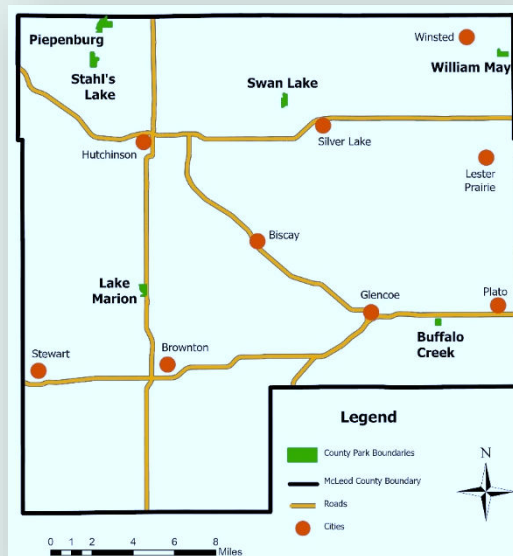


McLEOD COUNTY PARKS PLAN

December 2023



520 Chandler Avenue North
Glencoe, MN 55336

PREPARED BY
MCLEOD COUNTY PARKS PLAN TASK FORCE, AND
MID-MINNESOTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION



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PLAN OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION

This plan serves as a guide for the short- and long-term development of the McLeod County Parks System. The plan identifies more immediate physical improvement opportunities and maintenance needs within each McLeod County park as well as goals that may take 10+ years or more to realize. This plan should be regularly updated as McLeod County and its communities develop and grow. County demographic trends should also be considered. As goals are accomplished, new goals should be added. Improvements described in this plan have been suggested based on a detailed assessment of facilities, current recreation trends, and current gaps in park facilities and/or programming. Members of the public have also provided considerable input.

In addition to making improvement recommendations, this plan offers information intended to inform the prioritization of park investments, based on public, staff, and planner input, facility function and safety needs, as well as anticipated opportunities to maximize economy.

The McLeod County Parks Plan will ensure eligibility for state, federal and other grants, that can be accessed to help fund park maintenance and development of restrooms, shelters, trails and/or other recreational items.

This McLeod County Parks Plan process has:

1. Given all stakeholders, including McLeod County residents, an opportunity to provide input into the parks planning process.
2. Provided opportunity to assess/profile McLeod County's parks.
3. Led to the identification of potential park improvements, to improve park safety and usability.
4. Resulted in the development of an implementation plan for each McLeod County Park.
5. Provided a better understanding of potential funding sources, including grants, fundraising, stakeholder agreements and other creative funding opportunities.

The McLeod County Parks Plan will provide useful guidance to County leaders and staff as they make park-related decisions.

VISION

"Our vision is to provide citizens and visitors with room to explore nature by investing in the future, honoring the past, and preserving resources for recreation and growth."

VALUES

The vision statement is supported by several value statements, including:

- Fostering the health and well-being of McLeod County, its residents, and businesses by providing a balanced network of parks, recreational lands, and conserved open space sufficient to meet present and future needs.
- Preserving the geographical characteristics and environmental/high value natural resource areas for historic, cultural, and educational purposes.
- Providing residents with facilities to support a variety of enjoyable recreational activities that are located in a physically attractive setting.

- Ensuring that recreational opportunities are affordable and accessible (by various modes of transportation) to all citizens.
- Fostering a fully integrated and seamless system of regional, local, state, and federal parks, trails, and conservation lands.

HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Parks and trails are often the places people utilize to pursue physical fitness and mental/emotional well-being. A study conducted by the Pennsylvania State University (i.e., Penn State) showed significant correlation between park visit duration and physical health (reduced stress, lowered blood pressure, and perceived physical health). According to studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, creating, improving and promoting places where one can be physically active can improve individual and community health and lead to a 25% increase in the number of residents who exercise at least three times per week. Parks and protected public lands, when effectively developed and managed, are proven to improve water quality by protecting groundwater and preventing flooding. Parks also improve the quality of the air we breathe, provide vegetative buffers to development, produce natural habitat for wildlife, and provide a place for children and families to connect with nature and recreate outdoors together.

SOCIAL IMPORTANCE AND QUALITY OF LIFE

Parks add a value to communities that transcends the amount of dollars invested or fees gained. They are a tangible reflection of quality-of-life, provide a focal point of public pride and community cohesion, and define a community's identity. When residents are surveyed, parks and recreation services are often cited as one of the most important community livability factors. Parks and recreation programs and services promote equity, as they provide gathering spaces and contribute to the health of people of various ages, genders, abilities and ethnicities for low or no out-of-pocket cost. Furthermore, access to parks and recreation facilities has been strongly linked to reductions in crime and delinquency. This may explain why, according to an ongoing study by the Trust for Public Land, voter approval rates for bond measures to acquire parks and conserve open space exceed 75%.

Parks also provide opportunity for volunteerism, which often results in the identification of community leaders who might also have interest in working to address other important community issues. Parks also provide opportunities for economic development. Traditional business site selection processes examine things like access to transportation, skilled labor, and workforce housing. While these considerations remain important, businesses are also increasingly examining other quality-of-life indicators, such as the existence of quality green space, prior to making site selections.

“Placemaking is about creating all the things people want in a community. That’s why things like splash pads are important, and trails and parks are super important, public art is important, because people want that stuff. If we don’t supply it, someone else will. If we want to address our workforce issues, we’ve got to have all these little attractions people want to have.”

Miles Seppelt, City of Hutchinson Economic Development Director

CURRENT PARKS SYSTEM

Located directly west of the southwestern quadrant of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, McLeod County includes nine incorporated cities and 14 townships. These are situated across 504 square miles (311,388 acres), characterized by vast and prime agricultural land in addition to numerous lakes, trees, and rolling hills. In 2020, the County's resident population was 36,771, up slightly from 36,651 in 2010. These residents, along with visitors to the county, have the opportunity to enjoy McLeod County's six unique parks, which are found dispersed across the county. They include:

- Buffalo Creek County Park, east of Glencoe and southwest of Plato
- Lake Marion Regional Park, north of Brownton and south of Hutchinson
- Piepenburg Regional Park, north of Hutchinson
- Stahl's Lake County Park, north of Hutchinson
- Swan Lake County Park, northwest of Silver Lake
- William May County Park, east of Winsted

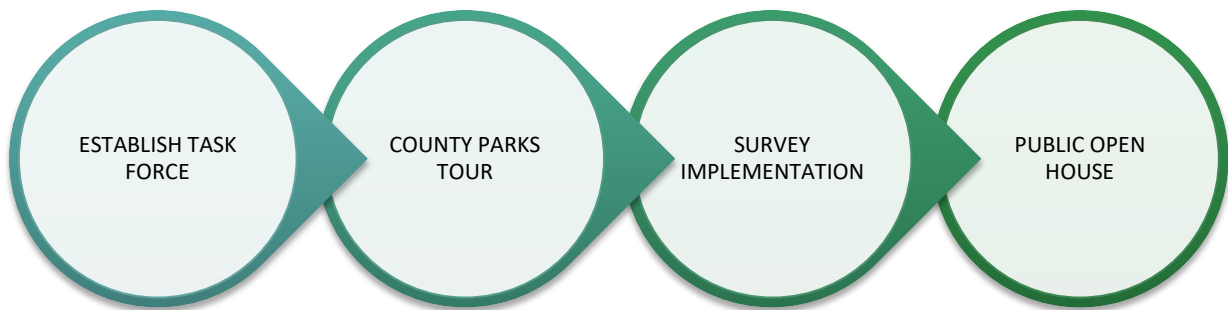
Collectively, these parks offer opportunities for camping, fishing, hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, picnicking, swimming, and other recreating. The following table provides an overview of the amenities of each McLeod County Park:

Table 1: McLeod County Park Amenities (2022)

	BUFFALO CREEK COUNTY PARK	LAKE MARION REGIONAL PARK	PIEPENBURG REGIONAL PARK	STAHL'S LAKE COUNTY PARK	SWAN LAKE COUNTY PARK	WILLIAM MAY COUNTY PARK
BOAT LAUNCH/LANDING		•	•		•	
CAMPING		•	•			
DUMP STATION		•	•			
ELECTRICITY		•	•			
SHOWERS		•	•			
FISHING AREA	•	•	•	•	•	
FISHING PIER		•	•		•	
SWIMMING BEACH/AREA		•	•			
PLAYGROUND	•	•	•	•	•	
PICNIC SHELTER	•	•	•	•	•	•
TOILETS (FLUSH)		•	•			
TOILETS (VAULT)	•			•	•	•
WALKING/XC SKI TRAILS	•	•	•	•	•	•
MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAILS				•		
LARGE ACTIVITY/SPORTING AREA	•	•	•		•	

PLANNING PROCESS

THE PLANNING PROCESS



For the development of this McLeod County Parks Plan, County staff, with direction from the McLeod County Board of Commissioners, engaged the assistance of Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC), a regional development organization focused on economic and community development issues and serving the counties of Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville.



McLEOD COUNTY PARKS PLAN TASK FORCE

Table 2: Committee Members of the McLeod County Parks Plan Task Force (established by Resolution 22-CB-34) as appointed by the McLeod County Board of Commissioners by Resolution 22-CB-35.

Joe Nagel County Commissioner	Paul Wright County Commissioner
Sheila Murphy County Administrator	Liz Danielson Economic Development Coordinator
John Brunkhorst Former Public Works Director/County Engineer	Coleton Draeger Resource Conservationist McLeod County Soil and Water Conservation District
Brian Stiles Commissioner District 1 Representative	Cory Neid Commissioner District 2 Representative
Chad Czmowski Commissioner District 3 Representative	Lori Cacka Commissioner District 4 Representative
Jerry Eggert Commissioner District 5 Representative	

TASK FORCE INPUT / PRIORITIES

A planning kick-off meeting was held in June 2022, during which a strategy for plan development, including a plan for public engagement, was formed. This strategy would include a July 2022 Tour of McLeod County Parks for Task Force members able to attend, along with additional County staff. This tour provided attendees opportunity to conduct an in-person assessment of park conditions and potential. A more detailed overview, along with notes resulting from this tour, can be found in Appendix A.

McLEOD COUNTY PARKS SURVEY

With assistance from the Task Force, an online McLeod County Parks Survey was developed and administered from July 22, 2022, through September 10, 2022. The purpose of the survey was to allow citizens opportunity to provide comments on McLeod County Parks, including potential projects, needed amenities, and overall suggestions.

Flyers requesting survey participation were posted in all County parks as well as other community areas (e.g. libraries, post offices, city offices, etc.). Survey information was also shared on the McLeod County website as well as social media, including Facebook and Instagram. In total, 503 people participated in the survey.



Example of graphics utilized by Parks Planning Task Force and County Staff to promote online survey participation.

A detailed accounting of survey responses can be found in Appendix B. However, one notable result of this survey is that the vast majority of respondents indicated interest in taking steps to improve McLeod County Parks in some way. Just 2.8% of respondents indicated a desire to leave the County parks in their existing condition. Figure 1 (Page 10) shows how McLeod County Parks Survey respondents answered the question, “*What would you do to improve McLeod County Parks?*”. As seen in Appendix B, numerous respondents also offered their own suggestions when asked, “*What other thoughts or ideas would you like to share with McLeod County’s decisionmakers with regard to our McLeod County Parks?*” (Question 29).

WHAT WOULD YOU ADD, EXPAND, AND/OR IMPROVE IN McLEOD COUNTY PARKS?

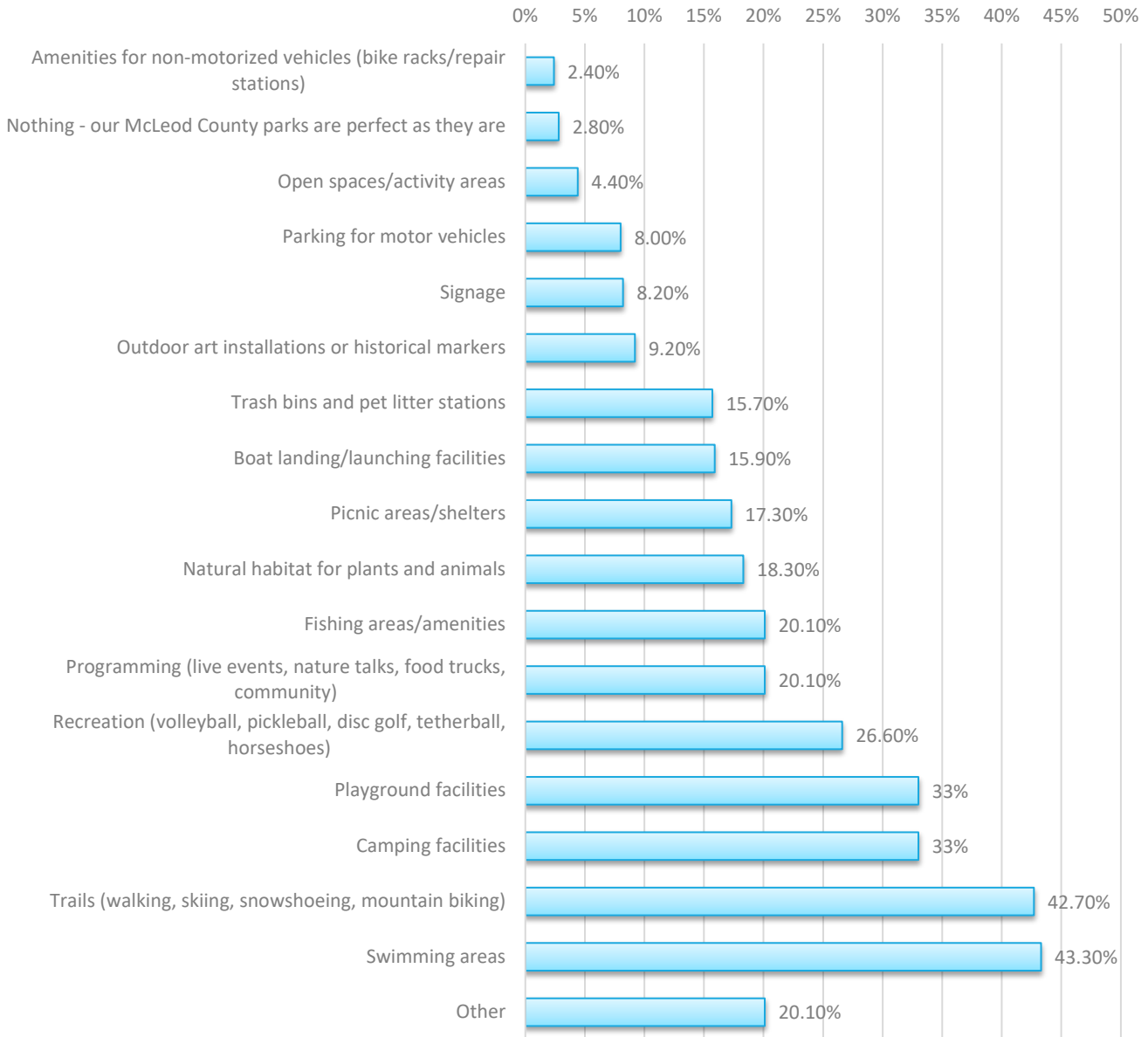


Figure 1: Online survey results showing responses to Question 28: "What would you do to improve McLeod County Parks?". Respondents were asked to select up to five options.

McLEOD COUNTY PARKS PLANNING OPEN HOUSE

In addition to the McLeod County Parks Survey, public input was solicited during a McLeod County Parks Planning Open House. This event occurred on Friday, August 19, 2022, at the McLeod County Fair. As the 2022 McLeod County Fair required no fee for admission, fair attendance was high. This, along with the added enticement of complimentary popcorn, provided County and MMDC staff terrific opportunity to engage people of various ages, genders, ethnicities, and socio-economic status.

Many open house visitors offered written or verbal comments on the McLeod County Parks System, and there was a general sense of appreciation that public input was being considered when planning park improvements. Many survey and open house participants also offered specific suggestions for park improvements, though others emphasized a need to balance improvements with fiscal responsibility. Appendix C includes comments received from McLeod County Parks Open House participants.



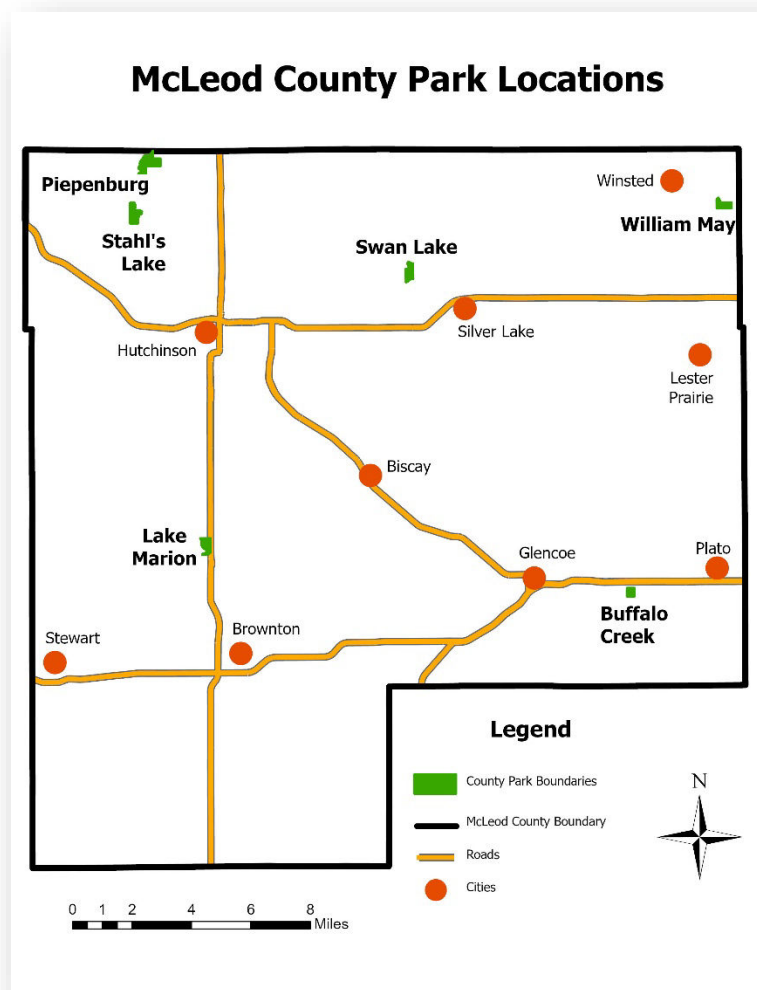
Flyer advertising the McLeod County Parks Planning Open House, hosted by the Parks Planning Task Force and County staff during the 2022 McLeod County Fair.

