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## A shared journey toward becoming better together

Parks serve as anchors for revitalizing “**third spaces**,” where people from different backgrounds, ages, and lifestyles meet, build relationships, develop trust, and discover that we have more in common than our divisions suggest.

**This Plan recognizes that parks address interconnected challenges.**

- **Combat** loneliness and isolation.
- **Allocate** resources equitably to reach underserved populations excluded by market economies.
- **Create** unplanned encounters that build social capital and trust.
- **Offer** programming that brings generations together.
- **Cultivate** stewardship and pride in common spaces.
- **Foster** infrastructure that enables vital human connections essential for a thriving democracy.

## Director's Introduction



Over several decades, American communities have experienced a profound disconnection. Bowling leagues have declined 95%, volunteering has dropped, and the informal gathering places where we once forged belonging, what sociologists call “third spaces,” have nearly disappeared. This erosion of community is the result of economic pressures, privatization of public spaces, and increased reliance on algorithms replacing local interdependence and spontaneous encounters.

As Parks Director for Outagamie County, I see Parks as essential civic infrastructure. They are powerful tools to reverse community atomization, rebuild social capital, and foster reengagement—a shared journey toward becoming better together.

This Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) is founded on the belief that investing in parks, facilities, and programming strengthens community connection.

Economically, one in four American households live paycheck to paycheck. Housing costs have consumed nearly one-third or more of household budgets. Meanwhile, healthcare, childcare, and insurance fees continue climbing faster than wages. Parks offer evidence-based solutions. For example, community gardens offer fresh food and education. Intergenerational playgrounds reduce isolation among seniors and strengthen youth development. Accessible parks within a 10-minute walk reduce neighborhood crime and improve health outcomes. Farmers’ markets and community spaces rebuild the local economic interdependence that once defined American community life.

Beyond data, there is wisdom found in how humans have always built community. We gather. We participate in shared projects. We encounter strangers and discover they are not strangers. We care for common spaces. We contribute to causes larger than ourselves. Parks are the public foundation where these timeless human practices can flourish again.

My vision is to make Outagamie County Parks the community’s heart, where everyone can connect, build relationships, engage in stewardship, and transform into a united community rather than isolated individuals. This CORP guides investment to create that future.

— Justin Schumacher, *Parks Director*

## Executive Summary

Welcome to the Future of Outdoor Recreation in Outagamie County. Our commitment to creating exceptional recreation spaces starts here.

This Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) is Outagamie County's roadmap for parks, trails, and recreation—shaping priorities for investments, partnerships, programs, and policy over the coming years.

## Key Goals

This Plan's goals define the strategic outcomes guiding efforts to elevate the County's parks and recreation spaces:

- Parks are safe and clean.
- Parks are welcoming and inclusive to all users.
- The park system protects natural spaces, conserves biodiversity and resources, and promotes environmental stewardship.
- Partnerships with the Parks Department expand opportunities and enrich experiences.
- Park spaces, programs, and facilities are accessible and diverse, promoting wellbeing, learning, and enjoyment for all ages and abilities.

**OUTAGAMIE COUNTY'S PARK SYSTEM** is an accessible, inclusive, and connected collection of spaces that invite all people to gather, play, explore, and connect with the natural world. Our parks blend protected landscapes, wildlife habitats, trails, and open spaces with modern amenities to foster recreation, community experiences, and appreciation of the environment for current and future generations.

### VISION



## Action Agenda to Strengthen the Park System



The action agenda responds to the County's needs and opportunities and reflects community input—translating what was heard into practical steps that strengthen the park system over time.

### Key Themes Include:

- **Strengthen** operations with clear policies for volunteers, communications, partnerships, and incident/emergency coordination.
- **Enhance** the year-round visitor experience through expanded programs/events, equipment lending, and better wayfinding (tech, maps, phased signage tied to branding).
- **Protect** natural resources and assets with invasive species response, native/pollinator conversions where feasible, and asset-based maintenance/capital planning.
- **Improve** access, comfort, and safety with ADA/sensory-friendly upgrades, restrooms and shade/hydration, audits, and targeted trail safety fixes.
- **Advance** trails and connectivity by implementing Bicycle & Pedestrian Plan priorities, upgrading trail surfaces/amenities, and coordinating regionally (Fox Cities Greenways, ECWRPC, neighboring jurisdictions).
- **Diversify** and stabilize funding through an annual grants strategy, evaluation of a foundation/endowment, and targeted financial sustainability planning.
- **Build** partnerships and stewardship via “Friends of” groups, a coordinated community/Tribal engagement approach, and a Parks–Public Health task force tied to outcomes.
- **Prioritize** high-impact site investments with targeted planning, feasibility work, and phased improvements at key parks and facilities.

Priorities and sequencing will be intentional but flexible so implementation can adapt to funding cycles, staffing capacity, partnerships, permitting needs, and emerging opportunities.

## Join the Adventure and Get involved

Successful implementation of this Plan depends on coordinated action among County leadership, staff, partners, and the community. Progress is built through shared responsibility, collaboration, and sustained engagement across sectors.

**Talk with the Parks Department:** Connect to explore ways to support this Plan—whether through volunteering, partnerships, stewardship, programming, feedback, or advocacy. Ideas and involvement help keep Outagamie County's parks and recreation spaces responsive, welcoming, and well cared for.





CHAPTER  
**01**

# Setting the Stage

This chapter introduces the Plan's purpose, importance, and development process.

## Overview and Purpose:

The 2027–2031 CORP will help shape County investments, and keep the County eligible for state and federal grants, which are critical to turning the community's vision into reality. Grounded in community input and an analysis of existing park conditions, the CORP helps focus limited resources on what residents value most.

Each chapter of this Plan builds on the last to create a clear roadmap for the next five years. In addition to the chapters of this Plan, a series of appendices provide supporting maps, plan and policy review, and community input summaries for those who want to dig deeper.

**Outagamie County's 2027–2031 Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP) is a roadmap to maintain and improve the county's parks, trails, and natural recreation spaces.**







9 Photo by Adam J Brandt


## The Case for Parks


Communities have long recognized the value of parks for enhancing quality of living. More than open spaces, they are critical infrastructure for sustaining strong, healthy, and economically vibrant communities.

 **Health Benefits:** Parks provide safe and convenient spaces for walking, bicycling, and recreational sports supporting regular physical activity that can help reduce the risk of many health conditions, including cardiovascular health, obesity, hypertension, diabetes, heart disease, stroke, stress, and depression.<sup>1</sup> By prioritizing accessible parks and trails, communities can effectively **promote public health and reduce healthcare costs.**

 **Environment Benefits:** Parks serve as natural infrastructure that promote resilient communities. These spaces can act as the “lungs” of a community, where biodiversity is preserved, stormwater is managed, and vegetation produces oxygen. A single mature tree can absorb up to 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year,<sup>2</sup> underscoring the **impact that green spaces can have on our climate and air quality.**


 **Social Benefits:** Outdoor recreation provides **opportunities for residents to connect and build social bonds.** Parks and trails can act as shared spaces for group gatherings, cultural events, and civic activities. Research shows that access to parks increase prosocial behavior, reduce loneliness, and create bonds that foster a sense of purpose.<sup>3</sup> In addition, park spaces can help to reduce crime rates by encouraging people to be outdoors and promoting natural surveillance.<sup>4</sup>

 **Economic Benefits:** Wisconsin’s outdoor recreation industry plays a powerful role in the state’s economy, contributing \$11.2 billion to the state’s gross domestic product and supporting 96,867 jobs across many industries (2023).<sup>5</sup> The economic impact of outdoor recreation is meaningful at the local level too. Studies show that property values are positively impacted when located near parks.<sup>6</sup> Strategic park investments can draw tourists and generate business for local shops and restaurants. Research indicates that **conservation returns between \$4 and \$11 for every dollar invested**<sup>7</sup> — making parks a cost-effective way to strengthen local economies.

 **Community Benefits:** Parks are shared public places that help a county function well—like **community “living rooms” that are open to everyone.** They give residents reliable, low-cost access to the outdoors, protect space for future generations, and help keep the community attractive and livable. Parks can also support community readiness by providing places for cooling/warming, temporary gathering points, and public information during emergencies. Overall, maintaining parks is a practical investment in a strong, resilient community.

 ...promote public health and reduce healthcare costs.

 ...impact that green spaces can have on our climate and air quality.

 ...opportunities for residents to connect and build social bonds.

 ...conservation returns between \$4 and \$11 for every dollar invested

 ...community “living rooms” that are open to everyone.

<sup>1</sup> Sandy J. Slater, et al (2020). *Recommendations for Keeping Parks and Green Space Accessible for Mental and Physical Health During COVID-19 and Other Pandemics*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.  
<sup>2</sup> USDA (2015). *The Power of One Tree – The Very Air We Breathe*, with data from the Arbor Foundation.  
<sup>3</sup> National Recreation and Park Association (2024). *Why Parks and Greenspaces are Integral to our Mental Health*.  
<sup>4</sup> American Planning Association (2003). *How cities can use parks to... Create Safer Neighborhoods*.  
<sup>5</sup> Wisconsin Office of Outdoor Recreation (2023). *Economic Impact of Outdoor Recreation*, with data from *Outdoor Recreation Satellite Account of the U.S.* Bureau of Economic Analysis.  
<sup>6</sup> Kaida Chen, et al. (2022). *Review of the impact of urban parks and green spaces on residence prices in the environmental health context*, National Library of Medicine.  
<sup>7</sup> Trust for Public Land (2024). *Dollars and Sense: Economic Benefits of Community Green Spaces*.

## Planning Framework and Process

The CORP is the first addendum to Outagamie County's Comprehensive Plan. Updated every five years, it reflects community priorities, demographic changes, and new opportunities. It also allows interim amendments to respond to unexpected challenges and new ideas.

The CORP provides a foundation for the Outagamie County Parks Department's annual work plan, guiding budgeting, capital improvement projects, and long-term goals.

Between May 2025 and July 2026, Outagamie County carried out the CORP planning process to update the County's 2022–2026 CORP for a new five-year period: 2027–2031. The effort launched publicly in July 2025, blending analysis and community engagement to ensure the CORP reflects the county's collective voice. The process included:

- ♥ **Park Audits:** Assessed County facilities for conditions, maintenance, safety, and upgrade needs.
- ♥ **Data Analysis and Trends Research:** Reviewed information to identify needs and opportunities.
- ♥ **Financial Analysis:** Analyzed historical Parks Department revenues and expenditures.
- ♥ **GIS and Spatial Mapping:** Mapped demographics, park locations, and other attributes to identify underserved areas and gaps in recreational access. See Appendix A for more details.
- ♥ **Review of 2022–2026 CORP:** Checked progress and carried forward relevant priorities.
- ♥ **Review of Related Plans and Policies:** Reviewed related plans to align goals and needs. See Appendix B for more details.
- ♥ **Community Engagement:** Gathered input through a task force, committee presentations, stakeholder focus groups/activities, open house, and online surveys. See Appendix C for more details.

The County promoted the process through press releases, postcard mailers, social media posts, email blasts, flyers, and word of mouth. Stakeholders and news media also helped to publicize the project.

The 2027–2031 CORP is a reflection of Outagamie County's community. The process sought to blend resident input with data from park audits, GIS analyses, and research findings. The County developed and refined plan recommendations to ensure they aligned with the community's needs and vision for Outagamie County parks and recreation spaces.

## The CORP tackles important planning questions.

*How should the county balance maintaining existing parks with building new amenities?*

*What are the Parks Department's top priorities for the next five years?*

*How can parks and programs become more inclusive and accessible for all residents?*

*What goals will drive the Parks Department's work program?*

*How can community partners, volunteers, and funders support the County's vision for its parks?*

## The Role of County Parks

Parks provide places to recreate, enjoy the outdoors, and connect with the landscape. They also protect natural resources, support public health, and help shape community character.

Counties play an important role because they plan and invest regionally—bridging municipal boundaries, filling service gaps, and serving urban, suburban, and rural areas.

County park systems can deliver recreation assets that are difficult for any one municipality to provide alone, such as large natural areas, extensive trail networks, dispersed water access points, and destination facilities. These parks are intended to complement local parks, not duplicate them.

Because residents choose parks based on experience, not ownership, County planning works best when roles are clear and investments are coordinated. This helps maximize regional impact, reduce overlap, and build a connected, equitable, and sustainable system that serves current and future generations.



CHAPTER  
**02**

# Vision and Direction

This chapter sets the Park System's direction through 2031, outlining the vision, goals, and guiding principles for prioritizing investments, partnerships, and daily operations.

## Park System Vision

VISION



Outagamie County's park system is an accessible, inclusive, and connected collection of spaces that invite all people to gather, play, explore, and connect with the natural world. Our parks blend protected landscapes, wildlife habitats, trails, and open spaces with modern amenities to foster recreation, community experiences, and appreciation of the environment for current and future generations.

The vision for Outagamie County's park system defines the system's long-term direction and serves as the foundation for its goals and objectives.

## Goals and Objectives

The following goals (*numbered*) and objectives (*bulleted*) present the outcomes this Plan aims to achieve. It will allow the County to measure progress toward reaching its vision through 2031.

### 1. Parks are safe and clean.

- Achieve an 85 percent or higher visitor satisfaction rating for safety and cleanliness in annual park user surveys.
- Reduce reported safety and security incidents in parks by 50 percent by 2031.

### 2. The park system protects natural spaces, conserves biodiversity and resources, and promotes environmental stewardship.

- Increase the application of sustainable management practices (e.g., regenerative forestry, reuse of forest products, removal of invasive species, and planting of native species) across at least 80 percent of eligible natural areas.
- Increase biodiversity metrics (using current scientific standards, such as native species richness or habitat quality indices) by 15 percent in priority natural areas by 2031.
- Maintain at least 70 percent of park system acreage as protected natural area, with no net loss to development, while allowing conservation-compatible passive recreation.



### 3. Parks are welcoming and inclusive to all users.

- Achieve an 85 percent or higher visitor rating for “feeling welcomed and included regardless of background, identity, or ability” in annual park user surveys by 2031.
- Increase park visitation numbers from residents and visitors by 10 percent by 2031.
- Increase program participation from user groups of underrepresented communities by 25 percent by 2031.



### 4. Partnerships with the Parks Department expand opportunities and enrich experiences.

- Establish at least five new partnerships by 2031 that deliver new programs, events, or capital improvements.
- Generate at least five percent of the Parks Department’s annual operating budget from grants, sponsorships, and partnership contributions by 2031.
- Co-produce a minimum of 10 collaborative events or programs annually with partner organizations or stakeholders.

### 5. Park spaces, programs, and facilities are diverse and accessible, promoting wellbeing, learning, and enjoyment for all ages and abilities.

