

FY 2023 - 2024

# ANNUAL REPORT



[CHARLESTONCOUNTYPARKS.COM](http://CHARLESTONCOUNTYPARKS.COM)

# LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Executive Director, Kevin Bowie

I am pleased to share with you our annual report for fiscal year 2023 – 2024. Detailed in these pages are many of the accomplishments we have achieved this year that have helped us to fulfill our mission of improving the quality of life in Charleston County.

We proudly welcomed over 3 million people to our parks, programs, and events. We have made many of our parks more accessible with ADA improvements at Isle of Palms County Park, the addition of an off-road wheelchair at Folly Beach County Park, and through our partnership with KultureCity®, the ability to train our staff and certify many of our parks as sensory inclusive.

To support the health of our visitors and staff, all our parks and facilities became smoke-free. We added new technologies offering touch screen concession ordering at Whirlin’ Waters, electric vehicle charging stations at Caw Caw, and tap credit card machines at the Holiday Festival Lights gate houses. We also celebrated as we cut the ribbon at the Wiltown Community Center’s new park and renovated shelter.

In addition, we finalized our 10-year comprehensive plan and have begun our 5-year strategic plan, each with a focus on maintaining and developing a park and recreation system that best serves our vibrant community.

These are just a few of the highlights that made FY 2023 – 2024 special. But equally important were the smaller moments. A child making a new friend at summer camp. Someone trying kayaking for the first time during a paddling program. Celebrating all of the birthdays, retirements, and engagements in our parks. And the many, many awe-inspiring natural moments that we are privileged to experience here in the Lowcountry.

Our team is committed to ensuring moments like these and more are available to all in our community today and for generations to come. Thank you for your continued support and engagement. I look forward to seeing you in the parks soon!

Warmly,

*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 23-24 BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS



Eduardo Curry  
Chair



Brad Taggart  
Vice Chair



Michelle Brandt  
Secretary-Treasurer



Collin Bruner  
Commissioner



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Commissioner

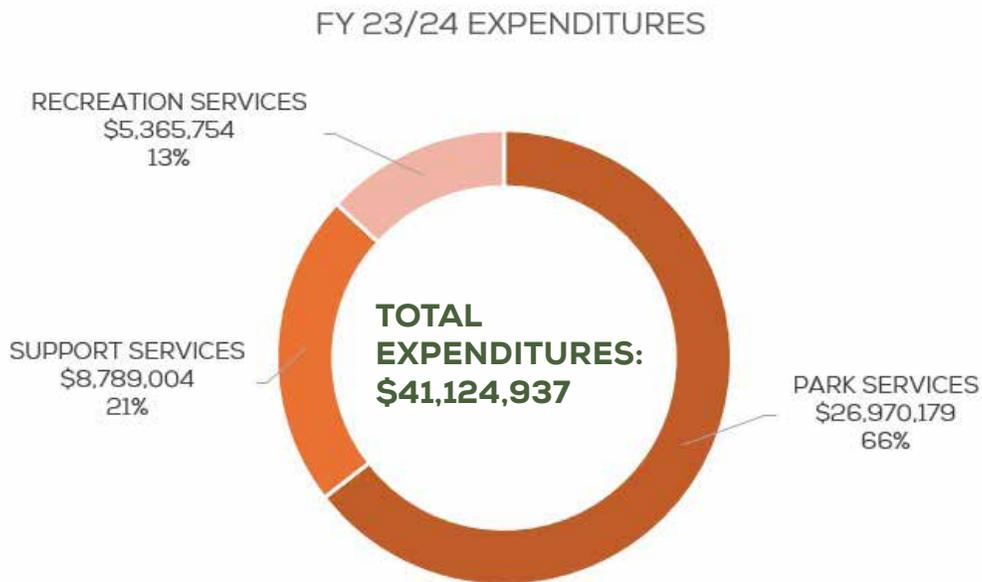
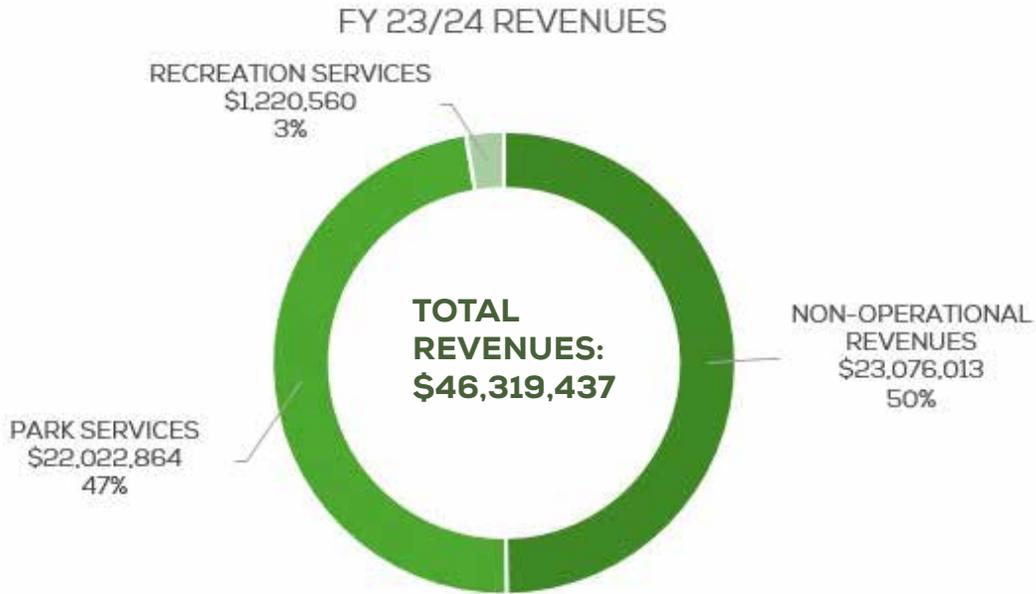