Note: This plan incorporates input from the Task Force's Parks Tour, the McLeod County Parks Survey, and the Open House. This input is intended to inform and guide, but not restrict, decision-making or project prioritization. Final park-related resource allocation decisions will always be determined by County leadership and staff, based on budgets and capacity, competing interests, outside funding opportunities (beyond County tax revenue), as well as other factors including safety, accessibility, park/amenity sustainability, and economic development potential.

PARK SUMMARIES AND OPPORTUNITIES

This section of the McLeod County Parks Plan provides an overview of the existing conditions of each park. Identified opportunities for park improvement and redevelopment are also provided. The intent of this section is to highlight potential with the understanding that County budgets and other resources are limited. Some of the suggested improvements may not ever receive funding priority due to their high cost and/or limited benefit. However, as there may be projects in which other funders (i.e., state, federal or private grantors, foundations, and/or other benefactors) have interest, they have been included.

It should also be noted that, while already extensive, there is a likelihood that additional projects will be identified during the course of plan implementation. The McLeod County Parks Plan should be considered a living document and should be regularly (at least annually) revisited and revised over time.



Map 1: McLeod County Park Locations

BUFFALO CREEK COUNTY PARK



Buffalo Creek County Park open area and woods.

Area

45.5 acres

Terrain

A mixture of wooded spaces and large open areas. Buffalo Creek passes through this park from west to east, north of the park's developed area. Approximately 25% of the park is located north of this creek. To date, this northern area has been left as natural wooded habitat.

Nearest Cities

- Glencoe, MN (approx. 4 miles east to city center)
- Plato, MN (approx. 4 miles west to city center)

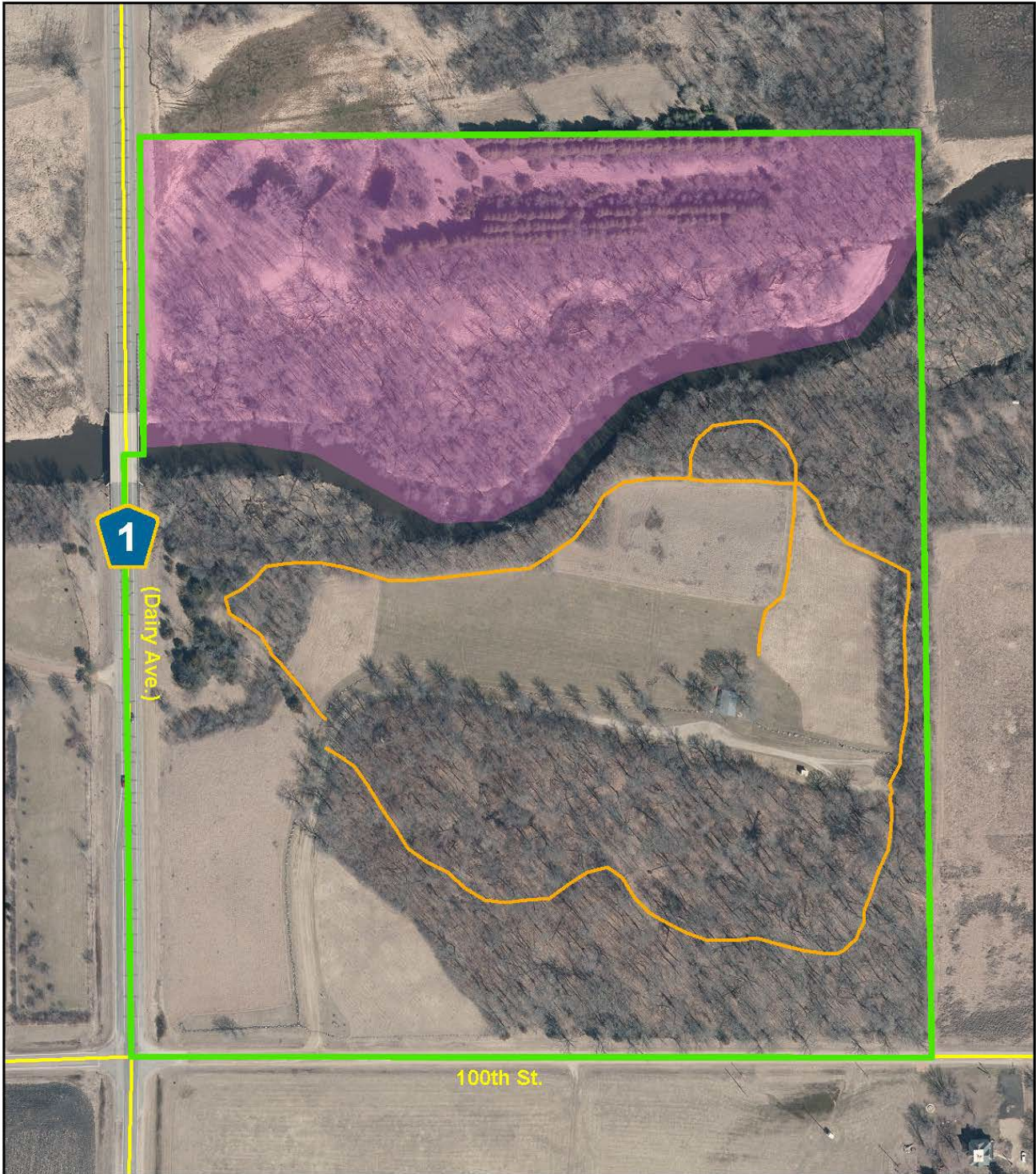
Park Amenities

Picnic shelter, walking trails, open space for activities, vault-style restroom.

Primary Uses

Wooded and open areas are the main features of this park and are primarily used for connecting with nature. Park users identified the trails and access to nature as the things they like most about Buffalo Creek County Park.

Buffalo Creek County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads
- Unused Park Parcel

Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: February 14, 2023



Map 2: Buffalo Creek County Park

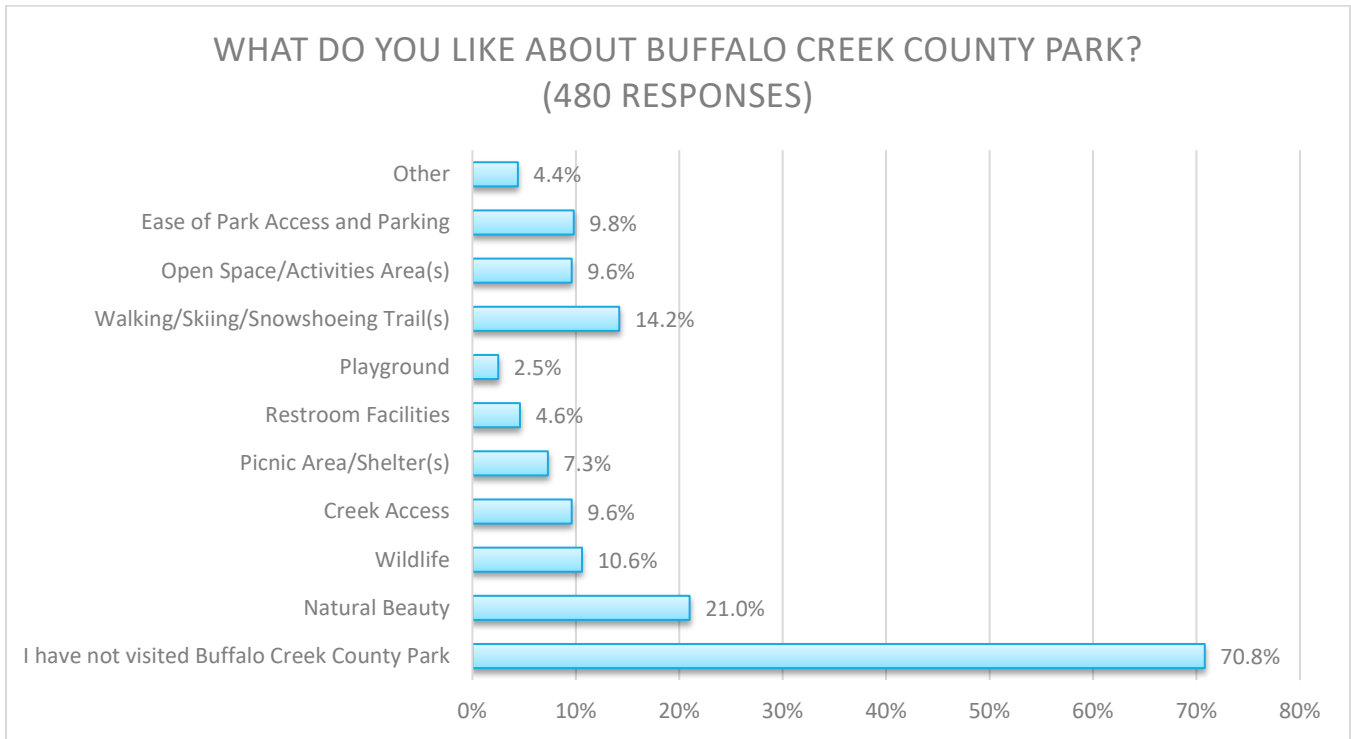


Figure 2: Online survey results showing responses to Question 5, "What do you like about Buffalo Creek County Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following potential improvements to Buffalo Creek County Park were identified after a review of public survey responses and as the result of a McLeod County parks tour, which was taken in June 2022 by McLeod County Parks Planning Task Force members along with staff from McLeod County and MMDC.

Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on Buffalo Creek County Park's greatest assets, including its abundant natural beauty and convenient location.

ELEVATE PARK VISIBILITY THROUGH IMPROVED SIGNAGE

High Value, Low Cost

Of the 499 McLeod County Parks survey respondents who answered the question, "Which of the following McLeod County Parks have you visited within the last three years?", only 129 indicated that they had visited Buffalo Creek Park. This indicates that the park is the second-least used of the McLeod County parks among survey respondents. Given its location, close to the communities of Glencoe and Plato, less than 1 mile from U.S. Highway 212, and approximately 30 minutes from the southwestern corner of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area, this park is well-positioned to receive more visits.

Opportunities to increase park visibility include the incorporation of larger, improved signage, especially along U.S. Highway 212 and Dairy Avenue.

REMOVE UNNECESSARY BOULDERS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

To restrict vehicles to the park roadways, some McLeod County parks, including Buffalo Creek County Park, have numerous large boulders alongside park roadways.

In many areas, these boulders are unnecessary and have also decreased efficiency with regard to park mowing. In recent years, herbicide has been sprayed around boulders in an effort to increase mowing efficiency. While effective, this is unattractive.

Therefore, as part of a proposed roadway shortening and parking area improvement projects, unnecessary boulders should be removed and repurposed or sold, with revenue applied to other park projects.



Boulders lining the entrance to Buffalo Creek County Park.

Alternatively, mowing could be reduced in some areas, allowing taller grasses to overtake boulder lines. This would reduce maintenance and improve attractiveness.

REPLACE BARBECUE GRILLS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Due to natural weathering and years of use, some of this park's barbecue grilling stations have outlived their usefulness.

As grilling stations remain an appealing amenity to some park users, it is recommended that at least one elevated grilling station be maintained in good working order. However, beyond maintaining one grilling station, those grills

that are no longer in working order should be removed. The addition of a small bonfire area with a grilling grate could be considered.

It will be necessary to ensure that sufficient distance is kept between any grill or bonfire ring and park buildings and to ensure that sufficient water is available for dousing flames/coals after use.

SHORTEN THE ROADWAY WITHIN THE PARK

High Value, Low Cost

This park currently includes a long gravel roadway with a turnaround loop at its end. While this does create an easy opportunity for changing direction, the lower elevation of the end loop, beyond a small, elevated area, creates an area where individuals can park outside of public view.

In recent years, this area has been used for inappropriate activities. By shortening this gravel road, this out-of-view area could be eliminated. The space currently occupied by the turnaround could instead be used for other purposes (e.g. a group campsite or increased native habitat).

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Low Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available.

This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park's annual expense.

IMPROVE SPORTING AMENITIES

Moderate Value, Low Cost

This park's current sporting amenities include a large, mowed field and an aging backstop, as well as aging volleyball net posts. They should be removed or restored to support current sporting activity trends that require fewer people. This could include activities such as whiffle ball, tetherball, kickball, or soccer.

REPLACE RESTROOM FACILITY

High Value, High Cost

The vault-style restroom facility should be replaced. It is outdated and does not meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act. A more comfortable and accessible restroom facility will accommodate people who wish to visit the park for longer periods, including families and community groups.



Vault-style restroom facility at Buffalo Creek County Park.

IMPROVE PARK TRAIL CONDITION AND SIGNAGE

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

The trail is one of the more attractive features of this park. However, there are areas of the trail that can become quite muddy during wet periods.



Hiking trail within Buffalo Creek County Park.

To improve trail condition and increase use, gravel, aglime or other material could be added to reduce mud in low-lying areas. The trail could be further enhanced with wayfinding signs/blazes and map-style signs in strategic locations along the trail.

Additional enhancements could include the incorporation of educational signage, informing trail users on local flora, fauna, or history. Outdoor art installations and geocaching opportunities could also be considered along the trail to draw a wider variety of park visitors.

ENSURE PICNIC SHELTER IS FULLY ACCESSIBLE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

High Value, Moderate Cost

The picnic shelter itself is at similar elevation to the parking area. Within the shelter, tables can be moved to accommodate people with wheelchairs and walkers. Designating parking spaces reserved for people with disabilities and adding a short concrete or crushed surface pathway would further improve this space for those with mobility barriers.



Buffalo Creek County Park picnic shelter.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE & SAFETY

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Buffalo Creek Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.

A wish list of maintenance projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

RELOCATE AND REPLACE PLAYGROUND

Low Value, High Cost

The playground consists of a set of swings and a sandbox and on the opposite side of the park road as the picnic shelter and activities/sporting area. Relocating the play area to the same side of the road as the picnic shelter and activities would improve safety and lend itself to better adult supervision.

The existing swings should be evaluated to determine if they meet current safety standards. If deemed safe, it may be possible to move and reuse the swings. It may also be desirable to add a playset to allow for climbing, sliding, etc.

Soft landing material should be placed beneath the playground equipment to ensure safety.

The sandbox should be removed, as sandboxes can become unsanitary.



Sandbox and playground at Buffalo Creek County Park.

INCREASE PARK MARKETING EFFORTS AND ADD PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost

Along with improved signage and other physical improvements, which will give people more reason to visit, Buffalo Creek County Park would benefit from intentional efforts to bring awareness to the park and park activities.

This could be accomplished by holding promotable events within the park. Events could be education-focused (e.g., nature-focused lyceums), entertainment/social-focused (e.g., bonfire-centered storytelling or music events), or even sports-focused (e.g., whiffle ball tournaments).



Campfire storytelling event held at Warwick County Park (Chester County, PA).

These events may provide people with an opportunity to visit the park for the first time, or otherwise refamiliarize themselves with this quality leisure location. They may leave the events with interest in returning for other, less organized park use.

Marketing could further be improved using social media platforms and tools (e.g. McLeod County Parks Facebook or Instagram pages), which could be managed by McLeod County staff or vetted volunteers.

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Low Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of this park by increasing the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species. This restoration would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects.

The incorporation of educational signage could also increase the educational value of this park, which would better lend itself to local field trips, etc. An additional benefit could be the reduction of mowed space, which would create a savings of staff time and mowing-related resources. When restoring native plants, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

ADD DISPERSED CAMPING AND/OR A GROUP CAMPSITE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

This park currently has no camping. Adding a full campground to accommodate recreational vehicle and car camping would likely detract from the inherent natural beauty of this park. However, given its proximity to local communities and the southwest metropolitan area, dispersed camping and/or a group campsite may be a nice enhancement. Dispersed campsites, perhaps north of Buffalo Creek or in the area where the ring road is, could accommodate those who prefer a quieter, more basic and natural camping experience, while a group campsite could be attractive to scout groups, youth groups, or other organizations.

Creation of a group campsite could be kept simple, possibly incorporating a fire ring, tenting area(s), and picnic table(s) only. Smaller dispersed sites would require, at a minimum, a fire ring, tenting area, and a place to sit (possibly a log or boulders in lieu of a picnic table). The County will need to consider camping rules, parameters, and any fees if it decides to move forward with any low-impact camping development.



Three Rivers District Group Campsite, provided as a reference.

IMPROVE/REDEFINE PARKING AREA

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Current parking largely occurs along relatively undefined areas along the park roadway. Improving the definition of this space could allow for more organized parking and has the potential to reduce accidents.

These improvements could be made in conjunction with the roadway shortening (referenced on Page 17). This improvement could also incorporate designation of spaces reserved for people with disabilities.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.



Example of an Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) smart cabinet.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Buffalo Creek County Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

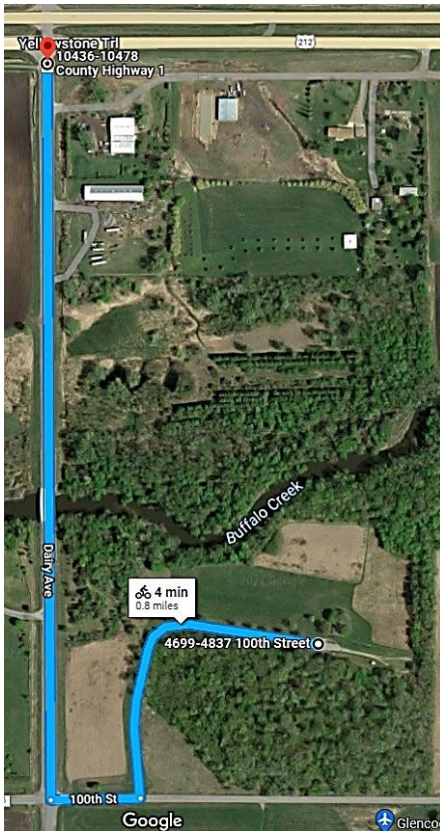
INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

CONNECT TO THE CITY OF GLENCOE VIA WALKING/BICYCLE TRAIL

High Value, High Cost

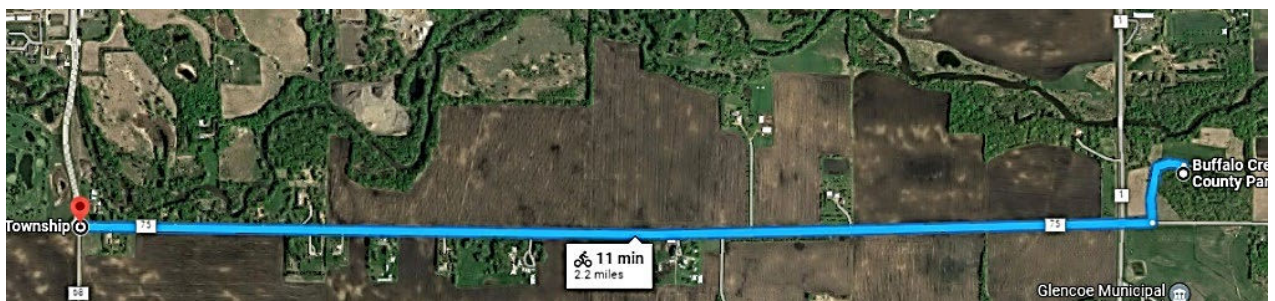


Walking and bicycling trail connection, Option 2.

