Park and Recreation Department Management Report June 2020

Overview

The mission of Park and Recreation is "**enhancing community wellness through recreation, open space and natural resources**." The department facilitated many events during April of 2020 that positively contributed to its mission and reflected the three pillars of the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) – **health and wellness, conservation** and **social equity**.

April Departmental Highlights

Capital Planning

The Sardis to Providence portion of the **McAlpine Creek Greenway** has reached substantial completion status. Wayfinding signage is currently underway. Site walks with consultants for two planned greenway sections occurred this month as well – Paw Creek Greenway and the Treyburn to Oakdale portion of the Long Creek Greenway.

Site preparation work is complete for the **Northern Regional Recreation Center** and construction is now underway.

Stone repairs to historic bleachers, ballfield reconstruction and lighting for **Independence Park** are nearing completion. The remainder of renovations to this park will commence in the summer. A virtual review of construction documents occurred on April 23 and included department staff, as well as representatives from Asset and Facilities Management and design consultants.

A virtual steering committee meeting for the **Meck Playbook Comprehensive Master Plan** occurred on April 24. Highlights included a discussion of park classifications, marketing and branding strategy and greenway connectivity/wayfinding components. On June 23, Park and Recreation staff will host three online community engagement meetings, with additional public meetings to be scheduled in the early fall. Plan completion is projected for early 2021.

Park Operations

The Park Operations team worked diligently during the month of April to manage daily operations in the face of restroom, sport court, playground and gate closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to managing these closures, ranger and maintenance staff worked to encourage social distancing between patrons, while administration staff helped customers with reservation cancellations. Parking lots were reopened to the public on April 29, and, since that time, ranger staff have collected weekly visitation numbers to track the skyrocketing number of customers visiting parks during the Stay At Home order.

Community Recreation Centers, Aquatics & Sports/Fitness

Community and Recreation Center staff took a leading role in providing content for the **"Happy At Home"** social media campaign, the goal of which is to provide engaging content to home-bound audiences, even with recreation centers closed. These videos garnered more than 16,000 views during the month of April.

Senior Center staff began the work of obtaining reaccreditation from the **National Council on Aging** (NCOA).

Staff continued their work to provide **childcare for essential employees**. The three childcare sites hosted 640 visits during the month of April.

Nature Preserves & Natural Resources

Natural Resources staff continued their **invasive species removal** efforts, despite the Stay At Home order, working more than 200 hours in nature preserves on this task. Staff also contributed content to the department's social media sites including the "Happy At Home" series, begin the planning process for a virtual Hummingbird Festival in August and created educational content in preparation for virtual or live programming over the summer.

FY20-22 Strategic Business Plan Highlights

This month, the Department is highlighting its progress related to its goal of optimizing utilization of recreation and leisure amenities.

Goal 2: Optimize Utilization of Recreation and Leisure Amenities

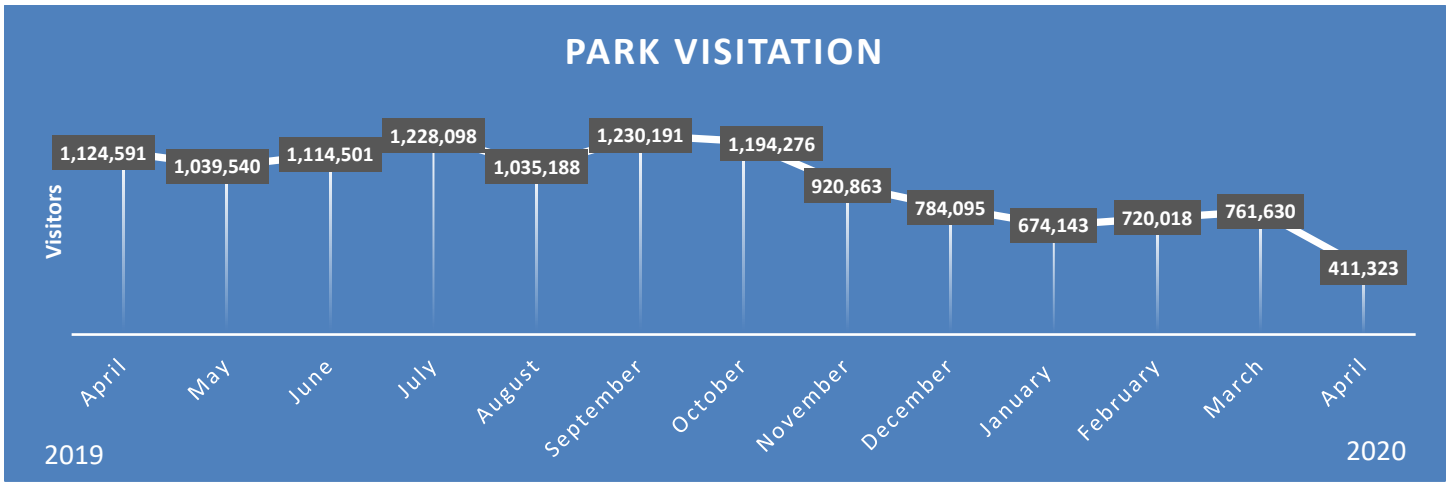
The **Website Team** is excited to announce the impending launch of its updated homepage design, featuring the Park Explorer application. The Park Explorer was created in partnership with Mecklenburg County Geographic Information Systems and Web Services staff in the County's Public Information Department. The Park Explorer application will provide the public with accurate and up-to-date information about park locations and amenities in an accessible, interactive map. The new website and Explorer app are expected to launch at the beginning of July. (2.1.A)