- Achieve and maintain at least 10.5 County-owned park acres per 1,000 residents. Work toward this desired long-term standard by strategically acquiring or protecting additional parkland as funding allows.
- Collaborate with municipalities to support a coordinated county-wide park system—advancing 15-minute access in urban and suburban areas by focusing County resources on regional parks and helping local governments plan neighborhood and community parks as growth occurs.
- Ensure 80 percent of County trails are ADA-accessible or track-chair compatible by 2031.
- Provide gender-neutral and family restrooms at all sites with restrooms.
- Maintain at least 80 percent of programs and offerings as free or low-cost each year.
- Offer a minimum of three distinct program types annually serving youth, adults, older adults, and all-ability participants.
- By 2031, ensure each major park has an ADA-compliant route linking key amenities and includes at least two inclusive features (e.g., adaptive seating, tactile maps).



Photo by Gregory T Photography

## Guiding Principles

The following guiding principles help inform how the County will evaluate and make decisions, especially when competing options or decisions that result in tradeoffs arise.

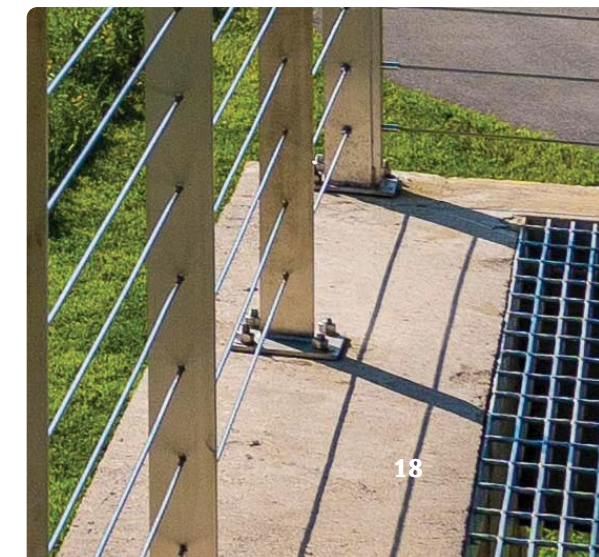
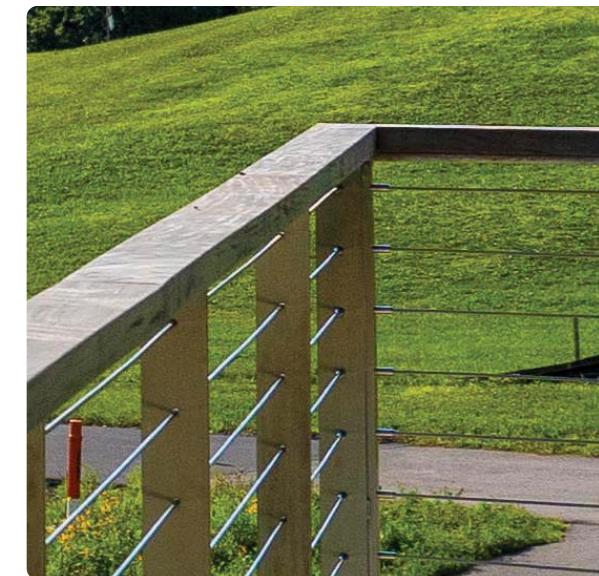
1. **Engage** community voices to shape a system reflecting shared values.
2. **Sustain and Maintain** existing park assets while strategically enhancing the park system in a manner that is operationally sustainable and financially responsible. Decisions will be guided by full lifecycle cost analysis and transparent communication to support informed decision-making.
3. **Prioritize** initiatives that promote health, community togetherness, and environmental well-being, considering benefits beyond just financial returns.
4. **Implement** adaptive approaches to meet evolving recreational preferences cost effectively.
5. **Consider** environmental conservation in decision-making processes.



## Parks System Mission

The mission of the Outagamie County Parks System:

**...to enrich the lives of its residents by providing and creating recreational opportunities while promoting community involvement for the betterment of the community and visitors alike.**



# Understanding Our County

This chapter describes the Outagamie County community, and what that means for the County's park system.

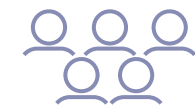
## Community Snapshot<sup>8</sup>

Outagamie County is growing, aging, and diversifying. The population increased from 176,695 in 2010 to 194,851 in 2025 (10 percent change), and the community's needs are shifting along with these trends.

- Aging Population:** In 2023, the median age in the County reached 39 years, up from 37 in 2010. Between 2000 and 2023, the share of seniors (aged 60 and older) grew by eight percent, while younger age groups saw a relative decline.
- Changing Households:** The County is also experiencing a rise in households without children. In 2023, 72 percent of households had no children present, up from 68 percent in 2010. This shift could reflect empty nesters staying in the county, young professionals settling in before starting families, or a growing number of residents choosing childfree lifestyles.

These changes have implications for community planning, including the types of spaces needed to serve different households. For instance, children and teens, who make up about a quarter of the population, need safe spaces to play, ride bikes, and play sports. The growing share of older adults seek quiet, accessible areas to walk, connect with nature, and stay active close to home.
- Continued Growth Expected:** Wisconsin's DOA projects Outagamie County will add about 11,800 people between 2020 and 2040, increasing demand for parks, trails, and green space.
- Increasing Diversity:** From 2010 to 2020, the County's non-white population grew from nine to 14 percent; the Hispanic/Latino demographic increased from four to five percent in the same time. These shifts highlight a need for inclusive design and programming such as culturally relevant events and multilingual signage.
- Health Equity:** The 2021 Community Health Assessment reported 36 percent adult obesity, and only 34 percent meeting recommended physical activity levels.<sup>9</sup> With 11 percent of residents reporting a disability (2023), accessible spaces that promote activity are increasingly critical.
- Workforce and Income Dynamics:** In 2023, median household income was about \$83,000 (lower than 2000 in real terms). Combined with remote work and flexible schedules, this increases reliance on parks for convenient, low-cost daily and weekend recreation.

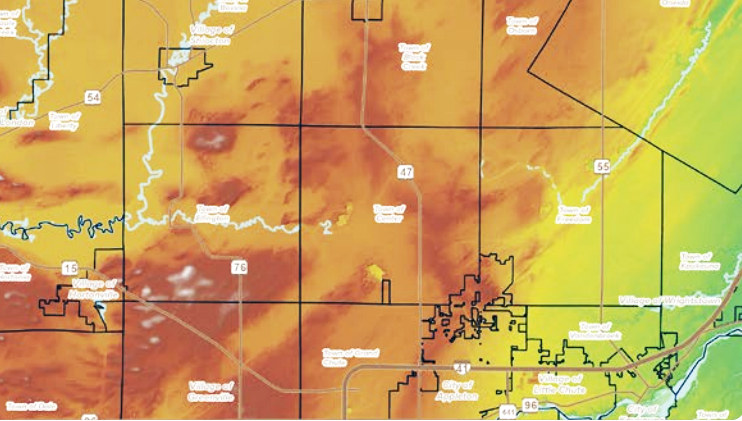
<sup>8</sup> Unless otherwise noted, data informing this section derives from the US Decennial Census (2000 or 2010), the US Census American Community Survey (2023 five-year estimates), and ESRI (2025).  
<sup>9</sup> Outagamie County Public Health (2021). Community Health Assessment.



## Outagamie County Population

2010	2025
176,695	194,851

+10%



## Natural Environment

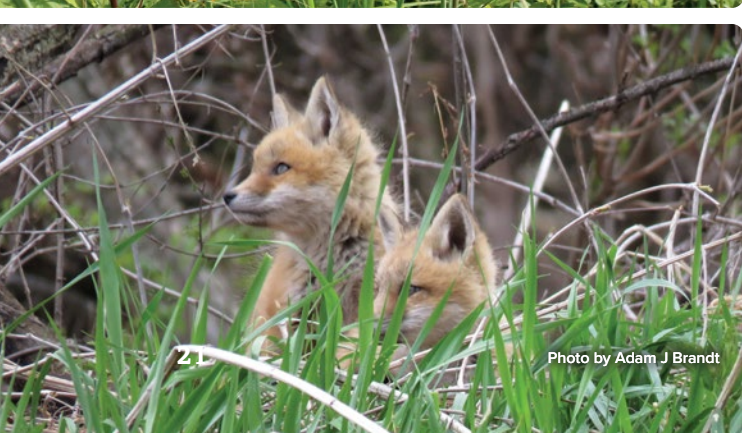
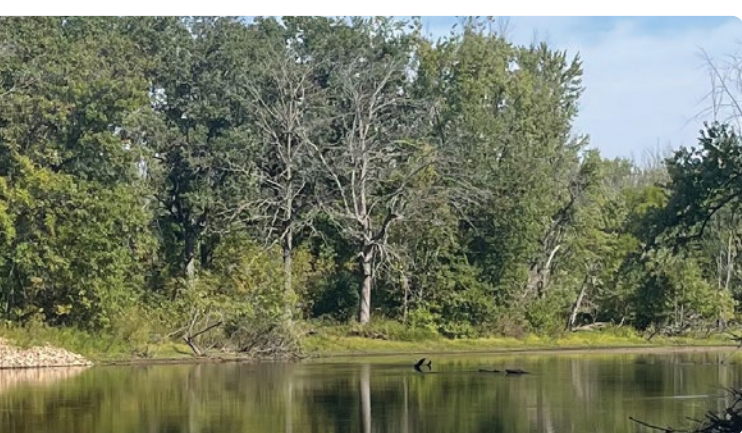
Outagamie County's diverse natural resources from rolling terrains to intricate watershed networks, offer a wealth of opportunities for thoughtful park planning and development.

◆ **Topography:** Outagamie County's landscape contains gentle rolling hills and varied elevations from 530 feet by the Fox River to over 1,000 feet near Hortonville. Gentle, well-drained slopes on the uplands are ideal for multi-purpose athletic fields, playgrounds, and accessible loop trails requiring consistent grades, while the steeper escarpment and river valley edges along the Fox River inspire overlooks, stair-supported trails, and passive use areas that protect bluff habitats.

◆ **Watersheds:** Home to 11 distinct watersheds, Outagamie County offers a tapestry of aquatic environments. Each watershed contributes to shaping the floodplains and stream corridors, setting the stage for imaginative park and trail networks. By visualizing these riparian landscapes, one might see them as perfect venues for flood management and habitat conservation. Trails and public access sites along these waterways enhance leisure opportunities like fishing and birding while fostering ecological connectivity.

◆ **Land Cover:** The county's land cover ranges from urban areas in the Fox Cities to rural agricultural landscapes, providing unique contexts for park planning. Agricultural areas can support compatible features like trails, buffers, and pollinator plantings. Wetlands and floodplains, especially along the Wolf River system, are strong candidates for preserves, boardwalks, and water access. Urban areas benefit most from close-to-home parks and connections to regional trail networks.

◆ **Soils:** Outagamie County's soils, shaped by its glacial history, influence park planning. Upland loamy till typically supports built amenities with fewer drainage upgrades. Sandy soils near waterways often need stabilization and erosion control. Hydric soils are best reserved for wetlands, habitat projects, and low-impact recreation.



## Economy and Tourism

Outagamie County's parks and trails generate economic value by supporting construction, hospitality, and recreation jobs; increasing nearby property values (including research showing about an eight percent premium within ½ mile of bike/ped facilities);<sup>10</sup> and boosting spending through events and festivals.

A high-quality park system also strengthens the County's ability to attract and retain employers and workforce, as outdoor amenities are increasingly important to quality of life and recruitment.

Parks are a core tourism asset, driving visitor spending on food, lodging, and retail. Placer.ai (2024) shows meaningful out-of-county visitation:<sup>11</sup>



**Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC):** 9,325 visits; 29 percent from outside Outagamie County; two percent from outside Wisconsin.



**Plamann Park:** 31,062 visits; 30 percent from outside Outagamie County; one percent from outside Wisconsin.

Key insights from the Tourism Master Plan for the Fox Cities region underscore how outdoor recreation and parks can strengthen our tourism economy. Priorities highlight opportunities to grow visitation through waterways, winter recreation, wellness/outdoor experiences, sports tourism, and conservation as a competitive advantage.<sup>12</sup> Overall, parks and seasonal programming already support the local economy and position the County to expand year-round regional and out-of-state tourism.

<sup>10</sup> Econsult Solutions (2022). The Economic, Health, and Environmental Impact of Bicycling and Walking Facilities.  
<sup>11</sup> For a closer look, Appendix A includes maps displaying visitation origin data for Plamann Park and MHNC.  
<sup>12</sup> Fox Cities Convention and Visitors Bureau and NextFactor (2023). Destination Master Plan.



## Land Use and Development

How and where Outagamie County grows will shape future park needs, access, and how responsibilities and resources are shared among the County, municipalities, and the State.

Outagamie's mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas creates different park planning needs. Most growth is in and around the Fox Cities, but communities such as Seymour and Hortonville are also expanding, and rural towns (e.g., Center, Kaukauna, and Freedom) are seeing increasing development pressure. As growth continues, parks should evolve to match local land-use patterns:

- **Urban/urbanizing areas:** prioritize walkable neighborhood parks with safety features, diverse play opportunities, nature play, trails, and active recreation amenities that support daily use close to home.
- **Rural/lower-density areas:** emphasize larger destination parks and regional trail networks that preserve natural character and support both recreation and conservation.

Many parts of the county are well served with park acreage and regional trails that cross municipal boundaries; Appleton alone has about 30 parks.

However, access depends on transportation, not just location. In 2023, about 3,000 Outagamie County households (about four percent) did not have a personal vehicle (U.S. Census ACS), making walk/bike/transit access especially important in urban areas. In rural areas and communities outside the Fox Cities, limited trail connectivity and Valley Transit coverage make access harder; ridesharing can help but may be too costly for regular use.



## Outagamie County Partnerships

Many partners strengthen Outagamie County's park system. The Fox Cities Convention & Visitors Bureau helped fund the Barks and Recreation Dog Park in 2025, and Shadows on the Wolf have consistently invested in river access site improvements over the years. Local municipalities routinely coordinate on park and trail development and maintenance to support a cohesive system.