Mattese Lecque  
Commissioner



Leslie Skardon  
Commissioner

# YOUR DOLLARS AT WORK



\* The annual net Revenue & Expenditures exclude transfers to the Capital Fund and the increase to the General Funds, Fund Balance.



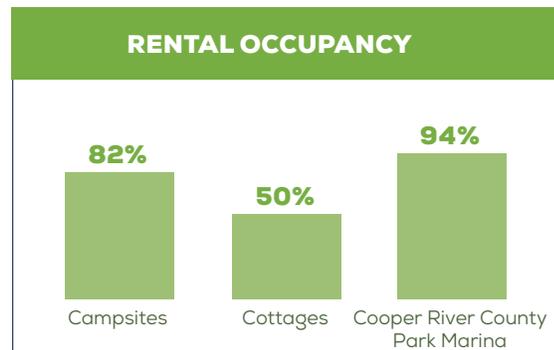
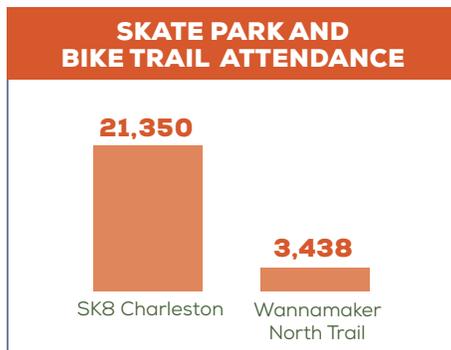
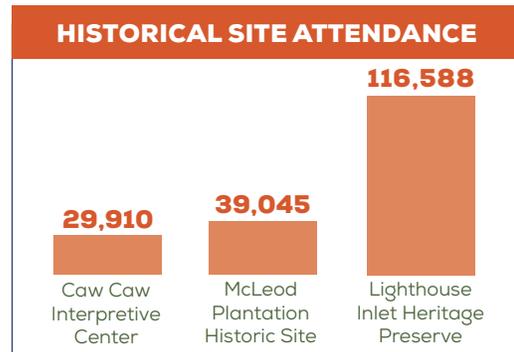
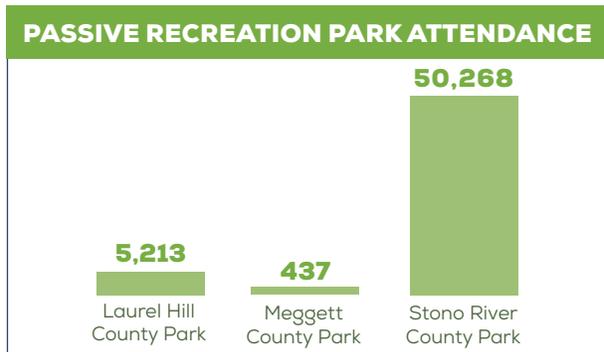
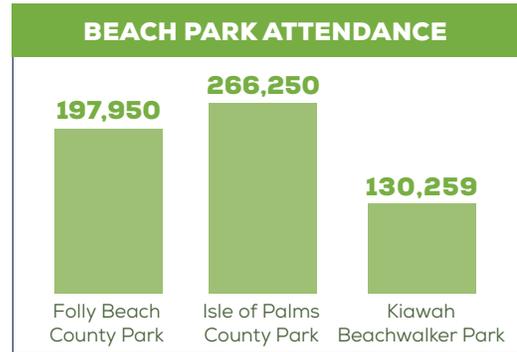
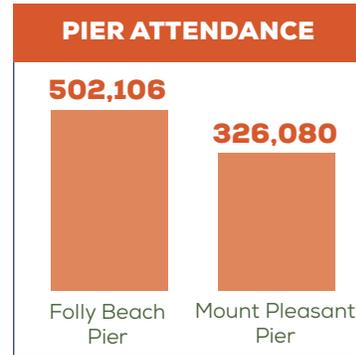
# PARK AND FACILITY INVENTORY

