



VII. Wood County Recreation Moving Forward

Outdoor recreation planning involves more than just drawing on a map, or taking pictures of existing and potential recreation areas. Both, an action program and implementation strategy need to be developed to guide local decision making over the next several years. Most importantly, these programs and strategies should relate to the information compiled during earlier phases of the planning process.



Action Program

The purpose of the following action program is to:

- Identify public policy measures and specific acquisition, development and improvement projects.
- Provide recommendations and general guidelines in which decisions regarding outdoor recreation improvements can be made.
- Identify strategies and tactics that solve or reduce deficiencies in Wood County's outdoor recreation system.
- Identify a dynamic Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) based upon community needs, priorities and funding opportunities.
- Provide a program for future operation and maintenance of Wood County's outdoor recreation system.



The private outdoor recreation sector has total responsibility in providing specific types of activities and lesser responsibility for others. The recommendations that follow assign responsibility to both public and private enterprise. In addition, private enterprise must be constantly aware of its impacts on the natural resources it depends upon. Frequently, the necessity of making a profit makes this a difficult assignment. Nevertheless, it is important for continued business success to safeguard resources against degradation.

The following recommendations reflect the desired improvements that the Wood County Parks and Forestry Department believe should be made in order to meet the recreation needs and priorities of its residents and visitors. Additionally, the Departments 2019-2023 Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was developed to coordinate implementation of improvements over the next 5 years. The CIP is presented in (Appendix E) of this plan. The recommendations and CIP are the result of a combination of public participation efforts including: public hearings, focus groups, workshops, and staff discussions. Additionally, a community survey was sent out to the public in 2018.

A phased development approach will allow improvements to be made incrementally over time as the funding becomes available. It is important that outdoor recreation improvements be coordinated with other public and private investments to maximize the effectiveness of each.

Future County Park & Recreation Area Projects

Nepco Lake County Park

- Addition to shelter building to include a covered outdoor patio area
- Trail head parking lot improvements
- Improved trail head and trail signage
- Playground equipment replacement
- Replacing rip-rap and walk trail between boat landing and beach area
- Treatment and control of invasive species in the park
- Replacement of outdated playground equipment

South Wood County Park

- Campground addition, to include full hook up and pull through sites. To include roadways, dump station, shower building, playground, ranger station, and additional restrooms as needed
- Construction of a 2nd shower building in existing campground
- Full hookup improvements to existing campsites
- Paving of multi-use trail on the north side of Lake Wazeecha
- Replacement of campground vault toilets with flush toilet buildings
- Replacement of outdated playground equipment
- White Beach remodel, which will include: beach house remodel, retaining wall replacement, and accessible walk path down to the beach
- Open shelter building improvements, to include: parking lot expansion, serving area addition, and flush toilet bathroom addition
- Enclosed shelter improvements for cool weather events- heated bathrooms, furnace for shelter building
- Addition of patio area near shelter buildings with canopy/gazebo for weddings and special events
- Construction of an accessible canoe/kayak launch area
- Consider disc golf course relocation to improve safety of walking trail
- Create a fenced in “off leash” area for dogs
- Improve fish population by improving fish habitat in lake
- Look into options for enclosing Red Sands Beach Pavilion to reduce wind and during cool temperatures
- Red Sands Beach terracing to reduce erosion and to enhance area to attract more events

North Wood County Park

- Construction of a new multi-use bridge to access the campground in order to eliminate high water issues that currently occur with the existing crossing
- Construction of a new open shelter building on the SE side of the beach area
- Paving of the existing disc golf course parking lot
- Replacement of outdated playground equipment
- Concrete overlay of lower dam

- Construction of a new snowmobile/ATV/pedestrian bridge near lower dam
- Emergency Exit Road improvements
- Walk trail paving
- Disc Golf course drainage improvements and walk trails
- Construction of a larger wood shed for campground
- Improve existing campsites that are in need of recycled blacktop
- Add a basketball court to campground
- Swimming pond construction near meadow area

Dexter County Park

- Improve sections of multi-use trail system with black top or recycled blacktop
- Expand campground to include ATV accessible sites and amenities
- Replacement of outdated playground equipment
- Outside patio area at shelter building
- Paved walk trail, with fishing pier, near shelter building
- Paved walk trail from shelter to restrooms and playground
- Swimming pond construction near entrance field
- Remodel existing beach restroom, adding shelter areas which will replace old changing rooms
- Improve fish population by improving fish habitat in lake
- Consider disc golf in areas of the park
- Construction of an ATV/UTV trail head with amenities, and trails in adjoining property

