



C H A P T E R T W O

RECREATION AND PARKS INVENTORY

2.1 Introduction



The Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks aims to provide diverse recreational opportunities to all residents through the provision of parks, open spaces, and specialized recreational facilities. This chapter inventories the publicly and privately held park and open space, detailing the different characteristics and uses of various park types, such as neighborhood parks, regional parks, and school recreation centers.

Quality parks are important for the overall livability of a place, contributing to improvements in public health, environmental health, and the economy. These spaces enable exercise, contributing to physical health, and provide a place for social activities or a quiet retreat, which is important for mental health. These areas are particularly needed in the urban areas of the County, where much of the land has been developed for housing, business, and retail. As greenspaces with permeable surfaces and forested areas, parks improve water quality, which is a priority within our Chesapeake Bay watershed. Parks are valued by residents, making Baltimore County a desirable place to live, and therefore contribute to our economy.



Baltimore County has an impressive park system including 13 square miles of County parks, 5 square miles of school recreation centers, and 5.5 square miles of County-owned open space, in addition to state and national parks. These provide great benefits to residents and attract visitors from neighboring counties.



As Baltimore County aims to serve residents equitably, we continue to assess the distribution of parks and facilities and seek to understand the needs of the diverse communities we serve. Chapter 2 solely creates an inventory of the land. Chapter 3 will consider public input and Chapter 4 will analyze the level of service provided to each community to better understand how well recreation and parks needs are being met across the County.

2.2 - Public Parks and Recreation Properties

Baltimore County has an extensive and diverse collection of preserved lands that greatly contribute to residents' quality of life, health of the natural environment, and character of both the rural and urban parts of the County. Such lands are the venues for many forms of recreation, provide places for communities and citizens to gather, and protect invaluable natural resources. The types of recreational facilities, parks, and open spaces available to Baltimore County residents are defined below.

County Parks (8,311 acres):

This category of preserved lands includes Baltimore County Recreation and Parks properties and leased recreation sites that feature some form of permanent recreational facility enhancement(s). The types of parks varies widely, from small neighborhood-serving sites of less than a half-acre with only a playground as the sole improvement, to the ~1,100-acre Oregon Ridge Park and its myriad recreational facilities. Leased sites include properties the County leases from civic organizations, churches, and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. One unique site included in this classification is the BeeTree Preserve in northern Baltimore County, for which a conservation and public recreation access easement was purchased from its owners, the Towson Presbyterian Church.