A walking and bicycling trail connection to the City of Glencoe will support increased park use, particularly among youth, adult nondrivers, and those who participate in walking or biking as a leisure activity.

One option is the construction of a trail along McLeod County Highway 33/100th Street. An existing bicycle trail ends at the intersection of 1st Street East and Morningside Drive (Glencoe's southeast corner). The entrance to Buffalo Creek County Park is approximately 2 miles directly east of this location. It is noteworthy that there is little shoulder area along the roadway, limiting safety for walking or bicycling.

A second option could be the construction of a trail that connects to an existing bike trail that ends on the south side of the intersection of U.S. Highway 212 and McLeod County Highway 1/Dairy Avenue. While this route is shorter, it would cross over Buffalo Creek. While it's possible an on-road creek crossing could be achieved on the Highway Bridge with sufficient paint and signage, another option could be to install a separate pedestrian bridge within the park, albeit a more expensive option.



Walking and bicycling trail connection, Option 1.

LAKE MARION REGIONAL PARK



Lake Marion Regional Park walking trail.

Area
86 acres

Terrain
A mixture of heavily-to-moderately wooded spaces and large open areas. The west side of Lake Marion Regional Park is bordered by Lake Marion.

Nearest Cities

- Brownton, MN (approx. 5 miles south to city center)
- Hutchinson, MN (approx. 8 miles north to city center)
- Stewart, MN (approx. 9.5 miles southwest to city center)
- Biscay, MN (approx. 9.5 miles northeast to city center)

Park Amenities

Campground (44 RV and tent sites including 32 sites with electricity), picnic shelters, walking trails, fishing piers, boat access, beach, open space for activities, full restroom and shower facilities, playground.

Primary Uses

Park users identified the campground as the feature they enjoy most about this park. They also liked the access to nature, such as the large wooded areas, open spaces, and Lake Marion for various water recreation.

Lake Marion County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads

Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: July 24th, 2023

Map 3: Lake Marion Regional Park

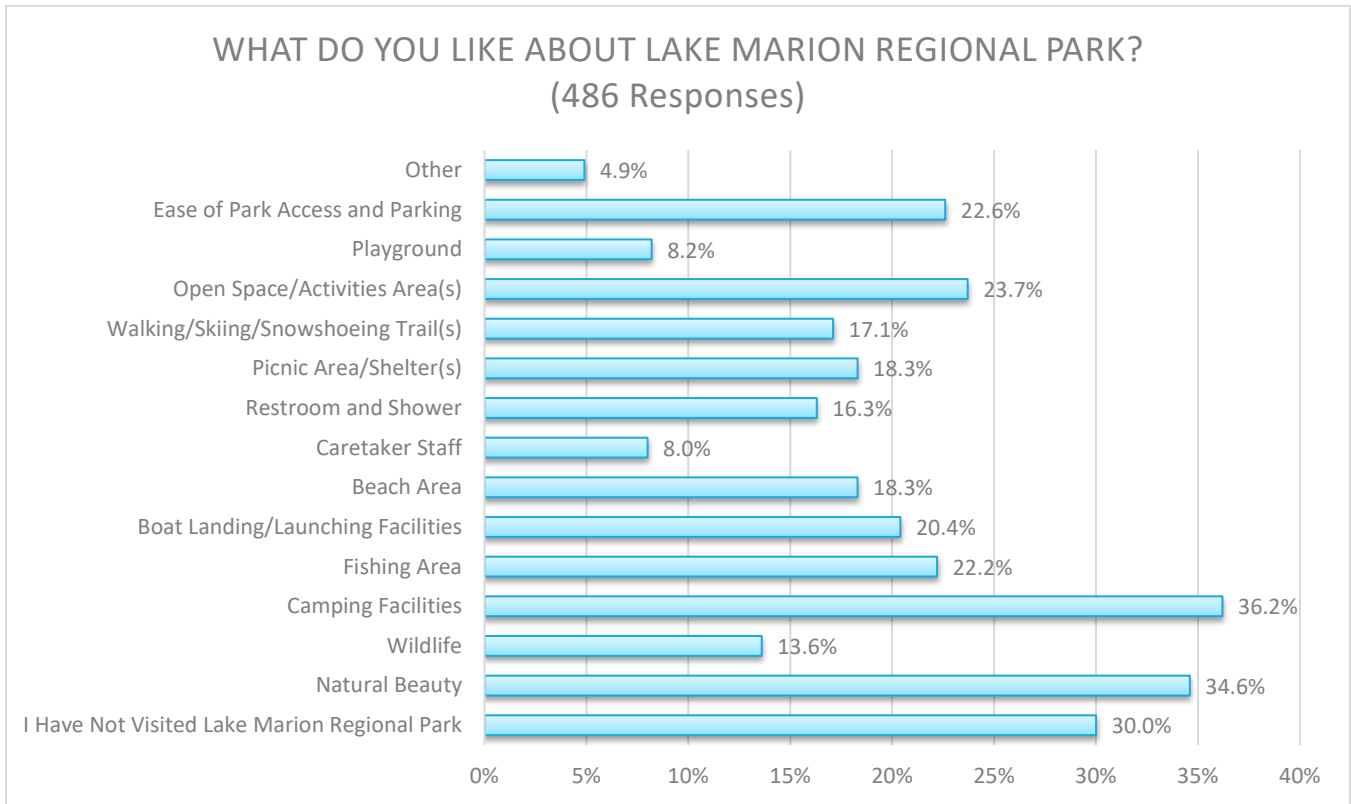


Figure 3: Online survey results showing responses to Question 6, "What do you like about Lake Marion Regional Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following potential improvements to Lake Marion Regional Park were identified after a review of public survey responses and as the result of a McLeod County parks tour, which was taken in June 2022 by McLeod County Parks Planning Task Force members along with staff from McLeod County and MMDC.

Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on Lake Marion Regional Park's assets, including its lakeside location and campground, and with the understanding that this park has great potential to draw visitors from outside the region who might also wish to visit area shops and restaurants.

CAMPGROUND STUDY: It is noteworthy that some of the suggested improvements to Lake Marion Regional Park are specific to the park's camping facilities. To better understand how McLeod County's campground facilities and rates compare, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) studied the amenities of and rates charged by other campgrounds within approximately 50 miles of McLeod County's center point (near Biscay, Minnesota). Findings have been included within Appendix D of this Plan. This information can be used by decision-makers when determining any need for change in rates or amenities offered.

INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

Additionally, in order to ensure the Lake Marion Regional Park campground is welcoming to those with large RVs, it will be necessary to ensure tree branches are trimmed and scratching/scraping hazards are minimized.

IMPROVE CAMPGROUND SIGNAGE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

To ensure proper traffic flow, it is recommended to add directional signage. This could be as simple as adding, "Keep Right" or similar signs beneath the speed limit indicators.

Additionally, to improve the ability of McLeod County staff and EMS services to quickly find the appropriate site in the case of an emergency or other issue, it will be necessary to add prominent campsite number markers throughout the campground.

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Low Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available.

This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park's annual expense.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Lake Marion Regional Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.

A wish list of maintenance projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

This park is located on a busy, well-traveled highway, so security is slightly better than in more remote parks. However, the size of this park makes it more difficult to monitor. Increasing park traffic and providing clear signage instructing how to report park misuse will reduce inappropriate activity, vandalism, and other crime.

ADD PARK BENCHES

Low Value, Low Cost

Additional benches, particularly those that face the water or various recreation spaces (e.g. playground) will increase comfort for those using the park, encouraging longer enjoyment.

This project could provide opportunity for locals to support the park with donations. Some may be interested in donating a bench in memoriam or to commemorate special occasions or enjoyable times had at Lake Marion Regional Park.

REMOVE BOULDERS WHERE UNNECESSARY

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Large boulders can be found throughout all McLeod County parks, including Lake Marion Regional Park. In some areas, these boulders are largely unnecessary. They also lead to decreased efficiency with regard to park maintenance and mowing.

In recent years, herbicide has been sprayed around boulders to increase mowing efficiency. While effective, this is unattractive.

Any unnecessary boulders should be removed. As boulders of this nature are often used for landscaping projects, they do have value. The opportunity to sell these boulders to help fund other park improvements should be

explored if McLeod County has no other use for them. The end result will be a more attractive park that is easier to maintain.

INCREASE PARK MARKETING EFFORTS AND ADD PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost

While Lake Marion Regional Park is well known to residents of McLeod County, economic benefit could be realized by working to attract more visitors from beyond the county's borders.

Holding promotable events within the park would draw more visitors. Events could be education-focused (e.g., nature-focused lyceums), entertainment/social-focused (e.g., bonfire-centered storytelling or music events), or even sports-focused (e.g., whiffle ball tournaments).



Example of a kite-flying event.

The McLeod County website provides a good foundation by providing a wealth of park information. However, marketing could further be improved using social media platforms and tools (e.g. McLeod County Parks Facebook or Instagram pages), which could be managed by McLeod County staff or vetted volunteers.

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD VENDORS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

The availability of food items could be an added draw for park visitors and give those already using the park reason to increase their visit duration and/or frequency.



Chito's Ice Cream Truck, Litchfield, MN.

McLeod County could explore allowing vendors to sell food (e.g., ice cream novelties, popcorn, hotdogs, tacos, burgers, etc.) from trucks, trailers, carts, or other food stands on park premises.

It may be possible to charge these vendors a reasonable fee to help offset other costs if and when traffic/business is such that a fee is warranted. This could also be seen as a fundraising opportunity for local clubs and organizations.

IMPROVE BOAT LAUNCH/LANDING

High Value, High Cost

Some McLeod County Parks Survey respondents indicated a desire for the County to be diligent in the maintenance of boat launches/landings located on park grounds.

Comments specific to Lake Marion Regional Park included a desire to drive from the campground area to the boat launch without traveling on Minnesota State Highway 15.

Another respondent indicated that it can be difficult to load a boat at the Lake Marion Regional Park launch/landing, as the in-water cement pads are out of level. While the usability of this launching and landing facility should be checked regularly, perhaps at the start, middle, and end of the boating season, any significant maintenance to or rehabilitation of the facility should be done in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and/or the Lake Marion Improvement Association.



Lake Marion Regional Park Boat Landing.

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Moderate Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of this park by increasing the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species, especially in the northeastern corner of the park and along Minnesota State Highway 15, but also in some smaller, closer-in areas. This restoration would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects.

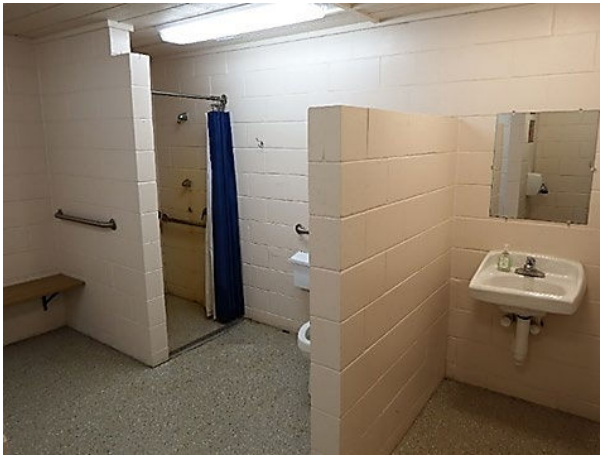
The incorporation of educational signage could also increase the educational value of this park, which would better lend itself to local field trips, etc. An additional benefit could be the reduction of mowed space, which would create a savings of staff time and mowing-related resources. When restoring native plants, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

REFRESH BATHROOM/Shower FACILITIES

High Value, High Cost

This park benefits from two full restroom facilities with running water and flush toilets. The larger of the facilities, located within the campground area of the park, also includes two family bathroom/shower rooms, which are both accessible to people with disabilities and conducive to families with young children.

While these facilities serve their intended purpose, a majority of McLeod County Parks Survey respondents who answered other than "Not Applicable" to the question "How would you rate McLeod County Park Campground Restroom/Shower Facilities?" indicated that they needed at least some improvement. This could include improved ventilation, lighting, or interior finishes (e.g., fresh paint).



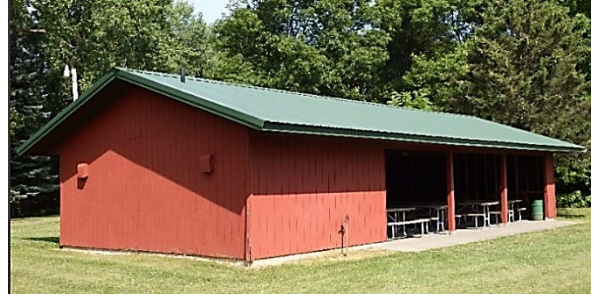
Interior (left) and exterior (right) photos of Lake Marion Regional Park's campground and shower facilities.

REFRESH AND IMPROVE PICNIC SHELTERS

Moderate Value, High Cost

Lake Marion Regional Park includes several areas appropriate for large and small picnics, including two large picnic shelters and both shaded and unshaded picnic tables located in open spaces. Both picnic shelters can be reserved for a small fee to host family and/or other gatherings. The largest of the shelters includes restroom facilities.

Both shelters are in working condition and have received periodic maintenance and improvements over the years, including a relatively new steel roof and new concrete floor in the park's largest shelter. Each would benefit from additional improvements, including sheeting the ceiling to reduce bird nesting and improve aesthetics. The shelter restroom facility should also be updated to improve both comfort and accessibility. A reevaluation of shelter reservation fees should then be conducted.



Picnic shelter at Lake Marion Regional Park.

INSTALL DISC GOLF COURSE

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

A number of McLeod County Parks Survey respondents indicated their desire to incorporate a disc golf course amenity into at least one of the County's six parks. An assessment done by the Little Crow Disc Golf Club identified Lake Marion Regional Park as a good candidate for such an installation.



Robbins Island Disc Golf Course (Willmar, MN).

The park provides adequate space to accommodate at least nine baskets, amidst both open and more wooded spaces. It may also be possible to expand the course to 18 baskets at a later date. Disc golf courses are often intermingled with other park activities.

Opportunity exists to solicit input and installation assistance from the Little Crow Disc Golf Club. It is believed that this could be successfully accomplished for approximately \$500.00 per basket, inclusive of the basket purchases and some County staff time and equipment. Funds to offset this cost may be available from various grantors, as this would support a healthy activity and foster positive community interactions.

IMPROVE OTHER SPORTING AMENITIES

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Lake Marion Regional Park currently includes a volleyball court built on a largely grassy area. The volleyball court should be relocated to a sand court and perhaps incorporated as a part of a larger beach improvement.

The park has ample space and could also support additional recreation such as kickball, whiffle ball, tetherball, etc.



Lake Marion Regional Park volleyball court.

ADD AN OUTDOOR WARNING/TORNADO SIREN

High Value, High Cost

The nearest outdoor warning siren to Lake Marion Regional Park is several miles away, within the City of Brownton. Given this park accommodates campers during Minnesota's tornado season, it would be prudent to work with emergency management officials to install a siren on the park premises. This siren would also benefit those residing around and in close proximity of Lake Marion.

RESTORE SWIMMING BEACH

High Value, High Cost

Lake Marion Regional Park has a marked swimming area. As there is little sloping, the beach area provides easy access to the water. However, this area has potential for much more and would benefit from redevelopment, including improving the beach itself, which now has little in the way of sandy space for play or relaxation.

The beach itself need not be large to be usable. Given the algae blooms that occur with regularity in Lake Marion, especially in July and August, the focus of this beach area should go beyond swimming. This could include the provision of adequate sand for castles and sand sculptures, installation of a sand volleyball court, incorporation of water equipment (e.g. kayak and paddleboard) rentals, and the addition of "sunset seating" (park benches facing the lake, across which the sun will set during the summer months).



Example of a kayak/paddleboard rental trailer.

Beach wheelchairs are also available for purchase. While monitoring would be required to avoid theft, such a chair could be made available to provide water access to those with mobility challenges.

A parking area should also be defined for this space, to improve safety and space efficiency. There may also be potential to collaborate with Lake Marion Improvement Association to address water quality issues, etc.

IMPROVE PARK TRAIL CONDITION AND SIGNAGE

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

The trails provide visitors opportunity to enjoy a bit of nature in the quieter areas of this park. Continued trail maintenance will be necessary to ensure usability, including the adding of gravel, aggregate or other material to reduce mud in low-lying areas.

Trails could be further enhanced with wayfinding signs/blazes and map-style signs in strategic locations along the trail. Additional enhancements could include the incorporation of educational signage, informing trail users on local flora, fauna, or history.

Outdoor art installations and geocaching opportunities could also be considered along the trail to draw a wider variety of park visitors.



Example of educational trail signage, provided as a reference.

UPGRADE POWER TO 50-AMP SERVICE FOR ALL RV SITES

Moderate Value, High Cost

When the Lake Marion Regional Park campground was initially developed, recreational vehicles (RVs) were smaller and required less power. Modern RVs are often larger and require more power to operate air conditioning units and other modern conveniences.

To better accommodate these modern RVs, electrical hookups should be upgraded to 50-amp service throughout the portion of the campground primarily used by RVs.

INCREASE PARKING PAD SIZE FOR RV SITES

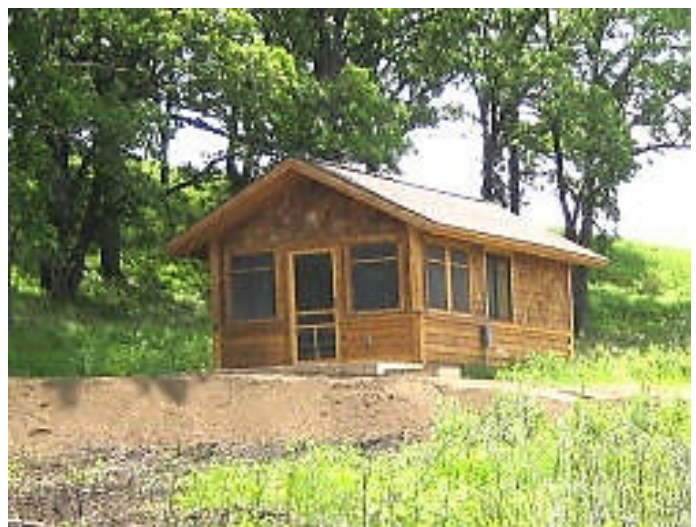
Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Modern RVs are often larger, with greater length and the incorporation of multiple slide-out spaces. To better accommodate these larger units, it will be necessary to create larger surfaces on which campers can park and more easily level their units.