Powers Bluff County Park

- Construction of single track and multi-use trail system
- Improve signage for the existing trail system to include interpretive signage for cultural, and natural history of the park
- Dig a recreational/fishing pond, and create a sledding hill and ice skating rink near trail head
- Construction of entrance road, parking lot, and shelter building at the trail head
- Continue entrance road and install 3-phase power to the base of the ski/tube hill
- Relocate the maintenance shop from the top of the hill to the bottom of the hill
- Restore disturbed areas within the sensitive areas on the south slope of the park
- Dig cooling pond and install snow making equipment
- Lengthen the ski run and tow system, and lengthen the tube tow system
- Install lights on the tube and ski hill
- Install playground equipment near shelter buildings

ATV Intensive Use Area

- Install drinking fountain
- Reduce size of parking lot and improve with pavement or recycled blacktop
- Install serving counter top in shelter building with increased outlets
- Create primitive camping area
- Consider additional trails in adjacent county forest

Public Rifle Range

- Parking lot improvements
- Construction of vault toilet
- Create berms between shooting lanes
- Consider archery shooting area

Other County Park Areas and County Forest Property

- Construction of additional ATV/UTV trails, and support facilities
- Construction of single track trails, and support facilities
- Construction of horse riding trails, and support facilities
- Create “off leash” areas for dogs

Public Policy Measures

The following general public policy statements apply to Wood County and the towns, villages and cities within the county.

Community Parks

Upgrade community park facilities in terms of quality and variety of facilities provided, and improve attractiveness of natural settings through landscaping where needed.

Neighborhood Parks

Develop centrally located neighborhood parks in residential areas.

Use of Easements

Utilize purchase of easements in order to limit land acquisition costs for neighborhood parks. Communities are encouraged to procure easements for the use of presently vacant property in locations appropriate for neighborhood park development.

Park Dedication

Require residential subdividers to dedicate a portion of subdivided land for permanent park and open space use in communities which are experiencing significant residential growth. Neighborhood parks may be acquired in this manner in newly developing residential areas. Local landowners should also be encouraged to dedicate land to their communities for recreational uses. Small town memorial parks have been acquired through the generosity of local citizens. If citizens are made aware of community needs, this form of private action may continue to enrich the public resources of small communities.

Snowmobile Routes

Integrate local snowmobile route plans with that of the Wood County Parks and Forestry Department in an effort to provide a continuous route for snowmobilers to follow on streets and rights-of-way in areas of the community where snowmobile noise and travel will cause the least amount of nuisance to community residents. Such action will not only increase the

compatibility of snowmobiles and community residents, but the provision of a continuous route will encourage economic gains to Wood County's communities. Continue to maintain the connectivity of the Wood County trail network to the statewide network of trails.

Specialized Facilities

Encourage development of specialized facilities by the private sector. Specialized facilities, such as golf clubs and marinas, can be an important asset to public recreational facilities. Quality and availability for public use should be emphasized.

Municipal-School District Cooperation

Promote continued and increased cooperation between municipalities and school districts in meeting recreational needs. With good planning, cooperation may take the form of joint land acquisition and/or facility development cost-sharing. Increased municipal use of existing school facilities during non-school hours should be encouraged.

Senior Citizen Involvement

Involve senior citizens in community park development and beautification, and provide recreational facilities for their use. Senior citizens constitute a growing proportion of the County's population and can contribute many ideas, as well as their labor, in providing a well-balanced park and recreation system.

Service Group Involvement

Involve organized service groups in needed park and recreation development, including development of competitive sports areas and neighborhood parks. Traditionally, service groups have played an active part in the development of park facilities in Wood County. Several local Lions Clubs have provided the impetus behind local park development. Continued activity of this type should be encouraged.

Grant Programs

Take advantage of state and federal financial and technical assistance programs that are designed to aid communities in meeting recreational needs. Maintain community eligibility for such programs by having an approved outdoor recreation program updated at least once every 5 years. Other non-profit community grants should also be considered for these improvements.

Community Beautification

All communities should recognize that community appearance is an important component of a recreation program. Maintained streets and sidewalks, attractive trees and shrubs, well cared for homes and commercial buildings, public open space, and parks are principle contributors to community beautification. Such a program is most rewarding to persons engaged in passive recreation.

Youth Programs

Few summer recreational opportunities have been planned for the high school age youth. School activities provide most recreational outlets during winter months, but during the summer, there is a distinct void. Local units of government and the County Parks Department should combine efforts to study what recreation activities would be best received by this age-group and what opportunities there are to provide for them at public parks.