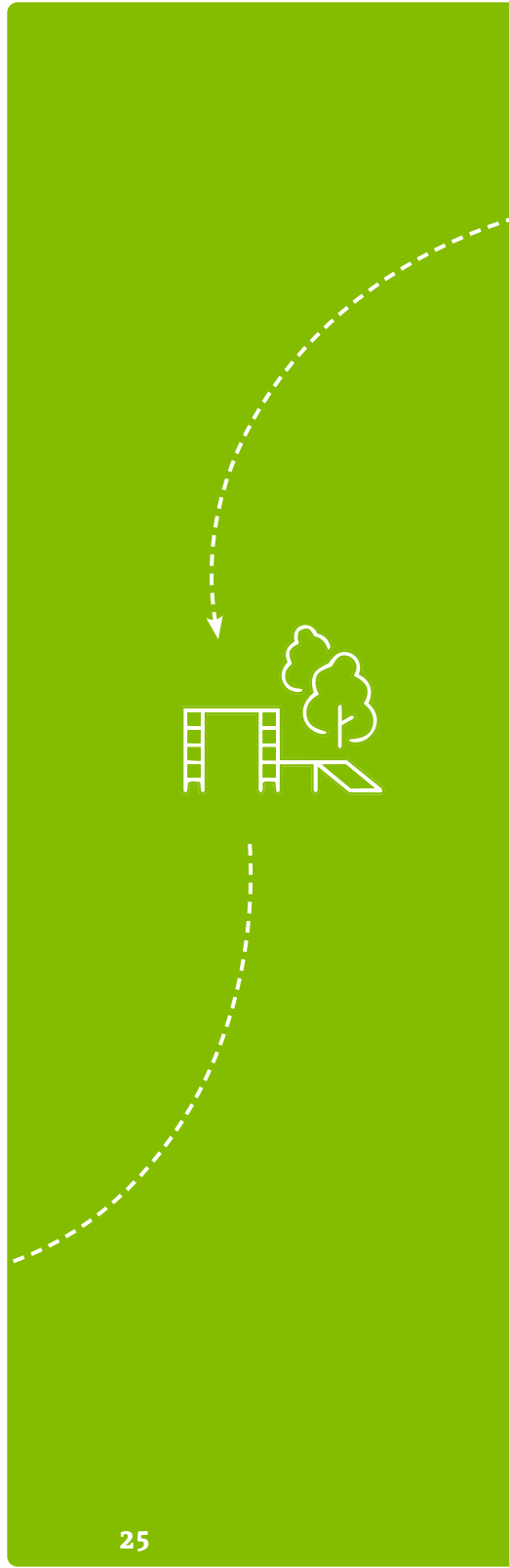
Community groups add amenities and programming, including Friends of Mosquito Hill and the Outagamie County Snowmobile Alliance. Inclusive recreation is expanded through Easterseals Wisconsin and SOAR Fox Cities. Schools (like the Appleton Public Montessori School), along with Scouts and youth groups, use parks for education and outdoor learning.

Regional trail efforts are advanced by The East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, the Community Foundation's Regional Trails Summit Series, and the Fox Cities Greenways Inc. Partnerships also include church groups, senior groups, and service clubs that host gatherings, like Honey Sunday at Mosquito Hill Nature Center with the Fox Valley Bee Keepers Club.

Local businesses sponsor activities, while Pop Warner Football and Grand Chute Baseball fill fields with youth sports. Philanthropists and volunteers support capital projects and trail maintenance, ensuring a vibrant park system.

**Together, these partners help keep County parks safe, inclusive, active, and responsive.**





CHAPTER 04

# Existing County Park System Assets

This chapter presents an overview of the Outagamie County park system's current features and assets, setting a foundation for evaluating needs and aligning with the recommendations in later chapters.

Together, these efforts ensure that Outagamie County's park system remains safe, accessible, and responsive to community needs.

## The Outagamie County Parks Department

The Outagamie County Parks Department oversees operations, maintenance, capital improvements, and programming for the County park system under the Parks Director. The 2025 Table of Organization includes 13 FTE, supported by seasonal park and lake workers hired as needed.

- Key services of the Parks Department include:
- ♥ **Park Operations and Maintenance:** Ensuring safe conditions of parks and facilities.
  - ♥ **Capital Improvements:** Planning and implementing facility upgrades, accessibility improvements, and new park amenities.
  - ♥ **Conservation and Stewardship:** Protecting natural resources, restoring native habitats, and promoting sustainable land management practices.
  - ♥ **Community Recreation:** Supporting youth sports, outdoor education, and special events through facility use arrangements and partnerships.
  - ♥ **Public Engagement and Planning:** Gathering community input, maintaining the CORP, and aligning park services with County growth and resident needs.

## County Recreation Programs

Outagamie County's recreation program offers year-round opportunities that connect residents and visitors to County parks, including student field trips at Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC); community-building "Pints at Plamann" events at Plamann Park; and partner-led MHNC traditions such as Honey Sunday, Earth Day celebrations, and the Harvest Moon Festival. The County Parks Department also coordinates memorial bench dedications to honor loved ones in our parks, manages public communications for countywide snowmobiling conditions and trail status each winter, and enhances cold-weather access by offering snowshoe rentals at MHNC.

## County Park System Inventory

This section provides an overview of the County-owned and County-maintained park and recreation facilities. It includes a comprehensive list and description of each site, followed by detailed facility inventory and condition reports for each park (excluding trails).



## Park Site and Trail Catalog

This section catalogs the County-managed parks and trails, listing each site's size (acres or miles) and providing a brief description, organized by site type. In addition, this section provides a site-by-site inventory of park facilities and amenities, along with a summarized conditions assessment. While this analysis provides some indication of needs, Chapter 5 presents a more detailed summary of site needs assessments.

Site	Scale	Description
<b>Multi-Purpose Sites</b>		
Mosquito Hill Nature Center	418.5 ac	Mosquito Hill Nature Center is a year-round environmental education and recreation facility along the Wolf River in New London. It features an interpretive building with natural history exhibits, displays, gift shop, themed classrooms, meeting rooms, library, and an office. The grounds contain a trail system and views of scenic vistas atop Mosquito Hill.
Plamann Park	258.3 ac	Plamann Park is a recreational area located between Meade Street and Ballard Road in Appleton. The site contains the Plamann Lake Aquapark, Children's Farm, multiple athletic fields, shelters, trails, and The Hillside at Plamann event venue.
<b>River Access Sites</b>		
Barker Park	24.8 ac	Barker Park is located southwest of Shiocton on Old 54 Rd. The park offers Wolf River access, a boat ramp, two fishing docks, and a picnic area.
Buchman Access	1.1 ac	Buchman Access, located North of Hortonville on CTH M, offers a handicap accessible fishing dock, a picnic area, and a boat ramp to the Wolf River.
Koepke Access	4.5 ac	Koepke Access, located north of Shiocton off STH 76 and Koepke Rd, provides a large boat ramp accessing the Wolf River, two handicap accessible fishing docks, and a picnic area.
New London Access	1.2 ac	The New London Access offers Wolf River shoreline fishing areas, and a handicap accessible fishing platform. This access is located south of New London along the STH 45 by-pass.
Stephensville Access	4.0 ac	The Stephensville Access offers a boat ramp, picnic areas, handicap accessible parking and a handicap accessible fishing platform. It is located west of Stephensville and north of CTH S.
<b>Special-Purpose Sites</b>		
Barks and Recreation Dog Park	2.1 ac	The Barks and Recreation Dog Park opened in May 2026. The site, located on the Brewster Village Campus in Grand Chute, offers an off-leash area for both small and large dogs, an agility training area, and a trail extension connecting to the Old Stone Bridge Trail.
Multi-Generational Playground	3.3 ac	The Multi-Generational Playground is a planned project on the Brewster Village campus. The site intends to offer shade structures, benches, play areas, picnic areas, and sightlines to the adjacent Barks and Recreation Dog Park.
Northland Dog Park	9.0 ac	The Northland Dog Park, anticipated to close (timing unknown), is located on the corner of French Rd and Northland Ave. This fenced-in area provides space for both leashed and non-leashed pets, as well as walking trails and picnic areas.
Trappers Lane Campground	18.8 ac	Trappers Lane is a proposed County-operated campground located off STH 187 in Maine. The site intends to offer seasonal campsites and Wolf River Access.
Treaty of the Cedars	0.4 ac	Treaty of the Cedars is a site containing a historical marker, detailing the agreement between the Menominee Nation and the US in 1836, where the US purchased about four million acres of land for \$700,000. The site is located south of Washington St, on STH 96, in Little Chute.

Continued: Park Site and Trail Catalog



Photo by Ruth Luedtke with CJ



Photo by Adam J Brandt



Photo by Adam J Brandt

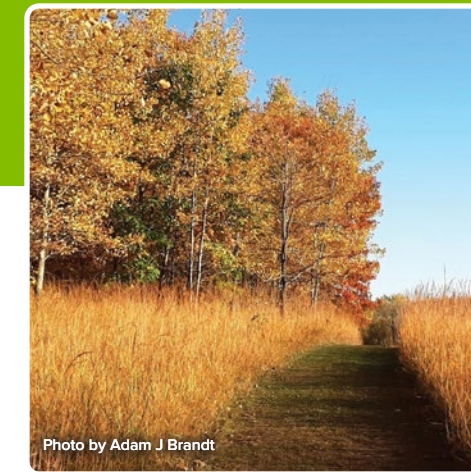


Photo by Adam J Brandt



Photo by Gregory T Photography



Continued: Park Site and Trail Catalog

Site	Scale	Description
<b>Natural Areas</b>		
County Forest	36.4 ac	The County Forest is a wooded site, offering trails and natural amenities. Located south of STH 15 on Casaloma Dr, the area is great for hiking and birdwatching.
Old Stone Bridge Wooded Area	20.3 ac	The Old Stone Bridge Wooded Area contains wooded space with trail access. Located adjacent to Brewster Village, the site connects the Old Stone Bridge Trail to the Barks and Recreation Dog Park.
View Ridge Natural Area	35.4 ac	Located on the former Mo-Ski-Tow Hill Ski Area grounds east of New London, the View Ridge Natural Area is an expansive wooded space, offering rustic hiking and bird watching opportunities.
Wolf River Nature Area	20.2 ac	The Wolf River Nature Area is an undeveloped natural area along the Wolf River in Shiocton. The property is currently inaccessible.
<b>Trails</b>		
CE Trail	5.9 mi	The CE Trail is a paved multi-use path that links multiple Fox Cities communities and supports three-season use.
Snowmobile Trails	316.0 mi	The County offers groomed snowmobile trails that wind through farmland, forests, and along rivers, connecting to nearby state trails. Trails open when conditions allow, offering riders a scenic way to explore the winter landscape.
Newton Blackmour State Trail	24.0 mi	The Newton Blackmour State Trail is a crushed-stone trail passing through New London, Shiocton, Black Creek, and Seymour. It offers year-round access for activities like hiking, biking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling.
Wiouwash State Trail	4.9 mi	The Wiouwash State Trail is a 28-mile multi-county system of which a 4.9-mile segment is located in Outagamie County. The gravel trail accommodates hiking, biking, horseback riding, and snowmobiling.

## Mosquito Hill Nature Center – Inventory

Items in Mosquito Hill Nature Center Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Facilities &amp; Buildings</b>	
Garage (1)	Good
Nature Center (1), Gift Shop (1)	Fair – Good
Park Shelters (2)	Very Poor, Fair
Sheds (4)	Good
<b>Recreation &amp; Play Amenities</b>	
Challenge Course (1)	Fair – Good
Play scape (1)	Good
Playground (1)	Good
Sensory Garden (1)	Good
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Automated External Defibrillator (1)	Good
Baby Changing Station (1)	Good
Benches (33)	Poor – Good
Informational Signs (107)	Very Poor – Very Good
Parking Lot (3)	Good
Picnic Tables (4)	Very Poor – Fair
Restrooms (3)	Good
Trash Receptacle (1)	Good

Items in Mosquito Hill Nature Center Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Boardwalk - Wet Meadow Trail (1)	Good
Hilltop Viewing Platform (1)	Good
Permanent Gates (2)	Good
Trailheads (2)	Good
Trails (13)	Fair – Good
<b>Nature Amenities</b>	
Bird Boxes (9)	Fair – Good
Bird Nest boxes (3)	Good
Beehive Area (1)	Good
Memorial Tree (1)	Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Docks (3)	Very Poor (2), Fair (1)
Memorial Bridge (1)	Good
<b>Cultural &amp; Historical Features</b>	
Donation Tube (1)	Good
Monuments (4)	Fair – Good



Photo by Adam J Brandt



Photo by Adam J Brandt

# Plamann Park – Inventory

Items in Plamann Park Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Facilities &amp; Buildings</b>	
Barn (1)	Good
Park Shelter (1)	Good
Plamann Lake Concessions (1)	Good
Restrooms - Lakeside (2); Baseball (1)	Poor – Fair; Very Good
Shed (3)	Good
The Hillside Venue (1)	Very Good
<b>Recreation &amp; Play Amenities</b>	
Baseball Field (4)	Good
Batting Cage (1)	Good
Children's Farm	Fair
Climber (3)	Good
Disc Golf Course (1), Basket (17) & Tee (17)	Fair, Poor – Very Good
Football Field (3)	Good – Very Good
Horseshoe Pit	Poor
Playground - Hillside (1); Lakeside (1)	Very Good; Good
Swing Set (6)	Very Poor – Good
Toss, Ladder (1)	Good
Toss, Bag (1); Toss, Lake Bag (1)	Good
Volleyball Net (1)	Fair
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Bench (21)	Very Poor – Very Good
Bike Rack (3)	Good – Very Good
Charcoal Grill (2)	Fair
Green Coated, Affixed Picnic Table (1)	Very Good
Trash Receptacle (5)	Very Good
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Trail System	Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
ADA Accessible Water Entrance (1)	Very Good
Diving Board and Ladder (2)	Good
Dock (1)	Good
Lifeguard Chair (5)	Good
Waterslide (1)	Good



Photo by Gregory T Photography



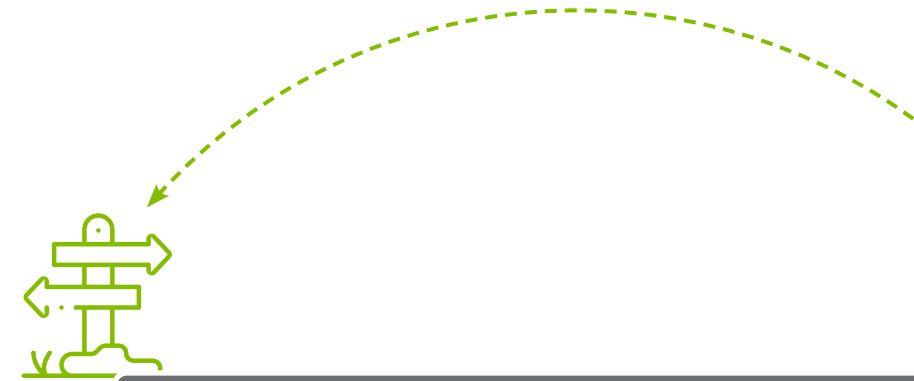
# Barker Park – Inventory



Items in Barker Park Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Parking Lot (1)	Fair
Informational Sign (8)	Poor - Good
Picnic Table (1)	Good
Trash Receptacle (1)	Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Fishing Pier (2)	Fair (1), Good (1)
Boat Launch (1)	Good



# Buchman Access – Inventory



Items in Buchman Access Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Parking Lot (1)	Fair
Informational Sign (5)	Poor – Good
Picnic Table (1)	Good
Trash Receptacle (1)	Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Fishing Pier (1)	Good
Boat Launch (1)	Good



## Koepke Access – Inventory



Items in Koepke Access Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Gravel Parking Lot (1)	Fair
Informational Sign (6)	Fair – Very Good
Picnic Table (1)	Good
Street Parking Lighting (1)	Good
Trash Receptacle (1)	Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Fishing Pier (2)	Fair
Boat Launch (2)	Fair



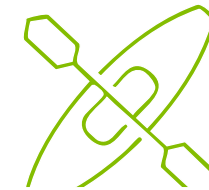
## Stephensville Access – Inventory



Items in Sepsheville Access Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Parking Lot (3)	Fair – Good
Informational Sign (5)	Poor – Good
Picnic Table (1)	Good
Trash Receptacle (1)	Good
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Gravel Access Road (1)	Poor
Gravel Fishing Area Access Road (1)	Very Good
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Fishing Pier (4)	Fair – Good
Boat Launch (1)	Good



## New London Access – Inventory



Items in New London Access Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Gravel Parking Lot (1)	Fair
Signage	Fair
<b>Water &amp; Access Structures</b>	
Fishing Pier (1)	Fair



Photo by Gregory T Photography



Photo by Adam J Brandt



Photo by Adam J Brandt

## Barks and Recreation Dog Park – Inventory



Items in Barks and Recreation Dog Park Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Facilities &amp; Buildings</b>	
Restrooms (2)	Very Good
Storage Room (1)	Very Good
<b>Recreation &amp; Play Amenities</b>	
Dog Agility Area (1)	Very Good
Large-Dog Play Area (1)	Very Good
Small-Dog Play Area (1)	Very Good
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Parking Lot (1)	Very Good
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Walking Trail (1)	Very Good



## Multi-Generational Playground



These two sites have not been developed yet.

