

Houston Parks *Rapid Assessment* for New Parkland Acquisition



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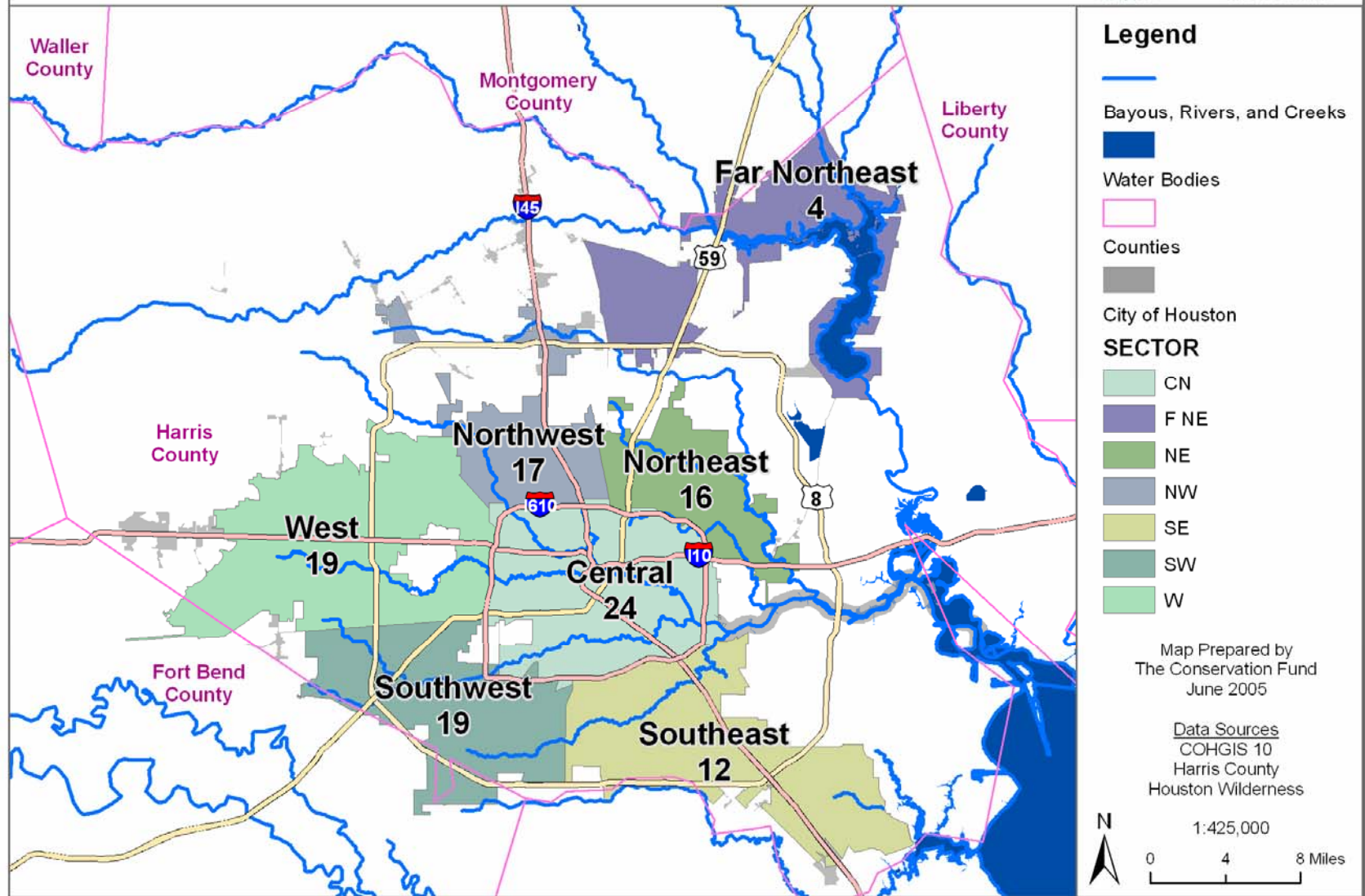
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Houston Parks Rapid Assessment

