



OXBOW PARK + ZOLLMAN ZOO MASTER PLAN

ADOPTED BY OLMSTED BOARD ON
DECEMBER 14, 2021



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Executive Summary



Oxbow Park is a 622-acre natural resource based park with miles of hiking trails, picnic areas along the Zumbro River, a campground, and the focal point, Zollman Zoo, with over 30 species of native, non-releasable Minnesota, wild animals. The park is located on the western side of the county, and is widely visited by tour groups, school field trips, families, and the general public. This document is intended to guide park investment and development over the coming years, to ensure that Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo continue to meet the needs of visitors and wildlife alike.

The Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo Master Plan seeks to plan and prioritize for the next 20 years of park development, operations, maintenance, and programming. The plan will also serve as a guide for natural resource management. The plan was developed to meet the requirements of the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) in order to seek funding for future improvements.

PROJECT PROCESS

This master plan was created as part of a larger project to identify future needs for the Olmsted County Park System as a whole and for each individual park unit within the County. Every five years following development of the initial master plans in 2016, project staff and the consultant team work to update plans for Chester Woods Park, Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo, Root River Park, Lake Zumbro Park, and the Olmsted County Park System by analyzing existing conditions, conducting community engagement, and developing concepts.

OXBOW PARK

Vision

Oxbow Park is a natural resource park that contains the special feature, Zollman Zoo, serving the residents of Olmsted County and visitors and tourists from the surrounding region with a high quality nature center, regionally native zoo animals, a campground, river recreation, nature trails, restored prairies and forest conservation areas, and other amenities. The park and zoo provide the park users with environmental education and foster environmental stewardship.

Established

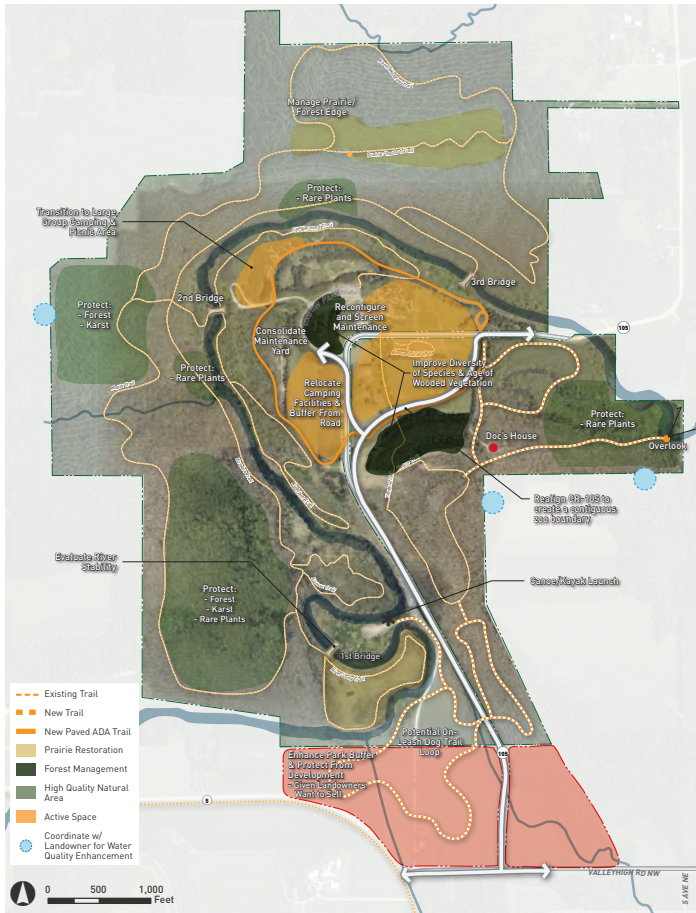
Original 465 acres acquired by the county in 1967 with the zoo being established in 1969

Size

622 acres, sprawled along both sides of the south branch of the middle fork of the Zumbro River

Amenities

- » Campground
- » 8 miles of primitive hiking trails
- » 5 picnic shelters, including one event area
- » Youth Group Area
- » Zollman Zoo
- » Playgrounds
- » Path of Imagination Natural Playscape
- » Oxbow Nature Center



DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN

Future development plans for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo include modifications and expansions that will allow more people to use and enjoy the park.

