

Parks and Recreation

Champaign County park acreages increased from 2,644 in 1970 to 5,706 in 2005. Table 8-1 shows the number of acres by jurisdiction for 1970 and 2005. The number of parks in Champaign, Urbana, and surrounding communities increased significantly over the past 35 years. The Champaign Park District now has 552 acres, over a 60 percent increase. The Urbana Park District currently manages 544 acres, a 150% increase from 1970. Village and Township parks also grew, particularly in Mahomet and Savoy, which had 80 and 17 acres in 2005, respectively. Figure 8-1 shows public parks in the County.

Table 8-1: Champaign County Parks Acreage, 1970 and 2005

Total Acreage by Agency	1970	2005
Champaign County Forest Preserve	1,226	3,611
Champaign Park District	338	552
Urbana Park District	216	544
Rantoul Park District/Rantoul Recreation	203	198
University of Illinois		
Arboretum & Illini Grove	169	169
Student Facilities	125	
Golf Courses	354	241
Other Parks	13	295
Village of Savoy	*	17
Village of Mahomet	*	80
Total	2,644	5,706

Source: Champaign County Today and Tomorrow: Select Trends and Conditions, 2006.

Park Provision Standards

In the recent past, a standard of 10 acres per 1,000 persons¹ was frequently used to determine the amount of park and recreational lands needed in a community. Table 8-2 shows parks acreage, including the Champaign County Forest Preserves, per 1,000 population. The data suggest, according to the standard, that there is enough park acreage in Champaign County given its population.

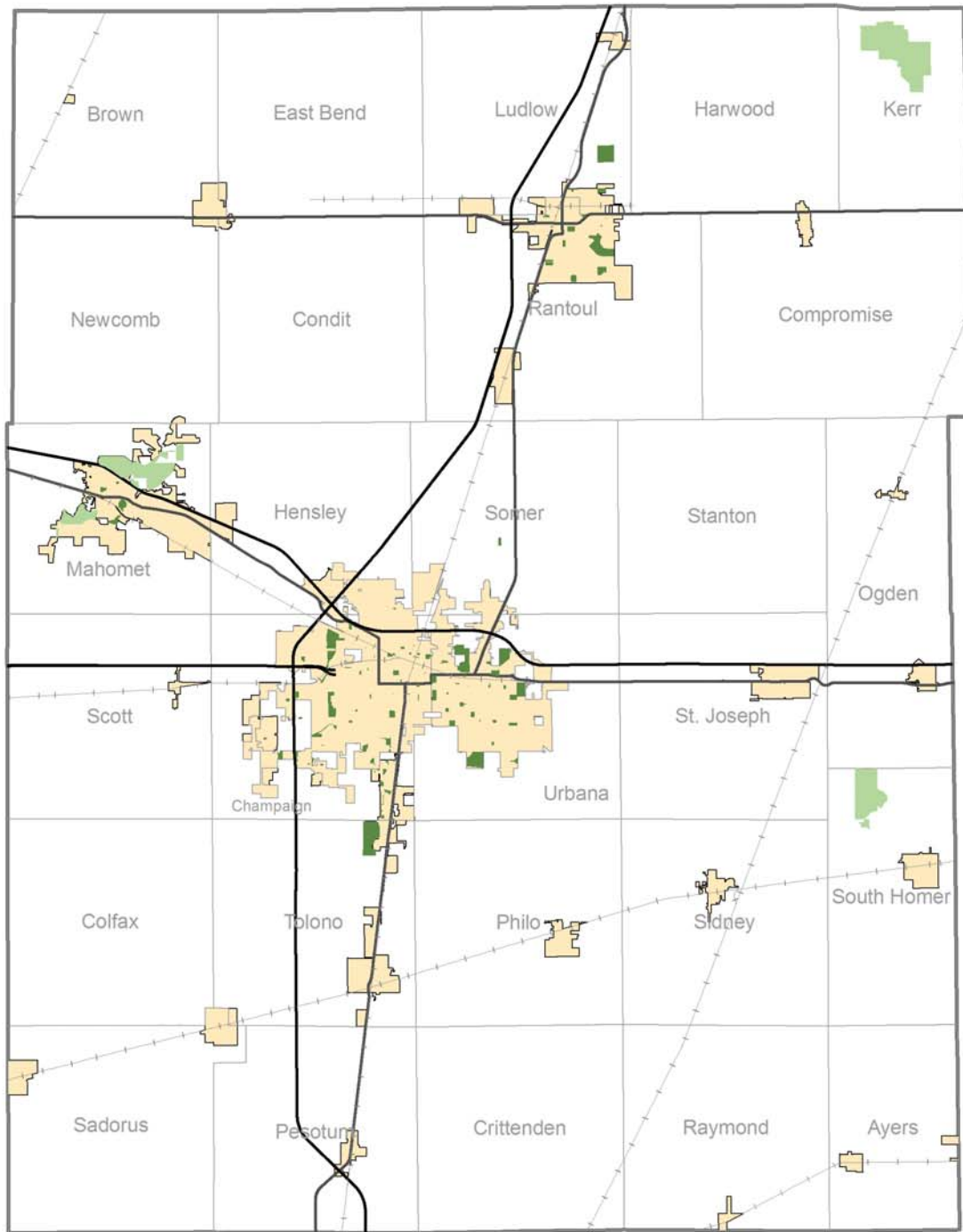
Table 8-2: Champaign County Parks Acreage Per 1,000 Population, 1970 and 2005