Program Costs

Communities should carefully monitor operations and maintenance (O&M) costs when developing or expanding a parks program. A too ambitious acquisition and/or development program can easily lead to annual O & M costs larger than the community can afford to meet. Communities should pool their resources to provide those activities that require large annual capital investments.

Winter Activities

All communities should provide winter outdoor recreation facilities. Skating and sliding sports, sledding, tobogganing and skiing, can generally be provided without large investments if the resources are available, specifically hills.

Future Planning

At a minimum, all communities should reassess their recreational needs near the end of the 5-year period covered by this plan. More frequent appraisals of needs may be called for under certain conditions, such as extreme variations in funding capability, rapid population changes, actions of other units of government and private enterprise, as well as the recognition of new legislation and public programs.

Capital Improvements Programs

Municipal officials should develop 5-year capital improvements programs for recreation that reflect implementation of proposals made in their plans and the priorities they place on them. To be functional, the programs must be flexible and be subject to annual review. The 2019-2023 Wood County Parks and Forestry CIP is presented in (Appendix E).

In developing a recreation program, care should be taken that the annual cost of maintenance does not exceed an amount the community can afford to pay. Too often, an ambitious program loses community support as a result of prohibitive maintenance costs.

Historic, Scientific & Archaeological Sites

Preservation and restoration of sites with historic, scientific and archaeological significance can be rewarding additions to any community's recreation program. This is especially true in areas oriented to serving a significant tourist trade. A study of potential areas is recommended.

Friends Groups

Friends groups are made up of volunteers and could be utilized to maintain parks and trails through efforts such as garbage pickup and fund raising. The creation of friends groups should be encouraged to help with park and trail maintenance and improvements, and other projects that will improve the overall recreation opportunities in the County.

Conflicting Uses

In an effort to meet the diverse recreation demands of park and trail users, the County many times inadvertently creates an environment of conflicting recreation uses. The County should remain responsive to conflicting uses and try to remedy them if at all possible.

Acquisition, Development & Improvement Projects

Wood County is not assigned the responsibility to implement all the recommendations contained in this document. On the contrary, some are specifically intended for implementation by other units of government or by private enterprise. Also, a strong possibility exists that recreation interests other than the County may be willing to implement portions of the program assigned to the County. There should be few objections to implementation of the County program by others, as long as implementation meets the criteria established by the County. The following recommendations are not listed in any order of priority.



- Providers of recreation, both public and private, are presently left largely to their own devices in developing their programs. Sustained and effective coordination of their endeavors is necessary to assure maximum satisfaction of recreation desires. Wood County appears to be the most logical authority to exert leadership in this area, with this plan as a key phase in the County's leadership role.

One reason for recommending coordination of recreation efforts lies within the framework of state and federal financial aid and loan programs to public and private recreation sponsors. Requirements for participation in these programs often include an evaluation of need and the establishment of priorities. These requirements cannot be fulfilled unless there is a program of continuous planning supplemented by active coordination of all recreation interests.

To achieve such a program, it is recommended that the County Board continue its support of the Highway Infrastructure and Recreation Committee and Conservation,

Education and Economic Development Committee as the County's recreation coordinating body. The Committee's function would be to:

- Act as a liaison between public agencies and private enterprise.
 - Keep recreation plans updated.
 - Coordinate the County recreation program with town, village, city and state park programs through the regular update of the countywide Park, Recreation, and Open Spaces Plan so that wasteful duplication of facilities does not occur.
 - Support local communities when they desire to provide recreational facilities of regional significance that will benefit all of Wood County and its economy.
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- It is recommended that all communities in Wood County adopt uniform standards for recreational development. Such standards should include common park definitions, acreage per thousand population guides, service area adaptations and a uniform philosophy in regard to the use of school-owned recreation areas, roles of units of government in the overall recreation program, use of state and federal grants and the role of private enterprise. An example of standards for parks is presented in (Section VI).
 - Construct, maintain, and/or improve park shelters to accommodate seasonal and year round use by County residents for private or community events.
 - Consider having flexible park opening and closing dates, and times, to accommodate the differing uses within the park.
 - Small communities in Wood County should make an effort to provide at least one park each within reasonable walking distance of all community residents. These parks should provide playground equipment, picnic tables, cooking grills, a shelter with attached sanitary facilities, a playfield for baseball/softball and soccer, and benches and tables for passive activities.
 - A detailed park plan for Powers Bluff County Park was adopted in 2005. This plan was intended to be a 10 to 15 year plan. The main recommendation from the plan, which was to acquire the property to the north, was completed in 2012. To complement the Long Range Master Plan for Powers Bluff, more detailed planning for the property has been completed, and should be developed as approved. A development map and project development summary is presented in (Appendix C) of this plan.
 - All providers of recreation facilities should make a determined effort to provide both service and recreation activities for physically and mentally handicapped persons.

