



**BELLE PRAIRIE COUNTY
PARK MASTER PLAN**

MORRISON COUNTY, MN

BELLE PRAIRIE COUNTY PARK MASTER PLAN

Submitted to
MORRISON COUNTY, MN



Approved by the Morrison County Board of Commissioners, September 2017

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WITH THANKS TO:

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Master Plan is to evaluate issues and needs within the existing Belle Prairie County Park (BPCP) facilities and to identify future site improvements that will reflect the needs and values of all potential users. This document is intended to act as a guide to Morrison County in the planning and implementation of park improvements.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The Belle Prairie County Park site was originally owned by the *Belle Prairie Franciscan Sisters* and, after changing ownership a few times, became the first county park in Morrison County in 1980. BPCP is 145.3 acres of park land situated along the east bank of the Mississippi River, adjacent to County State Aid Highway 76 (formerly State Highway 371). The park is a convergence of native prairie, virgin white pine stand, oak-savanna woodland, and floodplain terrace. BPCP serves 16 cities and 30 townships within Morrison County.

RESPONSIBLE ORGANIZATIONS

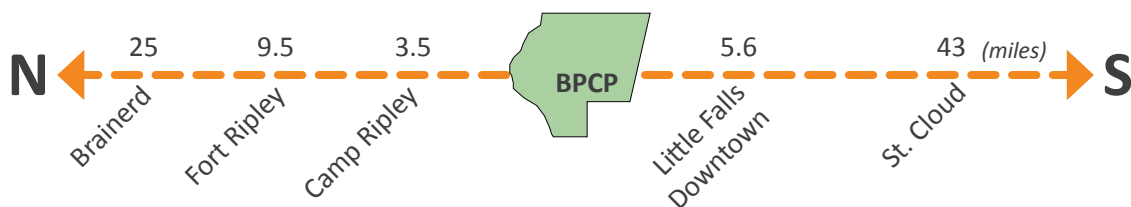
Morrison County owns and manages Belle Prairie County Park.

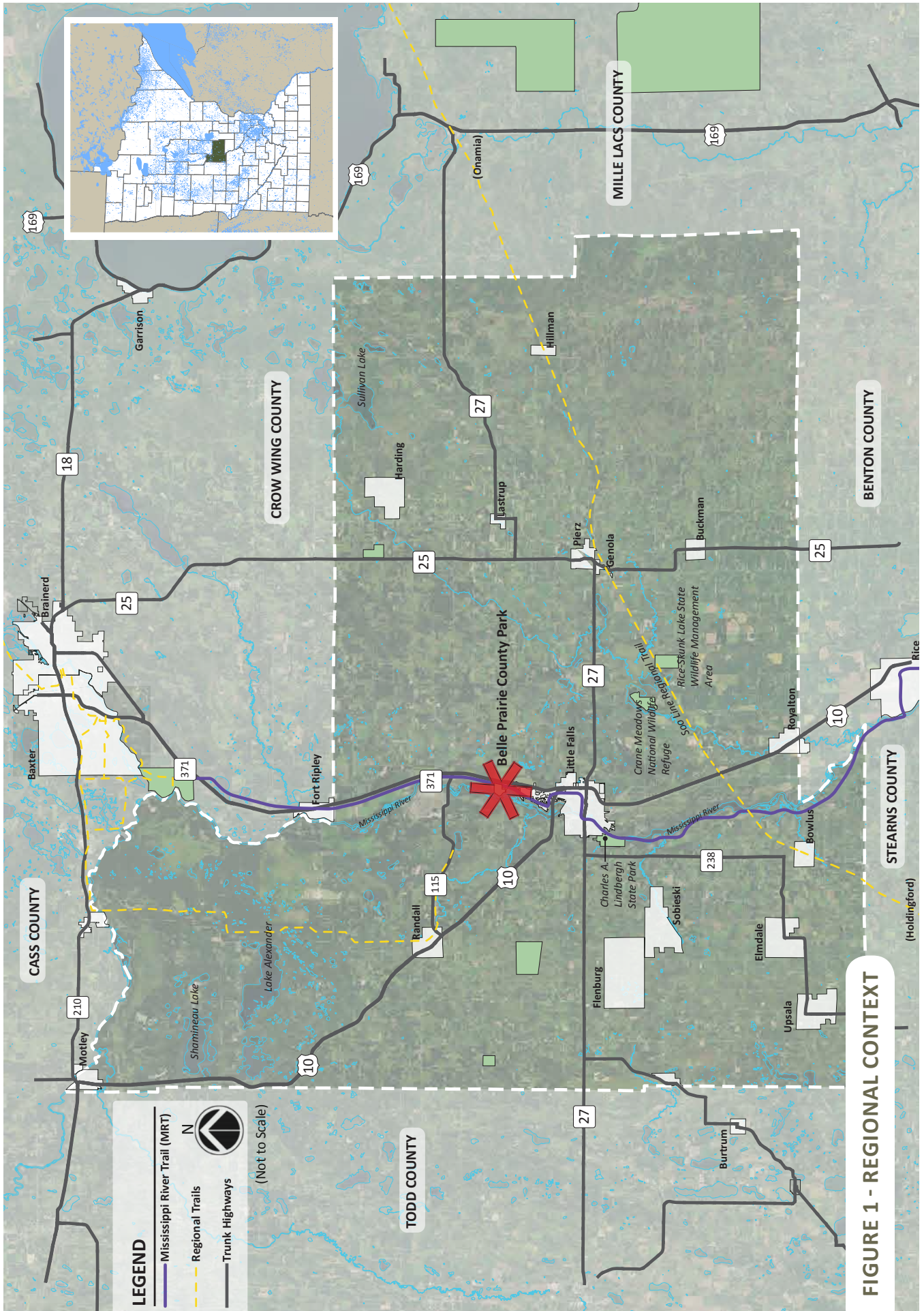


REGIONAL CONTEXT

Figure 1 illustrates Belle Prairie in a regional context. Located centrally in the county and just five miles north of Little Falls - the county seat - the park is a proven, outstanding venue to draw regional clientele.

Access to the park is multi-modal. The Mississippi River through this area is designated as wild and is part of the Department of Natural Resources State Water Trail. The park is promoted by the DNR for water trail users and is easily accessed by a landing along the river. In addition, Belle Prairie Park is also adjacent to the Mississippi River Trail (MRT, U.S. Bicycle Route 45), with the following destinations in close proximity:





2. SITE INFORMATION

Belle Prairie County Park (BPCP) is a popular regional destination for reunions, birthday parties, and anniversaries. It is the only County park within a 30-40 mile radius and acts as a public natural resource as well as a favored recreation destination.

SITE CHARACTERISTICS

Belle Prairie County Park is unique in its balance between the natural landscape and the man-made areas of play (as listed in 'Existing Site Facilities'). It has been a priority of the County, as well as previous land owners, to maintain and protect these distinct ecological features. BPCP is a convergence of native prairie, virgin white pine stand, oak savanna woodland, and floodplain terrace (black ash-silver maple). Since taking possession of the property, Morrison County has focused on preserving the majority of the park for its high biological diversity along with its geological, historical and archaeological significance. Projects that control undesirable and invasive species utilizing prairie restoration have been ongoing for many years. Restoration of the Oak Savanna began in 2013 with Great River Greening conducting outreach to provide the community opportunity to learn more about the park and participate in thinning the woodland and removal of the undesirable species.

Located within the floodplain terrace is a site designated as an "area of high cultural-resource sensitivity" with what looks to have been a Native American tool workshop (National Register site 21MO0017). Many stone fragments of what appear to be from the Archaic Period were found on this significant prehistoric cultural resource.



EXISTING SITE FACILITIES

The following list identifies the existing facilities and amenities available to users of Belle Prairie County Park. Refer to **Figure 2** for locations.

1. Hiking Trails/Mountain Biking Trails, approximately 1.54 miles (natural)
2. Picnic Shelter with Electric Plug-in
3. Playground and Play Area
4. Primitive Restrooms (two locations)
5. Picnic Areas with either grills or fire rings (various locations)
6. Horseshoes
7. Boat Landing and Parking
8. 9-Hole Disc Golf Course
9. River Access Points (3 locations)

FIGURE 2 - EXISTING SITE FACILITIES



LEGEND

- 1 Hiking Trails/Mountain Biking Trails
- 2 Picnic Shelter with Electric Plug-in
- 3 Playground and Play Area
- 4 Primitive Restrooms
- 5 Picnic Areas with either grills or fire rings
- 6 Horseshoes
- 7 Boat Landing and Parking
- 8 9-Hole Disc Golf Course
- 9 River Access Points (3 locations)
- A Holy Family Parish
- B County/Historic Site #19: Belle Prairie Church and Log Cabin
- C Historic Cemetery
- D Native American Tool Workshop (approximate location)



(Not to Scale)

PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS

Input from the Belle Prairie County Park Master Plan Task Force and the general public (through survey responses) were used to identify potential park improvements within Bell Prairie. **Figure 3** illustrates these potential facility/amenity improvements, which are listed and expanded upon below in no particular order:

Improvement #1

Build a parking lot on site

The addition of a parking lot at the apex of the asphalt loop road is recommended to accommodate both summer and winter use. The park access road is plowed to this point in the winter and there is access to the hiking trails from here as well. This will create a designated location for parking while still maintaining an “escape from the city” experience within the park interior.

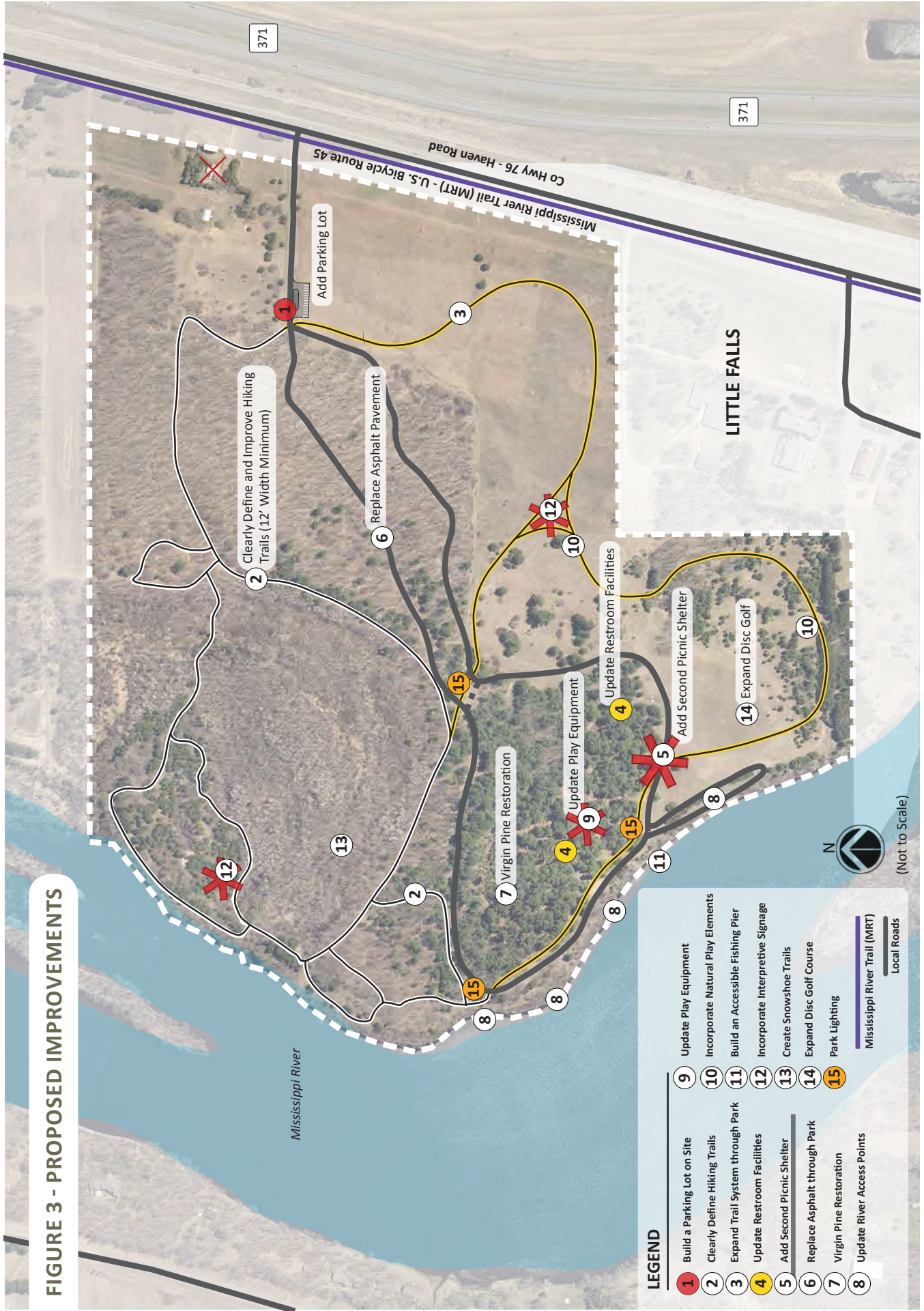
Improvement #2

Define existing hiking trails more clearly and maintain 12’ width minimum along with improved accessibility.