AI-generated illustrations (OpenAI)

## Trappers Lane Campground

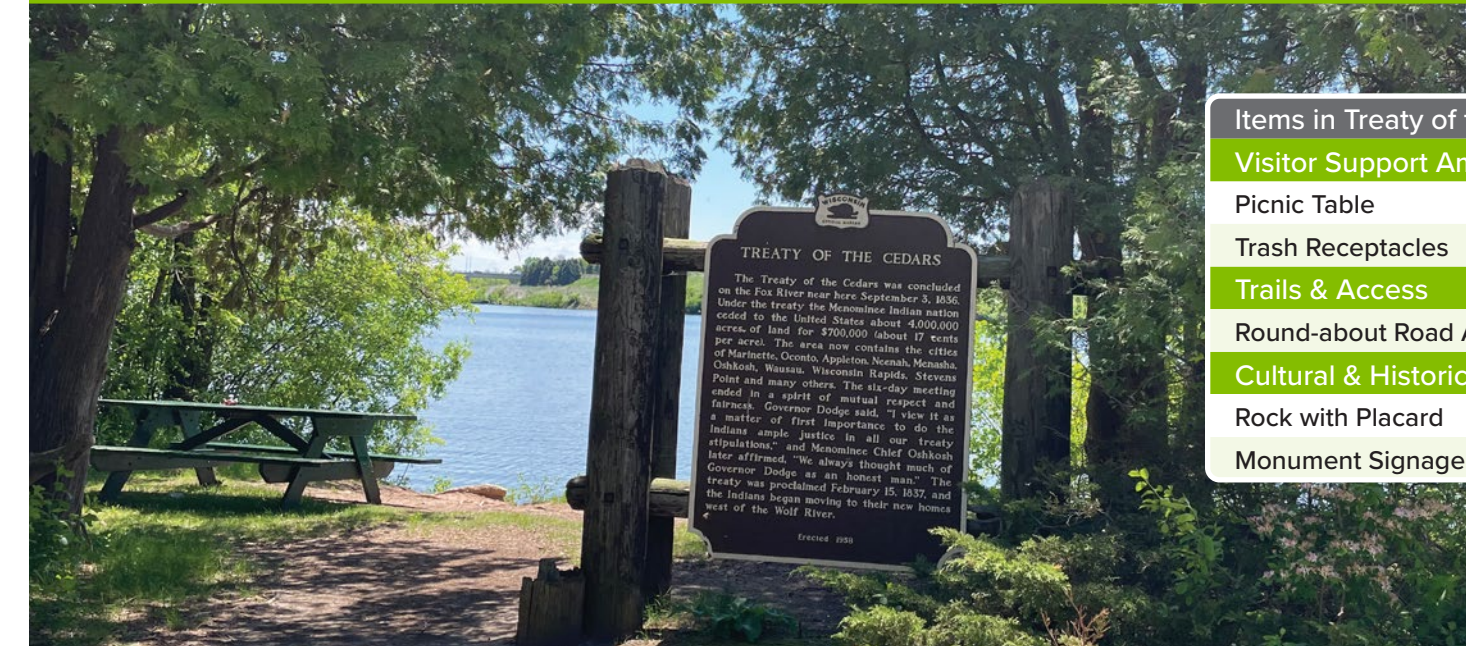


## Northland Dog Park – Inventory

Items in Northland Dog Park Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Recreation &amp; Play Amenities</b>	
Dog Play Area (1)	Good
Small Dog Play Area (1)	Good
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Benches	Good
Donation Box (1)	Good
Gravel Parking Lot (1)	Good
Picnic Table	Good
Portable Restroom, Summer Only (1)	Good
Signage	Good
Trash Receptacles	Good
Waste Bag Dispensers (2)	Good
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Natural Surface Trails (1)	Good



## Treaty of the Cedars – Inventory



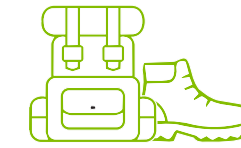
Items in Treaty of the Cedars Inventory	Conditions Rating
<b>Visitor Support Amenities</b>	
Picnic Table	Fair
Trash Receptacles	Fair
<b>Trails &amp; Access</b>	
Round-about Road Access	Very Good
<b>Cultural &amp; Historical Features</b>	
Rock with Placard	Fair
Monument Signage	Fair

## County Forest – Inventory



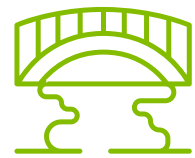
Items in County Forest Inventory	Conditions Rating
Visitor Support Amenities	
Signage	Fair
Trails & Access	
Gravel And Natural Surface Trails	Good
Nature Amenities	
Conservancy Area	Very Good

## View Ridge Natural Area – Inventory



Items in View Ridge Natural Area Inventory	Conditions Rating
Visitor Support Amenities	
Park Regulatory Signage	Fair
Trails & Access	
Natural Surface Trail (1)	Good
Nature Amenities	
Undeveloped, Natural Area (1)	Very Good

## Old Stone Bridge Wooded Area – Inventory



Items in Old Stone Bridge Wooded Area Inventory	Conditions Rating
Visitor Support Amenities	
Asphalt Parking Lot (1)	Good
Signage	Good
Benches	Good
Trails & Access	
Asphalt, Gravel, And Natural Surface Trails	Good
Cultural & Historical Features	
Natural Areas	Very Good



## Wolf River Nature Area – Inventory



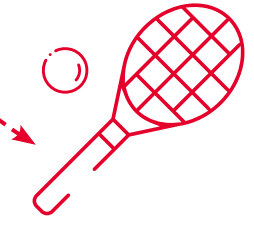
Items in Wolf River Nature Area Inventory	Conditions Rating
Nature Amenities	
Natural Area (1)	Very Good





CHAPTER  
**05**

# Needs Assessment



This chapter summarizes Outagamie County's park system needs assessment to inform future planning.

## Emerging Recreation Trends

This section reviews current and emerging national and Wisconsin recreation trends to identify opportunities for Outagamie County park programming and facilities.

### National Trends

Outdoor recreation is growing nationwide. National Park Service visitation reached 331.9 million visits in 2024, up 39 million from 2014,<sup>13</sup> signaling rising demand for outdoor experiences.

National data show that the top reason people visit parks is to spend time with family and friends,<sup>14</sup> reinforcing parks' role as social hubs. With loneliness rising as a public health issue, park planners are prioritizing spaces that foster connection in 2025 and beyond.<sup>15</sup>

Outdoor recreation preferences varies by age:<sup>16</sup>

- ♥ Seniors are one of the fastest-growing participant groups, favoring birdwatching, wildlife viewing, fishing, hiking, hunting, RV camping, and sea kayaking.
- ♥ Youth are increasingly active as well, favoring bicycling, camping, fishing, running, and hiking with growth in overnight backpacking, snowshoeing, canoeing, climbing, and triathlons.
- ♥ Across all ages, hiking remains the most popular outdoor activity, followed by running, bicycling, fishing, and camping.

A national survey of landscape architecture firms found high demand for amenities such as pickleball courts, dog parks, trails, restrooms, seasonal festivals, indoor recreation centers, splash pads, and swimming pools.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> National Park Service. Visitation Numbers, "Recreation Visits by Year."  
<sup>14</sup> Bronwen Mastro, et al. (2025). Emerging Trends in Recreation and Sports, The Field.  
<sup>15</sup> Richard J. Dolesh. (2024). Top Trends in Parks and Recreation 2025, National Recreation and Park Association.  
<sup>16</sup> Outdoor Foundation. (2023). Outdoor Participation Trends Report.  
<sup>17</sup> Bronwen Mastro, et al. (2025). Emerging Trends in Recreation and Sports, The Field.



## State (Wisconsin) Trends<sup>18</sup>

Wisconsin's 2025–2030 Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) reports strong participation in outdoor recreation, with trail-based walking/hiking/running, swimming in natural waters, wildlife watching/nature photography, and picnicking among the most popular activities statewide.

The SCORP also notes that the state's aging population is increasing demand for accessible trails, facilities, and amenities that accommodate mobility needs. Over the past decade, hunting and fishing participation has declined (reflected in lower license sales), while UTV and off-highway motorcycle registrations have steadily increased. Boat, snowmobile, and ATV registrations have remained relatively stable, indicating sustained demand for motorized recreation overall.

State park and trail attendance has generally increased since 2010, with particularly strong growth in annual and daily park sticker sales since 2020, reflecting heightened interest following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Finally, the SCORP highlights growing interest in year-round recreation (including winter use), the importance of equitable access and conservation, and the value of cross-sector partnerships. It concludes that well-planned outdoor recreation improves public health while supporting local economies and tourism—supporting continued investment by state and local agencies.

<sup>18</sup> Wisconsin DNR. (2025). Wisconsin Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), 2025–2030



Photo by Gregory T Photography



## Micro-mobility Trends in Outdoor Recreation

Micro-mobility refers to small, lightweight electric vehicles, typically e-bikes and e-scooters, used for short trips. These devices can be personal property or rented through a shared platform. Use of these devices is expanding in the U.S. and Wisconsin and they are increasingly becoming part of how residents and visitors access recreation and other destinations. In Wisconsin, usage is becoming mainstream in some urban areas: Madison's BCycle system (now fully electric) reported more than 500,000 trips in 2023 and over 430,000 trips in 2024,<sup>19</sup> and Milwaukee's dockless e-scooter program logged 971,980 trips in 2024.<sup>20</sup>

To manage impacts and capture benefits, agencies commonly use shared-path speed guidance (e.g., ~15 mph where permitted), clear etiquette signage, and centerline striping on busy segments, plus designated parking and geo-fencing near trailheads to prevent clutter. Done well, micro-mobility can expand access to recreation, support low-emission trips, and improve first/last-mile connectivity for people without cars or nearby transit.

<sup>19</sup> InBusiness. November 2024. Madison's BCycle ridership hits record highs.

<sup>20</sup> City of Milwaukee Department of Public Works. (n.d.) Dockless Scooter Program.





Photo by Gregory T Photography

## Partnerships Needed to Expand Recreation

Outagamie County faces rising costs for park/trail construction, maintenance, and operations amid declining state/federal support and tighter County resources. Limited municipal appetite for cost-sharing increases the need for broader partnerships. Expanding collaboration with sports clubs, niche recreation groups, health and wellness partners, municipalities, and state agencies can bring expertise, volunteers, in-kind support, and access to additional funding—helping offset costs, broaden offerings, and strengthen advocacy.

## Programs Needed to Activate Parks

Expanding the County's recreational programming will increase park use, participation, and community health. Priority options include outdoor education (e.g., Master Naturalist), gardening/food-based classes, lecture series, fitness and walking groups, sports leagues, wellness/mindfulness programs, and "learn-the-trails" outings. Health partners recommend focusing on transit-accessible and high-need areas, co-marketing with clinics/insurers/community organizations, and offering culturally responsive, low-barrier programs—supported through local and municipal partnerships for long-term sustainability.



Photo by Cassie Ingalls

## System-Wide Needs

This section documents system-wide needs for the County park system; the next section addresses site-specific needs.

### ADA and Universal Access

Several County Park System sites still present accessibility barriers for people with disabilities, older adults, and families with strollers, with inconsistent ADA/universal design in some playgrounds, paths, river access features, parking, and amenities.

To expand universal access, the County can prioritize improved trail surfacing, accessible seating, sensory-friendly play elements, shaded rest areas, and hydration stations, along with braille signage, tactile maps, and quiet spaces. These upgrades advance equity while improving comfort and usability for all visitors.

### Brand Development and Awareness

A unified visual and messaging identity may strengthen Outagamie County Parks by improving recognition, reducing visitor confusion, and more clearly differentiating the system from other park systems in the county. The brand could be centered on the County's authentic character and values, with standardized logos, colors, typography, and design elements carried across signage/wayfinding, events, publications, and digital platforms.



### Brand Development: Exploratory Concept

Outagamie County Parks' brand could reflect its emphasis on community connection and "third spaces," anchored by a simple message: "Get **OUT** in Outagamie." This concept links the physical act of getting outside with the idea of moving from isolation into shared community spaces.

Using "**OUT**" (drawn from the County name) could help create a distinct, repeatable identity—applied across facilities and programming through consistent naming and visuals. Example extensions might include **Roll OUT** (inclusive/adaptive sports), **Camp OUT** (overnight experiences), and **Branch OUT** (nature education and stewardship).



Photo by Gregory T Photography



## Inclusion and Equity Needs

Equitable park access goes beyond proximity to include affordability, comfort, representation, and a sense of belonging. While most residents report feeling welcome, engagement suggests opportunities to better serve seniors, families with young children, people with disabilities, and culturally diverse communities.

Potential opportunities may include:

- ♥ More free/low-cost programs
- ♥ Stronger outreach to underrepresented groups
- ♥ Varied amenities such as sensory-friendly elements, shade and rest areas, gender-inclusive restrooms, safety improvements, and multilingual signage.

Engagement also pointed to interest in LGBTQ+- and BIPOC-inclusive events and adaptive equipment (or rentals) to reduce participation barriers. Incorporating Native American history through interpretation, public art, or culturally inspired play features could also help sites better reflect local heritage.



Photo by Katie Dougherty



Photo by Adam J Brandt

## Leashed Dog Access

There is interest in expanding dog-friendly areas in County parks, though concerns remain about enforcement, safety, and waste. Leashed-dog access may work best with clear signage, adequate waste stations, and consistent rule enforcement. The County could consider allowing leashed dogs on designated pet-friendly trails and limited areas within specific parks, supported by education on responsible pet ownership and expectations to help maintain positive experiences for all users.



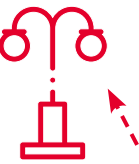
## Modern Visitor Amenities

Visitor amenities help ensure comfortable, enjoyable park experiences, and different park types may warrant different approaches.