	1970	2005
Population	163,281	184,905
Parks Acreage	2,644	5,706
Acre Per 1,000 Persons	16.2	30.9

Source: Greenways & Trails Plan, Champaign Park District, Village of St. Joseph, U.S. Census

There is now a shift towards a level of service standard based on residents' needs. Geographic proximity for all residents is also a consideration. The Cities of Champaign and Urbana and the Village of Savoy have jointly undertaken an open space needs study over the last two years. Those communities identified neighborhoods where park facilities are geographically difficult to reach, too far away, or insufficient in size for the population, suggesting that there is a need for more parks. No such study has been completed for the entire county.

Figure 8-1: Public Parks, 2006



Public Parks
 Champaign County

Legend

- Public Parks
- Forest Preserves
- Interstates
- Federal Highways
- Municipal Boundary
- County Boundary

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
LRMP
 LAND RESOURCE
 MANAGEMENT PLAN

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Date Map Prepared:
 October, 2007

Forest Preserve District

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District is a local, property tax-supported government agency charged with the stewardship of four forest preserves covering 3,500 acres in Champaign County. The Forest Preserve District, which covers all but seven sections of Champaign County, was established by referendum in 1935. Due to the Depression and World War II, however, the first park was not opened until 1948.²

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District consists of four forest preserves: Lake of the Woods; Homer Lake; Middle Fork River; and its latest acquisition, River Bend.

- *Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve* has approximately 900 acres. Paved roads within the park connect historical landmarks, the lake, the Early American Museum, Mabery Gelvin Botanical Gardens, and the Hartwell C. Howard Golf Course. A 3.3 mile bike trail runs through Lake of the Woods from Prairieview Road on the east to Crowley Road on the west side of the park.
- *Middle Fork River Forest Preserve* covers approximately 1,608 acres in the northeastern corner of the county. The preserve contains two restored wetlands habitats and several ponds as well as part of the Middle Fork River. Highlights of the preserve include the Harry L. Swartz Campground with adjacent shower house, the Activity Center, an Amphitheater and 6.5 miles of hiking trails.
- *River Bend Forest Preserve* is located on approximately 275 acres about one mile southwest of Lake of the Woods. This property has 1.5 miles of hiking trails as well as a boat access area and two lakes. The largest lake, Sunset Lake, is open for boating and fishing. The Sangamon River is the northern border of the property.
- *Homer Lake Forest Preserve* is located on approximately 828 acres in southeastern Champaign County. It is home to Homer Lake, part of the Salt Fork River, Environmental Education Center, the Salt Fork Recreation Center, and 11 miles of hiking trails.