Defining and improving the hiking trails in BPCP was a priority identified by the task force to utilize the existing trails for the local school cross country running and skiing teams. The 12’ minimum clearance is to allow for cross country ski grooming equipment in winter months. Currently the tree and understory growth is encroaching on parts of the trail, sometimes making it difficult to identify. Maintaining an even grade and eventually transitioning to aggregate paths will help with accessibility issues while keeping the ‘wild’ nature of the park.

FIGURE 3 - PROPOSED IMPROVEMENTS



- LEGEND**
- 1 Build a Parking Lot on Site
 - 2 Clearly Define Hiking Trails
 - 3 Expand Trail System through Park
 - 4 Update Restroom Facilities
 - 5 Add Second Picnic Shelter
 - 6 Replace Asphalt through Park
 - 7 Virgin Pine Restoration
 - 8 Update River Access Points
 - 9 Update Play Equipment
 - 10 Incorporate Natural Play Elements
 - 11 Build an Accessible Fishing Pier
 - 12 Incorporate Interpretive Signage
 - 13 Create Snowshoe Trails
 - 14 Expand Disc Golf Course
 - 15 Park Lighting
- Mississippi River Trail (MRT)
Local Roads

Improvement #3

Expand trail system throughout the entire park.



Walking and running were identified as some of the most popular uses of the park. Therefore it is recommended that the marked trail system is expanded upon to cover, not only the wooded areas, but also the oak savanna and prairie grasslands. This will provide longer, more varied loop options to users and also bring them through the various unique landscapes on the site, with an opportunity for educational moments regarding specific history or ecology.

Improvement #4

Update primitive restrooms

Restroom facilities were identified in the community survey as an initiative to focus on in next 5-10 years (short-term). While, not feasible to run utilities through the park for flushable toilets and running water for sinks, it is recommended to update these facilities to improve accessibility for all users and to review operational plans to ensure facilities are consistently clean and stocked with toilet paper and hand sanitizer.



Improvement #5

Add Second Picnic Shelter



BPCP is a popular location for large gatherings (reunions, birthday parties, etc.) and the existing picnic shelter is often in use. For this reason, it is recommended to build a second picnic shelter on the southern edge of the virgin pine stand. This location will still tie into many of the existing facilities, such as the playground and restrooms, and will also take advantage of the variety of landscapes in the park by tying into the prairie grasslands and disc golf course.

Improvement #6
Replace Asphalt pavement through park

The existing asphalt road through the park is original. While it is currently in acceptable condition, there are segments that are beginning to show their age. It is recommended to plan for replacement to maintain access and a high quality user experience.



Improvement #7
Virgin Pine Restoration

The virgin pine stand in BPCP has long been protected and maintained by the various landowners. Currently, the stand is in need of some maintenance to safely activate the space beneath the canopies. Removing understory brush and pruning branches at risk of falling is recommended.



Improvement #8
Update river access points



The current river access points are in need of repair and pose a safety hazard for those interested in getting close to the water. It is recommended that stairs and railings leading down to the water are replaced or repaired to a high quality.

Improvement #9

Update Play Equipment

While currently in acceptable condition, planning for the replacement of the existing play structures is recommended. Equipment that suits the nature of the site, using complementary materials and colors, is recommended so as to blend into the surroundings rather than stand out.

**Improvement #10**

Incorporation of “natural play” elements within park

A natural playground, or natural play features, are well suited to BPCP to celebrate the ecologically diverse resource, while providing park visitors with a unique play experience. These features can be clustered into a second play area or incorporated throughout the site along walking trails to create moments of discovery and spontaneous play.

Improvement #11

Build an accessible fishing pier

Fishing is a popular activity in BPCP, but the steep shoreline prohibits access for those with physical handicaps. Currently in Morrison County, the Minnesota DNR has identified three fishing piers on the Mississippi River at the Morrison/Cass County boundary with one more fishing pier in Little Falls. The addition of a fishing pier in BPCP would add a centrally located water access resource for the region.

Improvement #12

Incorporate interpretive signage in park to highlight history and ecological diversity.

Interpretive signage for biological diversity, geological, historical and archaeological significance in the park should be included in park improvements to highlight the value of this property. These signs communicate topics of interest, aid in creating a sense of place, and can be as simple as a sign or elaborate as a structural memorial.

Potential Interpretive Sites:

- The diverse landscape types and biological communities
- Native American Tool Workshop (National Register Site 21MO0017)
- Historic Sites (Cemetery, Church, Convent)
- The history of settlement in the area
- The Mississippi River rapids and historic crossing point

Improvement #13

Create snowshoe trails

Maintaining approximately 4' clearings in underbrush will create a marketable opportunity for snowshoeing enthusiasts in BPCP. This will require relatively little investment and maintenance from the County, while providing a form of recreation in the winter months. It is recommended that this trail system tie into the proposed parking lot for access as well as to the other identified trail systems.

Improvement #14

Expand Disc Golf Course

The existing 9-hole disc golf course was a popular addition to the park with a common request being to expand to an 18-hole course. Disc Golf has been both a recreational asset and has helped to cut down on vandalism, with more eyes on the park.

To avoid oversaturation, inclusion of this improvement will depend on the development plans of a recreation center on the north side of Little Falls that is currently considering construction of additional Disc Golf course holes.

**Improvement #15**

Park Lighting

Adding lighting in the park would extend usable park hours in the darker winter months. Currently, the only lighting in the park is in the picnic shelter, it is recommended that additional lighting be installed at key locations to increase visibility. Some possible locations would include: the proposed parking lot, entrance to hiking area, and along the roadway.

3. TRENDS/PUBLIC VALUES

PUBLIC INPUT

It is important to Morrison County to incorporate public involvement in the master planning process to ensure that the document reflects the values and interests of the community.

A Park and Trail Master Plan Task Force, consisting of seven community leaders and residents, was created and engaged throughout the process to provide input. Additional input was sought from the public through an online survey linked to the county website and social media pages. Meeting details and the results of this survey can be found in **Appendix A**.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The following demographics, from the U.S. Census Bureaus, paint a picture of the population make up of Morrison County and potential users of Belle Prairie County Park.

Population		
Population Estimate: July 1, 2015	Census (Estimate Base): April 1, 2010	Percentage Change from April 1, 2010-July 1, 2015
32,775	33,198	-1.3%

Age Distribution (Percent) - July 1, 2015			
Persons under 5 years	Persons under 18 years	Persons 65 years and over	Female Persons
6.0%	23.5%	17.9%	49.5%

Families, Living Arrangements, and Income (2011-2015)		
Households 2011-2015	Persons per Household	Median Household Income (2015 dollars)
13,352 total	2.43	\$50,049

Education and Workforce (2011-2015)			
High School Graduate or Higher (Age 25+)	Bachelor’s Degree or Higher (Age 25+)	In Civilian Labor Force (Age 16+)	In Civilian Labor Force, Female (Age 16+)
89.5%	17.0%	67.5%	64.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureaus estimates
Numbers based on April 1, 2010 Census

RECREATIONAL TRENDS AND PUBLIC VALUES

The following section is an excerpt from the “Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Strategic Plan,” adopted by the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission on April 22, 2015.

A key factor in making sound resource allocations is basing decisions on reliable information related to participation trends and changes in demand for various types of outdoor recreational facilities. Review of available research findings proved enlightening but also limiting, with the following being the most pertinent.

PARKS AND TRAILS: A HISTORY OF SUPPORT AND SUCCESS IN MINNESOTA

Each year, state and regional parks and trails receive tens of millions of visits, with Metro-regional parks and trails alone receiving an estimated 40 million+ visits. In 2009, there were 8,926,000 visits to the state park system, including nearly 1,082,000 campers and other overnight guests. Eighty-four percent of the visitors are Minnesota residents. Some 30% of all Minnesotans visit a state park at least once each year – a number that DNR is committed to increasing. In Greater Minnesota, many millions more use local and regional parks and trail, although no formal counts currently exist.

Based on 2007 research by DNR, satisfaction ratings of Minnesota State Parks visitor experiences are at an all-time high. Although traditional outdoor activities have indeed seen varying degrees of per capita decline in participation, new trends – such as providing “high service” items like park programs that cater to children and the opportunity to rent equipment and attend special events – are increasingly popular with many families and are bringing new populations to parks.

Clearly, Minnesotans across the state value parks and trails and find them important to their quality of life. Voter approval of the Legacy Amendment further reinforces Minnesotans’ general commitment to preserving the natural qualities of the state and having access to quality parks and trails. This history of success provides a sound platform to work from as the Commission considers how to best allocate its future resources in ways that will have lasting value to Minnesotans.

BUILDING ON PAST SUCCESS REQUIRES RECOGNIZING AND ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Importantly, building upon past successes and furthering the cause for parks and trails in Minnesota requires an understanding (and recognition) of new challenges, evolving trends, and changing participation patterns in outdoor recreation. With overall participation over the past decade flat or even in decline, paying attention to key trend indicators cannot be taken lightly if the Commission is to ensure that future investments of time and resources are well-targeted. The following highlights some of the trend indicators to pay attention to and address through informed investments.

PARK-RELATED/GENERAL FINDINGS

Review of available park-related research findings proved enlightening as well, with the following considered the most pertinent findings. As with trails, DNR park-related research provides some interesting and at times discouraging findings, including:

- Nature-based recreation participation is showing signs of decline – since the 1990s, the state is exhibiting declining participation on a per-capita basis; decline is broad based and national in scope, and relates to Minnesota State Parks, national parks, and state trails

- Minnesota's participation rate decline is less negative – as compared to all the state and national per-capita figures* are negative, the Minnesota figures tend to be less negative, declining at a per-capita basis of 10 to 12 percent
- Visitation shift to older adults poses longer term concerns – the age-class changes for Minnesota State Parks from 2001 to 2007 show visitation is shifting away from young adults and their children to older adults; median age of visitors has increased over 4 years, while the background population has increased just 1.4 years; an important implication of the decline in childhood visitation is the effect it may have on later-life visitation and participation

** The per-capita change figures are the most useful for revealing the underlying popularity of an activity, because they factor out the influence of population growth (or decline) on the change value*

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

Improvements to the Regional Park and Trail systems will promote economic growth in the area by attracting visitors, attracting and retaining businesses, and increasing tourism.

The future construction of the Camp Ripley Veterans State Trail (CRVST) will complete the missing link and create a continuous 300 miles of paved off-road trail system - the longest in the world! This will also be a part of the National Mississippi River Trail, extending from the river Headwaters to the Gulf of Mexico. Short- and long-term, this trail connection will bring many more visitors to the parks, towns and other destinations along the trail.

4. CLASSIFICATION DETAILS

Belle Prairie Park has been identified as a high potential park well positioned to become designated as a Natural Resource Based Regional Park according to the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC). This is the first step to become eligible to receive Clean Water, Land and Legacy Funding. For a Park or Trail to receive regional designation four criteria are evaluated and scored using a criteria rating scale and assigned weights to determine the overall value of the Park or Trail. The following identifies how the park aligns with the associated criteria.

Criteria #1:

PROVIDES A HIGH-QUALITY OUTDOOR RECREATION EXPERIENCE

Belle Prairie County Park offers an area with opportunity for many who may want to explore its natural wonders and beauties. The park offers a relaxing atmosphere and surroundings that many visitors have enjoyed and return for more. BPCP provides a range of activities in a natural setting nestled up against the Mississippi River just North of Little Falls, MN, offering outdoor recreation activities and facilities that are primarily natural resource based.

These facilities and activities include:

- picnicking
- hiking trails
- boating
- biking
- canoeing
- fishing
- rock hunting
- nature study
- 9-hole disc golf course.

Activities are accommodated within the park via:

- a children's playground
- picnic shelter/gazebo
- primitive restrooms
- parking areas
- boat and canoe launch
- disc golf course.

The park has been used for family, community, educational, government, and business activities, relating to a broad spectrum of events from outdoor, educational, sporting, and social activities. The latest example of BPCP being used for a large social gathering in a natural setting was as an outdoor wedding venue. It is also a waypoint for many rock hounds, biking enthusiasts, motorists, and tourists that consistently generate economic impact from outside the local area while seeking nearby historical settlement areas, historical churches and cemeteries, historical markers, as well as geocaches.

The park is open in the winter as well, in a limited scope, with the main road open and plowed to allow for access to ice fishing, snowshoeing and cross-county ski activities within the park. While there is a consistent demand for winter activities, there are presently no groomed trails. Invariably, BPCP is a proven, outstanding venue to draw regional clientele.

