



Chapter 2

Abilene Today

Introduction

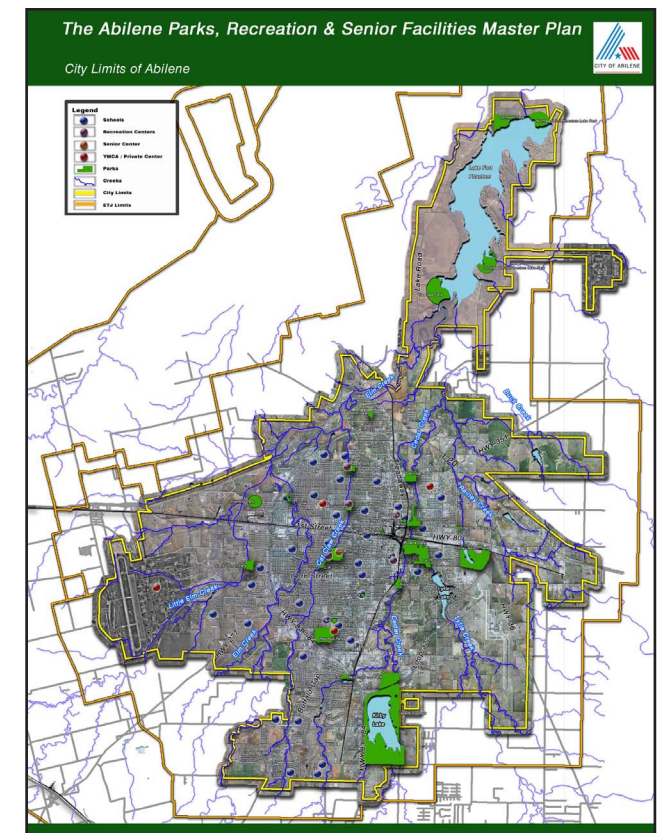
The following is a brief summary of the historical, economic, demographic and educational conditions in Abilene today. These elements significantly influence the recreational environment in the city, and should be considered as key park priorities are determined.

A Brief History of Abilene

The land that Abilene rests on was once occupied by nomadic Indians. By 1870, ranchers had taken over the land and drove the Indians out so that they could graze their cattle there. By 1880, the Texas and Pacific Railway was moving westward and bisected the cattlemen's land. The railways established a new town and the name Abilene was suggested after the Kansas cattle town. The railways promoted Abilene as the "Future Great City of West Texas" and people arrived when town lots began to be sold. The lots were auctioned on March 15, 1881 and the town was officially established in just two days with churches, schools, and businesses quickly constructed.

In 1940, the city acquired Camp Barkeley Army Post. During World War II 1.5 million soldiers trained at Camp Barkeley. After the war, local officials pressed hard to keep the military in the city because it provided a great deal of money to the local economy. In 1952 congress established the Dyess Air Force Base just west of the city.

The City flourished in the oil industry after World War II and became the oil center of West Central Texas. During Abilene's centennial celebration in 1981, the city set up a demonstration oil rig to represent the petroleum influence on the city. Surprisingly it actually struck oil, just enough to make a small profit. The oil bust in the 1980s had a hard impact on Abilene, almost crippling the city. In order to ensure the city's survival, Abilene adopted a half-cent sales tax to fund economic development. It was the first city in Texas to create such a tax.



"We have not inherited the world from our forefathers - we have borrowed it from our children."

Kashmiri Proverb



The Economy of Abilene

When the city was first settled, Abilene was mainly home to ranchers and cattlemen that would have their livestock graze on the land. Soon after the city was founded, townspeople also turned to agriculture and cattle production. The city held annual fairs starting in 1884 to celebrate their agricultural products such as corn, wheat, oats, pecans, fruits, and grain sorghum. However, there were severe droughts in the 1909-1910 and 1917-1918 growing seasons. This almost brought the agricultural community to a cease entirely.

The railway provided a great form of transportation, and so Abilene city officials worked hard to add even more railway connections. The Abilene Northern and Abilene Southern railroads offered north-south connections in the early 1900s. The Abilene Street Railway offered streetcar line transportation throughout the city from 1908 to 1931.