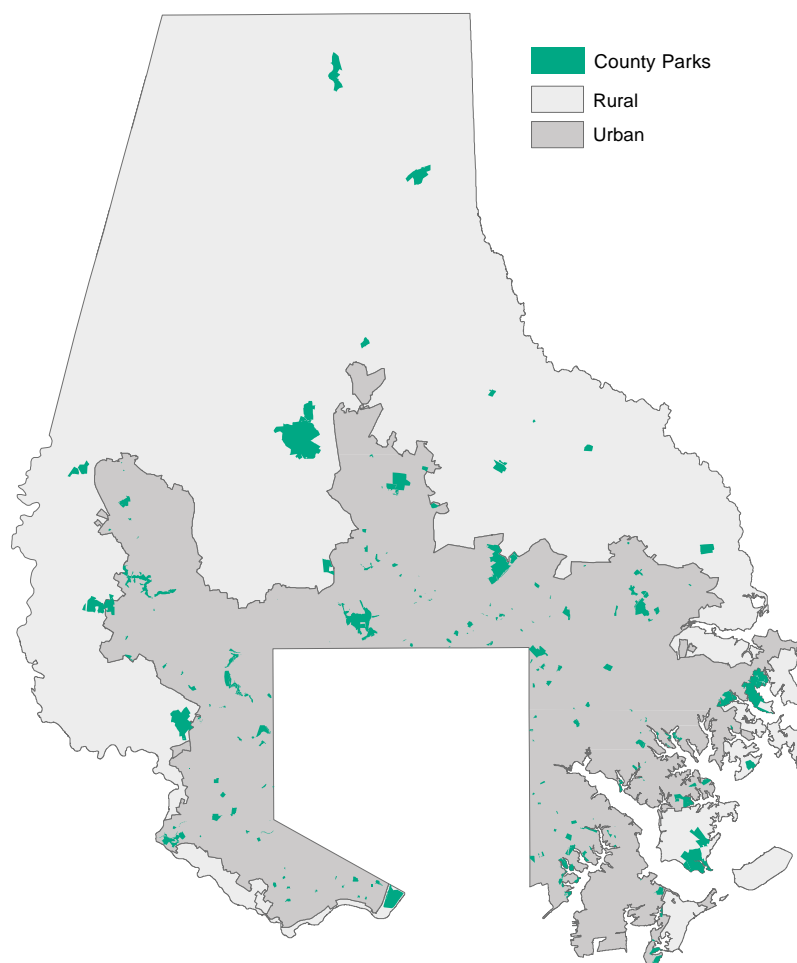


Figure 22. County Parks

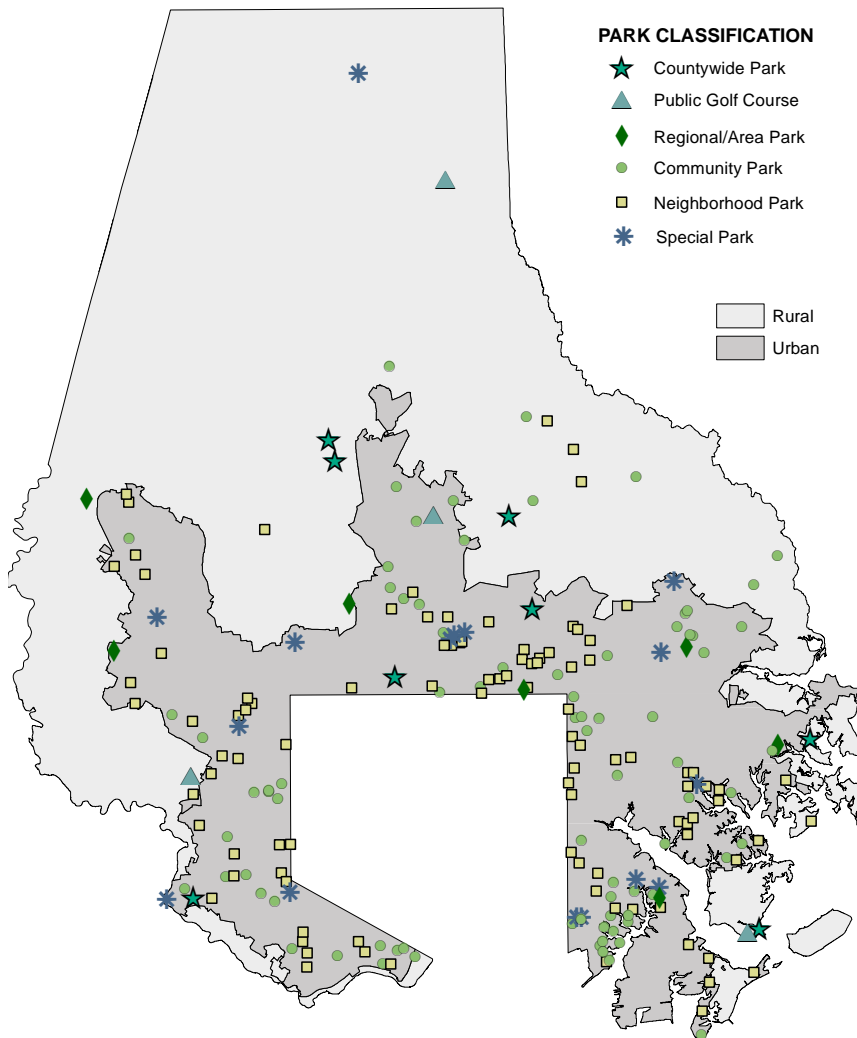


Figure 23. County Parks by Classification

Table 2. Park Classification Acreage Summary

Park Classification	Number of Sites	Acres	Average Acres
Countywide Park	8	2917	364.6
Public Golf Course	4	1099	274.6
Regional/Area Park	7	853	121.8
Community Park	80	2033	25.4
Special Park	16	688	43.0
Neighborhood Park	100	722	7.2
Total	215	8,311	39

The map above shows the types of County parks, followed by a table that shows the quantity of such parks countywide. The classification of parks is an imprecise process, and in numerous cases the class of an individual site has been revised on occasion. This reflects the diverse nature of the County's parks, and the wide range of recreational facilities that may be available. At one point in time DRP, like many jurisdictions throughout the nation, used a static acreage-base classification. However, this method did not accurately reflect the roles and nature of many parks. For instance, a 5-10 acre site that is developed with numerous recreational facilities may better serve the public (including recreation council programs) than a 60-acre site that is mostly natural and has few facilities. A facility such as the Randallstown Community Center, which is classified as a community park/recreation site, may also draw patrons from well outside the community as a result of its special facilities such as the pool and indoor walking track.

Countywide Parks: This classification pertains to the County parks with the largest overall service areas, extending to the entirety of the County and beyond. The majority of the larger County park sites, such as Oregon Ridge Park (1,100 acres) and Cromwell Valley Park (455 acres), fall within this category. This classification would also include a specialized site such as the Loch Raven Fishing Center, which provides anglers with access to Loch Raven Reservoir. Most of the County's interpretive centers and parks, including Marshy Point, Banneker, and the Ag. Center and Farm Park, are also considered countywide parks. A commonality of the countywide parks are the major facilities that draw park visitors from far and wide—interpretive centers, golf courses, concert facilities such as those at Oregon Ridge Park, large networks of hiking trails, etc.

Regional Parks: This park class includes sites with the next largest service areas, with the included parks and recreation sites each serving substantial portions of the County. In some cases the regional parks or certain facilities at the parks will have a designated primary and secondary service area that defines the priority of use provided for the recreation councils in their service area. Such is the case with sites such as Honeygo Run Regional Park, Reisterstown Regional Park, Eastern Regional Park, and the Northeast Regional Recreation Center, among other parks. The majority of regional parks feature numerous and/or specialized recreational facilities, such as indoor and outdoor sports complexes. One, the Reisterstown Sportsplex at Reisterstown Regional Park, features both an indoor sports field and an indoor ice rink (the latter operated by the Revenue Authority). Some of the regional parks, such as Northwest, Meadowood, Honeygo, and Eastern Regional Parks, also feature substantial paved paths (and in the case of Honeygo, nature trails) that have proven to be very popular and utilized year-round.

Community Parks: This classification of parks is considered to have service areas that are generally associated with a community or one or more local recreation councils. The facilities are of a type and scale as to draw regular use by recreation council programs, or contain an amenity that draws visitors from beyond the immediate neighborhood—a boat ramp or picnic pavilions, for example. Most of the County's community and recreation centers are situated at sites classified as community parks, with a few examples being the Banneker Community Center, Jacksonville Community Center (at Sweet Air Park), Fullerton Community Center, and Watersedge Community Center. In some instances, such as with the Woodlawn Community Center and the Soukup Arena, the center is the sole recreational facility situated at the site. Community centers, together with public school recreation centers (described later in this section), provide the venues for the vast majority of organized programs of the recreation councils.

Neighborhood Parks: This is the most numerous of the park classifications, with the most local and limited of service areas. The line between the community and neighborhood park classifications is sometimes very fine, with the overall deciding factor being whether or not the park features amenities regularly utilized by the local recreation council, or which frequently draw users from beyond the immediate neighborhood. In some cases a neighborhood park could be reclassified as a community park, or vice-versa, as classification of sites is not a precise science. The most common type of facility found in a neighborhood park is playground/tot lot equipment. In many cases playgrounds are the only recreational facility at a neighborhood park. Some other common facilities found at this class of park includes multi-purpose courts and relatively small ball diamonds and athletic fields that are not large enough to support most recreation council programs, but are perfect for local pick-up ball games. Very few of the neighborhood parks include on-site parking, as the expectation is that most visitors will live or work nearby, and will not use motorized transportation to travel to such parks.

Special Parks: This classification covers an assortment of park sites that do not truly fit well within the prior classification of parks. This category includes the historical sites Aquila Randall Monument, Battle Acre Park and Monument, Fort Garrison, and Perry Hall Mansion, all of which are sites where a historical feature is the focal point. Major stand-alone trails are also included—the Catonsville Short Line Trail, the Milford Mill Trail at Villa Nova Park, the Number Nine Trolley Line Trail, and the Red Run Trail and Greenway. Two memorial-focused parks in Towson are likewise included—Olympian Park and Cancer Survivors Park. Finally, this classification includes the BeeTree Preserve in northern Baltimore County, a nearly 250-acre site owned by the Towson Presbyterian Church, for which a conservation and public recreation access exists.

School Recreation Centers (3,721 acres)

The vast majority of public schools in Baltimore County serve dual roles as both educational and recreational facilities under an established joint-use agreement between DRP and the County's Board of Education. The school recreation centers (SRCs) provide invaluable indoor and outdoor recreation facilities that are typically heavily utilized by the programs of local recreation councils, and which many local residents regularly utilize when school is not in session. Many SRCs have been jointly funded by the Board of Education and DRP, and it is not unusual for DRP to fund site enhancements such as the highly popular and much demanded artificial turf fields at SRCs.