Criteria #2:

PRESERVES A REGIONALLY-SIGNIFICANT AND DIVERSE NATURAL OR HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

The park is a place of high biological diversity and important historical value. Located within a statewide site of high biodiversity significance, this park contains fragments of formerly vast and rich plant communities, which today are rare and vanishing. It lies in the Anoka Sand Plain. The landscape is composed of sandy terraces formed from the

outwash from Glacial River Warren, the predecessor to the Mississippi River. Located within a statewide site of high biodiversity significance, found here are remnants of dry sand-gravel prairie, oak woodland, and black ash-silver maple terrace forest, and the once widespread oak savanna. Populations of three rare plant species occur in the park, and can be found living in the savanna and prairie remnants. Located on the floodplain terrace forest near the riverbank is a significant historical archeological site containing ancient Native American artifacts. Many lithic (stone fragments) of what appears to be the Archaic period were found at a site designated MO-17 on the historic record. This site is designated an “area of high cultural-resource sensitivity” and must be protected. Burial mounds were not found inside the park boundaries, although two were located just outside the park, one each on its north and south sides. Additionally, there is a small, historic family cemetery (the “Hamilton-Farrand” cemetery) located within the park, where stone markers still designate where family graves rest. BPCP was one of the first sites where Euro-American families settled in the area. Beyond those markers that exist within the park, Historical Landmarks (Father Pierz & Ripley Esker Historical Markers) are also within close proximity of the park. Other historic resources (remnants of the Red River Ox-Cart Trail) were likely to have been found on the east side of the park.

Criteria #3:

WELL-LOCATED AND CONNECTED TO SERVE REGIONAL POPULATION AND/OR TOURIST DESTINATION

Located on the north edge of Little Falls, MN in Morrison County and being adjacent to the US Route 371, this park is easily accessible to those who may want to explore its wonders and beauties. The Mississippi River Trail is located on the east boundary and is directly connected to the park road entrance. Located approximately 3 miles north of the junction of State Highway 371 and US Highway 10, and being adjacent to both County State Aid Highway (CSAH) 76 and State highway 371, the park serves a regional clientele (multiple communities - 16 cities and 30 townships within Morrison County). This is the only County Park within a 30-40 mile radius of multiple communities, providing hiking trails, boat landing and parking, picnic areas with fire rings and/or grills, picnic shelter, playground, restrooms, scenic overlooks, as well as a 9-hole Disc Golf course, all within one complex. This is a no cost site that attracts a regional clientele to the park from communities within this radius and beyond.

Criteria #4:

FILLS A GAP IN RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITY WITHIN THE REGION

This park provides public natural resource based recreational opportunities that are not otherwise available of this nature, in one location, within a reasonable distance. The park serves a regional clientele (multiple communities within Morrison County - 16 cities and 30 townships), as well as visitors from outstate Minnesota. This is the only county park within a 30-40 mile radius of multiple communities, providing hiking trails, boat landing and parking, picnic areas with fire rings and/or grills, picnic shelter, playgrounds, restrooms, scenic overlooks, as well as a 9-hole disc gold course, all within one public context. This is a no cost site that attracts a regional clientele to the park from communities within this radius and beyond. This park has been used for family, community, educational, government, and business activities, relating to a broad spectrum of events from outdoor, educational, sporting and social activities. It is also a way point for many rock hounds, biking enthusiasts, motorists, and tourists that consistently generate economic impact from outside the local area while seeking nearby historical settlement areas, historical churches and cemeteries, historical markers, as well as geocaches. The park is open in the winter as well, in limited scope, to allow for access to ice fishing, snowshoeing and cross-county skiing activities within the park. The park compliments Lindbergh State Park by offering a unique destination for relaxation and enjoyment without the camping and canoeing opportunities.

5. DEVELOPMENT/ACQUISITION PLAN

At this time, development plans in the park extend no further than the improvements outlined in this planning document.

Additionally, at this time, there are no current plans to acquire additional lands to include in Belle Prairie County Park boundaries. Should any bordering properties become available in the future, the County would consider acquisition at that future date.

6. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

The following section describes the implementation plan for the potential park improvements, including specifics about investments to-date, cost projections and phasing.

INVESTMENTS TO-DATE

Table 6.1

Investment	Cost (\$)
Picnic Shelter	70,000
Disc Golf Course	4,000
Restrooms	27,400
Playground Equipment and Swings	185,000
Park Sign	5,000
TOTAL	\$291,400

COST PROJECTIONS AND PHASING PLAN

Identifying priorities for phasing implementation will allow the County and its stakeholders to focus their efforts in developing the proposed park improvements in a systematic manner, taking advantage of opportunities for implementation as they arise. The following implementation timeframes were developed for the recommended BPCP improvements: **Short Term (0-5 years); Mid-Term (5-10 years); Long-Term (10+ years)**.

This is not to say for example, that some projects identified in the mid-term category could not be built before others in the short-term category. The key is to identify needed improvements that the County and its stakeholders can implement as opportunities arise, whether that is through local funding, grants, or other reconstruction projects.

Table 6.2 categorizes each recommended improvement within the implementation time frames and outlines estimated cost projections:

Table 6.2

Proposed Park Improvement	Construction Cost Estimate (\$)*	Implementation Timeframe
Add Parking Lot	100,000	Short-Term
Clearly Define Hiking Trails and Maintain 12' Width Minimum	10,000	Short-Term
Expand Trail System	30,000	Short-Term
Update Primitive Restrooms	40,000	Short-Term
Replace Asphalt pavement through park	1,000,000	Short-Term
Virgin Pine Restoration	30,000	Short-Term
Incorporate Interpretive Signage	15,000	Short-Term
SHORT-TERM SUBTOTAL		\$1,495,000
Construct Second Picnic Shelter	200,000	Mid-Term
Upgrade River Access Points	300,000	Mid-Term
Add "Natural Play" Features	50,000	Mid-Term
MID-TERM SUBTOTAL		\$550,000
Create Snowshoe Trail System	10,000	Long Term
Build Accessible Fishing Pier	400,000	Long Term
Update Play Equipment	150,000	Long Term
Expand Disc Golf Course	20,000	Long Term
Park Lighting	50,000	Long Term
LONG-TERM SUBTOTAL		\$630,000
TOTAL		\$2,675,000

**These cost estimates are general guidelines for budgetary purposes only. Cost can vary due to a variety of factors. More detailed cost estimates will need to be developed prior to application for funding, during preliminary design, and prior to bidding for construction.*

7. OPERATIONAL PLAN

In order to keep the existing and new facilities in BPCP in good condition, it will be important to practice regular and proactive maintenance. Therefore, a typical park maintenance component should be included within the County's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) budget in order to keep the park and its amenities at peak performance. The following section describes the operational plan for the park, including responsible organizations and annual costs.

The operational costs for the existing park facilities are outlined in **Table 7.1**. Morrison County is the responsible party for this maintenance. **Table 7.2** outlines the estimated annual operational cost increase associated with each proposed park improvement.

Table 7.1

Public Works Expense	Year			Three Year Average (\$)
	2014 (\$)	2015 (\$)	2016 (\$)	
Labor	7,703.78	9,994.47	12,438.53	10,045.59
Equipment	11,076.50	847.50	16,993.00	9,639.00
Supplies	-	-	30.46	10.15
SUBTOTAL	18,780.28	10,841.97	29,461.99	19,694.75
Purchases*				
	10,576	15,373.62	5,913.51	10,621.04
TOTAL	29,356.28	26,215.59	35,375.50	\$30,315.79

**Cost estimates calculated from the total annual cost for park operations divided by the three (3) cost incurring parks in the County's care.*

Purchases include costs associated with: consulting, park management, memberships, electricity, equipment rental (from others), travel, misc. expenses, insurance, waste removal, repairs and maintenance, supplies, and building acquisition.

Table 7.2

Proposed Park Amenity/Facility Improvement	Estimated Annual Maintenance Cost (\$)	Notes
Construct Second Picnic Shelter	4,500	40 year lifespan
Add Parking Lot	3,000	30 year lifespan
Update Primitive Restrooms	1,500	30 year lifespan
Replace Asphalt pavement through park	25,000	40 year lifespan
Virgin Pine Restoration	1,000	
Clearly define hiking trails and maintain 12' width minimum	1,000	
Expand Trail System	7,500	40 year lifespan
Incorporate Interpretive Signage	500	40 year lifespan
Upgrade River Access Points	7,500	40 year lifespan
Add "Natural Play" Features	1,700	30 year lifespan
Create Snowshoe Trail System	1,000	
Build Accessible Fishing Pier	13,000	30 year lifespan
Update Play Equipment	5,000	30 year lifespan
Expand Disc Golf Course	700	30 year lifespan
Park Lighting	1,000	30 year lifespan
TOTAL	\$73,900	

8. PROGRAMMING PLAN

Without any formal programming plan, there is rarely a warm day that the park is not in use. Birthday parties, reunions anniversaries, and other celebrations are just a few of the popular group activities hosted at Belle Prairie County Park. The park is also a popular spot for walking dogs, running, fishing off the shore and picnics. The 9-hole disc golf course has been in high demand since its installation and continues to bring many users to the park.

BPCP is also an educational asset to the local high school environment class. Groups come to the park with teachers to learn about forestry, tree trimming, plant classification, and to clear invasive buckthorn.

APPENDIX A
PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

October 13, 2016

[Invitee Name]
[Invitee Address]

RE: Belle Prairie County Park Master Plan

27

Dear [Invitee]:

Bolton & Menk, Inc. will be assisting Morrison County in providing a long term plan for the Belle Prairie County Park that will address both short term needs and long term vision for our growing and changing community. It is anticipated there will be 2-3 stakeholder meetings regarding the park Master Plan.

1. Meeting #1: kickoff meeting will establish the following:
 - a. Identify or refine the vision statement for the park
 - b. Gather input from key stakeholders and community members
 - c. Establish park development standards based on existing documents and input from stakeholders
 - d. Identify park system needs, both existing and long term (10 years) based on existing and anticipated demographics, regional influences, and economic changes
2. Meeting #2 (optional/as necessary): stakeholder meeting will establish the following:
 - a. Verify park data received to date
 - b. Identify existing deficiencies and issues in the park
 - c. Discuss funding, programming and maintenance budget
3. Meeting #3: stakeholder meeting will establish the following:
 - a. Meet with County staff to review document and prepare for approval

We believe a small stakeholder group of 3-4 people is necessary to complete the Master Plan process. The proposed commitment level will be relatively minimal. It is anticipated the commitment will require 2 or 3 meetings based on data gathering and participation.

The objective of the Belle Prairie Park Master Plan is to provide a clear direction and approach to how the County's recreational infrastructure will evolve and continue to be a vital asset. This document will also assist in possibly securing grant funding from a variety of sources.

Belle Prairie County Park and Soo Line Trail Master Plans

PARK AND TRAIL MASTER PLAN TASK FORCE KICKOFF MEETING

January 9, 2017 – 4:00 PM

Morrison County Public Works Building

28

AGENDA

1. Introductions and Master Plan Overview

- a. Parks and Trails Legacy Grant Program
- b. Final Documentation

2. Inventory

[Identify Park and Trail System needs according to Task Force]

- a. County Map and Soo Line Trail
 - i. Review Existing
 - ii. Needs/Improvements
- b. Belle Prairie County Park
 - i. Review Existing
 - ii. Needs/Improvements

3. Vision Statements

4. Review Survey Questions

[Review and refine survey to be distributed digitally]







- a. Send additional feedback via e-mail by Wednesday January 18 - survey will be finalized and distributed on this day.

5. Next Steps

- a. Next meeting in February

Trail Committee Meeting

Meeting Date: January 9, 2017

Committee Members	Representing	Signature
Jeff Jelinski	Comm-District 2	
Mike Wilson	Comm-District 4	
David Lanners	ATV's	
Al Stangl	Snowmobiles	
Paul Nieman, Jr	Belle Prairie Twp	
Sam Beam	LFCHS Env. Student	
Alice Sunde	MC Trail Committee	

\$50.00 PerDiem

Mileage	Rate	Total
n/a	n/a	n/a
n/a	n/a	n/a
52	0.535 \$	-
52	0.535 \$	-
24	0.535 \$	-
7	0.535 \$	-
	0.535 \$	-

Approved by County Engineer

Belle Prairie County Park and Soo Line Trail Master Plans

PARK AND TRAIL MASTER PLAN TASK FORCE KICKOFF MEETING

January 9, 2017 – 4:00 PM

Morrison County Public Works Building

MEETING NOTES

1. Inventory

[Identify Park and Trail System needs according to Task Force]

- a. County Map and Soo Line Trail
 - i. Review Existing
 - 1. Add:
 - a. ATV/Snowmobile can cross Hwy 10 Bridge. Cannot cross Mississippi River Bridge.
 - b. 2018 grant to improve Mississippi River Bridge piers and abutment.
 - ii. Needs/Improvements
 - 1. Solve bottleneck issue for ATV at dam – pass legislation to allow for multi-modal use on bridge
 - a. Will open trail to everything south of river. Will open everything north of river to those in Stearns County.
 - b. Expand ‘regional’ connectedness of trail for uses
 - 2. Create larger regional scale loop
 - a. Loop with veterans trail
 - 3. Make the Trail a Destination (Rails to Trail Examples)
 - a. mud runs
 - 4. Connect Trail to Destinations
 - a. Mutually beneficial “side trips” – example: connect to Pierz trail system. Bring town to trail, bring trail users into town.
- b. Belle Prairie County Park
 - i. Review Existing
 - 1. Existing uses:
 - a. Popular location for Weddings, birthday parties, anniversaries
 - b. Forestry Class removes buckthorn
 - c. Hiking trails are mown grass.