2001 Master Plan: Sector Needs for Park Sites



PROJECT SUMMARY

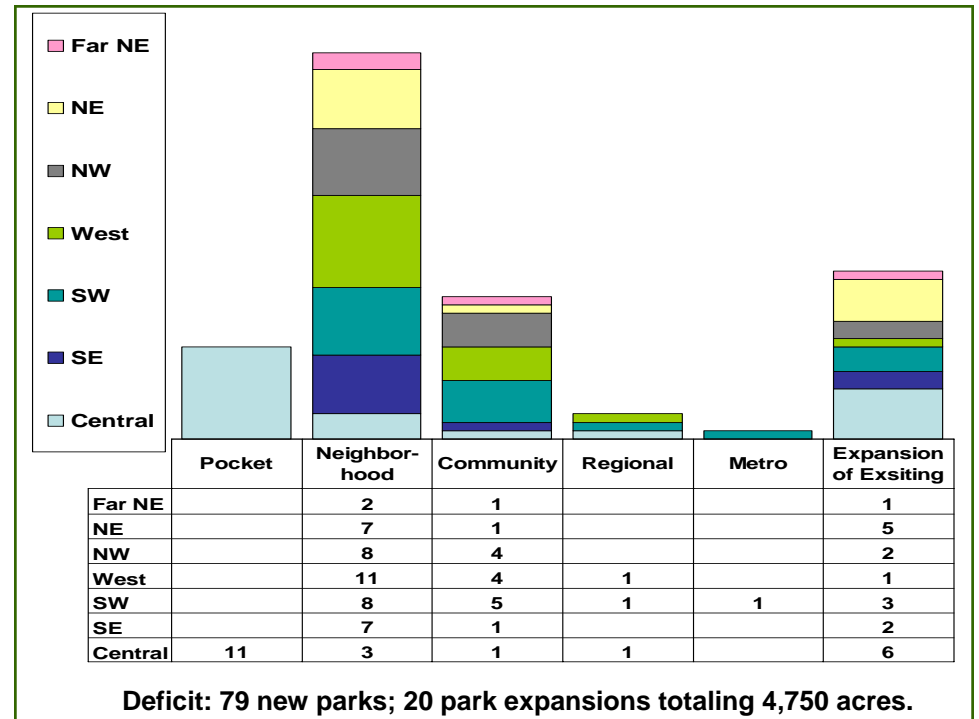
The Conservation Fund (the Fund) and the Houston Parks Board (Parks Board) have completed a rapid assessment of new parkland acquisition needs for the City of Houston. The rapid assessment facilitates identification and prioritization of parkland acquisition opportunities that implement the current City of Houston Parks and Recreation Master Plan. With input from a Stakeholder Advisory Committee, the Fund performed analysis using a geographic information system (GIS) that graphically represents suitable locations for potential parkland acquisitions. Based on this “suitability analysis”, the rapid assessment includes a ranking system and supporting information for over 840 square miles of land area, allowing the Parks Board to both proactively identify new opportunities and evaluate requests from Houston citizens.

As part of the rapid assessment, the Parks Board also received a customized GIS framework designed by The Fund’s Strategic Conservation Program. This framework has already narrowed the “universe” of 840 square miles of acquisition prospects to 23 square miles of prospects, and it will help the Parks Board to further narrow down the prospects to the needed 8 square miles (or 4,750 acres) of new parkland.