ADD ONE TO THREE CAMPING CABINS

High Value, High Cost

The addition of camping cabins would make Lake Marion Regional Park a more attractive lodging destination for motorcyclists and others who like to camp but do not wish to tent and do not have their own RV. While each camping cabin would require a significant expenditure, they would also provide a new revenue opportunity to offset upfront expenses.



Examples of a camping cabin, typical of what can be found in many campgrounds.

Camping cabins frequently found in Minnesota State Parks typically rent for \$80-\$90 per night. These one-room cabins are about 12 by 16 feet and contain a table, benches, and wooden bunkbeds with mattresses. Most cabins have a small, screened porch with a heat source and electricity (simple light fixtures and outlets). Typically, no cooking is allowed within a camping cabin, though exceptions have been made in some parks for crockpots and coffee pots. Camping cabins do not have indoor plumbing and instead share other campground restroom and shower facilities. McLeod County could explore partnering with local school districts' technical education programs for the construction of the camping cabins.

Alternative camping options could also be considered, including the addition of a yurt, a historically appropriate tipi/teepee, or frontier-style tent.

IMPROVE ROAD SURFACE THROUGHOUT THE CAMPGROUND AREA

Moderate Value, High Cost

The campground roadways require maintenance and possibly widening in some areas to improve the camping experience and to better accommodate larger RV units. Paving the campground road is a longer-term solution.

Adding and grading additional crushed rock or other similar material will provide an economical alternative, however this would require more continuous maintenance.



Lake Marion Regional Park campground roadway.

INSTALL NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT

High Value, High Cost



Lake Marion Regional Park playground.

The construction of a "destination playground" would provide additional reason for people to visit Lake Marion Regional Park while also providing an opportunity for community participation through fundraising and volunteerism. It is suggested that any new playground be placed in closer proximity to the large picnic shelter, as this will ensure more adequate adult supervision during larger gatherings.

While the playground at this park is larger than those found at several other McLeod County parks, it is underwhelming and is not a feature that would attract local or out-of-town visitors.

Given the size and location of this regional park, a full playground, rather than a more compact playset, is recommended.



Destination playground, built in Memorial Park (Litchfield, MN), adjacent to Lake Ripley, in 2013.

Relocating the playground to a space closer to the swimming beach area could be considered complimentary, and might result in a bigger draw. Should this occur, it is recommended that the playground remain untouched, provided equipment remains in good working order. Soft landing material should be placed beneath all playground equipment to ensure safety.

ADD WI-FI SERVICE TO CAMPGROUND AREA

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

To ensure this park's camping facilities remain attractive to modern campers, many of whom balance work with leisure on a daily basis, it will be necessary to add Wi-Fi service to the campground area.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Lake Marion Regional Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

ADD AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) CHARGING STATION

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

As EV technology improves and many American families, including campers and other parkgoers, gradually switch to electric cars, trucks, and even recreational vehicles, it will be wise for communities to incorporate charging technology to accommodate them.

While this may not yet be an urgent need within the McLeod County Parks System, the County should keep abreast of potential funding opportunities that might provide funding for such installations.

Adoption of EV technology could give McLeod County parks – at least the larger Lake Marion and Piepenburg Regional Parks – a competitive edge over otherwise similar parks in other areas.

EXPLORE POTENTIAL FOR WATER FEATURE

High Value, High Cost

A water feature, such as a man-made swimming pond, could provide an additional place for park-goers to play and could attract families from Biscay, Brownton, Glencoe, Hutchinson, Stewart and beyond.

Any additional water feature should be complimentary and not in competition with water recreation efforts provided by cities.

While there is potential for this addition to be very popular, it would likely be a more expensive project.

McLeod County could partner with other organizations or private donors to offset some of the expenses.



Man-made, chlorinated swimming pond at Flandreau State Park (New Ulm, Minnesota).

PIEPENBURG REGIONAL PARK



Piepenburg Regional Park grassland/open area.

Area
156 acres

Terrain
McLeod County's largest park. A mixture of expansive open areas and moderate to dense woodlands. The west side of Piepenburg Park is bordered by Belle Lake.

Nearest Cities

- Cedar Mills, MN (approx. 6.5 miles southwest to city center)
- Hutchinson, MN (approx. 7.5 miles south to city center)
- Darwin, MN (approx. 11.5 miles north to city center)

Primary Uses

The campground and Belle Lake beach were identified by park users as the things they most enjoy about this park. They also like the natural recreation opportunities provided by the park's wooded spaces, open areas and lake access.

Park Amenities

Campground (41 RV and tent sites including 30 sites with electricity), picnic shelters, walking trails, fishing piers, boat access, beach, open space for activities, full restroom and shower facilities, playground.

Piepenburg County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads

Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: July 24th, 2023

Map 4: Piepenburg Regional Park.



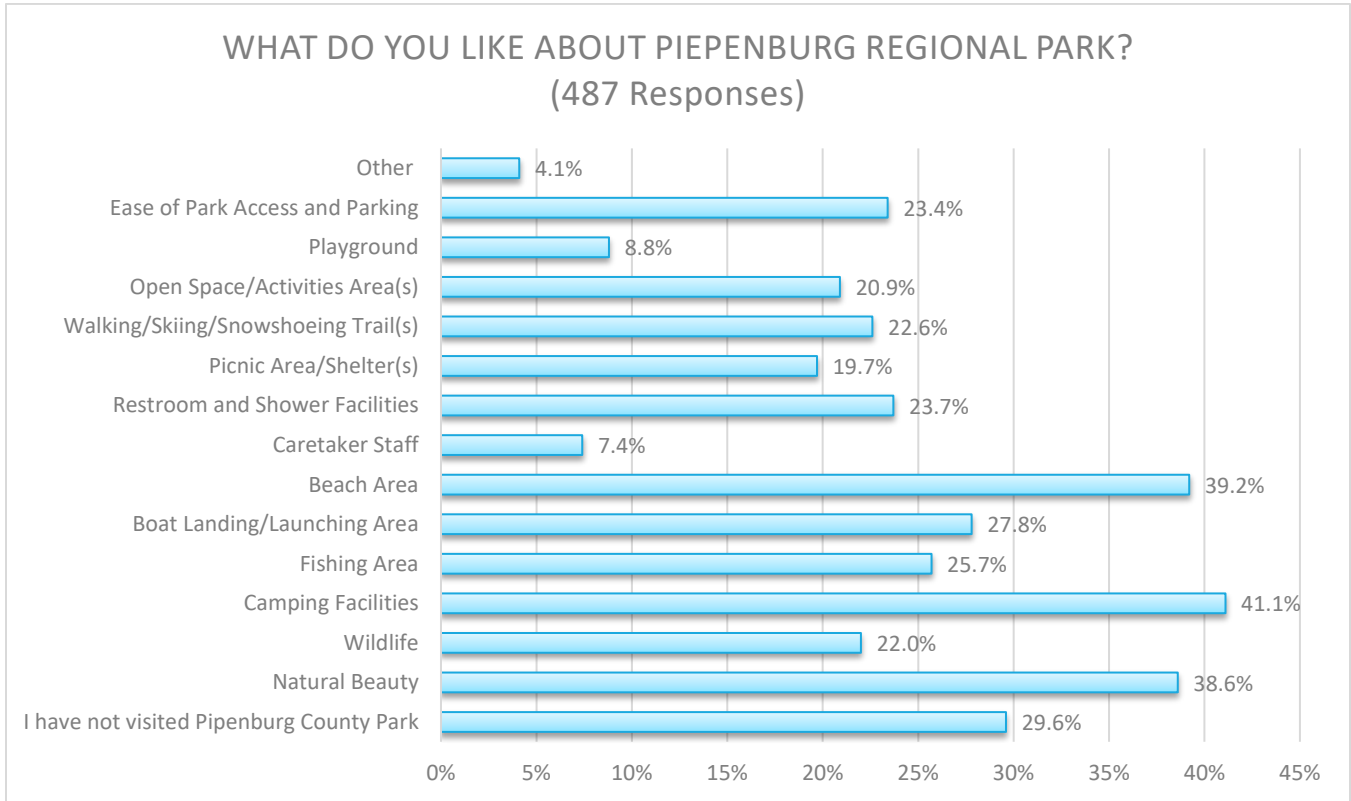


Figure 4: Excerpt from online survey results showing responses to Question 7, "What do you like about Piepenburg Regional Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

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Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on Piepenburg Regional Park's assets, including its abundant space and popular beach, and with the understanding that this park, like Lake Marion Regional Park, has great potential to draw visitors from outside the region who might also wish to visit area shops and restaurants.

CAMPGROUND STUDY: It is noteworthy that some of the suggested improvements to Lake Marion Regional Park are specific to the park's camping facilities. To better understand how McLeod County's campground facilities and rates compare, Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) studied the amenities of and rates charged by other campgrounds within approximately 50 miles of McLeod County's center point (near Biscay, Minnesota). Findings have been included within Appendix D of this Plan. This information can be used by decision-makers when determining any need for change in rates or amenities offered.

INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost



Piepenburg Regional Park campground site.

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

Additionally, in order to ensure the Lake Marion Regional Park campground is welcoming to those with large RVs, it will be necessary to ensure tree branches are trimmed and scratching/scraping hazards are minimized.

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Low Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available.

This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park's annual expense.

REMOVE UNNECESSARY BOULDERS

Low Value, Low Cost

There are far fewer boulders within Piepenburg Regional Park compared to other McLeod County parks, however there still may be opportunity to reduce the amount at this park as well.



Boulders lining the driveway to the south picnic shelter at Piepenburg Regional Park.

Boulders should be evaluated for usefulness. While it may be prudent to leave boulders in areas where drivers might frequently leave the park roadway (e.g. where vehicles might make a sharp turn to park in the boat launch/landing area), other boulders should be repurposed for other, more useful landscaping or removed entirely.

As boulders of this nature are often sought after for landscaping projects, they do have value. The opportunity to sell these boulders to help fund other park improvements should be explored if McLeod County has no other use for them. The end result will be a more attractive park that is easier to maintain.

REDEVELOP SWIMMING BEACH

High Value, High Cost

While the Piepenburg Regional Park swimming beach currently enjoys regular use, the adjacent parking loop occupies a good deal of space that has potential for redevelopment.



Piepenburg Regional Park beach area.

This redevelopment could start with the removal of the large parking loop in favor of a more organized parking lot. That space could then be used for amenities that complement the swimming beach, such as a new playground, kayak/paddleboard rental station, and concession stand or designated space for outside food vendors. Additional small-scale sporting amenities, such as tetherball, could also be added near the sand volleyball court, north of the swimming beach.



Parking loop near the beach area at Piepenburg Regional Park.

The swimming area itself will benefit from the occasional addition of play-quality sand and regular maintenance aimed at keeping plant-growth at bay.

A restroom facility within view and earshot of the swimming beach would likely improve safety, through improved ease of child supervision. It's possible that a portable facility, rather than a permanent structure, might provide a cost-effective solution. A separate changing building may also serve beachgoers well. It's possible this building could also serve as a warming hut during winter months if more wintertime activities are incorporated into this park.

Beyond the redesign of the parking area itself, some selected improvements (e.g. addition of tetherball or space for outside food vendors) may be made with a relatively small investment. Other investments (e.g. a kayak/paddleboard rental trailer) could require a more significant up-front investment. It is possible, however, that some of the associated expenses could be offset with equipment rental and vendor fees.



Example of a concession stand (possible alternative to commercial vendors).



Example of beach wheelchair (far left) and kayak/paddleboard rental trailer (left).

ADD BENCHES IN SPACES CONDUCIVE TO REST/REFLECTION AND CHILD SUPERVISION

Moderate Value, Low Cost

While the park currently incorporates several benches for rest and relaxation, there is ample opportunity to increase the number of benches throughout the park.

Some of these benches could be installed in quiet areas along pathways. Others should be installed in areas where children require adult supervision, in an effort to accommodate this supervisory behavior.

Creating opportunities for the broader community to make financial contributions to support this effort, perhaps in memoriam or to otherwise commemorate enjoyable times spent at Piepenburg Regional Park, would help to maximize economy for the County.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE AND SAFETY

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Piepenburg Regional Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.

A wish list of projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

This park has an on-site attendant and is located on a busy, well-traveled highway, so security is slightly better than in more remote parks. However, the size of this park makes it more difficult to monitor. Increasing park traffic and providing clear signage instructing how to report park misuse will reduce inappropriate activity, vandalism, and other crime.

IMPROVE BOAT LAUNCH/LANDING

High Value, High Cost

Some McLeod County Parks Survey respondents indicated a desire for the County to be diligent in the maintenance of boat launches/landings located on park grounds.

The usability of the Piepenburg Regional Park launching and landing facility should be checked regularly throughout the boating season. Any significant maintenance or rehabilitation of the facility should be done in collaboration with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and/or the Belle Lake Association.



Piepenburg Regional Park boat launch/landing.

Adding signage that informs boaters of launching/landing etiquette and discourages “power loading” will prevent holes and mounds at the bottom of the boat launch and should be considered.

While the Piepenburg Regional Park boat launch/landing does have a parking area that is typically sufficient in size, the addition of a second “overflow” parking area may also serve this park well. Belle Lake is a popular fishing and boating destination for local residents, and boats have generally increased in size over time.

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Low Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of this park by increasing the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species. This restoration would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects.

The incorporation of educational signage could also increase the educational value of this park, which would better lend itself to local field trips, etc. An additional benefit could be the reduction of mowed space, which would create a savings of staff time and mowing-related resources. When restoring native plants, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

IMPROVE PARK MARKETING AND PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost

Similar to Lake Marion Regional Park, Piepenburg Regional Park is well known to residents of McLeod County and neighboring communities, and therefore economic benefit could be realized by attracting more visitors to the park from further afield.

A variety of promotable events could be incorporated into the County’s economic development strategy. Kite-flying events, fishing contests, music and food festivals, falconer demonstrations, and even drone races could each draw different crowds.

McLeod County’s website provides a good foundation for park marketing. The incorporation of social media will drive more traffic to this online County resource.



Examples of outdoor drone racing (left), and a falconer demonstration (right), provided as illustrations.

REFRESH RESTROOM AND SHOWER FACILITIES

High Value, High Cost

Piepenburg Regional Park currently has two restroom buildings with running water, as well as a third, vault-style unit. One of these facilities, located within the park's campground area, also includes showers.

While both watered facilities are very functional, there is opportunity to increase their appeal. McLeod County should invest in the bathroom and shower structures.



Piepenburg Regional Park restrooms located near north picnic shelter (left), vault-style facility located near south picnic shelter (center), and campground restroom and shower facility (right).



Interior of Piepenburg Regional Park campground shower facility.

maximize economy.

The County might consider incorporating some of the same elements found at the McLeod County Fairgrounds restroom facilities, which provide a bright, clean, accessible, and comfortable environment.

The needs of those with mobility issues should be taken into consideration when making any improvement to facilities. Baby changing areas should also be incorporated with any improvements.

Along with other swimming beach area improvements, an additional restroom facility should be considered. A portable restroom unit in lieu of a permanent structure would

REFRESH AND IMPROVE PICNIC SHELTERS

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Piepenburg Regional Park's shelters are in reasonably good structural condition. However, the shelters could be improved by adding plywood or other sheeting to the ceilings and upgrading lighting and electrical outlets. This would enhance the space for those who would reserve the shelter for family reunions, company picnics, and other outings. This would also reduce opportunities for birds and other animals who might wish to nest in the shelter's rafter space.

Given the distance between the north picnic shelter and the parking area, it may also be prudent to extend the park roadway to accommodate one to two handicap parking spaces near the shelter, or otherwise improve the pathway with a harder surface more conducive to wheelchair or walker use.



Northern picnic shelter facility at Piepenburg Regional Park.

INSTALL DISC GOLF COURSE

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

A number of McLeod County Parks Survey respondents indicated their desire to incorporate a disc golf course amenity into one or more of the County's six parks. An evaluation done by the Little Crow Disc Golf Club identified Piepenburg Regional Park as a good candidate for such an installation.



Example of a simple disc golf basket installation.

This park has ample space, especially in the expansive areas on the east side of the park, to accommodate a full 18-basket course. However, to ensure disc golfer interest, it would be wise to incorporate at least some of the park's wooded and/or wetland areas.

Care should also be taken to ensure baskets are placed in such a way that they do not add to staff mowing time, etc.

Opportunity exists to solicit input and installation assistance from the Little Crow Disc Golf Club. It is believed that this could be successfully accomplished for approximately \$500 per basket, plus some County staff time and equipment. Funds to offset this cost may be available from various grantors, as this would support a healthy activity and foster positive community interactions.

ADD AN OUTDOOR WARNING/TORNADO SIREN

High Value, High Cost

The nearest outdoor warning siren to Piepenburg Regional Park is several miles away, at the northern edge of Hutchinson. Given this park accommodates campers during Minnesota's tornado season, it would be prudent to work with emergency management officials to pursue the install a siren on the park premises. This siren would also benefit those residing around and in close proximity of Belle Lake.

IMPROVE PARK TRAILS

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Piepenburg Regional Park provides ample opportunity for those who wish to walk or hike. However, the trail system could be improved with the restoration of natural wildflowers, grasses, and other plants.

The restoration of natural spaces would require an initial investment, though substantial savings of staff time could be seen over the course of each year due to decreased mowing. Time could be redirected to other park maintenance activities and projects.

Outdoor art installations (e.g. sculptures) and geocaching opportunities could be incorporated, as could signage that would educate walkers and hikers on plants and animals found within the park, local history, etc.

Additionally, McLeod County could consider using some space to create a "meditation path." A meditation path is a single winding path that leads walkers from the outer edge of a space to its center in a circuitous way. Such a path could be created via mowing and wildflower plantings. Several landscaping boulders could also be incorporated to provide spaces to sit and rest or reflect.



Examples of educational trail signage (left), a meditative trail (bottom right) and an outdoor sculpture (top right).

INCREASE WINTER AMENITIES

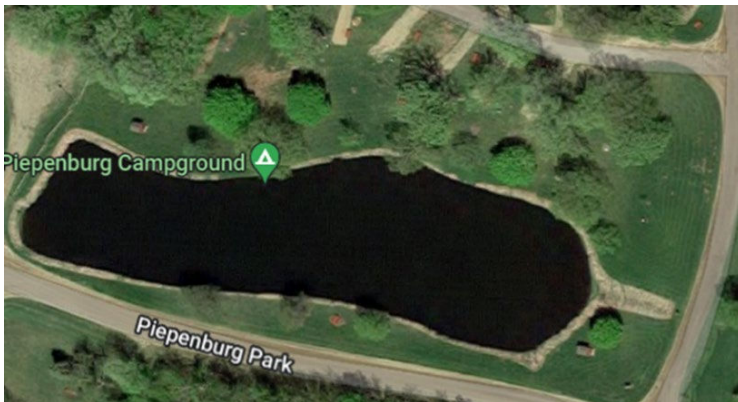
High Value, Moderate Cost

Minnesota experiences freezing temperatures for a substantial portion of the year. It would be wise to encourage wintertime use of McLeod County's parks.