- d. Fishing
 - 2. Add:
 - a. Oak Savanna
 - b. Prairie Restoration
- ii. Needs/Improvements
 - 1. Additional Grants to improve biomes (oak savanna, virgin pine, prairie)
 - a. Clear understory in virgin pine, clear out widow-makers, brush
 - 2. Define hiking trails more clearly and increase width to 12' minimum to allow for xc ski grooming equipment in winter months. (HS Cross Country School Team)
 - 3. Expand disc golf from 9 to 18-hole.
 - 4. Add additional picnic shelter – on South side, between virgin pine and disc golf course
 - 5. Replace asphalt pavement through park (original paving)

2. Vision Statements

- a. Soo Line Trail
 - i. Make a destination “Line is boring.”
- b. Belle Prairie Park
 - i. Year round use,
 - ii. Maintain balance between developed play and natural resources
 - iii. Highlight diversity of special natural resources

Belle Prairie County Park and Soo Line Trail Master Plans

PARK AND TRAIL MASTER PLAN TASK FORCE MEETING #2

March 7, 2017 – 4:00 PM

Morrison County Public Works Building

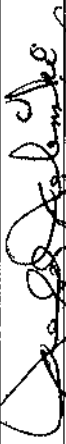

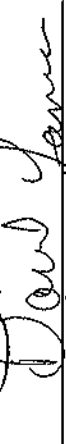



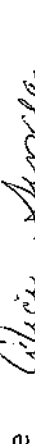
AGENDA

- 1. Review Meeting Notes from Kickoff Meeting**
- 2. Soo Line Trail**
 - a. Review Existing
 - b. Proposed Improvements
 - c. Survey Results
- 3. Belle Prairie County Park**
 - a. Review Existing
 - b. Proposed Improvements
 - c. Survey Results
 - d. Implementation Priorities
- 4. Next Steps**
 - a. Review document and maps and provide any additional feedback to Steve, Joel, or Maddie.
 - b. BMI to incorporate feedback into Master Plan Reports and review with County Staff to prepare for approval.

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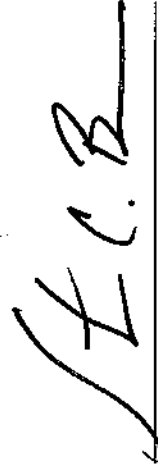
Park & Trail Master Plan Task Force
Trail Committee Meeting

Meeting Date: March 7, 2017

Committee Members	Representing	Signature
Jeff Jelinski	Comm-District 2	
Mike Wilson	Comm-District 4	
David Lanners	ATV's	
Al Stangl	Snowmobiles	
Paul Nieman, Jr	Belle Prairie Twp	
Sam Beam	LFCHS Env. Student	
Alice Sunde	MC Trail Committee	

Mileage	Rate	Total
n/a	n/a	n/a
n/a	n/a	n/a
—	0.535 \$	rode with Al-Stangl
52	0.535 \$	27.82
24	0.535 \$	12.84
7	0.535 \$	3.75
44	0.535 \$	23.54

\$50.00 PerDiem



Approved by County Engineer

Belle Prairie County Park and Soo Line Trail Master Plans

PARK AND TRAIL MASTER PLAN TASK FORCE MEETING #2

March 7, 2017 – 4:00 PM

Morrison County Public Works Building

MEETING MINUTES

1. Belle Prairie County Park

- a. Acquisition
 - i. If land north of park were to become available, County would consider
- b. Programming
 - i. High School Environmental Class uses park – clearing buckthorn, tree trimming, classify plants, forestry
 - ii. Great River Greening maintenance program (existing) –burns (fall vs. spring) and annual thinning of oak savanna
 - iii. Without any formalize programming activities, park is highly used and active with reunions, birthday parties, anniversaries, etc.
 - iv. Park shelter is popular for events – cannot book – second shelter would be appreciated improvement
- c. Interpretive Signage
 - i. Few existing markers/signage in and around BPCP – would be interested in this: ecology, settlement history, river rapids and early crossing
- d. Improvements
 - i. Restroom upgrades – talk regarding reviewing maintenance schedule, adding hand sanitizer, potentially updating structures, handicap accessibility. No utilities for plumbing.
 - 1. Existing maintenance: County check facilities daily (weekdays only), contract to have cleaned out monthly. Maintaining toilet paper in the facilities can be an issue
 - ii. 18-hole disc golf – change to lower priority. Existing 9-hole very popular. Recreation Center on North Side of Little Falls is considering an 18-hole disc golf course in master plan. Wait and see what they decide to install to avoid oversaturation

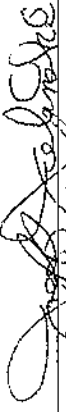
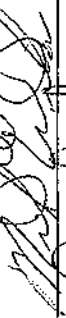

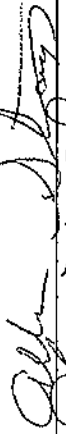
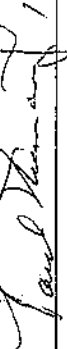


- iii. Trail System – expand walking/hiking/running trail to extend over entire site.
 - 1. Most popular activity according to survey. Many walk dogs at park.
 - 2. Respects goals for the park to maintain balance between natural areas and recreation. Trails to go through different restoration areas with interpretive signage
 - 3. Incorporate XC ski loops and snowshoeing trails (through woods – clear brush in ~4’ paths)
 - 4. Look into trail lighting to extend hours of use in winter
 - 5. Mow, gravel, or asphalt – hierarchy of trails
- iv. Additional forms of recreation discussed (basketball, mini-golf)
 - 1. Past vandalism an issue
 - 2. If new form of recreation will bring steady stream of users, may cut down on vandalism as happened with disc golf course
- v. Parking
 - 1. Add parking area at entrance
 - 2. Plow to this parking area in winter – access point for winter recreation
- vi. Fishing Pier - Many fish from shore now – accessible fishing pier as improvement
- vii. Upgrade River Access Points
 - 1. Stairs and railings in need of improvements
 - 2. Boat ramp access route is steep and has limited space to allow for ADA access or parking
- viii. Pavement is starting to show age – “if we can’t drive on the road to get to the park, what’ the point of making other improvements”

2. Next Steps

- a. Will schedule third task force meeting to present final plan for review. Send out plan documents to group beforehand.


Park & Trail Master Plan Task Force
Trail Committee Meeting

Meeting Date: June 22, 2017

Committee Members	Representing	Signature
Jeff Jelinski	Comm-District 2	
Mike Wilson	Comm-District 4	
David Lanners	ATV's	
Al Stangl	Snowmobiles	
Paul Nieman, Jr	Belle Prairie Twp	
Sam Beam	LFCHS Env. Student	
Alice Sunde	MC Trail Committee	

\$50.00 PerDiem

Mileage	Rate	Total
n/a	n/a	n/a
n/a	n/a	n/a
58	0.535 \$	31.03
-	0.535 \$	-
24	0.535 \$	12.84
7	0.535 \$	3.75
44	0.535 \$	23.54


Approved by County Engineer
6/22/17

Belle Prairie County Park and Soo Line Trail Master Plans

PARK AND TRAIL MASTER PLAN TASK FORCE MEETING #3

June 22, 2017 – 4:00 PM

Morrison County Public Works Building

37

MEETING MINUTES

Attendees: S. Beam, J. Jelinski, D. Lanners, P. Nieman Jr., A. Stangl, A. Sunde, M. Wilson, S. Backowski, J. Odens (Bolton & Menk)

1. Belle Prairie County Park Master Plan

- a. Bolton & Menk reviewed the online survey results (136 responders)
 - i. Most urgent need according to the survey is facilities and maintenance
 - ii. Most common park use is walking/running followed by picnicking
 - iii. Top items to focus on are trails and restroom facilities
 - iv. Most users visit during the summer, followed by fall, spring and then winter
- b. Bolton & Menk then reviewed the park plan with the Task Force and discussed the fifteen identified improvements
- c. The river access points were reviewed and the question of ADA river access was discussed. It was agreed that at least one river access point shall explore the incorporation of an ADA ramp. It was also agreed the ADA accessible point shall also be associated with the accessible fishing pier if possible. This directive will need further study and analysis as the Park begins addressing the various improvements identified.
- d. It was also noted that one existing stairway/river access point was missing from the map. The stairway in the middle of the boat launch area will be called out in the final master plan map.
- e. After the improvements were presented, it was agreed upon to move the building of a parking lot (along the entry roadway) to the top of the improvement list.
- f. There was a motion to approve the Belle Prairie Park master plan with the understanding that these slight revisions would be made to the plan and document.

2. Soo Line Trail Master Plan

- a. Bolton & Menk reviewed the online survey results (136 responders)
 - i. Most urgent need according to the survey is maintenance
 - ii. Most users access the trail by driving and parking
 - iii. Top initiatives for the next 5-10 years are the bridge crossing and expanding the trail system and other trail connections.
 - iv. Over half (>60%) of the people who completed the online survey stated they would feel comfortable with multi-modal usage of the Mississippi River Bridge.

- b. Bolton & Menk then reviewed the Master Plans proposed site improvements:
 1. Incorporate interpretive signage to highlight ecological or historical features and aid in creating a sense of place.
 2. Incorporate additional wayfinding signage to aid in establishing a unified network of trails and promote local businesses.
 3. Create loop trail systems in cities along the SLRT
 4. Obtain necessary approvals to allow for ATV traffic to cross the Mississippi River Bridge
 5. Create additional ATV route connections
 6. Add additional mud runs/loop trails for ATV use

- c. The decision to not pave the remainder of the Soo Line Trail through Morrison County was reviewed/discussed. The three main factors contributing to this decision are; cost, would limit user groups and completion of Camp Ripley Veterans Memorial Trail.

- d. The Mississippi River Bridge crossing and a possible alternate route was discussed. Within the Task Force it was determined there is no other safe alternative to ATV's using the existing Blanchard Dam Mississippi River Bridge. The group then discussed how this may be implemented. Safety was also discussed. Cameras, flexible bollards, different pavement surfaces, painted lines, expand the bridge deck, etc. were all discussed. The method and safety elements were not finalized but it was agreed the crossing should be a top priority.

- e. There was a motion to approve the Soo Line Trail master plan with the understanding that these slight revisions would be made to plan and document.



MORRISON COUNTY

NOTICE OF OPEN HOUSE
Wednesday, August 2, 2017
Meeting Room 1 at the
Morrison County Government Center
anytime between 4 pm and 6 pm

Morrison County Public Works will be holding an open house for interested residents to review, discuss and comment on the proposed Master Plans for Belle Prairie Park and the Soo Line Trail.

The Master Plans have been developed utilizing on-line survey results with oversight by the County Board appointed Task Force.

No presentation will be made. Interested residents may stop in to review and discuss the plans with county staff and representatives of Bolton & Menk.

715940so7/30/17



NOTICE OF OPEN HOUSE

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The Master Plans have been developed utilizing on-line survey results with oversight by the County Board appointed Task Force.

No presentations will be made. Interested residents may stop in at Meeting Room 1 at the Morrison County Government Center on August 2, 2017, anytime between 4:00 pm and 6:00 pm to review and discuss the plans with county staff and representatives of Bolton & Menk.

MORRISON COUNTY
PLEASE SIGN IN
August 2, 2017

Name

Address

Pat Redford

....., L.F.

Dick Redford

.....

Jim Allert

..... L.F.

Jay Lazar

Bowling MN

Bruce Miller

Little Falls Md

Bruce Geyer

Little Falls, MN

Gail Goyer

..... L.F. MN

Tyler JENSEN

.....

Carol Meyer

..... L.F.

Darrell Welle

..... 56449

Jordin Stuy

..... Bowling

County unveils plans for Belle Prairie Park, Soo Line

Published August 16, 2017 at 6:00 am

By Tyler Jensen

Staff Writer



The playground at Belle Prairie Park, where updates are planned by the Morrison County Public Works Department. Along with updated playground equipment, the park could see improved trails, buildings and forested areas.

The Morrison County Public Works Department has unveiled its master plans for improvements to the Belle Prairie Park and the Soo Line Trail.

While there is no timeline, Public Works Director Steve Backowski said the plans are meant to be included on the county's wish list so these two sites are eligible for funding.

Any improvement projects to the sites would be based on when money for them is available, Backowski said.

On the Soo Line Trail, one of the ideas is to incorporate areas where ATV riders can get off the main trail and do mud runs, Backowski said.