Guidance and recommendations are available from public and quasi-public organizations who directly serve this segment of the County's population.

- Federal and state grant programs require consideration of the handicapped as part of the funding process. Projects submitted for funding assistance must recognize the needs of handicapped individuals and provide the necessary accommodations.
- For many years Wood County has been a destination for campers and outdoor enthusiasts. Efforts should be pursued to promote the parks, trails and campgrounds to increase campground occupancy rates and promote economic development through tourism in the County.
- The County and/or local municipalities can adopt some measures to benefit private recreation enterprise. The most common measures include zoning and resource protection. Zoning can regulate things such as billboards, use of surface waters and land use. It is apparent that there is a close relationship between zoning and resource protection, but the latter depends on other regulatory and management devices.
- All public school sites in the County should continue to have associated outdoor recreation facilities open for public use when school is not in session. Facilities in need of extra care, such as a football field or track, are exceptions to this recommendation. Restricted use of school recreation sites can only result in added costs to the taxpayers by dictating duplication of recreational facilities. It is further recommended that municipalities in Wood County attempt to provide recreation areas in conjunction with school facilities wherever possible. An agreement between school and municipal officials assuring public use of school facilities and providing a means by which maintenance and replacement costs can be shared would be helpful.
- Prepare a Wood County ATV/UTV Master Plan. This plan should include analysis, recommendations and proposals to provide the framework to guide future ATV/UTV trail and route development. The plan should identify phasing, implementation schedules and priorities for action. The Wood County ATV/UTV Planning Map is presented in (Appendix H) of this plan. This map should be used for future planning purposes and master plan development.

➤ Except for Powers Bluff which is already a developed area, there are no slopes in Wood County capable of providing this type of recreational activity. Therefore, needs for skiing and tubing will have to be satisfied by Powers Bluff or outside the County. To continue to meet the need of skiing and tubing, the County should install lights to lengthen hours of operation that will help meet demand of this recreation activity, and improve safety by spreading peak use out over longer hours of operation. To improve the snow conditions and extend the winter recreation season at Powers Bluff, the County should consider purchasing snow making equipment. These items are included in the Powers Bluff development summary in (Appendix C).



➤ In recent years awareness of the impacts of invasive species has increased. Invasive species in many instances have the potential of impacting the recreational use of land and water in Wood County. Wood County should develop strategies as needed to control invasive species that impact the use of all County-owned property. Strategies and action plans should leverage the expertise of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and volunteer efforts of concerned citizens.



➤ Walking and bicycling continue to be very popular recreation activities for people of all ages. The existing walking/biking trails in County Parks should continue to be maintained, additional trails should be considered where appropriate and practical, and plans to connect County parks with trails developed. The Wood County Bicycle Map created by WDOT is included in (Appendix I) for reference and planning purposes.



➤ The County Parks provide approximately 10.7 miles of cross-country ski trails. The County should continue to provide ski trails by working with ski clubs and other groups that provide the volunteers necessary to maintain the trails. These trails should be designed as multi-use trails whenever possible to attract a variety of users, if user conflict can be managed.



➤ Wood County has become a destination for snowmobilers based on the efforts of 7 clubs to provide over 270 miles of snowmobile trails. The County Parks and Forestry Department plays a role in coordinating the efforts of these clubs. The County should continue its role in coordination



of the clubs.

- The County should continue to develop camp areas where camp sites are buffered by plant undergrowth and trees to create a “State Park” atmosphere.
- The possibility of providing seasonal, or longer term camping at Wood County campgrounds should be explored in reaction to increases in demand for seasonal camping sites and a low supply available in Wood County. Currently there is a 14 day maximum stay.
- The County should consider offering full hook up sites with water and sewer to accommodate demand for this type of campsite.
- The County should continue to monitor shoreline erosion, lake depths and overall water quality to ensure continued long-term recreational use and water quality of lakes in County Parks.
- Overall there are many options for canoeing/kayaking in the County, but lack of established routes known as “blue ways” may be a contributing factor to underutilization of many water bodies for this activity. The use of some “blue ways” may require annual clearing of trees and removal of other debris, a minimal amount of signage, and be subject to use limitations due to seasonal runoff or low water levels. The County along with the assistance of “friends groups” should look into the possibility of establishing “blue way” routes to promote the recreational use of waterways for canoeing/kayaking.