Park Type	Size (acres)	Service Area
Pocket	< 1	1/2 mile
Neighborhood	1 to 10	1 mile
Community	10 to 50	3 miles
Regional	50 to 200	> 3 miles
Metro	200+	city

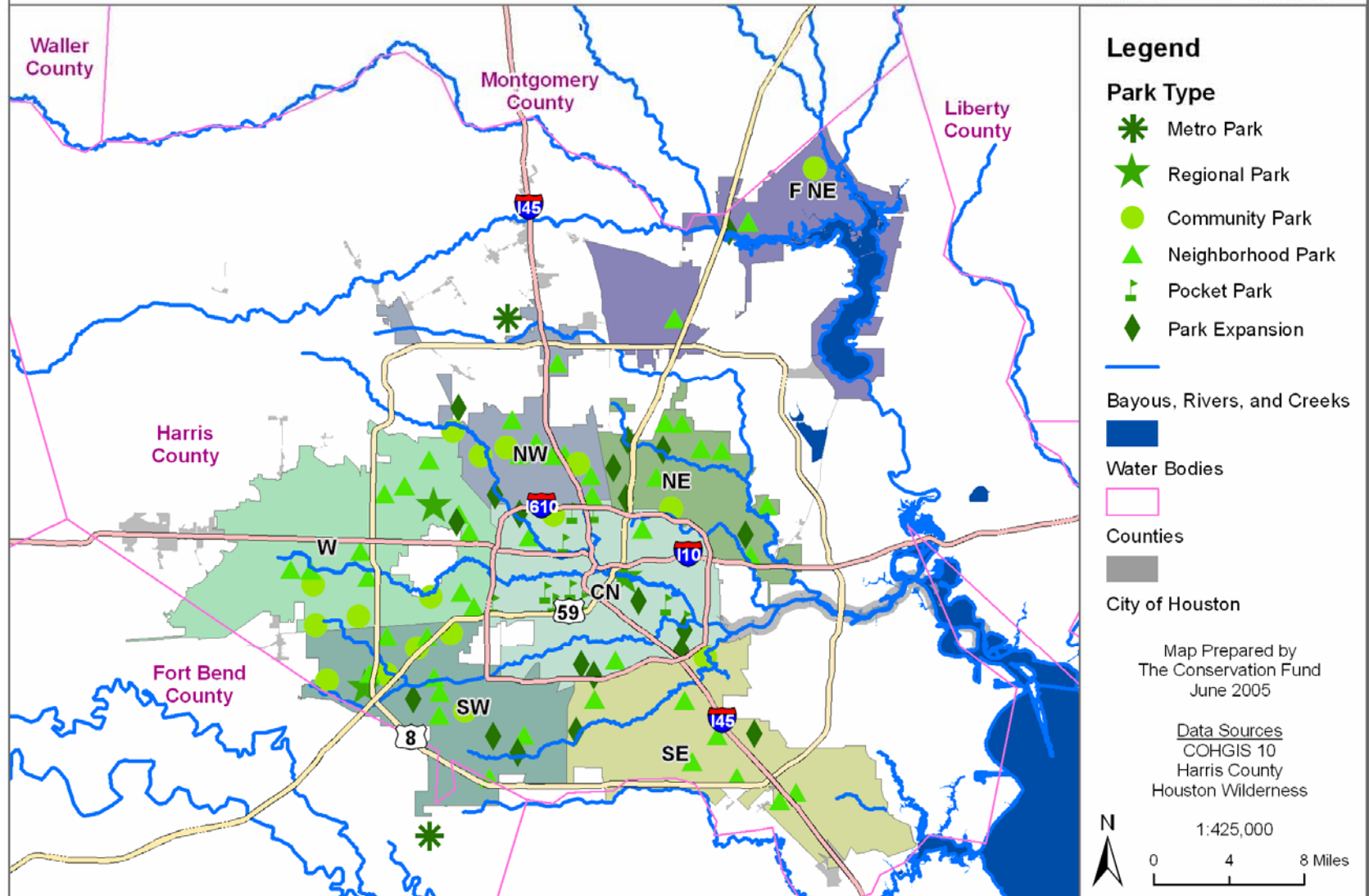
PROJECT GOALS

- Identify the most suitable locations within the City of Houston for:
 - ⇒ New parks
 - ⇒ Linear parks, mostly along creeks and bayous
 - ⇒ Expansion of existing parks
- Evaluate and prioritize parkland opportunities that have already been identified
- Evaluate acquisition requests made by others to the Houston Parks Board
- Identify other new park acquisition opportunities



