

Introduction

Nestled at the base of the Great Smoky Mountains, Blount County is one of Tennessee's oldest counties. Established in 1785, when 559 square miles of southern Knox County was separated, Blount County is rich with culture and history. Located only minutes from Knoxville, the County is bordered to the southeast by the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and to the northwest by a chain of lakes.

Early settlers were attracted to this eastern Tennessee area for its fertile land, abundant water supply and vast lumber resources. One of the earliest industries was lumbering, but today over 100 manufacturing plants can be found throughout the County. Many of the County's cities originated as company towns, including Townsend, a former lumber town named for Colonel W. B. Townsend, president of the Little River Lumber Company, and Alcoa, the home of the Aluminum Company of America. The county seat, Maryville, was a booming railroad junction at the turn of the century and is home to Maryville College, which was established in 1819. This private, co-educational, liberal arts college has an enrollment of nearly 1,300 students and was one of the first southern schools to accept minorities.

Blount County is thriving, which can be seen in recent demographics. According to the 2000 U.S. Census figures, the County's population is 105,823, of which 23,119 reside in Maryville and 7,734 in Alcoa. The County's population has seen a significant increase over the last ten years and this trend continues, especially among retirees.

The increase in population places greater demands upon the County, including the recreation opportunities. In addition to Blount's lakes and mountains, residents enjoy several parks and recreation facilities managed by the Maryville-Alcoa-Blount County Parks and Recreation Commission. Established in 1970, the Commission's goal is "to enhance the quality of life by providing diverse recreational opportunities for the community while maintaining the integrity of area parks and the surrounding environment." The Parks and Recreation Commission operates as a joint venture among the three governments, each of which is responsible for its own capital improvements.

In August of 2003, the Maryville-Alcoa-Blount County Parks and Recreation Commission initiated a strategic master plan study for improving the park and recreational services and facilities in order to better serve the County's residents. The Commission requested a 10-year plan that would act as a guide for the two cities' and the County's recreational expansion. In December 2003, Lose and Associates, Inc. began to develop a master plan based on public input (including surveys, interviews, and public meetings) as well as national standards of other communities similar to those in Blount County.