If the opportunity ever presents itself, one of the ideas in the plan is to connect the Soo Line to the Crow Wing County trail system northeast of Morrison County.

The Soo Line would also connect to the planned Camp Ripley Veterans State Trail and Pierz trail, Backowski said.

An idea that faces concerns from some is allowing motorized vehicles like ATVs to cross at the bridge over the Mississippi River at the Blanchard Dam.

“It was probably the most intensely discussed issue,” Backowski said of the open house held Aug. 3.

The recommendation from the group of citizens involved in the plan was to allow the ATVs to cross on the trail, keeping them out of highway traffic, before having them get off onto a ramp once they’ve crossed the river.

Because the Federal Highway Commission helped pay for the bridge and trail, Backowski said, the change would need its approval first.

Currently, if ATV riders want to cross the Mississippi, they need to either go up to Little Falls and cross on Highway 27, or go down to a crossing near Bowlus and Royalton and cross on Highway 26, at a location that isn’t the best for ATVs, Backowski said.

“This is a very difficult location to cross,” he said.

The consensus of the group was that the safety aspect made the crossing idea worthwhile.

At Belle Prairie Park, Backowski said the idea is to mostly keep it the same, only better.

“We’re not looking to change a lot of things. We’re looking to enhance and improve the current way the park is being managed,” Backowski said.

Some of these improvements include new parking lots near the playground and shelter area, which will also get updates, including making the bathrooms compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is also writing a plan for Morrison County to go into parts of the park containing virgin pine and remove exotic invasive species like sumac, prickly ash, buckthorn and more.

“They get so thick nothing else can grow,” Backowski said.

Hiking trails around the park would be improved and added, while a fishing pier would be installed on the Mississippi River across from the sheltered areas and river accesses would be improved.

Backowski said this plan is the most comprehensive the park has had.

“As we go through this and as time goes along, this (the plan) will allow us to apply for funding and make these improvements when we can,” Backowski said.

The improvements will not be done overnight, Backowski said. The first year the county can apply for funding is 2018.

“There is no time frame on when this would all get done. It’s just this big view of things we would like to see ,” Backowski said.

It could be five to 10 years before everything in the current plan gets done, Backowski said.

More things can be added to the master plans at later dates, depending on what the county wants to see, Backowski said.

His department is looking for input on the plans, which are available from Public Works.

To comment on the plan, contact Morrison County Public Works at (320) 632-0121 or a county commissioner.

Backowski said he intends to bring the plans to the County Board meeting Tuesday, Aug. 22.

Filed Under: [Belle Prairie Park](#), [Little Falls](#), [morrison county](#), [Motley](#), [Pierz](#), [Randall](#), [Royalton](#), [soo line trail](#), [Swanville](#), [Upsala](#)

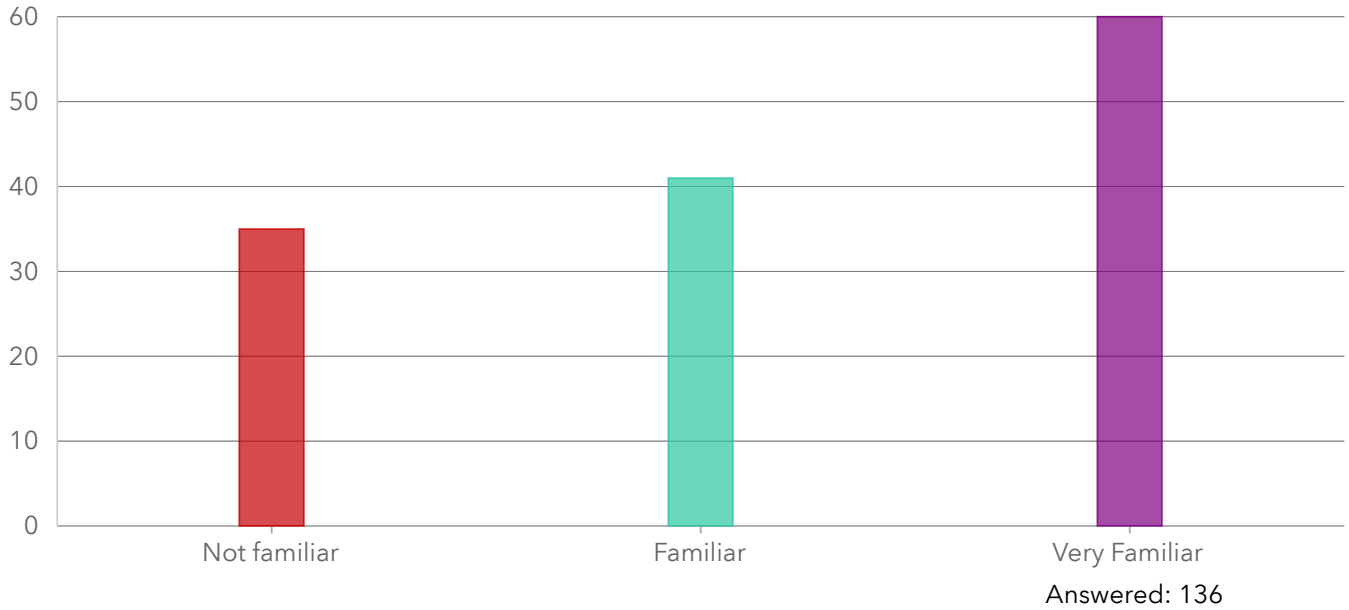
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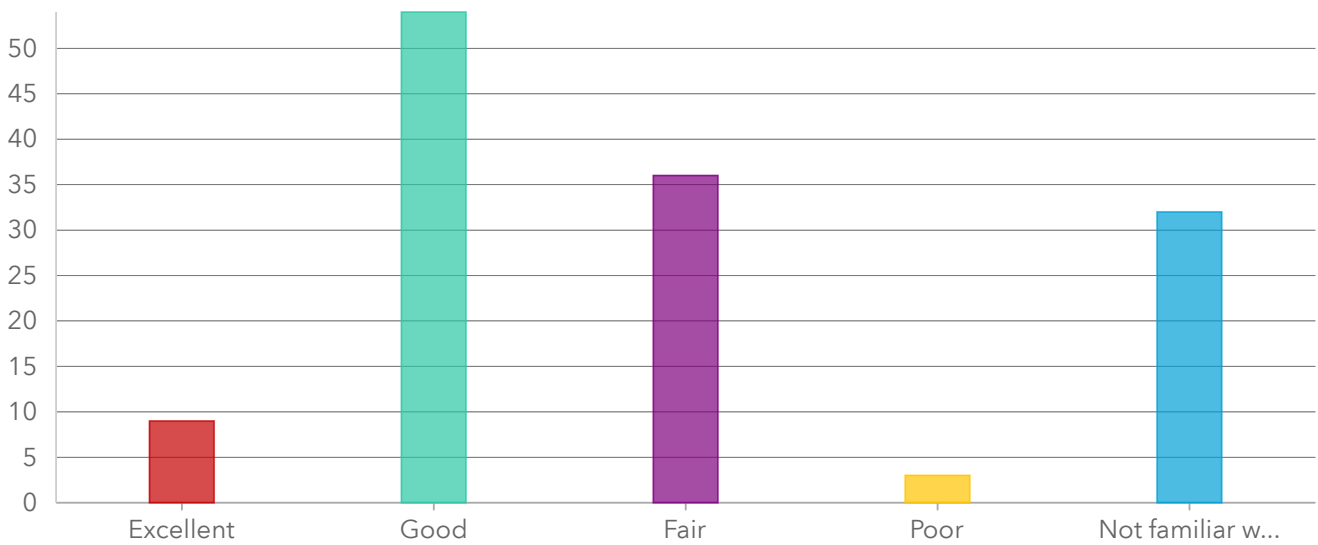
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Morrison County Master Plan Survey

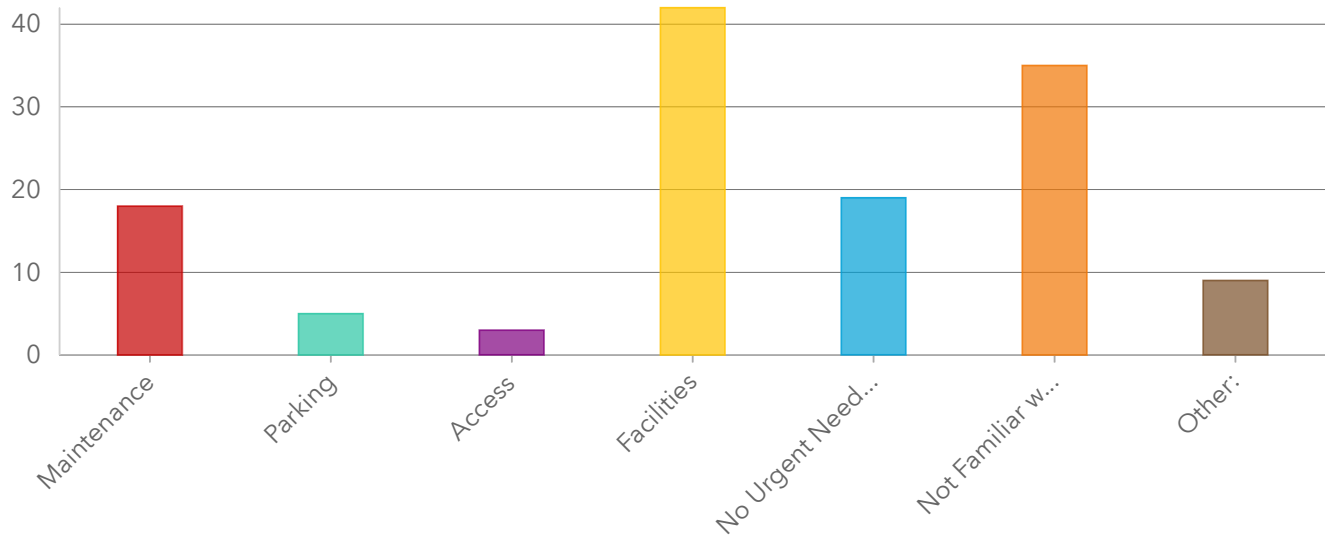
1. How familiar are you with Morrison County's Belle Prairie Park?



2. How would you rate the quality/physical condition of Belle Prairie Park and its amenities?



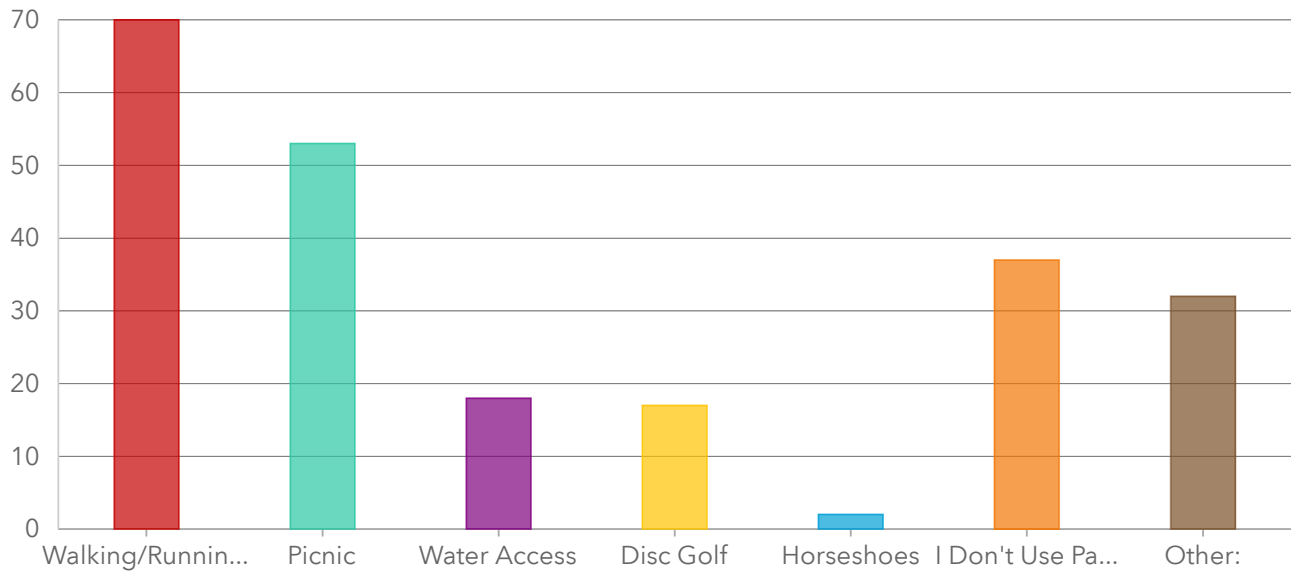
3. What do you feel is the most urgent need associated with Belle Prairie Park?



Other: - 3. What do you feel is the most urgent need associated with Belle Prairie Park?