Houston Parks Rapid Assessment

2001 Master Plan: Proposed Park Locations and Types



STUDY PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

A key step in the Houston Parks Rapid Assessment was a thorough review and understanding of the current Master Plan goals. The Master Plan clearly articulates an achievable set of new parkland acquisition goals and identifies general locations where implementation of the acquisition goals can be achieved. In January 2005, The Houston Endowment hosted a meeting of the Assessment's Stakeholder Advisory Committee to provide input on the assessment. The Stakeholder Advisory Committee confirmed the interest in focusing on implementation of the Master Plan acquisition guidelines within the City of Houston's current boundaries. The stakeholders reviewed and prioritized mapping criteria and assisted in developing an objective scoring system for land parcels.

Houston Parks Rapid Assessment Stakeholder Advisory Committee



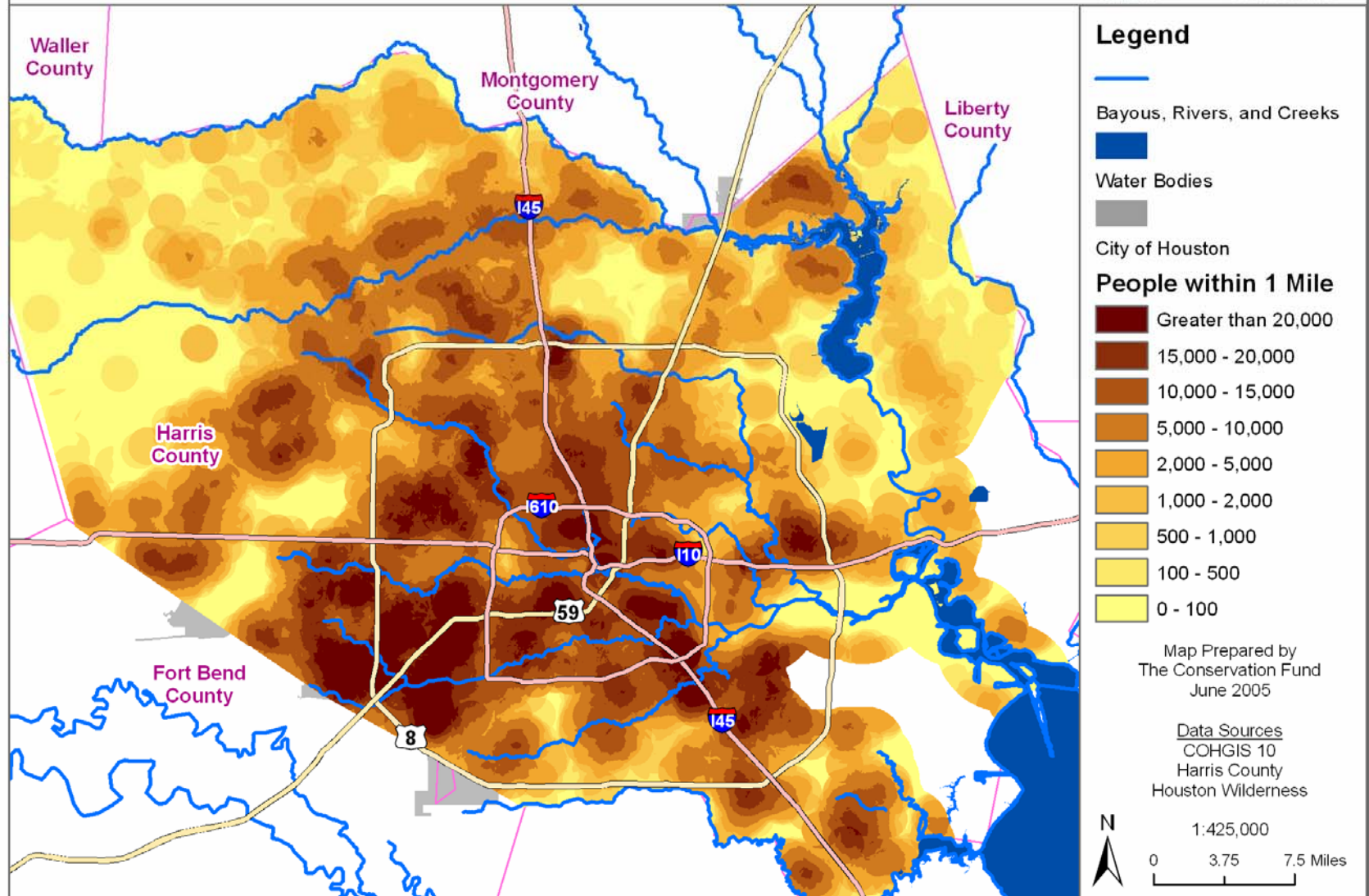
Alief Superneighborhood Council
 Bayou Preservation Association
 Blueprint Houston
 Buffalo Bayou Partnership
 City of Houston Mayor's Office
 Gulf Coast Institute
 Harris County Flood Control District
 Houston City Council Quality of Life Committee
 Houston Downtown Park Conservancy
 Houston Endowment
 Houston Parks Board
 Houston Parks & Recreation Department
 Houston Wilderness
 Trust for Public Land
 The Park People