Activity-focused or programmed parks may benefit from shelters, playgrounds, splash pads, and outdoor fitness equipment, while nature-based areas may be best served by simpler amenities such as all-season restrooms, Wi-Fi at key sites, trash receptacles, and benches. Consistent standards for maintenance, accessibility, and design can help parks feel welcoming, support longer visits, and broaden use by families, seniors, and casual visitors.

Technology—such as mobile maps, interactive trail guides, QR-coded interpretive signage, and a unified online park finder—may also improve wayfinding, education, and engagement.

## Operations, Maintenance, and Asset Management



The County's ability to deliver high-quality recreation experiences depends on maintaining its existing assets. As facilities age, maintenance demands increase. Parks staff identified recurring needs related to deferred maintenance, equipment replacement, and infrastructure upgrades. A system-wide maintenance plan and further development of the Parks Department's asset inventory could help prioritize investments based on condition, safety, and community benefit. Further, developing a more consistent approach to preventive maintenance—supported by volunteer programs, "Friends of" groups, and partnerships—would help sustain quality and extend the lifespan of facilities.



## Safety, Security, and Risk Management

Safety and maintenance are central to visitor confidence. Clear rules, visible staff presence, and responsive maintenance may reduce risk and improve perceived security. Applying Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles—such as better sightlines, appropriate lighting, and thoughtful amenity placement—can support safety, while partnerships with local law enforcement and volunteer groups may strengthen monitoring and stewardship.

## Strategic Park Planning

Outagamie County's mix of urban, suburban, and rural areas can make equitable park access challenging—especially in rural areas where dispersed development limits walkable access. As growth continues, there may be value in better aligning park planning with population change to support fairness and inclusion.

Coordination between the County and local jurisdictions could become increasingly important so new neighborhoods are planned with accessible parks and recreation in mind. County parks may be best positioned to emphasize regional recreation, natural resource preservation, and destination experiences, while municipal systems may be better suited to neighborhood-level access.

Community input has also expressed interest in reaching 10.5 acres of County parkland per 1,000 residents, compared with today's estimate (4.4 acres per 1,000, 2025) and a national average cited around 10.2 acres per 1,000.<sup>21</sup> While forecast data and acreage metrics can help guide standards, a cohesive system will likely depend on consistent collaboration and communication so County and municipal investments complement one another.

## Sustainability and Resilience

Sustainability appears to remain a core priority for the County park system, reflecting community values and parks' role in emphasizing natural landscapes. Public input emphasized conservation over development and maintaining parks as places for nature and quiet reflection. Common themes from community input included:

- ♥ Expanding wooded/green areas.
- ♥ Restoring native habitat.
- ♥ Planting native species and pollinator plants.
- ♥ Supporting wildlife viewing and environmental education.
- ♥ Limiting artificial elements (e.g., excess lighting or urban-style infrastructure).
- ♥ Encouraging stewardship.
- ♥ Prioritizing ecological connectivity.

<sup>21</sup> National Recreation and Park Association. (2025). NRPA Agency Performance Review.



## Third Space Development

Communities benefit from welcoming “third places” to gather beyond home and work, and public parks are well-suited to provide these accessible spaces for everyday connection and civic pride.

Supporting third-space function may mean pairing comfortable, accessible infrastructure (seating, shade, wayfinding, restrooms, and year-round amenities) with inclusive, inter-generational programming (events, volunteer days, informal recreation, and outdoor education). Parks that function this way tend to encourage repeat visits, support both structured and casual use, and build shared stewardship.

### What are third spaces?

A “third space” (or “third place”) is a welcoming, accessible setting outside home (first place) and work (second place) where people casually gather, socialize, and build community.

This definition is adapted from sociologist Ray Oldenburg's concept of “third places,” introduced in his book *The Great Good Place* (1989).

## Trail Connectivity Gaps and Network Upgrades

Residents consistently express interest in more trails, with a strong emphasis on better connectivity—linking existing segments to each other and to destinations. Parks can function as key hubs or “pit stops” within a larger network. Feedback points to a need for continuous, intuitive routes connecting neighborhoods to parks, schools, jobs, grocery stores, river corridors, and regional destinations. The County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan offers a framework, but implementation will likely depend on cross-jurisdictional coordination.

Preferred community upgrades included:

- ♥ Closing gaps and dead ends.
- ♥ Adding both paved and more challenging natural-surface options.
- ♥ Improving accessibility for wheelchairs and strollers.
- ♥ Creating more looped routes of different lengths.
- ♥ Implementing mountain biking options.
- ♥ Expanding hiking options and winter trail use (e.g., snowshoeing and cross-country skiing).





### Water Access and Blueways

The Wolf and Fox Rivers offer significant untapped recreation potential, which could be advanced through improved launches and piers, added amenities at access sites, and education/programming to encourage kayaking, canoeing, fishing, and other water-based use.

### Wayfinding and Identity System

Staff, stakeholders, and the public identified a need for consistent, intuitive signage across the park system. Improvements may include standardized entrance and directional signs, updated interpretive displays, and integrated digital maps. While some signs are newer, many are faded, missing, inconsistent, or outdated—weakening the County’s visual identity and confusing visitors.

A cohesive wayfinding and branding strategy could strengthen identity, improve navigation, and enhance the visitor experience. Updated interpretive signage (ecology, history, wildlife) can support education and stewardship, and multilingual text and/or clear iconography can improve inclusion.

### Winter Recreation

Winter recreation helps Outagamie County residents stay active and connected year-round, with local, state, and county parks offering options such as snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, sledding, snowmobiling, and ice-skating. Regional planning efforts (including the Fox Cities Tourism Master Plan) also point to opportunities to better leverage Wisconsin’s winter season through investments, events, and programs that keep outdoor recreation appealing in colder months.

Improving winter amenities will likely require coordination across jurisdictions to enhance existing sites and identify new opportunities. Potential upgrades include better trail grooming, lighting, signage, warming shelters, and equipment rentals, which can expand access for all ages and abilities and support well-being by reducing winter isolation.

## Specific Facility and Site Needs

Understanding facility and site needs is critical to ensure the County's Park System continues to offer safe, welcoming spaces that enhance visitor experience and protect natural resources. The following observations highlight areas that merit consideration as the County sets priorities for and implements projects over the next five years.

### Multi-Purpose Sites

Multi-purpose parks are the system's backbone, requiring ongoing balance between varied activities, infrastructure upkeep, accessibility improvements, and programming that support year-round use.



Photo by Adam J Brandt

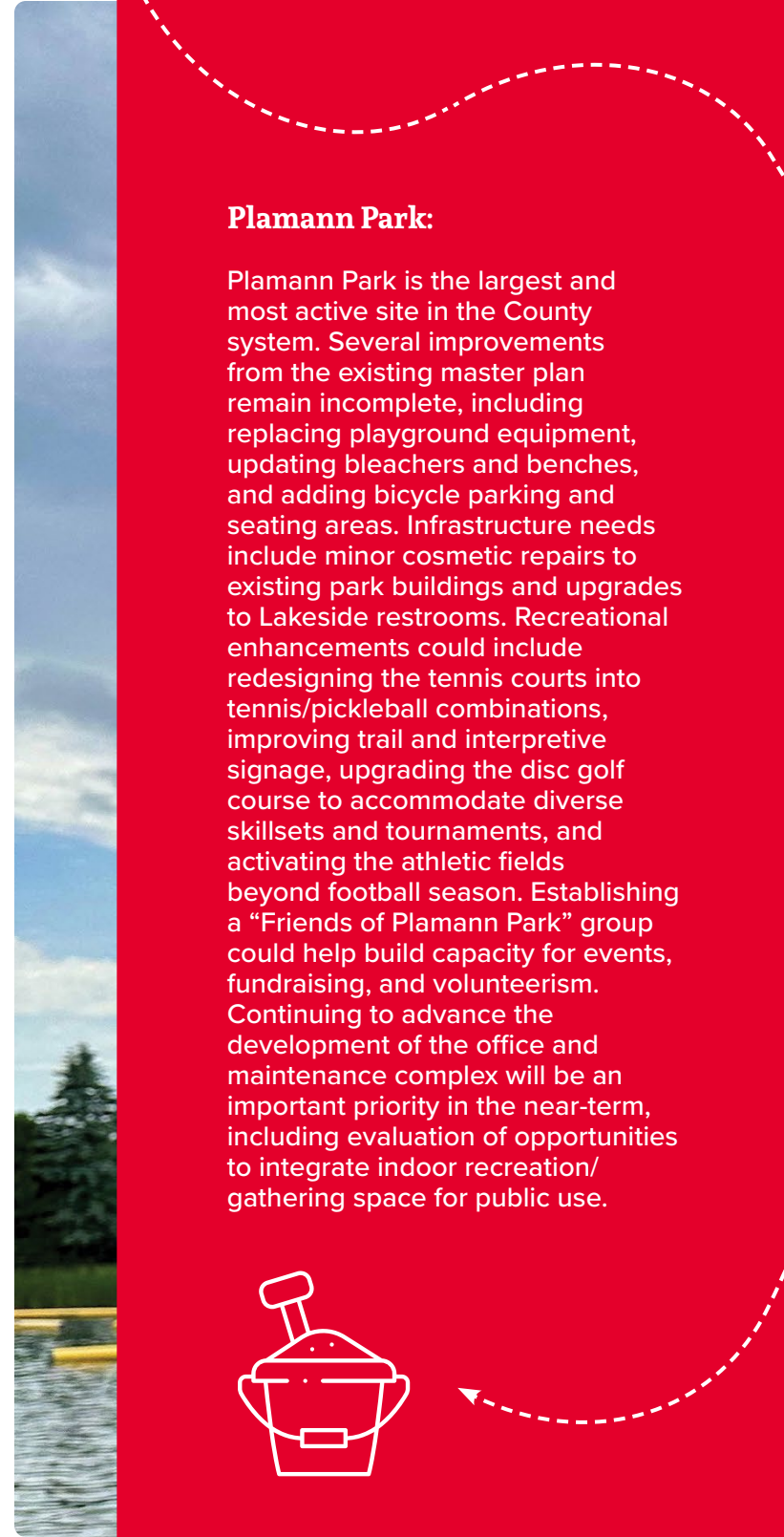
### Mosquito Hill Nature Center:

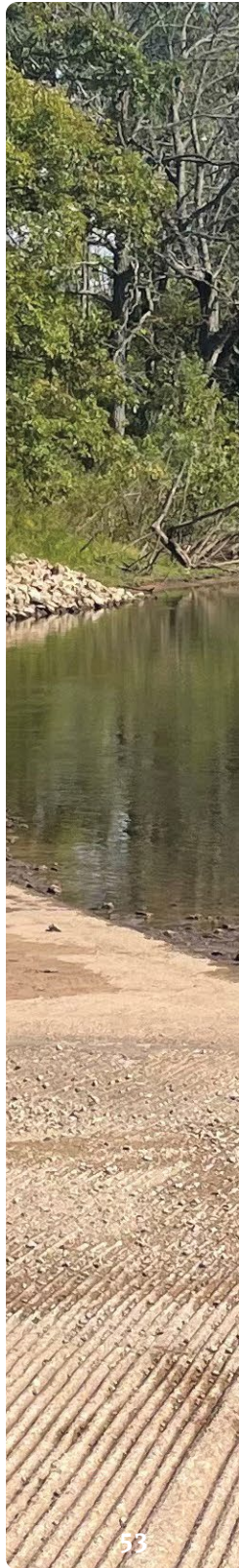
Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC) is one of the County's signature destinations. This process identified some maintenance needs including repairing components of the existing facility, challenge course, updating benches and picnic tables, replacing or consolidating aging signage, and addressing docks, observation decks, and monuments that are in poor condition. The Memorial Bridge requires repairs after storm damage, and the Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is due for servicing. Educational displays are outdated and in need of a refresh, and additional trail wayfinding signage is desired. There is interest in more programs, but the community has strongly emphasized a desire to keep the focus of MHNC on nature and walking trails, and avoiding over commercialization, development, or activities that might disturb wildlife.



### Plamann Park:

Plamann Park is the largest and most active site in the County system. Several improvements from the existing master plan remain incomplete, including replacing playground equipment, updating bleachers and benches, and adding bicycle parking and seating areas. Infrastructure needs include minor cosmetic repairs to existing park buildings and upgrades to Lakeside restrooms. Recreational enhancements could include redesigning the tennis courts into tennis/pickleball combinations, improving trail and interpretive signage, upgrading the disc golf course to accommodate diverse skillsets and tournaments, and activating the athletic fields beyond football season. Establishing a "Friends of Plamann Park" group could help build capacity for events, fundraising, and volunteerism. Continuing to advance the development of the office and maintenance complex will be an important priority in the near-term, including evaluation of opportunities to integrate indoor recreation/gathering space for public use.





## River Access Sites

River access sites play a critical role in encouraging water recreation and connecting residents to Outagamie County's rivers and streams. The primary needs for these sites focus on ensuring they are functional, safe, and visible to the public.

### Barker Park:

At Barker Park, infrastructure improvements could help enhance usability, including construction of a shelter with restrooms, installation of a playground, and paving and striping parking areas for ADA and boat access. A natural surface trail network and canoe/kayak launch would expand recreation opportunities. Existing fishing piers require monitoring to determine maintenance needs over time, with some maintenance such as repainting already identified as a need. Wayfinding and parking signage also need to be refreshed and made ADA-compliant.

### Other River Access Sites (Buchman, Koepke, New London, and Stephenville):

Common needs across these sites include paving gravel parking lots, adding ADA striping and access routes, and monitoring pier conditions for repair or replacement. Site-specific issues include loose or rotting pier boards at Buchman, a tilting pier and another nearing end-of-life at Koepke, and rot on the Stephenville pier. Roadway and entrance conditions also need attention, such as reducing the entrance drive grade at Buchman and repairing potholes at Stephenville. Signage is another need, as several signs are weathered, damaged, or display incorrect information.



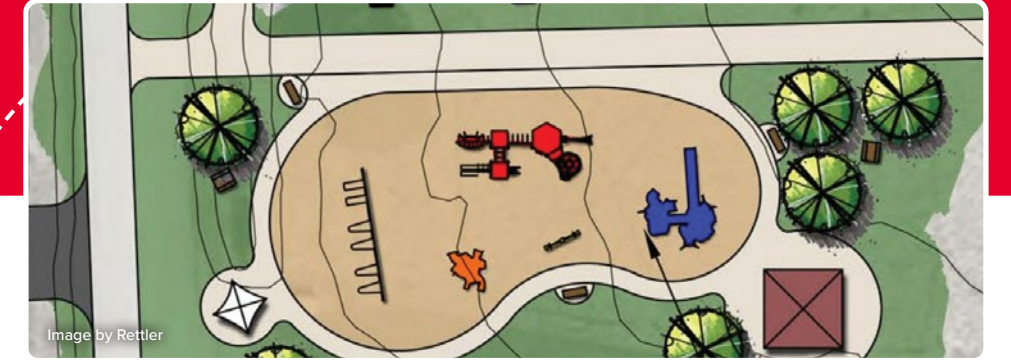
## Special-Purpose Sites

Special-purpose sites serve targeted recreation or education purposes. Needs for these sites often relate to optimizing user experience and sustaining relevance over time.