This could include some limited plowing, grooming of trails for cross-country skiing, and the creation of a skating area on the pond that sits directly south of the campground.

The County could also consider providing opportunity for parkgoers to rent winter equipment (e.g. snowshoes). This could be accomplished via partnership with a private concessionaire, who could also sell items like coffee, hot chocolate, popcorn, and other snacks.

A warming hut could also be incorporated into this park. With forethought and proper design, this hut might also be used as a changing room by beachgoers during the summer months.



A skating rink could be cleared on the pond directly south of the Piepenburg Regional Park campground. This may also be a good place to locate an occasional private concessions vendor and/or a winter equipment rental operator.



Piepenburg Regional Park could be a good fit for wintertime activities, such as skating (top) and snowshoeing (bottom).

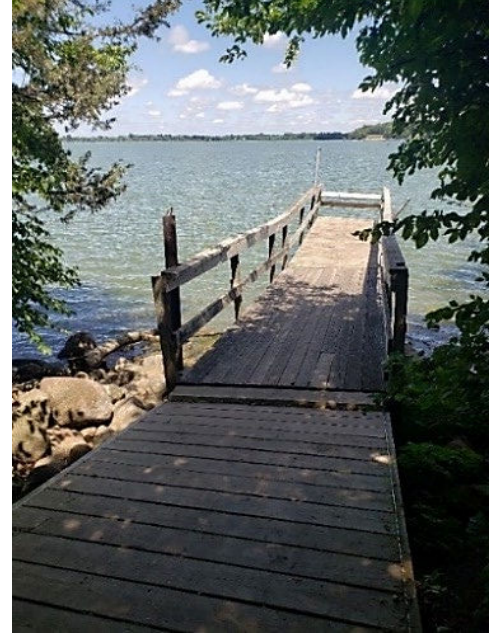
REPLACE FISHING PIER

Moderate Value, High Cost

While this park does have a fishing pier, it has been heavily damaged by ice over the years and is beyond repair. Replacing this floating pier would improve Piepenburg Regional Park as a destination for those who enjoy fishing from shore, including campers who may not have a boat.

Consideration should be given to pier design and mobility, as pushing ice will continue to damage any pier that is not removed from the water during Minnesota’s colder months.

It is noteworthy that several other docks can be found around the park, including within the lagoon near the campground.



The fishing pier in usable, though damaged, condition.

IMPROVE PLAYGROUND FACILITIES

High Value, High Cost

Located to the east of the park’s campground is a useable, though dated, playground facility. Rather than removing equipment or redesigning this play space, it may be better to instead check the playground equipment for structural soundness, make repairs as necessary, and focus more effort on the installation of a new, separate playground to compliment the swimming beach.



Piepenburg Regional Park playground.

Piepenburg Regional Park was the most used McLeod County park among survey respondents. Therefore, it would be justified to invest in a larger, more modern playground facility.

Soft landing material should be placed beneath all playground equipment to ensure safety.

The sandbox should be removed as sandboxes can become unsanitary.

UPGRADE POWER TO 50-AMP SERVICE FOR ALL RV SITES

Moderate Value, High Cost

When the Piepenburg Regional Park campground was initially developed, recreational vehicles (RVs) were smaller and required less power. Modern RVs are often larger and require more power to operate air conditioning units and other modern conveniences.

To better accommodate these modern RVs, electrical hookups should be upgraded to 50-amp service throughout the portion of the campground primarily used by RVs.

INCREASE PARKING PAD SIZE FOR RV SITES

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Modern RVs are often larger, with greater length and the incorporation of multiple slide-out spaces. To better accommodate these larger units, it will be necessary to create larger surfaces on which campers can park and more easily level their units.

ADD ONE TO THREE CAMPING CABINS

High Value, High Cost



The addition of camping cabins would make Piepenburg Regional Park a more attractive lodging destination for motorcyclists and others who like to camp but do not wish to tent and do not have their own RV. While each camping cabin would require a significant expenditure, they would also provide a new revenue opportunity to offset upfront expenses.

Camping cabins frequently found in Minnesota State Parks typically rent for \$80-\$90 per night. These one-room cabins are about 12 by 16 feet and contain a table, benches, and wooden bunkbeds with mattresses. Most cabins have a small, screened porch with a heat source and electricity (simple light fixtures and outlets). Typically, no cooking is allowed within a camping cabin, though exceptions have been made in some parks for crockpots and coffee pots. Camping cabins do not have indoor plumbing and instead share other campground restroom and shower facilities. McLeod County could explore partnering with local school districts' technical education programs for the construction of the camping cabins.



Examples of a camping cabin typical of what can be found in many Minnesota parks (left).

Alternative camping options could also be considered, including the addition of a yurt, a historically appropriate tipi/teepee, or frontier-style tent.

ADD WI-FI SERVICE TO CAMPGROUND AREA

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

To ensure this park's camping facilities remain attractive to modern campers, many of whom balance work with leisure on a daily basis, it will be necessary to add Wi-Fi service to the campground area.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Piepenburg Regional Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

ADD AN ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) CHARGING STATION

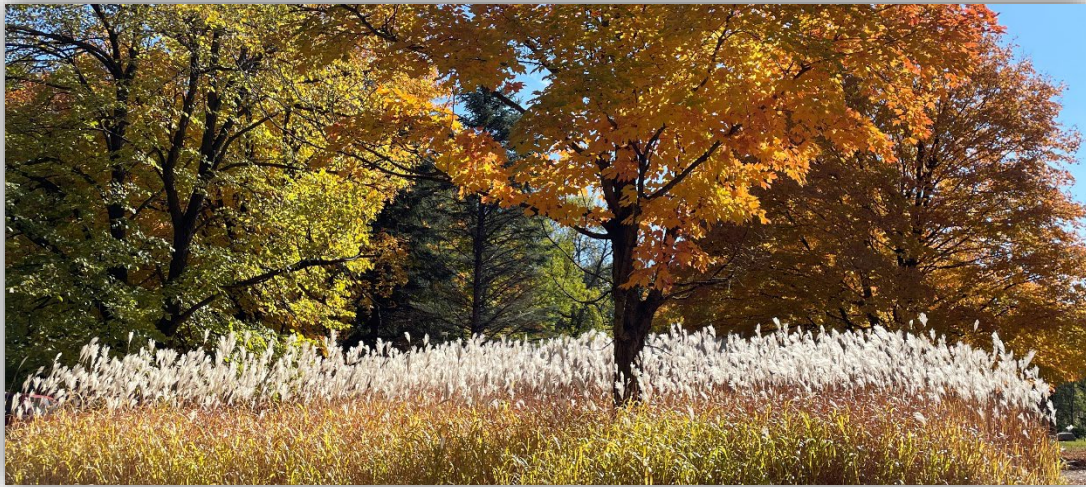
Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

As EV technology improves and many American families, including campers and other parkgoers, gradually switch to electric cars, trucks, and even recreational vehicles, it will be wise for communities to incorporate charging technology to accommodate them.

While this may not yet be an urgent need within McLeod County's parks system, the County should keep abreast of potential funding opportunities that might provide funding for such installations.

Adoption of EV technology could give McLeod County parks – at least the larger Lake Marion and Piepenburg Regional Parks – a competitive edge over otherwise similar parks in other areas

STAHL'S LAKE COUNTY PARK



Stahl's Lake Park wooded area.

Area

127 acres

Terrain

Expansive open areas on the park's north and west sides, with densely wooded areas to the south and east. The picnic shelter area and mountain bike trailhead sit atop a hill. Stahl's Lake can be found at the park's northeastern edge while French Lake can be found further south. Both lakes are connected by a navigable channel.

Nearest Cities

- Cedar Mills, MN (approx. 5.5 miles west to city center)
- Hutchinson, MN (approx. 6.5 miles south to city center)
- Darwin, MN (approx. 12 miles north to city center)

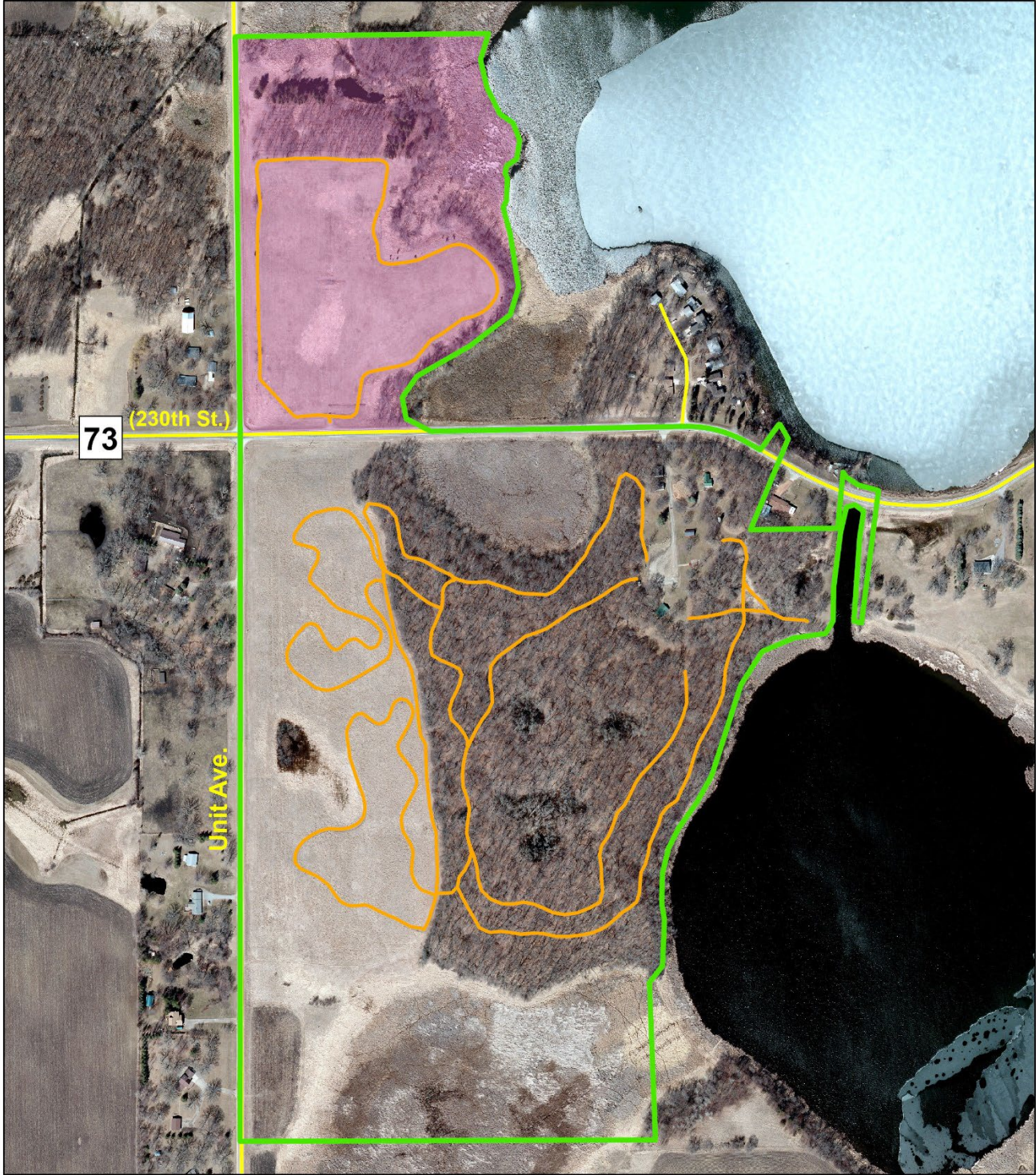
Park Amenities

Picnic shelter, walking trails, cross-country ski trails, mountain bike trails, fishing areas, vault-style restroom, playground, vast natural areas

Primary Uses

Park users identified the hiking, cross-country skiing and mountain biking trails as the things they enjoy most about this park. They also like the access to nature in the wooded and prairie areas of Stahl's Lake, as well as fish opportunities on the channel.

Stahl's Lake County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads
- Unused Park Parcel



Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: July 24th, 2023

Map 5: Stahl's Lake County Park.

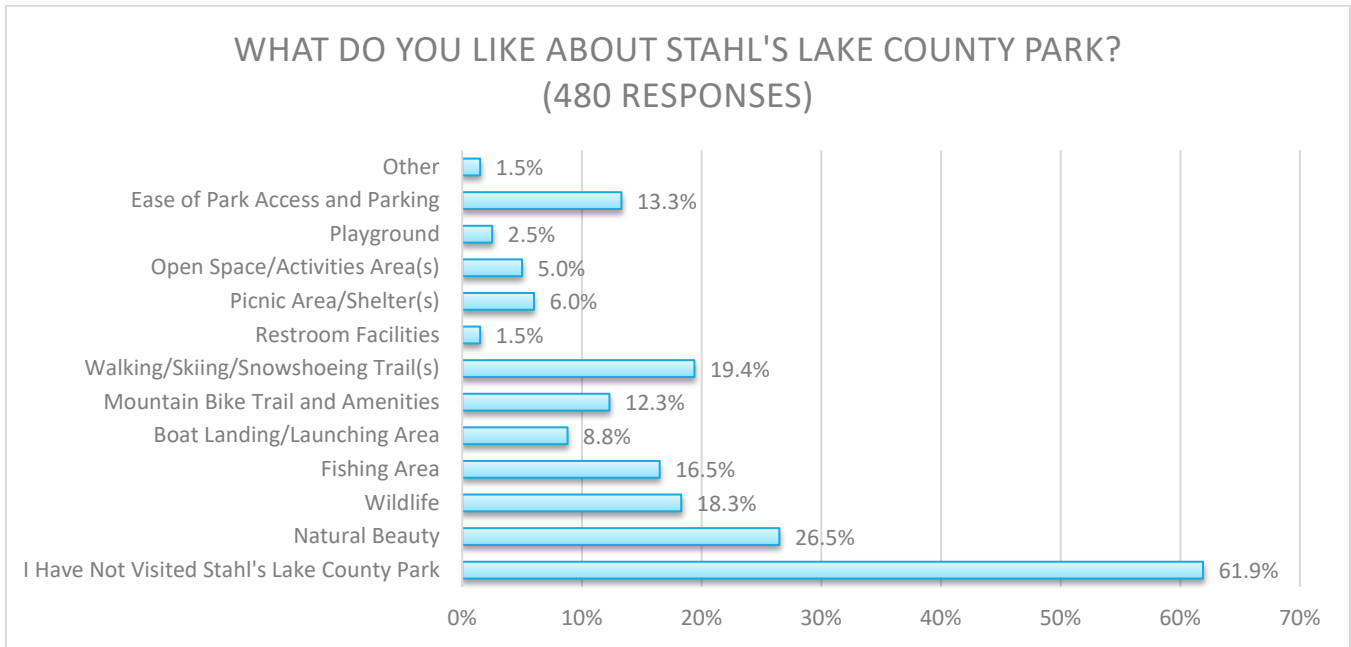


Figure 5: Excerpt from online survey results showing responses to Question 8, "What do you like about Stahl's Lake County Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following potential improvements to Stahl's Lake County Park were identified after a review of public survey responses and as the result of a McLeod County parks tour, which was taken in June 2022 by McLeod County Parks Planning Task Force members along with staff from McLeod County and MMDC.

Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on Stahl's Lake County Park's assets, including its varied terrain, mountain biking and cross-country skiing opportunities, and abundant lakeshore.

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Low Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available.

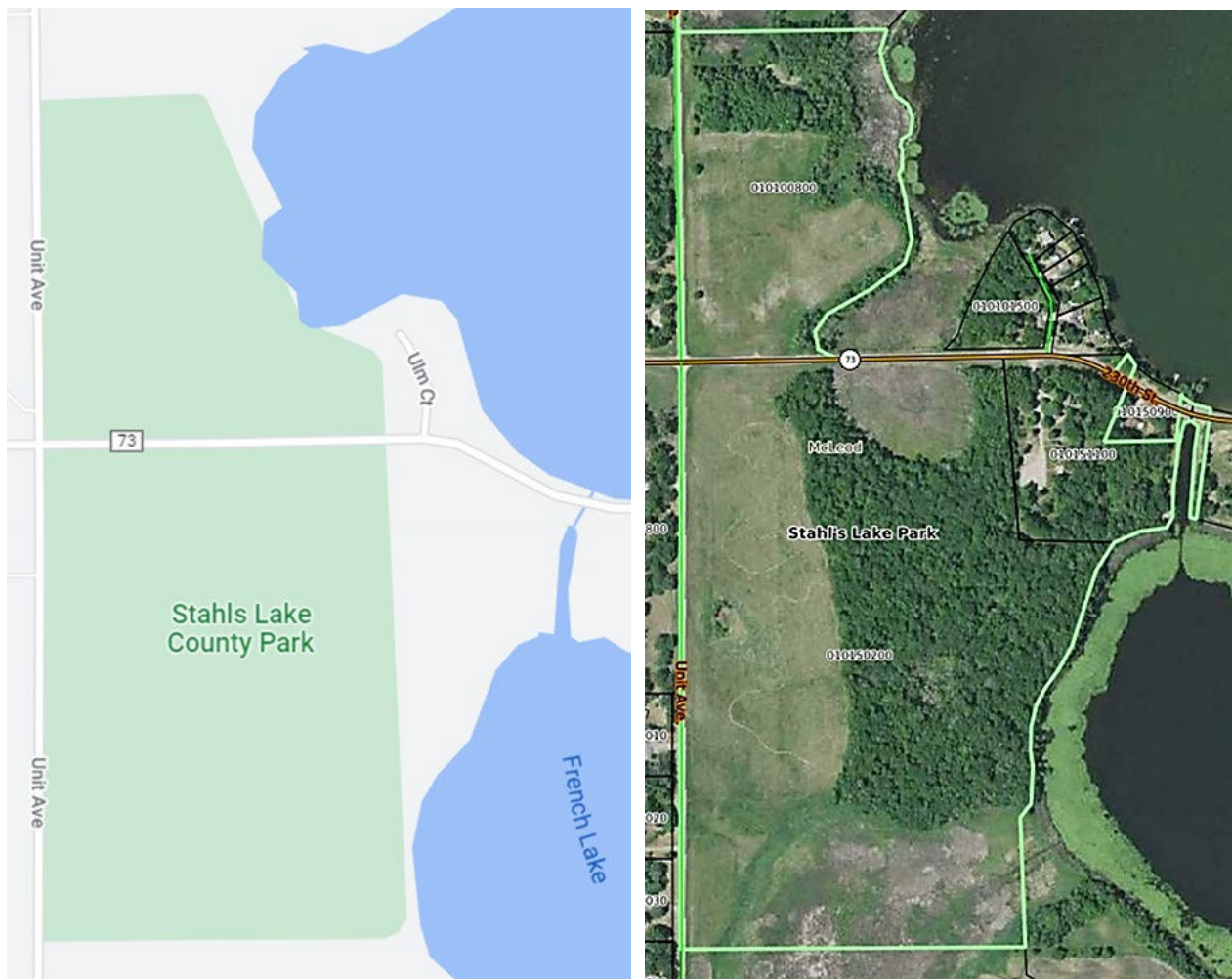
This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park's annual expense.