- Maybe just make sure bathrooms are kept a bit cleaner and are stocked with tp
- Bike trails
- both facilities and maintenance
- NO PUBLIC FUNDING
- disc golf made into 18 holes
- plowing in the winter to make park accessible
- Bathroom
- Clean up (a lot of garbage, overflowing dumpsters, cigarette butts, etc.)
- Regular clean-up

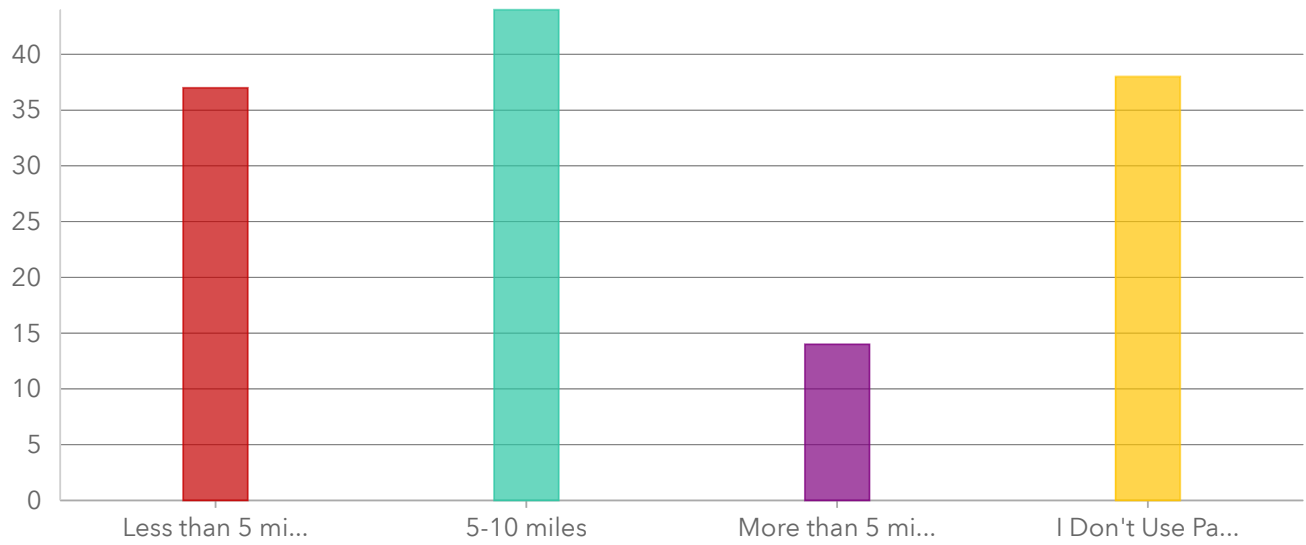
4. What activity/activities do you use Belle Prairie Park for? (include all that apply)



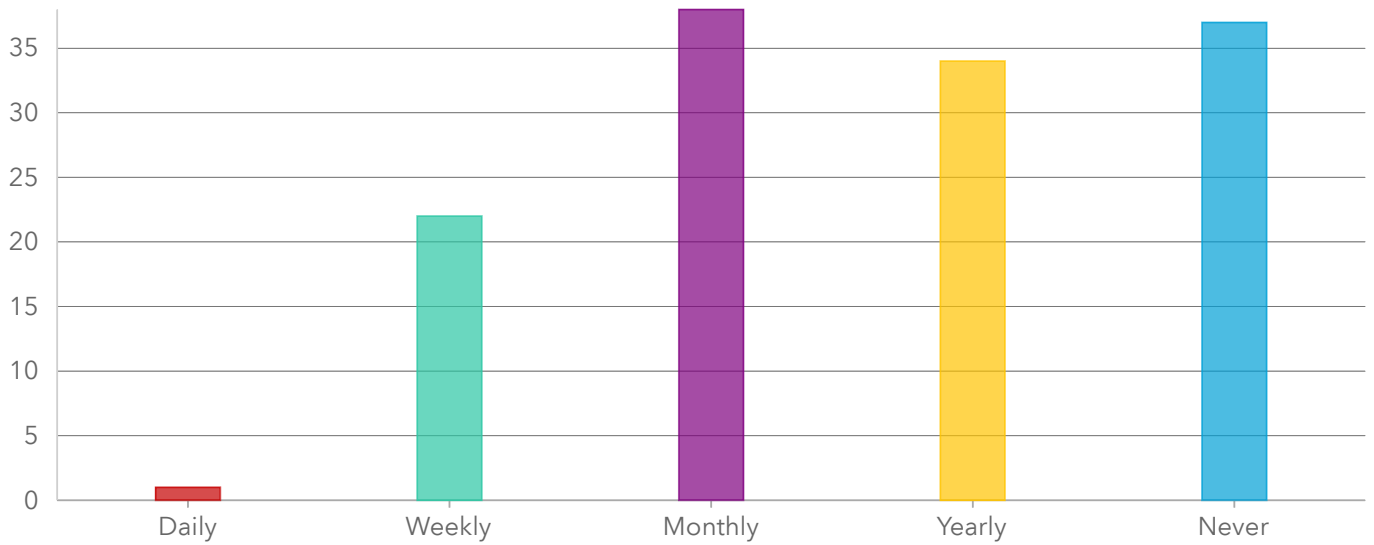
Other: - 4. What activity/activities do you use Belle Prairie Park for? (Include all that apply)

- Fun for my kids it's their favorite open space place
- 4 wheeling
- Viewing river, use playground equipment
- Only the color run.
- Bike through occasionally
- Snowshoes and fatbikes
- Snowshoes and fatbikes
- Softball, family gathers, rest stop for biking
- enjoying the scenic view
- Cycling
- Bicycling
- Biking
- Biking to the park.
- quiet outdoors
- biking
- family gatherings
- Parking for biking
- Hiking and playground
- COMPLAINTS
- Family Reunions
- Playground
- Biking
- Children's playground for kids in my care. Love it....best playground around.
- Bike Riding, Relaxing by the River
- Nordic skiing if there's snow
- Sitting and enjoying public outdoor space.
- walking the dog
- biking
- Relax and enjoy the beauty of the surroundings. Also the playground area.
- Sit and relax and enjoy the quietness.
- Large family gatherings
- Dog walking

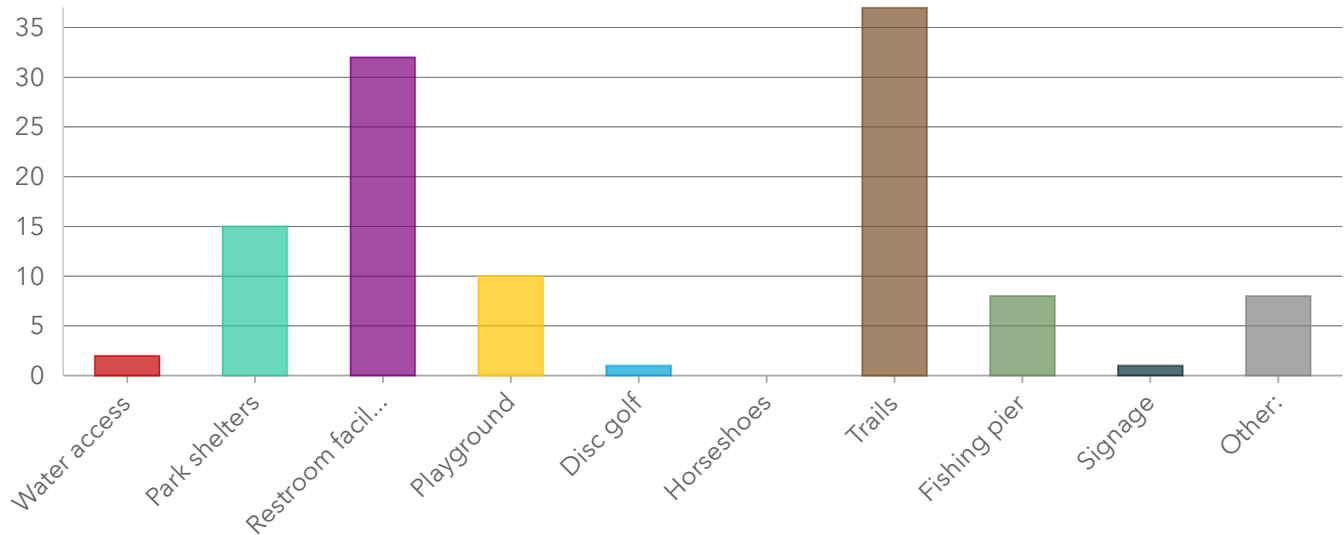
5. What distance do you typically travel to use the Park?



6. On average, how often do you use Belle Prairie Park?



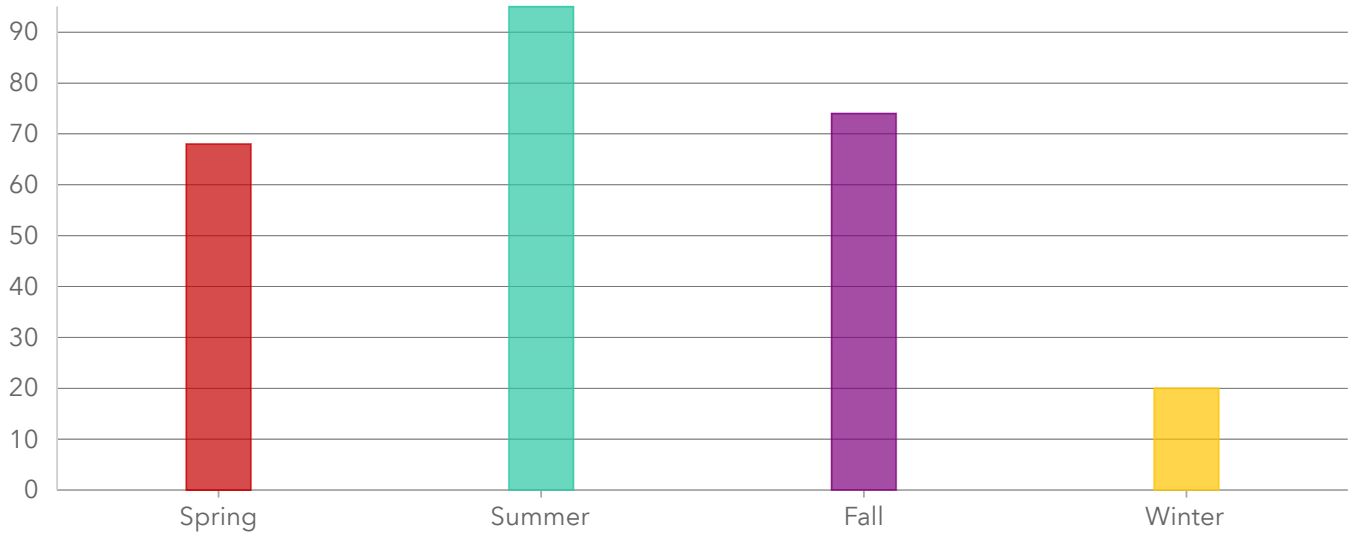
7. What Belle Prairie Park initiatives do you feel the County should focus on in the next 5-10 years?



Other: - 7. What Belle Prairie Park initiatives do you feel the County should focus on in the next 5-10 years?

- Making off road bike trails
- restroom, fishing pier, trails
- NONE - IT IS SCHOOL PROPERTY
- Keep playground as is. Keep hand pump well in good condition.
- No idea
- RESTROOM FACILITIES, Park Shelter, Playground and Fishing pier
- General maintenance

8. I use Belle Prairie Park during the following season(s) (include all that apply):



9. What other additional comments or issues related to Belle Prairie Park would like to share?



9. What other additional comments or issues related to Belle Prairie Park would like to share?

- Horseback riding trail access to bring in more money and more diversity
- I love the work being done with the woods/prairie restoration and also like seeing a lot of patrolling by city and county patrol cars, really keeps the vandalism down
- The Savannah looks great. Please keep it trimmed.
- Better security, and patrols.
- Be a great opportunity for the city if we opened up some mountain bike trails.
- Beautiful areas that is underutilized.
- Need to showcase the history of the area
- BELLE PRAIRIE WAS ANNEXED INTO LITTLE FALLS FOR THE SOLE PURPOSE OF MAKING ALL OF LITTLE FALLS RESIDENTS PAY FOR A PARK FOR THE RICH NEIGHBORHOOD WHICH SURROUNDS IT. NO PUBLIC MONEY SHOULD BE USED FOR ANY PARK THAT WILL ONLY BE USED FOR ENHANCING A PLAYGROUND FOR THE RICH. IT IS A WASTE OF TAXPAYER MONEY. BELLE PRAIRIE PARK SHOULD RECEIVE ALL THEIR FUNDS FOR EXPENSES FROM ONLY THOSE WHO USE IT, EITHER FROM PARKING FEES, FIELD FEES, OR FROM THOSE WHO ATTEND GAMES AND USE THE PARK.
- Parking would be my next action item to be addressed.
- The mosquitoes are too bad in the summer to go to the park.
- beautiful place
- Nice place to just relax!
- A lot of people that use the boat landing, park on the first hole of the golf course. I assume they do not know they are doing that.
- I would like to see a paved bike trail connected to the pave trail on the north end of little falls.
- Do not over develop the park. We appreciate the openness and naturalness of this public park space. Would like to see the shelter area / water access area become more user-friendly for mobility-challenged people who use wheelchairs and scooters.
- Would love to see the roads plowed in the winter - it was very difficult to get into the park this winter - it was a sheet of ice. Would also love to see more trails - but the available ones are great. Also would love to see an enclosed area as a dog park.
- adding camping would be nice sometime in the future
- I would also like to see improvements with park shelters, restrooms, the playground, and the trails.
- The county should consider using the vast open area for RV Campsites.
- Signage should warn young parents of the steep bank to the river that small children could fall off the edge into the river without warning.
- Expanding disk golf
- Maybe a few small primitive campsites. An area for a dog park.
- Great park, just needs more maintenance
- Restrooms also important (survey only allowed one response). An off-leash dog area would also be nice, or allow dogs off leash if they're under owner control.
- Parking is an issue with this park. It needs a bigger space for parking and better maintenance to upgrade it's appearance.