Key new parkland acquisition goals from the 2001 City of Houston Parks and Recreation Master Plan:

- Provide parks and open spaces adequate in size, distribution, and condition to serve all citizens.
 - ⇒ Include within the entire park system, a combination of pocket parks, neighborhood parks, linear parks, community parks, regional parks, and metro parks
 - ⇒ Utilize alternative sources of land such as school sites, other City departments' vacant or under-utilized land, existing street rights-of-way and joint City/County purchases or leases to lessen land acquisition costs
- Use the park system to preserve and protect environmentally significant areas for public enjoyment and education.
 - ⇒ Expand the linear park system along the City's bayous, streams, and former railroad rights-of-ways in coordination with the Comprehensive Bikeway Plan and in cooperation with Harris County and the Harris County Flood Control District
- Maximize public and private partnerships to assist in all aspects of park planning and development.

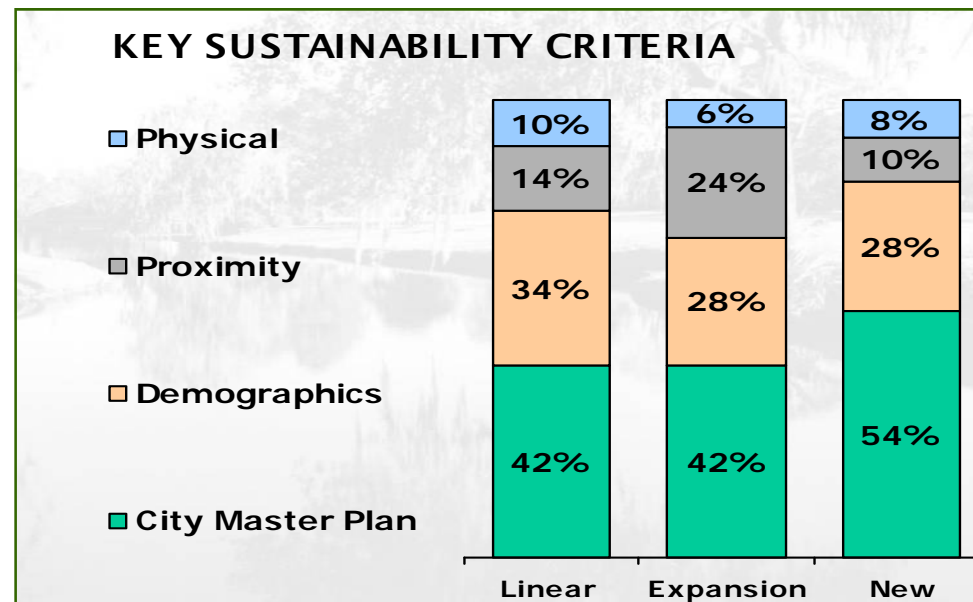
Houston Parks Rapid Assessment

Assessment Criteria Layer: Population Density



ANALYSIS