ADDRESS MAPPING ERRORS WITH ALPHABET INC.

Moderate Value, Low Cost

At present, when a person seeks to learn more about the location and boundaries of Stahl's Lake County Park using Google Maps (owned by Alphabet Inc.), they receive inaccurate information. Much of the park is not represented using this tool, giving potential visitors the impression that it has less space and fewer amenities to offer visitors.

Map 6: Stahl's Lake County Park as depicted by Google Maps (left) versus actual park borders (right).



There is also some ambiguity regarding the proper spelling of Stahl's Lake County Park. Currently the most common spelling in County literature is the one given in this plan. However, maps and other resources also spell it "Stahl Lake," "Stahls Lake," and even "Stahlis Lake."

County staff should research the proper spelling of Stahl's Lake Park and then work to make that spelling consistent online and in other relevant places. County staff should also work with Alphabet Inc. to learn what documentation the corporation requires to resolve inaccuracies online.

IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ALONG MCLEOD COUNTY HIGHWAY 73/230TH STREET

High Value, High Cost

McLeod County Highway 73 (also known as 230th Street) runs east and west through the northern portion of Stahl's Lake County Park. The posted speed limit along this highway is 55 miles per hour and the road shoulder is quite narrow. Those who fish from shore often park alongside the narrow county roadway, which creates hazards for those wishing to walk from one end of the park to the other.

Ideally, an off-highway trail would protect pedestrian safety, though limited space would make this difficult, if not impossible. County staff should explore applicable traffic-calming mechanisms that would enhance pedestrian safety in this area.



Aerial image of McLeod County Highway 73/230th Street, which is a safety risk for pedestrians within Stahl's Lake County Park.

REPAIR BROKEN FISHING DOCK

Moderate Value, Low Cost

At present, there is an unused dock kept onshore near the channel and French Lake area of Stahl's Lake Park. This dock is currently in disrepair. If possible, this dock should be repaired and used within the park. A good location for

the installation of this dock could be the area where the channel connects with French Lake. If this dock cannot be repaired, it should be disposed of and the County should consider a replacement.

REPLACE BARBECUE GRILLS

Moderate Value, Low Cost



Due to natural weathering and years of use, some of this park's grilling stations may have outlived their usefulness.

There are currently multiple grills near the picnic shelter; one quality grilling station will likely be sufficient to serve this area. Grills in poor condition should be removed and, if none of the grills is in good condition, one should be replaced.

A small bonfire area with a grilling grate could also be considered at the site of a removed grill. It will be necessary to ensure that sufficient distance is kept between any grill or bonfire ring and park buildings, and also to ensure sufficient water is available for dousing flames/coals after use.

The park's channel area does include a small picnic area with a newer table and grill. However, this grill is also in deteriorating condition and should be replaced.

Grilling stations at Stahl's Lake County Park picnic area (bottom) and channel area (top).

REPLACE RESTROOM

High Value, High Cost

The vault-style restroom facility at Stahl's Lake County Park's picnic area should be replaced. It is outdated and does not meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

A new, more comfortable and more accessible restroom facility will accommodate people who wish to visit the park for longer periods, including families and community groups. A baby changing station should also be added to increase usability.



Example of a modern and accessible vault-style facility provided as a reference.

A portable restroom unit could be considered in lieu of a permanent structure to maximize economy.



Stahl's Lake County Park restroom facility near the picnic area.

ELEVATE PARK VISIBILITY THROUGH IMPROVED SIGNAGE

High Value, Low Cost

Among 499 survey respondents, Stahl's Lake is McLeod County's third-most commonly visited park (35.5% of survey respondents indicated they had visited the park within the previous three years). However, the park is likely less known among visitors from outside of McLeod County.

The incorporation of larger, improved signage, especially near the intersection of McLeod County Highway 12/Tagus Avenue and McLeod County Highway 73/230th Street would increase park visibility. Visibility would also be elevated with the incorporation of additional signage along U.S. Highway 12 and Minnesota State Highway 7.

There may be opportunity to feature both Piepenburg Regional Park and Stahl's Lake County Park together in these locations. It will be necessary to ensure consistency when adding signage for this park.

UPGRADE PLAYGROUND AND REMOVE NEARBY SILO HAZARD

High Value, High Cost

The playground consists of a set of swings, a small out-of-level merry-go-round/spinner, a balance beam, and spring rider. A sandbox and a second spring-rider can be found on the opposite side of the shelter.

To improve this park for families, including families with children not yet ready to use the park's mountain bike amenities, the addition of a playset to allow for climbing, sliding, etc. is recommended. The spring rider toy can be relocated or removed, and a small sporting amenity such as tetherball or foursquare could be added. Soft landing material should be placed beneath all playground equipment to ensure safety.

The sandbox should be removed, as sandboxes can become unsanitary.

Of greater concern is the existence of an open silo found adjacent to the playground on a former farm space. This is a risk to anyone who may wish to climb or explore the silo and a liability for the County.



Playground equipment and sandbox at Stahl's Lake County Park.

INSTALL ADDITIONAL BENCHES ALONG FISHING AREAS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Stahl's Lake County Park is a popular shore fishing location. There is currently seating along the shore to accommodate those who fish, however, some of these benches are out of level and/or in need of basic maintenance.



Benches found at the channel's east side.

Additional seating, especially along the park channel's west side, is advised.

While landscaping boulders found within the park could be repurposed in this area, benches would be more comfortable. This would also provide opportunity for park frequenters to support the park via financial donations. Some may be interested in donating funds toward a bench, possibly in memoriam or to commemorate special occasions or enjoyable times had at the park.

Consideration for grounds maintenance around any new benches should be considered at the time of installation; it may be advisable to place them on concrete pads or another surface material to ease mowing.

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Low Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of this park by pursuing the ongoing maintenance of the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species. The continued maintenance would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects.

The incorporation of educational signage could also increase the educational value of this park, which would better lend itself to local field trips, etc. When performing maintenance on native plants, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Stahl's Lake County Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.

A wish list of projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

IMPROVE PARK MARKETING AND ADD PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost

Stahl's Lake County Park would benefit from intentional efforts to bring awareness to the park and park activities. This could be accomplished by holding promotable events within the park.

Events centered around mountain biking, cross-country skiing or fishing are recommended, given the park's current features. However, the park could also provide space for nature- or history-focused presentations, bonfires, or low-key/casual acoustic music events.



Image depicting marshmallow-centered programming for illustrative purposes.

Park project days, especially those that include a simple meal or other "victory celebration," could be used to engage local individuals interested in preserving and improving the park for future generations. These events may provide people with an opportunity to visit the park for the first time or otherwise refamiliarize themselves with this quality leisure location. They may leave the events with interest in returning for other, less organized park use.

IMPROVE PARK TRAIL CONDITION AND SIGNAGE

High Value, Low Cost

Stahl's Lake County Park is unique in that it is the only McLeod County Park to feature a single-track mountain bike trail, which, conditions permitting, is used on a year-round basis. The park also features a bike repair/adjustment station and a bike rack. These amenities are, in part, available due to the work of local mountain biking enthusiasts, many of whom have volunteered significant time and resources.

To improve and maintain trail conditions for mountain bikers, it is necessary to support the continued work of these volunteers and consult with them on needed trail features.

It would also be wise to add signage that diverts walkers, snowshoers, or cross-country skiers around any trail features intended for mountain bikers only, as well as signage that more clearly defines the parameters of mountain bike spaces. This will ensure that enthusiasts of different trail activities can peacefully coexist.

As this amenity is unique, not only to McLeod County but to the surrounding region, the continued development of this feature is recommended. It could serve to draw out-of-town visitors who might also visit area shops and restaurants.



Stahl's Lake County Park trailhead (left), bike repair/adjustment station (center) and bike rack (right).

Additional trail improvements could include wayfinding signage/blazes and/or other signage, educating on the area's local flora, fauna, and/or history. The installation of one or more outdoor sculptures along the trails may entice more destination-focused visitors to enjoy them, as could a geocaching opportunity. Gravel, aglime or other material could be used to reduce mud in any low-lying areas, improving the park's usability in early spring and after larger rain events.

IMPROVE PICNIC SHELTER

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost



Stahl's Lake County Park picnic shelter with gravel pathway visible.

The picnic shelter is in relatively good structural condition. There is also a gravel driveway/pathway between the structure and the main parking area.

Improvement could be made by adding plywood sheeting or another covering to the ceiling and by updating lighting and electrical outlets. This will eliminate nesting areas for birds and other animals and insects, while also making the space more attractive for family reunions and other gatherings.

To improve accessibility, the gravel pathway should be kept clear of obstructions to improve access to the shelter. One or two parking spaces reserved for people with disabilities could be placed near this pathway in the parking area.

ADD DISPERSED CAMPING AND/OR A GROUP CAMPSITE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Camping is not currently a feature of Stahl's Lake County Park. Adding a full campground to accommodate recreational vehicle and car camping would likely detract from the inherent natural beauty of this park while significantly increasing the need for park maintenance. However, this park's terrain and space would lend itself to the incorporation of one or two dispersed campsites (walk-in and/or bike-in) to accommodate those who prefer a quieter, more basic and natural camping experience.

This new feature could be seen as a nice compliment to the mountain bike trails and shore-fishing areas. Creation of dispersed campsites could be kept simple, possibly incorporating a fire ring, tent space, and picnic table(s) only.

One recommended location for dispersed camping is directly along the west side of the channel that connects Stahl's and French Lakes, or slightly further to the west in a small clearing within the wooded area. It is possible



Satellite image showing potential areas for dispersed camping along the channel and within the small clearing at the center-left of the frame.

that modest camping fees could be used to help offset the expense of the dispersed campsite installation.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Buffalo Creek County Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

REPURPOSE BOULDERS

Low Value, Low Cost

While relatively few in number, several boulders were previously placed at the entrance of the Stahl's Lake County Park picnic area. As these boulders are difficult to mow around and contribute little in their current location, it is suggested that they may better be used in other locations, possibly as seats for those who like to fish along the park's shorelines. The County should make every effort to be strategic in their relocation, so as to avoid new mowing challenges.

INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

SWAN LAKE COUNTY PARK



Swan Lake Park wetland and wooded area.

Area

82.5 acres

Terrain

The park includes large open areas dotted with trees and vegetation, bordered by more densely wooded areas to the west and north. Swan Lake can be found at the southern border of the park.

Nearest Cities

- Silver Lake, MN (approx. 3 miles southeast to city center)
- Hutchinson, MN (approx. 8.5 miles west to city center)

Park Amenities

Picnic shelter, walking trails, fishing piers, boat access, playground, open space for activities, vault-style toilets.

Primary Uses

Access to Swan Lake and shore fishing opportunities were identified by park users as what they enjoy most about this park. They also enjoy the opportunities to connect with nature in the park's wooded, prairie and open spaces.

Swan Lake County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads



Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: July 24th, 2023

Map 7: Swan Lake County Park

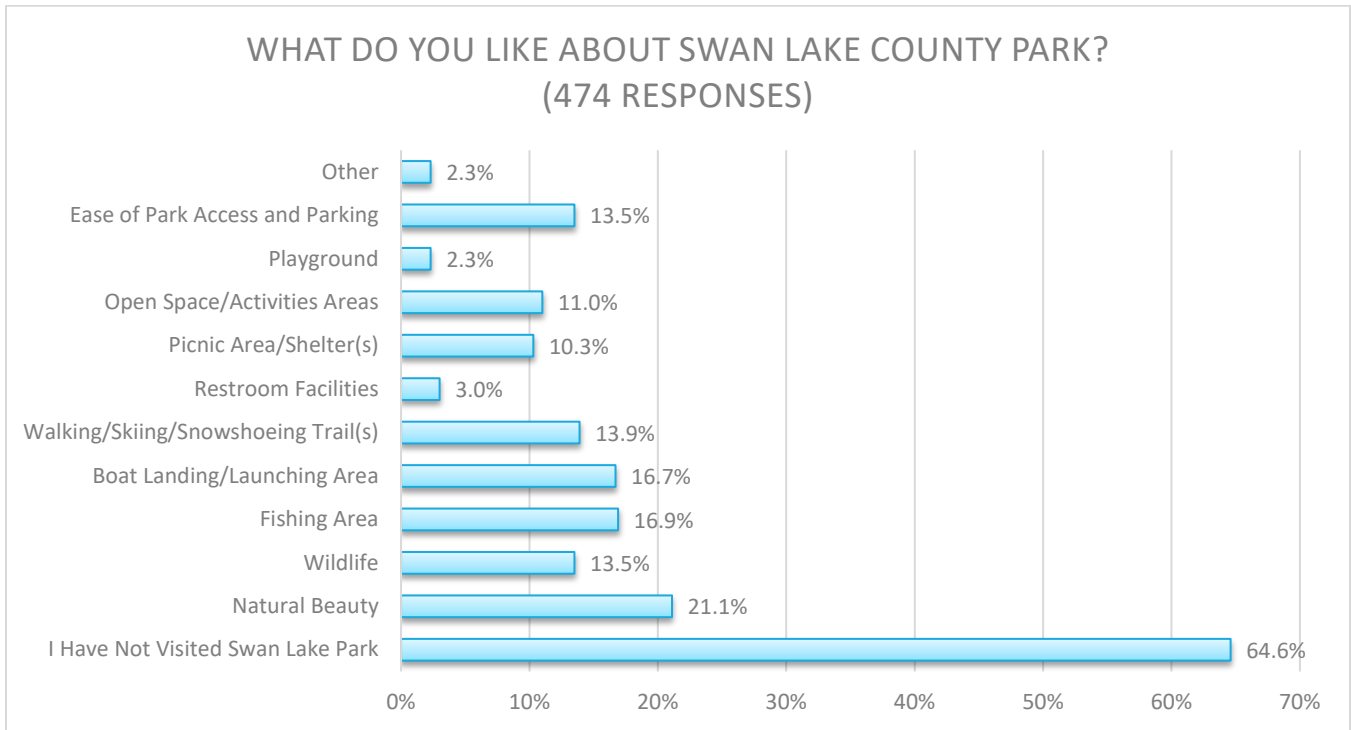


Figure 6: Excerpt from online survey results showing responses to Question 9, "What do you like about Swan Lake County Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following potential improvements to Swan Lake County Park were identified after a review of public survey responses and as the result of a McLeod County parks tour, which was taken in June 2022 by McLeod County Parks Planning Task Force members along with staff from McLeod County and MMDC.

Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on Swan Lake County Park's assets, including its abundant space, convenient access to Swan Lake, and proximity to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area.

REPLACE RESTROOM

High Value, High Cost

The vault-style restroom facility found at Swan Lake County Park picnic area should be replaced. It is outdated and does not meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

A more comfortable and more accessible restroom facility will accommodate people who wish to visit the park for longer periods, including families and community groups. A portable restroom unit could be considered in lieu of a permanent structure to maximize economy. A baby changing station should also be added to increase usability.

A second, portable restroom facility could be placed in the boat launch/landing and fishing pier area, to provide convenient access to those fishing or picnicking in that space.



Swan Lake County Park restroom facility.

ELEVATE PARK VISIBILITY THROUGH IMPROVED SIGNAGE

High Value, Low Cost

Among 499 survey respondents, only 31.1% indicated they had visited Swan Lake County Park within the previous three years, making it the third-least visited McLeod County park. While fairly close to Minnesota State Highway 7, the park does not enjoy highway visibility and signage is currently limited.

To improve park visibility, McLeod County should incorporate larger, more prominent signage along Minnesota State Highway 7, near 200th Street, including larger on-road signage as well as a billboard-style sign. Additional signage, smaller in scale, could be placed along the Luce Line Trail, which accommodates bikers and snowmobilers to the south, just across Swan Lake.

REPLACE BARBECUE GRILLS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Due to natural weathering and years of use, some of this park's barbecue grilling stations have outlived their usefulness.

As grilling stations remain an appealing amenity to some park users, it is recommended that at least one elevated grilling station be maintained in good working order. However, beyond maintaining one grilling station, those grills

that are no longer in working order should be removed. The addition of a small bonfire area with a grilling grate could be considered.

It will be necessary to ensure that sufficient distance is kept between any grill or bonfire ring and park buildings and to ensure that sufficient water is available for dousing flames/coals after use.

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Moderate Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available.

This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park's annual expense.

IMPROVE TRAIL AMENITIES AND SIGNAGE

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Swan Lake County Park includes a fairly extensive trail that works its way through the western and northern expanses of the park. To improve trail quality for hikers, snowshoers, and cross-country skiers, wayfinding signs/blazes should be evaluated and added, as appropriate. Additional signage educating on local species or historical events could also be added, as could outdoor art/sculpture installations. These features may provide interest and goals for more destination-focused hikers.

Benches could also be strategically added along the Swan Lake County Park's trails to provide opportunities for rest or quiet reflection. Creating opportunities for the broader community to make financial contributions to support these art and bench installations will maximize economy for the County.



Example of outdoor wildlife sculpture.

Gravel, aglime or other material could be used to reduce mud in any low-lying areas, improving the park's usability in early spring and after larger rain events.

IMPROVE MARKETING AND ADD PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost

Swan Lake County Park would benefit from intentional efforts to bring awareness to the park and park activities. This could be accomplished by holding promotable events within the park.

Events centered around fishing (angling or ice fishing) may be advisable, as the lake is known to be a quality fishing location. However, this park would afford itself to a wide variety of educational, sporting, and other entertaining activities.

Park project days, especially those that include a simple meal or other “victory celebration,” could be used to engage local individuals interested in preserving and improving the park for future generations.



Example of a "Park Project Day," provided as an illustration.

Organized events provide opportunity for gathering and would provide people a reason to visit Swan Lake County Park for the first time or to refamiliarize themselves with this quality leisure location.



Ice fishing contest in Lake City, MN.

Park marketing could further be improved using social media platforms and tools (e.g. McLeod County Parks Facebook or Instagram pages), which could be managed by McLeod County staff or vetted volunteers. This social media will drive online visitors to the County’s website, which already provides a wealth of McLeod County park information.

ENSURE UPKEEP OF BOAT LAUNCH/LANDING

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost

Swan Lake Park has a quality boat launch/landing facility that includes a generous parking area. As Swan Lake is known for quality fishing, it will be important to maintain this water access point.

The usability of the Swan Lake County Park boat launch should be regularly checked throughout the course of the boating season. Any significant maintenance or rehabilitation of the facility should be done in collaboration



Swan Lake boat launch/landing.

with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and/or any local lake association.

Signage discouraging “power loading” will remind boaters of the importance of maintaining an even loading and unloading surface beneath the water.

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Low Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of Swan Lake County Park by increasing the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species, particularly in the open areas throughout the northern half of the park.

This restoration would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects. The incorporation of educational signage or literature could also increase the educational value of this park for local field trips, etc. When restoring native plant species, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Swan Lake County Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.

A wish list of projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

ADD DISPERSED CAMPING

Moderate Value, Low Cost

Camping is not currently a feature of Swan Lake County Park. While adding a full campground to accommodate recreational vehicles and car camping could be possible, this would likely be a major, long-term project.

This park’s terrain and abundant space would lend itself to the incorporation of a number of dispersed, walk-in campsites, accommodating those who prefer a quieter, more basic and natural camping experience. Creation of dispersed campsites could be kept simple, possibly incorporating a fire ring, tent space, and one to two logs or

boulders for sitting. Tables could also be provided, though this is something to which most dispersed campers aren't necessarily accustomed. Dispersed campsites could be scattered throughout the northern and western areas of the park, along or near the park trails.

It is possible that modest camping fees could be used to help offset the expense of the dispersed campsite installation. It's also possible that the existence of this new camping opportunity will draw visitors to McLeod County from the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area or other parts of the state. These new sites may also relieve pressure on both Lake Marion and Piepenburg Regional Park campgrounds.

UPGRADE PLAYGROUND

High Value, High Cost

The playground consists of a set of swings and a spring rider with a nearby sandbox. A larger, more modern playground would improve this park for families and make it more attractive for reunions and other community or social gatherings.



Swan Lake County Park playground.

The swings and spring rider should be evaluated for structural soundness. If no unreparable flaws are found that would compromise safe use, they should be kept.

A playset should then be added to allow for climbing, sliding, etc. This set should be fairly large and able to accommodate numerous children, ages 2-12. Soft material should be placed beneath all playground equipment to ensure safety.

Convenient benches or tables should be placed to improve comfort for supervising adults.

The sandbox should be removed, as sandboxes can become unsanitary.

IMPROVE SPORTING AMENITIES

Moderate Value, Low Cost

At the eastern edge of Swan Lake County Park, just north of Swan Lake Road, is an expansive mowed activities area, conducive to large-field activities. The area currently includes an aging backstop that should be removed. McLeod County should work to improve the versatility of this space by adding amenities such as tetherball, soccer goals

and/or a simple ball diamond appropriate for whiffle ball, kickball, or softball.

As an alternative, this space could be repurposed entirely to support the development of a new campground. If this should occur, other areas of the park have ample space for more casual games.

Additionally, Swan Lake County Park could be an ideal site for the installation of a 9- or 18-hole disc golf course. While this sport is growing in popularity, the number of courses available for play is still fairly limited in this region. The desire for disc golf received considerable mention within the collected McLeod County Parks Survey responses and it is believed a local disc golf club would be interested in assisting with course development. Care should be taken to incorporate baskets in such a way as to avoid creating additional mowing obstructions. The ideal location for a disc golf course would be within the northern half of the park, beyond the picnic and activities area and commingled with any added dispersed campsites.



Swan Lake County Park's large activities area, as viewed from the picnic shelter.



Disc golf can be enjoyed in open spaces or in more wooded spaces, as depicted above.

IMPROVE PEDESTRIAN SAFETY ALONG SWAN LAKE ROAD

High Value, High Cost

Swan Lake Road runs east and west through the southern portion of Swan Lake County Park, separating the lake area from the rest of this park. While the posted speed limit has already been reduced to 30 miles per hour, the road is relatively narrow and curvy, creating some risk to pedestrian safety, particularly when crossing the road to travel between the lakeside and picnic shelter/activities areas.

To improve pedestrian safety, McLeod County can extend the pathway from the fishing pier area to the area directly across from the picnic area roadway, as this location will put those crossing the road in a position of higher visibility. Eastbound drivers will have more time to see those who are crossing as they complete the nearest curve to the west. The addition of pedestrian crossing signage (ideally flashing) and striping will serve to further define the crosswalk area, both for walkers and drivers.



Satellite image of roadway between Swan Lake County Park's lakeside and the larger northern portion of the park.

REMOVE OR REPURPOSE BOULDERS

High Value, Low Cost

During the development of Swan Lake County Park, hundreds of large boulders were used to define the various park areas and, presumably, keep traffic from entering park areas not intended for vehicular traffic.



Boulders currently dominate the landscape throughout Swan Lake County Park's most frequented areas, as shown above.

Long lines of boulders surrounded with dead vegetation, the result of herbicide used to keep grass at bay and ease mowing, now distract from the otherwise beautiful park.

While well-intended, these boulders are now seen by many as unsightly blemishes on the park landscape. While it may be sensible to strategically use a few boulders to protect areas that might otherwise be unintentionally damaged by traffic, or to incorporate them into more thoughtful landscaping, most should be removed.

As they do have value, for those who might use them for retaining walls or other landscaping, the possibility of selling these boulders should be explored, with proceeds put toward other park improvements.

IMPROVE PICNIC SHELTER

Moderate Value, High Cost

While the building is due for a new roof in the relative near future, the Swan Lake County Park picnic shelter remains in relatively good structural condition.

To improve this facility, the County should add a steel roof, as has been its recent practice and consistent with those found in other McLeod County parks.

An additional improvement would be to further enclose a portion of the shelter, possibly at the building's northwestern corner, to provide a barrier from the wind. This could make the space more conducive to family reunions and other events where meals are served. Given its large size and view of Swan Lake, this picnic shelter has real potential as a space for large gatherings as well as for entertainment and other programming.

Alongside Swan Lake, this park also includes two shaded picnic tables, equipped with grilling stations. Both of these tables and grills should be maintained to accommodate smaller family outings and provide space for those interested in a quieter picnic experience.



Swan Lake County Park picnic table/grilling station (left) and picnic shelter (right).

ADD CAMPING OPPORTUNITY FOR RECREATIONAL VEHICLES AND/OR CAR CAMPERS

High Value, High Cost

As mentioned elsewhere, Swan Lake County Park currently offers no camping amenities. While the addition of dispersed sites would be a relatively inexpensive initial step toward expanding camping within the McLeod County Parks System, a more resource- and time-intensive project would be the development of a new campground with drive-in RV and/or tent sites. This campground would likely be somewhat smaller than those found at Lake Marion and Piepenburg Regional Parks, though this park is also fairly large and there would be sufficient space for a reasonably-sized campground addition without undue crowding of other park amenities.

The activities field, or a portion of that space, could be repurposed, as could a portion of the little-used area directly north of the tree line that divides the athletic area from more remote park areas. Many steps would be involved with this park redevelopment, including the building of a campground roadway/parking pads, the construction of a restroom and shower facility, along with water and sewer infrastructure, and the addition of other campground amenities (e.g., tables and fire rings, Wi-Fi Service, Warning Siren). Camping cabins, as described elsewhere in this plan, could also be considered.



Potential area to locate camping for RVs and/or car campers.

While an ambitious and expensive undertaking, this redevelopment would give Swan Lake County Park a more regional draw, which would support economic development within McLeod County. However, great care should be taken to avoid reducing the natural appeal of this park. Crowding should be avoided and additional roadway traffic should be considered.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Buffalo Creek County Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

WILLIAM MAY COUNTY PARK



William May Park wooded and open area.

Area

71.5 acres

Terrain

The vast majority of this park is heavily wooded and somewhat hilly.

Nearest Cities

- Winsted, MN (approx. 2 miles west to city center)
- Lester Prairie, MN (approx. 6 miles south to city center)

Park Amenities

William May Monument, picnic shelter, walking trails, natural wooded area, vault-style toilets.

Primary Uses

Park users identified access to nature via trails for hiking and cross-country skiing as the thing they enjoyed most about this park. The park monument and history were also identified as a favorite part of this park.

William May County Park



Legend

- Park Boundary
- Park Trails
- Roads

Prepared by McLeod County Geographic Information Systems: July 24th, 2023



Map 8: William May County Park

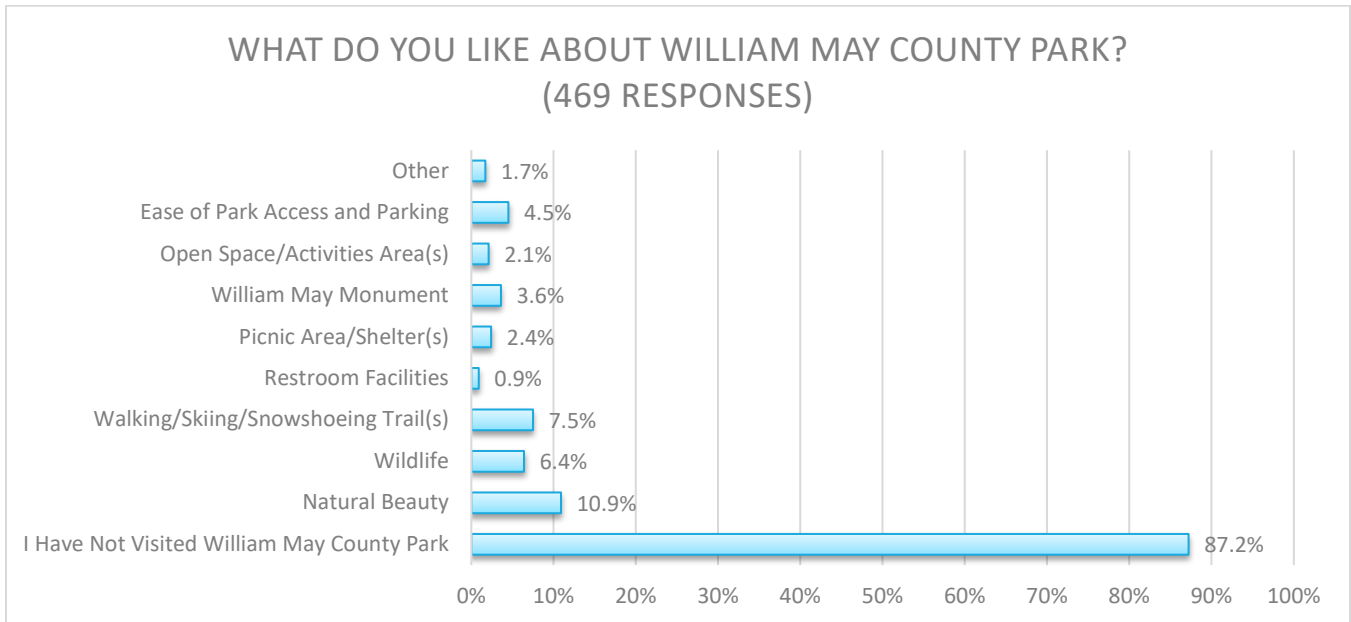


Figure 7: Excerpt from online survey results showing responses to Question 10, "What do you like about William May County Park?". Respondents were asked to select all that apply.

IDENTIFIED IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The following potential improvements to William May County Park were identified after a review of public survey responses and as the result of a McLeod County parks tour, which was taken in June 2022 by McLeod County Parks Planning Task Force members along with staff from McLeod County and MMDC.

Each improvement listed will bring value to the park. It will also come with a cost of dollars and/or time. For each suggested improvement, a general indication of perceived value versus perceived cost has been provided. It is important to note that this value/cost indicator is specific only to the park in which the improvement was suggested. Different parks may have different anticipated costs for similar projects based on park conditions. For instance, while the anticipated cost of a trail improvement project may be low in a smaller park, this cost may be significantly higher in a larger park with a more expansive trail system. It is also important to understand that value and cost are relative terms. While, in one park, the value of a specific project may be quite high as compared to the costs involved, the value of that project may be less in another park where anticipated project costs are higher or where fewer park visitors may benefit.

All suggestions for improvement have been made in an effort to capitalize on William May County Park's assets, especially its quiet nature, proximity to the community of Winsted, and forest spaces.

REPLACE RESTROOM

High Value, High Cost

The vault-style restroom facility found at the William May County Park picnic area should be replaced. It is outdated and does not meet the accessibility requirements of the Americans With Disabilities Act.

A new, more comfortable, more accessible restroom facility will accommodate people who wish to visit the park for longer periods, including family and community groups. A portable restroom unit could be considered in lieu of a permanent structure to maximize economy. A baby changing station may also be added to increase usability.



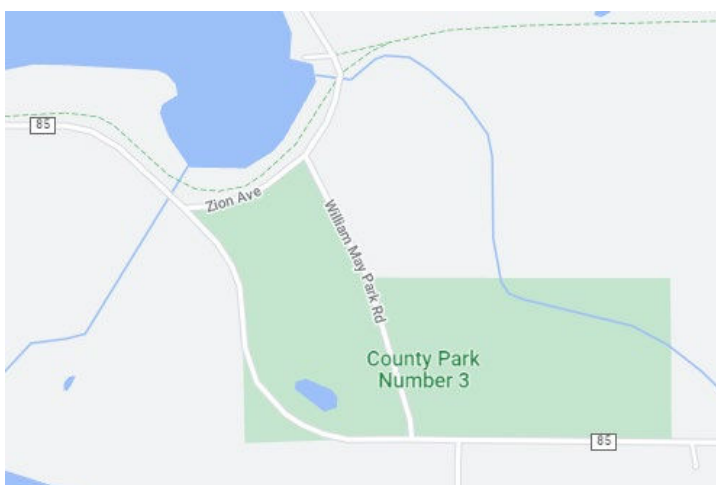
William May County Park restroom facility.

ELEVATE PARK VISIBILITY THROUGH IMPROVED SIGNAGE AND MORE

High Value, Low Cost

William May County Park is McLeod County's least-used park. Among 499 survey respondents, only 10.4% indicated they had visited the park within the previous three years. While the park is less than 1.5 miles from McLeod County Highway 1, and less than a mile from the City of Winsted, the park is not highly visible and few McLeod County residents are even aware of its existence.

Signage informing motorists and others of the park's location is limited. To improve park visibility, signage should be added along McLeod County Highway 1/Babcock Avenue, near County Highway 9/Baker Avenue West. This could include larger, on-road signage as well as a billboard-style sign. Additional roadway signage could also be added to



William May County Park, as it currently appears on Google Maps. The Luce Line State Trail, indicated with a dotted green line, is also visible.

the east of the park, possibly at the McLeod/Carver line along McLeod County Highway 85, at Zebra Avenue. Additional signage, smaller in scale, could be placed along the Luce Line State Trail, which accommodates bikers and snowmobilers to the north of the park, on the opposite side of Zion Avenue.

Along with improved road and pathway signage, William May County Park struggles with online identity issues. Those unaware of the park's location will likely be unable to locate it using the popular Google Maps tool, provided by Alphabet Inc., as the

company currently has the park identified only as “County Park Number 3.” It will be necessary for County staff to connect with Google Maps/Alphabet Inc. to resolve this issue and ensure the park appears appropriately when using other common routing tools. A process for reidentifying the park for Google Maps is available.

REPLACE BARBECUE GRILLS

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As in other parks, due to natural weathering and years of use, William May County Park’s grilling stations are due for replacement. While some park visitors will appreciate quality grill amenities, it is not likely necessary to maintain more than one grilling station. One new grill should be sufficient for the park’s picnic shelter area.

The addition of a small bonfire area with a grilling grate could also be considered. Both the grill and any bonfire area should be kept far enough from park buildings and forested areas to reduce risk of fire. Sufficient access to water should also be maintained for the dousing flames/coals after use.



Former grilling station at William May County Park showing evidence of inappropriate bonfire use.

ADD TRASH RECEPTACLES AND ONE OR MORE DOG WASTE STATIONS

High Value, Low Cost

To reduce litter within the park, it is important to ensure that one or more trash bins are readily available. Suggested locations include the picnic shelter and where the hiking trail crosses William May Park Road.

This park is also a popular destination for dog walkers. However, dog waste has become an issue, especially along the walking trail. The addition of dog waste stations (bins and pet waste bags) will encourage responsible disposal of pet waste and improve park hygiene. The addition of these amenities will require ongoing trash collection by staff or a contracted service provider, which will add to the park’s annual expense.

IMPROVE PARK TRAIL AMENITIES AND SIGNAGE

High Value, Low Cost

William May County Park offers a wooded trail that extends to the park’s eastern areas. However, portions of this park have been reclaimed by nature. Some effort will be required to clear the trail in these areas.

Wayfinding signage (i.e. blazes) should be added to direct hikers, snowshoers, and cross-country skiers, as regular use will keep the trail in more usable condition. A permanent trail map, which was at one time carved from wood by a local resident, does provide an overview of the general trail layout. However, this map has been located in the peak of the park's picnic shelter and is largely out-of-view. If kept, this sign should be lowered to eye level. Additional signage, educating on local species or historical events, could also be added, as could outdoor art/sculpture installations. These features may provide interest and goals for more destination-focused hikers.



Example of a simple trail blaze, provided as illustration.

A few benches could also be strategically added along the trail to provide opportunities for rest or quiet reflection. Creating opportunities for the broader community to make financial contributions to support these art and bench installations will maximize economy for the County.

Gravel, aglime or other material should be used to reduce mud in any low-lying areas, improving the park's usability in early spring and after larger rain events.



Example of educational signage, provided as illustration.

IMPROVE PARK MARKETING AND ADD PROGRAMMING

High Value, Low Cost



Community marshmallow roast, provided as an illustration.

Along with improved signage and online corrections, the visibility of William May Park could be increased through the incorporation of programming. Promotable events could be within the park. It's important to remember that these events need not be grand in scale. A simple ice cream social or marshmallow/wiener roast may entice locals to visit the park and become reacquainted with its natural charms.

Events centered on education (e.g. nature walks, interpretive presentations) could also be offered, as could more social events (e.g. trivia nights, acoustic music).

Park project days, especially those that include a simple meal or other "victory celebration," could also be used to engage local individuals interested in preserving and improving the park for future generations.

INCREASE PARK MAINTENANCE

High Value, Moderate Cost

It is impossible for County staff to monitor all of Piepenburg Regional Park on a 24-hour basis, however there are opportunities to improve park safety and accomplish more in the way of park maintenance.

Reducing time spent on park mowing would allow additional time for other park maintenance. A larger opportunity may be to increase volunteerism within the park. This could be through the organization of park project days or through the more informal incorporation of volunteers willing to visit the park on a regular basis and report inappropriate park use or maintenance issues.



