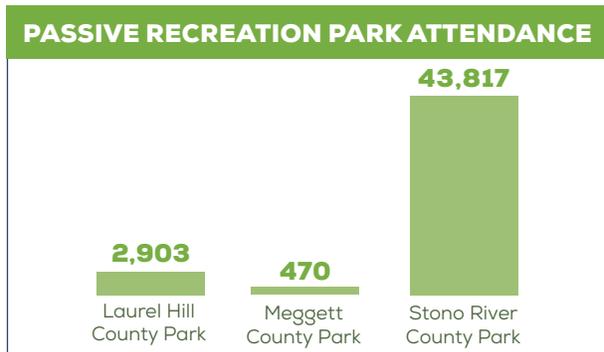
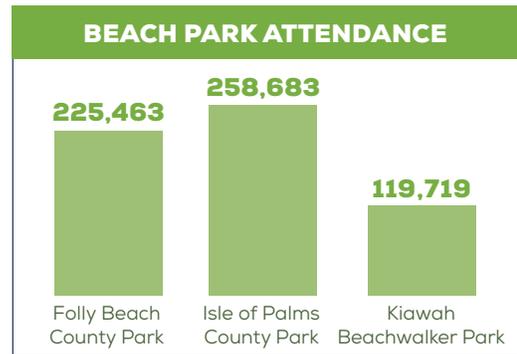
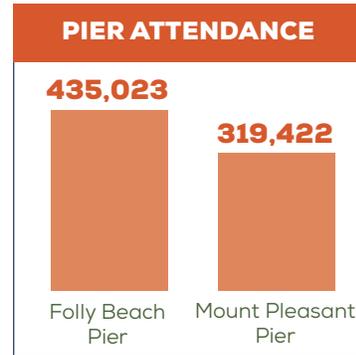
# PARK AND FACILITY INVENTORY

<b>3</b> ADVENTURE SPORTS ATTRACTIONS	<b>3</b> BEACH PARKS	<b>19</b> BOAT LANDINGS
<b>1</b> CAMPGROUND	<b>2</b> COMMUNITY CENTERS	<b>4</b> DOG PARKS
<b>3</b> HISTORICAL SITES	<b>1</b> MARINA	<b>2</b> PIERS
<b>4</b> RECREATION COMPLEXES	<b>4</b> REGIONAL PARKS	<b>13</b> RENTAL FACILITIES
<b>1</b> SWIMMING POOL	<b>3</b> PASSIVE RECREATION PARKS	<b>3</b> WATERPARKS

**TOTAL PARKS AND FACILITIES: 65**



# PARK AND FACILITY ATTENDANCE



# RECREATION PROGRAM INVENTORY

<b>102</b> CHALLENGE COURSE	<b>138</b> CLIMBING WALL	<b>60</b> COMMUNITY RECREATION
<b>2,014</b> CULTURAL HISTORY	<b>111</b> EDUCATION	<b>560</b> FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
<b>96</b> HEALTH AND WELLNESS	<b>24</b> INCLUSIVE RECREATION	<b>213</b> NATURAL HISTORY
<b>23</b> OUTDOOR MISC.	<b>69</b> PADDLE SPORTS	<b>132</b> YOUTH CAMPS

**TOTAL RECREATION PROGRAMS: 3,542**



# RECREATION PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

 <p><b>2,432</b> CHALLENGE COURSE</p>	 <p><b>19,098</b> CLIMBING WALL</p>	 <p><b>19,102</b> COMMUNITY RECREATION</p>
 <p><b>33,193</b> CULTURAL HISTORY</p>	 <p><b>11,955</b> EDUCATION</p>	 <p><b>30,046</b> FESTIVALS AND EVENTS</p>
 <p><b>7,966</b> HEALTH AND WELLNESS</p>	 <p><b>1,762</b> INCLUSIVE RECREATION</p>	 <p><b>15,318</b> NATURAL HISTORY</p>
 <p><b>239</b> OUTDOOR MISC.</p>	 <p><b>297</b> PADDLE SPORTS</p>	 <p><b>3,415</b> YOUTH CAMPS</p>

**TOTAL PARTICIPATION: 141,408**



# ACHIEVING OUR MISSION

## HOW WE ARE SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

As part of Charleston County Parks enabling legislation, we are committed to creating and operating county-wide park facilities and programs without duplicating services provided by other park and recreation organizations. Our mission is focused on improving the quality of life in Charleston County by offering a clean, safe and exceptional visitor experience that is accessible to all. One way we measure our progress is by the number of park visitors. In Fiscal Year 2022 - 2023 we welcomed 3,077,988 visitors, a record-breaking year.