Staff are exploring options for **virtual programming** in collaboration with partners at Mecklenburg County Public Information. The goal of virtual programming is to increase access to Park and Recreation programming, even during the COVID era, by bringing quality free programming to all Mecklenburg County residents via the internet. The first major special event to be offered virtually will be the Hummingbird Festival in August. (2.3)

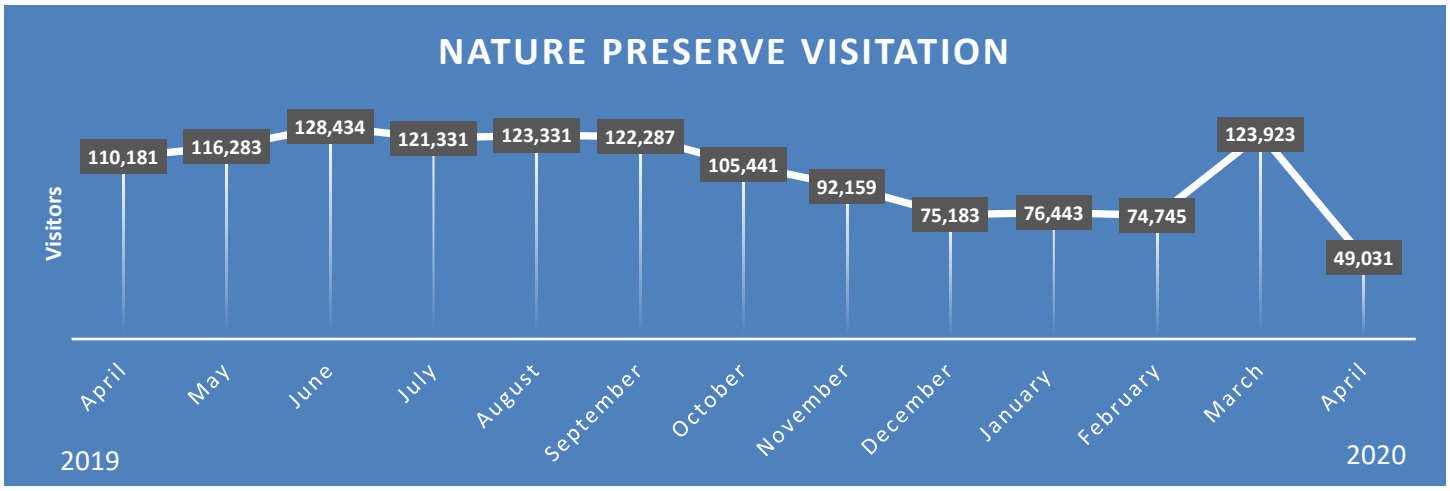
Key Performance Indicators

April volunteerism had a value of **$4,075.16** in cost recovery.