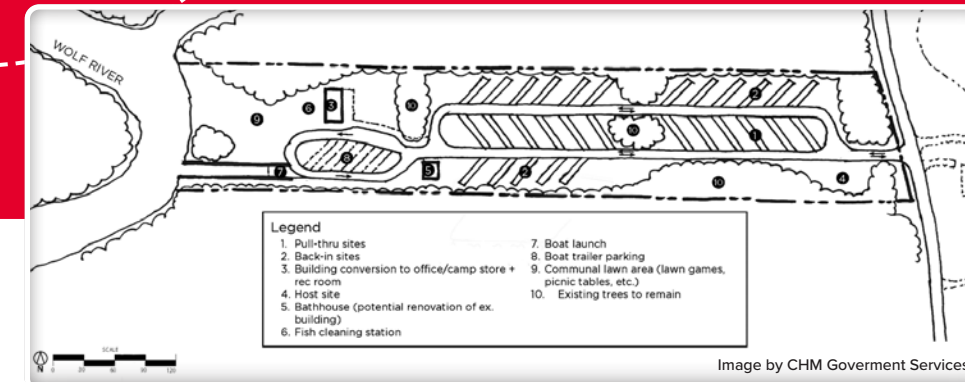
### Barks & Recreation and Northland Dog Parks:

With the recent opening of Barks and Recreation Dog Park, continue to monitor the site to ensure the facilities function well under heavy use. A clear plan for the eventual closure of Northland Dog Park will be important to communicate to users, as many have expressed concern about losing access.



### Multi-generational Playground:

Implement the concept plan with a focus on inclusivity, ensuring that equipment and design support users of all ages, abilities, mobility levels, and sensory needs. Engage a broad range of residents during the design phase of implementation.



### Trappers Lane Campground:

Interest remains in evaluating a seasonal campground at Trappers Lane. Future steps could include infrastructure feasibility (i.e., DNR allowance of a boat ramp), an evaluation of operational and maintenance costs and revenues over time, and how the new facility would fit into the County's overall recreation offerings.



### Treaty of the Cedars:

This site offers an opportunity to combine historical education with recreation. Updating/implementing the site's concept plan could activate space through a kayak launch, interpretive signage, and continued monument maintenance (e.g., addressing plaque corrosion). Increasing public awareness of the site's historical significance would strengthen community value.

## Natural Areas

Natural areas serve as important spaces for conservation and quiet recreation, but they also rely on public awareness to be fully utilized. Needs at these sites involve a mix of stewardship improvements, such as habitat management and safety maintenance, and strategies to raise awareness and encourage responsible use.



♥ **County Forest:** Modest amenities such as benches and interpretive signage could improve usability and encourage low-impact recreation while supporting stewardship of natural resources.

♥ **Old Stone Bridge Wooded Area:** This small natural area primarily requires routine maintenance, including removing dead limbs and branches from trails for safety.

♥ **View Ridge Natural Area:** View Ridge has the potential to become a major recreation destination if developed strategically. Exploring implementation of its concept plan (e.g., evaluating mountain biking trails, a parking area, and trailhead facilities) could improve the site's usability and, in the case of adding mountain bike infrastructure, provide the county with a new outdoor recreation option desired by the community.

## Trails

Outagamie County's Parks Department maintains three major trail networks in the county that serve recreation, connectivity, and tourism roles. One is County-owned (the CE Trail) and two are State-owned (the Wiouwash Trail and Newton Blackmour Trail). While they are well used and valued, targeted improvements could enhance safety, usability, and regional integration.

5.9  
MILES

**CE Trail:** Key needs for the CE Trail include repairing a corroded pedestrian underpass culvert to address safety concerns, improving lighting for visibility during early morning or evening use, and exploring an eastward extension to connect with Brown County's trail network for enhanced regional connectivity. Signage along the trail needs some attention and maintenance as some signs have dents, graffiti, and broken/loose posts.

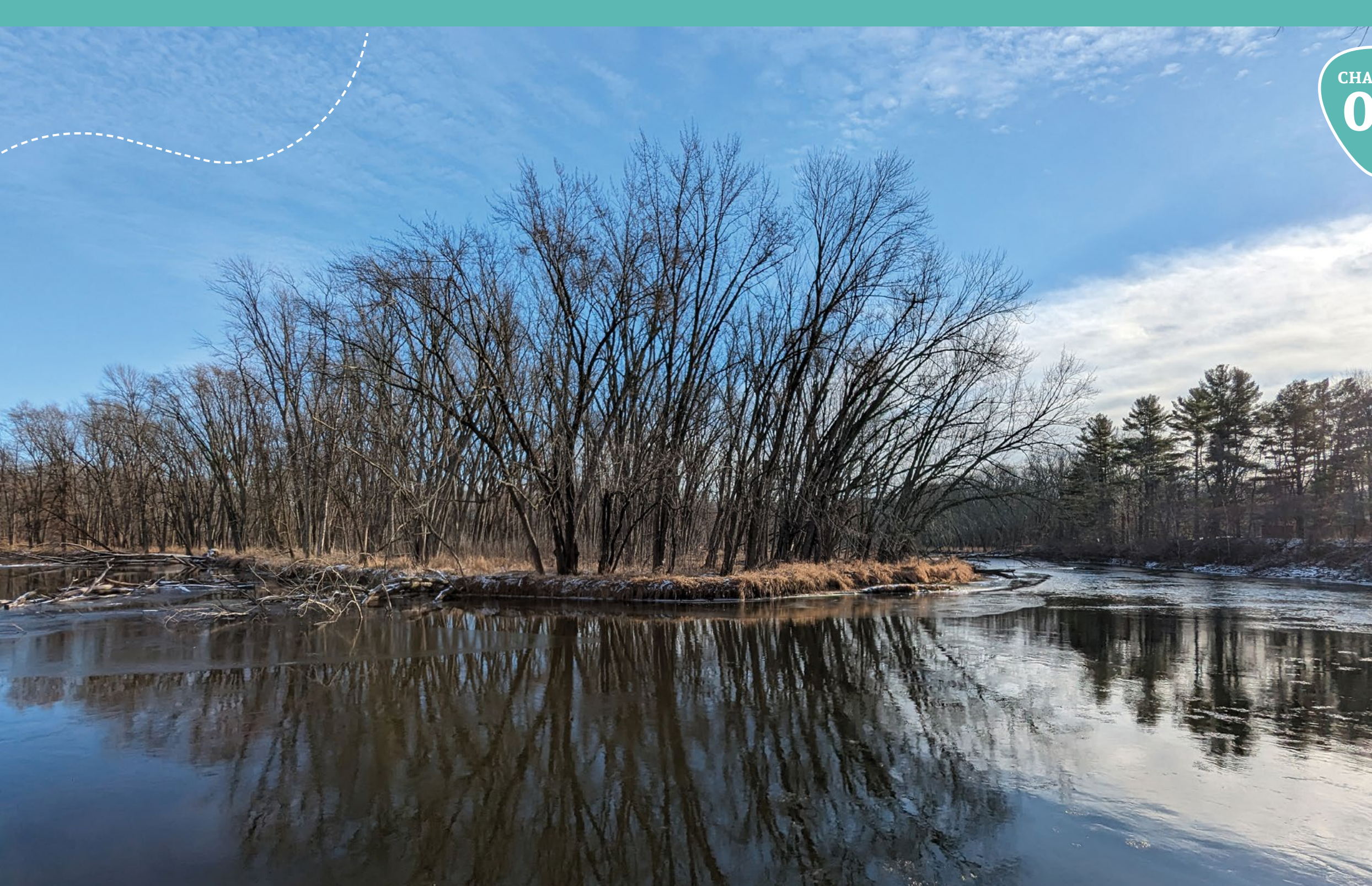
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MILES

**Newton Blackmour State Trail:** Key needs for the Newton Blackmour Trail include regular surface maintenance to address wear, adding bridges where crossings would improve continuity, and exploring trail extensions or spur connections to nearby parks and other trail networks to strengthen urban-rural integration.

4.9  
MILES

**Wiouwash State Trail:** Improvements for the portion of the Wiouwash Trail in Outagamie County include upgrading gravel surfaces for all-weather durability, adding rest areas, and pursuing a northward extension—potentially through Hortonville—to connect with the Newton Blackmour Trail, creating a continuous regional corridor and boosting tourism.

Across all three networks, there is a need for consistent surface grading, vegetation management, and improved signage. Strengthening linkages between county, state, and local trails would reduce network fragmentation and support longer multi-modal trips. Limited cell reception in remote areas poses a challenge for emergency communication. The County could address this concern through signage or infrastructure solutions. The County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan should guide future trail connection planning to maximize regional accessibility.

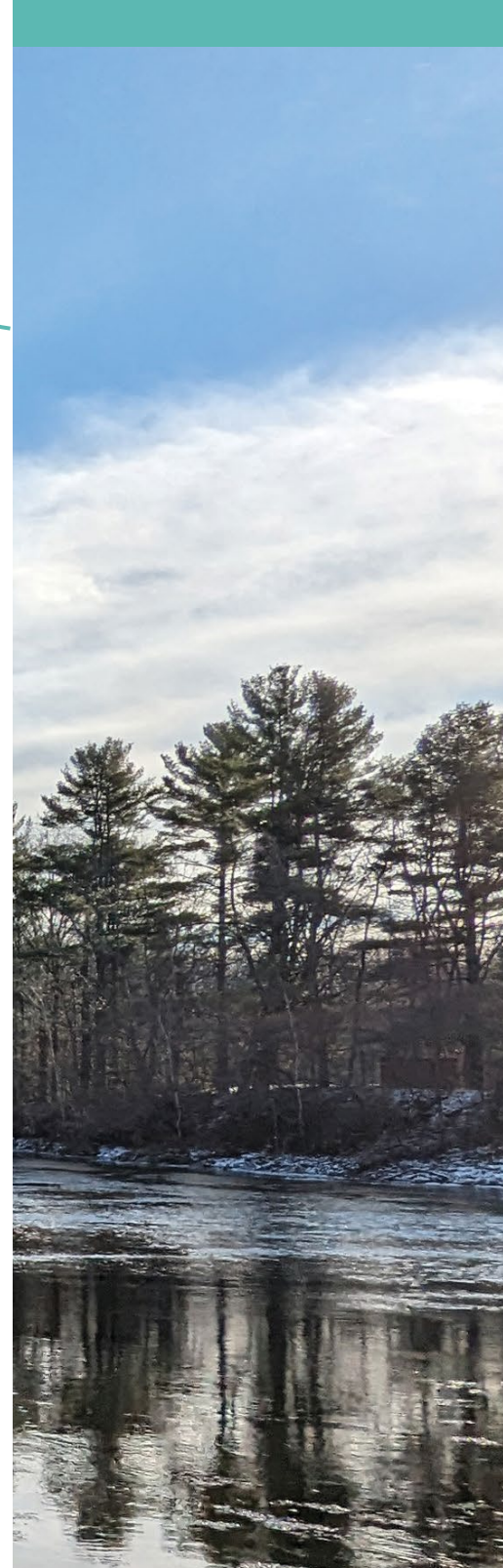


# Recommendations

This chapter presents recommendations to enhance Outagamie County’s park system. These recommendations address the needs discussed in Chapter 5 and support the vision and direction described in Chapter 2.

## Policy and Administrative Recommendations

Policy and Administrative Actions	Priority Level
1 Standardize Parks Department relationships with partners. Create MOU templates, volunteer management and risk/insurance forms, branding and procurement procedures, and decision-making workflows.	Highest
2 Standardize incident reporting and emergency markers; coordinate with Sheriff/EMS on administrative response protocols and training.	Highest
3 Draft a volunteer policy, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, access and decision-making limitations, and training requirements to ensure effective participation and support for event or initiative execution. Further, establish procedures for tracking volunteer participation, hours, performance, and compliance to ensure accountability, effective engagement, and successful events/initiatives.	Highest
4 Evaluate an ordinance update to consider allowing leashed dogs on designated pet-friendly trails, parks, or park zones. Consider needs related to environmental management, signage, waste-stations, restrictions, education, safety, and enforcement.	Medium
5 Adopt a Parks Department communications policy with content calendar and response standards. Communication methods to consider include website alerts, email and social media announcements, temporary site signage, and press releases.	Medium
6 Monitor implementation of the County’s local cost sharing policy (AR2025-01) for trails to understand its impact.	Medium
7 Explore a micro-mobility policy (e-bikes/e-scooters) and potential pilot program: define allowed locations/times, speed and etiquette rules aligned to Wisconsin law; consider vendor controls if utilizing a third-party to provide the e-bike/e-scooters.	Low



## Funding and Financing Recommendations

### Funding and Financing Actions

### Priority Level

- | Funding and Financing Actions  | Priority Level |
|--|----------------|
| 1 Explore establishing a Parks Foundation or endowment to diversify and stabilize funding. Evaluate fund structures, gift acceptance and investment policies, and the tradeoffs of this approach. Discuss options with the County Board. | Highest        |
| 2 Explore a financial strategy to sustain Mosquito Hill Nature Center given growing maintenance costs and comparatively low revenues.  | Highest        |
| 3 Create an annual grants strategy that links priority projects to potential grants. Consider match requirements, sponsorship opportunities, timelines, and staff leads for application development and reporting.                       | High           |

## Partnership Recommendations

### Partnership Actions

### Priority Level

- | Partnership Actions  | Priority Level |
|--|----------------|
| 1 Build a coordinated partnerships program to be more intentional about partnerships and community engagement with nonprofits, schools, “Friends of” groups, senior centers, early childhood/family-serving organizations, youth clubs, cultural and disability advocacy groups, health/wellness providers, Tribal governments, etc. | Highest        |
| 2 Continue to liaison with Outagamie County’s Greenways Implementation Committee, the Fox Cities Greenways, and East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission for regional recreation planning.  | High           |
| 3 Explore Fox River recreation activation by convening intergovernmental partners and river authorities; assess locks/advocacy, permitting, access points, small-business support; coordinate a phased action/advocacy agenda.   | Medium         |
| 4 Help to establish a Friends of Plamann Park group to build sustained stewardship and fundraising support. Help to recruit a founding board.  | Medium         |
| 5 Form a Parks–Public Health task force. Develop a scope, membership, cadence, and program and data sharing opportunities. Establish a work plan tied to health outcomes.  | Low            |