The Champaign County Forest Preserve District also owns the following facilities:

- *Early American Museum* at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve has an extensive collection interpreting 19th and early 20th-century life in east-central Illinois.
- *Environmental Education Center* at the Homer Lake Forest Preserve offers a wide range of educational programs year round.
- *Harry L. Swartz Campground* at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve contains 65 sites suitable for all types of camping.
- *Hartwell C. Howard Golf Course* is located at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve. This award-winning 18-hole regulation Golf Course features a pro shop and a clubhouse which is available for rental during the winter. There is also a 9-hole Par 3 course and practice range.
- *Mabery Gelvin Botanical Garden* at Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve boasts some of the most beautiful and diverse flora in east central Illinois.

- *Waterfowl Management Area* at the Middle Fork River Forest Preserve is a premier bird sanctuary in Champaign County. More than 130 acres of nesting habitat for migratory waterfowl are located here.

Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan

The 2004 *Champaign County Greenways and Trails Plan* has numerous goals related to the development and enhancement of open spaces and recreational facilities. Various projects identified in the plan seek to improve connectivity between open spaces and residential areas via pedestrian and bicycle facilities. The following objectives from the plan outline how open spaces should be considered in all future planning efforts:

- Increase park acreage
- Increase the number and types of recreational facilities
- Support efforts toward maintaining and improving the environment
- Increase the number of connections between natural features such as bodies of water, wooded areas, and open spaces
- Promote the connection of Champaign County with the central Illinois region, contributing to a future statewide system of greenways and trails

The Greenways and Trails Plan includes about 80 proposed pedestrian and/or bicycle facilities covering over 150 miles in Champaign County. While the plan did not focus on open spaces projects, local jurisdictions participating in the plan's implementation have begun analyzing open space needs for their communities and are enhancing their open space areas in both acreage and types of facilities offered. Transportation facilities related to the Greenways and Trails Plan are discussed in Chapter 9.

Other Park Areas Open to the Public

Ford Harris Park / Somer Township Park

The 14 acre park contains a fenced baseball diamond and shelter facility. The park is located 0.5 miles west of US Route 45, 2.5 miles north of Interstate 74.

Homer Lake Wetland

The recently developed 1.5 acre wetland contains several ephemeral ponds, full of water only part of the year, providing beneficial habitat for wildlife, controlling floodwaters, and serving as an outdoor demonstration area. The wetland restoration project is located in the Homer Lake Forest Preserve, north of Homer, and is open to the public.

St. Joseph Wetland

The 67-acre wetland was acquired in 2005 by the Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District, with a conservation easement held by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The restored wetland project is situated west of St. Joseph on both sides of US Route 150. Two ponds were constructed on the north portion of the wetland site. Plans for development and restoration of remaining portions of the site are in progress. The site is intended to serve as a wetland ecology demonstration site and is open to the public.

Barnhart Prairie

The Barnhart Prairie site is located on Old Church Road, two miles south of Urbana between Philo Road and Race Street. Eighty acres of the original prairie land gained Nature Preserve status in 2005. In total the site contains 100 acres of restored prairie, planted with the intent of developing an example of what land in the area of East Central Illinois might have looked like when settled in the early nineteenth century. The prairie currently serves as an educational resource for school and groups, and is open on to the public on an appointment basis.

Shortline Railroad Prairie

The Shortline Railroad Prairie site is located east of Gifford, approximately .5 miles south of the intersection of US 136 and County Road 2400E. This six-acre Grand Prairie Friends prairie restoration project is situated along a 0.7 mile long 66-foot wide segment of the former railroad right-of-way. The old railbed is maintained as a hiking trail with access from both the east and west sides.