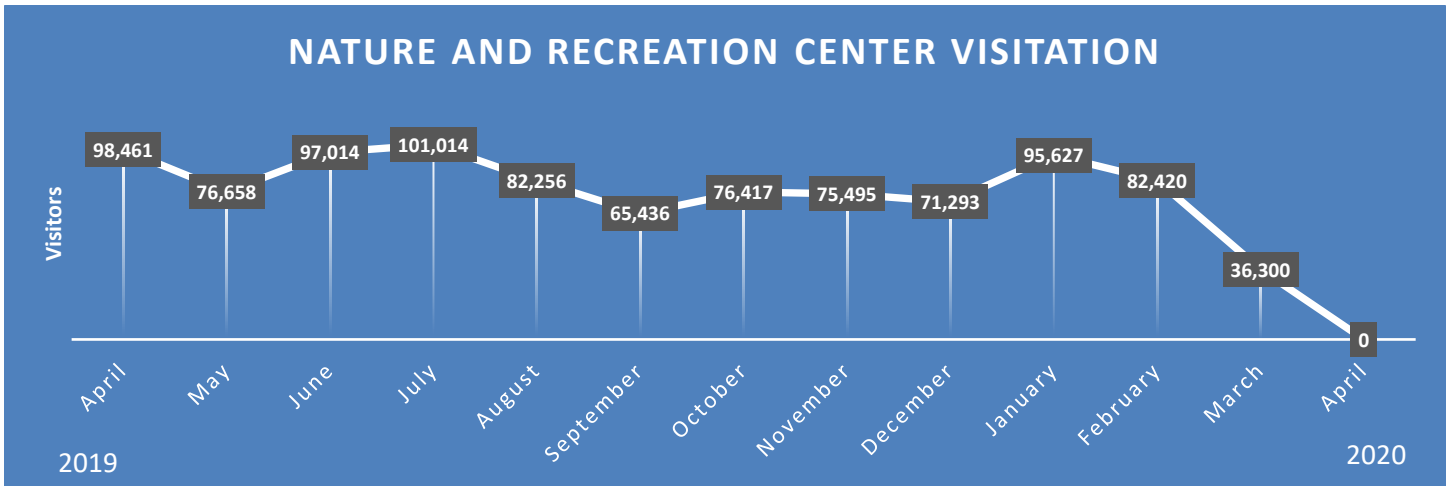
Note: the COVID-10 pandemic caused several substantial changes in monthly trend data in key performance indicators. Please review the context section at the end of this report for more detailed explanations of trends.



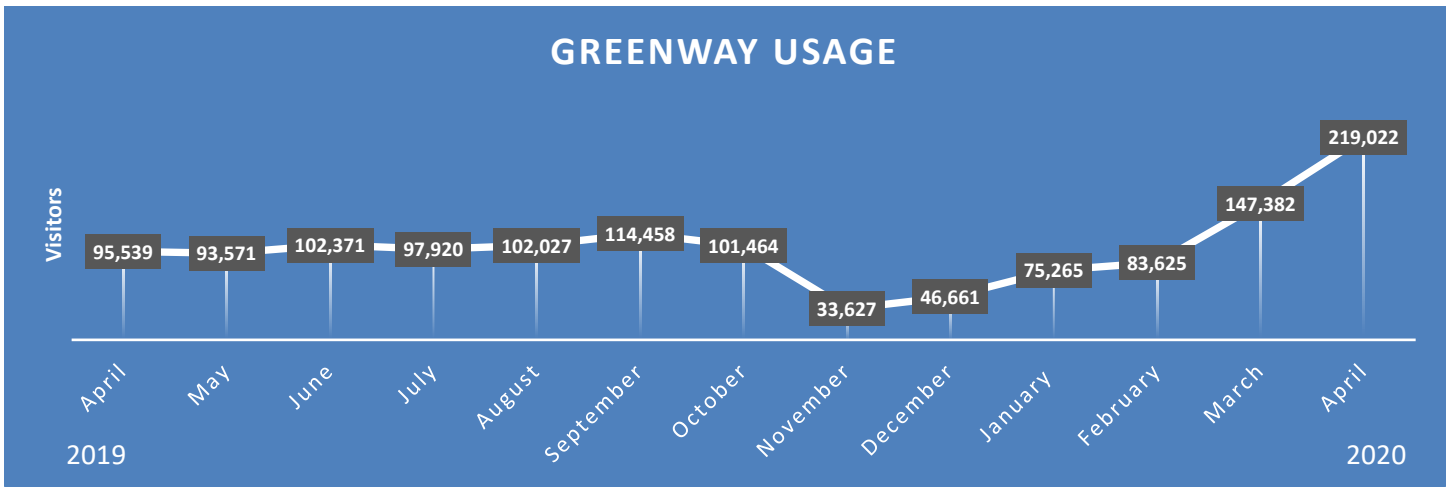
Park visitation numbers from April 2019 through April 2020 reflect a 4% increase from the prior year (April 2018 through April 2019).