As mentioned previously, the army had a base training camp, Camp Barkeley, in Abilene during World War II. The Dyess Air Force Base today still provides a great deal of income for the city with a 2006 economic impact of \$444 million.

The oil industry really took off in Abilene after World War II. Exploration, drilling, refining, and oilfield services expanded significantly until the 1980s. It is still a substantial industry.

Current health care facilities in Abilene that are also major employers include 2 hospitals, over 200 practicing doctors, and 19 nursing homes, retirement centers or assisted living facilities. Major employers include several banks, two public school districts, several universities and junior colleges, and food manufacturers such as Fehr Foods, Abtex Beverage, Mrs. Baird's Bakery, and Coca-Cola Bottling Company of North Texas.

To attract tourists the city offers a variety of museums, theaters, historic villages, arts centers, visitors' centers, a state park, local parks, a zoo, visitation to the air force base, a ballet, an orchestra, and an opera. The city has annual events as well such as a rodeo, outdoor festivals, and an Artwalk.

Abilene's Population

Understanding the current and future size and characteristics of the population to be served is a key part of the park master planning process. Abilene's parks, trails and open spaces provide recreation facilities for the citizens of the city, and for a significant number of persons living in nearby communities within Taylor County. Projections and demographic characteristics contained in this section are derived from the 2000 Census, 2006 Census population estimates and from other population projections prepared by the Texas Water Development Board.

Table 2.1 illustrates the population growth of Abilene since 1970. The growth in Taylor County is also shown.

Population of Surrounding Counties

Abilene is a thriving community that attracts visitors from Taylor County and the eight counties that surround it. It is the largest city in all nine counties and offers amenities for the residents of Fischer, Jones, Shakelford, Nolan, Taylor, Callahan, Coke, Runnels, and Coleman Counties.

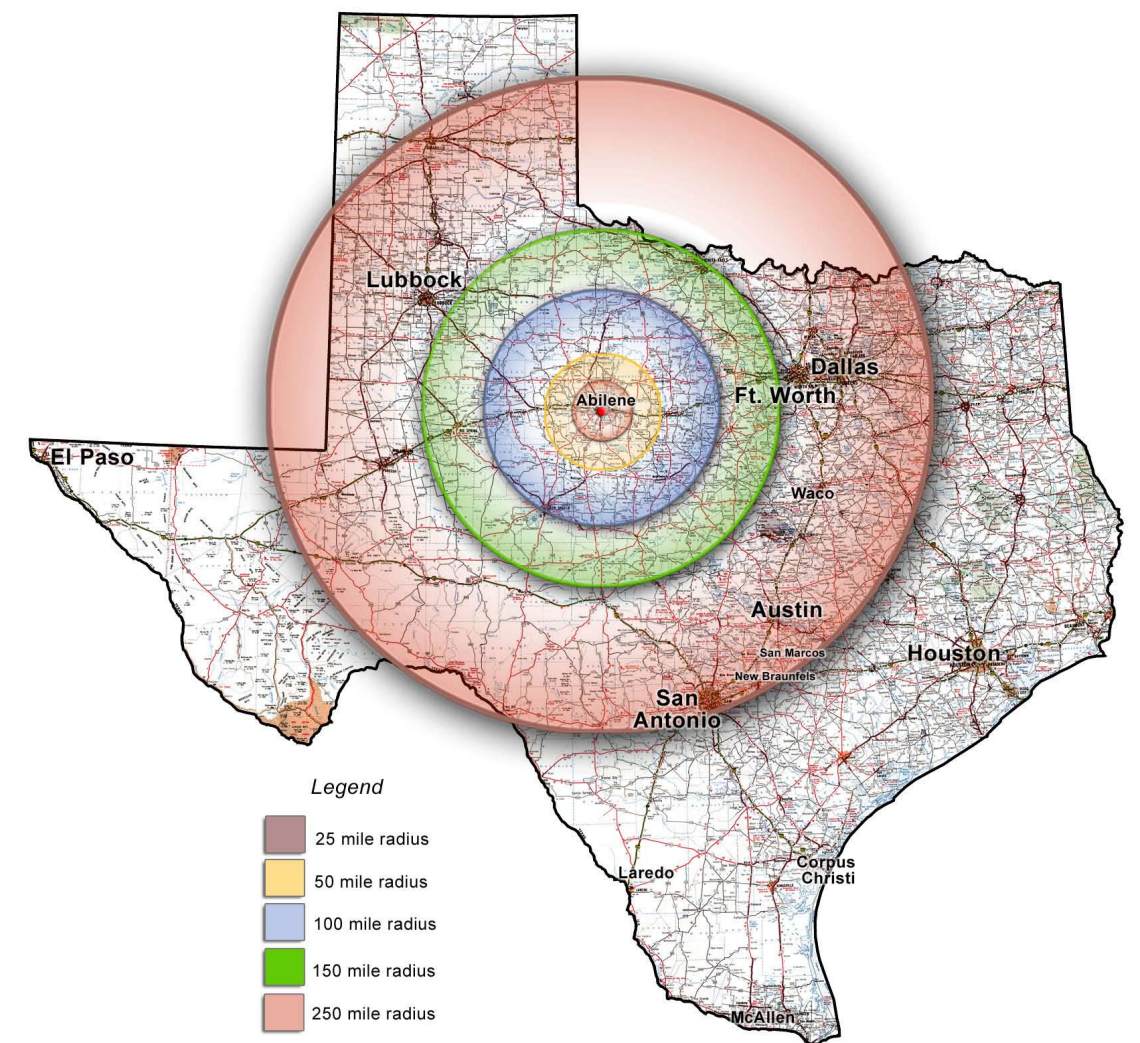
Table 2.2 below compares the populations of the counties as a whole to the population of Abilene.