Following the meeting, the Fund developed assessment criteria for new non-linear park sites, linear park sites, and existing park expansions. Using these criteria and the resulting suitability models, a score from 1-100 was calculated for each parcel within the 840 square mile study area. The suitability scores, in conjunction with information about the parcel's land use and assessment status, were used to rank the parcels based on the parcel's ability to fulfill a particular new park type need within the Master Plan. Using a combination of the suitability scores, Master Plan ranks, and specific information about each parcel, the Parks Board will utilize the rapid assessment results to both proactively identify new opportunities and evaluate requests from Houston citizens.



Suitability factors for new park sites, linear park sites, and existing park expansions

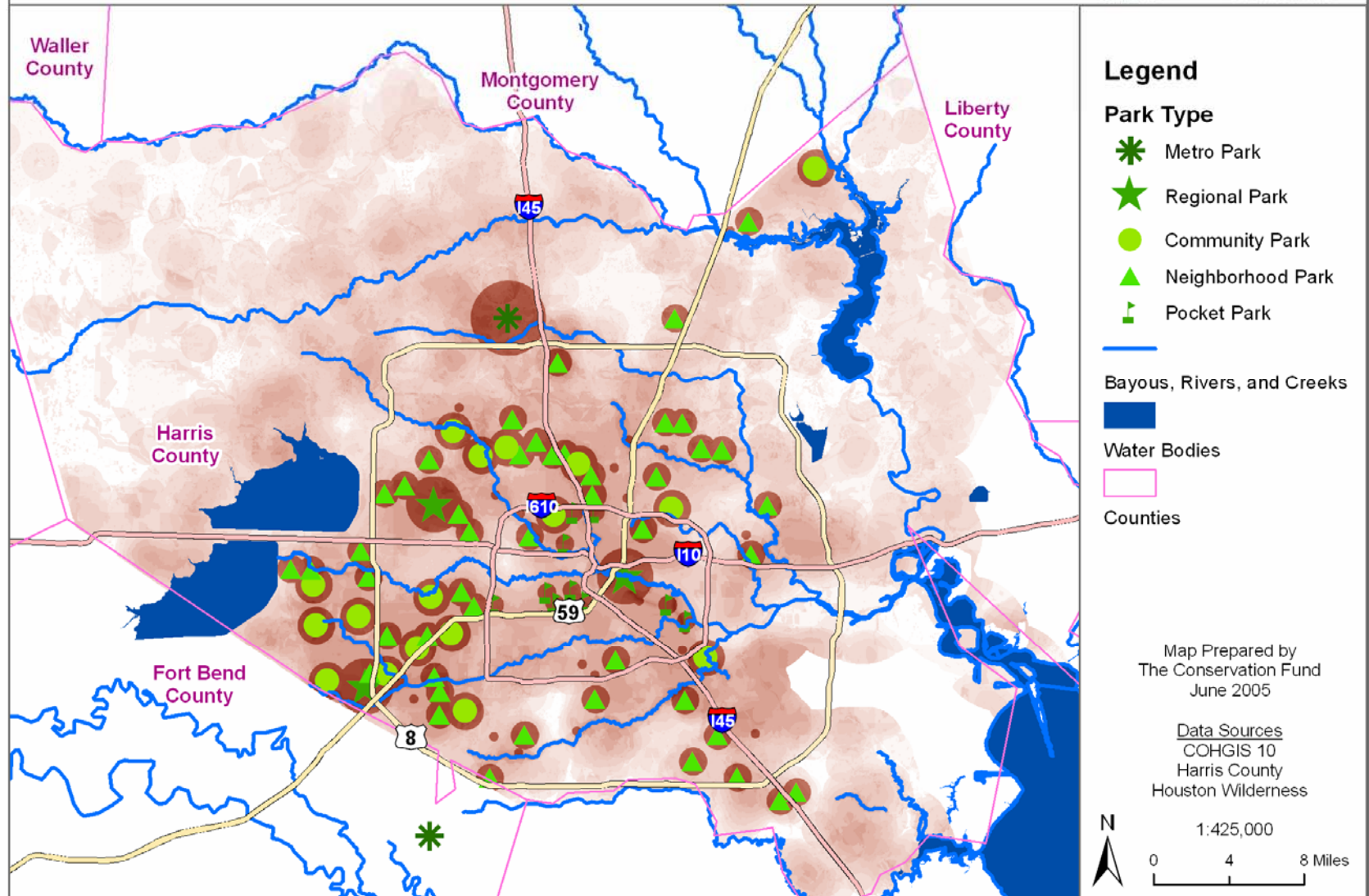
- Physical Characteristics
 - ⇒ Floodplain
 - ⇒ Wetlands
- Proximity
 - ⇒ Distance from Existing Non-Linear Park Sites
 - ⇒ Distance from Existing Linear Parks
- Demographics
 - ⇒ Population Density
 - ⇒ Household Income
- City Master Plan
 - ⇒ Inside Non-Linear Park Acquisition Target Areas
 - ⇒ Inside Linear Park Acquisition Target Areas