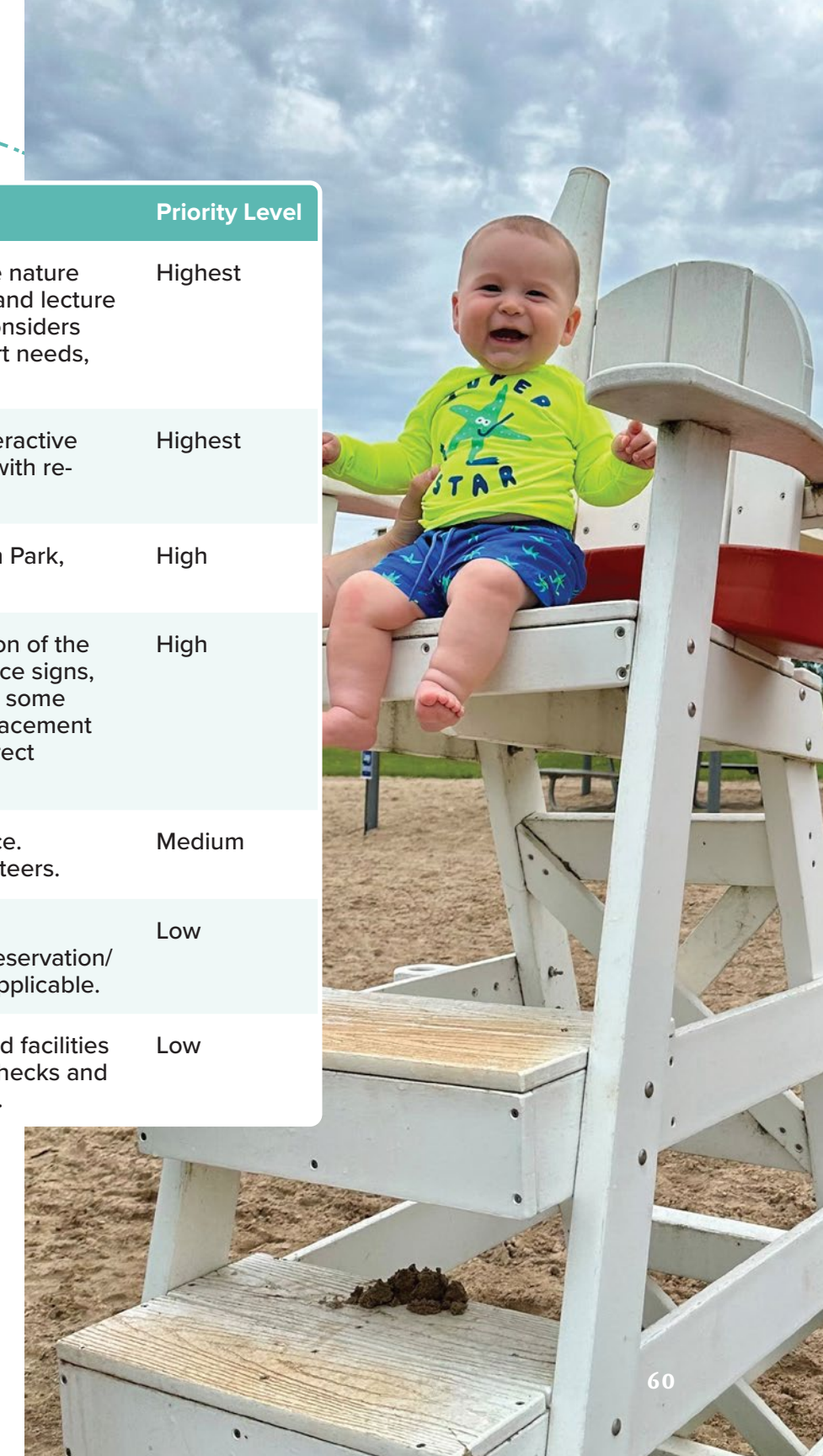


## Program Recommendations

### Program Actions

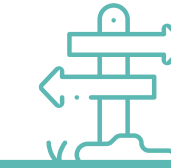
### Priority Level

- | Program Actions   | Priority Level |
|---|----------------|
| 1 Expand events and programs across seasons, including diverse offerings like nature education, community events, winter programming, outdoor fitness classes, and lecture series to engage various demographics. Maintain a program calendar that considers participant demand, equipment-lending needs, staffing and volunteer support needs, and weather-closure protocols.  | Highest        |
| 2 Integrate technology throughout the park system including mobile maps, interactive trail guides, QR-coded interpretive signage, and a unified online park finder with real-time conditions, accessibility details, and event information.   | Highest        |
| 3 Support competitive recreation and the formation of tournaments at Plamann Park, including football tournaments, disc golf tournaments, etc.  | High           |
| 4 Develop and implement a signage replacement program, following completion of the Parks Department’s brand strategy. Standardized wayfinding signage, entrance signs, directional markers, interpretive displays, and digital mapping integration. As some signs throughout the system are newer and functional, first prioritize the replacement of signs that are faded, missing, inconsistent, outdated, or that present incorrect information. | High           |
| 5 Launch an invasive species mitigation program to preserve ecological balance. Consider mitigation needs, educational resources, and ways to involve volunteers.   | Medium         |
| 6 Expand the Parks Department’s equipment lending/rental program. Consider equipment needs, equitable fee structures, training for staff/volunteers, and reservation/maintenance/safety protocols. Pursue grants to purchase equipment where applicable.  | Low            |
| 7 Establish a parking management program to monitor parking use at parks and facilities to avoid overcrowding. Track parking space usage with simple counts/spot checks and set thresholds to flag the potential need for future improvements or changes.   | Low            |





## Planning Recommendations



Planning Actions	Priority Level
1 Analyze program participation and user satisfaction to ensure the County is working toward its CORP goals and objectives.	Highest
2 Conduct an analysis of staff capacities and system service requirements by mapping tasks to FTEs. Develop an action plan based on the findings, incorporating metrics like feasibility to expand the park system relative to existing staff capacity.	High
3 Create a rolling maintenance plan and schedule tied to asset lifecycle costs to use for capital budgeting.	High
4 Develop or maintain a park master plan for every park site to guide investment, programming, and site missions aligned to the CORP vision; right-size scope by site context; use a consistent template and structured engagement protocols.	High
5 Commission a brand development and awareness initiative to establish a consistent visual identity and messaging of the County Park System; deliver brand standards, signage/digital templates, and co-branding guidelines.	Medium
6 In 2031, prepare the Outagamie County CORP update for 2032–2036.	Medium
7 Continue to build out the Parks Department’s asset inventory tool to monitor assets and prioritize investments based on condition and safety. Over time, this inventory should be used to determine when to place projects on the Park’s maintenance plan (see recommendation below).	Medium
8 Conduct AARP and Crime Prevention through Environmental Design audits of park sites to identify areas of improvement.	Medium
9 As opportunities arise, evaluate potential park acquisition sites using the decision-making criteria offered in this Plan to advance the CORP vision, goals, and objectives.	Medium
10 Once wetlands are established, evaluate transforming the County’s wetland mitigation bank into a public natural space through development of a concept plan and funding strategy. The site could incorporate pathways (e.g., raised boardwalks), educational signage, and viewing platforms to enhance appreciation of wetland ecosystems.	Low
11 While the County assesses the feasibility of a seasonal campground at Trappers Lane for specific users interested in longer stays, continue to explore opportunities for an additional (or alternative) campground that caters to traditional weekend / short-term campers within Outagamie County.	Low

## Trail Recommendations

Trail Development Actions	Priority Level
<p>1 Help implement the Outagamie County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan, specifically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strengthen links between the Newton Blackmour, Wiouwash, and CE Trails to Downtown Appleton, the Fox Cities, and Wisconsin 96.</li> <li>Advocate for connectivity to the Fox River Trail in Brown County to enable seamless regional access.</li> <li>Pursue connectivity along critical routes such as County Highway E, JJ, and ZZ.</li> </ul>	Highest
<p>2 Support direct links between trails like the Newton Blackmour Trail and Mosquito Hill Nature Center, as well as between state natural areas and other local/regional parks countywide.</p>	High
<p>3 Address safety concerns along the CE trail such as repairing corroded pedestrian underpass culverts and improving lighting for visibility during early morning or evening use.</p>	High
<p>4 Support the development of diverse biking trails by evaluating the feasibility of single-track/mountain biking trails in the county, for instance, at View Ridge Natural Area.</p>	Medium
<p>5 Expand non-paved trails with representing varying difficulties (e.g., from smooth paths to technical terrain) using sustainable practices to enhance hiking opportunities, while also continuing to accommodate paved options for accessibility and usability for people of different abilities.</p>	Medium
<p>6 Upgrade the Wiouwash State Trail's gravel surfaces for all-weather durability.</p>	Low
<p>7 Add all-season rest areas along Wiouwash State Trail.</p>	Low

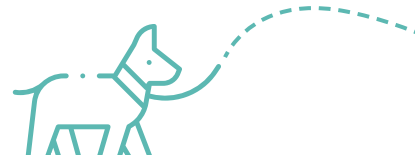


## System-Wide and Multi-Park Improvement Projects

System-Wide and Multi-Park Improvement Actions	Priority Level
<p>1 Upgrade river access sites with visitor amenities including restrooms, paved parking, and fish cleaning stations. Repair water access features (e.g., docks, fishing piers, boat launches) when needed, and support environmental restoration efforts.</p>	High
<p>2 Continue to improve accessibility and inclusion features in parks. Add accessible seating, picnic areas, and play areas in parks. Evaluate opportunities to expand multi-generational and sensory-friendly play elements and activities. Expand shaded rest areas and add additional seating and hydration stations throughout parks. Integrate braille signage, tactile maps, and quiet/sensory spaces.</p>	High
<p>3 Where possible, transform turf and low-use areas into areas/gardens with native plantings, pollinator plants, and wildflowers. Identify target areas, develop a conversion schedule, and seek grants to help fund the transition.</p>	Medium
<p>4 Improve limited cell reception and Wi-Fi connectivity at boat launches and along trails.</p>	Medium
<p>5 At park sites, install year-round, gender-neutral, single-stall restrooms with family-style accessibility features to cater to diverse user needs.</p>	Medium



## Specific Park Improvement Projects



Specific Park Improvement Actions	Priority Level
<b>Mosquito Hill Nature Center (MHNC)</b>	
1 Prioritize the maintenance of existing facilities until the adoption of a master plan for MHNC can guide a new strategic direction. Develop a maintenance plan for the County's capital budget for added transparency.	Highest
2 Develop a master plan for MHNC that reflects the community's vision. Prior to initiating the planning project, consider the lessons and findings learned from the 2018 master planning project and from 2025 community engagement.	Medium
<b>Plamann Park</b>	
1 Continue to oversee and manage the Parks Office and Maintenance Complex facility project through delivery. If a public indoor park space is included in the design, evaluate best practices for activating the space to foster community gathering.	Highest
2 Continue to implement the Plamann Park Master Plan (2019) to complete recommended park improvement projects.	Highest
3 Activate the Plamann Park athletic fields to maximize facility use and encourage greater community participation and engagement.	High
4 Evaluate upgrades and improvements to the Plamann Park disc golf course.	Medium
<b>Barker Park</b>	
1 Develop a comprehensive feasibility study and concept plan to guide future infrastructure improvements. If enhancements (e.g., park shelter, restrooms, playground) to improve site use are feasible, identify potential funding sources and partnerships to support the plan.	Low
<b>Barks and Recreation Dog Park</b>	
1 Conduct regular inspections to ensure new amenities are in optimal working condition. Establish a routine maintenance schedule to address upkeep needs and issues as they arise.	Medium
<b>Northland Dog Park</b>	
1 Formulate a comprehensive closure plan for Northland Dog Park, including identifying the final operational date. Ensure the closure plan and date are prominently communicated through park signage, the official website, and social media to keep the community informed of upcoming changes.	Medium

## Specific Park Improvement Projects

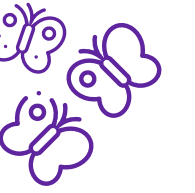
Specific Park Improvement Actions	Priority Level
<b>Multi-Generational Playground</b>	
1 Design a multigenerational playground on the Brewster Campus with diverse play equipment and amenities. Engage a broad cross-section of residents and stakeholders during the design process to maximize inclusivity, accessibility, and community ownership.	High
2 Establish a clear implementation timeline, considering key phases such as design finalization, procurement, construction, and public launch (grand opening).	High
3 Collaborate with community partners and local organizations to secure funding and volunteer support.	High
<b>Trappers Lane Campground</b>	
1 Work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to assess the feasibility and regulatory compliance of constructing a boat launch on site along the Wolf River. The viability of water access may be a determining factor in the progression of plans to establish a campground at this location.	Medium
<b>Treaty of the Cedars</b>	
1 Improve the Treaty of the Cedars Historical Site to enhance public access to the Fox River and increase community awareness of the site's historical significance.	Low
2 Work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to assess the feasibility and regulatory compliance of constructing a kayak launch on site along the Fox River.	Low
<b>View Ridge Natural Area</b>	
1 Evaluate the fiscal and site feasibility of opening up View Ridge Natural Area to single-track/ mountain biking as shown in its concept plan.	Medium
2 <i>(Contingent on above recommendation)</i> If View Ridge Natural Area is further developed, consider updating the park name to be more inclusive of its new amenities, and help to establish a "Friends of" group for the park.	Low





CHAPTER  
07

# Making It Happen



This chapter provides a framework for action. It outlines how the County and its partners will work together to implement the Plan, prioritize investments, track progress, and adapt over time.

## Banding Together for Success

Successful implementation of the CORP depends on coordinated action among different actors. No single entity can deliver the full vision alone. Instead, progress will be achieved through shared responsibility, collaboration, and sustained engagement across sectors. This section details how each party contributes to the shared vision:

- ◆ **Parks Department as the Orchestrator:** The County Parks Department is the primary driver of implementation. It is responsible for advancing recommendations, managing timelines, and aligning resources with priorities. They coordinate communication among the County Board, advisory groups, and other departments to ensure informed decision-making. Through public meetings and ongoing outreach, the department incorporates community input and fosters trust throughout the planning and implementation process.
- ◆ **County Board as Strategist:** The County Board provides policy direction and strategic oversight to ensure parks and recreation investments align with broader County goals. The Board establishes priorities, adopts policies, and exercises fiscal stewardship by approving budgets, allocating funding, and evaluating long-term financial impacts. Board leadership is also critical in advocating for parks and recreation as an essential public service.
- ◆ **Municipal Parks Departments as Collaborators:** City, Village, and Town governments are key partners in building a countywide park and recreation system. Coordinating planning efforts, aligning investments, and sharing data and expertise build a connected and complementary network of parks, trails, and programs. Municipalities address local needs, allowing the County to focus on regional and destination facilities—reducing duplication while expanding recreation.
- ◆ **Partner and Nonprofits as Innovators:** Partner agencies and nonprofit organizations play a vital role in expanding capacity and innovation. These organizations support education, programming, and outreach. Through collaborative program delivery, fundraising, volunteer mobilization, and grant partnerships, they help extend the reach and impact of County initiatives while strengthening community connections.
- ◆ **Community Catalysts as Advocates:** Community groups, volunteers, and informal leaders serve as catalysts for success by championing parks and recreation initiatives. They raise awareness, influence public support, and help shape positive perceptions of projects and investments. Through fundraising efforts, sponsorships, and community events, these advocates provide valuable momentum and help ensure projects reflect local values and needs.
- ◆ **Citizens as the Heartbeat:** Residents are at the core of the CORP's success. By participating in engagement efforts, using park facilities, volunteering, and sharing feedback, citizens help guide decision-making and refine services. Active use of parks and trails not only justifies continued investment but also strengthens wellbeing, social connection, and stewardship of shared spaces.