Table 2.2 Nine County Population	
County	2000 Census Population
Fischer	4,344
Jones	20,785
Shakelford	3,302
Nolan	15,802
Taylor	126,555
Abilene within Taylor	115,930
Callahan	12,905
Coke	3,864
Runnels	11,495
Coleman	9,235

Source: U.S. Census

Table 2.1 Population Growth in Abilene and Taylor County				
Year	Abilene	Percent Change	Taylor County	Percent Change
1970	89,653	-	97,853	-
1980	98,312	9.7% From 1970	110,932	13.4% from 1970
1990	106,665	8.5% from 1980	119,655	7.9% from 1980
2000	115,930	8.7% from 1990	126,437	5.8% from 1990
2006	114,797	-1.0% from 2000	124,927	-0.1% from 2000

Source: 2006 Census Estimate





Service Area Population

The parks service area for Abilene includes the city itself and lands in the city's Extra Territorial Jurisdiction (ETJ). The year 2000 population of the city by census tract, including tracts on the fringes of the city, is shown to the right in table 2.3. Abilene uses the census tract boundaries to divide the city into planning sectors which are called Super Neighborhoods.

Service Area Population Growth

As shown in Table 2.4 to the right, the population for both Abilene and Taylor County is projected to grow over the next three decades, creating a continued impact on the demand for recreational facilities and open space. Notice also that a large portion of the Taylor County population comes from the City of Abilene. This is important because much of the county will look to the City of Abilene for their park and recreational needs.

Abilene has a population that is close to the state average in terms of age with the exception of the very young and very old. A large portion of the population, 30.1%, is at the school age of 0 to 19, compared to 32% for the state average. Beyond that, over half of the population is at the working age of 20 to 59 with 54.4%, the state average being 56%. The elder population of Abilene is higher than the state average at 15.4% compared to 13% respectively.

Table 2.3 Parks and Recreation Year 2000 Service Area Population	
Census Tract / Super Neighborhood	Year 2000 Population
101 Abilene Heights	5,947
102 North College	2,308
103 Sears Park	1,690
104 Sears Park	2,273
105 Sears Park	3,350
106 Westwood Richland	3,677
107 Cobb Park	3,760
108 North College	2,078
109 Northeast & Southeast Hwy 80	5,954
110 Original Town North	1,243
112 Cobb Park	2,983
113 Westwood Richland	3,939
114 Elmwood	4,825
115 Elmwood	2,963
116 Salyes Blvd.	2,783
117 Original Town South	2,422
119 Original Town South	2,395
120 Lytle	2,093
121 Lytle	581
122 South Treadaway	2,829
123 Over Place	4,434
124 Red Bud Park	2,623
125 River Oaks Brookhollow	3,229
126 River Oaks Brookhollow	3,129
127 Chimney Rock	7,833
128 Park Central	6,073
129 Dyess	4,069
130 Dyess	900
131 Dyess	6,563
132 Shirley Road	1,880
133 Buck Creek	2,030
134.01 Dyess	3,863
134.02 Far Southside	4,428
134.03 Loop 332 East	4,157
201.01 Fort Phantom	6,267
Total Population in Service Area	121,571