Datasets/Sources used in the assessment

- Houston Wilderness GIS Data Library
- Federal Emergency Management Agency
- National Wetlands Inventory
- City of Houston GIS database – COHGIS Version 10
- US Census Bureau
- County parcels and assessment data (Source: Harris County Appraisal District)
- Aerial photography (Houston-Galveston Area Council)
- City limits, sectors and superneighborhoods (City of Houston Planning and Development)

Houston Parks Rapid Assessment

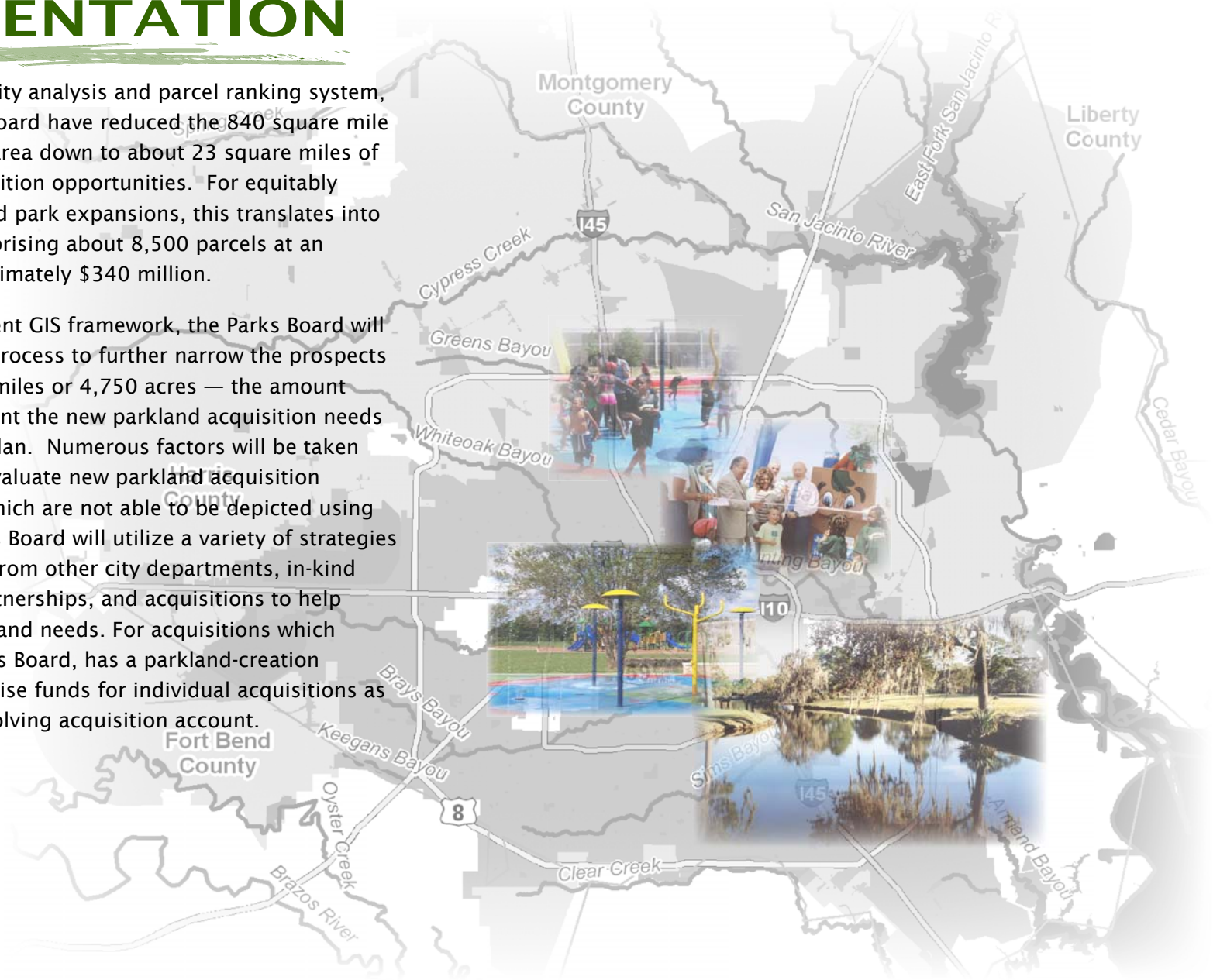
Suitability Model Results: New Park Sites



