

Chapter VII

SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

A park and open space plan for Washington County was included in the 1977 regional park and open space plan for the seven-county Southeastern Wisconsin Region. The regional 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 uses such 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, and tennis, and for playgrounds. Under the regional park plan, responsibility for acquiring and developing large, resource-oriented parks was assigned to the State and County levels of government, and 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, the Lake Michigan shoreline, and the Kettle Moraine; and 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 had a design year of 2000, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on December 12, 1989, and by the Regional Planning Commission on March 7, 1990.

In 1994, Washington County requested that the Regional Planning Commission prepare a new park and open space plan to refine and update information from the first edition of the Washington County park and open space plan. The resulting plan is documented in the second edition of this report, SEWRPC Community Assistance Planning Report No. 136, *A Park and Open Space Plan for Washington County*, August 1997. The plan, which has a design year of 2010, was adopted by the Washington County Board of Supervisors on August 12, 1997, and by the Regional Planning Commission on March 4, 1998.

On June 19, 2001, Washington County requested the assistance of Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in the preparation of 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 2020. 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.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

A description of the population and employment levels, natural resources, land use, and land use regulations within Washington County is presented in Chapter II. A summary of existing conditions in the County follows.

Population and Employment Levels

The population of the County in 2000, the most recent year for which data from the U.S. Census are available, was about 117,500. The population level increased by about 22,000 persons, or about 23 percent, between 1990 and 2000. Over the past three decades, the County population increased by about 53,700 persons, or 84 percent.

In 2000, there were about 43,800 households in Washington County, representing an increase of about 152 percent, from 1970. With the number of households increasing at a faster rate than population, the number of persons per household has decreased.

There were about 62,400 employment opportunities, or jobs, in Washington County in 2000. The County has experienced a 157 percent increase in employment over the past three decades, with the number of jobs increasing by about 38,100 between 1970 and 2000.

Natural Resource Base

The location and extent of various elements of the natural resource base, including wetlands, woodlands, and surface water resources and associated shorelands and floodplains, were inventoried and mapped under the planning program. The most significant of these features lie within areas referred to as environmental corridors and isolated natural resource areas.

Primary environmental corridors include a wide variety of important natural resource and resource-related elements and are, by definition, at least 400 acres in size, two miles in length, and 200 feet in width. Primary environmental corridors are located throughout the County. Such corridors in 1995 encompassed about 94.0 square miles, or about 22 percent of the County. The preservation of these corridors in essentially natural, open use is important to the overall quality of the environment and natural beauty of Washington County. Since these corridors are generally poorly suited for urban development, their preservation also helps to avoid the creation of new environmental and developmental problems.

Secondary environmental corridors, often remnants of primary corridors that have been partially converted to intensive urban or agricultural use, also contain a variety of resource elements. By definition, secondary environmental corridors are at least one mile long and 100 acres in area. In 1995, these corridors encompassed about 15.5 square miles, or about 3 percent of the County. Maintenance of these corridors in open uses can facilitate natural surface water drainage, and provide corridors for the movement of wildlife.

Isolated natural resource areas represent smaller concentrations of natural resource features that have been separated from the environmental corridors. Such areas, which are by definition at least five acres in size, in combination encompassed about 10.2 square miles, or about 2 percent of the County, in 1995. These areas sometimes serve as the only available wildlife habitat in an area, and may function as storm water retention areas.

Land Use

In 1995, urban land uses—consisting primarily of residential, commercial, industrial, governmental and institutional, recreational and transportation, communication, and utility uses—encompassed about 67.1 square miles, or about 15 percent of the total area of the County. Residential land comprised the largest share of the

urban land area, encompassing 34.9 square miles, or about 52 percent of all urban land and 8 percent of the total area of the County.

In 1995, nonurban land uses—including agricultural lands, wetlands, woodlands, surface water, landfill and extractive, and other open lands—encompassed about 368.6 square miles, or about 85 percent of the County. Agricultural land comprised the largest share of the nonurban land area, accounting for about 238.7 square miles, or about 55 percent of the total area of the County.