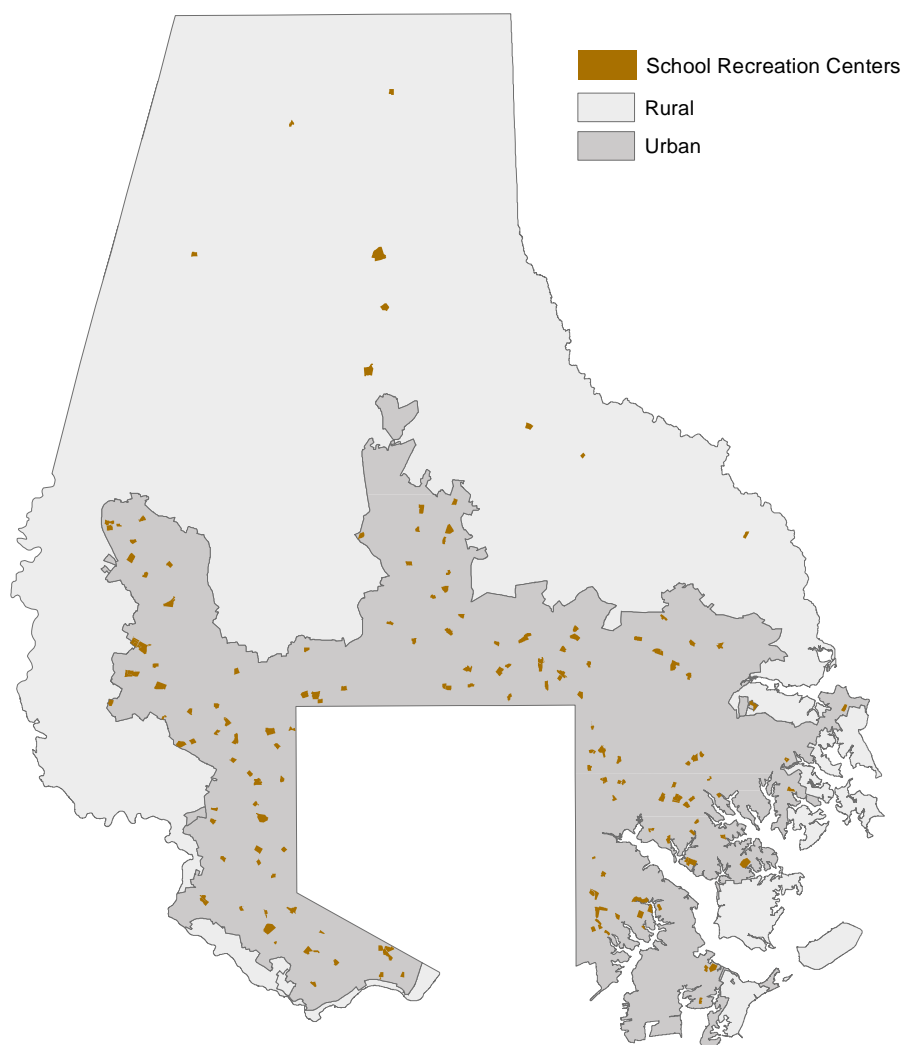


Figure 24. School Recreation Centers

Elementary, middle, and high SRCs typically provide different kinds and quantities of facilities. Commonplace indoor facilities at SRCs include gymnasiums, auditoriums/theaters, and activity rooms, and in some instances, local recreation offices are situated within the school structure. Outdoor recreation facilities often found at SRCs vary more by school type. Elementary SRCs usually feature a small number of ball diamonds and athletic fields, playground equipment areas, and one or more multi-purpose courts. Some will also have tennis courts (usually two). Middle SRCs will typically have more fields and diamonds than elementary SRCs, and both tennis and multi-purpose courts. High SRCs usually have the same outdoor facilities as middle SRCs, but with a larger quantity of most such outdoor facilities, and with many more illuminated with facility lighting systems. Another increasingly more common facility at high SRCs are artificial turf fields, which are operated under a specialized use agreement. Many such fields were funded through DRP, and in some cases substantial donations from local recreation councils and the school sports booster groups contributed towards field funding.

Following is a count of the public SRC sites in Baltimore County. In a few situations, two SRCs will exist at the same physical sites, in which case they are symbolized on the map as the larger school class but are counted as only one site in the table below. As an example, Sparrows Point Middle and High SRCs are situated on the same site, as are West Towson Elementary SRC and Ridge Ruxton School. Special schools are placed into the most suitable of the three primary school categories.

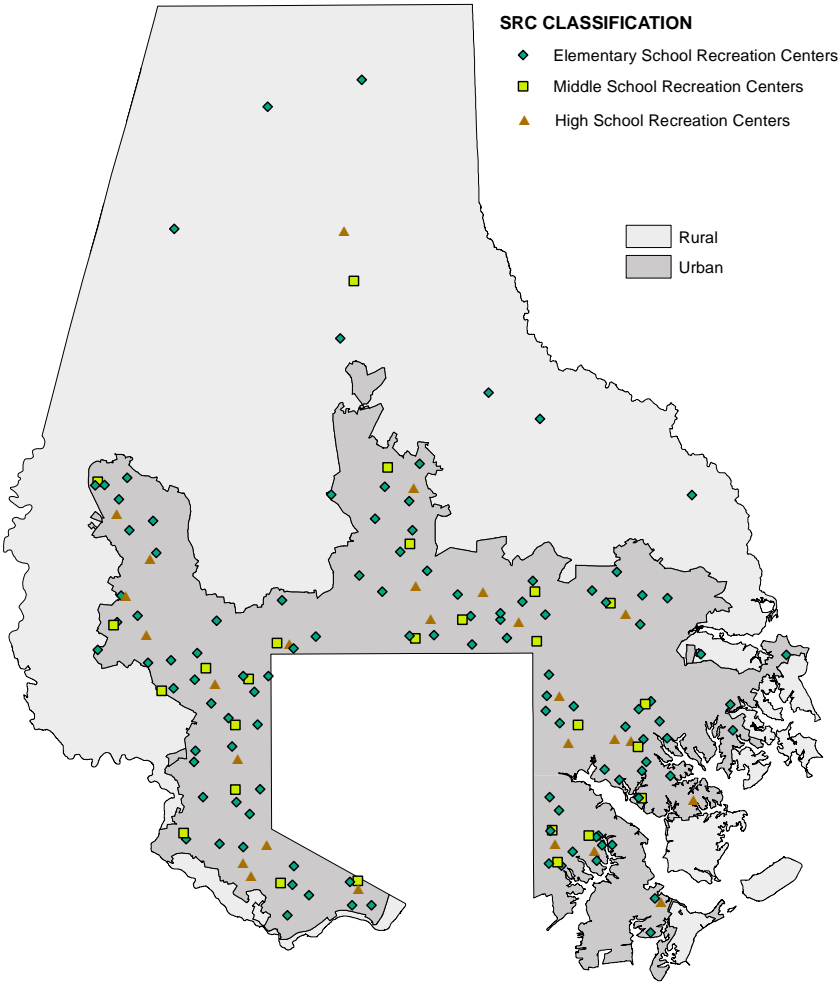


Table 3. SRC Acreage Summary

SRC Classification	Number of Sites	Acres	Average Acres
Elementary School Recreation Centers	111	1856	16.7
Middle School Recreation Centers	26	768	29.5
High School Recreation Centers	26	1062	40.8
Total	163	3,686	23

Figure 25. School Recreation Centers by Classification

Special Facilities

In addition to SRCs, Interpretive Centers, Community Centers, and PAL Centers provide recreational opportunities, including indoor recreation and organized activities. Interpretive Centers include nature centers, historical centers, and the agriculture center. These centers provide programming primarily for youth. Community Centers and PAL Centers have a variety of indoor and outdoor recreation facilities as well as programming and spaces available for rent.

