

Chapter VIII

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

A park and open space plan for Washington County was included in the 1977 park and open space plan for the seven-county Southeastern Wisconsin Region. That plan called for a system of large parks with natural resource amenities, such as lakes and wooded areas, to provide hiking trails and swimming beaches, as well as to accommodate such uses as camping, picnicking, and golfing. The plan also called for the development of smaller community and neighborhood parks for more intensive recreational activities, such as baseball, basketball, tennis, and for playgrounds. Under the regional park plan, responsibility for acquiring and developing large, resource-oriented parks was assigned to the State and the County; responsibility for acquiring and developing community and neighborhood parks was assigned to cities, villages, and towns.

In addition to a system of parks, the regional park plan also recommended a network of recreational trails along major rivers, along the Lake Michigan shoreline, and in the Kettle Moraine. It further recommended that areas with concentrations of important natural resources, which are referred to as primary environmental corridors, be preserved through a combination of protective zoning and public ownership. The plan also recommended that adequate public access to major lakes and streams for boating and fishing be provided.

In 1984, the Washington County Park and Planning Commission requested that SEWRPC assist the County in refining and updating the regional park and open space plan as it applied to Washington County. The resulting plan was documented in SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 136, A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County, March 1989. That plan, which has a design year of 2000, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors in December 1989.

In November 1994, Washington County requested the assistance of Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in the preparation a new County park and open space plan. This plan is designed to extend the recommendations of the existing Washington County park and open space plan to the design year 2010. The plan is based on updated information related to land use, population levels and distribution, anticipated growth and development, natural resources, and park and open space acquisition and development activities within the County. The plan is further intended to maintain County eligibility to apply for and receive Federal and State aids in partial support of the

acquisition and development of park and open space sites and facilities.

Inventory of Park and Open Space Sites

An inventory of existing public park and open space sites in Washington County in 1995 found that the County owned a total of eleven park and outdoor recreation sites encompassing 1,230 acres. The County park system consists of six developed major parks and five smaller sites. There are an additional 16 park and open space sites, encompassing 11,360 acres, owned by the State of Wisconsin, and 124 sites, encompassing 2,211 acres, owned by local units of government and school districts for outdoor recreation or natural resource preservation. An additional 44 sites, encompassing 4,876 acres, are developed for private resource-oriented outdoor recreational use and 19 sites, encompassing 1,105 acres, are owned by nonprofit conservation organizations for resource protection.

Public access for motorboating is provided at Big Cedar, Druid, Smith, and Wallace Lakes. Public access is also provided at Pike Lake, although no nearby public parking is available. A private boat launch open to the public for a fee is provided at Friess Lake and a boat rental is available on Little Cedar Lake.

Public access to major lakes for carry-in boating, fishing, and passive enjoyment is provided to Friess Lake at Glacier Hills County Park, to Pike Lake at Pike Lake State Park, and to Barton Pond at the West Bend Dam. Access to minor lakes and ponds for carry-in boating, fishing, and passive enjoyment is provided at a number of public sites throughout the County, including at Homestead Hollow, Ridge Run, and Sandy Knoll County Parks. Access to the Milwaukee River for canoeing is provided at Goeden County Park, at Newburg Park in the Village of Newburg, at River Hill Park in the Village of Kewaskum, and at the West Bend Dam and Riverside Park in the City of West Bend.

Existing trails in Washington County include a 17-mile segment of the Ice Age Trail and a two-mile segment of the Milwaukee River Trail. Both trails are located in natural resource corridors. The Ice Age Trail has been developed cooperatively by the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation, Inc., and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Existing segments of that trail are open to pedestrian travel only. The Milwaukee River Trail has been developed by the City of West Bend and accommodates pedestrian and bicycle travel.

Public Opinion Surveys

The Advisory Committee guiding the preparation of the County park and open space plan placed a high priority on obtaining citizen and local government input into the plan. Two public opinion surveys regarding the County park system were conducted by the Urban Research Center of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to help obtain such input.

The first survey was a telephone survey of about 600 County residents selected at random. Briefly, the telephone survey found that three-fourths of families with children had visited a County park at least once in the last year. The use of public funds for conserving lands for public parks, recreation, water quality and wildlife habitat was supported by 93 percent of those surveyed. Nearly three-fourths of those surveyed would like to see Washington County buy such lands as woodlands and wetlands to protect wildlife and preserve natural habitats for public enjoyment.