INVENTORY OF PARK AND OPEN SPACE SITES

An inventory of existing public park and open space sites in Washington County in 2002 found that the County owned a total of 15 park and outdoor recreation sites encompassing 1,511 acres. There are an additional 23 park and open space sites, encompassing 11,655 acres, owned by the State of Wisconsin, and 136 sites, encompassing 2,724 acres, owned by local units of government and school districts for outdoor recreation or natural resource preservation purposes. An additional 47 sites, encompassing 5,411 acres, are developed for private resource-oriented outdoor recreational use, and 28 sites, encompassing 1,661 acres, are owned by private organizations for resource protection purposes. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Cedar Lakes Conservation Foundation, and The Ozaukee Washington Land Trust held conservation easements at 30 locations, encompassing 953 acres.

Publicly owned access sites for motor-boating purposes in Washington County are provided at the following major lakes: Big Cedar Lake, Little Cedar Lake, Druid Lake, Pike Lake, Smith Lake, and Wallace Lake. Privately owned access sites for motor-boating on major lakes are also provided at Big Cedar Lake, Little Cedar Lake, Friess Lake, Pike Lake, and Silver Lake. Public access to major lakes for carry-in boating is provided on Barton Pond and Pike Lake. Canoe access to the Milwaukee River is provided at a number of locations in the County. There are also numerous other sites that provide access to minor lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams for other recreational and passive uses.

Existing trails in Washington County include a 25-mile segment of the Ice Age trail and a two-mile segment of the Milwaukee River recreation corridor.

PUBLIC OPINION SURVEYS

As part of the park and open space planning process, two public opinion surveys of County residents were conducted under this planning program in 2002 to gather information related to public perceptions of outdoor recreation, the County park system, and protection of natural resources. The surveys were conducted on behalf of the County by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Center for Urban Initiatives and Research and were designed with the assistance of the Washington County Park and Open Space Plan Technical Advisory Committee. Major opinions and recommendations expressed included: interest in nature education programs and the provision of a nature center by the County; provision of a system of recreation trails by the County; acquisition of lands for new County parks; and the preference of taxes, bonds, and user fees as the mechanism for acquisition of lands for resource protection purposes and expansion of the park system. Recommendations related to existing County parks included: the provision of additional benches and tables, dumpsters and recycling containers; the improvement of park maintenance and shelter amenities; and the provision of dog parks, playground equipment, and volleyball courts.

Similar surveys were conducted in conjunction with the previous County park and open space plan in 1996. The results of the 2002 telephone and mail surveys were generally similar to the telephone and mail surveys conducted in 1996, although some notable differences exist. Respondents expressed a greater interest in water slides/water parks in the 2002 survey compared to the 1996 survey. User fees were the overall preferred mechanism to finance park and open space acquisition and development in the 1996 survey, compared to a combination of taxes, bonds, and user fees as the preferred mechanism in the 2002 survey. Survey respondents' comments regarding park restrooms were somewhat more positive in the 2002 survey than in the 1996 survey.

The respondents in the 2002 survey indicated that they would prefer a telephone park reservation system; in the 1996 survey, respondents favored the in-person system employed by the County.

It should be noted that a greater effort was made to obtain public input from Washington County residents compared to previous County park and open space plans. In addition to the public opinion surveys, six public informational meetings and one public hearing were held throughout the planning process. Special consideration was given to all public input, and many changes/additions were incorporated into the recommended plan chapter.

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 located within established Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources project boundaries, which in Washington County include the Loew Lake, Northern, and Pike Lake Units of the Kettle Moraine State Forest, the North Branch Milwaukee River Wildlife and Farming Heritage Area, and the Allenton Marsh, Jackson Marsh, and Theresa Marsh Wildlife Areas; and 4) the preservation of prime agricultural lands.

It is recommended that a total of 77,334 acres, or about 28 percent of Washington County, be protected through a combination of public or nonprofit conservation organization ownership, or through the application of protective zoning. These 77,334 acres include planned primary and secondary environmental corridors, planned isolated natural resource areas, and areas outside corridors but within the Department of Natural Resources project boundaries. All natural areas and critical species habitat sites recommended to be preserved are contained within the planned primary or secondary environmental corridors or the planned isolated natural resource areas.