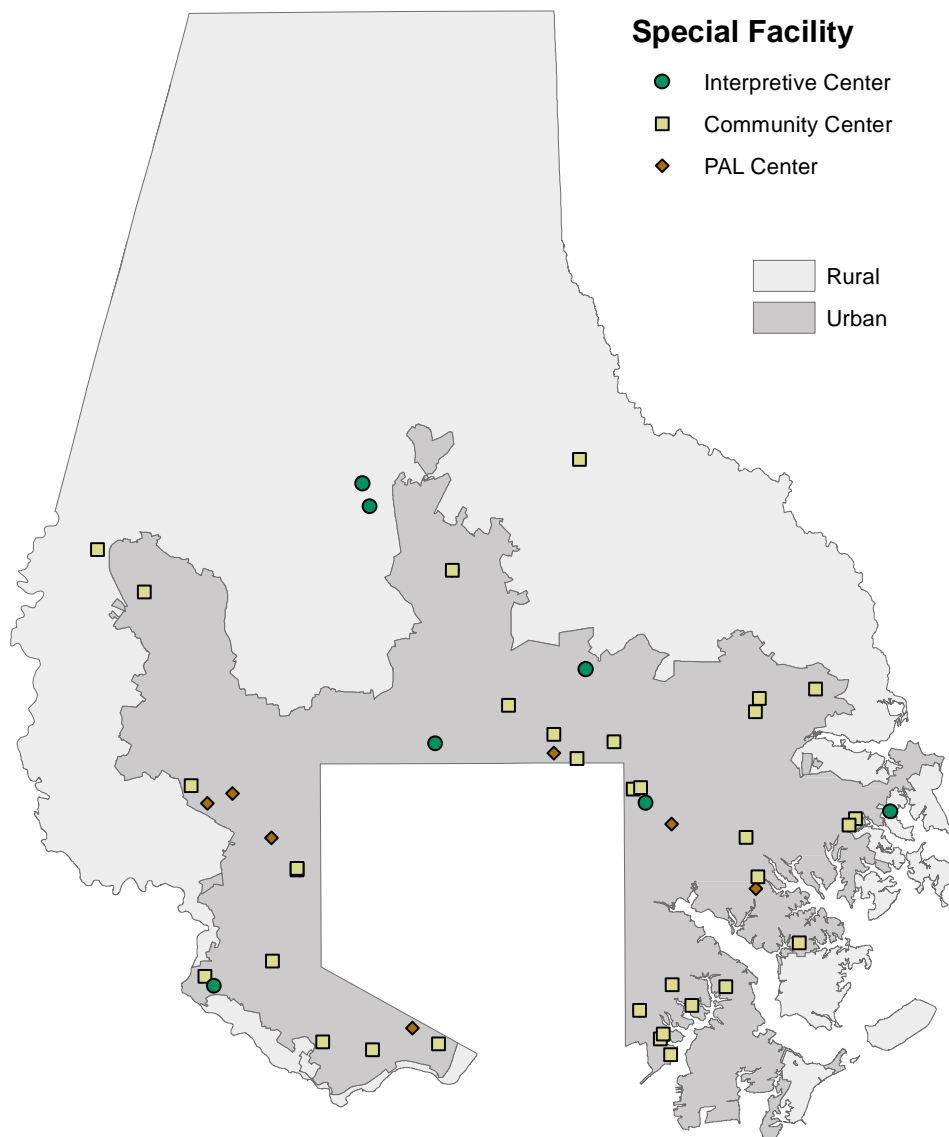


Figure 26. Special Facilities by Type

County-Owned Open Spaces (3,548 acres)

This site classification includes local open spaces (LOS) deeded to the County through its development management process, park and school recreation center sites that have not been developed/improved, and other miscellaneous open space lands assigned to DRP's inventory. Such sites that have been improved have been reclassified as parks. This category also includes extensive undeveloped greenway lands along various rivers and streams throughout the County. The nature of open spaces varies widely, from open, gently sloping areas conducive for both non-organized and active recreational uses, to wooded tracts and stream valleys.

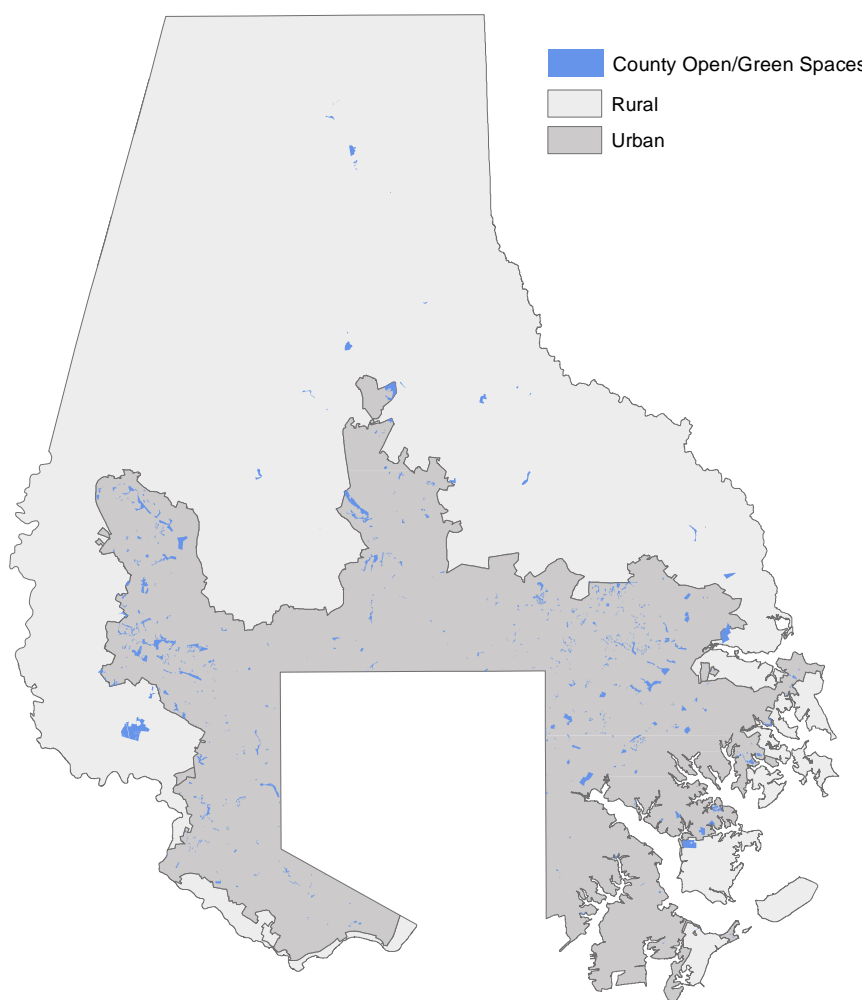


Figure 27. County-Owned Open Spaces

Other County-Owned Lands (2,365 acres)

In addition to DRP, Baltimore County's Department of Environmental Protection and Sustainability (EPS) and Department of Public Works (DPW) administer substantial amounts of land dedicated to preservation and conservation. This includes publicly-owned lands such as forest conservation reservations and flood plain and drainage reservations. The latter are very similar to parks and open spaces along stream valleys. The primary role of these lands is to protect the natural environment, though public access remains permissible, and many citizens use such areas as nearby opportunities to “escape to nature.” This category does not include storm water management ponds, nor forest conservation, flood plain, steep slope, or drainage easements .