To ensure we are serving our growing and changing community, we developed a 10-year comprehensive plan called *2033: Parks and Recreation For All!* (PARFA). This study was a truly inclusive and community-driven planning and decision-making process that cultivates a shared vision for the future of Charleston County Parks. We hosted eight community conversations, eight public workshops, and four pop-up events. We received more than 3,000 surveys, and there were 2,691 visits to our PARFA website.

This input will lead to a strategic plan shaped by five areas of focus to measure our success:

**ACCESS:** Our parks provide high quality experiences for all.

**RELEVANCY:** Our parks reflect our changing and growing communities.

**RESILIENCE:** Our parks celebrate and respond to our dynamic environment.

**CONNECTIVITY:** Our parks connect our communities to nature and to each other.

**ORGANIZATIONAL HEALTH:** Our commission is dedicated to demonstrating exceptional performance in service to our communities.

The vision of this plan is for Charleston County Parks to grow and innovate alongside changing community needs. The organization will sustain its mission, core services, and beloved spaces as we continue to advocate for a connected and resilient county park system that is equitable for all.

# TEAM ENGAGEMENT

## 3 WAYS WE ENGAGED AND SUPPORTED OUR #1 RESOURCE – OUR TEAM

1

The development of the PARFA 10-year plan included a significant amount of community input, but it was also an opportunity for staff to make their voices heard. Staff had the opportunity to share organizational health and strategic growth ideas through in-person sessions and surveys. This provided our team the opportunity to help shape Charleston County Park's future.

2

In FY 22/23 Charleston County Parks did a complete overhaul and update of its intranet. Staff took part in the naming of this digital hub and landed on Trailhead because the intranet is the starting point for resource gathering and many projects. Trailhead houses the agency's policies and procedures, employee directory, department specific documents and tools, forms & templates, important staff updates and much more, all in one easy-to-navigate online source.

3

In 2023, Charleston County Parks launched Viva Engage on the agency's intranet. This internal message board has become a forum for staff to share their work, honors and involvement in the community. These postings have become an excellent way for all staff to be better informed of what's going on in the different areas of our diverse park and recreation agency. It's also a great space for staff to show encouragement and accolades to each other.



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

## 3 PROGRAMS TO BETTER SERVE AND INVOLVE OUR COMMUNITY

1

The Public Accessibility Advisory Committee serves as a bridge between Charleston County Parks and our local community of individuals with disabilities. This group of 10 representatives advises the agency on services, programs, and opportunities for individuals with disabilities that may be lacking in the Charleston community. The advisory committee visits parks, facilities, programs, events, and our website to provide feedback on how we can become more accessible and inclusive.

2

The Gold Pass membership is a very popular program that allows unlimited access to our parks and many of our special events. To increase access to everyone in our community, we partnered with Charleston County Public Library to offer the Gold Pass as an item that can be checked out. Community members can check out a Gold Pass at their local library and enjoy a full week of visiting a variety of parks. There are currently 5 Gold Passes available at each of the libraries' 20 locations for a total of 100 available for checkout.

3

Each year at our award-winning Holiday Festival of Lights, Charleston County Parks works with area schools to participate in the annual Holiday Greeting Card competition. These giant 4x8 foot cards are all unique and showcase the incredible artistic talents of Lowcountry students. In 2022, the contest had 38 entries and featured artwork from schools throughout Charleston County.



# MAKING AN IMPACT

## 3 WAYS WE ARE MEASURING THE IMPACTS OF OUR WORK

1

In 2022, Charleston County Parks relaunched the Secret Shopper program to determine if we are living up to our vision of offering a clean, safe, and exceptional visitor experience that is accessible to all. Fifteen volunteers were selected who visited five parks each to document the park visitor experience. The secret shoppers were asked to rate the cleanliness of the parks, satisfaction with food and staff service. When the shoppers' results were tallied, we received an overall rating of 4.5 stars out of a 5-star scale.

2

Charleston County Parks continues to focus on swim safety in the county's rural communities. Over the last few years, we built a pool in Hollywood, SC, provided free swim lessons and established a swim club. In 2023, the West County Wahoos swim team was formed. Swimmers ages 5-18 competed in six meets organized by the Coastal Carolina Aquatic Association. The team gained valuable lifesaving skills, good sportsmanship, and tons of fun. The swim team also became an inspiration for Amir, a child who spent the summer building up his endurance and perfecting his stroke in the hopes of becoming a member of the team next year.