Of the total 77,334 acres of recommended open space lands, 17,758 acres, or about 23 percent, were in public ownership, nonprofit conservation organization ownership, conservation easements, or in compatible private outdoor recreation use in 2002; and are recommended to be preserved in such ownership. It is recommended that an additional 16,228 acres, or about 21 percent of proposed open space lands, be acquired by public agencies for natural resource protection or open space preservation purposes or for public park or trail use. The remaining 43,348 acres of open space lands should be placed in protective zoning districts to prevent incompatible development. Such protective zoning districts include floodland and lowland and upland conservancy zoning. Upland conservancy zoning should limit residential development to an overall density of no more than one dwelling unit per five acres, in areas outside steep slopes.

Existing prime agricultural lands should be protected by Washington County and local units of government. Specifically, it is recommended that all prime agricultural lands identified in the farmland preservation plan for Washington County be preserved insofar as practicable in agricultural use.

Outdoor Recreation Element

The outdoor recreation element of the plan recommends new major park sites and facilities; new facilities and improvements at existing major parks; the development of areawide trails; and boat access facilities to major lakes.

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

Under the outdoor recreation element of the plan, 12 major parks would be provided within the County. Of the 12 major parks, nine are existing parks and three would be new parks to be acquired and developed by Washington County. The nine existing major parks are: the Pike Lake Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest, owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Ackerman's Grove, Family Park/Washington County Golf Course/Joseph P. Marx Woods Nature Preserve Complex, Glacier Hills, Heritage Trails, Homestead Hollow, Ridge Run, and Sandy Knoll owned by Washington County; and Riverside Park owned by the City of West Bend.

Under the new County park plan, the existing major parks would be maintained and improved. It is recommended that five of the existing major County parks be expanded to include adjacent lands with important natural resource values. Additional facilities are also recommended to be developed at all seven existing major County parks.

In addition to maintaining and improving the seven existing major County parks, Washington County would be responsible for acquiring and developing three new major parks. The three proposed major County parks include: a park in the northwestern portion of the County; a park in the northern portion of the Village of Germantown; and a park in the southwestern portion of the County. The County would also provide two new smaller parks, one to the west of the Village of Jackson on Tilly Lake and one on Big Cedar Lake, and a dog park to serve residents in the central portion of the County.

Major recommendations for outdoor recreational facilities at County parks include the development of: a nature center at Glacier Hills Park; additional formal picnic areas at Heritage Trails Park, Ridge Run Park, and Sandy Knoll Park; formal picnic areas at Family Park/Washington County Golf Course/Joseph P. Marx Woods Nature Preserve Complex and at the three new major park sites; additional picnic shelters at Ackerman's Grove and picnic shelter improvements at Homestead Hollow Park; boat access facilities at Glacier Hills Park; a swimming beach at Heritage Trails Park.

The plan also recommends that 52 miles of recreation trails be provided within the County. About 12 miles would be provided by Washington County, and about three miles (including two existing miles) by the City of West Bend, as part of the Milwaukee River Corridor. The Milwaukee River recreation corridor would connect to a proposed Milwaukee River Corridor in Ozaukee County on the east and to the Kettle Moraine State Forest—Northern Unit on the north. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Ice Age Park and Trail Foundation would be responsible for about 37 miles (including 25 existing miles) as part of the Ice Age Trail. The Ice Age Trail would connect to the Ice Age trail segments in Fond du Lac County on the north and in Waukesha County on the south. In addition to the recreation corridors, one other trail, the 12-mile Canadian National Railway trail, would be developed by Washington County. Approximately eight miles of this trail coincides with the proposed Milwaukee River Corridor trail.

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

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The primary purpose of the park and open space plan for Washington County is to guide the acquisition and development of lands and facilities needed to satisfy the outdoor recreation needs of the existing and probable future year 2020 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.

Under the plan, 16,860 acres, representing about 6 percent of the total area of the County, would be acquired for park and open space purposes at an estimated cost of \$76.8 million. Washington County would be responsible for acquiring about 4,600 acres of that total, at an estimated cost of \$19 million. Development costs would total about \$20 million, with Washington County responsible for about \$19.2 million of that amount.

The total estimated cost for implementing the County park and open space plan, is about \$96.8 million. The estimated cost to Washington County is about \$38.2 million, or about 39 percent of the total. The costs associated with implementation of the County park plan may be off-set 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 off-set by donations, land dedications, or by revenues generated by existing parks and recreational facilities.