Both county-owned open spaces and other county green spaces may include sites suitable for parks. Relatively flat, grassy open spaces are often usable for many forms of recreation, generally supporting the immediate neighborhood in which they are situated. Stream valleys, wooded tracts, and steeply sloped natural areas may not be appropriate for park improvements. Most of the properties in this category are small, resulting in a widespread, scattered pattern in the map. Most of the green space sites are situated within the urban portion of the URDL, though some substantial green spaces such as the preserved lands on the Back River Peninsula and the undeveloped Granite, Belfast Road, and Days Cove Park Sites are situated in the URDL's rural areas.

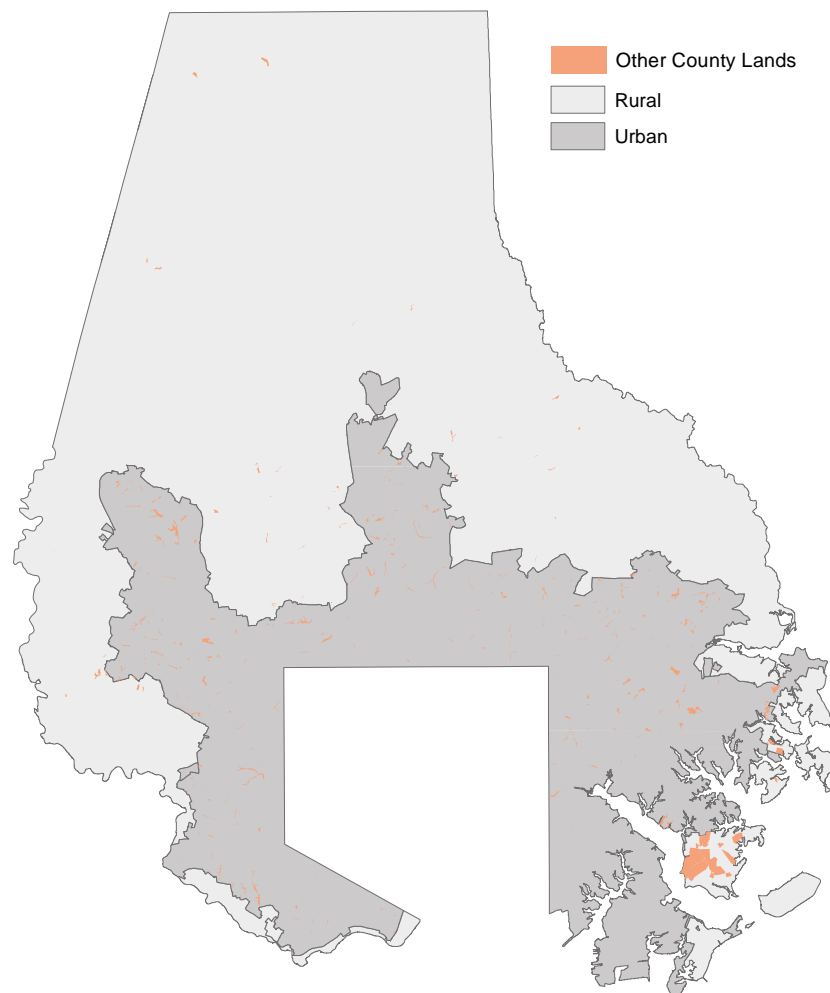


Figure 28. Other County-Owned Greenspaces

Baltimore City Reservoir Watershed Properties (14,679 acres)

There are three Baltimore City-owned and managed reservoirs either fully or partially within Baltimore County—Loch Raven, Liberty, and Prettyboy. While the primary role of the reservoirs is to hold the waters that serve the Baltimore metropolitan area's citizens, the extensive lands surrounding these water bodies contain sizable networks of trails, with Loch Raven also housing a public golf course and a skeet and trap shooting range. The reservoirs themselves also provide recreational opportunities including boating (limited and restricted to protect the water quality) and fishing, with Loch Raven Reservoir featuring a fishing and boating center operated by Baltimore County Recreation and Parks. Various uses of the reservoirs and surrounding watershed property are guided by the Baltimore Watershed Agreement. Through the Cooperative Wildlife Management Area agreements, Maryland DNR helps to ensure recreational uses of the reservoir, including hunting, are safe for people and the environment .

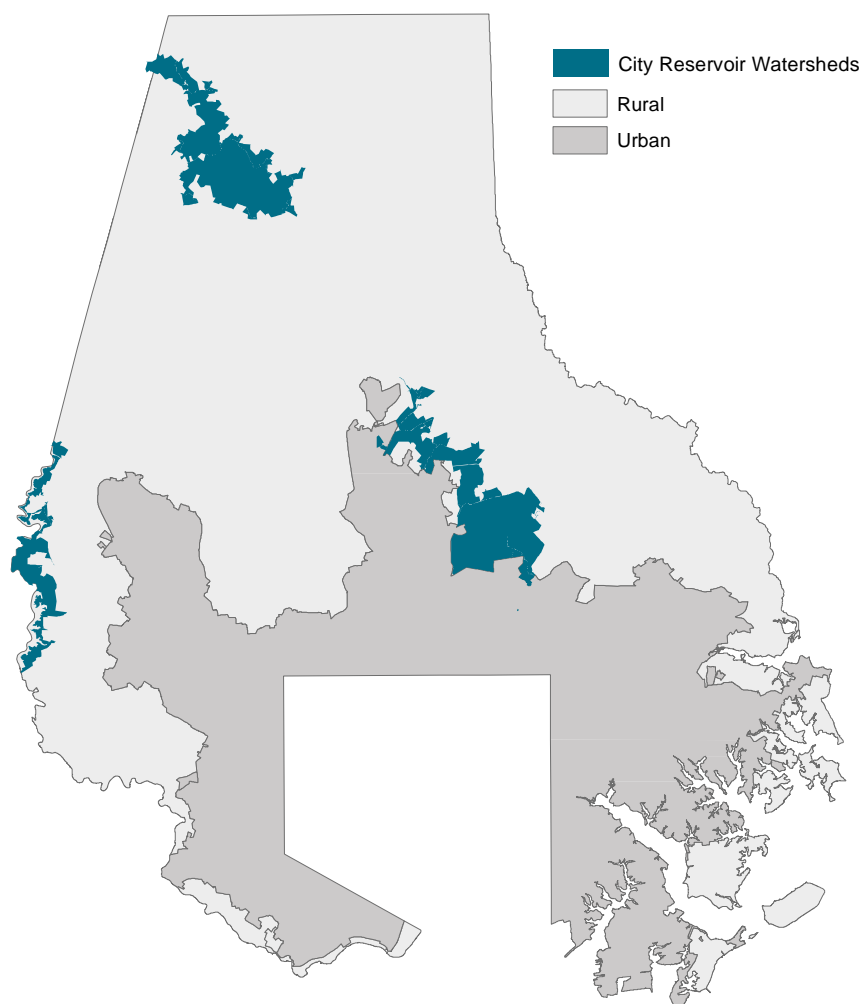


Figure 29. City Reservoir Properties

State and National Parks (22,236 acres)

Baltimore County is fortunate to be home to six vast properties administered by Maryland DNR-- Patapsco Valley State Park (Maryland's first State Park), Gunpowder Falls State Park, including the popular Torrey C. Brown Rail Trail, Hart-Miller Island State Park, North Point State Park, North Point State Battlefield, and the Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area. The first two of these sites extend for dozens of miles and cross into neighboring counties. The majority of public hiking trails in Baltimore County are situated within the State Parks and sites, which also feature a wide range of natural resource-based recreational opportunities such as picnicking, camping, fishing, boating, interpretive programs, and more. The County also leases portions of three State Parks, which it operates as individual parks (Kingsville Park/Athletic Fields, Millers Island Tot Lot/Park) or as part of a larger park (Cromwell Valley Park). These properties are not included in the acreage count for State land. The County is also home to the Hampton National Historic Site, a property owned and operated by the National Park Service and which features a Georgian mansion and associated structures on a portion of lands once owned by one of the most prominent families in Maryland.