3

We continue to strive to make our parks and facilities more accessible. In 2020, a report from the WT Group, a consultant specializing in conducting ADA audits which identified 1,480 deficits at 51 sites throughout our park system. We have been steadily correcting those deficits ever since, with over 11% complete to date. One of those projects was to build a new accessible boardwalk at IOP that also includes an extended shower deck with two additional accessible showers and an observation deck close to the beach which better serves customers who use wheelchairs, fishing carts, beach wagons, and strollers.



# INNOVATING

## 3 INNOVATIONS THAT ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

1

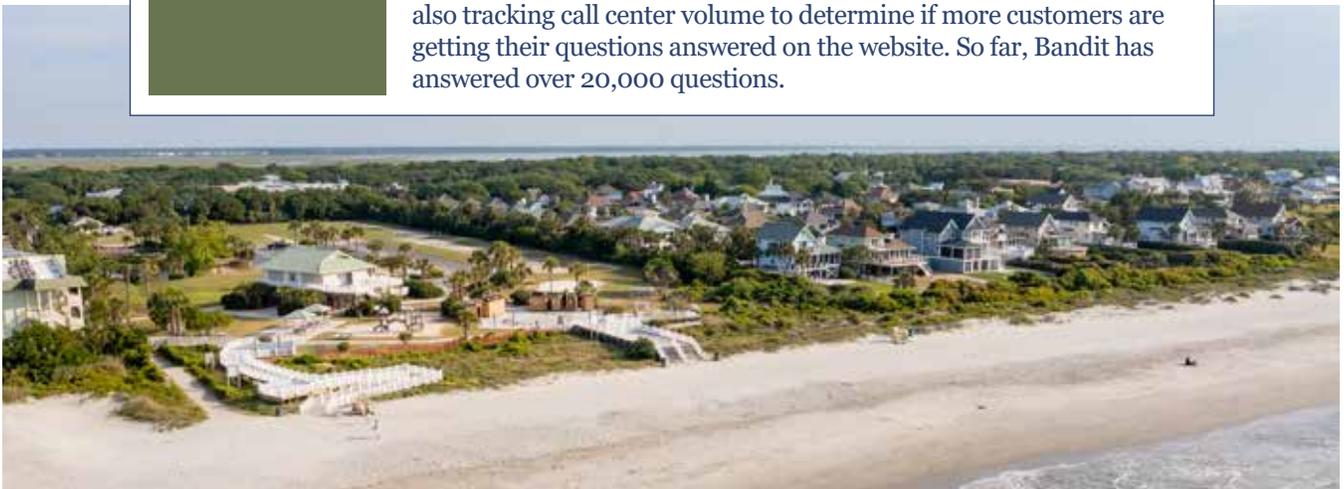
Developing strategies to mitigate beach traffic is a priority for Charleston County Parks. In the summer of 2022, we evaluated the entryway into the popular Isle of Palms County Park. By constructing a third entry lane we can move vehicles more quickly into the park reducing back up on the island's roadways and providing faster, easier access to our beautiful beaches.

2

For visitors to our unstaffed parks, we provided a new way to pay in the fall of 2022. The Pay By Phone app allows visitors to conveniently pay from their phone. Honor boxes for cash payments also continue to be available, providing options to our visitors. In fiscal year 2022 – 2023 the Pay By Phone technology was used 1428 times for park admission.

3

In July 2022, our new AI driven Chatbot "Bandit" was introduced on the Charleston County Parks website. The Chatbot, named and modeled after the agency's raccoon mascot, helps customers visiting the website more easily find what they need. The insights gathered help us understand more of what customers are looking for and have allowed us to better craft and display web content. We are also tracking call center volume to determine if more customers are getting their questions answered on the website. So far, Bandit has answered over 20,000 questions.



# CREATING ACCESS

## WHAT OUR FOUNDATION IS DOING TO CREATE ACCESS FOR ALL

Charleston County Parks Foundation’s mission is to eliminate barriers our residents may experience to accessing our parks and programs. In 2023, the Foundation reached over 4,100 people. It issued 53 summer camp scholarships, provided 53 people with free swim lessons, allowed 1,366 people to attend programs offered by CCPRC at no cost, provided tickets to 1,737 people so they could attend special events including the Holiday Festival of Lights and provided park admission to 913 people for recreational purposes. We know we are making an impact when we receive feedback like the following, “We wanted to say a big THANK YOU for providing this amazing experience for the Horizon students yesterday. They had such a great time and came back to school telling all the other teachers and students about how great the experience was.”