IMPLEMENTATION

As a result of the suitability analysis and parcel ranking system, the Fund and the Parks Board have reduced the 840 square mile (750,000 parcels) study area down to about 23 square miles of potential parkland acquisition opportunities. For equitably distributed new parks and park expansions, this translates into about 10,000 acres comprising about 8,500 parcels at an assessed value of approximately \$340 million.

Using the rapid assessment GIS framework, the Parks Board will continue the evaluation process to further narrow the prospects down to about 8 square miles or 4,750 acres — the amount required to fully implement the new parkland acquisition needs identified in the Master Plan. Numerous factors will be taken into account to further evaluate new parkland acquisition opportunities, most of which are not able to be depicted using mapping data. The Parks Board will utilize a variety of strategies including land transfers from other city departments, in-kind donations, corporate partnerships, and acquisitions to help implement the new parkland needs. For acquisitions which require funding, the Parks Board, has a parkland-creation campaign underway to raise funds for individual acquisitions as well as funds to fill a revolving acquisition account.



acknowledgements

The Houston Parks Board and The Conservation Fund would like to thank:

- The **Houston Endowment**, for its generous financial support for the project as well as for the hosting of the Stakeholder Advisory Committee meeting.
- **Houston Wilderness** (HW), for its critical in-kind contribution of the use of its GIS Data Library for the assessment (<http://www.houstonwilderness.org>).
- **The City of Houston** and **Harris County** for critical support for the project.

Houston Parks Board, created in 1975, is a private, nonprofit organization committed to expanding, enhancing and protecting Houston's park system. Since its inception, the Houston Parks Board has touched at least 75% of the City's parkland either through acquisitions and/or capital improvements. (<http://www.houstonparksboard.org>)

The Conservation Fund forges partnerships to conserve America's legacy of land and water resources. Through land acquisition, sustainable programs, and leadership training, the Fund and its partners demonstrate balanced conservation solutions that emphasize the integration of economic and environmental goals. Since 1985 The Conservation Fund and its partners have permanently protected more than 4 million acres of important wildlife habitat, working landscapes, and recreation areas. (<http://www.conservationfund.org>)

All photos are courtesy of the Houston Parks Board.

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