<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>98</b> CHALLENGE COURSE	<b>151</b> CLIMBING WALL	<b>101</b> COMMUNITY RECREATION
<b>1,922</b> CULTURAL HISTORY	<b>506</b> EDUCATION	<b>44</b> FESTIVALS AND EVENTS
<b>90</b> HEALTH AND WELLNESS	<b>30</b> INCLUSIVE RECREATION	<b>210</b> NATURAL HISTORY
<b>34</b> OUTDOOR MISC.	<b>85</b> PADDLE SPORTS	<b>151</b> YOUTH CAMPS

**TOTAL RECREATION PROGRAMS: 3,422**



# RECREATION PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

 <p><b>2,320</b> CHALLENGE COURSE</p>	 <p><b>22,717</b> CLIMBING WALL</p>	 <p><b>26,265</b> COMMUNITY RECREATION</p>
 <p><b>34,750</b> CULTURAL HISTORY</p>	 <p><b>12,616</b> EDUCATION</p>	 <p><b>34,811</b> FESTIVALS AND EVENTS</p>
 <p><b>8,165</b> HEALTH AND WELLNESS</p>	 <p><b>1,813</b> INCLUSIVE RECREATION</p>	 <p><b>11,396</b> NATURAL HISTORY</p>
 <p><b>235</b> OUTDOOR MISC.</p>	 <p><b>441</b> PADDLE SPORTS</p>	 <p><b>4,474</b> YOUTH CAMPS</p>

**TOTAL PARTICIPATION: 160,003**



# ACHIEVING OUR MISSION

## HOW WE ARE SERVING OUR COMMUNITY

Developing strategic alignment in our long- and short-term projects and goals is key to CCPRC achieving our mission. In the past couple of years, CCPRC has created plans and pathways that build upon the foundational elements of our mission, vision, and core values.

In 2023, CCPRC completed our 10-year comprehensive plan 2033: Parks & Recreation for All (PARFA) that included valuable input from stakeholders, our dedicated staff, and our community. This plan is a roadmap designed to improve our parks, expand recreational programs, and ensure that our facilities meet the needs of our diverse and growing community.