The narrow gauge Rantoul to Potomac, or Shortline, Railroad was built in 1875, converted to standard gauge in 1887 by the Illinois Central Gulf railroad. Passenger service was offered until 1920. The line was abandoned in 1982 and the track removed in 1984. The areas bordering the old railroad bed support a variety of native prairie plants. Since removal of the rails in 1984, the 11 foot wide rail bed is becoming colonized by a variety of disturbance tolerant species such as Prairie Dock, Monarda, and some non-native plants.³

Cultural Resources

Historic Sites

Numerous historic sites exist in Champaign County. The sites noted below represent some of the historic or cultural important sites included in the publication entitled Historic Sites in Champaign County.⁴

Rantoul Prairie- from Rantoul to Ludlow between the Illinois Central Tracks and old Route 45

Rantoul Prairie is an excellent example of a railway remnant prairie. These small patches of prairie serve as the best examples of what the native vegetation that once covered the County looked like. A diverse landscape, the Rantoul Prairie is host to more than 140 species of plants and animals. Flowering occurs in June-July and August September, and is attractive all year round. Visitors should be sure to visit the prairie during all seasons to truly understand the complexity and beauty of Illinois Prairie.

Sadorus Pioneer Marker- east bend in C.H. 529, South of Sadorus

A bronze tablet set in a boulder at this location commemorates the arrival of the Sadorus family to Champaign County. The marker reads "in memory of Henry Sadorus, first white settler in Champaign County, March, 7, 1824." Mr. Sadorus is presumed to be the oldest permanent settler within the Champaign County territory.

Lincoln Farewell Message Marker- Railway Station, Tolono

This bronze marker indicates the spot where Abraham Lincoln bid his farewell to the people of Illinois on his way to assume the presidency in Washington, DC. The words of his farewell speech are inscribed on the bronze tablet.

Savoy Prairie- Between Kirby Avenue and Airport Road on Route 45 South

One of the closest natural prairies to Champaign, this prairie remains in large tracts, albeit at slightly degraded quality due to occasional mowing. With careful management and community recognition, this prairie will become a valuable asset to the County.

Eighth Judicial Circuit Boundary Marker- North side Old State Road at County Line

This series of markers identifies the boundaries of the Eighth Judicial District. These markers read "Abraham Lincoln Traveled this Way as He Rode the Circuit of the Eighth Judicial District, 1847- 1859." It may be of interest to note that although Lincoln was riding the circuit as an attorney by 1841, the Eighth Judicial Circuit was not created until 1847.

Old Homer Park- West side of IL 49 at Salt Fork River

Old Homer Park was developed on previously developed land that had been relocated at another town site. The park became successful when the Illinois Traction system ran a branch line to make it accessible. Shortly after the opening of the line, the area became a popular recreational park.

State-Designated Sites of Archeological/Cultural Significance

The Illinois State Agency Historic Preservation Act (20 ILCS 3420/3) mandates state government to preserve, restore, and maintain the historic resources of the state. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) regulates public and private site development that can result in a change of historic properties. An inventory and assessment of the scientific and historic potential of archaeological and historic properties must occur on a documented archeological site or an area with a high potential for archaeological resources.

The Illinois State Museum maintains a database regarding areas with a high probability for archaeological resources. A high probability area is defined as any occurrence of Cahokia Alluvium, Carmi Member of Equality Formation, Grayslake Peat, Parkland Sand, Peyton Colluvium the Batavia Member of the Henry Formation, or the Mackinaw Member within specified non-intermittent stream floodplains.⁵ These areas encompass 500 yards of the adjoining bluff line crest of the Kaskaskia River and 300 yards of the adjoining bluff line crest of all other rivers within Champaign County.

Centennial and Sesquicentennial Farms

In 1972, the Illinois Department of Agriculture established a program to honor the generations of farmers maintaining family farms throughout Illinois (20 ILCS 205/205-15). To date, throughout Champaign County 282 farms have been certified as a Centennial Farm, with two farms certified as a Sesquicentennial Farm. An agricultural property must have been owned by a family line of descendants for a minimum of 100 years to qualify as a Centennial Farm, and a minimum of 150 years to qualify as a Sesquicentennial Farm.