In addition, more than half of residents surveyed indicated an interest in hiking or walking, fishing, picnicking, or beach swimming, which are all activities commonly provided at major parks. The same four activities were also the most commonly mentioned by respondents when they were asked to name recreational activities they had participated in during the year prior to the survey. Washington County parks were also mentioned most often as the locations for such activities as cross-country skiing on ungroomed trails, tobogganing and sledding, picnicking, and pleasure driving. Finally, those surveyed indicated a desire for more hiking and biking trails and for more swimming pools in Washington County.

The second survey was mailed to 500 County residents who had reserved a County park facility in 1995 or 1996. The mail survey helped determine user satisfaction with existing park facilities and identified additional facilities park users would like to see provided at County parks. While the mail survey of park users found that there generally was a high degree of satisfaction with existing park facilities, respondents also suggested areas where improvement could be made. These included improved park rest rooms and availability of potable water; more picnic shelters, especially shelters with electrical service; better park security and improved maintenance; and additional recreational facilities and concession stands.

The survey results were used to help design the new park plan and will help the County Land Use and Park Department develop future work programs and budgets.

Recommended Park and Open Space Plan

The recommended park and open space plan for Washington County will guide the acquisition and development of lands to protect existing natural resources and to provide sites and facilities for outdoor recreation. The plan consists of two elements, an open space preservation element and an outdoor recreation element.

Open Space Preservation Element: The open space preservation element consists of four components: 1) The preservation of primary environmental corridors, secondary environmental corridors, and isolated natural resource areas, 2) The preservation of natural areas, critical species habitat sites, and geological and archeological areas in accordance with the recommendations set forth in the regional natural areas protection and management plan,¹ 3) The protection of open space lands within established Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources project boundaries, which in Washington County include Pike Lake State Park, the Loew Lake and Northern Units of the Kettle Moraine State Forest, and the Allenton Marsh, Jackson Marsh, and Theresa Marsh Wildlife Areas, and 4) The protection of important agricultural lands.

It is recommended that a total of 77,087 acres, or about 120 square miles, of open space lands be protected through a combination of public or nonprofit conservation organization ownership or through the application of protective zoning. These 77,087 acres include planned primary and secondary environmental corridors, planned isolated natural resource areas, and areas outside corridors but inside the Department of Natural Resources project boundaries. All natural areas and critical species habitat sites recommended to be preserved lie within the planned primary or secondary environmental corridors or the planned isolated natural resource areas.

Of the total 77,087 acres of recommended open space lands, 15,463 acres, or about 20 percent, were in public ownership, in nonprofit conservation organization ownership, or in compatible private outdoor recreation use in 1996 and are recommended to be preserved in such ownership. It is recommended that an additional 22,530 acres, or about 29 percent of proposed open space lands, including about 4,482 acres within proposed new or expanded major County park sites, be acquired by public agencies for natural resource protection or open space preservation purposes or for public park or trail use. The remaining 39,094 acres of open space lands should be placed in protective zoning districts to prevent incompatible development. Such protective zoning districts include floodland, conservancy, and, for upland portions of the corridor outside areas of steep slopes, rural residential zoning with an overall density of no more than one dwelling unit per five acres.

Farmlands recommended to be protected in agricultural use until at least the year 2010 total 87,043 acres. Farmlands in unincorporated areas to be protected are those designated as prime farmlands by the Washington County farmland preservation plan. Lands designated as "Rural Agricultural"

¹*Documented in SEWRPC Planning Report No. 42, A Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat Protection and Management Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin, September 1997.*

by the Village of Germantown land use plan² are also recommended to remain in long-term agricultural use, as recommended in the Village plan.

Outdoor Recreation Element: The outdoor recreation element of the plan recommends new major park sites and facilities and improvements at existing major parks, boat-access facilities to major lakes, and the development of areawide trails.

Under the outdoor recreation element of the plan, 12 major parks and three special regional outdoor recreational sites would be provided within the County. Of the 12 major parks, eight are existing parks and four would be new parks to be developed by Washington County. Of the eight existing major parks, six are owned by Washington County. The three special outdoor recreational sites in the County are the Loew Lake and Northern Units of the Kettle Moraine State Forest and the Lac Lawrann Conservancy Area in the City of West Bend.

In addition to its six major parks, Washington County owns three parks which are smaller than 100 acres, and thus not classified as major parks. These are the Cedar Lake Wayside, Goeden Park, and Lizard Mound Park. Although not part of the County park system, the County also owns the Hughes Burckhardt ballfields, which are leased to the West Bend Little League, and the existing Washington County Fairgrounds in the Village of Slinger and Town of Polk, located on a portion of the grounds of a County Highway Department substation. A new fairgrounds site, in the north-eastern portion of the Town of Polk, has recently been acquired and is expected eventually to replace the existing fairgrounds.