MORRISON COUNTY

**BELLE PRAIRIE PARK
AND THE SOO LINE TRAIL**

Master Plans for Belle Prairie Park and the Soo Line Trail have been developed utilizing on-line survey results with oversight by the County Board appointed Task Force. Anyone wishing to review the plans may go to www.co.morrison.mn.us.

Any additional comments may be directed to your County Commissioner or to the Public Works Department at 320-632-0121. The plans will be presented for approval at the September 5th County Board of Commissioners Meeting.

724229vw8/20/17

RESOLUTION #2017-006
Belle Prairie Park Master Plan

WHEREAS, the Morrison County Board of Commissioners supports the input, recommendations and efforts of the Park and Trail Master Plan Task Force members and the General Public (through survey responses and open house) to identify potential improvements for codification within the Belle Prairie Park (BPP) Master Plan, and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Belle Prairie Park Master Plan is to evaluate issues and needs within the existing Belle Prairie Park facilities, as well as to identify future site improvements that will reflect the needs and values of all potential users, and


WHEREAS, the Belle Prairie Park Master Plan is a document intended to act as a guide to Morrison County (MC) in the planning and implementation of park improvements to the Belle Prairie Park as part of the Morrison County park system,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED the Morrison County Board of Commissioners accepts and supports the recommendations and proposed improvements as presented within the Belle Prairie Park Master Plan.

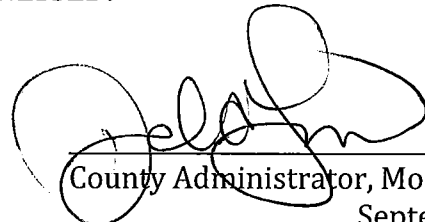
I CERTIFY THAT the above resolution was adopted by the County Board of Morrison County on September 5, 2017.

SIGNED:

WITNESSED:



 Chairman, MC Board of Commissioners
 September 5, 2017

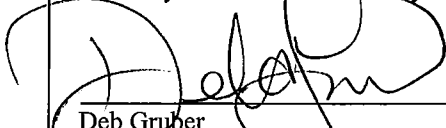


 County Administrator, Morrison County
 September 5, 2017

Adopted this 5th day of September, 2017.

STATE OF MINNESOTA }
 COUNTY OF MORRISON }

I, Deb Gruber, County Administrator, Morrison County, Minnesota hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing copy of the resolution of the County Board of said County with the original record thereof on file in the Administration Office of August, 20 Morrison County in Little Falls, Minnesota as stated in the minutes of the proceedings of said board at a meeting duly held on this 5th day of September 2017, and that the same is a true and correct copy of said original record and of the whole thereof, and that said resolution was duly passed by said board at said meeting.
 Witness by hand and seal this 5th day of September, 2017.



 Deb Gruber
 County Administrator

Commissioner	Yes	No	Abs	Mot	2nd
Wilson	X				
Jelinski	X			X	
Johnson	X				
LeMieur	X				X
Winscher	X				

APPENDIX B
MANAGEMENT PLANS

LONG-TERM CONIFER MANAGEMENT PLAN

Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Prepared by: Bob Perleberg | Forestry First Consulting

12 August 2017

Introduction

Location: NE ¼ Sec 14 TWP 41 R 32 Belle Prairie Township

The conifer stands are in three separate locations. Stand #1 is located around the picnic/community center and is 14 acres in size. Stand #2 is located along the North border and is 6 acres in size. Stand #3 is along the South Border and is 6 acres.

CONIFER STANDS IN BELLE PRAIRIE PARK



Stand 1

Present stand condition

The picnic picnic/shelter area is 6 acres of the 14 in stand #1.

This 6 acres is heavily utilized by the public and mowed. The White Pine overstory here is nearing 200 years of age and densely stocked. This heavy stocking and heavy use has resulted in suppressed diameters, soil compaction, poor health, scattered mortality and increased susceptibility to environmental damage.

The remaining 8 acres outside of the day use area has lighter stocking, larger diameters, and is a mix of Red and Burr Oak in the overstory. The stand health is better here. The understory is dense consisting of European Buckthorn, Prickly Ash, Boxelder, scattered White Pine and Oak seedlings. The Pine and Oak seedlings have been heavily browsed by deer.

Recommendations

Picnic / shelter area:

Due to the advanced age of the White Pine improving the vigor and diameter of the present Old growth trees is not likely. Removing the highly stressed small diameter and damaged trees will allow more sunlight to the remaining trees and hopefully improve their health and extend the life of these magnificent trees.

Consider removing a portion of this area (1/2 acre) from public use after thinning the overstory and replanting mixed conifers (4-5 ft tall) to start replacing the overmature overstory. Rotate this protected area around the picnic area each 10 years to regenerate the stand and allow the soil to partially recover from the compaction/traffic issues.

The remainder of Stand 1 must have the invasive members of the understory controlled and eliminated. This would best be done with a mulching head on a skid loader and following this up with a chemical application after resprouting the following year.

Remove the dead and dying trees in the overstory and prune the existing White Pine regeneration for Blister Rust control. Once the invasives in the understory are controlled and the overstory is thinned, replant the understory with White Pine, Norway Pine and Burr Oak. Consider using balled and burlapped 4-5 foot saplings along with individual caging to jump start the natural regeneration process and to get ahead of the deer browsing problem. When the invasive understory is controlled natural regeneration from the parent White Pine will also occur to supplement the planted seedlings.

Yearly maintenance will be needed to control invasives and monitor stand health.

Stand 2

Present stand condition

This stand is located on along the river in the Northwest corner of the property. The hiking trail bisects the stand and provides an excellent recreational opportunity for park visitors.

The stand is primarily composed of 50-60 year old planted Red Pine. Stand health is good, stand density is also good. Scattered natural White Pine, Red Oak and Aspen are also present. The stand is bordered on the south by a Black Ash stand and on the north by the property line.

The understory consists of a very complex and dense mixture of Plum, European Buckthorn, Prickly Ash and Grapes. The Plum and Grape appear to have been planted.

Recommendations

The overstory in stand 2 is generally very healthy and needs little work at this time. The problem here is once again the understory. A very dense layer of non-native shrubs is eliminating the process of natural regeneration and creating a dense blanket that will eventually jeopardize the overstory. It also limits the ability of the public to enjoy such a beautiful hike along the river.

This dense layer of understory non-native competition should be treated much the same as the understory in stand #1. The future improvement of the Park and trail system will lead to the increased day use of this uniquely beautiful area. Eliminating the invasive species in the understory and showing long-term success would be a model for residents of the county to strive for when dealing with European Buckthorn issues on their own property. It has great potential to be used as an outdoor learning area.

Stand #3

Present stand condition

This stand is 6 acres in size and comprised of naturally regenerating White Pine and a small border planting of Red Pine. The White Pine naturally seeded into the open grassland south of the Stand #1. The stand density is low, White Pine blister Rust is present in this stand due to its open grown environment and lack of natural pruning. Since these are native seed source natural White Pine they should be protected and managed to ensure their survival. The buffer of Red Pine along the south border was probably planted the same time the Red Pine in type #2 was planted. This stand density is very high and mortality is occurring due to stress and insect damage. European Buckthorn is also present in this understory.

Recommendations

The naturally seeded open grown White Pine saplings should have 1/3 of the live crown from the ground up removed. This will help control the Blister Rust infection rate and improve the stand health. Pocket Gopher control would also benefit newly established seedlings.

The planted Red Pine along the South border should have 1/3 of the density removed by harvesting stressed, deformed and suppressed trees. This will greatly improve the health of the remaining trees and give them many more years of life. Once again control the non- native understory. The high density of the overstory may limit the control method to hand removal and backpack spraying.

Summary

The goal of this ambitious plan is to keep Belle Prairie Park a destination for residents and visitors far into the future. This will be done by maintaining the health of the majestic Pine overstory for as long as possible and to provide a replacement stand for the present stand when it fails.

The regeneration of these native conifers and the controlling of the non-native understory will showcase the counties commitment to natural resources and recreation in Morrison County. The completion of the Conifer management plan will tie in with the ongoing Oak savanna and native Prairie work to create a recreation area/outdoor classroom for all residents of our county to enjoy and learn from. The combination of the river, Old-

Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan

Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Introduction

Belle Prairie Park (BPP), located in Morrison County (MC), Minnesota, is a place of high biological diversity and important historical value. The landscape is composed of sandy terraces formed from the outwash from Glacier River Warren, the predecessor to the Mississippi River, contains a diverse variety of landforms and hydrology. Found here are remnants of dry sand-gravel prairie, oak woodland, and black ash-silver maple forest, and the once widespread oak savanna.

The Little Falls region was historically dominated by oak-pine savanna vegetation. This type of vegetation was common in the Northern Hemisphere. Historic savanna biotic communities serve as a model for sustainability. Prior to industrial agriculture, savanna vegetation of some form was the dominant vegetation of earth. The names for savanna vary with location, but include groves, openings, barrens, chaparral, meadows, glades, balds, and Dehesha. Savanna was also the most evolutionary advanced, functional, and productive terrestrial ecosystems to ever exist.

The vision or end-state for the BPP savanna vegetation is to be dominated by oak-pine savanna with a density of 11 to 12 mature trees/per acre. The understory is contains smaller oaks and native shrubs. The vistas are open and park like. Ground layer vegetation completely covers the soils, and is composed of a diverse array of native species, with an average height of 6 - 12" inches.

The Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan addresses the oak savanna restoration, long-term management plan. Savanna restoration is a multi-year process, requiring several seasons of work to achieve a stable configuration from which we can launch a long term management regime. Additionally, and invariably, long term management generally involves Prescribed Burning. Prescribed Burning is defined as a prescribed fire (Rx fire), which is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health, and reduce wildfire risk. For BPP, the best case scenario, Rx-fire would suffice, but in our current landscape, relying solely on Rx-fire can be difficult, especially in urban settings and in landscapes containing a coniferous component, and especially on sandy soils, where burning bands frequently prohibit fire. At this stage, for BPP, we cannot afford to go two or three seasons without fire, or a fire substitute. This is why project design included mowing, especially during the first few growing seasons (Phase 1), as an easy cost effective way for Morrison County to achieve and maintain restoration objectives.

Present BPP Savannah Condition

Phase 1 of the Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration is completed, meeting the primary objectives to:

1. Trees & brush thinned allowing more sunlight to reach soils to increase ground layer vegetation.
2. Reduced competitive advantage of undesirable species (e.g. buckthorn).
3. Opened up site safe for ongoing management including mowing & Rx-fire.

The trees and brush have been cut and removed from 35 acres. The trees and shrubs were removed at different densities to create a heterogeneous patchiness of more open sunny areas and more closed canopy shaded areas. The different density cuttings help identify density targets for future cuttings.

2017 Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan
Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Recommendations

On-Going Operational Maintenance

- ✓ **Stacking wood:** Prior to mowing, dead down wood should be stacked. Fewer, larger wood piles are much preferred to many smaller wood piles. Fewer piles allow for greater efficiency in management especially for mowing and Rx-fire. Piles should be burned or chipped and hauled off site as possible.
- ✓ **Forestry Mowing:** Conduct one forestry mow in mid-July. Forestry mowing in July will help reduce stumps & stubs that are a threat to future rotary mowing. No part of any stump shall exceed 3" inches in height. Forestry mowing will reduce dead down wood, allowing more rapid decomposition of dead branches which will help facilitate quicker less expensive Rx-fire. Mowing will also suppress woody resprouts which will help increase sunlight to the soils.
- ✓ **Rotary Mowing:** Mowing will help control undesirable species, make Rx-fire more feasible, increase spring wildflower cover and diversity, and help promote an open park like structure. Buckthorn and other undesirable species are suppressed by mowing, while desirable species such as hazel, oak, and aspen are tolerant to infrequent mowing. Mowing will help us increase light levels to the soils, which will allow us determine how much of the ground layer vegetation is still in-tact. Mowing will also reduce vegetation height which will help us achieve low complexity burns, which are less expensive. Midsummer mowing will promote spring and fall wildflowers. Mowing is a multiple year event. The site benefited from a late September early to mid-October rotary mowing. Two mowing's per season made a difference. Mowing occurred in late July and again in late September through mid-October when the vegetation was dormant. After three seasons of mowing, mowing can now occur every other year, with the intent of knocking down late July vegetation to encourage spring wild flowers, with subsequent mowing reduced to once every three years.
- ✓ **Prescribed Burning:** Defined as a prescribed fire (Rx fire), which is a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health, and reduce wildfire risk. Long term management generally involves Rx-fire. In the best case scenario, Rx-fire would suffice, but in our current landscape, relying solely on Rx-fire can be difficult, especially in urban settings and in landscapes containing a coniferous component, and especially on sandy soils, where burning bands frequently prohibit fire. At this stage, for BPP, an Rx-fire, should occur every two or three seasons.