Funding Resources

The most common challenge is low funding for the development of park and outdoor recreation facilities. The most common remedies include finding alternative public revenue sources, soliciting donations, and obtaining grant funding. While the scope of the recommendations in this plan is large and may be beyond the current financial capability of Wood County and its municipalities, this should not influence adoption of the plan.

There are a wide variety of organizations in Wood County and Central Wisconsin ranging from snowmobile clubs and gun clubs to conservation organizations. Although the interests of many of these nonprofit organizations vary, many of the clubs have a common interest in working to improve the quality of parks, recreation, and open spaces in Wood County. The projects these organizations focus on include preservation of natural areas, development of recreation

facilities and trails, and education on natural resources or outdoor activities. These groups are not only effective at fund-raising to cover project costs, but include many members who contribute by volunteering their time and expertise.

The backbone of many organizations is its volunteers, and the success of proposed projects in this plan is dependent on the generosity of individuals, organizations and businesses who donate their time, talents, services and materials. Relying on volunteerism and donations to better local communities and accomplish projects can be challenging, but is welcomed since it does not require a large amount of tax-levied money for implementation. The volunteer experience is embraced by the community, and at the same time it can be personally gratifying and have a positive impact on your community.

Grant funding programs are available to assist in implementing this plan. Wood County and its municipalities should take advantage of any local, state and federal aid programs.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and sets out to meet a variety of conservation and recreation goals that protect and restore wildlife habitat and natural areas, and the quality of water resources and fish habitat. Chapter NR 51, Wis. Adm. Code guides the administration of grant funding through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Funding levels for grants are based on biennial budgeting of the state. Local units of government and nonprofit conservation organizations are eligible to apply for funding to be applied towards “nature based” projects and include the following programs: acquisition and development of local parks, urban rivers and urban green space, and acquisition of development rights. Projects that are eligible for funding are identified in NR 51.

Outdoor recreation grant programs administered by the WDNR and other related funding programs are detailed in (Appendix G) of this plan.

There are a variety of other funding opportunities that focus on parks and recreation facilities and activities. Some grant programs have funds available on a reoccurring basis while some are available on a one-time basis. County staff and elected officials should monitor grant funding opportunities on a regular basis.

Fundraising can bring the community together in an effort to achieve a common goal. This method of funding gives the community a sense of ownership in the projects and builds civic pride. Wood County should explore public/private partnerships to share the responsibility of providing a diverse, high quality parks and recreation system. Since fundraising and grant funding are so



important to the success of future outdoor recreation amenities in Wood County, the following strategies are important to identify and implement to ensure success:

- **Community Informational Documents-** Incorporate a form for donations into community informational documents, such as newsletters, pamphlets, and recreation maps.
- **Fundraising Committee-** Establish a fundraising committee tasked with coordinating funding efforts.
- **Donor Recognition-** Implement ways of recognizing the efforts of donors.
- **Grants-** Establish a grant writing team comprised of local leaders, citizens and others.

Wood County is also encouraging the formation of “friends groups” to assist with park and trail maintenance and improvement projects. The County will work to match up the resources of friends groups with necessary park projects. These groups may also be effective at raising funds for improvement projects. Should the opportunity present itself for a cooperative project between private and public entities, these groups would be an appropriate contact point for beginning the funding process.

Operation & Maintenance

The Wood County Parks and Forestry Department operates from their main office located in the Riverblock building in Wisconsin Rapids. Four maintenance shops are used in the Parks and Forestry system to maintain five major parks, three areas, and approximately 38,000 acres of County Forest. Thirteen full-time employees and 12 part-time seasonal employees are employed to maintain these areas. For 2019, the Parks and Forestry budgeted expenses are approximately \$1,750,000, to operate and maintain outdoor recreation facilities and areas. Budgeted revenues are approximately \$550,000 in park revenues, \$385,000 in forestry timber sale revenues, and \$328,000 from other revenue sources.

Implications of Capital Improvements on Operation & Maintenance Capabilities

The Wood County Highway Infrastructure and Recreation Committee has been very careful in the past to ensure that renovations, improvements and additions to park facilities are within the maintenance capabilities and budget of the Parks and Forestry Department. This practice has limited acquisition proposals in the past but has helped to ensure that the park properties that are currently managed will remain in excellent condition.