In 2024, CCPRC is building upon the PARFA plan with the development of a 5-Year Strategic Plan (2025-2030). This strategic plan will provide us with actionable steps to achieve the goals outlined in our comprehensive plan. These goals focus on expanding access to all, aligning with our partners, engaging our community, emphasizing our natural and cultural resources, elevating our staff, and ensuring organizational strength. Ultimately, the aim is to create vibrant spaces where families can gather, children can play, and everyone can connect with nature.

Both the PARFA and Strategic Plans are supported by divisional annual objectives that will help ensure CCPRC remains focused on these key goals, while also remaining open and responsive to our community as new opportunities may arise.

Community input is the cornerstone of each of these plans and CCPRC is committed to continuing our engagement to ensure that our services reflect our neighbors' needs and aspirations.



# TEAM ENGAGEMENT

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

1

In October 2023, CCPRC launched its first Community Relations Bureau. To increase our presence at outside community engagements, this bureau established a large group of enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff members who could share their expertise with the public and other organizations. It also created an organized communications and scheduling system for coordinating public engagements to aid community relations, to help elevate our brand, and to spread awareness about the county parks. To date there are nearly 50 members of the Community Relations Bureau who have attended dozens of events.

2

CCPRC's over 1,000 part-time employees are vital to fulfilling its mission. To show appreciation, several initiatives were launched in FY 23/24. Two part-time appreciation events were held during the summer when the highest number of seasonal part-time staff are employed. These included an evening at Stars & Strikes and a room rental at The Terrace Theater for a viewing of Jaws. A new gift card rewards program was introduced called Tango, which allows managers to give an e-gift card to a part-time employee who has gone above and beyond. Employees can use their Tango gift card at hundreds of retailers.



# COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

## 3 PROGRAMS TO BETTER SERVE AND INVOLVE OUR COMMUNITY

1

In May 2023, CCPRC began renovations on the Wiltown Community Center in rural Adams Run. CCPRC entered into an agreement to renovate and maintain the park in an effort to expand recreational facilities in this part of the county, gaining input from community members and a steering committee. The renovated facility opened in November and includes a new accessible playground; basketball/pickleball court, multi purpose field and grill; major renovations to its outdoor shelter; and improved roads, paths and parking areas.

2

In 2024, CCPRC hosted an Adaptive Sports Weekend in partnership with the SC Spinal Cord Injury Association. The events were partially funded by a grant from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and included adaptive equipment with trained staff at our climbing wall, a Reggae Nights Summer Concert, the Wheel To Surf adaptive surfing event at Folly Beach County Park, and an Inclusive Swim Night at the waterpark that welcomed those with disabilities and their families to enjoy a sensory-friendly environment. There were 176 participants in the events throughout the weekend. "I love this!" said a mother who attended the Inclusive Swim Night. "My son can come and be among others without being stared at or made a fun of. It's beautiful to have a place or night that we can call our own. Like our own little world and we're accepted. It's great, I love it."

3

In 2022, CCPRC began a study of the cemetery at McLeod Plantation Historic Site in hopes of identifying graves and burial sites that had been lost in a deeply wooded area with centuries of degradation. Some grave sites were apparent with headstones, but others were only suspected burial sites with indentations in the ground. After two years, the study determined over 300 marked and unmarked remains were located within the cemetery using ground penetrating radar and detection dogs. Through outreach efforts both online and around the Charleston area, staff worked to find people with a lineage to the remains and now have relationships with roughly 35 to 40 descendants. Future plans include engaging these family members to help decide how they would like to see the site further developed to honor their ancestors and teach visitors about the history of the site.

# MAKING AN IMPACT

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

1

CCPRC partnered with the non-profit organization KultureCity® to train staff and certify our parks as places that include sensory inclusive modifications. Select events throughout the year offer quiet spaces and KultureCity® bags with headphones and other items that may help someone with sensory needs. Our three largest parks are now KultureCity® certified venues with 155 staff trained throughout the agency. On average, 1-3 bags are checked out per event.