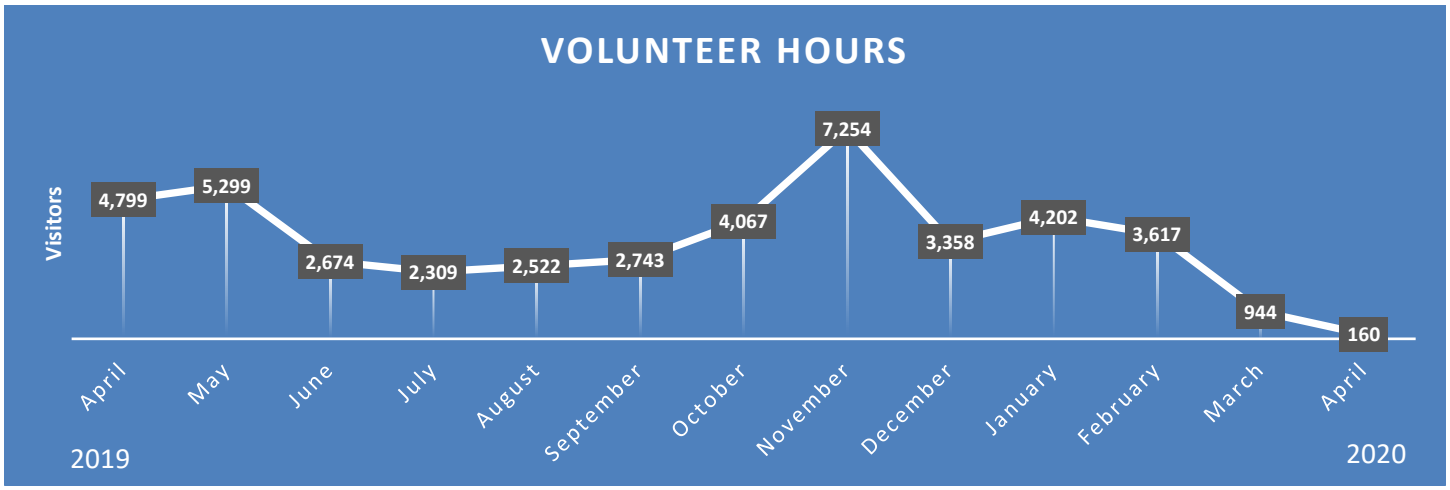
Nature preserve visitation numbers from April 2019 through April 2020 reflect a 6% increase from the prior year (April 2018 through April 2019).



Center visitation numbers from April 2019 through April 2020 reflect a 22% decrease from the prior year (April 2018 through April 2019).



Greenway visitation numbers from April 2019 through April 2020 reflect a 20% increase from the prior year (April 2018 through April 2019).



Volunteer hours from April 2019 through April 2020 reflect a 19% decrease from the prior year (April 2018 through April 2019).

Context for Key Performance Indicators

Park Visitation:
Data is based on a combination of staff estimates for walk-in facilities and car counter data for park facilities with a vehicular entrance. Car counter results are multiplied by 2.5 to account for the fact that cars may have multiple riders.

Park gates were closed to the public from April 7 – 29 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature Preserve Visitation:
A combination of car and pedestrian counter data is used to estimate visitor attendance at 12 Mecklenburg County Nature Preserves. Car counter data using the same 2.5 multiplier as parks provides an estimate for 10 preserves, which is supplemented by pedestrian counter data at Stephens Road and West Branch Nature Preserves. Pedestrian counters are located at the main trailhead at these facilities.

Nature preserves gates were closed to the public from April 7 – 29 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Nature and Recreation Center Visitation:
Visitation numbers at all sites are staff-reported. Marion Diehl and Sugaw Creek Recreation Centers are currently closed for renovations.

Nature and Recreation Centers were closed to the public on March 18 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Greenway Usage:
The Department purchased two additional laser-beam counters in January, which have been placed along greenways. With this additional purchase, there are now seven greenway counters used to track usage along the following greenway trails: Four Mile Creek, Little Sugar Creek, Mallard Creek and McAlpine Creek.

Volunteer Hours:
Volunteer hours are self-reported by staff and the value of these hours is calculated at $25.43 hourly.

The drop in volunteer hours during the month of April can be attributed to the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic.