

**Dane County**

**Parks & Open Space Plan**

**2012**

2013

2014

2015

2016

**2017**





## Dedication to Elizabeth “Libby” Lewis

The 2012-2017 Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan is dedicated in honor of Elizabeth “Libby” Lewis. Libby passed away on February 1, 2012 after a distinguished lifetime of public service.

Libby served on the Dane County Park Commission for 26 years, from 1981 to 2007. During her time on the Commission, Libby championed the importance of landscape planning and design. Libby was also a strong advocate for the protection of environmental corridors and the need to educate the public on their importance.

In partnership with her husband, Professor Emeritus Phil Lewis, Libby led the effort to preserve the Nine Springs E-Way and the establishment of the Lussier Family Heritage Center.



Libby also served as a founding member of the Friends of Dane County Parks, of the Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability and of the Phil Lewis Academy of Sustainable Design, and was an active member of the League of Women Voters for over 50 years.

Future generations will benefit from Libby's passion and influence on the Dane County Parks System. The Dane County Park Commission and Department of Land & Water Resources is honored to have had the good fortune of working with Libby and dedicates the 2012-2017 Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan in her honor.



*Connie Threinen, Libby Lewis, and Kate Wipperman at Festge County Park.*

*Cover Photo: Robert Farrell*

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# I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION



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## I.I ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the Dane County Park Commission, I wish to extend our sincere gratitude to all of the local units of government, Dane County residents and especially the many non-profit conservation organizations who truly made this a diverse and visionary plan. I also would like to thank our four appointed Park and Open Space Advisory Committee members, Supervisors Patrick Downing, Melissa Sargent, Carousel Bayrd, and Robin Schmidt for their reliable attendance and valuable input throughout the planning process. Finally I want to thank the County Parks staff for their work on the plan, particularly, Chris James, the principal planner, Laura Guyer, Darren Marsh, Sara Kwitek, and Kevin Connors.

Over the next five years, we will be challenged to implement this plan by a variety of fiscal and staffing constraints. However, we believe those can be overcome with the assistance of our many partners including our Friends groups, a growing volunteer program, and the other groups and organizations outlined throughout the plan. We are hopeful that the recommendations of this plan will provide many opportunities for generations of people to connect with and enjoy the fantastic land, water and cultural resources of Dane County.

-- William G. Lunney, Chair, Dane County Park Commission and Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee

### **DANE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION and PARKS & OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

All members listed served on the Parks & Open Space Advisory Committee. Bold print indicates members who also serve on the Park Commission.

**William G. Lunney, Chair** Supervisor Carousel Bayrd

**Supervisor Dave Ripp, Vice-Chair** Supervisor Pat Downing

**Tom Thoresen, Secretary** Supervisor Melissa Sargent

**Christine Haag** Supervisor Robin Schmidt

**Supervisor Kyle Richmond**

**Mary Schlaefer**

**Dan Wisniewski**



*From left to right: Supervisor Dave Ripp, Tom Thoresen, Supervisor Carousel Bayrd, Mary Schlaefer, Supervisor Melissa Sargent, Dan Wisniewski, Chair Bill Lunney, Christine Haag, Supervisor Robin Schmidt, Supervisor Pat Downing, Supervisor Kyle Richmond*

## I.2 AUTHORIZING RESOLUTION

### Res. 300, 2011-2012

#### Adopting the 2012-17 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan

For more than thirty years the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan has provided the foundation for preservation of key cultural, natural and historic resources that enhance the quality of life in Dane County. The Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan Advisory Sub-Committee has completed an update of the County Parks and Open Space Plan for the period of 2012-2017. The plan must be updated every five years in order to be eligible to apply for a variety of grants including land acquisition and park development funding through the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Knowles-Nelson Stewardship grant program.

The planning process included seven public informational meetings, an interactive website, a Facebook page and nearly fifty individual meetings with local units of government, non-profit conservation organizations, and other state and federal agencies for the purpose of soliciting input on recommendations to be included in the updated plan. The plan is used by the Dane County Park Commission as a guide for making future resource protection and park development decisions over the next five years. It also provides the vision to guide future land acquisition through the Dane County Conservation Fund. Participation by private land owners or local units of government to carry out any of the resource protection initiatives or park and trail development projects outlined in the plan is on a voluntary basis. This plan is not a land use plan or created for the purpose of guiding future zoning decisions.

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Dane County Board of Supervisors and the Dane County Executive approves and adopts the 2012-17 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Dane County Park Commission wishes to dedicate the 2012-17 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan in memory of Elizabeth “Libby” Lewis, who served as an inspired and thoughtful member of the Park Commission from 1981 through 2007.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED** that the Dane County Board of Supervisors, Dane County Executive, and Dane County Parks Commission thank all of the citizens, local units of government, non profit conservation organizations, staff and other stakeholders who assisted in the preparation of this plan.

Adopted by the Dane County Board of Supervisors on March 29, 2012.



## I.3 DANE COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

The Dane County Park Commission provides oversight and guidance to Parks and Real Estate staff of the Department of Land & Water Resources on a variety of topics that require public input. Meetings are usually held on Wednesday evenings twice per month and are publicly noticed by the County. These meetings provide a public forum for discussion and interpretation of the rules governing use of lands overseen by the Commission. The Dane County Park Commission is authorized by Wisconsin Statute Section 27.02(2), which states that in any county with a county executive, the county park commission shall consist of seven members appointed by the county executive, subject to confirmation by the county board. The Park Commission is an advisory committee to the Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee (EANR), which is a standing committee of the County Board that focuses primarily on oversight of the Land & Water Resources Department.

The Park Commission and the Land & Water Resources Department may exercise certain powers delineated in state statutes, subject to approval of EANR and the County Board. The County Board, made up of 37 elected supervisors, directs the Land & Water Resources Department to carry out adopted Park Commission policies and authorizes Park Commission actions, such as the acquisition of land.

## I.4 LAND AND WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

The 2005 Dane County budget created the Land and Water Resources Department (LWRD), by merging Dane County Parks, the Land Conservation Department and the Office of Lakes and Watersheds. The goal of the LWRD is to protect and restore Dane County's natural resources and to promote the sustainable and environmentally responsible enjoyment of public natural areas. The Department consists of five work units:

### ADMINISTRATION DIVISION

The Administration Division provides administrative support, including budget management and GIS services, to the entire department. The Division serves as the first point of contact for many customers, oversees permit sales and park reservations, maintains the department website, and helps coordinate watershed management and invasive species activities.

### LAND CONSERVATION DIVISION



The Land Conservation Division provides conservation implementation services to private landowners and land users in order to protect and enhance Dane County soil and water resources. The Division's three work groups provide conservation services on agricultural and urban lands and apply scientific methods to measure, monitor and manage lake levels.

### OFFICE OF LAKES AND WATERSHEDS



The Office of Lakes and Watersheds coordinates water-related policy initiatives across the County and, working with many partners, informs and educates the public about water resource issues and actions citizens can take to protect lakes, streams and wetlands. The Office coordinates the county's aquatic invasive species prevention and control and aquatic plant management planning programs. The Office also provides staff support to the Dane County Lakes and Watershed Commission.

### PARKS DIVISION



The Parks Division operates and maintains over 12,000 acres of recreation parks, natural resource areas, trail corridors, historical/cultural sites, wildlife areas and forests for Dane County's citizens. The Division includes the following program areas: visitor services and enforcement, land maintenance, park planning and development, volunteer program, naturalist program, lock and dam operations, aquatic plant harvesting, and the Lussier Family Heritage Center.

### REAL ESTATE DIVISION

The Real Estate Division acquires historical/cultural, recreational and natural resource lands or easements for protection, restoration and recreation. The division works closely with the Parks Division to coordinate the management and restoration of recently purchased lands, including agricultural leases. The Division also administers the County's land acquisition and park development grant programs and provides real estate assistance to all County departments.

## I.5 DEFINITIONS

The following terms are found throughout this plan and are generally defined as follows:

**Active Recreation-** For the purposes of this planning report, active recreation is defined as recreation that requires some type of developed facility or manipulated landscape to participate and requires ongoing maintenance. Examples include soccer, mountain biking and disc golf.

**Passive Recreation-** For the purposes of this planning report, passive recreation is defined as outdoor activities that do not require a developed setting or facilities to participate. Examples include bird watching, foraging, hunting.

**Silent Sports-** For the purposes of this planning report, silent sports are generally defined as human powered recreation activities that have little to no impact on the surrounding environment. Examples include snowshoeing, hiking, kayaking.

**Nature Based Outdoor Recreation-** Activities where the primary focus is the appreciation or enjoyment of nature. (*Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources*)

**Priority-** Priorities generally identify acquisition, planning or preservation efforts that should always be a part of ongoing work programs throughout the course of a year. However, it should be noted that park acquisition, development and management decisions are often based on *funding* opportunities, partnerships and willing sellers rather than priority.

**Policy-** Policies are more specific statements that provide guidance for future park planning, development, management and land acquisition decision making processes. The policies of the Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan 2012-2017 were updated by staff to reflect current park operation, planning, and land acquisition procedure and practices.



## I.6 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Many of the recommendations outlined in the 2006-2011 Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan have been realized or are currently being implemented. Almost all of these projects received at least 50% outside grant funding as a result of being included in an adopted park and open space plan. The 2006-2011 Parks & Open Space Plan outlined the following recreation-related needs and priority areas: additional trail facilities, lake/water access improvements, camping, picnicking, hunting and fishing, dog exercise areas and disc golf. The following is a summary of major plan initiatives that have been achieved since the last update to this plan:

**Trails:** Added 6 miles of bicycle pedestrian trails, 2 miles of hiking trails, 5 trail bridges, 1 bicycle pedestrian underpass and 1 snowmobile bridge. Completed BikeDane planning initiative.

**Parks & Recreation:** Added 2 new dog exercise areas, 2 new group camp areas, 1 new picnic area and shelter building, added 27 holes of disc golf.

**Lake/Water Access:** Added 1 new lake access parking area, completed Stewart Lake restoration and Tenney Lock improvements.

**Hunting and Fishing:** Added 1,364 acres of Wildlife Area lands open to public hunting, increased archery program to over 4,000 acres, and added 14 miles of public streambank easements for fishing access.

**Land Acquisition:** Approximately 3,500 acres of recreation park, natural resource area, conservation easements, trail easements and grant projects were acquired since the last update to the plan.

**Volunteer Program:** The volunteer program contributed nearly 31,000 hours per year of park service and installed approximately 150 acres of new prairie.

**Park Planning:** Completed 5 park master plans, 4 major park development plans and 1 interpretive display area.

The projects above were not included in this plan update. Recommendations that have yet to be completed from the 2006-2011 Dane County Parks and Open Space plan have been included in this plan.

Dane County has experienced a considerable increase in park system use between 2006 and 2010. The number of people using Dane County park and trail facilities in 2010 was estimated conservatively at about 2 million. Nearly all sales of annual permits and camper registrations showed increasing trends over the past 5 years. Mountain bike permit sales showed the most significant increase at 42%, and disc golf permit sales also significantly rose by 34%. The number of nights camping increased from 7,119 to 9,366 or a 24% increase. Annual permits sold for dog exercise areas increased from 4218 to 4558 and lake access annual permit sales rose from 3,646 to 4,013. Many of the accomplishments listed above were completed in 2010 and 2011, and it is anticipated that park use and permit sales will continue to increase.

## II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



The 2012-17 Dane County Parks & Open Space Plan seeks to identify significant cultural, historical, and natural resources that should be considered for possible protection, preservation or restoration over the next five years. The plan also seeks to identify countywide recreation needs and Dane County's role in providing facilities to meet anticipated demands. This plan is not a land use plan or created for the purpose of guiding future zoning decisions. The Parks & Open Space Plan must be updated and adopted by the County Board every five years in order to maintain the county's eligibility for a variety of state and federal grant funding programs for park and trail land acquisition and development. This update to the Parks & Open Space Plan has the following vision statement and five primary goals: **Vision Statement:** Connect people to the land and water resources of Dane County.

1. **Provide sufficient park land and recreation facilities to meet the demand of Dane County residents without adversely affecting existing natural resources.**
2. **Preserve for posterity the characteristics and diversity of the natural, cultural and historical resources of Dane County.**
3. **Preserve large tracts of natural and agricultural rural landscapes at urban fringe areas that will provide regional resource protection and recreation benefits.**
4. **Provide volunteer opportunities and stewardship education to county residents of all ages.**
5. **Protect lakes, rivers and streams, including shorelines, wetlands, high infiltration areas and associated vegetative buffers to maintain high water quality, manage water quantity and sustain water-related recreation throughout Dane County.**

### PLANNING PROCESS

The update to the Parks & Open Space Plan began in December of 2010 and included a comprehensive public input process consisting of seven public informational meetings and nearly fifty individual meetings with local units of government, non-profit conservation organizations, and other state and federal agencies. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit input on recommendations to be included in the updated plan. A Facebook page and interactive web page with feedback form was also posted on the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department website. Invitations to provide ideas for the update to the plan were mailed to all local units of government in December of 2010. A second invitation to provide feedback on the draft plan was sent to all local units of government in November of 2011.

### INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS

Several related planning reports were considered during the preparation of this plan including all prior completed Dane County Parks & Open Space Plans (1970-2011), 2011-2016 Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, Dane County Comprehensive Plan, Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization Bike Plan, 2010 BikeDane Plan, and the comprehensive plans of participating local units of government. An inventory of existing lands and facilities was completed for each classification of lands under Park Commission jurisdiction including recreation parks, natural resource areas, forests, cultural/historical sites and wildlife areas. The park system includes 25 recreation parks (~4,200 acres), 29 natural resource areas (~3,400 acres), 2 forests (~187 acres), 3 historic sites (~116 acres) and 5 wildlife areas (~1,817 acres). A detailed list of facilities found at each property for all categories is also provided.

Phosphorus Reduction Areas is intended to strengthen partnerships between the County, non-profit organizations and other agencies such as Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District to assist with reduction of phosphorus in the Yahara River watershed.

## RECREATION PARKS

Recreation parks are usually several hundred acres in size and provide a mix of natural and developed park lands. The County's role is to provide large, regional-scale parks that attract users from several communities.

Two new future recreation parks are proposed in the 2012-2017 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan in response to public input, forecasted residential growth, and lack of parks within the region. One new park site is proposed in the northeast quadrant of the County and the other in the south-central region of the County near the Village of Oregon. Ideally, these parks would be 100 acres or more in size to provide for multiple uses and contain a mix of natural resource features. This plan also recommends exploring future development of a disc golf facility and dog exercise area in the west central portion of the County. New dog exercise areas are also proposed near the Villages of Cottage Grove, Deerfield and Mount Horeb. Specific park and trail development recommendations are identified for each recreation park that may be pursued through a variety of grant programs.

## NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

A natural resource area consists of lands that contain valuable natural resources or greenbelt corridors identified through a public process. Ideally, lands protected within these project areas should be large, contiguous blocks that may include a mixture of agricultural, water, wetlands, steep topography, prairie and forests.

Five new Natural Resource Areas are included in this update to the plan. The Badfish Creek Natural Resource Area is located between the Village of Oregon and City of Stoughton and extends south to the County border. The project area spans from the Badfish Creek headwaters in the Town of Dunn and follows the creek and associated wetlands south to the county line in the Towns of Rutland and Dunkirk. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin DNR, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Friends of Badfish Creek, Natural Heritage Land Trust and Rock River Coalition are all potential future conservation partners in this region.

The Mauneshia River Natural Resource Area is located in the northeast corner of the County and would extend from the WDNR Deansville Marsh Wildlife Area southeast along the Mauneshia River through the Village of Marshall to the county line. The Wisconsin DNR, Village of Marshall, Capitol Water Trails Ltd., Natural Heritage Land Trust and Capital Off Road Pathfinders mountain bike advocates are all potential future conservation and recreation partners in this region.

A Walking Iron Natural Resource Area is proposed in the Town of Mazomanie. This property provides a continuous connection of public land between Walking Iron County Park and WDNR Lower Wisconsin Riverway lands to the north. The connection of these areas will create a premier corridor that supports a wide diversity of wildlife and habitat types and offer many recreational opportunities.

The Blue Mounds Natural Resource Area seeks to combine the existing Pleasure Valley Natural Resource Area and Hidden Valley region east of Brigham County Park. There was local support for this larger and combined project area during the public input process. The landscape consists of steep wooded hills and valleys that afford spectacular views, streams, savannah and prairie remnants. Dane County has made several significant land purchases over the past five years to provide connections from Brigham Park to Blue Mound State Park and the Military Ridge State Trail. The Prairie Enthusiasts have also been actively working to preserve lands in this project area.



## **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

The Dane County Park Commission is responsible for considering a variety of planning criteria when formulating recommended updates to this plan with an end goal of balancing user needs with proper land stewardship. Planning considerations for this plan update included: demographics, related planning efforts, recreation needs analysis, future land needs analysis, local unit of government input, public and non-profit conservation organization input, state Stewardship requirements, Dane County parks staff input, land management considerations, partnership opportunities, and committee and County Board input.

An analysis of population trends and future County development growth areas was conducted. The Wisconsin Demographic Services Center and US Census Bureau continue to predict moderate increases of both male and female Dane County residents age 65 or older through 2020. Dane County also has a large percentage of population under the age of 20, and is forecasted to continue through 2020. This continues to suggest a need to provide more passive recreation facilities such as picnic areas and hiking and biking trails, and to explore more ways to engage youth both actively and educationally. Future residential growth and development areas were also taken into account during the preparation of this plan. Generally, higher growth areas are predicted surrounding the metropolitan Madison area and in the northeast quadrant of the County. It is important to identify where growth is anticipated for the purpose of locating future recreation parks, prioritizing acquisition of lands targeted for resource protection, and prioritizing future trail development projects.

A recreation needs analysis was completed that considered several factors for determining future types of recreation facilities to be recommended by the plan. The analysis suggests the following primary recreation needs and expectations of the Dane County Park system: trails (mainly mountain biking, snowshoeing and multi-use regional), lake access facilities, camping, picnicking and shelters, disc golf, dog exercise areas, hunting, fishing and wildlife observation.

Public input regarding future land protection resulted in several new proposals for partner projects and natural resource areas. There continues to be strong support for County creation of large, contiguous tracts of land devoted for resource protection.

## **PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS**

The 2012-2017 Parks and Open Space Plan includes several new initiatives. “Agriculture, Gardening and Foraging” was added to the plan to promote gathering of food and begin investigation of community gardening and other forms of agriculture on County-owned lands. “Art in Parks” is included as a recommendation to begin looking at providing stimulating sights and experiences that capture the imagination and create a greater sense of appreciation for and connection to the outdoor world.

Four new “Partner Projects” are also included in this plan update. “Active Sports Fields” was added to allow local units of government and non-profit organizations the opportunity to apply for Conservation Fund grant dollars for acquiring property to develop regional recreation facilities. “Target Archery Ranges” was an initiative that was suggested by Dane County 4H groups and conservation clubs in an effort to promote more opportunities for youth and school archery programs. “Conservation Club Buffers” is included to allow non-profit sporting clubs the opportunity to apply for Conservation Fund grant dollars to purchase lands surrounding shooting ranges to buffer them from future development.

The Yahara Headwaters Natural Resource Area is located within the northern area of the Village of DeForest and the Town of Windsor. The project area aims to provide water quality and wildlife habitat buffers for the upper reaches of the Yahara River. The Village of DeForest, WDNR, Natural Heritage Land Trust, and U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service are potential conservation partners. This project area is ecologically connected to the WDNR Land Legacy Arlington Prairie that contains deep soil prairie and prairie potholes.

## FORESTS

The 2012-2017 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan recommends active management of County-owned forests and woodlots that includes removal of invasive species, selective timber harvest to promote overall forest health, and provision for educational opportunities and limited, passive recreation uses that are compatible with timber management objectives.

## REGIONAL TRAILS

Trails are perhaps the most frequently used recreation facility in the park system. Development of additional trails is also consistent with providing future recreation opportunities for the forecasted aging population of Dane County. This plan makes County-wide recommendations for regionally significant hiking, water, bicycle-pedestrian, equestrian and snowmobile trails. Recommendations of the 2010 BikeDane initiative are also included in this plan. Acquisition of lands for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail remains a continued priority.

## SCENIC TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS

Driving for pleasure continues to be listed as one of the most popular recreational activity for the Dane County region in the WDNR 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. This program requires further definition through a planning process that includes local Township input. Development of this recreation program is consistent with providing opportunities for the projected aging population.

## HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SITES

These project areas consist of lands specifically purchased for the preservation, restoration or reconstruction of significant historical or cultural features. The Fort Blue Mounds historical site is a newly-proposed historical site in this plan update. Fort Blue Mounds was constructed in the spring of 1832 to provide protection to area mining families from anticipated Native American attacks. An incredibly rich and colorful history of this site was prepared by retired State Archeologist Bob Birmingham and is available online at [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/summer03\\_birmingham.pdf](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/summer03_birmingham.pdf). The original plaque dedicated on the site in 1910 was the first historic marker erected by the State Historical Society.

## PRAIRIE AND OAK SAVANNA SITES

Dane County staff worked with the Prairie Enthusiasts to update and map remaining high quality prairie remnants and the seven best potential grassland/prairie landscape scale management areas. Dane County's role in this initiative is to work with non-profit conservation organizations and land trusts, such as the Prairie Enthusiasts and Natural Heritage Land Trust, as well as with local units of governments and the WDNR, in funding the acquisition and preservation of those areas that coincide with other objectives of the Parks and Open Space Plan.

## STREAM CORRIDOR PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT

Dane County has worked closely with the WDNR to identify streams designated for protection and restoration within this plan. Streams classified as Tier I are primarily high quality, cold water streams where considerable County and WDNR restoration and habitat improvement measures have already been undertaken. Tier II are primarily warm water streams that have significant potential for habitat improvement. Restoration work on Tier II streams would be completed primarily by non-profit conservation organizations and partner groups.

## WILDLIFE AREAS

In 1994 the County Board amended the park ordinance allowing for permitted hunting within the County parks. The County recognized as the acres of parkland grew there would be additional opportunities to provide for hunting, especially on lands adjacent to State and Federal Wildlife and Fishery Areas and/or lands that historically provided for passive recreational uses such as hunting. In 2007, the County Board approved updates to park ordinances allowing the Park Commission to designate Wildlife Areas. Two new Wildlife Areas are proposed in this plan: one at Capital Springs State Recreation Area and one along the Sugar River in the Town of Verona.

## PROGRAM AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

Initiatives outlined in this plan will be carried out by multiple partners and the Land and Water Resources Department within the following program areas: Volunteer Program, Lussier Family Heritage Center, Naturalist, Park Planning and Development, Real Estate, Operations and Maintenance. This plan provides an overview of each program area along with recommendations for priority projects to be undertaken over the next five years.

## SUMMARY

Dane County Parks has undergone tremendous changes in both size and management responsibilities over the past ten years. Ongoing public education and regular communication with stakeholders, volunteers and local units of government regarding proper stewardship and allowable uses becomes increasingly essential with this broadening diversity. It will also be important to continue updating and preparing master plans for properties as demand for public use and access to County-owned lands continues to increase. These plans provide a common vision for future development and management strategies that is achieved through a public consensus-building process. Keeping current with recreation trends and needs will also be vital to maintaining an active and engaged park user base from which future volunteers often arise.

There is still strong public support to continue regional scale landscape protection initiatives. Prioritizing work in project areas that have a wide palette of partners will be a resource protection survival skill during difficult economic climates.

As outlined in its vision statement, Dane County Park's ongoing mission over the next five years will be to connect people to the land and water resources of Dane County. The park system provides the public place for this to happen; schools, Friends groups, non-profit conservation organizations and volunteers are envisioned to be the entities that will bring the people to the place and coordinate events. Dane County Parks needs to continue to promote awareness of its system to these groups through web-based applications and social networking.

Perhaps one of the most challenging and critical issues the Dane County Park Commission will need to address over the next five years will be how to maintain and steward a system of now over 12,000 acres with limited resources. Maintaining and cultivating new sources of volunteer labor and funding to complement the existing Park system will be necessary to sustain programs into the future. Many of the strategies outlined within the "Adapting for the Future" section and throughout this plan should be near-term implementation priorities.

### III. INTRODUCTION & PLAN PURPOSE



Over the past decade, the Dane County park system has nearly doubled in size from approximately 6,600 acres in 2001 to now over 12,000 acres. In 2010, park and trail counting devices conservatively estimated nearly 2 million users. Perhaps even more significant has been the ever expanding diversity of landscapes and land management practices that are all included under the umbrella of “parks.” The Dane County Park Commission continually strives to balance public use with proper stewardship and lands management. As economic conditions continue to remain poor and uncertain, the use of public parks has been increasing by residents seeking less expensive recreation alternatives close to home. Dane County Parks provide excellent economic and health benefits, and improve the general quality of life for our residents.

The 2012-17 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan seeks to identify significant cultural, historical, and natural resources that should be considered for possible protection, preservation or restoration over the next five years. The plan also seeks to identify countywide recreation needs and Dane County’s role in providing facilities to meet anticipated demands. Both resource and recreation needs were identified through a comprehensive public input process. The Parks and Open Space Plan must be updated and adopted by the County Board every five years in order to be eligible to participate in a variety of State and Federal funding programs for park land acquisition and development, including trails.



*Photo: Nathan Mugan*



### VISION STATEMENT: CONNECT PEOPLE TO THE LAND AND WATER RESOURCES OF DANE COUNTY

Goals in this plan are intended to be broad statements that are not time-specific and serve to guide the policies and direction of Dane County Parks. The County Parks and Open Space Plan has five primary goals:

1. Provide sufficient park land and recreation facilities to meet the demand of Dane County residents without adversely affecting existing natural resources.
2. Preserve for posterity the characteristics and diversity of the natural, cultural and historical resources of Dane County.
3. Preserve large tracts of natural and agricultural rural landscapes at urban fringe areas that will provide regional resource protection and recreation benefits.
4. Provide volunteer opportunities and stewardship education to county residents of all ages.
5. Protect lakes, rivers and streams, including shorelines, wetlands, high infiltration areas and associated vegetative buffers to maintain high water quality, manage water quantity and sustain water-related recreation throughout Dane County.



*Pheasant Branch Conservancy  
Photo: Kerry G. Hill*



# V. ECONOMIC & HEALTH BENEFITS OF PARKLAND



Dane County park lands have inherent conservation and scenic values, yet it's important to recognize the potential economic and health benefits of them as well. Numerous studies indicate a positive relationship between parks, the economy, and healthy people.

## Economic Benefits of Parks and Trails

Information provided by the Wisconsin Bicycle Federation indicates bicycling contributes \$1.5 billion annually and 13,200 jobs to the Wisconsin economy. Tourists from outside the state are estimated to spend \$535 million annually on bicycling in Wisconsin. Wisconsin and Dane County are consistently ranked as some of the best bicycling destinations in the country. Dane County is also home to some of the largest bicycling industries in the nation.

### What We Heard...

"There is no question that parks, open space and trail systems create value in any neighborhood. Lots adjoining open space can be valued higher and often sell first."

*-David M. Roark, President, Benchmark Community Holdings, Ltd.  
Madison, Wisconsin*

Parks have shown to increase property values and improve economies by attracting businesses and local residents. According to the Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, outdoor recreation contributes over \$9.7 billion annually to the

Wisconsin economy by supporting 129,000 jobs and providing nearly 4% of the gross state product. Employment in recreation and tourism industries has increased over the years. In 2008, these industries employed 8.4% of workers in Dane County.

The Dane County Park system draws visitors and supports events that directly benefit the local economy. For example, Reddan Soccer Park at Badger Prairie County Park draws over 225,000 visitors to the park annually. The Greater Madison Convention and Visitors Bureau estimates that the seven soccer tournaments held at Reddan alone generate more than \$3 million annually in direct spending in the local economy. Trout anglers visiting Dane County park lands and streambank easements also contribute to the local economy. A recent study published by Trout Unlimited indicated that anglers in the Driftless Area spend \$647 million each year that goes into the local economy, and that for every dollar spent on stream restoration an additional \$24.50 is returned to the economy each year thereafter. Special events held at Dane County Parks, such as the Maple Sugar Music Festival, cyclo-cross and mountain bike races, various runs/walks, disc golf and fishing tournaments, draw thousands of visitors each year. Dane County issues over 3,000 lake access permits annually, with a third being non-resident. The amenities and services provided by the Dane County parks system are a central reason why people visit, live, and work in Dane County, providing substantial benefits to the local economy.



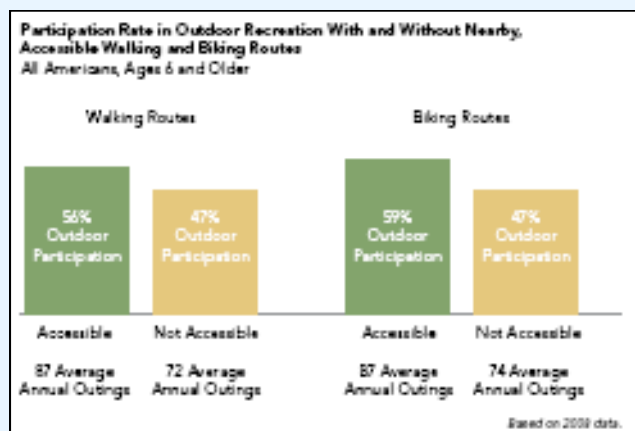
*Indian Lake County Park 2010 Trail Run*

## Health Benefits of Parkland

Parks and outdoor recreation are also vital for keeping people healthy and physically active. This is increasingly being recognized by the health care industry, especially as obesity and its associated health care costs are on the rise. According to the Center for Disease Control, 66.3 percent of U.S. adults aged 20 and older were obese or overweight in 2003–04. The percentage of children and adolescents who are overweight has quadrupled since the early 1970s. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimated that expenses resulting from conditions related to obesity and overweight totaled \$117 billion in 2000. Outdoor recreation is now understood as being part of the health care system in promoting a healthy and active lifestyle that is essential for preventing health problems and associated costs.

There is strong evidence that people are more physically active if there are parks or walking and biking trails nearby that can be easily accessed for exercising. The chart below from the 2010 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report published by the Outdoor Foundation illustrates this trend.

Studies also indicate that the current economic recession has increased the use of parks for exercise by families. In addition, minority groups have identified park and recreation services as the most important outlet for physical activity. Investing in parks and outdoor recreation can maintain and increase physical activity benefits. Studies show that the number and size of parks in a community are positively related to physical activity levels.



Interestingly, the amount of parkland per resident in the U.S. has declined due to rapid increases in population. It's important to consider opportunities for maximizing physical activity benefits as Dane County parks and natural resource areas are planned and developed. For example, park lands and recreation facilities can provide more exercise opportunities if they are easily accessible, close to home, and designed for a wide cross-section of the population.

Parks also provide a place for people to relax and let go of stress, relieving symptoms of anxiety and depression. Other psychological and social benefits of parks include the therapeutic effects of nature and providing a place for people to gather and spend quality time with friends and family. Research has also shown that children who suffer from Attention Deficit Disorder experience less severe symptoms if they are involved in activities in a green setting.

## VI. PARK HISTORY & CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Dane County Parks was created in 1935 when the County acquired land for Stewart Park. Eleven additional park sites, Babcock, LaFollette, Goodland, Mendota, Brigham, Fish Lake, Riley-Deppe, Festge, Half-Way Prairie, Token Creek and Lake View Woods were added over the next 30 years.

The first County Parks and Open Space Plan was adopted in 1970, enabling the department to apply for a number of State and Federal park acquisition and development funding programs. Beginning around 1990, the County began to focus on acquiring larger tracts of land for the purpose of protecting key natural resources, water and wetlands. The Dane County Park system would grow from around 700 acres to more than 3,600 acres over these 20 years. The Parks Department also began exploring diverse recreation opportunities including off-leash dog exercise areas, the Ice Age National Scenic Trail, and disc golf.

The acquisition and recreation diversity from the 1990s continued to evolve, and by 2000 the system had nearly doubled in size to over 6,600 acres. Park system project areas became much larger and contained a diverse mixture of land cover types including wetlands, prairies, forests, historical buildings and developed park lands. It became apparent with the expanding diversity of lands that a system was needed to provide a common vision for land management.

In 2000, the Park Commission adopted a park classification system that divided county park lands into four categories:

- Recreation Parks
- Natural Resource Areas
- Forests
- Historical/Cultural Sites



*North Mendota Natural Resource Area: Dorn Creek Wildlife Area*

The classification system identified consistent management practices for each land type and also provided the public a clear expectation of how lands would be managed within each category. Between 2000 and 2010, the lands managed under the Park Commission nearly doubled again to almost 12,000 acres. Increasingly large tracts of land within the Natural Resource Area classification were being purchased that had little or no development of recreation facilities on them. Several properties were added to the system that were adjacent to very large tracts of WDNR wildlife areas. In 2007, a new land classification category called “Wildlife Areas” was adopted by the County Board with the intent of maintaining hunting on lands purchased that historically had this use, providing seamless management practices on lands adjacent to WDNR wildlife areas and mitigating crop losses on lands historically prone to wildlife damage.



# VII. EXISTING LAND & FACILITY INVENTORY

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*Children Collecting Prairie Seeds at Ice Age Junction Natural Resource Area,*



## VII.I RECREATION PARKS

### DEFINITION

A recreation park consists of land that is specifically set aside for active and passive recreation uses. Active recreation generally refers to activities that can only occur on developed park lands or facilities such as soccer, disc golf, dog parks, and RV camping. Passive recreation refers to activities that occur in natural areas with little or no development of facilities required; ie: kayaking, hiking, wildlife observation, and snowshoeing. Recreation park use is often extensive and intensive. A recreation park primarily serves users who are attracted to outdoor recreation with an expectation of using some type of developed access or facilities. It may provide facilities that offer a wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities, cater to only one predominant activity (special use), or consist of a trail corridor that offers continuous, protected, and safe routes of outdoor recreation. Recreation parks may be found within the boundaries of lands which are of a different category.

### OVERVIEW

Dane County Parks has 25 recreation parks, which account for about 4,000 acres of all the lands in the system. The County's role is to provide large, regional-scale parks that attract users from several communities. Recreation parks are usually several hundred acres in size and provide a mix of natural and developed park land areas. Recreational use of Dane County park land is extremely diverse and includes, but is not limited to, hiking, biking, horseback riding, camping, picnicking, mountain biking, soccer, aeromodeling, boat launching, dog walking, disc golf, bowhunting and fishing.

### INVENTORY

The table on the following page presents an inventory of all Dane County Recreation Parks.



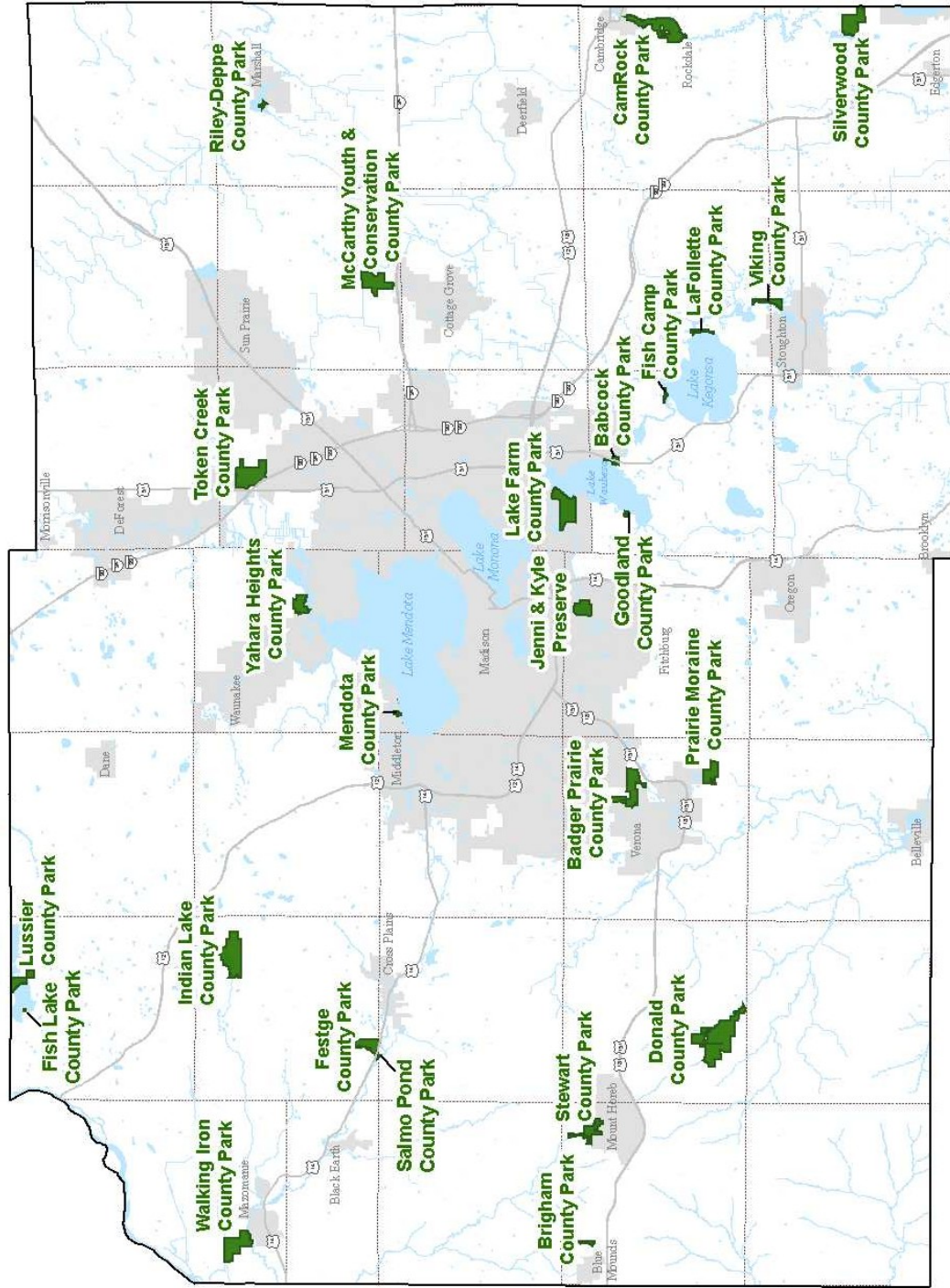
*Badger Prairie County Park*



Park: Date Represents Year Established in County POSP	Total Acres	Car Parking and Public Access	Number of Camp Sites	Electric Campsites	Camping with Showers	Group Camping	Restrooms	Reservable Shelters	Non-Reservable Shelters	Picnic Area	Playground Equipment	Improved Boat Launch (Trailer Parking Spaces)	Small Watercraft Launch	Canoe Launch	Swimming	Accessible Fishing Pier	Multi-Purpose Hard Surface Trails (Miles)	Hiking / Natural Surface Trail (Miles)	Mountain Biking (Miles)	Bridle Trail (Miles)	Cross-Country Skiing (Miles)	Snowmobile Trail (Miles)	Softball Field	Basketball Courts	Volleyball Courts	Tennis Courts	Pet Exercise Area (Acres)	Pet Exercise Trails (Miles)	Historic Site	Facilities for People with Disabilities	Permitted Archery Hunting	Other Amenities	
Babcock (1936)	36.4	●	25	●	●	●	●	1	1	1	●	78				1	0.5									8						Aeromodeling Field	
Badger Prairie (1976)	320.6	●					●	1	1	1	●						0.3	1.9	3														
Brigham (1952)	159.5	●	25		●		●	2	1	1	●							1							●								
Cam-Rock (1970)	444.7	●					●	3	3	2	●							4.1	6.2						●								
Donald (1993)	781.5**	●					●	1	2	3	●							6.9				1.2											
Festge (1963)	155.6	●					●	3	1	1	●							2															
Fish Camp (1976)	15.6	●					●	2	2	2	●	21		●				0.3															
Fish Lake (2000)	2.9	●					●	1	1	1	●																						
Goodland (1937)	13.9	●					●	2	1	1	●	19													●								
Indian Lake (1975)	480.3	●					●	1	1	1	●							8.8								24	1.3						
Jenni & Kyle (1989)	160.3	●					●	1	1	1	●																						
La Follette (1936)	28.6	●					●	1	1	1	●																						
Lake Farm (1973)	345	●	54	●	●	●	●	3	3	3	●	54		●				4.5															
Lussier (2000)	133.2	●					●																										
McCarthy (1974)	288.5	●					●											4.3															
Mendota (1951)	19	●	30	●	●	●	●	2	1	2	●																						5 Unit Boat Campground
Prairie Moraine (1993)	165.7	●																								51							
Riley-Deppe (1962)	12.9	●						1	1	1	●																						
Salmo Pond (1980)	7.5	●																															
Silverwood (2000)	283.9	●																															
Stewart (1935)	176.3	●					●	1	2	3	●							2.7															
Token Creek (1966)	417.9	●	42	●	●	●	●	5	6	6	●							6.3								46	1.4						
Viking (1972)	88.3	●					●	1	1	1	●							1.2								14	1						
Walking Iron (1972)	316.6	●					●											5.8															
Yahara Heights (2000)	140.5	●												●												20							
<b>Totals</b>	<b>4208.7</b>		<b>176</b>				<b>28</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>36</b>			<b>172</b>				<b>12</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>53.9</b>	<b>18.8</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>				<b>163</b>	<b>3.7</b>							

\* Jenni & Kyle Trails are ADA Accessible  
\*\* Includes wildlife area designated lands (22.5 acres)

# Recreation Parks



- Legend**
- Recreation Park
  - Lake/Pond
  - Urban Service Area
  - Stream/River
  - Township Boundary



## VII.2 NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

### DEFINITION

A natural resource area consists of land that is specifically set aside for the protection of a valuable natural environment and/or greenbelt corridor that were identified through a public process. This can include habitat protection and open space preservation. Recreation at natural resource areas is a secondary objective, and users are encouraged to enjoy the resource as is. Passive recreation activities dominate the site use. If at all, active recreation only takes place on the fringes or in small pockets (areas) of a natural resource area. Natural resource areas may include off-road regional trails and surrounding lands belonging to another category, such as recreation parks or wildlife areas.

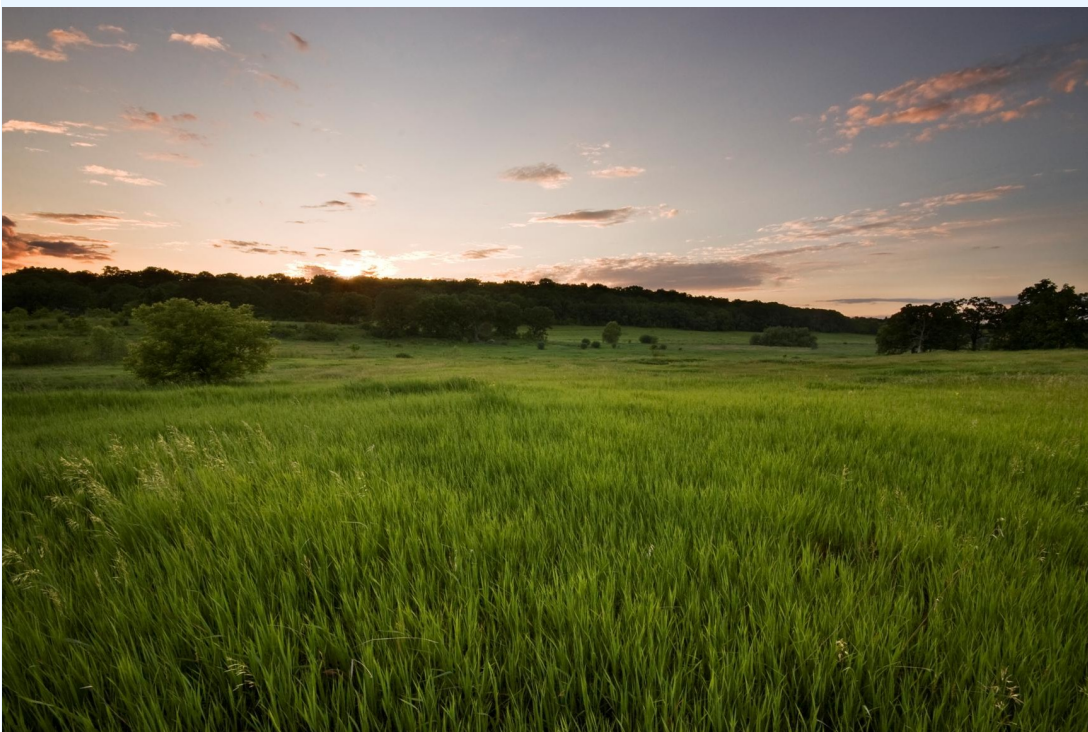
### OVERVIEW

Typically lands protected within these project areas should be large, contiguous blocks that may include a mixture of agricultural working lands, water, wetlands, steep topography, prairie and forests. Some of these lands may be protected through fee title purchase, however, much of the protection of larger landscapes can be achieved through purchase of conservation easements and continue to remain under private ownership. Land or easements are only purchased from willing sellers. Natural Resource Area boundaries have no bearing on any zoning or land use decisions and participation by private landowners or local units of government to carry out any outlined resource protection initiatives is on a voluntary basis.

Creation of larger areas will provide enough space to incorporate some limited recreation use without impacting the resource and also allow native vegetation management practices, such as burning, to take place. Lands protected within natural resource areas are often owned by multiple public agencies, therefore, it is critical that the County work jointly with these other agencies to ensure cohesive resource and recreation management.

### INVENTORY

The table on page 28 and map on page 29 present an inventory of all Dane County Natural Resource Areas.



*Blooming Grove Drumlins  
Natural Resource Area  
Photo: R. Farrell*



*Ice Age Junction  
Natural Resource  
Area  
Photo: R. Farrell*



Natural Resource Areas: Date Represents Year Established in County POSP	Project Area Boundary (acres)***	Total Acres under County Ownership****	Car Parking and Public Access	Number of Campsites	Electric Campsites	Camping with Showers	Group Camping	Restrooms	Reservable Shelters	Non-Reservable Shelters	Picnic Area	Playground Equipment	Improved Boat Launch	Small Watercraft Launch	Canoe Launch	Accessible Fishing Pier	Swimming	Multi-Purpose Hard Surface (Miles)	Hiking / Natural Surface Trail (Miles)	Mountain Biking (Miles)	Bridle Trail (Miles)	Cross-Country Skiing (Miles)*****	Snowmobile Trail (Miles)	Softball Field	Pet Exercise Area (Acres)	Historic Site or Interpretive Information	Facilities for People with Disabilities	Permitted Archery Hunting	Other Amenities			
<i>Anderson Farm (2012)*</i>	125.8	125.8																														
<i>Badfish Creek (2012)</i>	15975.8	0.0																														
<i>Badger Mill Creek (1995)</i>	623.1	0.0																														
<i>Black Earth Creek (2001)</i>	11630.7	94.0																														
<i>Blooming Grove Drumlins (2000)</i>	1645.8	174.7																														
<i>Blue Mounds (2012)</i>	2471.4	101.4																														
<i>Cherokee Marsh (1970)</i>	3722.9	218.8																														
<i>Door Creek Wetlands (2000)</i>	3961.5	0.0																														
<i>Fish Lake (1996)</i>	683.3	248.2																														
<i>Holtzman (1973)</i>	63.2	63.2																														
<i>Ice Age Trail (1995)</i>	3300.0	411.3																	18.5													
<i>Ice Age Trail Junction (1993)</i>	1949.6	535.9																														
<i>Koshkonong Creek</i>	3519.4	0.0																														
<i>Leopold-Riley Game Cooperative (2001)</i>	1820.0	0.0																														
<i>Lower Mud Lake (1995)</i>	2226.0	344.9																														
<i>Maunasha River (2012)</i>	6035.1	131.0																														
<i>Nine Springs E-Way (1976)</i>	3889.0	558.6																														
<i>North Mendota (2006)**</i>	4602.1	172.4																														
<i>Patrick Marsh (2001)</i>	990.0	13.4																														
<i>Pheasant Branch Conservancy (1995)</i>	501.7	99.9																														
<i>Phil's Woods (1974)</i>	36.0	36.1																														
<i>South Waubesa Marsh (1990)</i>	2069.1	0.0																														
<i>Springfield Hill (2001)</i>	701.0	198.1																														
<i>Starkweather Creek (2006)</i>	2372.8	0.0																														
<i>Sugar River (1983)</i>	7644.4	33.3																														
<i>Token Creek (1970)</i>	890.3	18.6																														
<i>Upper Yahara River (2001)</i>	496.0	0.0																														
<i>Walking Iron (2012)</i>	2688.1	0.0																														
<i>Yahara Headwaters (2012)</i>	1141.6	0.0																														
<b>Totals</b>	<b>87775.7</b>	<b>3579.6</b>																														

\* May be reclassified and renamed pending future master plan adoption.

\*\* Boundary established per North Mendota Park way Study.

\*\*\* Not all lands within Natural Resource Area Project boundaries are in public ownership. Please respect private landowner rights.

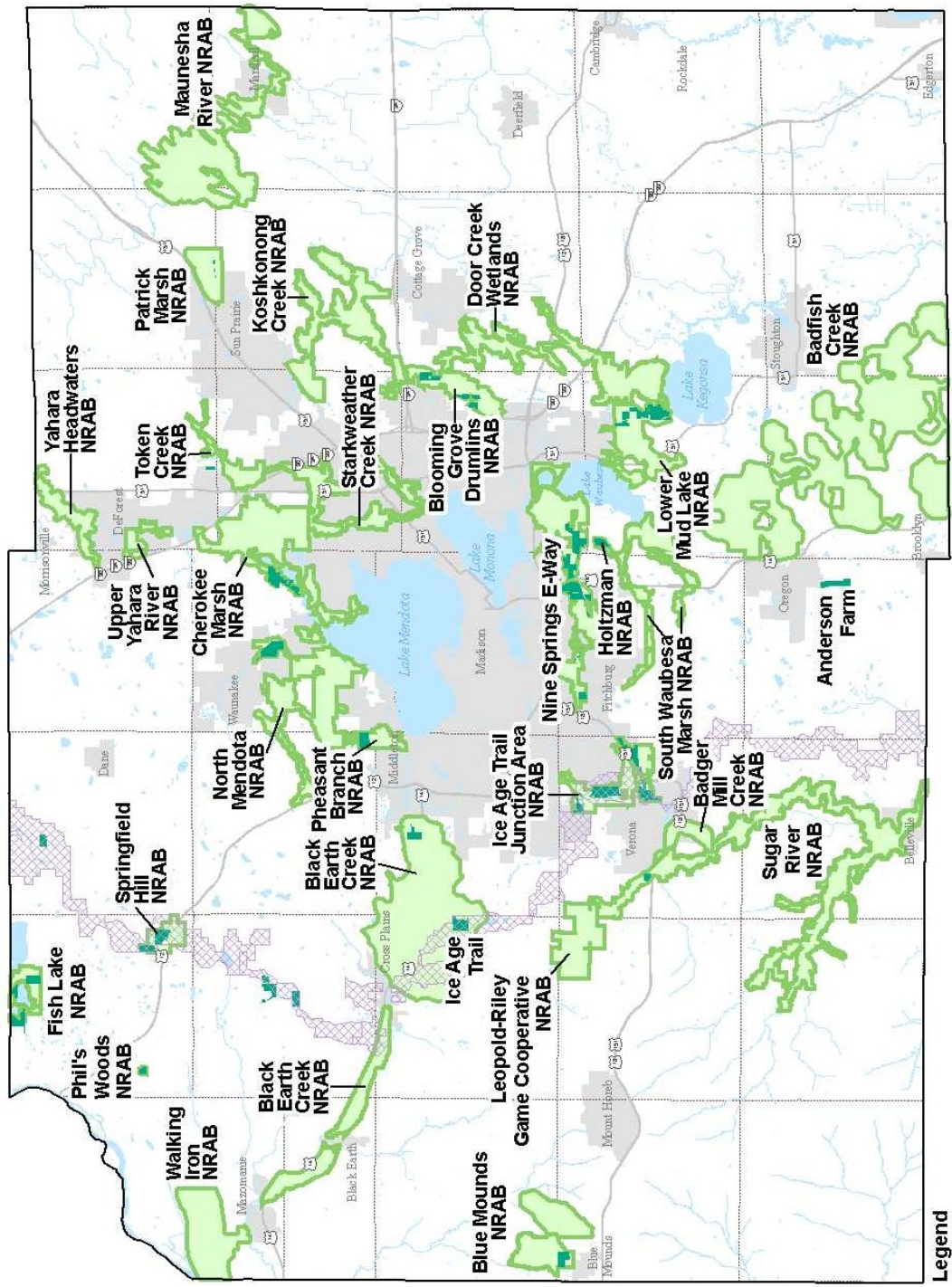
\*\*\*\* Does not include recreation park lands or wildlife areas.

\*\*\*\*\* Includes only groomed trails that require a trail pass.

Note: This facility inventory includes only those found on County-owned property. Natural Resource Area lands are generally open to the public year-round for hiking, fishing, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, wildlife observation, and foraging. However, there are not typically any designated trails or developed facilities for these activities.



# Natural Resource Areas



- Legend**
- Natural Resource Area Boundary (NRAB)
  - Natural Resource Area Property
  - Ice Age National Scenic Trail Corridor
  - Lake/Pond
  - Stream/River
  - Township Boundary
  - Urban Service Area

## VII.3 FORESTS

### DEFINITION

A forest in the Dane County Parks system consists of lands where timber is managed using sustainable methods and where some passive recreation such as hiking, cross-country skiing, berry picking, wildlife observation, hunting, snowshoeing and foraging may occur. Dane County forests are different from other county forests, where more active and motorized uses may occur. Dane County Forests have the potential to become excellent outdoor classrooms for people of all ages to learn about forest ecology, vegetation management practices, and the wildlife that use these areas. These lands also offer great demonstration areas for land management practices, such as prescribed burns, invasive species removal and selective cutting of trees, that contribute to the overall health and sustainability of forest ecosystems. Dane County Forests may be found within the boundaries of lands of a different category.

### OVERVIEW

Lands managed under this category will allow the County to receive income from timber management as well as from a variety of grant programs. Lands may be enrolled in the WDNR “School and Community Forest” program that allows the County to receive income from timber management as well as provide an excellent opportunity to demonstrate sustainable forestry practices and teach about land stewardship. As acreage increases in the future, hunting will continue to be utilized for both recreation and wildlife management purposes compatible with forest use and ecology. The County may also consider enrolling some lands in the WDNR “County Forest” program that would make them eligible for a greater variety of funding programs as this program area increases in the future.

### INVENTORY

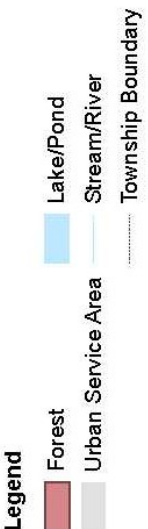
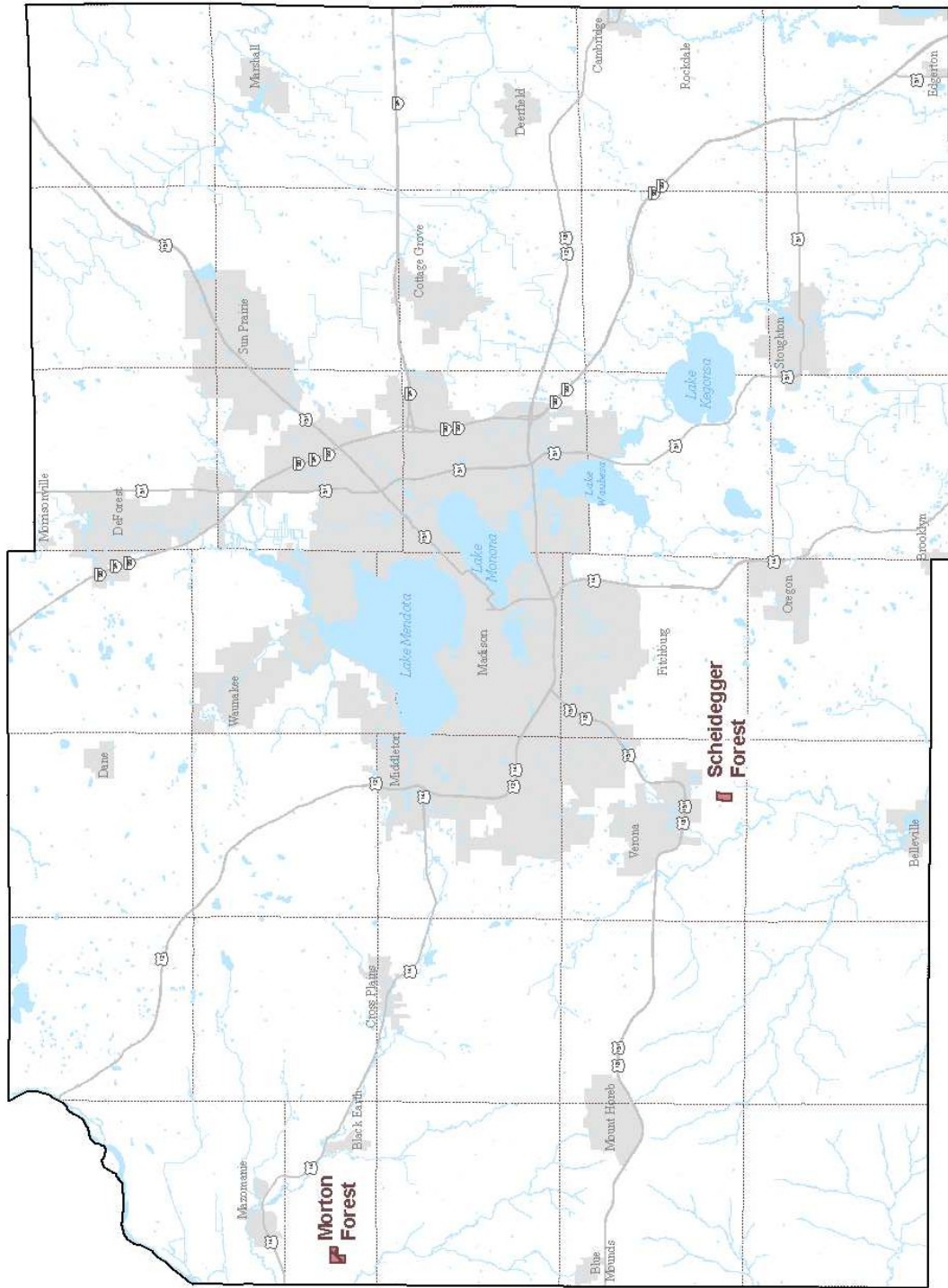
The table presents an inventory of all Dane County forests.

Other Amenities			
Permitted Archery Hunting		●	
Facilities for People with Disabilities			
Historic Site			
Pet Exercise Trails			
Pet Exercise Area (Acres)			
Tennis Courts			
Volleyball Courts			
Basketball Courts			
Softball Field			
Snowmobile Trail (Miles)			
Cross-Country Skiing (Miles)			
Bridle Trail (Miles)			
Mountain Biking (Miles)			
Hiking / Natural Surface Trail (Miles)		●	
Multi-Purpose Hard Surface Trails (Miles)			
Accessible Fishing Pier			
Swimming			
Canoe Launch			
Small Watercraft Launch			
Improved Boat Launch (Trailer Parking Spaces)			
Playground Equipment			
Picnic Area		●	
Non-Reservable Shelters			
Reservable Shelters		●	
Restrooms		●	
Group Camping		●	
Camping with Showers			
Electric Campsites			
Number of Camp Sites			
Car Parking and Public Access		●	
Total Acres	113.9	73.4	187.3
Forests: Date Represents Year Established in County POSP			
Morton Forest (1999)			
Scheidtger Forest (2002)			
Total			





# Forests



## VII.4 HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SITES

### DEFINITION

A historical/cultural site consists of land that is specifically set aside for the preservation, restoration, or reconstruction of features significant to the history or cultural heritage of an area. This can include historic buildings, reconstruction of historic buildings, and archaeological sites. Activities at a historic site may be limited to sightseeing and the study of the historic or cultural features. Recreation use at these properties should be extremely passive, such as trails, nature study and picnicking. Historic sites may be surrounded by lands belonging to another category, such as recreation parks or natural resource areas. *Note:* This category does not include several smaller historical sites on County owned property such as native American mound sites, cabin remnants, etc.

### OVERVIEW

Dane County Parks has four historical/cultural sites, which range dramatically in size and scope. Each site is unique to the system and provides different components of the region's history and culture. Management of each property is also unique to the specific characteristics of the site and each has dedicated volunteers that are instrumental in providing access, management, restoration and programming.

### INVENTORY

The table presents an inventory of all Dane County historical/cultural sites.



Hiking trail through restored prairie at Schumacher Farm Park

Other Amenities					
Facilities for People with Disabilities					
Historic Site	●	●	●		
Pet Exercise Trails					
Pet Exercise Area (Acres)					
Tennis Courts					
Volleyball Courts					
Basketball Courts					
Softball Field					
Snowmobile Trail (Miles)					
Cross-Country Skiing (Miles)					
Bridle Trail (Miles)					
Mountain Biking (Miles)					
Hiking / Natural Surface Trail (Miles)	●	●			
Multi-Purpose Hard Surface Trails (Miles)					
Accessible Fishing Pier					
Swimming					
Canoe Launch					
Small Watercraft Launch					
Improved Boat Launch (Trailer Parking Spaces)					
Playground Equipment	●				
Picnic Area	●				
Non-Reservable Shelters					
Reservable Shelters					
Restrooms					
Group Camping					
Camping with Showers					
Electric Campsites					
Number of Camp Sites					
Car Parking and Public Access	●	●	●		
Total Acres	0.6	115.5	41.3	0.2	157.6
Historic Sites: Date Represents Year Established in County POSP	Halfway Prairie (1964)	Schumacher Farm (1978)	Lake View Hill Park (1967)	Fort Blue Mounds (1910)	Total







## VII.5 WILDLIFE AREAS

### OVERVIEW

In 1994 the County Board amended the park ordinance to permit hunting within the County parks. The County recognized that as parkland acres increased, there would be additional opportunities to provide for hunting, especially on lands adjacent to State and Federal Wildlife and Fishery Areas and/or lands that historically provided for passive recreational uses such as hunting. In response to strong support expressed for more hunting opportunities on County owned lands during the 2006-2011 Parks and Open Space Plan update and changing Stewardship requirements, the Dane County Park Commission worked through a public process to create Wildlife Areas. In 2007 the County Board approved updates to Park Ordinances allowing the Park Commission to designate Wildlife Areas. The first Dane County Wildlife Area was established in October 2007, and there are now over 1,500 acres total offered at Dorn Creek, Door Creek, Walking Iron and Donald Wildlife Areas. Often, but not always, a Dane County Wildlife Area will be located adjacent to State Wildlife Areas, which creates larger tracts of public recreational land with similar uses and rules regardless of ownership. There are designated public parking areas at each site along with an information board that includes a map and any special rules.

### DEFINITION

A wildlife area consists of land that is primarily undeveloped with the exception of limited parking opportunities along the outer fringes. The lands function similar to WDNR wildlife areas and are open to nature-based outdoor activities. Management practices focus on providing wildlife habitat and undeveloped recreation uses such as hunting, trapping, hiking, foraging, snowshoeing, fishing and cross country skiing. Land covers usually consist of forest, wetlands, grasslands and working farmlands. All Wisconsin DNR fishing, hunting and trapping regulations apply for County wildlife areas unless otherwise posted. Each site may have specific restrictions for use based on location to residential areas, endangered resources and other issues that have been identified in a public planning process. Similar to a Natural Resource Area, users are encouraged to enjoy the area as is and trail access of any type is extremely limited. Wildlife Areas may be found within the boundaries of lands that are of a different classification. Wisconsin DNR conservation wardens help enforce all WDNR hunting and fishing laws on County Wildlife Areas.

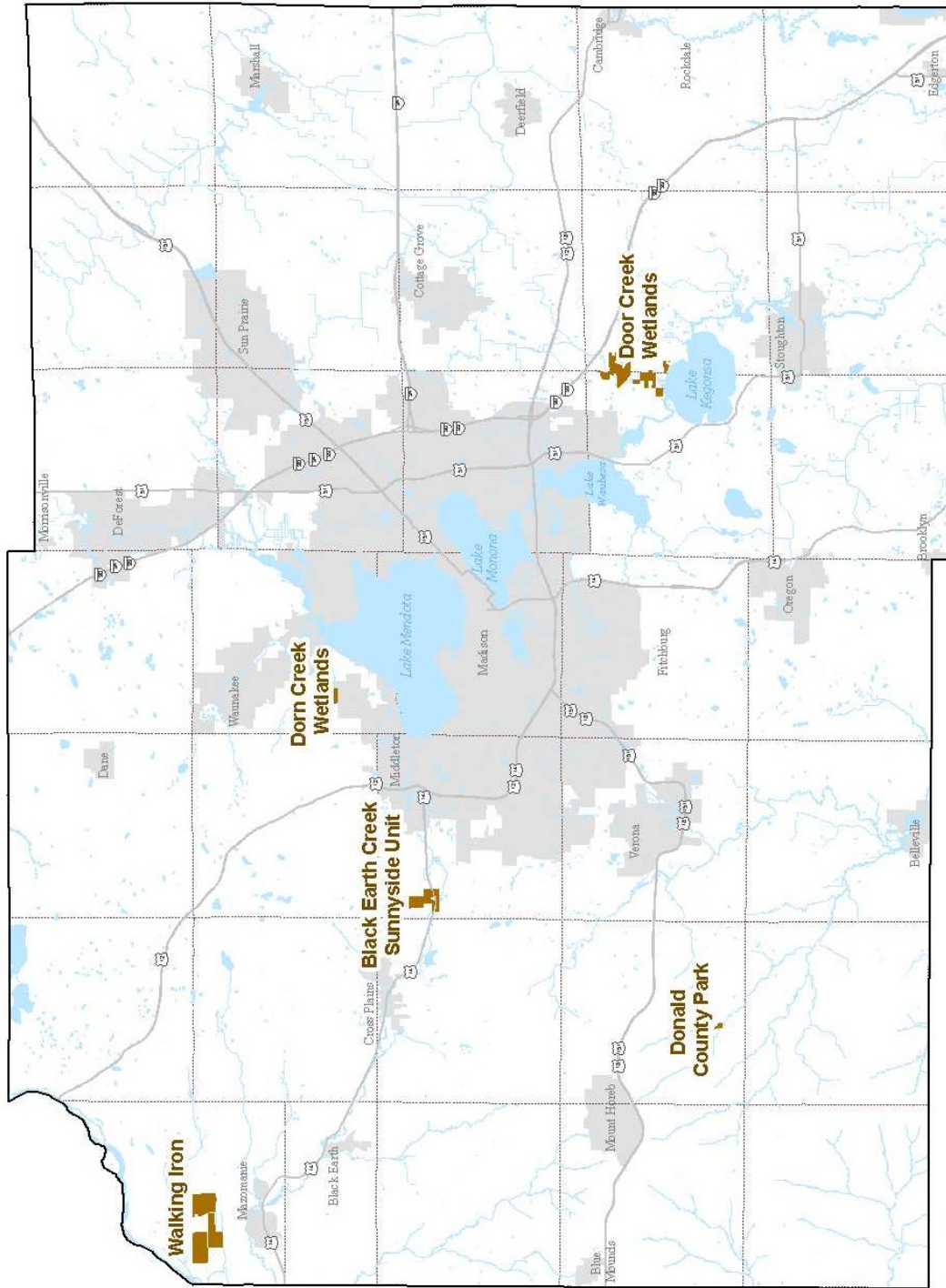
### INVENTORY

The table presents an inventory of all Dane County Wildlife Areas.

	Grasslands	Wetlands	Upland Forest	Streams/Ditches	Mountain Bike Trails	Equestrian Trails	Foraging	Trapping	Hunting	Cross Country Skiing	Snowshoeing	Hiking	Fishing	Off Road Parking	Total Acres under County Ownership
	●	●	●	●			●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	291.8
		●					●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	22.5
			●												552.6
				●											39.7
														●	911.3
															<b>1817.9</b>
<b>Wildlife Areas: Date Represents Year Established in County POSP</b>															
Black Earth Creek Sunnyside Unit (2012)															
Donald County Park (2012)															
Door Creek Wetlands (2012)															
Dorn Creek (2012)															
Walking Iron (2012)															
<b>Total</b>															

*Note: Developed and maintained facilities are not available for recreation uses such as hiking, snowshoeing, and cross country skiing at Wildlife Areas.*

# Wildlife Areas



## VIII. PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The Dane County Park Commission is responsible for combining and balancing a variety of planning criteria when considering recommended updates to this plan with an end goal of balancing user needs with proper land stewardship. Planning considerations for the update to this plan included:

- **DEMOGRAPHICS**
- **RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS**
- **RECREATION NEEDS ANALYSIS**
- **FUTURE LAND NEEDS ANALYSIS**
- **LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT INPUT**
- **PUBLIC & NON-PROFIT CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION INPUT**
- **STATE STEWARDSHIP REQUIREMENTS**
- **DANE COUNTY PARKS STAFF INPUT**
- **LAND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**
- **PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**
- **COMMITTEE INPUT**

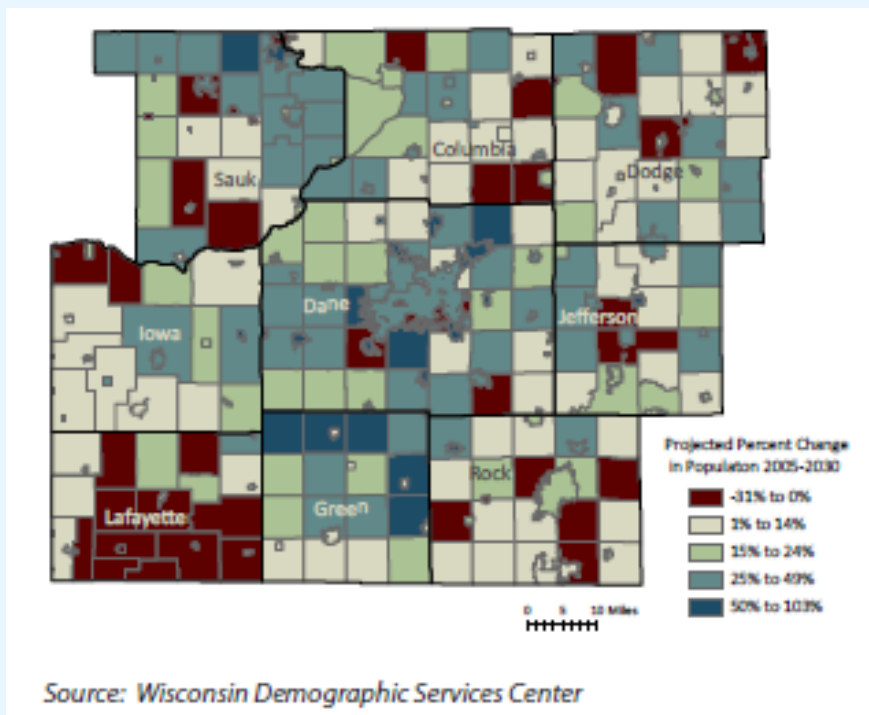
## DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics are the statistical characteristics of a population related to age, race, income level, education, employment status, etc. Unless otherwise noted, demographic information was compiled from the draft 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan Region 9 analysis. Region 9 consists of Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk counties. Demographic information was compiled by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Applied Population Laboratory (APL) for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Parks and Recreation Program.

### POPULATION

Dane County continues to be one of the fastest growing counties in the State, and the population is expected to continue to rise steadily for the next thirty years according to the Dane County Community Analysis and Planning Division. In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the Dane County population at 488,073. The Wisconsin Demographic Service Center projects the population to rise to 624,500 by 2030, or an approximate 19% increase. Between 2000 and 2008, the Cities of Edgerton and Verona and Villages of Brooklyn and Cottage Grove experienced considerable growth. The City of Madison and its suburbs and the Town of Bristol are expected to experience the greatest percentage of population increases from 2000 to 2030. It is important to identify where growth is anticipated to occur for the purpose of locating future recreation parks, prioritizing acquisition of lands targeted for resource protection, and prioritizing future trail development projects. The map below from the draft 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan presents projected population change for the Dane County region.

#### PROJECTED POPULATION CHANGE, 2005—2030





## AGE

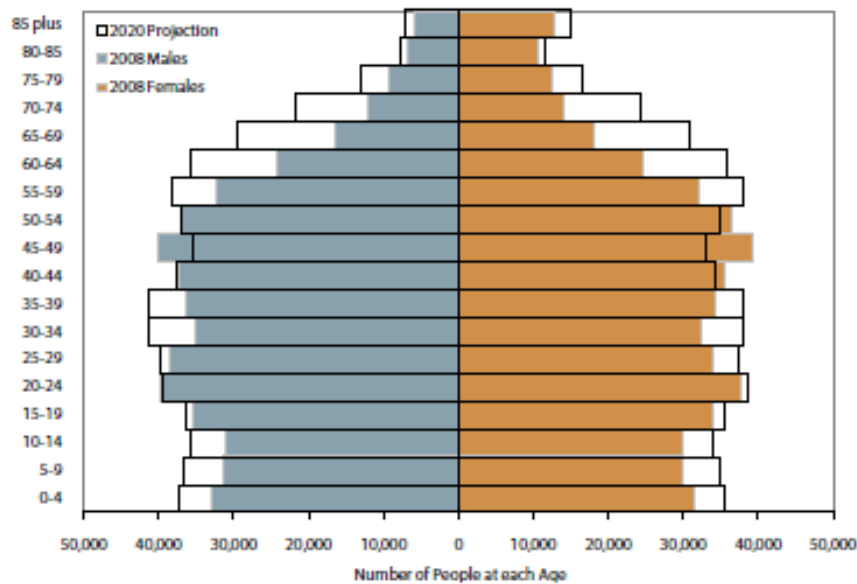
The Wisconsin Demographic Services Center and U.S. Census Bureau continue to predict moderate increases of both male and female Dane County residents age 65 or older through 2020. Dane County also has a large percentage of population under the age of 20, and this is anticipated to continue through 2020. The chart and table below from the draft 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan graphically present these trends for Dane County and the surrounding counties.

POPULATION BY AGE, 2008 & 2020

	Under 20 (2008)	Over 65 (2008)	Under 20 (2020)	Over 65 (2020)
Columbia County	24.3%	14.4%	22.7%	17.4%
Dane County	26.1%	9.9%	25.6%	14.4%
Dodge County	22.9%	13.7%	22.7%	16.4%
Green County	25.0%	14.7%	25.1%	18.2%
Iowa County	25.5%	13.1%	25.3%	16.8%
Jefferson County	26.3%	13.1%	26.3%	15.7%
Lafayette County	24.7%	15.5%	26.1%	18.8%
Rock County	27.0%	13.1%	25.7%	15.9%
Sauk County	24.8%	14.5%	24.0%	18.2%
<b>Region 9</b>	<b>25.7%</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>25.2%</b>	<b>15.6%</b>
<b>State of Wisconsin</b>	<b>26.0%</b>	<b>13.2%</b>	<b>25.0%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates & Wisconsin Demographic Services Center Projections

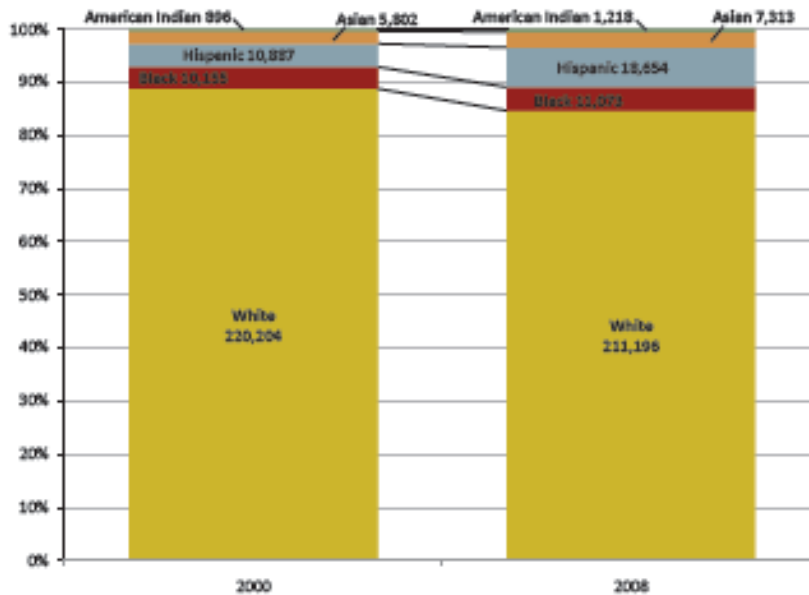
AGE STRUCTURE BY SEX, 2008 & 2020



## RACE/ETHNICITY

Information compiled by the University of Wisconsin Madison Applied Population Lab for the draft 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan indicates Dane County has the highest and most diverse ethnic population in south central Wisconsin. The Hispanic population is growing most rapidly, a 65% increase between 2000 and 2008. Child population characteristics are another indicator of how populations may change in future years. The chart below from the draft 2011-2016 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan presents child population changes for Region 9.

CHILD POPULATION BY RACE/ETHNICITY, 2000 & 2008



Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates

Between 2005-2009, SCORP lists snowmobiling, mountain biking, snowboarding, handball, and visiting historic sites as the top five Hispanic outdoor recreation activities.

## DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

The aging population structure data continues to support 2006-2011 Dane County Park and Open Space Plan recommendations for provision of facilities such as trails, picnic facilities, hiking and wildlife viewing. Strong interest heard throughout the public input process to increase mountain biking facilities is consistent with recreation needs of the rising County Hispanic population. It may also be necessary to investigate provision of bilingual signage at some parks. Continued high youth population numbers also warrants ongoing investigation of possible future partnerships with local units of government on regional active sports field areas.

In addition to recreation considerations, youth and retirement age groups are of particular interest for sustaining the County park system volunteer efforts and strong conservation ethic. The majority of regular volunteers who carry out a variety of projects in the park system are retirement age residents. This same age group also plays a key role in coordinating and fostering school and youth group park activities. Encouraging youth to take an early and active interest in parks and conservation is critical to the long-term success of the Dane County park system.

## RELATED PLANNING EFFORTS

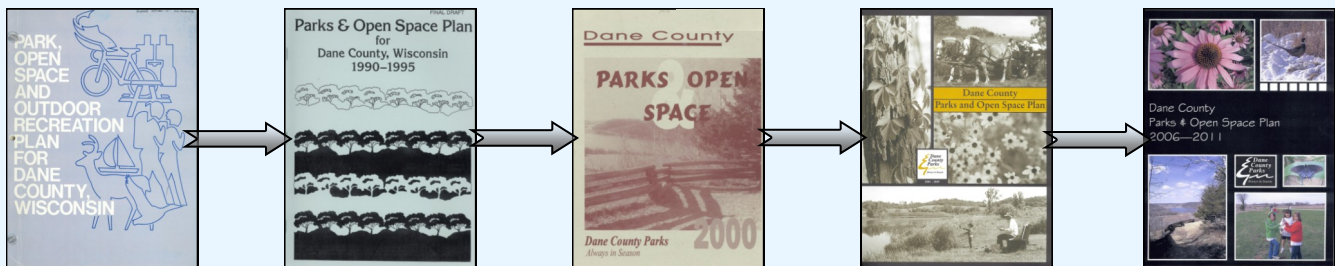
The following is a list of other planning efforts that were considered in the preparation of the 2012-17 County Park and Open Space Plan. Several of the recommendations that are found within this plan are supported and/or included within these related planning projects.

### BIKE DANE

In July of 2010, a meeting was convened by Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk to identify needs within the bicycle facility system countywide that would complement existing urban area on- and off- road systems. The meeting was attended by bicycle event organizers, bicycle business owners, transportation planners, representatives from local units of government and bicycle advocates. Following a presentation that provided an overview of existing Dane County bicycle trail initiatives as outlined in the 2006-2011 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan, meeting participants broke out into work groups to identify desired on-road and off-road bicycle facilities as well as perceived issue/conflict areas that needed improvements. Results from the July Bike Dane planning meeting were summarized by Dane County Parks planning staff and reviewed by a volunteer workgroup at a follow-up meeting on October 14th, 2010. Results of this planning initiative were incorporated into this plan update.

### DANE COUNTY PARK AND OPEN SPACE PLANS 1970-2011

The County has completed seven Park and Open Space Plans over the last 40 years. The first plan was completed by the Dane County Regional Planning Commission in 1970. All subsequent planning has continued to build upon this original plan with additional recommendations for park planning and facility development, land management, acquisition of new lands, as well as ongoing recreation and trail needs analysis.



### 2011-2016 WISCONSIN STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

The SCORP plan is done every five years to identify essential issues that affect the future of outdoor recreation and include appropriate recommendations. All supply, demand, and recreational data was compiled on a regional level and included nine SCORP planning regions throughout the state. The plan includes a recreational demand survey, needs assessment of recreational resource requirements and demographic data for the Dane County region that was considered in preparing this plan.

### COMPREHENSIVE AND LOCAL LAND USE PLANS

A Comprehensive Planning Law was passed as part of the 1999-2001 Wisconsin State biennial budget and required that by 2010, all land use related actions (regulations, etc.) must be consistent with an adopted comprehensive plan. Dane County Parks planning staff obtained adopted comprehensive and other land use plan information from several local units of government to consider for the update to this plan.

### MADISON AREA METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATION BIKE PLAN

The Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) maintains a comprehensive inventory of existing and proposed bicycle facilities throughout the County that is based on a compilation of several bicycle/pedestrian planning efforts. Dane County Parks planning staff is routinely in contact with MPO staff to review the latest updates and discuss potential future trail projects.



## RECREATION NEEDS ANALYSIS

As additional lands continue to be acquired and added to the park system, it is important to have a thorough understanding of what types of recreation facilities and opportunities should be provided on them. Keeping current with recreation trends and demand is critical to meeting the recreation needs of Dane County residents.

Recreation needs analysis planning is unique for Dane County in that the population structure and demand for recreation use is very diverse. This diversity may be attributed to strong numbers of college students who reside in Dane County and adds to the importance of also analyzing national and statewide outdoor recreation participation rates. Several recreation uses are quite popular in Dane County and yet go unrecognized in most recreation participation survey results. Geocaching (treasure hunting for hide-and-seek items with a GPS unit) and disc golf are two recreation activities that have experienced significant increasing demand in Dane County. Also, the majority of the population is urban and concentrated throughout the Madison metropolitan area. This most likely accounts for the high demand to provide dog exercise areas in Dane County that is not typical in other adjacent counties.

The following information was also considered in determining recreation needs for Dane County.

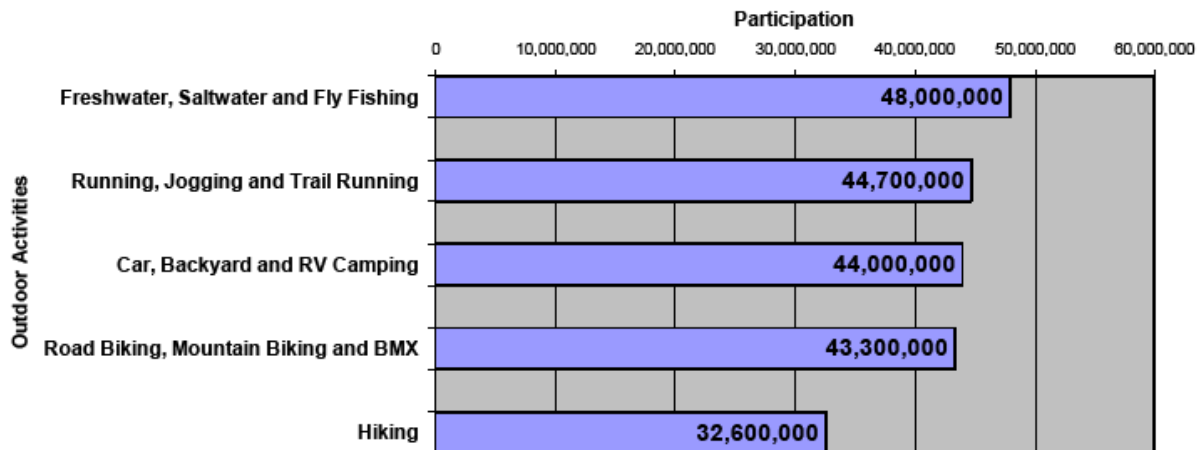
### 2010 OUTDOOR RECREATION PARTICIPATION REPORT

The Outdoor Foundation is a non-profit organization committed to growing and inspiring future generations of outdoor enthusiasts, particularly youth. In 2010 it published the Outdoor Recreation Participation Report to identify nationwide trends in outdoor recreation participation across the country. Information gathered for this report came from surveys of more than 40,000 individuals and households throughout the country.

Between 2008 and 2009 for all Americans age six and older, bowhunting, kayaking, adventure racing, off-road triathlons, cross country skiing and snowshoeing showed the highest increases in participation rates. Snowshoeing and kayaking were also some of the higher ranking first-time participation sports in 2009. In general, participation in human-powered outdoor activities across the country had significant increases in 2009. This may be attributed to poor economic conditions and the general lower costs associated with these types of “silent sports.”

The following graph presents the top nationwide outdoor recreation participation rates in 2009.

### Most Popular Outdoor Activities All Americans, Age 6 and Older



## DRAFT 2011-2016 STATEWIDE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources also prepares a five year outdoor recreation plan that includes significant planning information that is pertinent to the County plan. In addition to demographic information, the plan also includes valuable survey data pertaining to the amount and trends of outdoor recreation activities occurring across the State and south central region. The source of recreation demand data that was included in this plan was the National Survey on Recreation and Environment 2005-2009, Versions 1-5. N=718. Interview dates: 1/05 to 11/09, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Parks and Recreation, March, 2011.

The graph below represents a summary of recreation participation by use for Wisconsin Southern Gateway counties including, Sauk, Columbia, Dodge, Iowa, Dane, Jefferson, Lafayette, Green, and Rock counties.

**Table 16: Recreation Demand**

Rank	Recreational Uses*	Region (%)	State (%)
1	Picnicking	62.5%	56.6%
2	Boating	48.5%	47.6%
3	Visit a beach	43.4%	47.3%
4	Swimming in Lakes, Streams, etc.	42.7%	45.8%
5	Snow/ice activities (any type)	40.8%	44.4%
6	Visit a wilderness or primitive area	39.9%	38.3%
7	Day hiking	38.0%	35.0%
8	Freshwater fishing	35.1%	40.7%
9	Motorboating	32.0%	36.4%
10	Developed camping	31.4%	32.3%

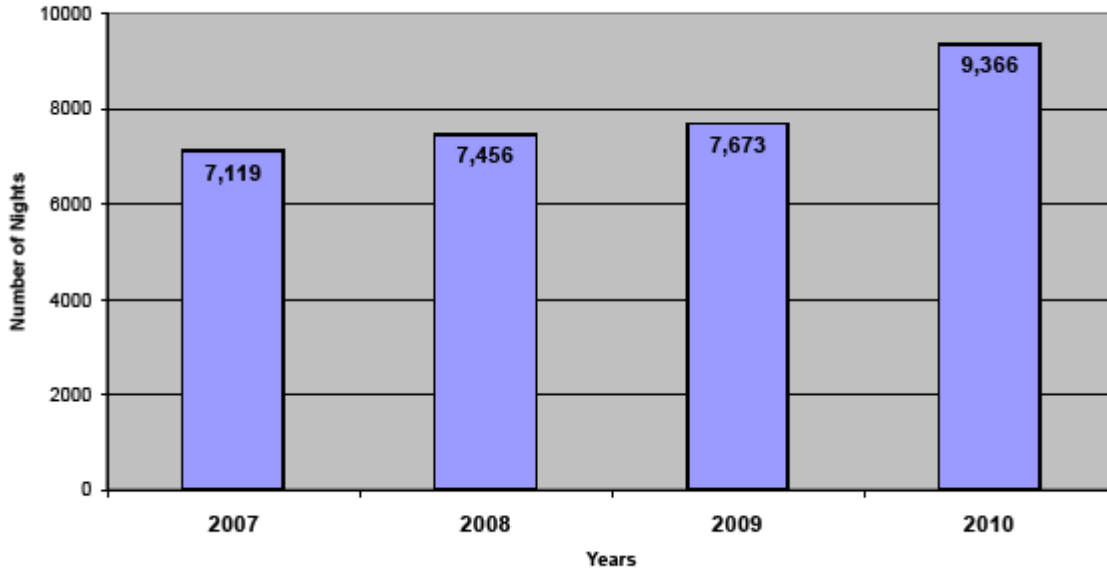
\* Selection of SCORP 2005-2010 recreational uses determined to be nature-based



*Picnicking at Lake Farm  
County Park.*

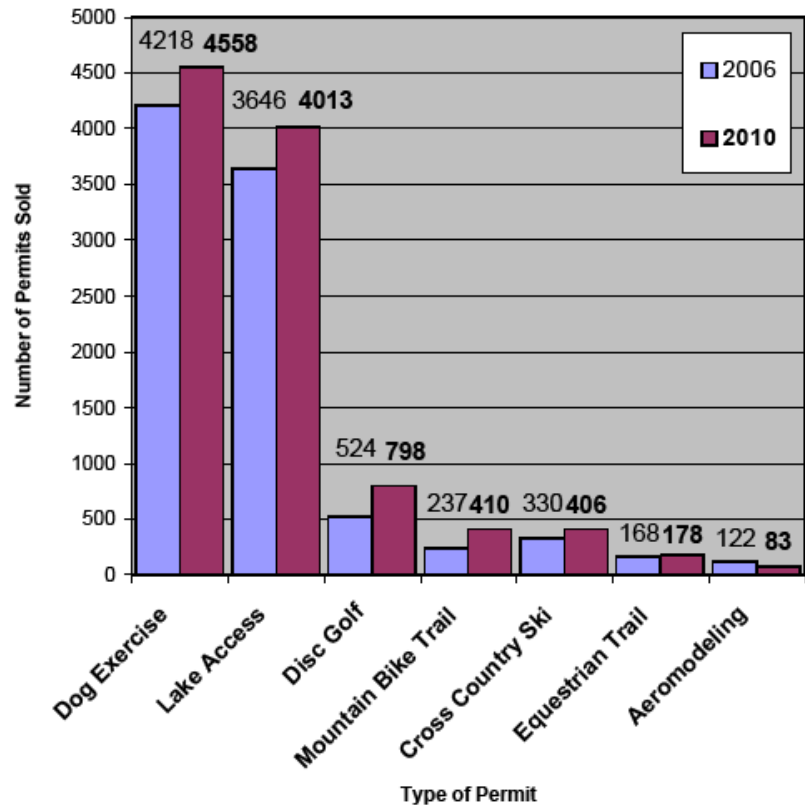
Dane County Parks also compared recreation uses that require purchase of a permit in 2006 and 2010 to identify trends for these park uses. Number of nights camping at Dane County Parks was also inventoried between 2007 and 2010. These analyses are presented on the following graphs.

### Number of Nights Camping



Lake access, dog exercise areas and camping continue to be very popular uses on Dane County park lands. Disc golf, mountain bike and cross country skiing all showed significant use increases between 2006 and 2010.

### 2006 & 2010 Annual Permit Sales





## **OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

Dane County Parks staff has reported a strong increase in snowshoe use during the winter of 2010-11. This could be attributed to a significant reduction in cost and increase in availability of snowshoes at most sporting good stores. Dane County Parks will need to further investigate how to successfully provide this winter trail use without impacting groomed cross country ski trails.

Overall, statewide hunting license sales showed slight declines between 2009 and 2010. This may be attributed to hunter frustration with CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) in deer and increasingly complex hunting regulations. Dane County Parks has had very high interest in the limited access archery hunting program. Demand for available permits has exceeded the amount available by nearly 50% for the past three years. Related, in 2009 (30,584) and 2010 (30,205) the WDNR sold the most hunting licenses in Dane County.

## **RECREATION NEEDS SUMMARY**

High demand and participation rates are consistently shown for camping, biking, fishing, and most trail activities in national, state, county and local recreation surveys. High participation rates in water-related activities continue to warrant the priority to provide a variety of public access opportunities on Dane County waters. Strong public support was heard throughout the planning process to expand trail facilities, particularly single track mountain biking in western Dane County.

A synthesis of all planning considerations provides an accurate portrayal of the primary recreation expectations and needs on the Dane County Park system. They are as follows:

- Trails (Particularly Mountain Biking, Snowshoeing, Multi-Use Regional)
- Wildlife Viewing Opportunities
- Water Access Facilities (fishing, kayaking)
- Camping
- Picnicking and Shelters
- Disc Golf
- Dog Exercise Areas
- Hunting & Archery

Future development of these types of recreation programs is also compatible with projected County population trends that point toward high future populations of both youth and retirement-age residents.

## **FUTURE LAND NEEDS ANALYSIS**

Dane County is unique in that it has its own funding mechanism (Conservation Fund) for acquiring and expanding future park lands. Poor economic conditions for several years has greatly lowered demand for developable land and perhaps even caused a decrease in some land values. This has created a very favorable environment for the purchase of land for conservation purposes.

Future land needs recommended in the Parks and Open Space Plan are identified primarily through stakeholder and local unit of government input during the planning process. Some of the considerations to recommend new project areas include restoration potential, strong public support, existing public ownership, partnership potentials, high probability of an active friends group forming and opportunity to provide a variety of public uses. This method has been successful in generating a greater sense of ownership by plan stakeholders and broadening partnership opportunities with other government agencies and non-profit conservation groups.

## **LOCAL UNIT OF GOVERNMENT INPUT**

In December of 2010, invitations were sent to all County cities, villages, and townships to provide suggestions on possible updates or additions to this plan. This resulted in individual meetings with fifteen local units of government throughout Dane County. Also, Dane County Parks facilitated four public listening sessions throughout the County each Monday in June of 2011 to present draft recommendations being considered for the plan update. Sessions were held at Town halls in Albion, Windsor, Mazomanie, and Perry. All meetings were publicly noticed and posted on the County web page.

In general, comments heard were related to increasing trail facilities and connectivity, expanding natural resource area project boundaries, and establishing more dog exercise areas.

## **PUBLIC AND NON PROFIT CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION INPUT**

The five-year update to the County Parks and Open Space Plan provides an excellent forum for the public and other stakeholders to communicate new ideas and provide feedback on proposed plan updates. Several public meetings were held throughout the planning process to generate ideas from the public and stakeholders. In December of 2010, a kick-off meeting was held to introduce the planning process and provide instructions for how input could be provided on the plan update. A feedback form was also posted on the County website and a Facebook page was created to provide notifications of upcoming meetings and developments in the planning process.

In May of 2011, a public information meeting was held to present a draft of the limited access trapping program that was being proposed in response to changes in State Stewardship program requirements. Additional planning will be necessary to address concerns regarding the proposed WDNR requirement of allowing trapping on lands purchased with State Stewardship funds (See State Stewardship Access under Real Estate Program Recommendations).

In August of 2011, another public information meeting was held to present results of the public input process and present draft recommendations being considered for the update to the plan. Similar to the last plan update in 2005, strong support for additional trail projects and continued preservation of large tracts of natural resource area lands was heard. There was also support evident for continuation and expansion of the County Naturalist and Volunteer programs. Related, efforts to engage and incorporate youth into the outdoor activities was a commonly heard topic. Finally, comments were heard throughout the public input process related to support for planning, development and proper stewardship of the lands that have been recently added to the park system and currently have no facilities or access.

Regarding the process itself, it was suggested that Dane County Parks also investigate utilizing a survey to gather input during the next update to the plan.

All public information meetings were posted on the Dane County Clerk's Office web page, the Dane County Parks web page, posted under Legal Notices of the Madison Newspapers, and sent out as County press releases.

In addition to public information meetings, eleven meetings were held with a variety of non-profit organizations to discuss possible updates to the plan. Strong support was evident for provision of public agriculture and gardening on County-owned lands (See Agriculture, Gardening and Foraging under Dane County Parks Program Area Recommendations). Input gathered also suggested a continued strong interest in acquiring lands that protected water and associated wetlands. There continues to be a recurring theme that the County should continue to work toward creating larger continuous tracts of lands devoted for natural resource protection.

## **STATE STEWARDSHIP REQUIREMENTS**

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program provides matching grants for acquisition and development projects. Program requirements related to public access on Stewardship-funded properties changed in 2007 (see the Real Estate Division Program section for more detail). Consideration of how to meet the public access requirements is a factor when determining appropriate recreational uses for a property.

## **DANE COUNTY PARKS STAFF INPUT**

Dane County Parks operations and ranger staff provide critical-in-the field observations on how the park system is being used by the public and priority facility needs. Park management staff was also interviewed throughout the planning process to gain insights on program area needs. Staff input was used for identifying some of the Dane County Parks system and program area recommendations found in this plan.

## **LAND MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS**

The Dane County Park system now consists of over 12,000 acres of land with land management practices varying according to property classification. Land management practices strive to balance proper stewardship of resources (including prevention and control of invasive species) with an appropriate amount of compatible public uses. Recommendations pertaining to land management within this plan must be consistent with a variety of conservation guidelines including Wisconsin DNR Best Management Practices, Dane County Chapter 14 storm water management requirements, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service restoration standards, Park Commission Integrated Pest Management Plan and Agriculture Conservation Plans that are reviewed and approved by the Dane County Land Conservation Division.

## **PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES**

The potential to partner with Friends Groups and other non-profit conservation organizations is a strong consideration for deciding if a new initiative is included in this plan. Many new programs and project areas would not be possible without outside assistance in areas such as land acquisition, property stewardship and program development.

## **COMMITTEE INPUT**

The Park and Open Space Advisory Committee consists of seven Dane County Park Commission members and four appointed County Board supervisors. The Advisory Committee provides input on draft plan recommendations prior to final approval by resolution. The Environment, Agriculture and Natural Resource Committee (EANR) is the policy oversight committee for the Dane County Park Commission and also provides input for the plan prior to adoption consideration by the County Board.



# IX. DANE COUNTY PARKS SYSTEM PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

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*Prescribed Prairie Burn, 2007*

## IX.1 RECREATION PARKS

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Maintain and expand existing park boundaries where needed to provide future park facilities and adequate buffers from adjacent urban and transportation land uses.
2. Consider potential expansion of disc golf, dog exercise, mountain biking, snowshoeing and camping program areas throughout existing and new park lands to meet growing demands.
3. Consider including revenue generating program areas where appropriate to offset maintenance costs in all future recreation park projects.
4. Mitigate loss of park land for any purpose to the greatest extent possible.

### **POLICIES**

1. Provide park and recreation resources that have regional significance and provide multiple uses for County residents from several local units of government.
2. Locate new recreation parks close to, but isolated from, large population centers on lands that provide for year-round multiple recreation uses with diverse natural resources. Ideally, natural features such as rugged topography, water or wetlands will provide separation from urban areas.
3. Undertake partnerships with schools and recreation groups, including private, non-profit organizations, that have a regional user base.
4. Charge fees in balance with other available resources for use of park facilities in order to offset costs for operations, maintenance and development of the park system.
5. Consider development of new regional recreation uses on existing or future park land if the demand is quantifiable, designated lands are suitable for the intended use and there are sufficient resources available to plan, develop and manage the proposed use.
6. Consider expanding types of hunting allowed and areas open to hunting on County owned lands in coordination with other Federal, State, and local properties that is compatible with park land public uses and safety, to complement land management and wildlife protection goals.
7. Incorporate a minimum of twenty-five acres of level, utility open space available for parking and special events into recreation parks where possible.
8. Develop higher intensity park program areas such as camping, disc golf, dog exercise, mountain bike areas and other uses that require daily management at staff occupied park work unit locations unless alternative volunteer/ partnership management options exist.

## **FUTURE COUNTY PARK LOCATIONS**

Two new recreation parks are proposed in this plan. These new park proposals were included in the 2006-2011 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. The first would be located centrally in the northeast quadrant of the County. This suggestion came from several of the participants who attended the northeast public listening session and by several local units of government. This region of the County is expected to experience a large amount of residential growth according to local land use plans and other demographic analysis.

The second recreation park would be near the Village of Oregon. Again, the request for this park came from area local units of government and was supported in the public input process. This park would complete an even distribution of recreation parks across the southern tier of Dane County.

## **GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Most of the infrastructure in Dane County's recreation parks is more than 30 years old and will need ongoing repair and replacement. Also, much of the signage throughout the entire park system is extremely outdated and needs to be redesigned and replaced. The need for these park improvements should be viewed as an opportunity that will allow the parks division to re-evaluate design standards for all park facilities and create a more uniform appearance. This "branding" of the park system will help promote an awareness and visibility of the Dane County park system.

Dane County Parks should continue working with local units of government to connect bicycle-pedestrian trails from urban areas to County recreation parks and trails. This will enhance access to a variety of recreation facilities for County residents of all age and income levels. As the bicycle/pedestrian network continues to expand, additional consideration should be given to development of park and recreation facilities that are primarily accessed by bike or foot.

There was considerable interest throughout the public input process for additional development of mountain bike trails (particularly single track) in western Dane County. Dane County staff will continue to investigate suitable locations.

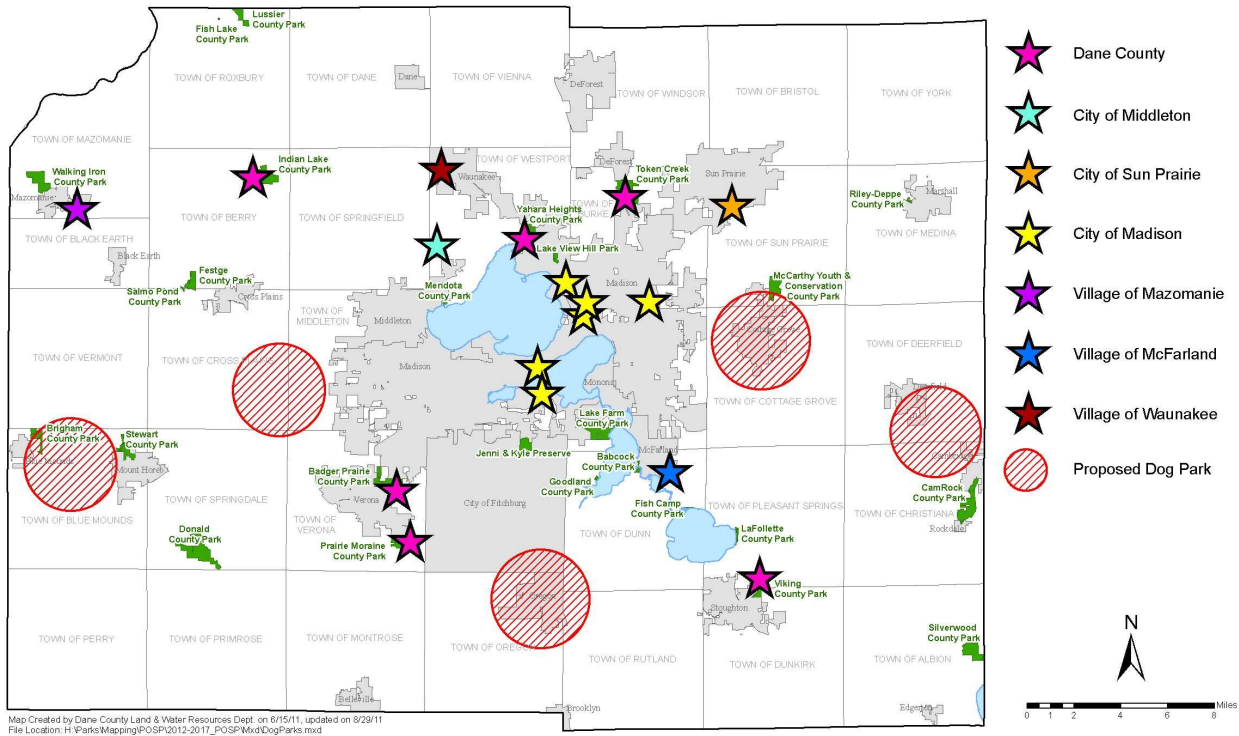
The interest in the disc golf program has continued to grow. Currently, all facilities are located in the Madison metro area or in the eastern half of the county. This plan recommends continuing to investigate development of a new course on the western side of the county.

Dane County Parks often receives requests for assistance to develop new dog parks from local units of government throughout the county. Dane County's role will continue to be providing dog parks that serve regional populations. An inventory of existing dog parks is presented on the following page.

The existing recommendation to provide a new dog park on the western side of the county will remain, particularly in the Town of Middleton and Mt. Horeb regions. This update to the plan also recommends consideration of new dog parks in the following regions: Oregon, Cottage Grove and Deerfield/Cambridge. The Bristol region should be considered in the next plan update if population forecasts for significant growth occur there.



## Existing and Proposed Off Leash Dog Parks



*Prairie Moraine  
 County Park—  
 Dog Exercise Area*

## EXISTING RECREATION PARKS

### **BABCOCK County Park** (Village of McFarland/Town of Dunn, 36.4 acres)

Babcock County Park is located on the east shore of Lake Waubesa where the Yahara River flows under USH 51. The park is named after Stephen Moulton Babcock, who came to the University of Wisconsin faculty in 1887 and remained until his death in 1931. He is best known for the perfection of the butterfat test which bears his name and his work in the field of animal nutrition. The park has a very popular boat launch facility, shore fishing area and campground that are used extensively during the summer months. **Recommendations:**

- Construct shore fishing pier at shoreline on north side of lock.
- Maintain shore fishing access at lock and dam structure.
- Resurface pavement areas at lock, shower building and campground and incorporate stormwater infiltration areas.
- Reconfigure bicycle/pedestrian path between shower building and lock.
- Continue discussions with WDOT on mitigation activities required for the proposed USH 51 roadway expansion project.
- Include improved and increased ease of navigability of lock within lock and dam update engineering study.

### **BADGER PRAIRIE County Park** (Town of Verona/City of Verona, 350.2 acres)

Badger Prairie County Park is located at the eastern edge of the City of Verona at the intersection of CTH MV and USH 151. The City of Verona constructed a library off Enterprise Drive which could provide a western parking lot entrance for the park. A variety of recreation uses take place at the park including aeromodeling, dog exercise area, soccer, cyclocross, and mountain biking. A master plan was completed for the park in 2009.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue to implement recommendations of the adopted master plan.
- Investigate outdoor education and archery program partnerships with Verona Schools.

### **BRIGHAM County Park** (Town of Blue Mounds, 120.2 acres)

Brigham County Park is located on CTH F just northeast of the Village of Blue Mounds and is named after Ebenezer Brigham, one of the first to homestead in the area. The park offers camping and outstanding panoramic views of the surrounding countryside.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Improve signage throughout the park.
- Consider implementation of a regional scale mountain bike trail system with connections to Blue Mound State Park.
- Investigate provision of snowshoeing trails.
- Consider expanding park boundaries, including a continuous corridor south and east to Military Ridge State Trail and west to Blue Mound State Park.
- Work with the Village/DNR to develop a bicycle trail connector from the park to Military Ridge State Trail.



*Brigham County Park*



### **CAMROCK County Park** (Town of Christiana, 439.9 acres)

CamRock County Park is located along the Koskonong Creek between the Villages of Cambridge and Rockdale. The original park property acquisition was made possible through efforts of the Cambridge Foundation and Dane County Park Commission. Mountain biking and cross country skiing are popular recreation uses.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue implementing recommendations of the 2006 Master Plan for the park and mill site.
- Investigate provision of snowshoe trails with volunteers and on single track mountain bike trails to eliminate conflict with groomed ski trails.
- Consider partnership with the Village of Cambridge to convert former fur building site to a Koskonong Creek water trailhead.

### **DONALD County Park** (Town of Springdale, 538.4 acres)

Located along USH 92 south of Mount Horeb, Donald County Park was made possible by a donation of 105 acres from the Donald/Woodburn family in 1993. The park has potential to become a premier equestrian destination with an extensive trail system and also offers outstanding hiking, trout fishing and picnicking opportunities.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue implementing recommendations of the park's 2005 Master Plan.
- Investigate provision of snowshoe trails.
- Begin planning for future park access site at Hitchcock residence.
- Investigate community agriculture that practices row crops that are in character with surrounding landscape.

### **FESTGE County Park** (Town of Berry, 155.6 acres)

Festge County Park is located along USH 14 between the Villages of Cross Plains and Black Earth. Festge County Park has an overlook area that provides panoramic views of the Black Earth Creek valleys. **Recommendations:**

- Continue to acquire lands/easements to protect views from the overlook area.
- Investigate provision of snowshoe trails.
- Renovate/restore overlook area to expand use potential.
- Replace existing shelter with timber frame shelter.
- Expand boundary to include connection to Swamplovers parcel.



#### *Festge Overlook:*

*Festge County Park sits atop a glacial moraine overlooking a deep pre-glacial valley dotted with dairy farms.*

*Courtesy of Mark Adsit*

### **FISH CAMP County Park** (Town of Dunn, 15.6 acres)

Located at the end of Fish Camp Road off CTH B, this park's primary use is the boat landing for water access to the Lower Yahara River and Lake Kegonsa. In 1934, the Wisconsin Conservation Department hired netting crews and established rough-fish removal camps. Fish Camp Launch was one of several rough-fish removal facilities. Carp were captured in nets and then held in pens until they were shipped live by truck to stock ponds in other states, or packed in ice and sent by rail to fresh fish markets in Chicago and New York. An interpretive display that tells the story of the carp harvesting operation was installed in 2009. **Recommendations:**

- Begin planning bridge and boardwalk facilities required for implementation of the Lower Yahara River Trail.

### **FISH LAKE County Park** (Town of Roxbury, 2.9 acres)

Fish Lake County Park is located on the northwest shore of Fish Lake and is primarily used for boat access to the lake. Only electric boat motors are allowed on the lake. Fish Lake is 252 acres in size and has a maximum depth of 62 feet. It is one of only a handful of southern Wisconsin lakes that are capable of supporting a coldwater cisco population. **Recommendations:**

- Consider working with WDNR to relocate boat launch facility to Lussier County Park on east side of lake.
- Prepare a Master Plan that would include recommendations for future recreation development of Fish Lake and Lussier County Parks, as well as all lands within the Fish Lake Natural Resource Area.

### **GOODLAND County Park** (Town of Dunn, 13.9 acres)

Goodland County Park is located on the western shore of Lake Waubesa and provides a variety of recreation facilities including picnic areas, tennis, basketball and volleyball courts, ball diamond, unsupervised swimming beach and boat launch facility. **Recommendations:**

- Replace and relocate permit kiosk to central area of boat landing turn around at ramp.
- Continue to investigate partnerships with the neighborhood and Town for restoration of tennis court area.

### **INDIAN LAKE County Park** (Town of Berry, 480.3 acres)

Indian Lake County Park is located along STH 19 approximately 2 miles west of USH 12. The park includes a historic chapel building atop a wooded hill. The nearby overlook provides outstanding views of the park and surrounding hillsides. This park is used extensively for cross country skiing during the winter. Only electric boat motors are allowed on the lake. **Recommendations:**

- Increase park acreage by approximately 250 acres. Acquisition areas include buffers on the northerly lakeshore, as well as the lake headwaters north and east of the park and associated wetlands and springs.
- Replace permit board with three sided informational kiosk that would be centrally located in parking area.
- Relocate historical marker to more accessible and visible location.
- Develop new shelter and parking area northeast of existing parking lot with vault toilet.
- Evaluate lake drainage areas for potential pollutant reduction strategies. Develop fisheries management objectives to restore recreational opportunities.

*Indian Lake County Park, courtesy of Steve Salt*





## **JENNI AND KYLE Preserve** (City of Fitchburg, 160.3 acres)

The Jenni and Kyle Preserve began in 1989 with a generous donation from Patricia and Harvey Wilmeth as a memorial to their two grandchildren, Jenni and Kyle, who both died at the age of 4 of a degenerative neurological disease. This park was designed and developed with the intent of providing children and persons with disabilities a place to enjoy outdoor activities and learn about natural environments. **Recommendations:**

- Complete an accessible path and waterfowl observation area surrounding the wetland complex south of the ponds.

*2010 Annual Jenni and Kyle Fishing Day*



## **LAFOLLETTE County Park** (Town of Pleasant Springs, 28.6 acres)

LaFollette County Park is located on the eastern shore of Lake Kegonsa on Williams Drive. The park is very linear in nature and includes a small picnic shelter, restroom and play equipment. Use of this park is limited due to extensive recreation opportunities available at nearby Lake Kegonsa State Park. **Recommendations:**

- Consider transfer of park to the Department of Natural Resources as a potential addition to the State Park.
- Provide increased shore fishing opportunities at the lock on the Yahara River.
- Begin working on establishing Lower Yahara River Trail corridor through the park.

## **LAKE FARM County Park** (City of Madison/Twn. of Blooming Grove, 320.0 acres)

This park originated from the historic Lake Farms property and is included within the Capital Springs Recreation Area. It is located along the Capital City Trail on Libby Road west of Lake Waubesa and forms the eastern end of the Dane County E-Way. The park was previously listed as “Lake Farm Centennial State Park” in the 2006-2011 County Park and Open Space Plan. A master plan for the Capital Springs Recreation Area was adopted in 2010 that includes recommendations for this park unit. **Recommendations:**

Begin implementation of recommendations found within adopted master plan.

## **LUSSIER County Park** (Town of Roxbury, 133.2 acres)

Lussier County Park is located on the eastern shore of Fish Lake and was made possible by a significant donation from John H. Lussier. The property includes approximately 3,000 feet of shoreline and a small parking area. Some prairie restoration and vegetative management efforts are already underway. **Recommendations:**

- Prepare a Master Plan that would include recommendations for future recreation development of Fish Lake and Lussier County Parks, as well as all lands within the Fish Lake Natural Resource Area.

## **MCCARTHY Youth and Conservation Park** (Town of Sun Prairie, 263.5 acres)

This park is located approximately six miles east of Madison on CTH TT. The original park lands were donated by Russell and Ella McCarthy with the objective of providing “a place where kids from the city could learn about nature.” The park serves as a combined recreational and conservancy place for young people to participate in group camping, prairie restoration, and equestrian trails. The park's purpose is to involve young people in conservation and outdoor activities. A new group camp area was developed in 2011 and several restoration projects have been completed at the park. A Friends group has been established that has worked primarily on vegetation management activities and leading large outdoor recreation and education events for youth and area residents including a Youth Volunteer Day and winter festival.

### **Recommendations:**

- Acquire additional lands east, north and west of the park for expansion of trail and wetland restoration projects.
- Prepare an updated master plan for this park to provide a common vision for further development, management and programming of the park.



*McCarthy County Park*

## **MENDOTA County Park** (Town of Westport, 19.0 acres)

Mendota County Park is located along CTH M at the eastern edge of the City of Middleton along the north shore of Lake Mendota. The park is used primarily as a neighborhood park; however, it does still provide regional benefit as it provides the only campground and boat camping available on Lake Mendota. **Recommendations:**

- Consider extending the canal further north and creating a sediment trap area that could also provide additional shore fishing opportunities.

## **PRAIRIE MORAINÉ County Park** (Town of Verona, 161.4 acres)

Prairie Moraine County Park is located on CTH PB approximately 1 mile south of Badger Prairie County Park. The primary uses of the park are the Ice Age Trail corridor along one of the best examples of a terminal moraine in southern Wisconsin and an extremely popular dog exercise area. **Recommendations:**

- Continue working with the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation to develop interpretive signage along existing trails and at the overlook area.
- Expand park boundaries north, east, and south to protect the terminal moraine and other glacial features, upland oak woodlands and scenic views as well as to provide an adequate buffer for these features.
- Relocate the parking lot area to the former Wesner property. Construct a new small dog exercise area.

### **RILEY-DEPPE County Park** (Town of Medina, 12.9 acres)

This park is located on STH 19 just west of the Village of Marshall on a millpond impoundment of the Maunasha River. Facilities include shelter, picnic area, play equipment, and small boat launch, and are primarily used on a very local level. The park is within the Maunasha River Natural Resource Area and is also within the WDNR Glacial Heritage Area project boundary. The Village of Marshall is interested in continuing discussions with the Park Commission regarding future management options. The boat launch area could serve as a regional water trailhead for the Maunasha River water trail. **Recommendations:**

- Continue working toward mutually agreeable ownership/management partnership scenarios with the Village of Marshall.

### **SALMO Pond** (Town of Berry, 7.5 acres)

This park is located on USH 14 immediately south of Festge County Park. The property is owned by the WDNR, however, Dane County has a 99-year management lease that allows it to operate and maintain the property as a County park. Dane County recently completed a shoreline restoration project that enhances bank fishing opportunities. The DNR is in the process of completing vegetation management practices along Black Earth Creek. **Recommendations:**

- Consider pavement resurfacing at the parking area.

### **SILVERWOOD County Park** (Town of Albion, 283.9 acres)

This property is located in the southeastern corner of the county along STH 106. The concept of this future park began with a donation of land from Irene Silverwood. The vision for this park is to provide a place for people from the city to visit and experience a working farm environment. The property also includes a mature oak woodlot and shoreline frontage on Rice Lake. The land is currently under lease agreement to be actively farmed and has no public access. **Recommendations:**

- Complete a Master Plan for future development of the park.
- Explore community agriculture options for this property.

### **STEWART County Park** (Town of Blue Mounds, 176.3 acres)

Stewart County Park is located on CTH JG immediately north of the Village of Mount Horeb. This park is nearly 70 years old and was the County's first park. The County completed an extensive water quality improvement project to reduce the amount of sediment being washed into the lake. Between 2009-2010, county staff and partners completed lake dredging, aquatic habitat improvements, beach construction and fish stocking. A Friends group has been evolving that works on a variety of education and restoration efforts. **Recommendations:**

- Construct accessible shore fishing platforms at the lake.
- Construct a parking area and small craft launch site at dam area.
- Construct a timber frame shelter area and improvements to the restroom facility that include a beach changing room area.
- Consider incorporating snowshoeing into the park.
- Acquire buffer lands east of the park and lands to the west to provide connection to STH 78. Consider acquisition of conservation easements on adjacent lands to maintain rural viewsheds of surrounding hillsides from within the park.





Stewart  
County  
Park

### **TOKEN CREEK County Park** (Town of Burke, 417.9 acres)

Token Creek County Park is located near the intersection of Interstate 90-94 and USH 51. The park is perhaps best known for its very popular disc golf course. Token Creek is the only stream in northeastern Dane County with the potential to support a cold-water fishery. Dane County Parks and the WDNR are continuing to work on a stream restoration project within the park to stabilize banks and improve habitat. A master plan for the park was completed in 2011. Work has also begun on adding nine additional disc golf holes. **Recommendations:**

- Begin to implement recommendations of the adopted park master plan.

### **VIKING County Park** (Towns of Dunkirk and Pleasant Springs, 83.3 acres)

Viking County Park is located on the Yahara River north of Stoughton on CTH N. A bicycle-pedestrian path and bridge was completed that connects the park to the City of Stoughton. Upgrades have also been done to the parking lot and dog exercise area. **Recommendations:**

- Consider replacing small open shelter near lagoon.
- Work with WDNR on shoreline restoration and habitat improvement projects throughout the park.
- Consider storm water and boat launch improvements to prevent wash outs and treat runoff.
- Investigate potential expansion of park to the north with the City of Stoughton to provide continuous public ownership to existing DNR lands.
- Continue discussions with WDOT on mitigation activities required for the proposed USH 51 roadway expansion project.



### **WALKING IRON County Park** (Town of Mazomanie, 316.6 acres)

Walking Iron County Park is located in northwestern Dane County adjacent to the Village of Mazomanie. The park contains native sand prairies and a segment of Black Earth Creek. Access to the park is primarily through the Lions Park in the Village of Mazomanie. In 2009, Dane County purchased approximately 1,000 acres north of the park that are being managed as a Wildlife Area. **Recommendations:**

- Prepare a master plan to further investigate how recreation and stewardship activities at this park can be improved and enhanced.
- Explore expansion of equestrian trails into newly acquired lands as available and consider possible connection to Blackhawk state riding area.

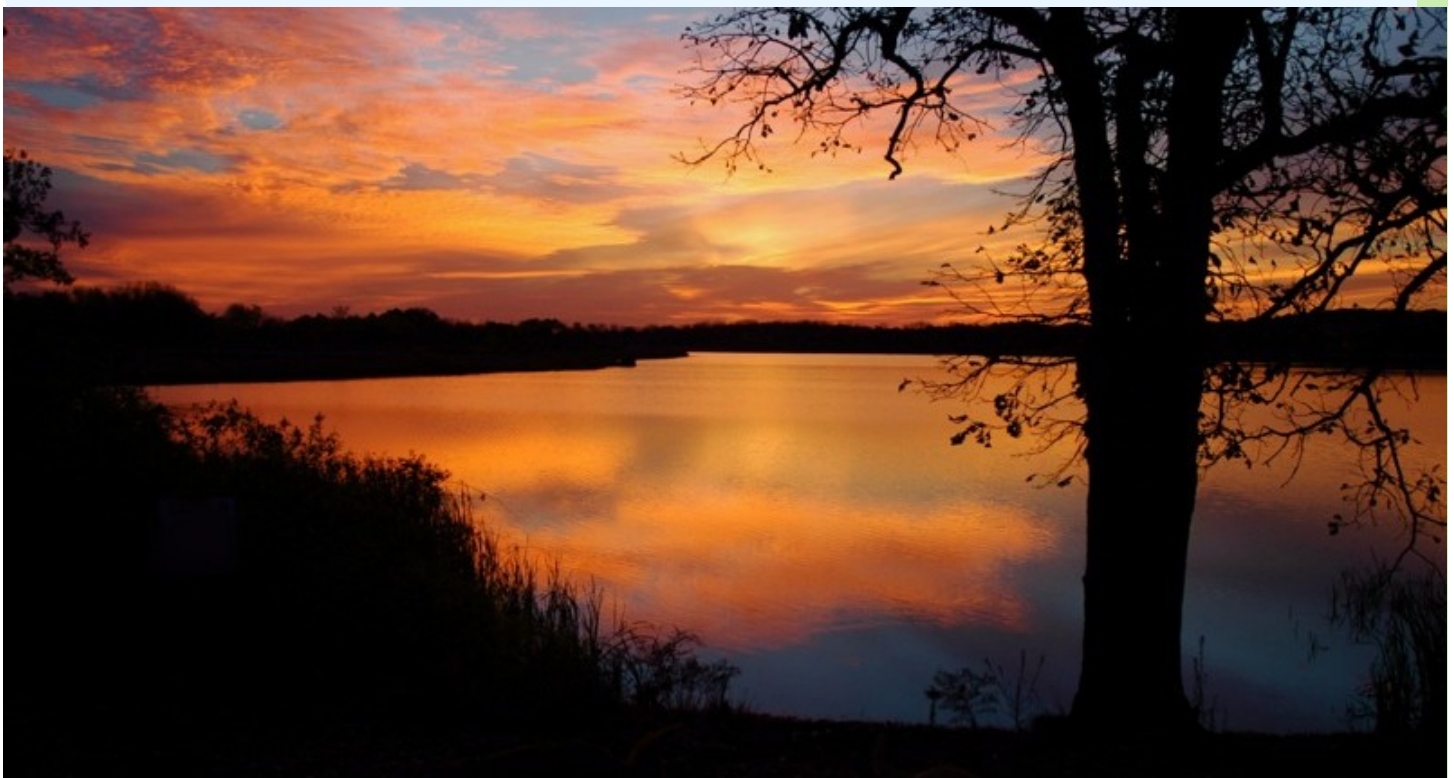


*Aromatic Aster at Walking Iron Photo: Peter Gorman*

### **YAHARA HEIGHTS County Park** (Town of Westport, 140.5 acres)

This park is located at the intersections of CTH M and STH 113 along the Yahara River. The primary use is as an off-leash dog exercise area; there is also a canoe landing area along the river. **Recommendations:**

- Prepare a site development plan for planned relocated entrance that includes considerations for water access, regional trail and trail access to prairie restorations, burial mounds and woodland areas east of the dog exercise area.
- Apply for funding/budget to relocate entry road access and parking area from Catfish Court to River Road.



*November Sunrise at Yahara Heights Photo: Sandy Setzen*

## IX.2 NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Preserve lands adjacent to urban areas that improve water and wetland quality and quantity.
2. Through partners acquire or fund natural resource area acreage that increases overall size and connectivity of existing natural resource areas.
3. Focus on projects that involve and foster multiple partnerships.
4. Continue to expand existing and create new natural resource areas that provide a variety of regional functions, including nature-based recreation uses, water quality improvement, and other environmental services, trail connectivity and habitat improvement.
5. Continue and increase restoration efforts to the extent possible on woodlands, wetlands, prairie and savanna ecosystems.

### **POLICIES**

1. Communicate project area resource protection priorities to partnering agencies and non-profit groups to provide a common vision and work plan.
2. Work with partnering agencies and groups toward creation of larger landscape-scale parks and natural resource areas.
3. Plan and implement greenway connections that enhance non-motorized public access from population centers to existing public lands and regional trails.
4. Plan, implement and partner on projects that provide environmentally sensitive access to Dane County lakes, streams and rivers, including water-based trails and shore fishing.
5. Acquire buffer lands to Dane County water and wetland areas to reduce flooding and enhance water quality.
6. Allow low-impact, nature-based recreation development and use of natural resource areas that include overlook areas for natural and scenic views.
7. Where advantageous, undertake alternative land lease, rental or sustainable resource management practices that could generate revenues for future operation, maintenance and development of natural resource areas.
8. Stabilize streambanks, shorelines and other areas of erosion through coordinated planning efforts on County-owned parklands, working jointly with adjacent property owners as necessary to ensure permanent stabilization.
9. Consider both working and non-working farm lands as a complementary component of natural resource areas.

## NEW NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

### BADFISH CREEK Natural Resource Area

(Towns of Rutland, Dunkirk, Dunn, 15,975.8 acres)

Strong support was heard throughout the public input process for creation of this new natural resource area. The project area spans from the Badfish Creek headwaters in the Town of Dunn and follows the creek and associated wetlands south to the county line in the Towns of Rutland and Dunkirk. The US Fish and Wildlife, Wisconsin DNR, Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD), Friends of Badfish Creek, Natural Heritage Land Trust and Rock River Coalition are all potential future conservation partners in this region. The project area lies between two large population centers, Stoughton and Oregon, and is anticipated to provide quasi-wilderness experiences for the region. Existing recreation uses that may be enhanced include canoeing and kayaking, hunting, fishing and wildlife observation. There is also high potential for a variety of wetland restoration projects in lowland and hydric soil areas that could expand and connect existing publicly-owned lands.

#### What We Heard...

“As a frequent paddler of Badfish Creek, I would like to register my support for Badfish Creek to be designated a Dane County Natural Resource Area. It provides one of the few relatively undeveloped paddling opportunities in close proximity to Madison”  
*Gregg Riemer, Chair-River Touring Section of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club*

### MAUNESHA RIVER Natural Resource Area

(Towns of York, Sun Prairie, Medina, Bristol, Village of Marshall, 6,035.1 acres)

This proposed Natural Resource Area would extend from the WDNR Deansville Marsh Wildlife Area southeast along the Mauneshia River through the Village of Marshall to the county line. Riley-Deppe County Park and the 131 acre Socha parcel that was donated to the County in 2008 are included in this project area boundary. The Wisconsin DNR, Village of Marshall, Capitol Water Trails Ltd., Natural Heritage Land Trust and Capital Off Road Pathfinders mountain bike advocates are all potential future conservation and recreation partners in this region. The project area is situated between Sun Prairie, the Village of Marshall and lands north and west of the project area that are anticipated to experience future high growth rates. This region is part of the southeastern Wisconsin glacial plains landscape that provides extensive wetland and grassland habitats. Existing recreation uses that may be enhanced include canoeing and kayaking, hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and mountain biking.

### YAHARA HEADWATERS Natural Resource Area

(Village of DeForest, Town of Windsor, 496.0 acres)

The project area aims to provide water quality and wildlife habitat buffers for the upper reaches of the Yahara River. The Village of DeForest is supportive of this proposed initiative and could likely be a future conservation partner. The Wisconsin DNR, Natural Heritage Land Trust and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are also potential future conservation partners in this pothole region. There is high potential for grassland habitat restoration work along the river corridor and associated floodplain areas that extend just north of the Village of DeForest to the county line. This project area is ecologically connected to the WDNR Land Legacy Arlington Prairie property that includes deep soil prairie and prairie pothole remnants that once covered most of north central Dane County and south central Columbia County.

Photo: B. Farrell





### **WALKING IRON Natural Resource Area** (Town of Mazomanie, 2,688.1 acres)

In 2008 Dane County acquired over 1,000 acres of property known previously as 7A Farms in the Town of Mazomanie. This property provides a continuous connection of public land between Walking Iron County Park and WDNR Lower Wisconsin Riverway lands to the north. The connection of these areas will create a premier corridor that supports a wide diversity of wildlife and habitat types while also offering many recreational opportunities. The property hosts Wisconsin River backwater and shoreland communities as well as large tracts of working farm lands. Flocks of sandhill cranes use the property as a staging site for fall migration, and each fall several thousand cranes gather here. On at least one occasion, whooping cranes have also stopped here in the spring. An area north of Walking Iron County Park hosts a scrub oak forest and could be considered an oak-barren ecological type, and has the potential to support ornate box turtles, an endangered species. An old glacial lake of some 200 acres, now drained, may easily be restored to a productive wetland. In addition, a half-mile of Marsh Creek meanders through a wide riparian corridor. Interior ditches throughout the project area and seasonally flooded crop fields provide outstanding waterfowl habitat. The Wisconsin DNR, Natural Heritage Land Trust and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are potential future conservation partners in this river region.

### **BLUE MOUNDS Natural Resource Area** (Towns of Vermont and Blue Mounds, 2,471.4 acres)

This project boundary seeks to combine the existing Pleasure Valley Natural Resource Area and Hidden Valley region east of Brigham County Park into Blue Mounds Natural Resource Area. There was local support for this larger and combined project area during the public input process. The landscape consists of steep wooded hills and valleys that afford spectacular views, streams, savannah and prairie remnants. Dane County has made several significant land purchases over the past 5 years to provide connections from Brigham Park to Blue Mound State Park and the Military Ridge State Trail. The Prairie Enthusiasts have also been actively working to preserve lands in this project area. The WDNR, Natural Heritage Land Trust and Capital Off Road Pathfinders are also potential future conservation and recreation partners in this region. There is strong interest to create an extensive mountain bike trail network in this project area that would connect to the Blue Mound State Park trail system. Portions of this project area could be managed as Forest lands.



*Photo: B. Farrell*



## EXISTING NATURAL RESOURCE AREAS

### **BADGER MILL CREEK Natural Resource Area** (Town of Verona, 623.1 acres)

This project area includes wetlands and adjacent upland buffer lands along the lower stretch of Badger Mill Creek. The WDNR reclassified Badger Mill Creek as a “cool water fishery,” indicating it does have the potential to sustain some trout populations. **Recommendations:**

- Continue discussions with the City of Verona on future land use plans for this corridor.

### **BLACK EARTH CREEK Natural Resource Area** (Towns of Black Earth, Berry, Mazomanie, Cross Plains, Middleton, 11,630.7 acres)

Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area combines the Black Earth Creek Valley and Upper Black Earth Creek project areas that were included in the 2001-2005 plan. Black Earth Creek is nationally known for its excellent trout fishing. Some of the lands along the creek are owned by the WDNR as public fishing and wildlife habitat areas. Future land acquisitions would seek to fill in the gaps between existing publicly-owned lands and protect the scenic quality of the stream corridor. The Dane County Regional Planning Commission completed a project plan for Black Earth Creek in 2003 that was adopted by the Dane County Board. A master plan for the Sunnyside property was completed in 2010. **Recommendations:**

- Acquire “Old Mud Lake” north of USH 14 and additional headwater lands immediately south of USH 14 with the help of multiple partners for future wetland restoration projects.
- Expand Sunnyside Seed Farms property west and south along the creek, and north to expand future park, access and recreation potential.
- Continue working with the Natural Heritage Land Trust on its identified priority areas within the project boundary, including acquisition of conservation easements from ridge top to ridge top between Cross Plains and Mazomanie.
- Investigate allowing hunting on county lands adjacent to WDNR public hunting grounds where compatible with other park uses.
- Begin implementation of the Sunnyside master plan.
- Continue discussions with the Town of Middleton and WDOT on future road access to the former Sunnyside property.

### **BLOOMING GROVE DRUMLINS Natural Resource Area** (Towns of Blooming Grove and Cottage Grove, 1,645.8 acres)

This project area seeks to protect the glacial drumlin features found throughout this region as well as the associated wetlands that surround them. Drumlins are low, smoothly rounded, elongated hills of compact glacial till (sand, gravel, rock) deposited under the sheet of ice and shaped by its flow; with the longer axis parallel to the direction of ice movement. They have a blunt nose that points in the direction from which the ice approached, and a gentler slope tapering in the opposite direction. **Recommendations:**

- Partner with WDNR and Cottage Grove on implementation of connector trail between Capital City Trail and the Glacial Drumlin Trail.
- Expand project boundary north to include additional Door Creek headwaters area.
- Partner with City of Madison to expand hiking/cross country ski trails into Door Creek Park.

**CHEROKEE MARSH Natural Resource Area** (City of Madison, Towns of Burke, Windsor, and Westport, 3,722.9 acres)

For the purposes of this planning report, the Cherokee Marsh project area includes the historic boundaries west of Interstate 90-94 and east of STH 113. Public ownership is a mixture of City of Madison, Dane County, and WDNR owned lands. The City of Madison has been conducting extensive vegetation and wetland management efforts on the south side of the river. Dane County has been working on removal of invasive species and prairie restoration on the north side of the river. **Recommendations:**

- Explore creation of a land-based trail that provides connections to Token Creek Park and the Upper Yahara River Natural Resource Area.
- Continue vegetation management practices.
- Investigate allowing hunting on county lands adjacent to WDNR public hunting grounds where compatible with other park uses.
- Continue working with the Friends of Cherokee Marsh, City of Madison, and WDNR on acquiring lands within the project area boundary.

**DOOR CREEK WETLANDS Natural Resource Area** (Village of McFarland, Towns of Dunn and Pleasant Springs, 3,961.5 acres)

This project area includes wetlands and surrounding upland buffer areas of Door Creek on the north shore of Lake Kegonsa. A project plan completed by the Dane County Regional Planning Commission and adopted by the County Board in 2000 provides management recommendations that include protection of wetlands and associated buffers, provision of northern pike spawning areas, and enhancement of Door Creek water quality.

**Recommendations:**

- Work with the WDNR on creating unified resource and recreation management strategies for the entire project area.
- Begin preliminary planning for the Lower Yahara River Trail.
- Expand boundary north and east to Blooming Grove Drumlin Natural Resource Area per City of Madison's recommendation.
- This boundary should be revised in the future as local units of government complete more detailed neighborhood plans for developing areas.



*Door Creek Wetlands NRA and Lake Kegonsa*

**FISH LAKE Natural Resource Area** (Town of Roxbury, 683.3 acres)

This project area is located on lands surrounding Fish Lake in the far northwestern corner of the county. There have been perennially high lake levels here for several years. A lake district was formed, and under a WDNR permit, pumping of the lake began in an effort to decrease water levels. Dane County has purchased some properties within the project area boundary. **Recommendations:**

- Continue to expand county-owned lands, with priority given to acquiring shoreline and shoreline buffer areas.
- Complete a Master Plan that would include resource and recreation recommendations for all lands within the Fish Lake Natural Resource Area, including Lussier County Park.
- Work with WDNR to explore the possibility of creating a boat launch facility on the east end of Fish Lake and re-establishing the Crystal Lake boat landing to the west shore.

### **HOLTZMAN Natural Resource Area** (Town of Dunn, 63.2 acres)

This property is located just south of the Capital Springs Recreation Area and is currently included in operation and maintenance agreements with the WDNR for the Recreation Area. The property was donated to Dane County with the intent that it be considered a nature preserve. Because the property is not located along a roadway, access can only be obtained by permission from one of the surrounding landowners.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Consider acquiring property that would provide public access if the opportunity becomes available.

### **ICE AGE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL** (3,300.0 acres)

The Ice Age Trail corridor traverses north to south through the western side of the County and follows the end moraines that mark the extent of the glacial advancement in Dane County. The intent of the trail is to provide users with an opportunity to see and learn first hand about impacts of the glacier on our landscape. The trail was designated a National Scenic Trail by Congress in 1980. More information about the Ice Age Trail can be found on their website at [www.iceagetrail.org](http://www.iceagetrail.org). **Recommendations:**

- Continue working with the Ice Age Trail Alliance, DNR and National Park Service on acquisition of land and development of the trail.
- Continue prioritizing acquisition of lands for the Ice Age Trail, particularly where they overlap with other project boundaries and where partnership support is available.

### **ICE AGE JUNCTION Natural Resource Area** (Town of Verona, 1,949.6 acres)

This project area includes Ice Age Trail corridor lands north and south of Badger Prairie County Park and the park itself. It also includes the habitat and WDOT wetland mitigation area known as Goose Lake. The Ice Age Trail Junction Area was the result of a 1991 proposal that called for a wider Ice Age Trail corridor in the Verona-Madison area to encompass key resource and scenic features associated with the trail. In 1992, the Dane County Park Commission established an intergovernmental advisory committee composed of the Town of Verona, City of Verona, Dane County Board, Dane County Executive and the Park Commission to create a project plan for the area that was adopted by the County Board in 1993. **Recommendations:**

- Continue to work with the City of Madison on extending the Ice Age Junction Trail north of McKee Road, including the PD overpass, Raymond Road rest stop and CTH M underpass.
- Continue to work with the City of Madison, Ice Age Trail Alliance and Meriter on trail development concepts through the Meriter property.
- Solicit outside funds to provide bicycle trail connections from the Ice Age Junction Trail to MAYSA.
- Investigate acquisition partnerships with the City of Verona and MAYSA on lands surrounding Reddan Park.
- Consider development of snowshoe trails.



*Ice Age Junction Natural Resource Area  
Photo: B. Farrell*



### **KOSHKONONG CREEK Natural Resource Area** (Town of Sun Prairie, 3,519.4 acres)

This project area spans from the City of Sun Prairie south to Interstate 94 and the northern tip of the Blooming Grove Drumlin Natural Resource Area. It also includes environmental corridor lands northeast of McCarthy County Park that drain into the Koshkonong Creek. The vision for this project area is that it would become a greenbelt corridor between the Cities of Sun Prairie, Madison and the Village of Cottage Grove while also providing a rural transition into the Town of Sun Prairie. This corridor could provide a diversity of benefits including flood mitigation, wetland restoration potential, and future recreation opportunities such as shore fishing and trails. Protection of these lands is also expected to include working farms that exist throughout the drainage district areas. **Recommendations:**

- Investigate acquisition opportunities along the CTH N corridor west of McCarthy County Park.

### **LEOPOLD-RILEY Game Cooperative** (Towns of Springdale, Verona, and Cross Plains, 1,820.0 acres)

In 1931, Aldo Leopold formed a cooperative for the purpose of providing its members a place to hunt. The area encompassed all or part of 11 farms, or about 1800 acres, mostly in the Town of Springdale, but also extending into the Towns of Verona and Cross Plains. Within the reserve boundary were croplands, pastures, an oak savanna, woods, a cattail marsh, a sedge meadow, springs and spring ponds, and the Sugar River. Historically, the Chicago and Northwestern railroad track ran through Riley on the way between Madison and Mount Horeb. The railroad right-of-way is now the Military Ridge State bike trail. This project area seeks to preserve the remaining natural resources and rural landscape within the original boundary designated by Leopold.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Accelerate landowner contact efforts for purposes of acquiring land or easements.
- Work with WDNR and Dane County Conservation League on exploring the possibility of providing public hunting opportunities in the future as additional lands are acquired or leased.
- Work with U.W. Madison and volunteer groups to prepare a management plan for the project area.

### **LOWER MUD LAKE Natural Resource Area** (Town of Dunn, Village of McFarland, 2226.0 acres)

This extensive natural resource area stretches between Lake Waubesa and Lake Kegonsa along the Yahara River. The land is a mix of County, Town, Village and DNR ownership and supports a variety of recreation uses including public hunting, canoeing, cross country track and field races, and fishing. The Village of McFarland has a master plan for a proposed community park along the northern boundary off of Elvehjem Road and developed a new dog exercise area in 2010. The County Board adopted a project plan for this area in 1994.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Expand project area boundary north to Elvehjem Road and east to CTH AB.
- Begin further planning and fund raising for the Lower Yahara River Trail.
- Work with the WDNR on creating unified resource and recreation management strategies for the entire project area.
- Incorporate interpretive signage at Native American fish weir sites.

### **NINE SPRINGS E-WAY** (Cities of Madison & Fitchburg, Town of Dunn, 3,889.1 acres)

In 1969, the National Endowment for the Arts provided funds for the development of an environmental study model to illustrate how a community can identify and capitalize on existing natural and human made resources in an effort to elevate environmental, ecological and esthetic planning decisions to a higher priority within the community development decision making process. This resulted in an “E-Way” concept developed through efforts of the University of Wisconsin Environmental Awareness Center, with the “E” representing educational, environmental, esthetic and ecological. The Nine Springs E-Way project area extends from Dunn’s Marsh at Seminole Highway east to Lake Waubesa and includes more than 1,300 acres of land under county ownership.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Implement recommendations of the Capital Springs Recreation Area master plan within the E-Way boundary.
- Develop a series of educational kiosks along the Capital City Trail.
- Work with Capital Off Road Pathfinders, City of Fitchburg and neighborhood residents on investigating feasibility of proposed Dawley Park mountain bike trail project.
- Work with City of Fitchburg/WDNR on feasibility of adding bike lanes to Syene Road.

### **NORTH MENDOTA Natural Resource Area** (Town of Westport, 4,602.1 acres)

In 2008, Dane County Parks worked through a public consensus building process with the Towns of Westport and Springfield, Village of Waunakee, City of Middleton, WDOT, WDNR and stakeholders to identify a North Mendota Natural Resource Area project boundary. The planning effort was a component of the WDOT North Mendota Parkway study led by the consulting firm Strand Associates. The revised boundary included in this plan update represents the results of this planning process. The project area begins at STH 113 and the Yahara River to the east and follows the north shore of Lake Mendota, including Six Mile and Dorn Creeks and their associated wetlands. Dorn and Six Mile Creeks contain some state fishery lands and public hunting areas. Properties within this project area are anticipated to enhance water quality of the Yahara chain of lakes and provide fish and wildlife habitat. **Recommendations:**

- Plan and implement a segment of the proposed North Mendota bicycle and pedestrian trail to provide connection from Waunakee to Governor Nelson State Park and westward to Middleton.
- Investigate connecting this Natural Resource Area with the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.
- Work with WDNR to create unified resource and recreation management strategies for entire project area.
- Include a proposed regional trail connector between Governor Nelson State Park, Holy Wisdom Monastery, and Mendota County Park.

### **PATRICK MARSH Natural Resource Area** (Towns of Sun Prairie, Bristol, City of Sun Prairie, 990.0 acres)

Patrick Marsh is located on the eastern edge of the City of Sun Prairie just south of USH 151. The property was the first Wisconsin Department of Transportation wetland mitigation bank site in the state. The majority of public land around the marsh is owned by the WDNR and contains some prairie restoration efforts. The shallow marsh area is home to many varieties of waterfowl and grassland nesting birds. Rising water levels have resulted in the marsh becoming more of a lake, and therefore long-term goals should involve lowering water levels to restore vegetative diversity of a shallow marsh. Dane County Parks worked with area local units of government, the Patrick Marsh Middle School and several area stakeholders to prepare a project plan that was adopted by the County Board in 2003. **Recommendations:**

- Continue to provide peripheral planning support to stakeholder groups to identify future recreation and management objectives for Patrick Marsh.
- Continue to acquire lands designated under priority one within the Patrick Marsh project plan.
- Continue to fund partner acquisitions within the project area boundary.
- Work with volunteers to provide vegetation management recommendations.

### **PHEASANT BRANCH Conservancy** (City of Middleton, Town of Springfield, 501.7 acres)

This project area is located on the northern boundary of the City of Middleton and is jointly owned by Dane County, WDNR and the City of Middleton. An active Friends group has been assisting the County Naturalist with ongoing wetland, savanna and prairie restoration efforts throughout the Conservancy. The Friends mission is “to restore, preserve, and understand the value of Conservancy lands and other natural habitats in the Pheasant Branch watershed for today and tomorrow.” In 2005, the City and the County worked jointly on installation of a crushed limestone bicycle-hiking trail, with interpretive kiosks, that extends from Orchid Heights Park in Middleton west to an existing trailhead along Pheasant Branch Road. The property also contains an overlook for a large spring that contributes 2.6 million gallons of fresh water to Lake Mendota each day. **Recommendations:**

- Acquire lands adjacent to the Conservancy within the Fredrick Springs Recharge Area for water protection purposes and for future establishment of regional bicycle trail connector to Governor Nelson State Park.
- Prepare an updated master plan to establish a common vision for future facility development, stewardship and management of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.



*Great Blue Heron (Ardea herodias) at Pheasant Branch Conservancy*

*Photo Courtesy of Joshua Mayer*

### **PHIL'S WOODS Natural Resource Area** (Town of Roxbury, 36.1 acres)

Phil's Woods is located in the Town of Roxbury west of USH 12 along North Dunlap Hollow Road, and is named for Philip LaFollette, three-time governor of Wisconsin. The site consists of woods and open meadows with hilltop views of the Wisconsin River valley and Baraboo Range. **Recommendations:**

- Construct small gravel parking lot and trailhead off North Dunlap Hollow Road.
- Consider reclassifying as a “Forest” to enable the property to come under a forest management plan.



### **SPRINGFIELD HILL Natural Resource Area** (Town of Roxbury, 701.0 acres)

This project area is located along the new USH 12 corridor and provides outstanding views from atop Springfield Hill, one of the highest points in the area. The landscape includes steep wooded valleys, glacial kettle ponds, and open meadow areas. Inclusion of this project area is closely linked to future development of the Ice Age Trail. The County purchased nearly 120 acres within this project area that has provided some limited bowhunting opportunities and will facilitate future development of a segment of the Ice Age Trail. **Recommendations:**

- Construct a small parking lot trailhead off Ballweg Road for public access.
- Continue to work with the Ice Age Alliance on acquisition of lands necessary for trail development and to maintain the scenic, rural quality.
- Investigate development of snow shoe and/or single track mountain bike trails through a cooperative planning process with the Ice Age Alliance.

### **SOUTH WAUBESA MARSH Natural Resource Area** (Town of Dunn, 2,069.1 acres)

South Waubesa Marsh is located on the southwest end of Lake Waubesa and includes segments of Swan and Murphys Creek. The marsh includes deep peat deposits and major springs and seepages that provide water to Lake Waubesa. A Friends of Lake Waubesa group has been working on some wetland restoration and enhancement projects within the project area. The Nature Conservancy and WDNR are the primary public landowners. **Recommendations:**

- Upon completion of the hydrologic study of this region and review of the study by Dane County (or appropriate agency), the local units of government or eligible non-profit conservation organizations would be able to apply for matching funds through the Conservation Fund grant program for protection of additional lands critical to maintaining the existing hydrologic function outside of the project area boundary.
- Expand project boundary west to include additional headwater areas of Murphys Creek and east of Murphys Creek to include undeveloped Lake Waubesa hillside and shoreline adjacent to State Natural Area.
- Expand project boundary west to include additional headwater areas of Swan Creek and the moraine edge geologic feature.

### **STARKWEATHER CREEK Natural Resource Area** (City of Madison, Town of Burke, 2,372.8 acres)

This project area extends from the confluence of Starkweather Creek at Lake Monona north and east, including both branches of Starkweather Creek. The boundary includes an environmental corridor identified in the 1983 Water Quality Plan for Starkweather Creek plus additional area as recommended by the City of Madison Parks Department that extend to adjacent watersheds of Cherokee Marsh, Token Creek, Door Creek, and Koshkonong Creek. The Dane County Airport is the largest property owner in the watershed. Lands protected within this natural resource area are primarily envisioned to provide lake and water quality protection, water and land based trails, upland vegetation buffers and wildlife habitat. The project boundary included in this plan is based on information in the City of Madison's Comprehensive Plan. This boundary should be revised in the future as local units of government complete more detailed neighborhood plans for developing areas.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue working with the City of Madison Planning Department on concept of trail connection to Token Creek County Park.

### **SUGAR RIVER Natural Resource Area** (Town of Verona, 7,644.4 acres)

The Sugar River Natural Resource Area lies just west of the City of Verona and includes a segment of the Military Ridge State Trail. It is one of the largest continuous wetland complexes along the boundary of the driftless area in western Dane County. The WDNR and WDOT are the primary public land owners in this project area.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue working with the Village of Belleville on regional park, trail and restoration initiatives being undertaken as part of the Lake Belle View project.
- Work with volunteers to provide increased canoe/kayak access.

### **TOKEN CREEK Natural Resource Area** (Towns of Windsor, Burke, 890.3 acres)

The boundary is generally defined as Interstate 90-94 on the western edge and extending along the creek to CTH C. The dam was removed from the mill pond in 2004, and the WDNR has been actively working on restoration efforts to enhance habitat and water quality of the stream. Token Creek is the only cold water fishery in the northeast quadrant of Dane County. A master plan was completed for this project area in 2011.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Continue working with WDNR and other non-profit conservation organizations on streambank restoration and fish habitat improvement projects.
- Dane County would work toward acquiring lands north and east of Token Creek Park to STH 19. Local units of government and/or non-profit conservation organizations would work on protection of lands from STH 19 east to the mill pond either through dedication or acquisition. These agencies would be eligible to apply for partial funding through the Dane County Conservation Fund grant program.
- Begin implementation of the 2011 master plan.

### **UPPER YAHARA RIVER Natural Resource Area** (Village of DeForest, Town of Vienna, 496.0 acres)

This project area lies along the Upper Yahara River and on the western boundary of the Village of DeForest. It contains large areas of wetlands, floodplain forest, a heron rookery and calcareous fens. The Village is currently beginning to develop properties adjacent to this project area. **Recommendations:**

- Work with the Village on development of a regional off-road bicycle trail along the river that would provide

connections to Token Creek Park and Cherokee Marsh.



*Canoeing the  
Upper Yahara River*

*Photo: Eric Lawson*





*Birch Woodlot at Token Creek County Park  
Photo: Steve Salt*

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Consider using WDNR staff expertise and resources to create Forest Management Plans (including sustainable timber harvest) for county forests and woodlots that are compatible with other forest use objectives.
2. Educate county park users about sustainable forest management practices, including sustainable timber harvest, when compatible with other forest use objectives.
3. Increase county-owned acreage of forests and woodlots and consider future transition into an expanded “Dane County Forest” program as forest lands increase.
4. Utilize proceeds of sustainable and environmentally compatible timber harvests for future forest land acquisition, management and facility development.

### **POLICIES**

1. Consider multiple low-impact recreation use of County forests and woodlots, including hiking, cross country skiing, picnicking and hunting, compatible with forest objectives.
2. Investigate revenue-generating sustainable timber management practices and collection of firewood.
3. Maximize volunteer efforts to control invasive vegetative species.
4. Work toward establishing partnerships with schools, Friends and non-profit conservation organizations to assist with management, maintenance and monitoring of forest lands.



*Birches at Token Creek County Park  
Photo: Steve Salt*



## **EXISTING FOREST RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **MORTON Forest** (Town of Mazomanie, 113.9 acres)

The Morton Forest is located on Reeve Road at the western boundary of the County. The landscape includes steep wooded areas, prairie remnants on the hilltops and scenic overlook points. Stephen Morton donated the property to the County in 1999. Mr. Morton retains life estate on the property, and at this time there is no public access to this property. **Recommendations:**

- There are no recommendations until the County has property rights for the site.

### **SCHEIDEGGER Forest** (Town of Verona, 73.4 acres)

This forest property was made possible through a generous donation from Walter R. Scheidegger in 2001. The land was formerly the Abraham's Shooting Range for the Dane County Sheriff's Department. In 2005 Dane County Parks requested assistance from the WDNR to complete a Forest Stewardship Management Plan for the Scheidegger Forest and enrolled the property in the State Community Forest program. The plan was completed in December 2005 and takes into consideration the property objectives outlined in the Dane County Park and Open Space Plan. A master plan was completed for this property in 2006, and a shelter, kiosk, trails and parking area completed in 2010. **Recommendations:**

- Dane County Volunteer Coordinator should solicit interest in an organized Friends group.
- Investigate potential of Town of Verona providing limited snowplowing at entry gate to allow winter access.



*Scheidegger Forest*

## IX.4 HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SITES

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Implement cultural and historic educational exhibits and outreach programs at the Lussier Family Heritage Center.
2. Design and install additional Native American interpretive signage throughout the Capital Springs Recreation Area where appropriate.
3. Increase emphasis and awareness of unique cultural/historical resources on all County park lands.
4. Investigate systems of connected landscapes and trails that highlight significant cultural and historical resources of Dane County, and integrate with future cultural planning processes.
5. As staff time and resources allow, continue to develop interpretive and educational signage to increase public interest and appreciation of cultural and historical sites.

### **POLICIES**

1. Friends, non-profit and special interest groups are responsible for all costs and fund raising related to construction or restoration of historic buildings or structures.
2. Dane County Park Commission and Public Works are responsible for design oversight and approval, development of construction plans and specifications and review of bidding and construction for all new building construction or building relocation.
3. Explore cultural/historical project implementation partnerships with other agencies, such as the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission.



*2010 Halloween Happenings at  
Schumacher Farm*



## NEW HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SITES

### FORT BLUE MOUNDS Historical/Cultural Site (Town of Blue Mounds)

The Fort Blue Mounds historical site and land surrounding it is located on County F just south of the 18-151 expressway near the Village of Blue Mounds. Fort Blue Mounds was constructed in the spring of 1832 to provide protection to area mining families from anticipated Native American attacks. An incredibly rich and colorful history of this site was prepared by retired State Archeologist Bob Birmingham and is available on line at [http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/summer03\\_birmingham.pdf](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/wmh/pdf/summer03_birmingham.pdf). The original plaque dedicated on the site in 1910 was the first historic marker erected by the State Historical Society. The Blue Mounds Area Historical Society has restored the historical marker and is trying to develop a vision for the fort site. There are several other potential partners for this project area including The Nature Conservancy, Prairie Enthusiasts, and WDNR Southwest Grasslands program. The Blue Mounds Area Historical Society is interested in working together to possibly restore the prairie grasslands around the fort site, establish public access and develop interpretive displays. **Recommendations:**

- Partner with non-profit organizations on acquisition of additional lands surrounding the site that would enhance access and the connectivity to adjacent existing grassland restoration projects.

## EXISTING HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SITES

### HALFWAY PRAIRIE SCHOOL Historical/Cultural Site (Town of Mazomanie, 0.6 acres)

This site is located at the junction of CTH F and STH 19 two and a half miles north of the Village of Black Earth and contains the oldest elementary school in Dane County. The one-room school was operated from 1844 until it closed as a result of consolidation in 1961. Visitors may view the inside of the school in its original restored condition on holidays and Sunday afternoons, from 1-5 p.m., Memorial Day through Labor Day.

#### **Recommendations:**

- There are no new recommendations for this site.



*Volunteers at Halfway Prairie School*



## **LAKE FARM ARCHEOLOGICAL DISTRICT** (Town of Dunn)

Native Americans have lived in Wisconsin for about 12,000 years. Evidence of Native American inhabitation in Dane County dates back to the Paleo-Indian Tradition, or 10,000-5,000 B.C. It is still unclear as to the name of the people who first inhabited the park area or if they were related to the historic tribes met by the first European settlers. By far the greatest concentration of archaeological resources found within the Capital Springs Recreation Area are located within the Lake Farm County Park region. Between September and November of 1976, Philip H. Salkin and Thomas E. Emerson conducted an environmental impact survey of the proposed E-Way that identified 10 prehistoric sites at Lake Farm Park and artifacts dating back to the Early Archaic and Late Woodland periods. Salkin and a team of University of Wisconsin students conducted a more intensive study in 1977 and identified 32 prehistoric sites at Lake Farm Park. A Lake Farm Archeological District was designated and placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The geography of this area may have been what made it so attractive as a settlement area. The park is on a peninsula that had a vast wetland marsh complex to the north and west, Lake Waubesa to the east, and oak woodlands on the upland areas to the south. These areas were rich in a variety of fish, shellfish, wild game, nuts and berries.

Additional information about the archeological resources of the Lake Farm Archeological District can be found in Phil Salkin's report, "*An Intensive Archeological Survey in the Lake Farms Archeological District of Madison, Wisconsin*," June, 1979. The Dane County Park Commission has a pamphlet entitled "Prehistoric Native Americans in Lake Farm Park" that provides an overview of early settlement of the park by these people.

### **Recommendations:**

- Plan and develop a comprehensive exhibit area at the Lussier Family Heritage Center to educate park users about the extensive Native American history of this area and other people that first settled in the region

## **LAKE VIEW HILL Park** (City of Madison, 41.3 acres)

Located on Northport Drive on the north side of the City of Madison, the property aims to conserve both historical and natural resources, while also offering recreation uses such as walking trails, nature study, historical/cultural education, and an area to picnic and watch fireworks. The site was reclassified from a Recreation Park to a Historical/Cultural Site per the master plan that was adopted by the County Board in 2009. The buildings on the site, currently used as office space for Dane County Health and Human Services, are on the National Register of Historic Places and originally functioned as a County tuberculosis sanatorium from 1930 to 1966. There are also remnant landscape features visible on the site from this time that help tell the story. For example, a series of cement-lined waterfall pools and stream channel leading to a pond are still visible on the property that were historically enjoyed by the patients, their visitors, and medical staff. An evaluation was completed in 2011 by Quinn Evans Architects that assessed the sites historical landscape and provided treatment recommendations for key features. The Friends of Lake View Hill Park have been working actively on overall stewardship of the property and more recently have begun to focus on increasing awareness of its historical significance.

### **Recommendations:**

- Implement recommendations of the adopted master plan.
- Consult the historical evaluation as appropriate for future management or development of the site.
- Continue vegetation restoration efforts per Applied Ecological Services management plan.

## SCHUMACHER FARM Historical/Cultural Site (Town of Westport, 115.5 acres)

Schumacher Farm was donated by Marcella Pendall Schumacher to Dane County Parks in 1978. It is located just east of the Village of Waunakee on the north side of STH 19-113. The purpose of Schumacher Farm Park is to provide a period appropriate restoration and re-creation of an early 20th century farmstead, as well as a nature conservancy that offers a representation of Dane County's rural heritage through preservation, restoration and education. The farmstead is made up of a restored house complete with period furnishings, a barn, granary, chicken coop, outhouse and corn crib all restored and maintained to their 1920-30's state. A prairie remnant has been expanded to contain 45 acres of restored prairies with hiking trails. There is also a young Sugarbush that will provide an additional period experience. There are educational programs that are in place for school groups exploring Wisconsin history. Special events such as the popular Harvest Fest in September feature rural lifestyles of the 1920-30's period. A master plan was adopted in 2005 and is being executed by the active Friends of Schumacher Farm Park group. **Recommendations:**

- Implement recommendations of the adopted master plan.
- Schumacher Farm should be considered as a place where historic buildings could be relocated that are consistent with the historic integrity of the property. Relocation of additional buildings to the site beyond those shown on the adopted master plan would be reviewed by the Dane County Park Commission on a case-by-case basis.
- Implement permanent interpretative signage to assist the public in learning about historic features, both for the grounds and buildings, as well as building contents.
- Increase passive recreation of the prairie including snowshoeing, cross country skiing, walking and nature study.
- Increase educational use by families and school groups.
- Complete newly-constructed barn as a gathering area for school groups and special events, office area for Friends of Schumacher Farm Park staff and Park Headquarters, and a trailhead for Dane County Trail System.
- Explore expanded educational and passive recreational uses with the Village of Waunakee Parks and Recreation Department and area schools.





## IX.5 WILDLIFE AREAS

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Maintain and restore large, contiguous natural areas to improve water quality, natural environments and critical habitats.
2. Provide historic uses that occurred on properties prior to coming under county ownership including hunting.
3. Provide seamless management to the extent possible in situations where the county owns lands adjacent to existing WDNR Wildlife Areas.
4. Allow expanded hunting opportunities to mitigate wildlife crop damage on working farm lands.
5. Seek cooperative management opportunity partnerships for access, restoration, vegetation management, enforcement and maintenance activities.

### **POLICIES**

1. Designate Wildlife Area lands through a public planning process.
2. Provide boundary property signage, information board and property maps.
3. Provide park website information on properties throughout the county.
4. Provide limited off road parking facilities.
5. Allow for seasonal snowmobile trails authorized and approved by the county.



*2011 Snowshoeing at  
Dorn Creek Wildlife Area*



Wildlife areas have minimal facility development and public access is often limited to on road or small off road gravel parking lots. Wildlife areas are open to hunting, fishing, trapping, hiking, cross country skiing, foraging and snowshoeing. Recommendations for all wildlife areas would include completion of boundary signing, improving off road parking as needed and vegetation management practices including invasive species removal and habitat restorations.

## **PROPOSED WILDLIFE AREAS**

### **SUGAR RIVER Wildlife Area** (Town of Verona , 33 acres)

The Sugar River winds through the southern third of this property located in Section 17 along Bobcat Lane. The primary land cover is lowland/wetland grassland vegetation. A public information meeting to present proposed land management practices would be undertaken before the county officially designates the property under the Wildlife Area classification.

### **CAPITAL SPRINGS RECREATION AREA Wildlife Areas** (Cities of Monona, Fitchburg and Village of McFarland)

Properties are identified within the 2010 adopted Capital Springs Recreation Area as proposed hunting areas. These lands are generally located west of USH 14 and north of McCoy Road, and also along the Upper Mud Lake shoreline. The primary land cover is lowland/wetland grassland vegetation. A public information meeting to present proposed land management practices and further define boundaries would be undertaken before the county officially designates the property under the Wildlife Area classification.

## **EXISTING WILDLIFE AREAS**

### **BLACK EARTH CREEK Wildlife Area** (Town of Middleton, 258 acres)

The property is located just west of the Twin Valley Road and USH 14 intersection. A small gravel parking area was constructed on the north side of USH 14 in 2011 that provides walk-in access. Wetlands along Black Earth Creek and crop fields are the primary land cover south of the highway, steep wooded hills and crop lands lie to the north. This area offers the potential for excellent deer and turkey hunting. A map of the property is available on the Parks web page at :

[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/BECWildlifeArea\\_kioskmapfinal\\_web.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/BECWildlifeArea_kioskmapfinal_web.pdf)

### **DOOR CREEK Wildlife Area** – (Towns of Dunn, Pleasant Springs, 680 acres)

Primarily a large wetland complex extending north of Lake Kegonsa with some crop and uplands surrounding the north/northeast perimeters. Parking access points are available off CTH MN, Elvejhem Road, Fish Camp County Park and Longview Drive. There are also Wisconsin DNR public hunting grounds within the southern half of the boundary. Deer, turkey, pheasant and waterfowl are the primary hunting opportunities. Firearms are restricted to shotgun and muzzleloaders on County property.

A map of the property is available on the Parks web page at :

[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Door\\_Creek.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Door_Creek.pdf)

**DONALD PARK Wildlife Area** (Town of Springdale, 70 acres)

Located on STH 92 just to the west of Mt. Vernon on the northern edge of Donald County Park, this property is a combination of WDNR and county-owned lands. Wetlands and crop field are the two primary land covers. Parking access is available at a WDNR gravel lot on the south side of STH 92. Firearms and bows must be in a case for hunters accessing the wildlife area from Donald County Park south of the creek.

A map of the property is available on the Parks web page at :

[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Donald\\_Park.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Donald_Park.pdf)

**DORN CREEK Wildlife Area** (Town of Westport, 230 acres)

This property is located north of Oncken Road between CTH M and Q and is a mix of upland grasslands, creek and associated wetlands. A small gravel parking lot on the north side of Oncken Road provides seasonal walk-in access. Deer and waterfowl are the primary hunting opportunities. A 40-acre WDNR parcel on the northwest corner of the intersection of CTH M and Oncken Road is also included within this wildlife area boundary.

A map of the property is available on the Parks web page at :

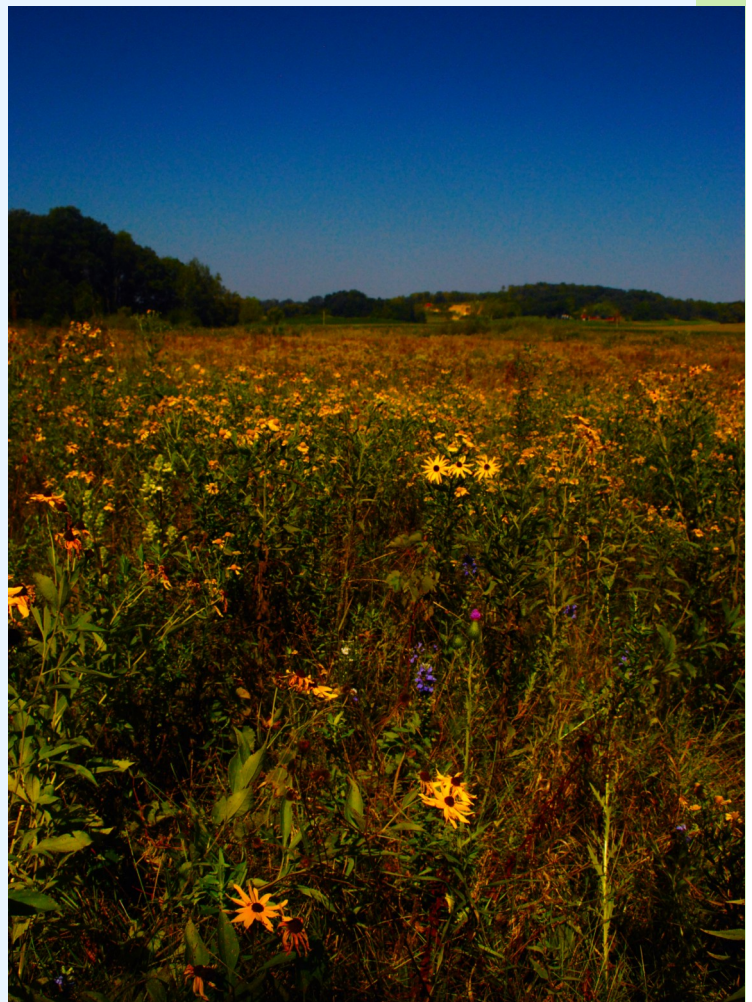
[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Dorn\\_Creek.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Dorn_Creek.pdf)

**WALKING IRON Wildlife Area** (Town of Mazomanie, 737 acres)

Located north of Walking Iron County Park and the Village of Mazomanie, this property can be accessed off a gravel parking lot at the intersection of CTH Y and Amenda Road, and from two additional gravel parking lots on Amenda Road. The Dane County Conservation League provided a substantial donation that allowed parking lots and boundary signage to be installed. Lands east of CTH Y are primarily crop lands and grassland restoration. Lands north of Amenda Road contain a small woodlot, crop fields and drainage ditches that can offer fantastic waterfowl hunting.

A map of the property is available on the Parks web page at :

[http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Walking\\_Iron.pdf](http://danedocs.countyofdane.com/webdocs/pdf/lwrp/parks/Walking_Iron.pdf)



*Donald Park Wildlife Area*

*Photo Courtesy of Joshua Mayer*

## IX.6 TRAILS

Trails again were the most frequently requested recreation facility addition to the park system. According to The Outdoor Foundation survey data presented under the Planning Considerations section of this plan, trail activities account for three of the five most popular outdoor activities for all Americans ages six and older. The National Survey on Recreation and Environment 2005-2009, completed for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Bureau of Parks and Recreation in March of 2011, documented that nearly 90% of all state residents walk. The Wisconsin Bike Federation reports 2.5 million Wisconsin residents bicycle for recreation. Development of a variety of additional trail types is consistent with providing future recreation opportunities for the forecasted increasing retirement age and youth populations of Dane County.

Bicycling, on and off road, is extremely popular in both rural and urban areas of Dane County. Requests for additional single track mountain bike trails generated more comments than all other recreation uses throughout the public input process. There is also strong support for development of off road, paved bicycle trails throughout the County. **Recommendations:**

- Maintain current relationships with the Bike Federation and other trail advocacy groups.
- Expand hiking and snowshoe trail opportunities where appropriate.
- Investigate expansion of single track mountain bike trails, particularly in western Dane County.
- Investigate creation of trail Friends groups.
- Explore the feasibility of the Earth Day Heritage public lands and land/water trail proposal to celebrate and highlight a unique cultural legacy of Dane County and beyond. Dane County's initial role with the trails portion of this proposal would include investigation of educational/interpretative information for significant historical places located on trails identified in this plan that are on county-owned lands. Initial development could begin with a web-based "E Trail." As this Earth/Art® Resources proposal is further defined, in collaboration with the Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability (CRANES), additional partners may be involved, including other Dane County departments and local municipalities.

### **PRIORITIES**

- Provide connectivity between existing park facilities and trails.
- Implement trail systems that enhance youth and low income resident access to park facilities.
- Implement trail systems that have the potential to reduce automobile trips and serve commuting purposes.
- Implement the Ice Age Trail, the only National Scenic Trail in Dane County.



*Capital City Trail  
Photo: Michael Lemberger*



The following are recommendations for regionally significant water, bicycle/pedestrian, equestrian and snowmobile trails.

## **WATER TRAILS**

Dane County has a number of lakes, streams and rivers that provide outstanding water trail opportunities. Capitol Water Trails Ltd. has been spearheading most of the water trail development efforts in Dane County. Some of the waters that provide water trail opportunities include Token Creek, the Yahara chain of lakes, Badfish Creek, Maunsha River, Black Earth Creek, Dunlap Creek, Halfway Prairie Creek, Sugar River, and Koshkonong Creek. Extent of trail development, public access points and more detailed trail maps can be found on the Capitol Water Trails website at [www.capitolwatertrails.org](http://www.capitolwatertrails.org), or by calling them at 608-223-0995.

Another outstanding resource is the Yahara Waterways Water Trail Guide. A project led by the Dane County Environmental Council and many partners, the trail highlights historical, cultural and environmental features. The trail guide is available online at [www.danewaters.com/yaharawatertrail.aspx](http://www.danewaters.com/yaharawatertrail.aspx).

A bicycle pedestrian ferry from Middleton and Governor Nelson State Park to downtown Madison that was first proposed in 2001 remains a component of this plan.

### **Recommendations:**

- The County's role will be to continue acquiring future lands that provide public access for parking and canoe/kayak launching to navigable waterways. Dane County Parks may also construct small gravel parking lots and trailhead facilities as staff and budgets allow. Development, signing and maintenance of these water trails will be carried out by volunteer organizations.
- Include east and west branches of Starkweather Creek as potential future water trails from Olbrich Park north to Highway 30.
- Establish a canoe/kayak trail from the Village of Cambridge to the Village of Rockdale along the Koshkonong Creek. Investigate water trail access partnership with the Village of Cambridge at former fur building site on Water Street.
- Establish a water trail on Sugar River from the former Pelliteri property south to Paoli.
- The Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area have cleared a water trail on Nine Springs Creek from CTH MM to the Yahara River. County support of efforts to provide access points, bridges and improved underpasses (i.e. County MM/Syene Road/RR trestles) will be critical for the water trail to meet its potential as a significant recreational opportunity for the community.
- Investigate development of canoe campsites with the Village of Belleville along the Sugar River.
- Investigate measures necessary to improve water trail access under railroad trestles on Nine Springs Creek.

## **NEW WATER TRAIL RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Rock River Trail Initiative**

The mission of the Rock River Trail Initiative is to establish and interpret a Rock River Water Trail along the 300-mile river course from the headwaters in Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin, to the Mississippi River at Rock Island, Illinois, and a separate Rock River route on roads within the river corridor to provide access for all to the natural resources, recreational opportunities, scenic beauty, and historic and cultural assets of the Rock River Valley. The Yahara River could provide Dane County residents with future water trail access to the Rock River Trail Initiative. Inclusion in this plan is intended to further awareness and grant eligibility for local units of government, volunteers and non-profit groups who are working to implement this initiative.

## BICYCLE PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

Strong public support was again evident throughout the planning process for development of bicycle pedestrian trails that are identified in the plan. A new trail initiative identified is an off-road trail connection between CamRock County Park and Silverwood County Park and ending in the City of Edgerton. Another new trail included in this plan is the “Sherman Flyer Trail” that is proposed to follow the rail corridor between the Village of Waunakee and downtown Madison.

Since 2001, Dane County has included the concept of an off-road trail between the City of Middleton and Village of Mazomanie. In 2007, local unit of government elected officials and interested parties formed the Good Neighbor Committee (GNC) to promote intergovernmental cooperation on matters of mutual interest through communication and information-sharing along the corridor. A GNC Trail Subcommittee formed out of the GNC as a forum for the discussion and decision making process for the development of a regional multi-use trail to connect the City of Middleton to the Village of Mazomanie. Dane County will continue to explore planning, funding and development partnerships with this organization.

The overall long term countywide vision is for a regional bicycle pedestrian trail system that connects the majority of the major population centers to county park facilities and other regional trails.

### Recommendations:

- The county’s role is to develop off road regional trails within project areas identified in the Parks and Open Space Plan. Regional trails that extend outside of these project areas would be developed by the local unit of government. In some circumstances, the county may consider partnering with local units of government to utilize its own staff and equipment to develop off road regional trails identified in this plan by formal agreement.
- For regional trails identified in this plan that extend outside of county project area boundaries and are funded or developed with assistance by Dane County Parks, the county may have the option to eventually transfer ownership to the state or charge user fees to offset maintenance costs. These trails would also be identified by signage as county trails with other partner logos as appropriate.
- For regional trails identified in this plan that extend outside of county project area boundaries, the county’s primary role is to provide eligibility to apply for Conservation Fund grant dollars for local units of government to acquire lands necessary for trail construction.
- Some of the regional bicycle pedestrian trails identified in this plan may be on-road bike routes or bike lanes. These would be implemented by the local unit of government and possibly coordinated with the Dane County Highway Department. The intent of including them in this plan is for grant eligibility purposes only.
- Investigate feasibility of implementing a seamless, shared countywide bike trail pass via an advisory panel consisting of local units of government, the Bike Federation, Capital Off Road Pathfinders, Wisconsin DNR and the Greater Madison Bicycling Advocacy Committee.
- Investigate creation of bicycle advocacy Friends groups to assist with operation and maintenance of trails.
- Continue and expand on BikeDane initiatives.
- Continue working with the Bike Federation, rural townships, Dane County Highway and Sheriff Departments, and bicycle clubs to improve coordination of bicycle events that affect county highways or parks.
- Coordinate semi annual meetings with Dane County Highway and the Bicycle Federation to investigate possible on road facility improvements and opportunities.

## Priorities:

Dane County should work on planning and development of off-road regional bicycle pedestrian trail projects, identified in this plan, closest to major population centers or through areas targeted for development adjacent to urban areas. Dane County Parks should also continue to work in partnership with the Highway Department on on-road initiatives that are a component of the regional trail system. These trails and on-road facilities can serve both commuter and recreation needs. Over the next five years, as staff and budget allow, Dane County should work on planning and development of the following regional off-road bicycle pedestrian projects:

- North Mendota Trail-Planning for the connection between Schumacher Farm in Waunakee, to Governor Nelson State Park including connections to Mendota County Park via the Holy Wisdom Monastery property, to Pheasant Branch Conservancy. The Village of Waunakee has already constructed segments of trail that could potentially be incorporated into this system.
- Georgia O’Keefe Trail-Proposed to extend between McCarthy County Park and Patrick Marsh, traveling past the original homestead and countryside that inspired many of Georgia O’ Keefe’s paintings. Educational signage about the life and work of O’ Keefe could be placed along the trail at bicycle rest stops.
- Phase Two Lower Yahara River Trail-Begin design and engineering of segment from Village of McFarland to the City of Stoughton.
- Ice Age Junction Trail North-This trail would begin at the Ice Age Trail parking lot on CTH PD and travel north to CTH M.
- Token Creek Trail-This trail would extend from Token Creek County Park to Patrick Marsh Natural Resource Area.
- The county should work with the Center for Resilient Cities, the City of Madison, and other partners to provide an off-road facility at the proposed “Central Park” for the section of Capital City Trail that crosses the proposed city park.
- Begin design and engineering for connector trail between Military Ridge State Trail and Brigham County Park.
- Work with the Town of Dunn toward establishment of bicycle lanes on Lake Farm Road that will provide connections to the Capital City Trail and Lower Yahara River Trail.
- Bicycle Commuter Lots. Recent surveys in the community have indicated a strong desire by employees working in downtown Madison to commute to work by bike. Presumably, employees in other areas of the city and county would also be interested in commuting to work by bike. A possible way to create opportunities for this activity would be to develop a series of bicycle commuter lots on county lands. One possible location would be the Schuepbach parcel abutting CTH MM and Hwy 14 in the Capital Springs Recreation Area.



*Capital City Trail*



## **BIKE DANE**

Bicycling provides significant economic, health, transportation and enjoyment benefits to Dane County residents. In July of 2010 a meeting was convened by Dane County Executive Kathleen Falk to identify needs within the bicycle facility system countywide that would complement existing urban area on and off-road systems. The meeting was attended by bicycle event organizers, bicycle business owners, transportation planners, representatives from local units of government and bicycle advocates. Following a presentation that provided an overview of existing Dane County bicycle trail initiatives as outlined in the 2006-2011 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan, meeting participants broke out into twelve work groups to identify desired on-road and off-road bicycle facilities as well as perceived issue/conflict areas that need improvements.

Results from the July Bike Dane planning meeting were summarized by Dane County Parks planning staff and reviewed by a volunteer workgroup at a follow up meeting on October 14th, 2010. The following is a list of the primary themes that were identified by the workgroup and recommendations to be incorporated into the 2012-2017 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan:

### **1. Preservation and Maintenance of Urban Escape Routes**

Urban escape routes are roadways that are used by bicyclists to travel from intensively used inner-urban roads to reach lesser-traveled rural bike routes and trails. Maintaining and adding bicycle lanes and signage along these roadways is critical to the safety of bicyclists.

County AB, BB, Portage Road and Old Sauk Road were all identified by the Bike Dane planning process as urban escape routes that should continually be monitored for need of improvements. Consideration of possible linkages to future regional off-road trails to urban escape routes should also be considered.

### **2. Priority Off-Road Trail Connection Needs**

Three off-road facility missing link priorities were confirmed through the planning process: Capital City Trail connection to Glacial Drumlin Trail, north extension of the Ice Age Junction Bicycle Pedestrian Trail, and creation of the “Sherman Flyer Trail,” a trail proposed to utilize abandoned railroad right of way between the Village of Waunakee and downtown Madison. Additional reoccurring suggestions included completion of the Starkweather Creek Trail between the Cities of Sun Prairie and Madison, Phase One of the Lower Yahara River Trail, and completion of an off-road trail between the City of Middleton and Governor Nelson State Park.

### **3. Priority On-Road Bicycle Needs**

Many on-road bicycle needs were identified throughout the county, but the addition of bicycle lanes to Old Sauk Road was clearly identified as a top priority. Another very popular on-road route identified as needing signage and lane striping was the loop between Festge County Park and Indian Lake County Park. Other on-road priorities identified included improvements to Portage Road, Fish Hatchery Road, Range Trail Road, Lacy Road, CTH M and Pheasant Branch Road. Identification of these highly used on-road bicycle routes should be considered in locating future regional trails within the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan.

## 4. Safety

In general, a lack of paved shoulder or striped bike lane and signage to provide a designated riding area on rural roads was identified as a primary safety concern. Lack of adequate bike lanes on Old Sauk Road was identified as a top safety concern among bicycle advocates. The Dane County Highway Department should consult with Parks on all future county highway roadway projects that may benefit from signage and striping.

There were a few reoccurring bicycle crossing locations identified as needing additional facility improvements including: Military Ridge to Capital City State Trail crossing at the McKee/Verona Road interchange and lack of a separated grade crossing at McKee Road for the Badger State Trail. A suggested solution would be to redirect the Military Ridge Trail east to the Badger State Trail south of McKee Road to take advantage of the existing median and future proposed overpass. This project would be a state trail initiative.

## 5. Regional Bicycle Trail Initiatives

Several regional bike routes and paths that currently are not called out in the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan were identified. The Wisconsin Department of Transportation is investigating a “Bicycle Interstate” concept that would provide a combination of off and on-road linkages between LaCrosse, Madison and Milwaukee. Dane County should continue to work with the WDOT as planning for this system continues. There were also several recommendations confirming an interest in creation of the off-road trail between Middleton and Mazomanie (Good Neighbor Trail), and also connecting to Devils Lake State Park.

Another recurring recommendation was the concept of a “wheel and spokes” system that would provide a continuous bike system loop connecting cities and villages around the metropolitan area with spur trails that would tie into downtown Madison.

## EQUESTRIAN TRAILS

Dane County Parks has been working with equestrian riders to develop an “outside the park” regional trail system. These trails are made possible by volunteers securing formal access agreements to construct equestrian trails on lands adjacent to and beyond county park lands. Donald County Park, has recently developed such a trail and additional loops have been added. The equestrian community hopes to further this concept from other public riding areas in the county with the eventual goal of forming a continuous loop through rural areas around the entire metropolitan area. **Recommendations:**

- Dane County equestrian clubs should form a committee that would carry out landowner negotiations, development and maintenance of a regional trail system.



*Token Creek County Park*

## SNOWMOBILE TRAILS

Dane County has a long snowmobiling history. Several of the oldest snowmobile clubs within Wisconsin originate from the county. Dane County Parks manages over three hundred fifty miles of state-funded snowmobile trails and assists with the coordination of another 150 miles of club trails. The Parks Director is the Snowmobile Trail Coordinator for the program and works closely with the Dane County Council of Snowmobile Clubs.

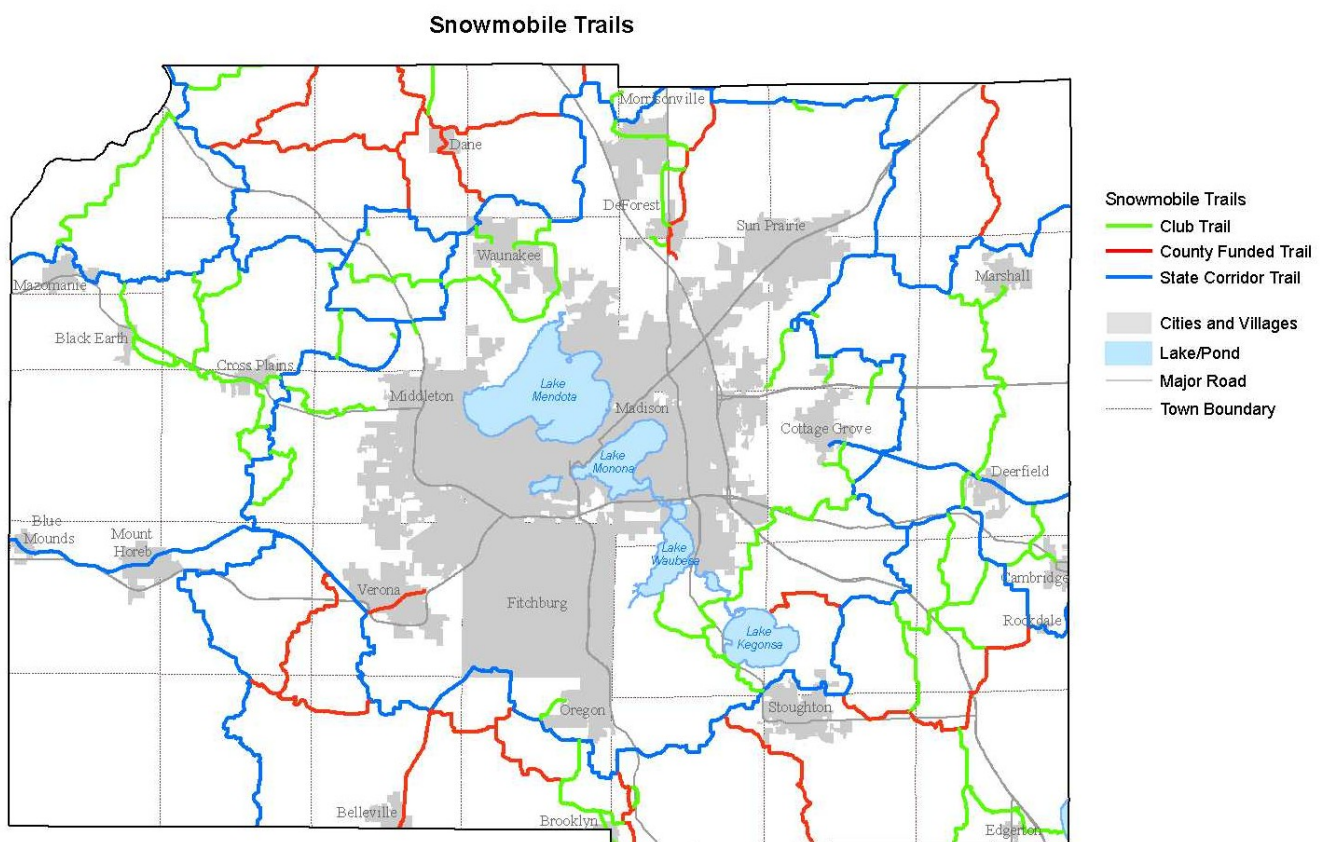
Administration of the funded trails is handled through the parks office; staff inspect the funded seasonal trails once a year for proper signing, layout and safety.

Dane County has been one of the fastest growing counties for the last 20 years. As the county's urban centers continue to expand, the snowmobile trail system has had to move into increasingly narrower corridors.

Snowmobiling is an important winter recreation activity for residents and provides an economic benefit for both Dane County and the State of Wisconsin. To maintain the integrity of the trail system, more needs to be done to protect and preserve lands where these seasonal trails (and other trails) can be maintained for future generations of users. A comprehensive study of the existing snowmobile trail system in Dane County should be done in conjunction with the Dane County Snowmobile Council. This study should identify snowmobile trail needs for the future and designate permanent trail corridor goals.

### Recommendations:

- Utilize summer intern, university students or volunteer help to complete a comprehensive study of the existing and future snowmobile trail system.





# X. DANE COUNTY PARKS PROGRAM AREA RECOMMENDATIONS



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## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Volunteer Program

The Dane County Volunteer Program (formerly Adult Conservation Team) was created in 1992 to establish a link between Dane County Parks and the community. It is also intended to educate the public about natural resources and departmental goals, improve quality of life and raise level of service delivery. The Volunteer Program extends and enriches the work done by park staff and is also a source of advocacy and financial support of Dane County Parks. The program serves as a bridge to the public to better understand concerns and issues at a grass roots level.

The Volunteer Program has accelerated the development of parks and natural areas, increased wildlife habitats, and increased recreational opportunities. Volunteers also carry out some of the day-to-day maintenance tasks that are beyond the capacity of parks division staff and help create special touches throughout the system. Supervision of volunteers by Park staff varies considerably, depending on the volunteer and activity.

In 2010, the Volunteer Program had over fifteen hundred individuals and eighty two groups who donated over thirty three thousand hours of service. Additionally, there are many volunteer hours that have not been recorded but are occurring routinely in the Parks system. Some examples of volunteer projects include blue bird trail development, invasive vegetative species removal, prescribed burn assistance, prairie seed collecting, cleaning, and planting, park research, fund raising, trail clearing and stewardship, and tree planting.

### Friends Groups

A primary component of the Volunteer Program is Friends groups. Dane County Parks has several official Friends groups that have signed agreements with Dane County, which outline the mission of the group and the relationship with Dane County Parks. There are also several Friends groups that do not have signed agreements but make significant contributions to the Park system. Friends groups typically provide support for a specific park and tend to have a medium to high level of organizational capacity. These groups meet with Park staff on a regular basis and receive assistance with projects and events. Some groups provide community events and programming that bring users into the Park. Below is a list of Friends groups and some of the public events they held in 2010. Please note that this is not an inclusive list.

#### Dane County Friends Groups (2010):

Friends of CamRock Park, Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area, Friends of Donald Park, Friends of Halfway, Prairie Park, Friends of Indian Lake Park, Friends of Lake View Hill Park, Friends of McCarthy Youth Conservation Park, Friends of Schumacher Farm Park

#### Sample of Public Events Sponsored by Dane County Friends Groups (2010):

- Fathers Day at Pop's Knoll-Friends of Donald Park
- Halfway Prairie Schoolhouse Grade School Field Trips
- Harvest Moon Festival-Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area
- Holiday Teas-Friends of Schumacher Farm
- Winter Fest-Friends of McCarthy Park

## Community and Individual Partners

Another aspect of the Volunteer Program are the many organizations, community groups and individual volunteers that make contributions of time throughout the year. Similar to Friends groups, these volunteer activities are supported by the Volunteer Coordinator and other staff. Many organizations bring dozens or more volunteers together to support Dane County Parks on various projects. Some events are initiated by the county while other events are requested by a community group looking for a service project. There are also many dedicated individual volunteers that put in substantial time and often money towards projects. For example, in 2010 and 2011, a small group of individuals, including off-duty park staff, spent hundreds of hours clearing invasive species at Festge County Park, making dramatic improvements to the habitat and opening up new scenic views of the Black Earth Creek Valley.

## Campground Hosts

The Volunteer Program also solicits annual campground hosts for each of the five campgrounds (Babcock County Park, Lake Farm County Park, Token Creek County Park, Mendota County Park and Brigham County Park). These volunteers stay at the campground, generally for several weeks or the entire summer, assist with daily campground operations and serve as liaisons between campers and park staff. In addition to helping manage reservations, maintain the campground, etc., they also serve as friendly faces that can answer questions and provide information about the park and area.



## Volunteer Program Recommendations:

- Investigate grants, donations, endowment funds and other alternative sources of income to fund increased volunteer efforts that provide outreach and education.
- Improve assistance and support to Friends Groups, which in turn will increase volunteer efforts.
- Improve ability to respond to community groups that want to contribute but require high levels of supervision.
- Identify and train “lead volunteers” that are willing to manage projects and other volunteers.
- Expand training opportunities, such as chain-saw safety, that empower volunteers and expand contributions.
- Integrate fun and interesting educational components into some volunteer activities, so that new volunteers are inspired to come back and better understand the contribution they are making.
- Continue expanding activities that engage volunteers of all ages.
- Establish a forum or other mechanism through which Friends Groups could share ideas, expertise, human and materials resources (interns, equipment, materials, etc.)
- Investigate ways to enhance volunteer recognition efforts to increase and retain members.



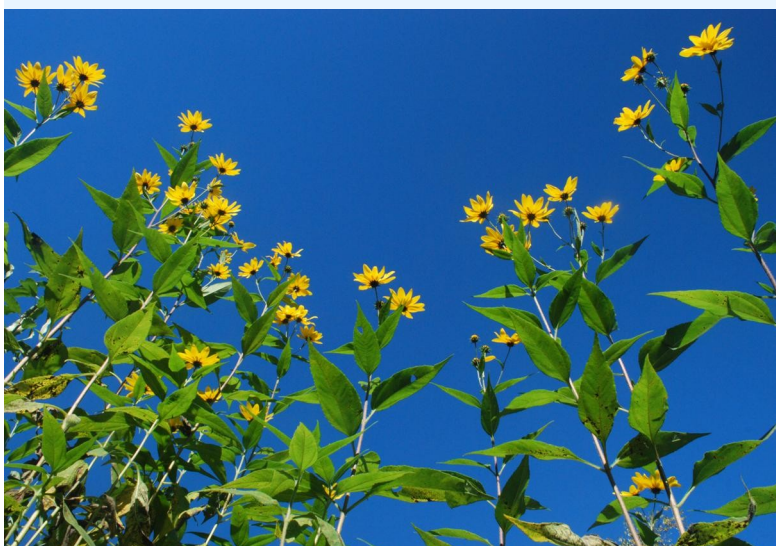
## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Naturalist Program

The Naturalist Program is currently focused primarily on prairie restoration and vegetation management. The majority of public outreach, education and volunteer efforts have been associated with assistance on prairie seeding, prescribed burns, invasive species removal and prairie seed collection and cleaning. Establishing and maintaining coordinated volunteer vegetation management efforts is increasingly challenging given differing opinions on proper management practices, and the wide range of conflicting management strategy information available through the internet. Ongoing public education that provides the latest acceptable and safe vegetation management practices is critical to the success of this program.

Large scale restoration of county parklands can only continue with significant contributions from volunteers. The Naturalist and Volunteer Programs are intertwined in this regard and the Volunteer Program must continue offering volunteer opportunities that provide direct support to the Naturalist Program. Strong support was heard throughout the planning process to continue and expand the Naturalist Program. The Naturalist position plays a key role in providing leadership and outreach to volunteers and established Friends groups. Expanding the responsibility and leadership roles of qualified individual volunteers to carry out Naturalist program initiatives could tremendously increase the capacity of this program.

In addition to prairie restoration, the Naturalist Program could expand to provide more direct environmental education programs. The Dane County Volunteer Coordinator receives frequent inquiries regarding educational opportunities that are available through Dane County Parks. Participating in Naturalist-led tours, visiting interpretive exhibits, or volunteering for conservation activities provides entertainment for park users. Furthermore, a diverse education and outreach program instills a greater sense of conservation and environmental awareness in park users. These programs can inspire people to make wiser conservation decisions at home and to get more involved in volunteer opportunities. Finally, increasing environmental education outreach programs could create new volunteer Naturalist opportunities and expand awareness and appreciation of the Dane County Park system.

### Naturalist Program Recommendations:



*Photo: Joshua Mayer*

- Create a countywide Vegetation Management Plan that outlines goals and acceptable practices for all lands under the Naturalist Program direction.
- Expand and diversify the educational and public contact role of the Naturalist Program including creation of park educational tour pamphlets, media interviews and outreach to schools.
- Utilize volunteers as “Teacher Naturalists” under the direction of the Naturalist.
- Investigate grants, donations, endowment funds and other alternative sources of income to fund expanded Naturalist programming that provides outreach and education.

## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Lussier Family Heritage Center

Situated at the heart of the Dane County environmental corridor (E-Way) and the Capital Springs Recreational Area, the Lussier Family Heritage Center is part of the Nine Springs E-Way vision of UW Madison Professor emeritus Phil Lewis. The Center is proposed to provide County residents with an experiential facility to learn about the cultural and environmental heritage of Dane County. The center was built almost entirely through private funds including a very substantial donation from John H. Lussier. It is supported in large by user fees generated from rental of the facility for special events. Planning for the Center began in the early 1990s and its doors were opened in 2001.

The upper level of the Heritage Center includes an exhibit hall and commons area. The main room of the upper level is currently being used for retreats, conferences, meetings, receptions and other special events. The long-term plan is to construct a west wing addition that would serve this purpose and thereby allow the main room to provide the original intended purpose as a permanent and traveling educational exhibit area. The upper level also includes the Lunney-Pfeifer Donor Recognition Wall that recognizes people and organizations that have provided significant contributions to the Dane County Park system. The wall also includes space for recognition of exceptional volunteer efforts. The Natural Heritage Land Trust Wall describes land conservation activities in Dane County and recognizes those special people and organizations that have worked to preserve the county's Natural Heritage. State and county offices and restrooms are located in the south half of the upper level. On the lower level, the Ken Lepine Hall is used for retreats, conferences, meetings, receptions and other special events. The lower level also includes a kitchen for food preparation and catered events. Dane County Historical Society offices are also located in the lower level and provide a repository for county records and information.

There is an observation deck outside of the upper level room with a spotting scope that provides views of the E-way flora and fauna. An existing barn is used for storage of materials for Dane County's Volunteer Program. The grounds also include a playground, solar panels, a rain garden exhibit, and extensive native landscaping.



*The Lussier Family Heritage Center*

The October 2010 adopted Capital Springs State Recreation Area Master Plan recommends that the Lussier Family Heritage Center become the primary educational hub for the E-Way that will provide educational opportunities for outdoor recreation skill development along with study and interpretation of the natural and archeological resources of the area. The plan also recommends that the Lussier Family Heritage Center become the main gateway for E-way visitor interaction and interpretation. The Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area have already begun to implement this vision through a variety of efforts including fund raising, development of interpretive signage and the annual Harvest Moon festival that has become a major fall event.



*Harvest Moon Festival at the Lussier Family Heritage Center*

#### **Recommendations:**

- Work with volunteers to provide additional and expanded park video materials for the entry informational monitor.
- Develop and implement educational kiosk nodes throughout the Lussier Family Heritage Center grounds.
- Continue to develop an action plan for creation of education and interpretive exhibit areas within the upper and lower levels of the existing building.
- Continue to investigate fundraising options for the proposed west wing expansion area.



## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Park Planning

As Dane County Parks continues to acquire additional acreage and bring new lands into the system, park planning is necessary to determine property management and use. In addition, many of the recreation parks are more than fifty years old and have had significant changes in surrounding land use and transportation patterns. Recreation trends are fluid and continually evolve with the changing population dynamics and demands of county residents. Trail planning is also necessary to secure required permits for construction, identify preferred alignments and prepare construction documents.

Many of the county recreation parks, trails and natural resource areas currently have no or very outdated master plans. Master plans are necessary to provide a common vision for how properties will be developed, managed and to identify the types of uses that will occur on them. Project plans are completed for natural resource areas and seek to define more exact project area boundaries based on resource protection and recreation needs. The Parks Division conducts park and resource planning through public processes using a variety of Dane County Land and Water Resource staff. This in house approach allows the county to maintain on-going grass-roots-level relationships with local units of government, non-profit conservation organizations and private landowners that are critical to long term success of the Parks Division.

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Prepare master plans for project areas that currently have none or are in need of updating due to additional land acquisition, restoration efforts and changing recreation demands.
2. Plan for non-motorized and mass transit access to existing and future park lands and facilities to the greatest extent possible.
3. Implement projects that improve public access to lands and water that currently have none.
4. Implement projects that improve safety and environmental conditions of a property.
5. Meet with the Madison Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, local units of government and the Bicycle Federation on an annual basis to coordinate implementation of regional trail objectives identified in this plan.

### **POLICIES**

1. Provide peripheral support and input into other state, county and local natural resource protection planning efforts.
2. Conduct a joint inventory and analysis of existing and proposed land management practices on all county park lands that share boundaries with other state, federal and local government property to work toward consistent and compatible management practices throughout project areas.

3. Utilize salvaged construction materials and employ sustainable building practices to the maximum extent possible when developing park infrastructure.
4. Provide review and peripheral input to local units of government on park, open space and resource protection plans, as staff and resources allow.
5. Dane County Park Commission and Public Works are responsible for design oversight and approval, development of construction plans and specifications and review of bidding and construction for all new building construction or building relocation.
6. Dane County Parks will prepare, with Park Commission review, Project Plans for Natural Resource Areas identified in this plan, as staff and resources allow. Project Plans will include a comprehensive inventory of existing natural, cultural, historical and recreational resources within and adjacent to project area boundaries, recommendations for future property management, park and trail development, land acquisition, boundary adjustment(s), and identification of potential future project partners and their roles in implementing plan recommendations.
7. Dane County Parks will conduct, with Park Commission review, all planning and design efforts for recreation parks, trails, forests and historic sites, including site development plans, exterior signage, and master plans.
8. Dane County Parks will conduct, with Park Commission review, all planning efforts necessary for establishment of future wildlife areas.
9. Develop park lands in a manner that restores and preserves to the greatest extent possible the original character and integrity of existing natural, biotic, cultural and geographic features.
10. Conduct thorough archeological inventories prior to starting any park or trail development projects.
11. Develop new and retrofit existing park facilities to meet guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Consumer Product Safety Commission, regardless of the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.
12. Park and recreation plans completed by Dane County Parks are not land use plans or created for the purpose of guiding future zoning decisions.
13. Consider the protection of significant natural, cultural and historical resources on lands adjacent to and within the viewshed of county, state, and federally-owned recreation and habitat lands.
14. All landscape projects should strive toward an emphasis of utilizing native plant materials that provide both human and wildlife benefits.



## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Operations & Maintenance

The Operations and Maintenance program provides a variety of services to several County divisions and departments including Parks, Public Works, Health and Human Services, Sheriff, the Alliant Energy Center and Zoo. Some of the services provided include aquatic plant harvesting, vegetation and lands management, building demolition and new property stabilization, mowing, special event coordination, invasive species management, enforcement of park rules and county ordinances, snowmobile program coordination, lake lock and navigation support, lake access maintenance, forestry, restoration and habitat projects, park and trail development, Friends support, and public outreach.

Parks provide a critical outlet for people who are seeking a place to escape the everyday stresses of life or noise and congestion of the urban environment. It is well documented that people who engage in regular outdoor activities are generally healthier and happier. Historically it has been the goal of the Dane County Park Commission to provide free access into the parks. User fees have been charged to offset maintenance costs for some park facilities that require higher maintenance such as reserving a shelter, camping, lake access, dog parks, disc golf, cross-country ski trails, mountain biking and the state trail pass for the Capital City Trail. Dane County will need to continue to explore options to offset operating expenses to maintain the current level of services.

To gain increased efficiency in park operations, high intensity recreation use and maintenance areas should be designed and developed to be within close proximity of each other and easily accessible. Examples of this practice include facility development at Capital Springs Recreation Area and Token Creek County Park, where layout of activity areas such as campgrounds, shelters, lake access points, dog exercise areas, trails and disc golf allows for the most efficient operation of facilities while reducing transportation and labor costs.

### **PRIORITIES**

1. Maintain cleanliness, function and integrity of county parks and facilities including the Lussier Family Heritage Center.
2. Maintain and enhance the natural resource components of county lands through restoration of native habitat, control and removal of invasive species.
3. Improve and increase access to parks, facilities and natural resource areas as staff and resources allow.





4. Provide for the safe enjoyment of county parks and natural resource areas along with visitor education and oversight of park use through public contact, enforcement and information programs.
5. Provide for aquatic and terrestrial invasive species education, outreach and municipal access to state and federal grant programs.
6. Provide for navigational and recreational use of our waterways and for prioritized aquatic plant harvesting throughout the boating season with guidance from the WDNR.
7. Implement shoreline stabilization and erosion control measures as necessary throughout county-owned lands as staff and resources allow.

## **POLICIES**

1. Provide courteous and responsive public information and contact.
2. Make facilities available for public use in a timely, safe and cost-efficient manner, as resources allow.
3. Provide facilities and use areas to accommodate a variety of recreation uses and special events.
4. Maintain parks and lands by the most efficient and practical means, as resources allow.
5. Continue to grow a recreational volunteer program, develop cooperative partnerships with public, non-profit and private groups to help provide for future management and operation of the parks.
6. Oversee the county forestry program that provides assistance to other county agencies, emergency response to storm damage clean-up, hazard tree removal, vegetation management and restoration efforts.
7. Provide safe use of county waters, including maintenance of locks and dams, navigation buoys and channels, lake access points, and flood mitigation through aquatic plant management.
8. Oversee the Naturalist Program that provides restoration and long-range vegetation management plans for all county park lands.
9. Oversee the Volunteer Program to coordinate recreational volunteer assistance with education, maintenance and development tasks.

## X.I CORE PROGRAMS: Real Estate

Lands identified in this Plan are generally purchased through the Dane County Conservation Fund, although other county funds, such as Land and Water Legacy, or grant dollars may also be utilized.

The Conservation Fund was established in 1990 and expanded in 2000 after 75% of voters county-wide approved a 10-year, \$30 million referendum. Funding for the Conservation Fund remains as of 2012, although appropriations are subject to annual budget deliberations.

These monies are spent primarily on the acquisition of land or property interests (e.g. conservation easements) identified in the Parks and Open Space Plan, including miscellaneous costs such as appraisals, title insurance, surveys, and site preparation.

### GRANT PROGRAMS

As of 2012, there are two county grant programs that are administered by the Land & Water Resources Department – Real Estate Division that relate to the Parks and Open Space Plan.

The first is the Conservation Fund Grant Program, which provides matching grants to non-profit organizations and local governmental units for the purchase of land or land interests identified in the Plan. Generally, up to 20% of the annual Conservation Fund is available for grants.

The second is the Partners for Recreation and Conservation (PARC) Program, which provides matching grants to non-profit organizations and local governmental units for regionally significant outdoor recreation and conservation capital projects. Although projects funded through PARC need not be identified in this Plan, they often relate either directly or indirectly.

### STEWARDSHIP ACCESS

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program (“Stewardship”) was established in 1989 to Preserve Wisconsin's most significant land and water resources for future generations and provide the land base and recreational facilities needed for quality outdoor experiences. The program is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and funds are made available to local units of government through various grant sub-programs.

Dane County applies for Stewardship grants on an annual basis to support both land acquisition and development projects. These grants cover up to 50% of project costs and are often the driving force behind the project. There are many outstanding properties and development projects throughout the Dane County Parks system that would not have been possible without Stewardship support.

Stewardship grants come with various restrictions, such as the requirement that lands funded through Stewardship may not be converted to non-park uses. Starting in 2007, Stewardship grants for land acquisition also require that lands must allow hunting, fishing (if fishable water is present), trapping, hiking, and cross-country skiing. The only exceptions to this requirement are to protect public safety and to protect unique plant and animal communities. Determinations regarding exceptions are made by the DNR as outlined in Chapter NR 52, Wisconsin Administrative Code, and Dane County has limited ability to assert when an exception for public safety or to protect unique plant and animal communities is necessary.



Dane County will continue to apply for Stewardship grants and will review each potential application on a case-by-case basis to decide if all five uses are appropriate for the property in question. Some potential applications may not be submitted if all five uses are not consistent with the applicable policies or master plan for the property. Other times, the county may ask the DNR to consider an exception to protect public safety or to protect unique plant and animal communities if it appears that the project meets the criteria for exceptions as outlined in the administrative code. Finally, the county may ask for a variance from the administrative code in circumstances where the project appears to meet the overall goals of the Stewardship Program but where one or more of the five public uses can not be offered and where the county can offer the uses on other county-owned properties. However, it is important to note that there is not a process in place for requesting a variance and there are no indicators that such a request would succeed. Regardless, the county hopes to work with the DNR on the concept of receiving credit for Stewardship grants by offering the five uses on non-Stewardship lands. The county will also work with the DNR to gain support for county policies and rules that govern the five uses, such as a permit program. County policies and rules have gone through a public input and planning process and are designed to best meet the goals of the Dane County Parks system.

## **PRIORITIES**

1. Develop a system to systematically incorporate newly-acquired lands into the Parks system.
2. Plan for the continuation of the Conservation Fund or other funding mechanisms for land acquisition.
3. Initiate contacts with landowners in project areas that have recent master or project plans in place.

## **POLICIES**

1. Cooperate with federal and state agencies, local units of government and community organizations in acquiring land.
2. Identify properties of high interest and proactively contact the owners.
3. Provide real estate assistance to all Dane County departments.
4. Work with willing sellers and treat all landowners fairly when pursuing lands identified in the Parks and Open Space Plan.
5. Participate and assist in the removal, sale or conversion of incompatible buildings located on recently acquired properties.
6. In relinquishing county-owned parkland for purposes other than preservation or recreation, take into account the following factors:
  - The long-term impacts on parks and recreational use throughout Dane County.
  - Dedication of revenue for additional park lands or improvements, or an equitable exchange of land
  - Action being consistent with local and regional plans.
  - Total costs and benefits of land ownership.
  - Possible deed restrictions placed on property being relinquished.
  - Existing deed restrictions that carry mitigation requirements for any parkland that is relinquished.
7. Evaluate donations of land to the Park Commission on the following:
  - Consistency with needs identified in the Parks and Open Space Plan.
  - Maintenance and development costs, including proximity to existing parkland.
  - Special environmental or cultural qualities.



## X.2 LAND & WATER MANAGEMENT: Land

### **Cooperative Management**

Dane County Parks owns many properties that are within project areas of nonprofit, state or federal agencies. As staff and financial resources become increasingly limited, it is critical to form and expand partnerships. The county has and will continue to enter management agreements with, for example, the WDNR and the Ice Age Trail Alliance. Management agreements currently exist on several properties, including Salmo Pond, Capital Springs Recreation Area, the Capital City Trail, Pheasant Branch Conservancy and segments of the Ice Age Trail.

### **Agriculture**

County parkland is often leased for agriculture as an interim management tool. Row cropping helps prepare the site for restoration and prevents invasive species from spreading into the area. Agricultural leases also provide a revenue stream that offsets operational costs of parkland. Use of parkland for agriculture will continue (and in some cases will expand as outlined in Agriculture, Gardening and Foraging) as an effective management strategy and revenue source.

### **Sustainable Forestry**

Dane County Parks has begun sustainable timber harvests on some properties, such as Scheidegger Forest. This initiative will continue and will often be done in partnership with foresters from the WDNR. The timber harvests will be conducted to maximize the health of the forest while also serving as revenue to offset operational costs of parkland.

### **Invasive Species Control**

Invasive plants and insects are a direct threat to the health and enjoyment of parkland. The Naturalist program oversees control of invasive plants throughout the Park system. Additionally, Dane County Land and Water Resource Department is the lead agency working to control invasive species on county lands and waters. They also provide coordination and access to state and federal cost-share grant programs to local units of government for invasive species control. Current programs include:

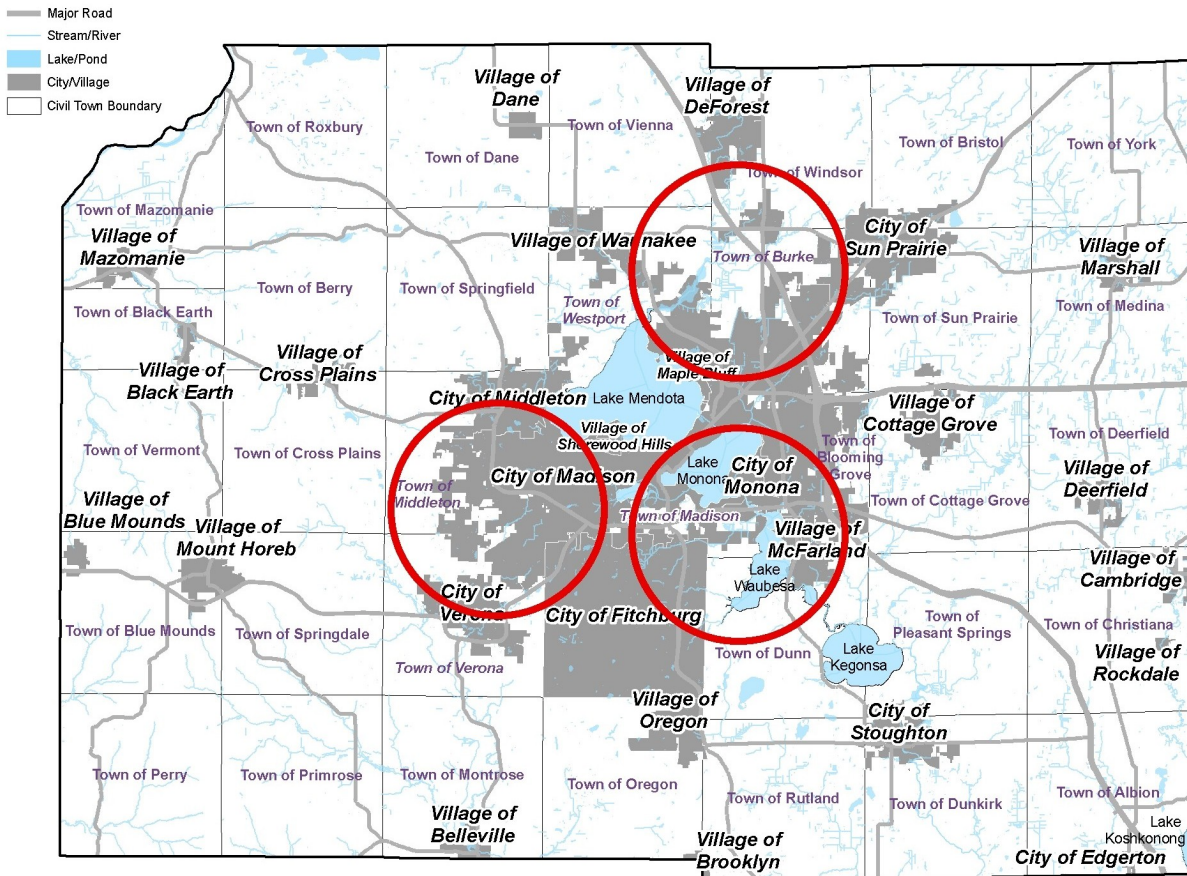
- Monitoring of invasive species on county lands and waters.
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Gypsy Moth Suppression Program – Aerial Treatment Program on Gypsy Moth Concentrations
- Countywide Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Preparation Plan and Monitoring
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Clean Boats, Clean Water Program at Lake Access Sites
- Lake Management Invasive Species Harvesting on Area Lakes

One component of the EAB plan is the recommendation to develop wood utilization yards. Wood utilization yards would be strategically located to handle unanticipated large volumes of down or damaged woody vegetation. Wood formerly considered waste, such as that damaged by infestation or storm damage, could be proactively managed with the additional benefit of potential revenue from sale of material for logs and chips. Criteria for both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) site development will be evaluated, but the county would only become involved in the development of a facility if it was a large scale initiative involving multiple municipalities.

Currently, there are limited protocols for establishing wood utilization yards. Dane County, working in concert with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and local municipalities proposes to help formulate guidelines. A report summarizing criteria, existing sites, timelines, and other pertinent information will be prepared through an Urban Forestry Grant provided by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

The following map presents general proposed wood utilization yard locations within the County.

### Potential Wood Utilization Sites



#### Land Management Recommendations:

- Continue partnering with nonprofit, state and federal agencies to cooperatively manage land.
- Implement recommendations of the 2009 Dane County Emerald Ash Borer and Wood Utilization Strategic Management Plan, including planning for wood utilization yards.
- Expand educational opportunities for volunteers that focus specifically on land management and will directly assist the Naturalist Program.
- Expand the Naturalist Program to provide both land management and environmental education.

## X.2 LAND & WATER MANAGEMENT: Stream Corridors

### Stream Eligibility and Designation

Two stream categories were designated for inclusion into this plan, Tier I and Tier II. Streams were categorized using varying sets of criteria based on the designated biological use, current level of protection or enhancement and the likelihood of establishing conservation within the stream corridor.

**Tier I** streams have one or more of the following attributes/designations:

- Coldwater-high value from a biological and recreational standpoint. They support cold-water fish communities, and flow is supplied primarily from spring discharge.
- Streams which have been enhanced or protected through an existing conservation program. Restoration or enhancement programs may include but are not limited to: Priority Watershed Projects, Targeted Resource Management, WDNR Habitat Projects, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and other non-profit or conservation organization work. Most if not all have existing easements on them. Priority may be given to those streams/segments where easements have expired or will expire soon.
- Streams which have been identified under the 303(d) designation resulting from non point source pollution or habitat degradation.
- Streams classified as Outstanding Water Resources (OWR) or Exceptional Water Resources (EWR) by WDNR.
- Streams identified as sensitive in the Dane County Water Body Classification Study
- Streams within the boundary of an approved Dane County Resource Protection Area Plan.

**Tier II** streams have one or more of the following attributes/designations:

- Warm water streams that may exhibit a sensitivity to development or have the ability to be restored or enhanced through management actions.
- Streams within the boundary of an approved Dane County Resource Protection Area Plan.
- Streams identified in WDNR Basin Plans with “high” or “medium” designations for habitat improvement.

### Program Implementation

Priorities for implementation will consider varying factors, including whether streams have protection plans in place, financial commitments from the local municipality or qualified non-profit organization and the recommendation of the Dane County Land and Water Resources Department and respective Divisions. In cases where opportunities arise and there is no protection plan approved, an evaluation will be conducted to determine the resource being protected, ability to adequately manage surrounding uplands to support the water resource, fiscal resources available for both purchase and implementation, and the potential for future protection efforts. Dane County would take more of a leadership role in restoration efforts and landowner contacts on Tier I streams, while non-profits and local units of government would be expected to work on Tier II streams, with Dane County providing financial assistance through the Conservation Grant Fund program.

In addition to biological considerations, the county should investigate increasing public fishing access through acquisition of permanent easements on these streams. Dane County should work with local non-profit groups such as Trout Unlimited and the Dane County Conservation League, to identify which streams offer the highest fishing potential and would benefit from increased public access.



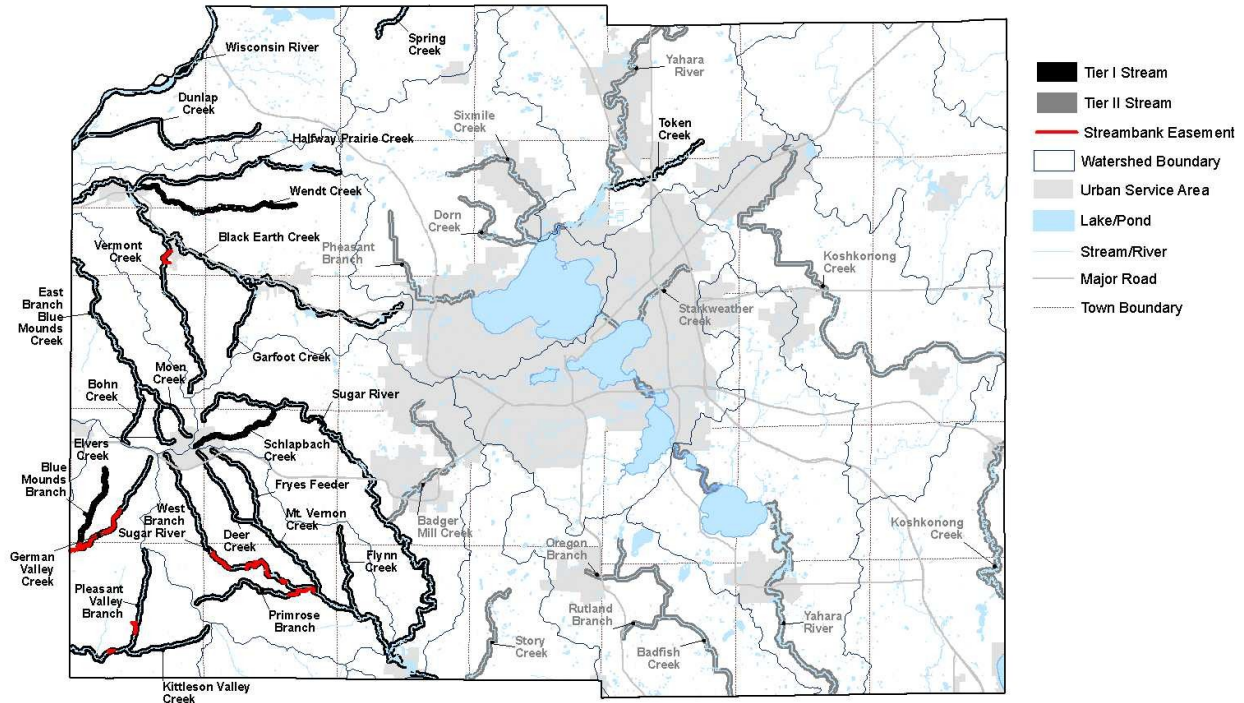
TIER I STREAMS

- Black Earth
- Bohn
- Deer
- Dunlap
- Elvers
- Flynn
- Fries Feeder
- Garfoot
- German Valley
- Gordon
- Halfway Prairie
- Kittleson Valley
- Moen
- Mt. Vernon
- Pleasant Valley
- Primrose Branch
- Schlapbach
- Spring
- Sugar
- Token
- Vermont
- Wendt
- West Branch Blue Mounds
- West Branch Sugar
- Wisconsin

TIER II STREAMS

- Badfish
- Badger Mill
- Dorn
- Koshkonong
- Oregon Branch Badfish
- Pheasant Branch
- Rutland Branch Badfish
- Sixmile
- Starkweather
- Story
- Yahara

Tier I and II Stream Project Areas



## Streambank Easements

Since 2007, monies have been available in the Dane County budget as part of the Land & Water Legacy Fund to purchase streambank easements along Tier I streams. Priority has been given to streams that have been restored or enhanced through an existing conservation program and to those that offer the highest fishing potential and would benefit from increased permanent public access. The majority of these streams are located within the unglaciated Driftless Area of Dane County that is well known for its excellent trout fishing opportunities and rugged scenery. Streambank easements typically extend 33 feet from the streambank and are open to public fishing, hiking, and wildlife observation.

Trout Unlimited, WDNR, the Natural Heritage Land Trust, and Badger Fly Fishers have contributed greatly to the program's success and ability to leverage County dollars.

### STREAMBANK EASEMENTS ACQUIRED, 2007 – 2011

Stream	Miles	Easements
West Branch Sugar River/ Primrose Branch	6.8	9
Vermont Creek	1.3	2
Gordon Creek	1.4	2
German Valley Branch	4.7	8
Kittleson Valley Creek	0.4	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>22</b>

#### *What we heard...*

“Dane County is beginning to surpass other destinations in the mid-west for fly fishing. The small stream challenges offered by the county have brought huge amounts of anglers to our doorsteps resulting in major economic gains.”

Jeff Smith,  
Southern Wisconsin Chapter of Trout Unlimited



*Sugar River Photo: Joshua Mayer*

## X.3 OTHER INITIATIVES: Agriculture, Gardening & Foraging

The ability to grow and harvest food locally is an excellent way to get people outdoors and connected to the land. Foraging for edible fruits, nuts and mushrooms is allowed on Dane County park lands and can be a fun way for parents to introduce their children to the outdoors. Blackberries, black raspberries, blueberries, morel mushrooms, black walnuts, hickory nuts and wild apples can all be found throughout the park system.

Agriculture and gardening are vivid components of both the Dane County landscape and cultural identity. A new recommendation of the 2012-2017 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan is the recognition of agriculture and gardening as well-suited and possibly long-term uses of county parkland. Utilizing parkland for agriculture and gardening is an opportunity to provide local food, support healthy, active lifestyles and attract new users.

Historically, conventional agriculture has been utilized on some park properties as an interim management tool. Row cropping helped prepare sites for restoration and prevented invasive species from spreading into the area. Over the past few years the explosive growth of the local foods movement, along with new perspectives of integrating natural area management with food production, has culminated in a desire to add sustainable agricultural activities into the park system.

Recommendations for agriculture and gardening will evolve over the next several years and are not, at this time, intended to wholly replace conventional agricultural practices that may continue to occur.

A starting framework for agriculture and gardening on county parkland can be found in Sub. I to Res. 280, 2009-2010, Establishing a Sustainable Agriculture Agenda for Dane County. This resolution includes recommendations that span across multiple county departments. Those that are most relevant to the Parks & Open Space Plan and the Land and Water Resources Department are to:

- Establish an agricultural incubation and demonstration farm in Dane County
- Clearly define “urban agriculture” and “community food security” utilization of county-owned lands
- Ensure that all county-owned lands have a conservation plan created and implemented for all uses of that land
- Develop a complete inventory of county-owned land that would be strong candidates for longer-term uses that support community agriculture and food security
- Set aside county-owned land for longer-term uses that support community agriculture and food security, and integrate this concept into the this concept into the County Parks & Open Space Plan, as well as current planning for existing properties
- Give lease preferences to 1) beginning farmers and 2) community gardens and other community-based agriculture ventures on county land parcels of 10 or less tillable acres.

Staff in the Land and Water Resources Department will work to implement the above recommendations, to the extent possible and reasonable, and will also work with community organizations and other units of government to develop agriculture and gardening partnerships. Generally the county will seek partnerships with entities that can provide direct management of agricultural and gardening practices and the county in turn would provide the land and perhaps other needs such as water and parking. Generally speaking the county is not in a position to provide direct oversight of multiple agricultural tenants or gardeners. There are many organizations that may be able to work with the County on agriculture and gardening initiatives, including the following groups that staff consulted with during the development of this Plan: Research, Education, Action and Policy on Food Group, Farley Center, Community Ground Works, Madison Area Community Supported Agriculture Coalition, Community Action Coalition, Center for Resilient Cities and Fitchburg Fields. Seasonal foraging opportunities should also be posted on the Dane County Parks web page.



Specific programs, activities, terms of use and costs would be determined on a case-by-case basis. The location of a property will play a significant role in determining suitable uses. For example, properties that are very close to population centers will be more suitable to community gardens. Properties that are located in more rural parts of the county will not be suitable for community gardens but may be suitable for incubator space or organic practices.

Possible uses of parkland for agriculture and gardening, beyond those identified above, may include the following:

- Community gardens
- Incubator gardens, particularly larger plots with no limitations on the sale of produce
- Incubator fields and infrastructure
- Certified organic fields
- Demonstration gardens
- Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
- School farm
- Access for non-traditional or minority groups

The following sites have been identified by staff as potential sites for agriculture and gardening :

- Donald County Park
- Badger Prairie County Park
- Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area – Headwaters Unit
- Blooming Grove Drumlins Natural Resource Area – North Unit
- Nine Springs E-Way
- Fish Lake Natural Resource Area
- Lyman Anderson Farm
- McCarthy County Park
- Schumacher Farm County Park
- Lower Mud Lake Natural Resource Area
- Walking Iron County Park and Natural Resource Area
- North Mendota Natural Resource Area
- Yahara Heights County Park
- Land and Water Legacy Site, Town of Westport
- Silverwood County Park



Identifying potential sites is only one step in selecting suitable locations and it does not guarantee that agriculture and gardening activities will occur there. Furthermore, there may be additional sites that could be utilized that have yet to be identified. Finally, the inclusion of agriculture and gardening in this Plan creates the opportunity for nonprofit organizations and local units of government to apply for Conservation Fund grants to protect lands for said use.

***What we heard...***

“I would like to go on record as supporting edibles in our parks, including foraging for edibles and medicinal plants (while preserving the resource). Wouldn't it be awesome if there were berry bushes at every park where folks could get raspberries or elderberries or currants?”

*Judy Skog, Madison, Wisconsin*

## X.3 OTHER INITIATIVES: Art in Parks

Incorporating more public art and cultural activities into the park system is a new recommendation of the Parks and Open Space Plan for 2012-17. The goal of this recommendation is to provide stimulating sights and experiences that capture the imagination and create a greater sense of appreciation for and connection to the outdoor world.

There are no specific plans for art and cultural activities at this time and staff will work with the Park Commission to identify appropriate projects as opportunities arise. Projects could range from ephemeral and permanent installations to cultural programming. Furthermore, a greater awareness of aesthetics, architecture, ecology and sculpture could be used to improve both the form and function of park infrastructure in new and creative ways.

In 2011, the Park Commission partnered with the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission and granted funds to VSA Wisconsin for a mural at the Jenni & Kyle Preserve. The resulting mural is titled “Seasonal Inspirations” and is composed of 15,000 tiles set into the park shelter wall, fashioned by 70 individuals with disabilities from Walbridge School and the Madison Area Rehabilitation Center-South under the direction of VSA Wisconsin teaching artists Marcia Yapp and Megan Cain.

Partnering with the Cultural Affairs Commission is a good example of a way to pursue art and cultural activities within the park system. Partnerships with other local organizations may also be possible. Generally speaking, the Park Commission and staff will consider the following when reviewing potential projects:

- How is the site currently utilized – will the project limit any existing activities?
- Will the project impact the landscape in a way that could enhance the natural sights and sounds for the majority of park users?
- Might the project bring new users into the park system?
- Can the project be maintained over time (if applicable)?
- Will the project attract vandals (if applicable)?
- Will the project create a better sense of understanding, appreciation or connection to the outdoors?
- Can the project evolve over time as the landscape or use of an area changes (if applicable)?



*Shelter Mural at Jenni & Kyle County Park*



## X.3 OTHER INITIATIVES: Scenic Transportation Corridors

Sightseeing was listed as the 10th most participated statewide recreation activity in the 2011-16 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. The 2001-2005 Park and Open Space Plan recommended designation of a county scenic roads program, and could potentially link local, county and state park facilities. Safety determinations would have to be made prior to the designation of any road. These roads could be designated on a map and provide pull off areas that offer scenic views of the countryside and interpretive signage. Development of this recreation program is consistent with providing opportunities for the projected aging population and also benefits other transportation means, such as bicycling.

The county's role in any scenic road program would be to work with willing landowners that wanted to permanently protect their lands through conservation easements and to possibly provide signage and interpretive information regarding the landscape. Any scenic transportation corridors identified by the county through this Plan should not be used for any zoning decisions or in any way influence or limit private property rights. The county would seek support from the local towns before designating any scenic transportation corridors.

### **Recommendations:**

- Utilize student interns or university student help to begin investigating designation of this program with Park Commission oversight.
- Investigate possible opportunities with U.W. Extension to create a transportation route that would link Prairie Heritage sites.



*Black Earth Creek Valley*



# XI. REGIONAL RESOURCE PROTECTION INITIATIVES



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As in the last update to the plan, strong support was again evident throughout the public input process for the county to preserve larger tracts of lands dedicated toward resource protection as well as to strengthen and expand partnerships with other conservation organizations. Larger resource protection and recreation initiatives may be a component of conservation projects that extend far beyond Dane County borders.

## **SOUTHWEST GRASSLANDS**

The goal of the proposed project is to work with a broad group of partners to conserve and enhance functioning grassland, savanna and stream ecosystems in southwest Wisconsin, set within a rural farmland landscape, focusing on the area's biological, cultural, historical, economic, and recreational values. The project includes parts of Dane, Iowa, Green, and Lafayette counties and encompasses approximately 320,000 acres. The project area is composed of agriculture lands, prairies, savannas, grasslands, streams, rare plant and animal species, recreational opportunities, historical and cultural resources. The project will work to conserve the open rural landscape of southwest Wisconsin by utilizing a wide range of conservation tools.

## **GLACIAL HERITAGE AREA**

In October of 2009, the State Natural Resources Board approved the Glacial Heritage Area (GHA) Plan. The Glacial Heritage Area includes lands in Dane, Dodge, Rock and Jefferson counties and proposes to establish a coordinated network of conservation lands and recreation opportunities. CamRock County Park, Riley-Deppe County Park and the Silverwood property are all within the boundary of this regional resource initiative. It is not the goal of the GHA plan to change individual management plans for existing properties, but rather incorporate them into a broader network. The project seeks to protect and restore native grasslands, forest and wetland habitats, improve water quality, identify and protect cultural and historical resources, and collaborate with working farms to maintain open, agricultural landscapes. Another goal of the plan that overlaps with several Dane County initiatives is to provide connectivity of park and recreation resources through trails. This project area is expected to provide easily accessible opportunities to connect with the outdoors for one of the state's largest population centers.



*Kayaking Koshkonong Creek  
At CamRock County Park*

Dane County's role would primarily be limited to a potential funding partner through the Conservation Fund grant application program only on lands that are within Dane County. The DNR and other non-profit conservation groups would be responsible for all planning, management and implementation of conservation tools for these project areas. Access to the county grant program is contingent upon DNR completing and adopting feasibility studies and environmental impact statements that follow public processes.

Other WDNR Land Legacy projects in Dane County such as the Arlington Prairie and Dunn-Rutland Savanna and Potholes that become adopted project areas by the same process could also be considered in the future.

## **RECHARGE AREA FOR FREDERICK SPRINGS**

In 2000, R.J. Hunt and J.J. Steuer with the U.S. Geological Survey prepared Water-Resources Investigations Report 00-4172 in cooperation with the City of Middleton and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The report identifies critical groundwater recharge areas for the spring and wetland areas of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy. It is envisioned partners such as the Natural Resource Conservation Service, WDNR, Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, and local conservation organizations would work toward protecting working farm lands and open space within the recharge zone identified in the plan by utilizing a variety of acquisition tools.

## **MILITARY RIDGE PRAIRIE HERITAGE AREA**

The MRPHA lies in southwestern Dane and southeastern Iowa counties at the headwaters of the Sugar and Pecatonica Rivers. The historic prairie that covered these lands and additional areas to the west was called the Military Ridge Prairie, after Military Ridge Road that was built in 1835. The road served as a highway for immigration of settlers into this region of the county. The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area organization is made up of eight partnering agencies who signed a Memorandum of Understanding in 2003 pledging resources toward protecting and promoting the grasslands and water quality of this project area. The Nature Conservancy has been helping coordinate efforts of this organization with other agencies, private land owners and local units of government. In 2003 the Dane County Board of Supervisors adopted Res. 68 03-04, Adopting Elements Of the Town of Perry Open Space and Recreation Plan as an Amendment to the 2001-05 Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. The resolution authorizes inclusion of the Hauge Historic District Park within this project area boundary.

Dane County's role in all of these project areas would be limited to potentially providing matching funds to government and non-profit conservation organizations through the Conservation Fund grant application program only on lands that are within Dane County.



# XII. PARTNER PROJECTS AND PROGRAMS



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Dane County works with a wide pallet of conservation and recreation partners on a variety of initiatives. These projects have some connection to county-owned park lands, facilities or trails and are expected to provide some regional recreational, cultural, or natural resource protection value. Partnership benefits may include non-profit grant eligibility for a variety of funding programs, staff, park or planning assistance, shared stewardship responsibilities and shared acquisition responsibilities. Projects in this section were brought forward to the Park Commission through the public input process by local units of government or non-profit agencies. Inclusion of projects in this section does not guarantee grant funding, and the Conservation Fund Grant Advisory Committee and the Park Commission retain the right to determine cost-share amounts, reversionary rights and any other relevant restrictions or conditions as appropriate, based on the details of the project, including other project partners.

### **CAPITAL SPRINGS RECREATION AREA (2755.4 acres)**

The vision for the Capital Springs Recreation Area (CSRA) started in January of 2000, with a successful proposal to the State of Wisconsin from Dane County to establish a centennial park that would serve as a “crown jewel” of the Nine Springs E-Way project. Dane County has been working on implementing the vision of the Nine Springs E-Way by acquiring parkland and managing natural areas that facilitate environmental education and awareness for more than 40 years.

In 2002, the State of Wisconsin and Dane County began a joint master planning process for the approximately 2,700 acres of land included within the CSRA boundary. The process included many public informational meetings and planning workshops that were well attended by representatives of local governments, private citizens, other government agencies, and special interest groups. The plan was completed and adopted in 2010. This Master Plan will provide the vision for future acquisition, development, management and operation of the recreation area and will create opportunities to apply to a variety of grant funding programs.

A Friends of Capital Springs Recreation Area has formed that has been very active fund raising and promoting stewardship and educational opportunities of this project area. In particular, this project area offers tremendous potential to educate and promote the important archeological and cultural features of the Lake Farm County Park Capital Springs Recreation Area. Another recommendation is to develop interpretive nodes/signage and “rest areas” along the Capital City Trail, showcasing the important culture, flora and fauna of the area. In July of 2011 the Friends assisted with a mural dedication at the Jenni and Kyle Preserve that was designed in part with the assistance of youth and disabled Dane County residents. These efforts to provide cultural elements including visual and performing arts should be expanded throughout the recreation area.



*Photo: Joshua Mayer*

*Nine Springs Creek*





## **CENTRAL PARK** (City of Madison, 17 acres)

A master plan for this park in the City of Madison was completed in 2010 and amended in 2011. The park is located along the Capital City Trail and the following main uses are envisioned:

1. Performance space engineered to support up to three large festival events per year
2. Gathering areas, earthworks, and pathways
3. Community gardening and local agriculture
4. Skate Park
5. Playground

Fundraising, planning and development efforts for the park are the responsibility of the City of Madison. Its inclusion in this plan is intended for the sole purpose of eligibility for the Conservation Fund Grant Program.

## **MADISON SCHOOL FOREST** (Towns of Verona, Montrose, 356.2 acres)

The Madison School Forest is located on Spring Rose Road just west of STH 69. Public land owners of the Madison School Forest are the Madison Metropolitan School District, Friends of the Madison School Forest and WDNR. The purpose of including it in the county Park and Open Space Plan is solely to provide eligibility for State Stewardship and County Conservation Fund grant dollars for future acquisition of contiguous parcels from willing sellers as they become available. The Madison School Forest would continue to be the lead agency for all planning, acquisition, management, and maintenance efforts for this project area.



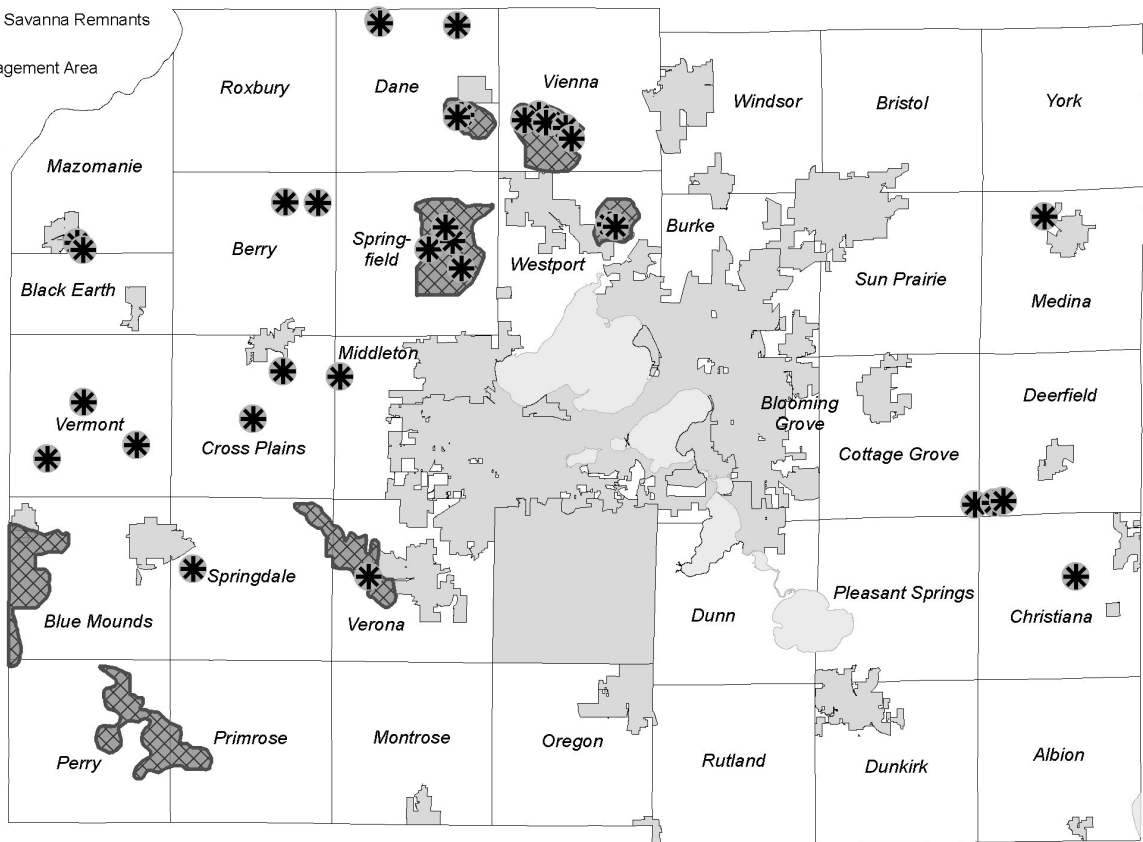


## PRAIRIE AND OAK SAVANNA SITES

The amended Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan 1990-1995 recommended that the county support and assist in completing an inventory of prairie and oak savanna sites, notify landowners and local governments of site locations and to promote better awareness of these important natural environments. The Prairie Enthusiasts is developing a database of known prairie and savanna remnants. Its goal is to inform the owners of the existence of these remnants and work with them on restoration, management and protection if the owners so choose. Dane County's role in this initiative is to work with non-profit conservation organizations and land trusts, such as the Prairie Enthusiasts and Natural Heritage Land Trust, as well as with local units of governments and the WDNR, in funding the acquisition and preservation of those areas that coincide with other objectives of the Parks and Open Space Plan. These objectives may relate to park, natural resource areas, trails or historical/cultural sites recommended in this plan. The county's role is also to consider partially funding the acquisition and preservation of the highest quality unprotected remnants of prairie and savanna (including limited buffering) identified on the map through the Dane County Conservation Fund program. The county should also investigate opportunities to expand these sites through proposed phosphorus reduction projects in the north Mendota watershed. The map shows the top prairie remnants and the seven "best" potential grassland/prairie landscape-scale management areas. The latter are study areas only and are not to be considered defined project areas. These areas and their rankings have been compiled by The Prairie Enthusiasts and the WDNR Bureau of Endangered Resources.

### Legend

-  Priority Native Prairie & Savanna Remnants
-  Grassland/Prairie Management Area
-  City/Village
-  Municipal Civil Division
-  Major Lake



## **ACTIVE SPORTS FIELDS**

Throughout the planning process, several local units of government and other non-profit sports groups expressed their interest in partnerships to develop large scale, open field active sports complexes similar to Reddan Park. Inclusion of this initiative is intended to allow local units of government to be able to apply for Conservation Grant funds for acquisition of land needed to develop this type of facility. Proposed sports field complexes would need to serve multiple jurisdictions and provide regional recreation benefits. Ideally, they would be planned to allow for non-motorized and mass transit access and be a component of an existing adjacent park or resource protection initiative.

## **TARGET ARCHERY RANGES**

The popularity of target archery and bow hunting has been growing steadily. As indicated within the Planning Considerations section of this plan, The Outdoor Foundation survey data indicated bow hunting had one of the highest increase rates in participation between 2008 and 2009. Dane County has also experienced tremendous interest in its limited archery permit program, with applications for permits consistently exceeding permits available by more than 50%. The Wisconsin DNR has begun a National Archery in the Schools Program initiative that aims to provide increased target archery opportunities for youth across the state. The county will work with the WDNR and interested parties to define this proposed program for further consideration. Dane County would only provide suitable sites; schools and non-profits groups would need to provide equipment and oversight.

## **CONSERVATION CLUB BUFFER ZONES**

Dane County has a number of active conservation clubs that offer a variety of target shooting opportunities. As urban areas continue to expand, the distances between residential areas and these clubs diminishes. Very limited public shooting range opportunities exist in Dane County, so it is important that these clubs are able to continue to exist and provide this recreation use. Dane County's role would be limited to providing eligibility to non profit conservation organizations to apply for Conservation Fund grants for acquisition of buffering lands around these facilities.

## **PHOSPHORUS REDUCTION AREAS**

Dane County has been investigating phosphorous reduction strategies and partnerships in the Yahara River Watershed. The Madison Metropolitan Sewerage District (MMSD) is also investigating strategies to reduce phosphorus loads in the Yahara Watershed and has been working cooperatively with Dane County in this regard. Possible examples of future joint effort projects that could complement Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan initiatives include wetland restorations, expansion of prairie and oak savanna sites and streambank buffers throughout the Yahara Watershed and the proposed Badfish Creek Natural Resource Area. Dane County and MMSD, along with other partners, should continue to work cooperatively and evaluate opportunities to implement management options that could provide for multiple benefits.

## XIII. ADAPTING FOR THE FUTURE



A major theme of the 2012-2017 Parks & Open Space Plan is adapting to changing needs and demands on county-owned public lands. Planning and adapting for change will ensure that Dane County can sustain and maintain the park system into the future. Many examples of these strategies are found throughout this plan; this section highlights some of the larger initiatives or themes.

### **PEOPLE**

People are the heart of a successful parks system. While there is intrinsic value in the protection of lands for wildlife habitat and ecological functions, the community needs to be an engaged and vested partner in the system for long term success. Dedicated park users, such as a family that visits a dog park on a daily basis or a disc golfer that plays every week, are often passionate about the activities that become an important routine in their everyday lives. These regular park patrons are often the same people who consistently volunteer their time and donate resources to help out on a variety of projects. Maintaining open and current relationships between park staff, user groups and volunteers is a critical ongoing task. It is also extremely important to maintain a social and fun component for volunteer projects. Many volunteers have stated the opportunity to get outdoors and socially network with like minded people as the primary motivation to continue their regular volunteering.

Obtaining a better understanding of the number, type and demographics of park users is also important to be able to continue to meet the future public demands. Information could be collected through a variety of means including surveys, counting devices, sales data, and field observations. A review of current data tracking methods should be completed and strategies identified to more accurately obtain park user information.

### **PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY**

Dane County has benefited greatly from donors large and small that have given their time, money and land to grow and expand parkland. Large scale park development projects such as the Jenni and Kyle Preserve, Scheidegger Forest and the Ice Age Junction Bicycle Pedestrian Underpass are often made possible through these donations. Private philanthropy is an area that may provide further opportunities to expand and enhance various projects and programs. Continuing into the future, private donations will be necessary for many initiatives, including the expansion of the Lussier Family Heritage Center into a larger educational center and further development of the volunteer program.

Establishing a more prominent charitable giving fund could encourage and stimulate more donations. This fund or funds could be established and managed by a non-profit organization whose mission is to support Dane County Parks with oversight by the Park Commission. Maintaining separation between the fund(s) and Dane County may provide greater flexibility and allow deeper and more responsive relationships with donors. Many types of funds could be established, from traditional endowments to capital campaigns. Beyond large scale capital development projects, funds could also be used to support new grants and expansion of education and interpretive programs.

### **SPONSORSHIPS**

Dane County Parks will need to explore a variety of new ways to offset operational and development costs of parkland. Several alternative funding sources have been discussed earlier in this plan. Another option may be the integration of sponsorships. The Dane County Park Commission would need to identify appropriate opportunities for sponsorships and outline general expectations prior to engaging in any corporate sponsorship program.



## YOUTH IN PARKS

Dane County Parks has strong interest in supporting ways to further engage youth through outdoor education, stewardship, and recreation activities. The number of youth participating in outdoor activities is declining, which could lead to less outdoor users or conservation leaders for future generations. According to the 2010 Outdoor Recreation Participation Report compiled by the Outdoor Foundation, the outdoor recreation participation rate from 2006 – 2009 for 6 – 12 year olds decreased from 78% to 62% and from 68% to 60% for 13 to 17 year olds. The barriers that seem to keep children indoors are primarily a lack of time or interest, as they prefer to spend more of their free time on other activities such as team sports/fitness activities, schoolwork, watching television, being on the computer, or playing video games. This study also indicated that most youth are introduced to the outdoors by parents, friends, or family and that media, experienced mentors, and outdoor education programs are not as strong of motivators for getting children outdoors.

This data illustrates an obvious need for engaging youth in outdoor recreation and provides insights on possible programming, events, activities or amenities that could attract more youth to the Dane County Parks system and help sustain it into the future. Currently the county is partnering with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the University of Wisconsin, conservation groups, Friends groups and other organizations to develop new programs and opportunities to encourage more youth to get involved in outdoor activities. The Dane County Naturalist fall seed collecting program has been very successful at getting thousands of school children and scout troops outdoors to teach them conservation and land stewardship within the parks and natural resource areas. This program could be expanded to strengthen connections between youth and Dane County parkland. A youth education and stewardship partnership would involve children in the ongoing stewardship of Dane County parkland through activities such as collecting prairie seeds, pulling and cutting invasive species, or other special projects. There are several organizations and schools that already have programs like this in place. The county's role would largely be to provide Dane County parkland that could serve as outdoor classrooms, looking to Friends groups or volunteers to help promote and coordinate youth activities. Some other ideas for attracting more youth to Dane County park lands include:

- Incorporate activities associated with new technology such as Smartphone or GPS applications that can key into various park or natural features.
- Use Facebook or other social media websites for events, activities, etc.
- Encourage family events that provide an outdoor learning environment for parents and children that fosters a shared conservation ethic and connection to the outdoors.
- Continue to expand and improve Dane County Parks Volunteer and Naturalist Programs to include coordinating and promoting school or youth activities, including provision of transportation.
- Encourage integration of outdoor curriculum, internships, and leadership and skills building programs. Examples include Patrick Marsh Middle School curriculum incorporating natural features and biology of Patrick Marsh, the Sierra Club Madison's Inner City Outings program, Wisconsin Youth Conservation Corps, and Youth Programs of the National Trails System.
- Consider soliciting and utilizing private donations to support and expand youth education programming.



*Father and son biking at Pheasant Branch, Photo: Kerry G. Hill*

## NEW TECHNOLOGY

Incorporating new technology into the Parks system is another opportunity to explore. There are several existing applications that could be utilized to expand interpretive information in parks. For example, smartphone applications can use GPS to track a visitor's location along a trail and can send a signal at points of interest. The visitor can then use the application to learn interesting and relevant information about the various points.

Quick Response Codes (QR codes), the square, black-and-white patterns that often appear in advertising, can also be utilized in the outdoors. Users can scan QR codes and receive information on their smartphone on whatever topic has been programmed in, such as flowers that are currently blooming, or birds they might see. This method has already been implemented in several park systems throughout the country. These methods of delivering information and providing recreation are often less costly than traditional interpretive signage, easier to change and update as needed and leave a very small footprint in the landscape.

Social networking sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, can also be utilized to highlight events and share information. Rather than requiring a user to visit a website, social networking sites deliver information directly to them.

Geocaching is another technology-enabled activity, similar to a treasure hunt, that is already occurring in Dane County Parks. Players explore the outdoors and try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS-enabled devices and then share their experiences online.

These new approaches should be viewed as tool for attracting and retaining new users in the Parks system. The end goal of any new technology, as it relates to Dane County Parks, is to inspire people to get outside to be active and explore.

### *What we heard...*

“Build upon the wonderfully successful prairie seed collecting program with school children developed by Parks Naturalist Wayne Pauly and expand it to formally link schools in Dane County with Dane County parks, resource areas, and e-way corridors in a long-term Education – Stewardship Partnership. The idea is to formally introduce every school child in Dane County to the natural world of Dane County through these special protected places and involve the children in the ongoing stewardship of these places – whether that is collecting prairie seeds, pulling invasive species (or for older students cutting honeysuckle and buckthorn or doing high school biology research projects). Establishing and maintaining such a program with the schools could be one of the most important services that Dane County Parks provides to the community of Dane County.”

*Capital Region Advocacy Network for Environmental Sustainability*

## XIV. CONCLUSION



Dane County Parks has undergone tremendous changes in both size and management responsibilities over the past ten years. Ongoing public education and regular communication with stakeholders, volunteers and local units of government regarding proper stewardship and allowable uses becomes increasingly essential with this broadening diversity. It will also be important to continue updating and preparing master plans for properties as demand for public use and access to county-owned lands continues to increase. These plans provide a common vision for future development and management strategies that is achieved through a public consensus building process. Keeping current with recreation trends and needs will also be vital to maintaining and replenishing regular park users who often become future volunteers.

There is still strong support heard from the public to continue efforts to protect regional scale landscape initiatives. Prioritizing to work in project areas that have a wide palette of partners will be a resource protection survival skill that is necessary during difficult economic climates.

As outlined in the vision statement, Dane County Park's ongoing mission over the next five years will be to connect people to the land and water resources of Dane County. The park system provides the public place for this to happen; schools, Friends groups, non-profit conservation organizations and volunteers are envisioned to be the entities that will bring the people to the place and coordinate events. Dane County Parks needs to continue to promote awareness of their system to these groups through web based applications and social networking.

Perhaps one of the most challenging and critical issues the Dane County Park Commission will need to address over the next five years will be how to maintain and steward a system of now over 12,000 acres with limited resources. Maintaining and cultivating new sources of volunteer labor and funding to complement the existing Park system will be necessary to sustain programs into the future. Many of the strategies outlined within the "Adapting for the Future" section and throughout this plan should be a priority to implement in the near future to sustain the park system.