Under the new County park plan, the existing major County parks would be maintained and improved. It is recommended that four of the existing major parks be expanded to include adjacent lands with important natural resource values. It is also recommended that Lizard Mound County Park be expanded to include adjacent Native American effigy mounds and that additional land be acquired to connect Lizard Mound and Sandy Knoll parks. Additional facilities are also recommended to be developed at all existing major County parks.

In addition to maintaining and improving the six existing major County parks, Washington County would be responsible for acquiring and developing four new major parks, including new parks in the Newburg, Jackson, Addison, and Erin areas. The new parks will serve County residents not currently being conveniently served by an existing major park.

²*Documented in the report entitled Comprehensive Master Plan for the Village of Germantown, prepared by Vandewalle & Associates, August 1993.*

Recommended facilities at the new park sites include development of picnicking and trail facilities at each of the new parks, development of a swimming beach or pool at the Jackson-area park site, and development of group camping facilities at the new parks in the Addison and Erin areas.

The plan also recommends that the following major trails be provided within the County: the Ice Age Trail in the Kettle Moraine and the Milwaukee River Trail. The Ice Age Trail is proposed to extend about 37 miles within Washington County and will continue into Waukesha County on the south and Fond du Lac County on the north. About 17 miles of the Trail have been completed within the County. Under this plan, the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation, Inc., and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources would share responsibility for developing the Trail. Washington County would be responsible for developing those portions of the Milwaukee River Trail outside the City of West Bend. The Milwaukee River Trail is recommended to be open to bicycling and hiking and would be 15 miles in length. Thus far, about two miles of the Trail have been completed within the City of West Bend. The City of West Bend would assume responsibility for an additional three miles of the Trail within the City, while the County would assume responsibility for developing the remaining 10 miles of Trail outside the City.

The plan also recommends the development of boat-access points on major lakes in accordance with State policy to provide public motorboat access to lakes of 50 acres or more. Such access provides opportunities for those individuals who do not own land on a body of water to participate in such water-related recreation activities as motorboating, water-skiing, fishing, and canoeing. Under the plan, it is recommended that public boat-access sites be acquired and developed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on the following lakes: Bark Lake, Lake Five, Friess Lake, Green Lake, Little Cedar Lake, Lucas Lake, Pike Lake, Silver Lake, and Lake Twelve.

Upon completion of the preliminary draft of the park and open space plan, two public information meetings were held to acquaint public officials and interested citizens with the key recommendations of the plan as well as to receive comments on and answer questions pertaining to the plan. Those in attendance were generally dissatisfied with the limited opportunities for public access to County lakes. This sentiment was expressed, not only by representatives of the boating community, but also by individuals who are not boating enthusiasts who believe additional access to lakes for other recreational uses, such as beach swimming, shore fishing, or other passive uses, should be provided. Upon consideration of the comments and concerns made at the informational meetings, the Advisory Committee overseeing the preparation of the plan recommended that the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources place a higher priority on the provision of boat-access facilities on all the major lakes

in Washington County which now lack adequate facilities. In addition, the Committee recommended that Washington County pursue the acquisition and development of lands to provide the opportunity for public lake access for the recreational activities mentioned above, shore fishing, and other passive uses, as opportunities become available.

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS

The primary purpose of the park and open space plan for Washington County is to guide the acquisition and development of the lands and facilities needed to satisfy the outdoor recreation needs of the existing, and probable future year 2010, resident population of the County and to protect existing natural resources. Implementation of the recommended plan would assure the protection and preservation of important natural resources within environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas in the County. The plan is also designed to provide a variety of park and open space sites and facilities geographically well distributed throughout the County to meet the existing, and probable future, recreation needs of County residents.

Development costs would total about \$12.6 million, with Washington County responsible for about \$11.6 million of that amount.

The total estimated cost for implementing the County park and open space plan, is about \$51 million. The estimated cost to Washington County is about \$19.3 million, or about 38 percent of the total. The costs associated with implementation of the County park plan may be offset through grants provided for recreational and open space purposes by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. The acquisition and development costs for recreational and open space lands and facilities may also be offset by donations, land dedications, or by revenues generated by existing parks and recreational facilities. Finally, it should be recognized that public financial resources available for park and open space acquisition and development are limited; thus implementation of the recommended plan will, as a practical matter, occur gradually over time.

Under the plan, 23,346 acres, representing about 8 percent of the total area of the County, would be acquired for park and open space purposes at an estimated cost of \$38.4 million. Washington County would be responsible for acquiring about 5,000 acres of that total, at an estimated cost of \$7.7 million.