2

In fall 2023, Interpretation staff introduced an inclusive birding program at James Island County Park. Perfect for those with limited mobility, the Big Sit brings people together in a designated location to identify as many birds as possible. Created with accessibility in mind, the goal of the inaugural event was to introduce a wide range of people to the benefits of birding. Bringing their own chairs – a camp chair, wheelchair, or otherwise – participants identified birds within a 17-foot diameter circle. The event was open to birders of all levels and experts were on hand to help with identification.

3

SK8 Charleston skate park has made great strides in introducing the sport of skateboarding to area residents and supporting the skating community in recent years. Skateboarding lessons and camps are now open for all skill levels. The Charleston County Parks Foundation supports the SK8 Forward program, which offers free field trips and admission to the park, as well as free instruction, safety awareness, and use of equipment for those in need. The past three years, SK8 Charleston has also hosted The Boardr Series, a national skateboarding competition for all levels that benefits a non-profit supporting cancer patients called Grind For Life.



# INNOVATING

## 3 INNOVATIONS THAT ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE

1

In 2023, CCPRC partnered with Charleston County Government to open a charging station for electric vehicles at Caw Caw Interpretive Center in rural Ravenel, SC, where few opportunities exist for electric vehicle charging. In addition to the site's strategic location, CCPRC thought the chargers, which are free with the park admission fee, would be well-used by visitors to Caw Caw, and perhaps bring new patrons to the park. As part of a partially grant funded project, Charleston County Government installed five additional chargers at other sites throughout the county. The six chargers are used an average of 91 times per month.

2

To create a faster, better experience for CCPRC customers at concession stands at our busiest waterpark, our IT team implemented touch screen ordering. After a customer completed their order, a ticket was printed behind the counter and the customer waited for their food at a pick-up window. During its first year of implementation in 2023, the two kiosks that were installed had 16,217 customer transactions totaling \$175,412.17 in sales.

3

CCPRC employees rely on a shared fleet of vehicles. In the past these vehicles were reserved using a binder where employees would write in their reservations. This system was updated in late 2023 to an application called FleetBook. The app is available on agency cell phones and through the CCPRC intranet. Employees can now easily book and manage vehicle reservations and report issues if the vehicle needs servicing. FleetBook also allows CCPRC to better monitor vehicle usage, which will inform future fleet needs.

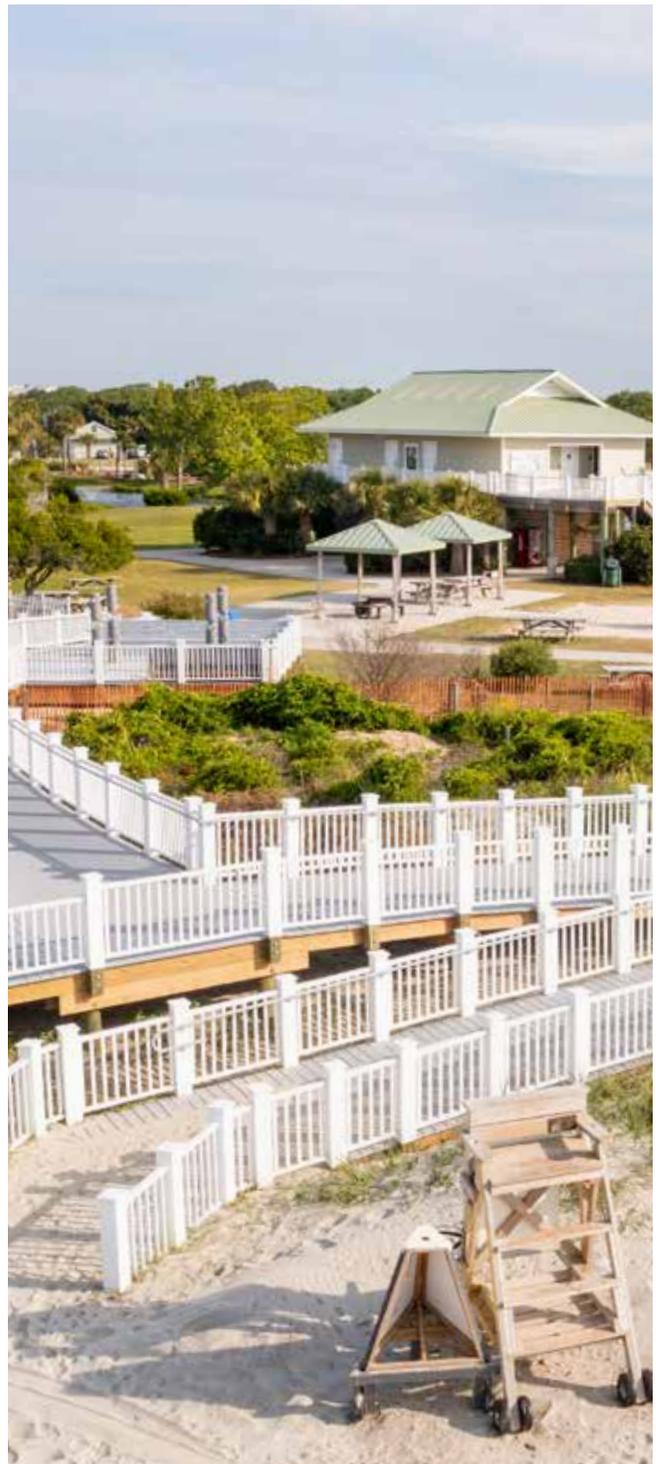
# CREATING ACCESS

## MAKING OUR BEACH PARKS ACCESSIBLE TO ALL

CCPRC has worked to increase access significantly at our beach parks over the past three years. A \$600,000 project at Isle of Palms County Park included rebuilding an ADA access ramp to the beach while also including a new ADA compliant shower deck and observation deck. The new ramp is two feet wider with a gentler slope to the beach than its predecessor. We also received permission from the office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management to place Mobi-mats® on the sand, further extending access onto the beach. At Folly Beach County Park, we partnered with a non-profit to provide an off-road power wheelchair for the public to reserve and check out. The treads on the chair allow a single-user to navigate on the sand independently. Renovations at the Folly Beach Pier included a gentler slope to our ADA access ramp while also widening the landing areas.

## CHARLESTON COUNTY PARKS FOUNDATION EMPOWERING ACCESS

In 2023 - 2024 the Charleston County Parks Foundation was able to assist 5,637 people in accessing our parks and programs. The Foundation raised over \$300,000 in gross revenue that in turn supported programs such as camp scholarships, free swim lessons, and nature stewardship.



# IMPROVING HEALTH & WELLNESS



## CREATING OPPORTUNITIES TO LIVE HEALTHIER LIVES

After several years of research and planning, CCPRC became a smoke-free park and recreation agency in 2023. Any form of smoking, vaping or tobacco use is no longer permitted within any CCPRC park or facility, nor during any programs or events within the parks. This initiative supports many of CCPRC's core values including health and wellness, stewardship, safety, quality, and customer service. It also furthers CCPRC's mission to improve the quality of life in Charleston County, and supports the agency's vision to provide a clean, safe and exceptional visitor experience for all. Reducing cigarette and e-cigarette waste in parks protects wildlife, waterways and the environment. It also reduces exposure to secondhand smoke. This initiative also supports industry trends of going smoke free. Parks are for everyone, and CCPRC wanted to ensure that guests with health conditions or those who cannot tolerate secondhand smoke are able to enjoy county parks and facilities.

# EMPHASIS ON SUSTAINABILITY

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

CCPRC started the process of reintroducing a longleaf pine ecosystem at the Two Pines property after the previous owner, a paper company, used the property to harvest the fast-growing Loblolly Pine species. Since longleaf landscapes are a fire-adapted system, CCPRC also conducted a series of controlled burns on the property as part of our forest management plan. The agency planted 20,000 longleaf pines on roughly 40 acres to help in this reintroduction. Longleaf pine ecosystems (when fully matured) are considered one of the most biologically diverse ecosystems in the world, providing habitats to a range of threatened and endangered species.