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 2.4 Projected Population Growth in Abilene and Taylor County				
Year	Abilene	Percent Change	Taylor County	Percent Change
2000	115,930	-	126,551	-
2010	124,607	7.5% from 2000	136,370	7.8% from 2000
2020	130,220	4.5% from 2010	142,645	4.6% from 2010
2030	132,820	2.0% from 2020	145,634	2.1% from 2020

Source: Texas Water Development Board

Table 2.5 Year 2000 Age Characteristics		
Age	Percent - Abilene	Percent - Texas
0 - 14	21.0%	24%
15 - 19	9.1%	8%
20 - 34	24.9%	23%
35 - 59	29.5%	33%
60 - 74	9.7%	9%
75 +	5.7%	4%

Source: 2000 U.S. Census

Table 2.6 Racial Characteristics for the City of Abilene - Year 2000	
Race	Percent
White or Caucasian	78.1%
Black or African American	8.8%
Asian	1.3%
Hispanic or Latino	19.4%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.6%
Other	8.7%

Source: 2000 US Census



**Table 2.7
Existing AISD School Campuses**

Name	Super Neighborhood	Number of Students in 2007-2008
Austin Elementary	River Oaks Brookhollow	533
Bassetti Elementary	Park Central	584
Bonham Elementary	Elmwood	532
Bowie Elementary	Over Place	598
College Heights Elementary	North College	300
Dyess Elementary	Dyess	576
Fannin Elementary	Sears Park	465
Jackson Elementary	Red Bud Park	526
Johnston Elementary	Westwood Richland	522
Lee Elementary	Westwood Richland	364
Long Elementary	Sears Park	379
Ortiz Elementary	Sears Park	516
Reagan Elementary	Dyess	346
Taylor Elementary	Abilene Heights	521
Thomas Elementary	Lytle	486
Ward Elementary	Park Central	536
Clack Middle School	Dyess	723
Craig Middle School	Southeast Hwy 80	675
Madison Middle School	Red Bud Park	914
Mann Middle School	Sears Park	594
Abilene High School	Cobb Park	2296
Cooper High School	Red Bud Park	2032
Woodson Center for Excellence	Original Town North	138

Schools in Abilene

The Abilene Independent School District has 2 high schools, 5 middle schools, and 16 elementary schools which are described in more detail in Table 2.7 to the left. In addition to the public schools, AISD offers special campuses such as early childhood campuses and the Woodson Center for Excellence. There is also the Wylie Independent School District with campuses listed below in Table 2.8.

There are a number of private schools in the city of Abilene as well. Kenley School is for children in 1st through 8th grades that have learning disabilities such as dyslexia. Other schools include St. John’s Episcopal School for grades pre-K to 5, Abilene Christian School for children grades pre-K to 12, and Big Country Home Educators, an organization in Abilene for children that are home schooled.

There are several institutions of higher learning in Abilene. These include universities such as: Abilene Christian University, Hardin-Simmons University, and McMurry University (see Table 2.9). Also, Cisco Junior College, a center for Texas State Technical College, and a Texas Tech campus for engineering are located in Abilene.

**Table 2.8
Wylie ISD School Campuses**

Name	Number of Students in 2006-2007
Wylie Elementary	409
Butterfield Elementary	211
Wylie Intermediate School	386
Wylie Middle School	435
Wylie Junior High School	497
Wylie High School	914

**Table 2.9
Universities in Abilene**

Name	Number of Students	Campus Size
Abilene Christian University	4,800	208 acres
Hardin-Simmons University	2,368	209 acres
McMurry University	1,400	40 acres



Abilene is home to multiple institutions of higher education