## Turning Vision into Reality: Implementation and Phasing

The recommendations outlined in Chapter 6 are intended to be implemented over time and will require flexibility in response to funding availability, staffing capacity, partnerships, and external opportunities.

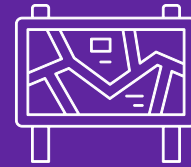
The priority levels assigned to recommendations in Chapter 6 guide sequencing rather than dictate rigid timelines. Higher-priority actions generally reflect critical needs, safety concerns, or strategic investments aligned with community goals. Medium-priority actions generally support system enhancements and incremental improvements, while low-priority actions often represent longer-term opportunities, activities with less community demand, or aspirational initiatives that lack urgency.

The highest priority recommendations, as determined through this process, warrant increased emphasis and focus over the planning horizon. In no particular order, these are:

- ♥ **Expand** events and programs across seasons, including diverse offerings like nature education, community events, winter programming, outdoor fitness classes, and lecture series to engage various demographics. Maintain a program calendar that considers participant demand, equipment-lending needs, staffing and volunteer support needs, and weather-closure protocols.
- ♥ **Analyze** program participation and user satisfaction to ensure the County is working toward its CORP goals and objectives.
- ♥ **Help** implement the Outagamie County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan.
- ♥ **Continue** to implement the Plamann Park Master Plan (2019) to complete recommended park improvement projects.
- ♥ **Continue** to oversee and manage the Parks Office and Maintenance Complex facility project at Plamann Park through delivery. If a public indoor park space is included in the design, evaluate best practices for activating the space to foster community gathering.
- ♥ **Prioritize** the maintenance of existing facilities until the adoption of a master plan for MHNC can guide a new strategic direction. Develop a maintenance plan for the County's capital budget for added transparency.
- ♥ **Explore** establishing a Parks Foundation or endowment to diversify and stabilize funding. Evaluate fund structures, gift acceptance and investment policies, and the tradeoffs of this approach. Discuss options with the County Board.
- ♥ **Standardize** incident reporting and emergency markers; coordinate with Sheriff/EMS on administrative response protocols and training.
- ♥ **Build** a coordinated partnerships program to be more intentional about partnerships and community engagement with nonprofits, schools, "Friends of" groups, senior centers, early childhood/family-serving organizations, youth clubs, cultural and disability advocacy groups, health/wellness providers, Tribal governments, etc.
- ♥ **Standardize** Parks Department relationships with partners. Create MOU templates, volunteer management and risk/insurance forms, branding and procurement procedures, and decision-making workflows.
- ♥ **Explore** a financial strategy to sustain MHNC given growing maintenance costs and comparatively low revenues.
- ♥ **Draft** a volunteer policy, clearly defining roles, responsibilities, access and decision-making limitations, and training requirements to ensure effective participation and support for event or initiative execution. Further, establish procedures for tracking volunteer participation, hours, performance, and compliance to ensure accountability, effective engagement, and successful events/initiatives.
- ♥ **Integrate** technology throughout the park system including mobile maps, interactive trail guides, QR-coded interpretive signage, and a unified online park finder with real-time conditions, accessibility details, and event information.

However, high priority may not always equate to immediacy. A high-priority recommendation may face constraints such as funding gaps, land acquisition challenges, or regulatory hurdles that delay implementation. Conversely, a lower-priority action may advance quickly if it aligns with ongoing staff efforts, available grant funding, partnerships, or time-sensitive opportunities. This flexible approach allows the County to remain responsive while still advancing the CORP's overarching vision.

## Tracking Progress: Measuring Success



Implementation of the CORP will be guided by measurable outcomes to ensure accountability and continuous improvement. The goals and objectives outlined in Chapter 2 provide the primary framework for evaluating progress. In addition, the Parks Department may track broader performance indicators to assess overall system health and effectiveness, including:

- ♥ **User Engagement Metrics:** Participation levels, facility usage, and satisfaction as measured through surveys, public feedback, and program data.
- ♥ **Environmental Outcomes:** Protection of natural resources, habitat improvements, and sustainability practices associated with park development and management.
- ♥ **Program Performance:** Effectiveness, reach, and inclusivity of programs and partnerships.

Regular evaluation allows the County to adjust strategies, refine priorities, and communicate progress to the County Board, stakeholders, and the public.

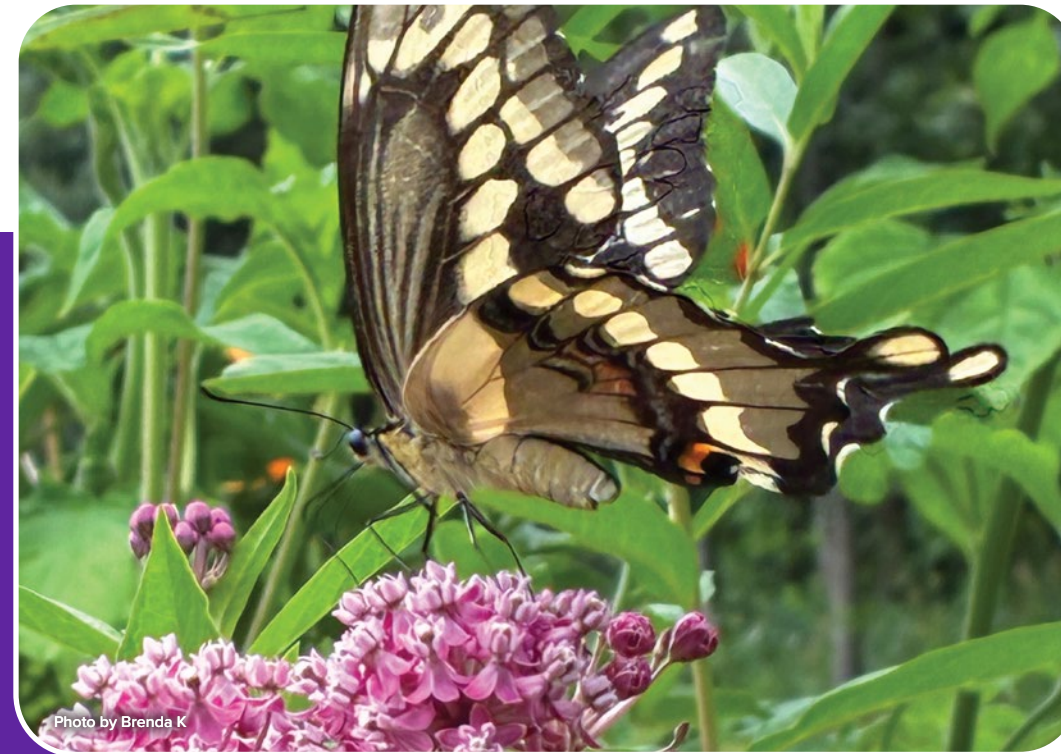


Photo by Brenda K



Photo by Gregory T Photography

## Decision-Making Framework

Beyond the guiding principles in Chapter 2, this section provides a framework for consistent, transparent, and sustainable plan implementation—aligning parks and recreation investments with County goals, community values, and fiscal responsibility.

### Acquisition and Expansion Decision-Making Criteria

This framework supports decisions related to acquiring land, developing new facilities, or expanding existing assets. Staff may assess investments against the following criteria:

- ♥ Does the proposal address a need/goal identified in the CORP or other adopted plan?
- ♥ Is there demonstrated public interest or demand?
- ♥ Does it provide opportunities or services that are not available elsewhere?
- ♥ Does it address a need that cannot reasonably be met by another local government/provider?
- ♥ Does it protect, enhance, or responsibly manage natural, cultural, or historical resources?
- ♥ Does it preserve land that would otherwise be lost to development?
- ♥ Does it align with the maintenance budget or include a revenue stream to offset costs?
- ♥ Are costs justified by expected benefits to the community?
- ♥ Can investments be leveraged with other agencies, organizations, or funding sources?





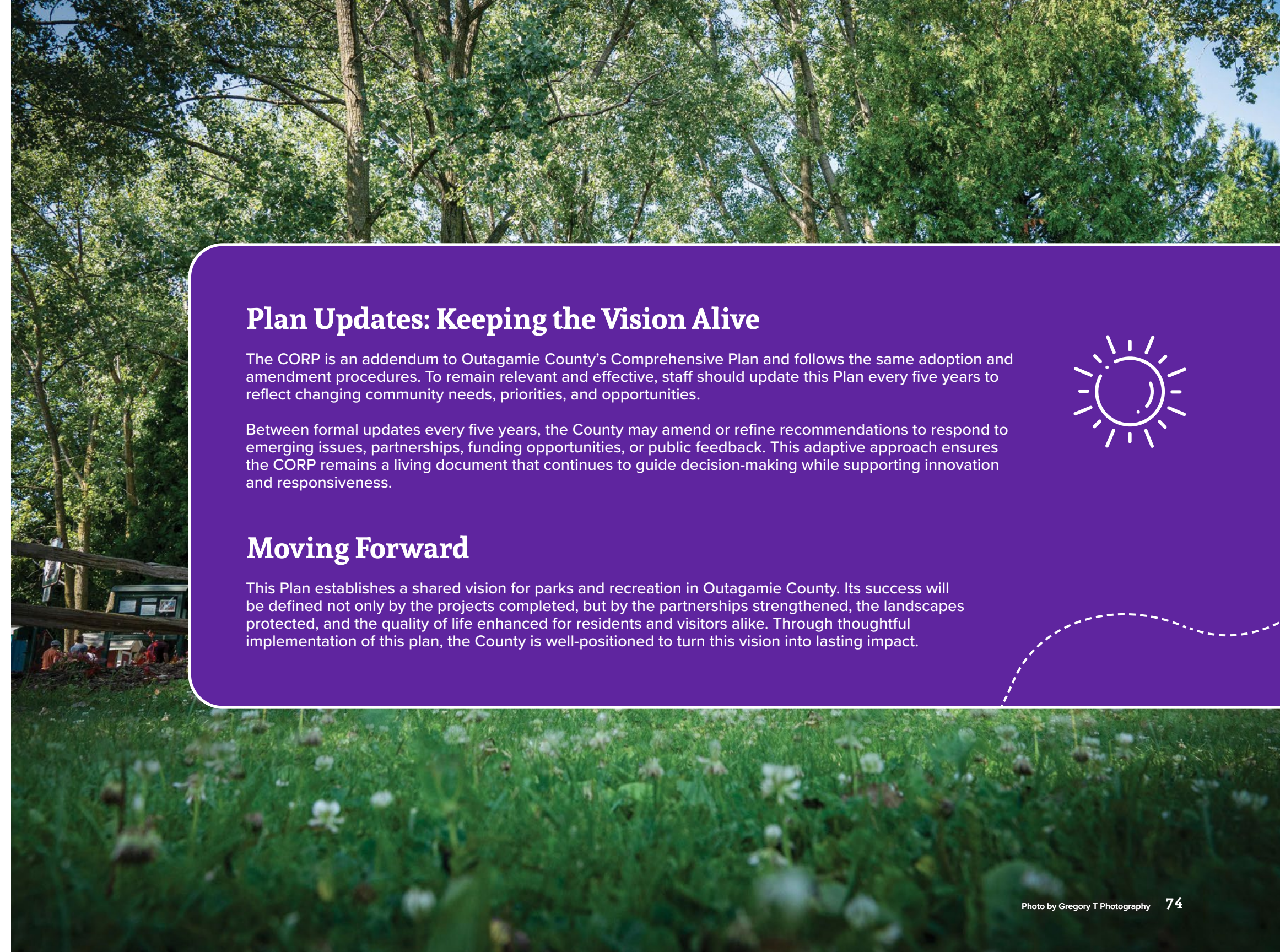
## Funding Toolbox to Fuel Our Initiatives

Delivering the CORP will require a diversified funding approach. Potential funding mechanisms include:

- ◆ **Federal, State, and Local Grants:** Competitive grant programs can support land acquisition, facility development, conservation, and programming. Examples include:
  - **Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program:** Offers multiple types of grants for land acquisition, park development, trails, habitat protection, and facility improvements; many grants require matching funds.
  - **Land & Water Conservation Fund (LWCF):** Provides matching grants for outdoor recreation land acquisition and development; administered by the Wisconsin DNR.
  - **Recreational Trails Program (RTP):** Federally funded and state-administered program that supports trails/trail-related facilities for motorized and non-motorized recreation.
  - **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP):** A federally competitive grant to create or improve recreation opportunities in urban or disadvantaged communities.
  - **Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP):** Can fund pedestrian, bicycle, and related trail projects that support transportation and recreation objectives.
  - **DOA Grants for Local Projects:** Wisconsin DOA capital grants support infrastructure projects with a statewide public purpose; requires local match.
  - **David L. & Rita E. Nelson Family Fund:** Funds support parks, recreation and waterways; education; health care; community services and community centers; and historic preservation, including lighthouses, museums, and historical societies.
  - **Fox Cities CVB Tourism Development Grant:** Can support tourism development projects, including attractions, amenities, and interactive, hands-on experiences as well as high-impact traveling exhibitions and certain types of signage. All projects must be likely to generate overnight hotel stays or enhance the visitor experience in the area.
- ◆ **Bonding:** Bonds may be used for large-scale capital projects that provide broad and long-term public benefit.
- ◆ **Joint Ventures:** Public-private partnerships can leverage shared investment, expertise, and resources.
- ◆ **Community Contributions:** Donations, sponsorships, and gift campaigns allow residents and businesses to directly support parks and recreation.
- ◆ **Endowments or a Parks Foundation:** Long-term funding mechanisms can support maintenance, programming, and future improvements.



Photo by Gregory T Photography



## Plan Updates: Keeping the Vision Alive

The CORP is an addendum to Outagamie County's Comprehensive Plan and follows the same adoption and amendment procedures. To remain relevant and effective, staff should update this Plan every five years to reflect changing community needs, priorities, and opportunities.

Between formal updates every five years, the County may amend or refine recommendations to respond to emerging issues, partnerships, funding opportunities, or public feedback. This adaptive approach ensures the CORP remains a living document that continues to guide decision-making while supporting innovation and responsiveness.



## Moving Forward

This Plan establishes a shared vision for parks and recreation in Outagamie County. Its success will be defined not only by the projects completed, but by the partnerships strengthened, the landscapes protected, and the quality of life enhanced for residents and visitors alike. Through thoughtful implementation of this plan, the County is well-positioned to turn this vision into lasting impact.



## **Outagamie County Parks Department**

[www.outagamie.gov/Our-County/Parks](http://www.outagamie.gov/Our-County/Parks)

**Adopted June 17, 2026**