Example of a park project day, provided as an illustration.

A wish list of projects could be created to be taken on by local volunteers (e.g. Scouts, local civic organizations, horticulture clubs).

RESTORE NATIVE PLANT SPECIES

High Value, Moderate Cost

The County has opportunity to further enhance the natural beauty of this park by increasing the restoration of native grasses, flowers, and other plant species. This restoration would also support the environment by creating habitat for animals and pollinating insects.

This work could involve the strategic thinning of the park's tree canopy in some areas, particularly in the vicinity of the picnic shelter, to allow more sunlight to reach the ground.

The incorporation of educational signage could also increase the educational value of this park, which would better lend itself to local field trips, etc. When restoring native plants, invasive species should be eliminated to the extent possible.

ADD DISPERSED CAMPING

Moderate Value, Low Cost

William May County Park currently features no camping, and this natural area probably would not lend itself to full-scale campground development. However, given this park lies directly across the road from the Luce Line State Trail, and the park's proximity to the Twin Cities Metropolitan Area (less than 30 trail miles from Wayzata), this park has great potential to meet the needs of "bikepackers" interested in a shorter bikepacking trip. Such trips are often used to test gear, introduce new participants into bikepacking activities, etc.

Walk-in campers interested in a more basic, natural camping experience could also use these sites, which could consist of a simple fire ring, tent space, and informal log or boulder-style seating. While tables could also be provided, this is something that many dispersed campers would not expect.

Locating one to three primitive campsites along the hiking trail, between the picnic area and William May Park Road would provide relatively easy camper access to the park's restroom facility. It is possible that modest camping fees could be used to help offset the expense of the dispersed campsite installation.



Example of a simple dispersed camping site.

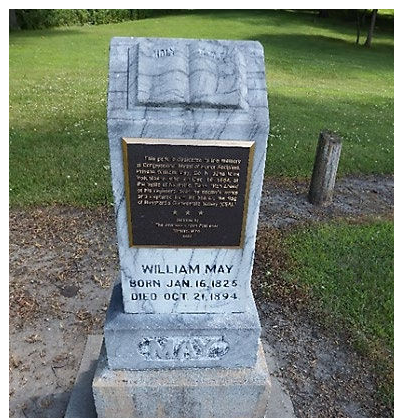
IMPROVE VISIBILITY OF WILLIAM MAY MONUMENT

Moderate Value, Moderate Cost



William May Monument.

A unique feature of this park is the onsite presence of William May Monument. This monument honors the park's namesake, a Civil War-era Congressional Medal of Honor recipient who once resided in Winsted.



Currently, the monument sits near the parking area and there is nothing that draws visitors' attention. As this monument is intended to honor a local resident, efforts should be made to enhance the surrounding area.

Some simple landscaping, possibly incorporating repurposed boulders and colorful perennials will greatly enhance this space.

IMPROVE SPORTING AMENITIES

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As William May County Park has limited space for large-scale sporting activities, the addition of smaller-scale sporting amenities would be advisable. This could include a simple tetherball installation or the installation of a challenging wooded disc golf course.

Disc golf received considerable mention from a number of those who responded to the McLeod County Parks Survey and it is believed a local disc golf club would be enthusiastic about this prospect. This group may be willing to provide its assistance with course design and installation. This course would be an especially nice asset for those residing in the neighboring Winsted community and surrounding area. It is believed such a course could be installed for less than \$500 per basket, plus staff labor.

In winter months, there may be some opportunity to use William May County Park for sledding. This activity might be especially attractive to families with younger children.

IMPROVE TRAIL CROSSING SAFETY AT WILLIAM MAY PARK ROAD

High Value, Low Cost

William May Park Road runs relatively north and south through this park, within the forested area. While this narrow road typically has little traffic, it does intersect with the parks hiking/skiing/snowshoeing trail. To improve trail visibility, simple trail crossing signage should be added.

ADD OFF-LEASH DOG AREA

Moderate Value, High Cost

Currently, only one official dog park exists within the borders of McLeod County (located in Hutchinson, MN). A simple off-leash area could draw residents from the communities of Winsted, Lester Prairie, Silver Lake, and beyond.

Such an installation would, at a minimum, require fencing with a height of no less than 5 feet, with a double entrance gate, shade, and convenient access to water. This area could be further enhanced with agility-related items (pet bridges, tunnels, etc.) benches for pet owners, and signage clearly indicating rules and expectations

INSTALL SMALL PLAYGROUND

High Value, High Cost

William May County Park does not have a playground. Adding a small playground will increase usability of the park, both for casual family visits and for family reunions and other organized gatherings.

This new playground need not be large, however a modestly-sized playset that includes opportunity for climbing and sliding and a set of swings would suit this park well. These items should be placed in easy view of the picnic shelter, to help ensure adequate adult supervision.

Pea gravel or other soft material should be provided. However, sand should be avoided to reduce bacteria and pathogens resulting from animal use.



Example of playground equipment.

REPURPOSE BOULDERS

Low Value, Low Cost

A number of boulders define the parking area and mark trail locations at William May County Park. The County should repurpose the boulders found in the parking area, perhaps strategically placing them in dispersed camping locations or along the trail to provide informal seating.

Boulders could also be used to create more attractive landscape features and/or retaining walls, as needed. Removing the boulders from the parking area will reduce mowing obstructions, resulting in less time spent on this activity.

Once the boulders are removed, the County can consider other ways to define the parking space using plantings or other means.



Boulders within William May County Park, currently used to define the main parking area.

IMPROVE PICNIC SHELTER, INCLUDING ACCESSIBILITY

Moderate Value, High Cost

The William May County Park picnic shelter remains in relatively good structural condition, but it will be due for a new roof in the near future. To improve this facility, the County should add a steel roof, as has been the recent practice and consistent with structures found in other McLeod County parks.

Additionally, adding sheeting to the ceiling space would prevent birds and other animals and insects from nesting in that space and increase user comfort. Upgrades to lighting and electrical items could also be made at that time, to improve the space for large gatherings.



William May County Park picnic shelter.

INSTALL OUTDOOR AED UNIT

Moderate Value, High Cost

In recent years, technology advances have made it possible for local governments, businesses, and other organizations to install Automatic Electronic Defibrillator (AED) units in their buildings and other spaces.

A newer development is the installation of monitored AED smart cabinets. This allows AED units to be placed in visible, outdoor, public spaces to ensure easy access in times of emergency. These units are built to protect the AED from the elements. When the AED is removed from its cabinet, an alarm is sent to emergency services, notifying of an AED event, triggering an EMS response. A photo is also taken of the person removing the AED from its cabinet.

As our largely rural population ages and Buffalo Creek County Park enjoys more frequent use, it will be necessary to consider response strategies for medical emergencies. The installation of one or more AED units will significantly enhance emergency response in this park. The cost of an outdoor AED smart cabinet is significant (approximately \$5,000 – \$7,000, plus an annual monitoring fee). Further enhancements could include the incorporation of first-aid kits.

INCREASE TREE MAINTENANCE

Moderate Value, Low Cost

As more tree pests and diseases are introduced into McLeod County and its parks, it will be important for regular tree maintenance (trimming, inspection, removal, etc.) to be performed. Priority should be given to areas where safety is a concern as well as areas where damage to property could occur.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

To ensure that McLeod County's Parks continue to flourish over the long-term, intentionality will be required. Successful implementation of the plan should involve project priorities being set with the understanding that certain items may be moved ahead of schedule or possibly delayed due to funding availability. Careful consideration should be taken to ensure that each park's unique identity is preserved to allow for diverse experiences for parkgoers.

While McLeod County does have a Park Commission, this group has been inactive in recent years. It will be important to eventually reengage the Park Commission to consider current and future park needs and to make recommendations to the McLeod County Board of Commissioners, pertaining to park operation and improvement. County ordinance should be reexamined to ensure it is current and that the prescribed makeup of commission membership will be representative of the county population.

To ensure effectiveness, Park Commission membership should be comprised of elected representatives, County residents, and County staff. The County Board of Commissioners should also consider the need for equitable representation, which might be addressed by including Park Commission members from each County district, as well as from various population segments (e.g., women, seniors, youth, people with disabilities, people of color). Once the Park Commission has been reengaged, it should meet regularly (e.g., quarterly) to reevaluate priorities and ensure adequate progress. A framework for Park Commission decision-making could include:

- The interests and desires of the public
- The need to ensure park safety
- The need to ensure park accessibility
- The need to sustain the parks and park amenities over the long term
- The potential for parks and their amenities to support economic development























The public should be reengaged from time to time, through survey or other means, as this will help the Park Commission keep abreast of public desires and gain feedback on park condition and improvements.

Although implementation recommendations were chosen to reflect the short-term and long-term needs of the parks, the plan should be reviewed annually to track progress and set priorities. The plan should be updated every 10 years to reflect the changing needs of the parks and the needs and wants of park visitors and residents of McLeod County.


































Implementation Guide

A compilation of the recommendations for each park with potential impact(s), expected time frame for completion, and potential cost range. The implementation guide should be used as a reference and implementation needs may change due to funding availability and timing.

Table 3: Priority areas and opportunities (note: priorities are subject to change over time)

KEY										
	FEATURE OR OPPORTUNITY ADDED TO IMPROVE PARK ENJOYMENT									
	ACCESSIBILITY IMPROVEMENT									
	RESTORES PARK TO DESIRED CONDITION AND/OR SUPPORTS MAINTENANCE OF GOOD PARK CONDITION									
	SAFETY IMPROVEMENT									
	IMPROVES PARK VISIBILITY									
	SUPPORTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND/OR TOURISM (when considered with other improvements)									
①	SHORT-TERM GOAL (1-3 years)									
②	MEDIUM-TERM GOAL (3-6 years)									
③	LONG-TERM GOAL (6+ years)									
	BUFFALO CREEK	LAKE MARION	PIEPENBURG	STAHL'S LAKE	SWAN LAKE	WILLIAM MAY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	IMPACT	
RESTROOM(S)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	① ②	\$-\$\$\$		
TREE MAINTENANCE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
PARK SIGNAGE	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
LANDSCAPING	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
REPLACE GRILLS	✓			✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
PARKING	✓					✓	①	\$\$		
ADD/IMPROVE REFUSE AREA(S)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
SPORTING AREAS/AMENITIES	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
PARK TRAILS	✓	✓	✓				①-②	\$\$		
PICNIC AREA(S)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①-②	\$-\$\$\$		
VOLUNTEERISM	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	①	\$\$		
UPDATE GOOGLE MAPS				✓		✓	①	\$		
MARKETING/SOCIAL MEDIA	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$		
PROGRAMMING	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$-\$\$		
RESTORE NATIVE PLANTS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	①	\$-\$\$		
MAINTENANCE	✓	✓	✓	✓			①	\$\$		

KEY	
	FEATURE OR OPPORTUNITY ADDED TO IMPROVE PARK ENJOYMENT
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	RESTORES PARK TO DESIRED CONDITION AND/OR SUPPORTS MAINTENANCE OF GOOD PARK CONDITION
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	SUPPORTS ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND/OR TOURISM <i>(when considered with other improvements)</i>
①	SHORT-TERM GOAL (1-3 years)
②	MEDIUM-TERM GOAL (3-6 years)
③	LONG-TERM GOAL (6+ years)

	BUFFALO CREEK	LAKE MARION	PIEPENBURG	STAHL'S LAKE	SWAN LAKE	WILLIAM MAY	TIME FRAME	COST RANGE	IMPACT
REMOVE SILO HAZARD				✓			①	\$\$	
FOOD VENDORS		✓	✓				①	\$	 \$
BOAT LAUNCH AND LANDING		✓	✓				①	\$-\$\$\$	 \$
DISC GOLF COURSE		✓	✓				①	\$\$	 \$
INSTALL TORNADO SIREN		✓	✓				①	\$\$\$	
BEACH AREA/AMENITIES		✓	✓				①	\$\$\$	   \$
IMPROVE CAMPGROUND ROAD		✓					①	\$\$\$	  
PEDESTRIAN SAFETY				✓	✓	✓	①	\$-\$\$\$	
INSTALL OUTDOOR AED	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	②	\$\$	
ADD CAMPSITE(S)	✓						①-③	\$-\$\$\$\$	 \$
CAMPING CABINS		✓	✓				②	\$\$\$	 \$
WALK-IN/BIKE-IN CAMPING				✓	✓	✓	②	\$	 \$
PLAYGROUND	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	②	\$\$\$	   \$
UPGRADE RV SITE POWER		✓	✓				②	\$\$\$	 \$
INCREASE RV PAD SIZE		✓	✓				②	\$\$\$	 \$
WI-FI IN CAMPGROUND		✓	✓				②	\$	 \$
WINTER AMENITIES			✓				②	\$\$	  \$
FISHING PIER			✓	✓	✓		②	\$-\$\$\$	  \$
ELECTRIC VEHICLE (EV) CHARGING		✓	✓				③	\$\$	 \$
ADDITIONAL TRAIL CONNECTION	✓						③	\$\$\$\$\$	  \$
ADD CAMPGROUND					✓		③	\$\$\$	  \$
MAN-MADE WATER FEATURE		✓					③	\$\$\$	  \$

First Focus Areas

The Parks Plan Task Force discussed and identified priority areas that should lead off implementation of the plan. These “First Focus” areas highlight some of the more urgent needs at the County parks. While these items were identified as a first focus, it is not required to act on them first if opportunities arrive for funding of other projects or other items require immediate attention.

- Safety for parkgoers is of the utmost priority for McLeod County. Projects that present an opportunity to improve user safety or areas where safety concerns have been identified should be prioritized.
- Maintenance at all parks should be addressed. Structures that need repair should be attended to or should be removed if deemed no longer usable or needed. Opportunities for decreasing maintenance time should also be prioritized as to allow staff to focus on other projects. Areas that are currently being mowed could be reverted to natural prairie area.
- Sanitary and up-to-date restrooms are a necessity in all County parks. Vault-style restrooms should be eliminated and either converted to a structure with running water and septic or replaced with portable restrooms.
- Parkgoers should have access to clean drinking water at all parks. The installation of wells with fixtures for accessing safe water should be included in all county parks that do not currently offer it.
- Signage throughout all parks should be updated and be uniform. Parkgoers should recognize that they are in McLeod County Park upon entering and park rules/expectations should be easily identifiable. In some cases, signage should be removed/replaced while there may be areas where additional signage would be beneficial for wayfinding or informational purposes.

POTENTIAL FUNDING SOURCES

In an effort to reduce taxpayer burdens, the County may be able to capitalize on other funding opportunities to fund parks system improvements. These may include:

GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

PARKS AND TRAILS LEGACY GRANT PROGRAM

The Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program provides funding for parks and trails of regional significance, outside of the seven-county metropolitan area. Applications for this program are submitted directly to the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). The GMRPTC submits funding recommendations to the Legislature. The Legislature then appropriates funding to the Department of Natural Resources to award and administer the grants.

OUTDOOR RECREATION GRANT PROGRAM

The purpose of the Outdoor Recreation Grant Program is to increase and enhance outdoor recreation facilities in local and community parks throughout the state. Eligible projects include park acquisition and/or development/redevelopment such as internal park trails, picnic shelters, playgrounds, athletic facilities, boat accesses, fishing piers, swimming beaches and campgrounds. All park projects must be maintained for outdoor recreation into perpetuity. Total project costs must be \$20,000 or greater. Applications for this grant are generally due in the first quarter of the calendar year. Money awarded for this grant in FY 2023 was about \$3 million from state and federal funding sources.

REGIONAL TRAIL GRANT PROGRAM

This Regional Trail Grant Program exists to provide grants to local units of government to promote development of regionally significant trails outside the seven-county metropolitan area. Eligible projects include acquisition and development of trail facilities outside the seven-county metropolitan area that are considered of regional or statewide significance. Acquisition projects require a perpetual easement for recreational purposes. Development projects require a 20-year maintenance commitment by the project sponsor. Funding amount in the past has been around \$850,000 and applications are generally due in the first quarter of each calendar year.

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

Projects and programs eligible for Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) funding include on- and off-road pedestrian and bicycle facilities, and infrastructure projects for improving non-driver access to public transportation and enhanced mobility. Minnesota will be soliciting projects for approximately \$12.5 million in available grant funding across the state. The application period for this grant takes place in the fourth quarter of each calendar year.

NATURAL AND SCENIC AREA GRANTS

The Natural and Scenic Area Grant opportunity provides matching funds to local units of government and school districts for up to 50% of the cost of acquisition of natural and scenic areas. Minimal betterment activities are eligible as part of an acquisition project including site surveying, boundary signage, and immediate measures needed to stabilize the site and ensure the safety of users and active restoration efforts that would significantly

improve the site's natural resource values. The application period is generally within the first quarter of each calendar year.

NO CHILD LEFT INSIDE GRANT

Recent and emerging research indicates that students are increasingly disconnected from nature. Getting more people into the outdoors is crucial for the future stewardship of Minnesota's natural resources. The No Child Left Inside Grant Program aims to support and increase efforts to expand programming that connects youth to the outdoors. There are \$250,000 in grant funds available during Phase 4. At least \$100,000 of those funds will be dedicated to high-scoring fishing and hunting related projects. Applications will be competitively reviewed and awarded on a geographically balanced statewide basis. Additional phases are being planned with an additional \$450,000 in funding available. Applications were due in the first quarter of each calendar year.

MID-MINNESOTA COMMUNITY ENHANCEMENT FUND

Mid-Minnesota Development Commission (MMDC) works to strengthen communities by improving quality of life and opportunity for prosperity for the residents of Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville Counties. To further improve quality of life and to promote health and safety, the MMDC gives back a portion of revenue earned through contract work. Permitted uses include adding public amenities that will promote physical and/or mental well-being, and/or increase opportunities for positive community interaction. Matching grants of up to \$3,000 are available to local governments (cities, counties, school districts, or townships) and nonprofit organizations.

LOCAL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION GRANTS

A number of communities have organized community foundations which regularly provide funding to support community causes. The Hutchinson Area Community Foundation and Glencoe Area Community Foundation are two examples of such foundations.

PRIVATE DONATIONS (TIME AND MONEY)

McLeod County can and should make it easy for benefactors to provide donations, of both time (i.e., volunteerism) and money, that support park projects. This may include providing a project or donation "wish list" for each park, which includes the anticipated expense associated with each project. The County should develop policies and parameters that outline the use and expectations of donations.

CORPORATE SPONSORSHIPS

In some communities, corporate partnerships have been forged to fund improvements to public amenities or even the construction of new amenities. These partnership agreements often come with strings attached, such as naming rights or recognition requirements. However, the benefit of the improvement may far outweigh the burdens of these requirements. These sorts of partnerships should be considered on an individual basis to ensure suitability.