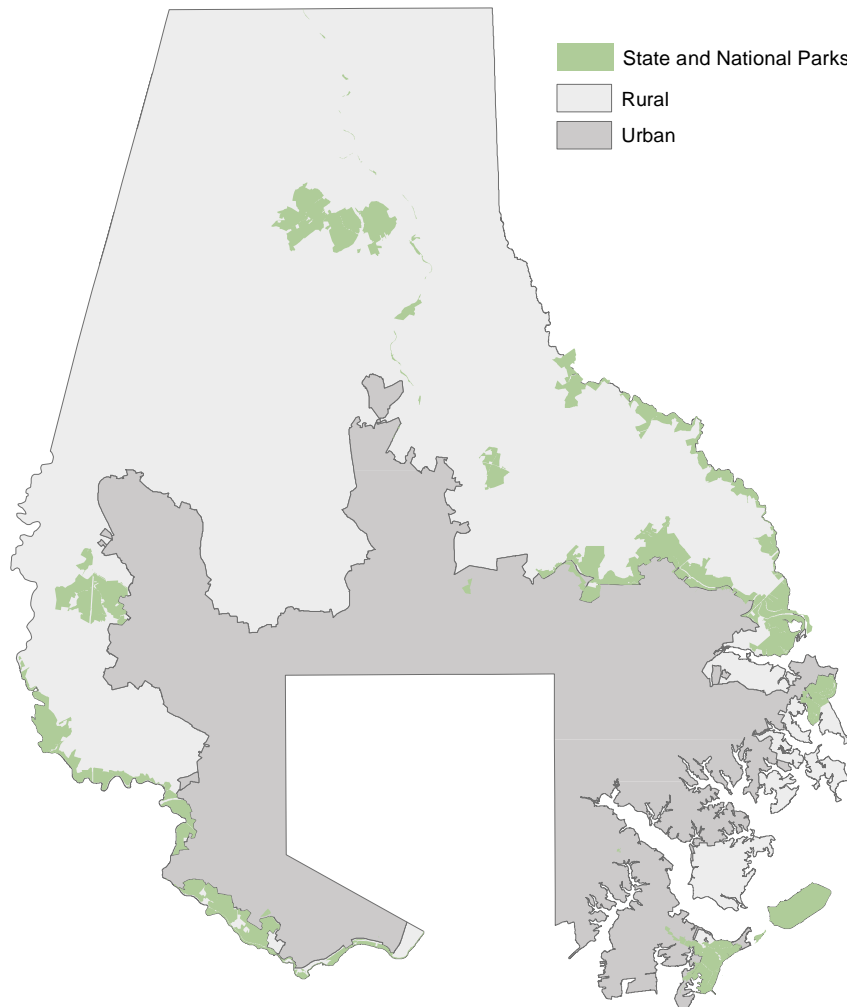


Figure 30. State and National Parks

2.3 Privately Owned Recreational Facilities and Parklands

Private Open Space (1,679 acres)

This category includes two overall types of open space. First and more extensive are open spaces preserved through the County's development process that have been deeded to entities such as homeowner and condo-owner associations. These spaces are much the same in nature as the County open spaces previously described, though not owned by the County. In some cases the sites have been improved with recreational facilities, and serve as local parks. The second type of lands within this category are the properties owned and administered by NeighborSpace of Baltimore County, an independent non-profit organization that works cooperatively with the County, and which seeks to preserve and sometimes enhance green spaces within the urban section of the County. The map does not include other private or non-profit recreation sites such as YMCA's, Girls and Boys Clubs, Boy and Girl Scout camps, private pools, fitness clubs, private golf courses, etc. Nor is HOA/COA "common area" included, as such lands are not a formal open space designation and may include facilities such as parking lots and structures and amenities available only to residents.