Furthermore, when mature, a longleaf pine's long tap-roots act as important "carbon sinks," actively pulling and retaining carbon from the atmosphere. This natural carbon sponge is an important tool to help mitigate rising temperatures caused by increased carbon levels in the atmosphere.

CCPRC conducts timber harvests to make room for the longleaf pines along with the controlled burns. In FY 23/24 CCPRC earned \$340,00 from the timbers harvests that in turn is used to fund the forest management plan.



# TACKLING CHALLENGES

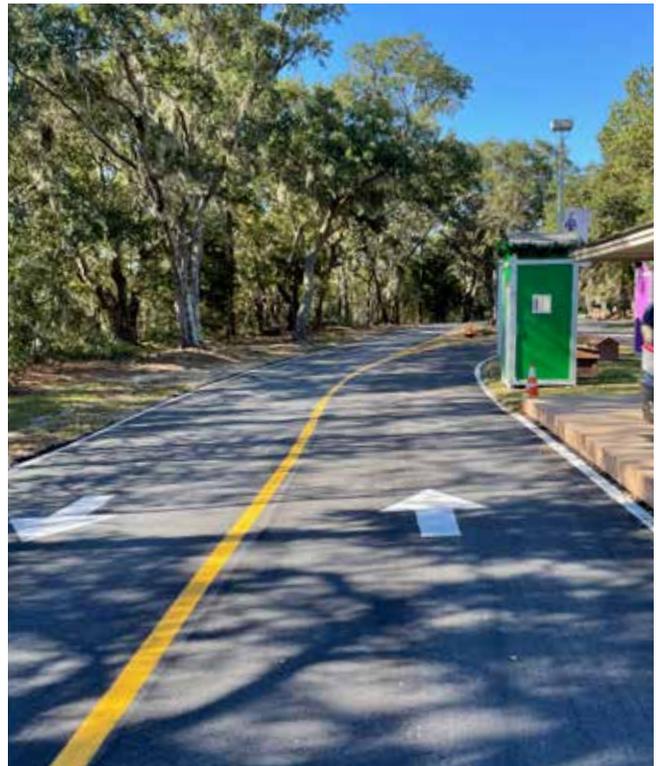
## RECOGNIZING AND MEETING AGENCY AND COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

For over 30 years, the Holiday Festival of Lights has been a beloved tradition for both locals and visitors. In 2023, 208,169 individuals in 60,765 vehicles attended the festival. While the festival continues to grow in popularity, CCPRC is mindful that the visitation at times creates traffic issues for the neighborhoods surrounding James Island County Park.

CCPRC has worked to mitigate these traffic issues, and in 2023 launched a multi-point, coordinated effort that included

- Using past attendance data, CCPRC identified historically busy nights and increased ticket prices to encourage people to come on a slower evening. In 2023, three tiers of pricing were introduced ranging from \$40 on the busiest nights to \$15 on a slower evening. Visitors can view a calendar on the website showing each night's pricing tiers and make an informed decision.
  - Online tickets are one of the fastest ways to get into the festival. The process is a quick scan and go. CCPRC encouraged advanced online ticket purchases and offered a discount if a ticket is purchased online.
  - CCPRC upgraded all credit card machines to include the tap feature, saving time on each credit card transaction.
  - Santa Claus came to town early! The big man himself was at the festival starting opening night, and families were encouraged to come during those early, less busy days to get their holiday photos.
  - CCPRC continued to work with our local government partners to identify opportunities to improve routing of festival traffic on busy nights.
- A letter was crafted and sent to the households in the neighborhoods that are most impacted by Holiday Festival of Lights, detailing the mitigation efforts CCPRC was making. The mailing also included a special guest pass and invitation for those neighbors to come to the festival.
  - Finally, CCPRC constructed a third entry lane into the park that greatly increased vehicular capacity entering the festival.

Combined, these efforts were effective. The 2023 Holiday Festival of Lights experienced far fewer nights where vehicular traffic backed up onto the road. While there have been some significant improvements, CCPRC will continue to work to mitigate traffic by continuing to implement the initiatives that have been effective and to pursue new opportunities.







**CHARLESTON COUNTY PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION**

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