Threats to Long-Term Savanna Vegetation Management (Table 1)

- ✓ **Too Many Trees:** Conduct selective cutting over the next several years to attain the 11 to 12 mature trees per acre rule of thumb.
- ✓ **Excessive Dead Downed Wood:** Dead down wood will hinder mowing and executing Rx-fires. Wood laying on the ground consisting of dead branches which fell from the trees needs to be stacked into piles for burning or chipping to be hauled off site.
- ✓ **Excessive Leaf Litter:** The amount of leaf litter on the ground is a real threat for several reasons. First it eliminates the desirable heliophilic herbaceous community, while facilitating shade tolerant species such as buckthorn. Also, an excessive amount of nitrogen will dissolve out of the leaf material which in turn will fuel the invasion of undesirable vegetation. Burning will help eliminate this threat.
- ✓ **Loss of native seed bank:** The seed mix needs to remain intact. Reintroduce seed in thin areas. Increase diversity as threats are minimized, through seed and seedlings.
- ✓ **Undesirable species seed bank germination and resprouts:** Undesirable woody vegetation will continue to re-sprout from cut stumps. There will also be a significant seed bank flush from the soils. Species desired to control include buckthorn, hazel, prickly ash, raspberry, elm and red oak. Implement processes to prevent these species from resuming dominance over the site. Forestry mowing, coupled with herbicide treatment will reduce surviving resprout vigor while allowing more efficient future maintenance to occur.

2017 Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan
 Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Table 1: Threat Management on Belle Prairie Savanna

Threat	Action	Timing
Accumulating wood from existing dead branches in trees hinder mowing and Rx-fire	Cut up and stack down dead wood into piles. Burn or chip and haul off site	Yearly, Ongoing
Wood piles create a management obstacle course, harbor non-desirable species, release excessive nitrogen, and hinder Rx-fire.	Burn Piles	Whenever possible, the wood is cured and well stacked piles should ignite and burn during a downpour. In winter with 3" inches of snow, burn permits are not required.
Stumps and stubs higher than 3" inches pose a threat to county mowing machinery	Forestry mow, cutting stumps lower than 3' inches high	Yearly, Ongoing
Too many trees	Id trees, cut & harvest	Yearly, Ongoing -11 to 12 mature trees per acre rule
Resprouting vegetation from cut stumps and germinating seed from the soil seed bank will greatly reduce sunlight to soils while becoming more difficult to manage over time	Forestry mow	Every other year.
	Apply herbicide	As needed
	Rotary mow	Yearly
	Rx-fire	Minimum of every two years
Excessive leaf litter, after years of no fire, the leaf litter has built up to the point of smothering out ground layer vegetation	Rx-fire	Minimum of every two years
Excessive brush and tree growth re-dominates the site	Rx-fire	2 year burn cycle, fall burns or early spring burns are a good way to reduce leaf litter and encourage spring/fall blooms.
	Rotary mow	Mowing should occur once or twice each year. Mow mid-July to encourage spring/fall wildflowers. A second mowing could occur at the end of the growing season, in October to enhance spring/fall wildflowers.

Opportunities

Mowing in the Cemetery: There are several rare and beautiful wildflowers in the cemetery and the surrounding lawn. These species are there because of the mowing and leaf removal, which has allowed sunlight to reach the soils. Many of these species would bloom & seed if mowing was curtailed until early July. These species will re-appear in the restoration site, another reason the plan includes mowing.

2017 Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan
Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Operational Maintenance Objectives and Specifications

1. **Forestry Mowing Objectives:** Forestry mowing is designed to reduce the amount of stumps and wood which could damage conventional rotary mowers. Mowing will also suppress woody resprouts which in turn will increase sunlight to the soils. Mowers will reduce dead down wood, allowing more rapid decomposition of dead branches which will help facilitate quicker less expensive Rx-fire.

Forestry Mowing Specifications:

- a) Forestry mowing shall occur between July 15 and August 15.
 - b) The forestry mower will not damage soils, or if soils are damaged, they will be repaired.
 - c) The mower height is to be set at 2" above the ground.
 - d) No part of any stump shall exceed 3" inches in height following the mow.
2. **Herbicide Treatment Objectives:** This is a maintenance herbicide application to control resprouting woody vegetation over 35 acres of land in a recently restored savanna.

Herbicide Treatment Specifications:

- a) Work crew should include 4 people with back pack sprayers for three day each.
 - b) Approximate start date is August 15th of the year, and again August 15th of the following year.
 - c) Applicators will use herbicide which is appropriate for target species including: re-sprouting buckthorn, red elm, red oak, prickly ash, and ash.
 - d) Do not applicate re-sprouting oaks
 - e) Do not applicate re-sprouting hazel
 - f) Herbicide containing active ingredient Glyphosate and Triclopyr are pre-approved.
 - g) Herbicides with other active ingredients must be explicitly approved by project manager prior to use. Pesticides containing neonicotinoid family of active ingredients are expressly prohibited.
3. **Prescribed Burning/Fire (Rx-fire) Objectives:** Provide a safe way to apply a natural process, ensure ecosystem health, and reduce wildfire risk.

Prescribed Burning/Fire (Rx-fire) Specifications:

- a) Conduct prescribed burns on 37 acres within Belle Prairie Park (Spring & Fall - Figures 1).
- b) The Subcontractor is required to develop an appropriate burn plan, obtain proper permits, and contact appropriate authorities the day of the burn.
 - 1) Little Falls Fire Department ()
 - 2) Morrison County Sheriff ()
 - 3) Regional DNR ()
- c) The Subcontractor is required to construct and secure all necessary fire breaks.
- d) The Subcontractor is required to contact Project Manager, Morrison County, 24 hours prior to burning.
- e) Subcontractor will keep roads leading into the property open and not blocked with equipment, vehicles or debris resulting from this operation.
- f) Subcontractor is to ensure necessary trails are closed to protect visitors during running fire.
- g) Subcontractor is responsible for securing all necessary state and local permits including compiling necessary burn plans. Copies of permits must be provided to Project Manager. This includes pile burning, if any, and running fire.
- h) Subcontractor is responsible for smoke management while conducting the burns. Avoid winds that will put heavy smoke on neighbors, roads and/or train corridor.
- i) Subcontractor is responsible for any and all neighbor contacts

2017 Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan
 Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

Table 1: Prescribed Burning/Fire (Rx-fire) Outcome and Performance Standards

<i>Task</i>	<i>Target Outcome</i>	<i>Minimal Performance Standard</i>	<i>Evaluation Method</i>	<i>Corrective Measures</i>
Rx-Fire	Fire effectively covers 90% of the burn unit reducing leaf-litter by 90 - 100% in the burned over area	NA	Site assessment by Subcontractor and Project Manager	Subcontractor will seek optimal burn conditions to meet project goals. If suitable burn conditions do not arise, contractor will discuss alternative options with Project Manager. If a burn is conducted in sub-optimal conditions without Project Manager agreement, and results do not meet minimum specs, Subcontractor agrees to re-burn for no additional charge.

Belle Prairie Park Rx-fire

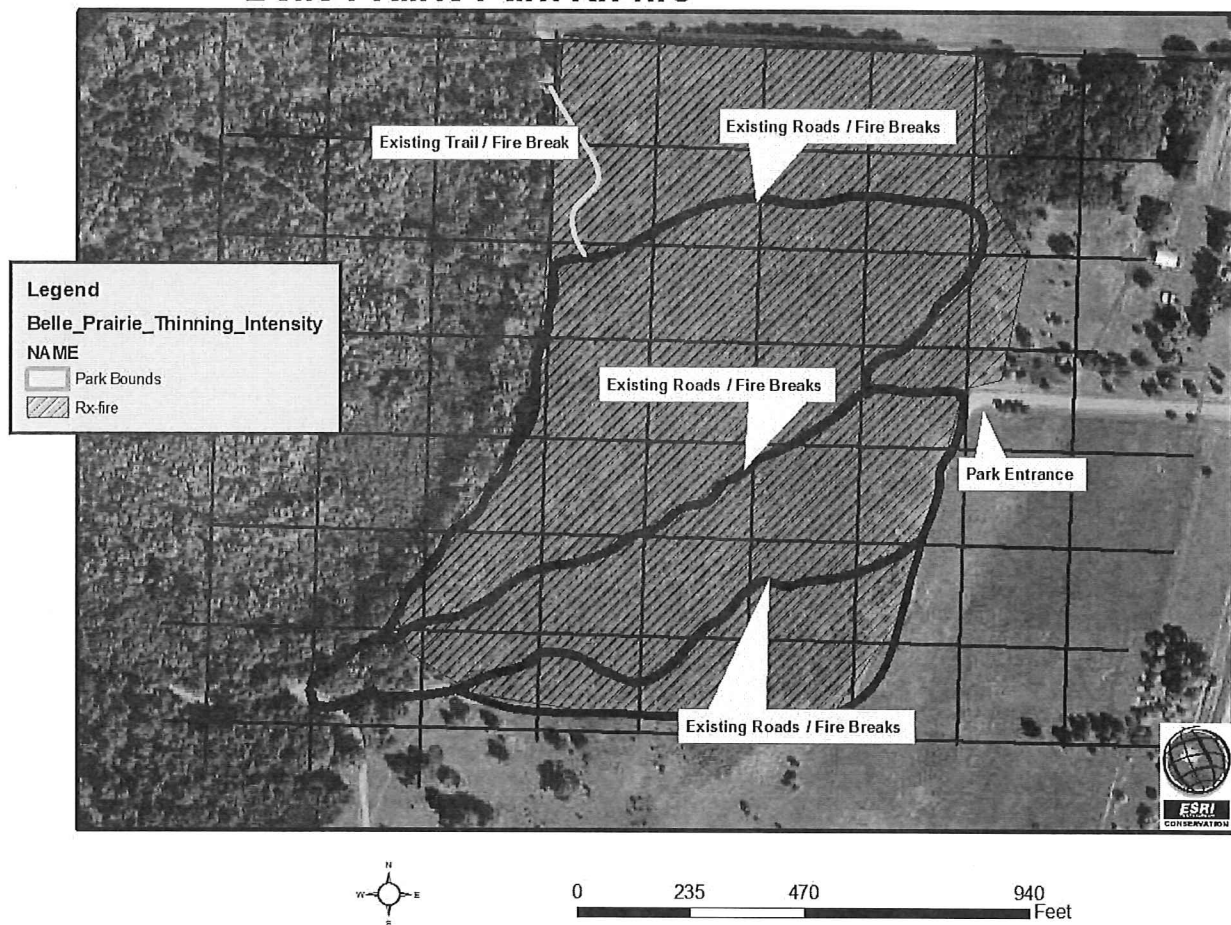


Figure 1: Belle Prairie Rx-fire map.

2017 Belle Prairie Savanna Restoration Management Plan
 Belle Prairie Park, Morrison County, Minnesota

4. **Reporting and Documentation:** Subcontractor will submit to the Project Manager a brief follow-up report that will include weather conditions during the burn, burn results, unexpected events, and any other deviations from the plan. A report form follows.

Site Name:					Burn Date:			
Service Provider		Burn Boss		Burn Crew		Number/type of vehicles on-site		
Weather								
	Time	Wind dir.	Wind Spd	Temp	Rel Hum	Heavy Fuel Moist	Comment	
Forecasted Fire Weather								
Observed weather								
Observed Fire Behavior					Acres Burned			
Time	Spread Rate	Flame Length	Scorch Ht		Fuel type	Planned	Actual	
					Grass			
					Woodland			
					Wetland			
Burn Summary: include difficulties, unexpected events, deviations from plan - e.g. weather changes, extensive mop up, neighbor issues, etc (if significant incident occurred submit separate Incident Report to GRG)								
Post Burn Observations: were Objectives met, what burned or did not								
Recommendations (for next burn)								
Post Burn - Next Day Visit								
Name:		Date:	Results:					
Burn Boss Signature								
Name:			Title:				Date:	

growth Pines, Prairie and Oak Savanna in one location is extremely unique and celebrates the diversity and history of Morrison County.