# IMPROVING HEALTH & WELLNESS



## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE HEALTHIER LIVES

Charleston County Parks are the perfect places to achieve greater health and wellness for members of our community. This past year we offered 121 fitness programs attended by over 8,000 people. We organized and facilitated over 14 races consisting of 5K runs/walks, duathlons, triathlons, and marathons throughout the year.

We also offered yoga classes, swimming lessons and aquatic programming. In addition to these organized events, we create access to many more fitness activities from bike riding, kayaking, canoeing or stand-up paddle boarding, beach volleyball, skateboarding, archery, climbing, forest bathing, or simply a stroll in the park.

# EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY

## MAKING OUR WORLD A BETTER PLACE NOW AND FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Charleston County Parks is uniquely positioned to make a real impact on environmental stewardship and sustainability. In fiscal year 2022 – 2023 we showed our commitment through a variety of programs and practices.

The Monarch Butterflies of North America migrate in masses to the same winter roosts, often to the exact same trees. Our Charleston County Parks' Naturalists are helping scientists better understand this remarkable process through tag and release research. Participants to our Monarch Migration program have the opportunity to participate in this process, and in 2023 our Naturalists tagged 40 Monarchs.

Our Stewardship Committee and Planning & Development teams have been working to introduce more native plants to our parks. Our teams worked with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

(USFWS) to plant both Butterfly Milkweed and Swamp Milkweed at Johns Island County Park. These plants are an essential food source for Monarch butterflies. The USFWS fish hatchery on Wadmalaw Island raises the milkweed and then works with partners such as Charleston County Parks to install the plant in different areas. The teams also started re-seeding the historic agricultural field along Folly Road at McLeod Plantation Historic Site. The goal is to provide a new wildlife and pollinator habitat by seeding beneficial native wildflowers and warm-season grasses.

Charleston County Parks is proud to host some of the Lowcountry's premier special events, but we also understand large gatherings featuring delicious regional foods can create a lot of waste. Our special events team works to mitigate this waste through a food composting program. During the 2022 Latin American Festival we diverted 880 pounds of food waste through compost recycling and 3,740 pounds during the 2023 Cajun Festival.



# TACKLING CHALLENGES

## RECOGNIZING AND MEETING AGENCY AND COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Charleston County Parks continually strives to operate an efficient park system for our visitors and staff, however there are times when challenges arise.

### RECRUITMENT

In 2022, the agency had to address a shortage of seasonal employees, specifically lifeguards, which led to the closure of Splash Island and Splash Zone waterparks on Sundays and Mondays. The agency worked to address this issue by starting recruitment in early January, increasing wages, participating in job fairs and launching a multi-media advertising campaign utilizing social media, billboards, in-park signage, press releases, TV coverage and printed materials. We are also taking into account an evolving workforce who are looking for greater flexibility in their schedule and are not always available to work the full summer season. These new insights will help the agency refine operations, so we have the necessary summer staff to fully operate our parks.



## BEACH TRAFFIC

Charleston beaches continue to attract large numbers of people from near and far. Charleston County Parks operates parking areas, facilities and lifeguarding at Isle of Palms County Park, Kiawah Beachwalker Park, Folly Beach County Park and the Folly Pier. During the summer months, visitors to these highly desirable places can add to the traffic. In the past several years, Charleston County Parks has focused on enhancing public communications, partnerships and modifying access to help mitigate traffic.

Recent work includes:

- In 2022, a third entrance lane was added at Isle of Palms County Park.
- DOT traffic signs ahead of all three beach parks alerting visitors when the parking is full.
- Partnerships with local municipalities to establish coordinated beach traffic mitigation efforts.
- Partnerships with the Berkeley-Charleston-Dorchester Council of Governments (BCDCOG) to promote the Beach Reach App that shows real time traffic cameras and CARTA's free Beach Reach Shuttle that runs from Mount Pleasant Towne Center to Isle of Palms County Park.
- Partnering with local media outlets to promote beach tips such as to arrive early or late and plan visits during the slower mid-week days.
- Increased communications to our customers via our website, social channels, e-newsletter, the media and more to share beach traffic mitigation tips ahead of busy beach times.





**CHARLESTON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

861 Riverland Drive, Charleston, SC 29412  
CharlestonCountyParks.com | (843) 795-4386