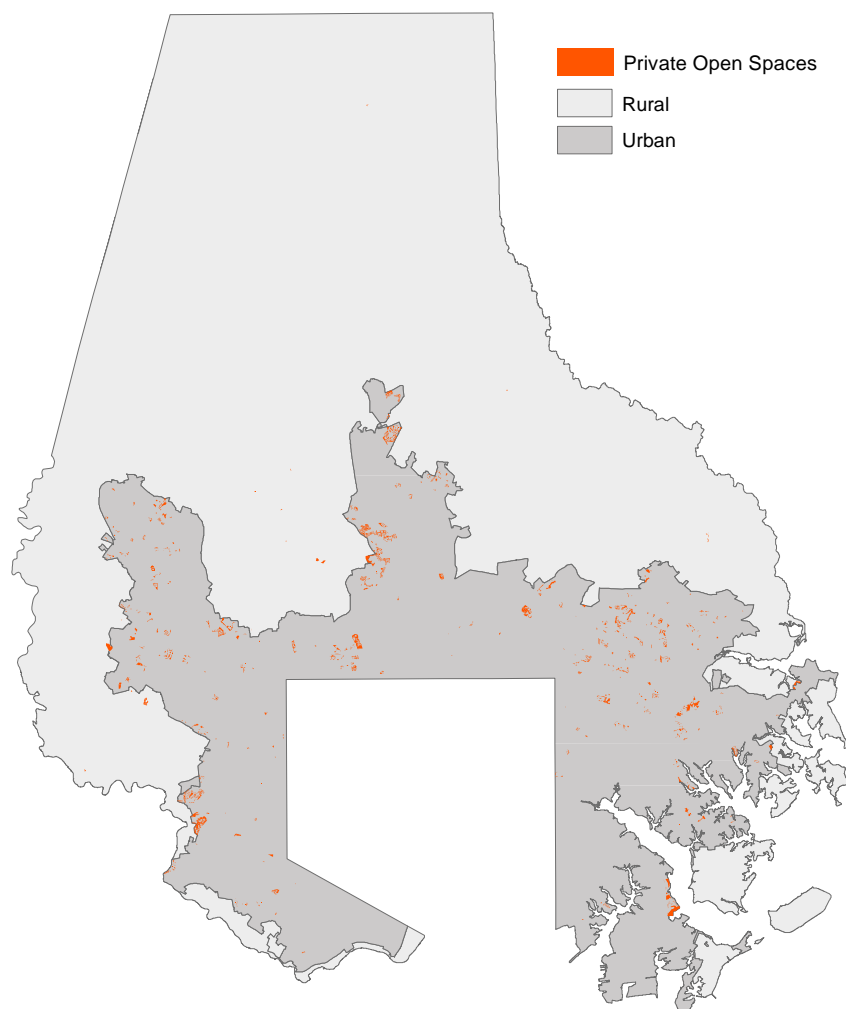


Figure 31. Private Open Space

2.4 Inventory Map

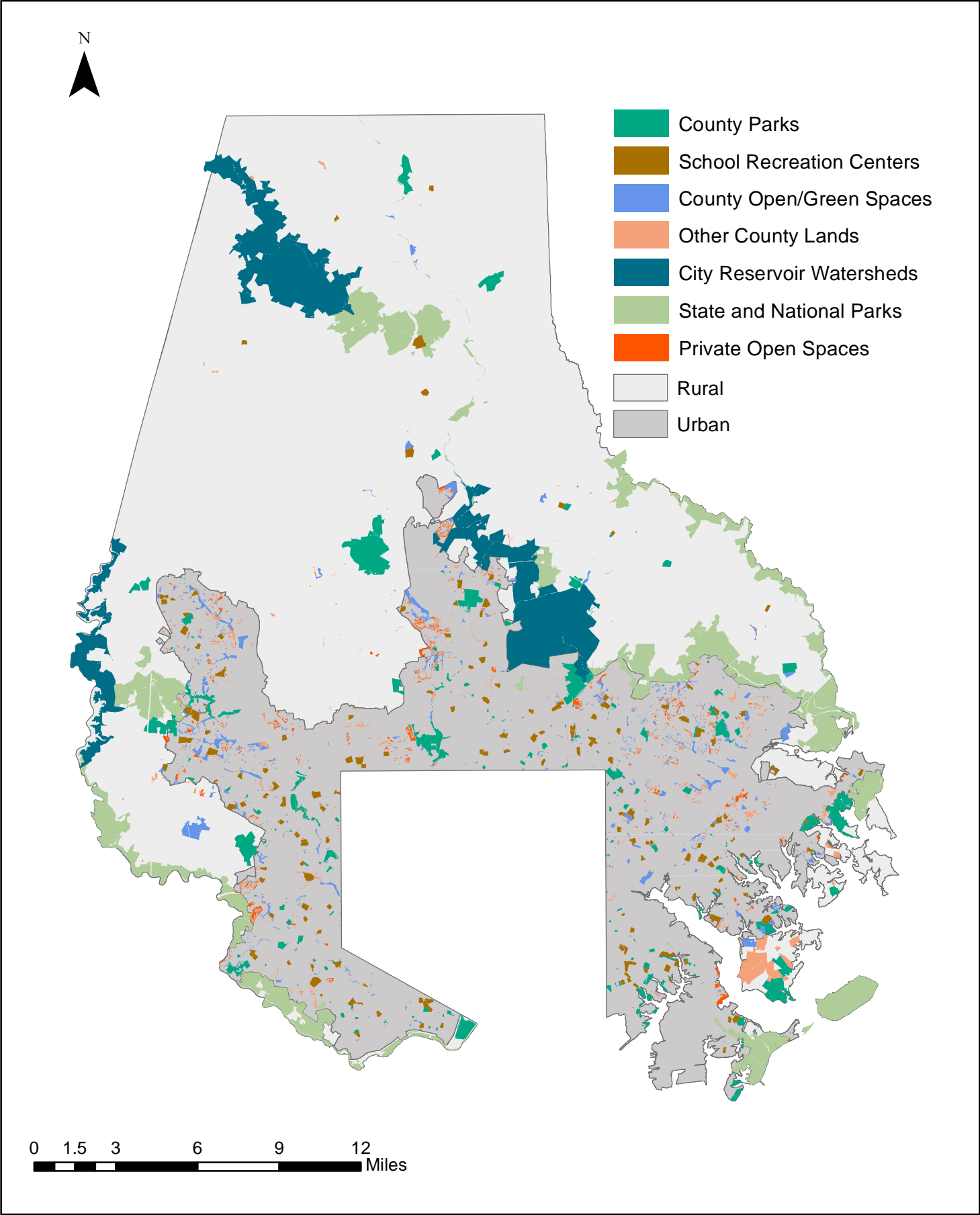
The next map shows all combined parklands identified in the preceding maps. The term parklands refers to public and non-public lands where public access for recreational purposes is available. The map does not include agricultural land preservation easements or other lands preserved under easements and other mechanisms that preserve lands but do not provide some level of public access.

The map demonstrates the breadth and diversity of parklands available throughout Baltimore County, including County, State, and National parks, public school recreation centers, reservoir watershed properties, and numerous types of open space and green spaces. These lands combined comprise nearly 90 square miles, representing approximately 15% of the County's land area. A full listing of all sites is included within the plan appendix, with maps and park descriptions by RPD Group.

Table 4. Parkland Inventory Acreage Summary

Site Type	Acres	Square Miles	Percent of County Land
County Park	8,311	13.0	2.1%
School Recreation Center	3,721	5.8	1.0%
County Open Space	3,548	5.5	0.9%
Other County-Owned Green Spaces	2,365	3.7	0.6%
Reservoir	14,679	22.9	3.8%
State Parks	22,175	34.6	5.7%
National Parks	61	0.1	0.0%
Privately Owned Open Space	1,679	2.6	0.4%
Totals	56,539	88.3	15%

Preserved Land in Baltimore County



2.5 Preserved Natural Resource and Agricultural Lands

In addition to the land owned by local, state, and federal governments, there are areas of Baltimore County protected for natural resource and agricultural preservation through other means, including easements and zoning. Areas designated as Targeted Ecological Areas and Agricultural Priority Preservation areas have valued characteristics that make them high priorities for preservation. In addition, the URDL and Baltimore County Growth Tiers help to manage a balance of development and conservation. These policies help to enable growth, while maintaining both the agricultural heritage and natural beauty of our County. These protections are complementary to the parks and recreation system.

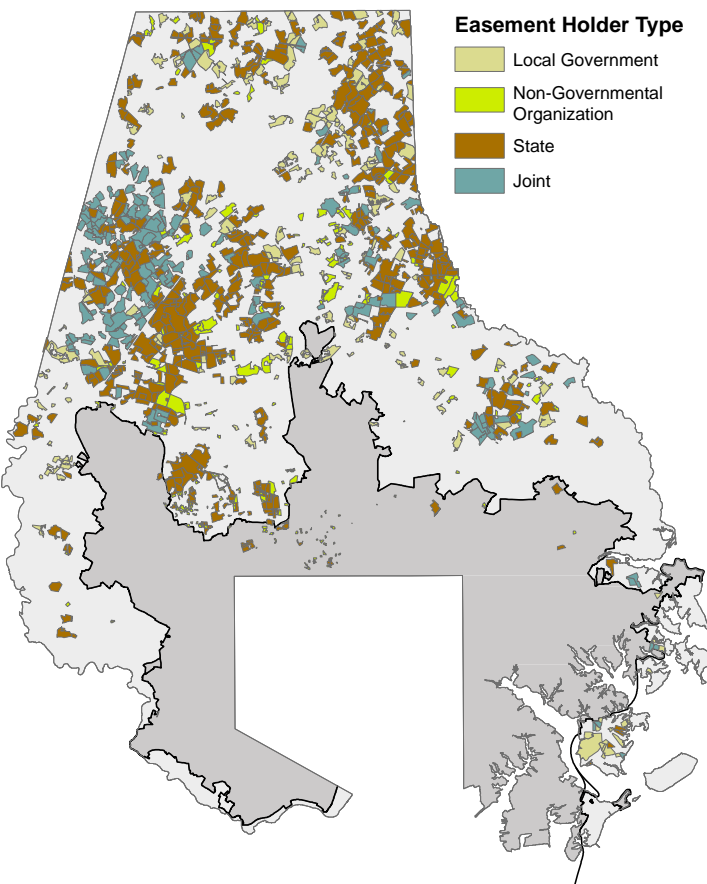


Figure 33. Baltimore County Conservation Easement Holders

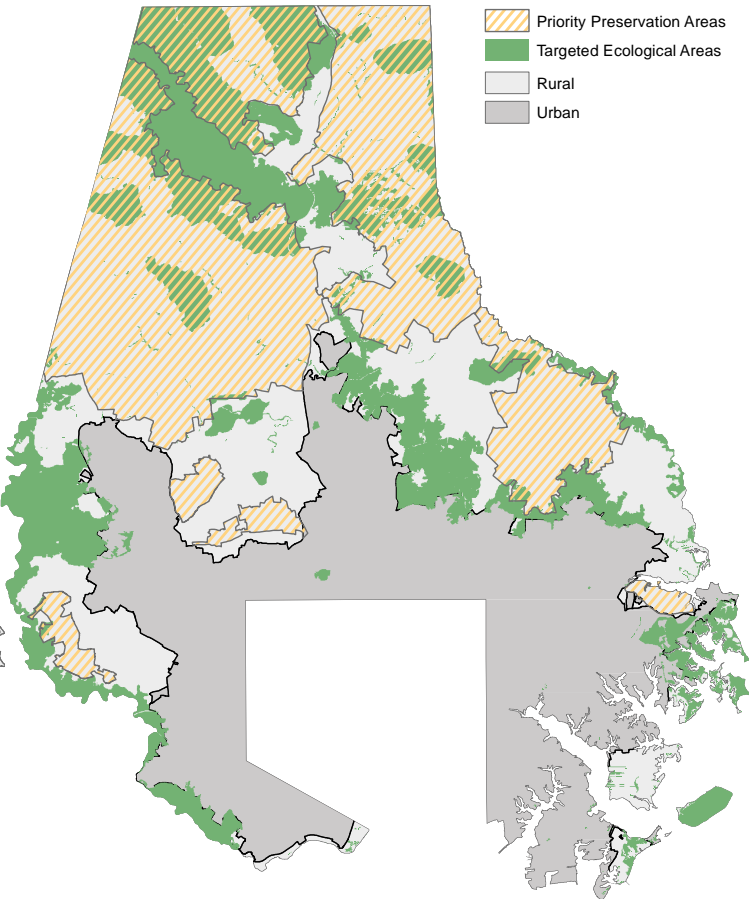


Figure 34. Targeted Ecological Areas and Priority Preservation Areas

Preserved Land in Baltimore County

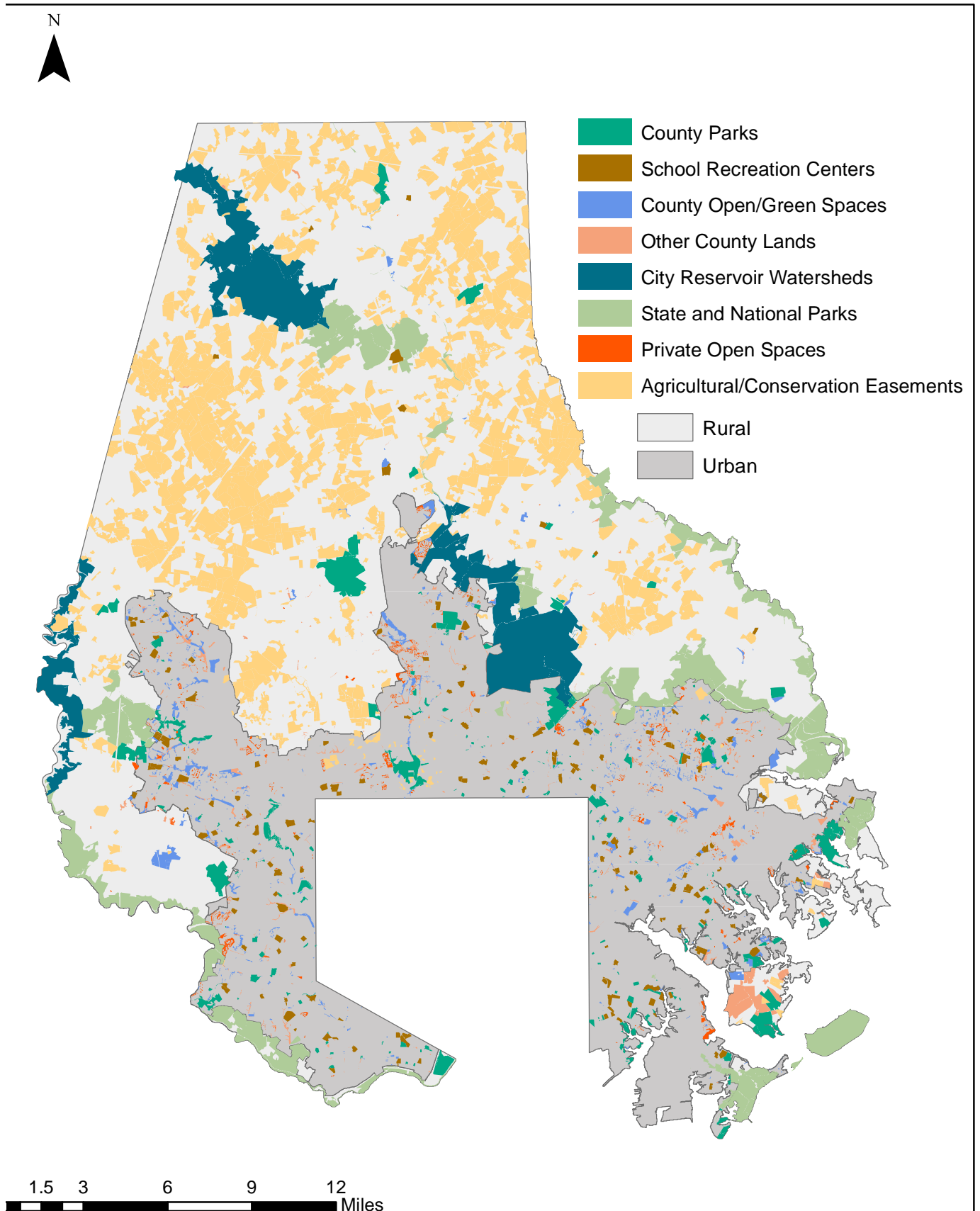


Figure 35. Preserved Land including Agricultural/Conservation Easements