Planned improvements for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo include:

- » Realignment of County Road 105 to create a safer, contiguous zoo boundary
- » Relocating the campground to higher ground
- » Repurposing of existing campground for group picnicking
- » New ADA trail loop
- » Addition of new seasonal group camp site in old campground area
- » Trail extensions in east, including a new river overlook
- » Bridge replacements
- » New on-leash dog trails in south
- » Additional canoe/kayak launch
- » Safety improvements along CR 105
- » Reconfigured maintenance areas with enhanced screening
- » Potential park expansion to the south as acquisition opportunities arise

Completed improvements to Oxbow Park + Zollman Zoo since the 2016 Master Plan:

- » Reconfigured and expanded parking adjacent to Zollman Zoo
- » Repurposed Doc's House
- » Expanded Nature Center (2022)
- » Realigned intersection between CR 105, Valleyhigh Rd NW, and CSAH 5



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This document presents the master plan for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo in Olmsted County, Minnesota. Oxbow Park is a 622-acre natural resource based park with miles of hiking trails, picnic areas along the Zumbro River, a campground, and the focal point, Zollman Zoo, with over 30 species of native, non-releasable Minnesota, wild animals. The park is located on the western side of the county, and is widely visited by tour groups, school field trips, families, and the general public.

The master plan consists of the following sections:

- » The **Introduction** gives an overview of the park, its context within Olmsted County and the region, and defines the process undertaken to complete the plan.
- » **Existing Conditions** identifies existing conditions, issues, and opportunities.
- » The **Vision** outlines the system vision, mission, and values, summarizes public input, and describes demographics, recreation trends, economic trends, and public health values that support the vision.
- » The **Development Master Plan** describes desired park improvements in the next 10-20 years.
- » The **Natural Resources Plan** defines the ongoing management and future restoration strategies for ecological and land resources.
- » The **Implementation, Management, and Sustainability Plan** establishes programming, operations, maintenance, and implementation strategies, processes, and priorities. This section also contains cost estimates for future improvements.

OXBOW PARK

Established

Original 465 acres acquired by the county in 1967 with the zoo being established in 1969

Size

622 acres, sprawled along both sides of the south branch of the middle fork of the Zumbro River

Annual Visitation

An estimated 300,000 visitors annually

Amenities

- » *Campground has 30 sites, 10 of which are electric and 20 non-electric – Bath and shower facility constructed in 2004*
- » *There are approximately 8 miles of primitive hiking trails*
- » *The five picnic shelters, spread out in three different areas, are all available on a first come first serve basis, and may be reserved*
- » *The Youth Group Area is available for reserving at a rate of \$50/day and has its own picnic shelter, fire rings, parking lot, and recreation space*
- » *The Zollman Zoo is home to over 30 native Minnesota species and is the base of the environmental education and programming*
- » *Playgrounds are located at all three of the picnic areas as well as in the campground*
- » *Path of Imagination Natural Playscape completed in 2015*
- » *The Oxbow Nature Center is open daily from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. coinciding with the zoo hours*

Staffing

5 FTE as well as seasonal; in 2019 the park received 6.3 FTE of volunteer time

Master Plan Purpose

This master plan has the following objectives:

- » Inventory the existing conditions and facilities of each park and analyze issues and opportunities within the parks
- » Meet the requirements of the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) in order to attain regional designation and to seek funding for future improvements
- » Engage the community in order to learn about and plan for issues, opportunities, and future improvements
- » Plan and prioritize for the next 20 years of park development, operations, maintenance, and programming
- » Plan for long-term natural resource management within the park land
- » Provide a user-friendly guide for future decision making

Project Process

This master plan was created as part of a larger project to identify future needs for the Olmsted County Park System as a whole and for each individual park unit within the County. During the spring and summer of 2016, the project staff and consultant team worked to develop plans for Chester Woods Park, Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo, Root River Park, the White Bridge Fishing Pier, and the Olmsted County Park System. The following process was used for all parks:

- » Organization & Inventory (April): background research, site visits, and field inventory
- » Site and Needs Assessment (May): stakeholder engagement, public meeting, and summarization of issues and opportunities
- » Concept Development (May-June): preliminary concepts developed for each park, and reviewed by staff, Park Commission and public
- » Prepare Master Plans and Approvals (July-September): cost estimates and implementation plans are prepared, master plan document is assembled, draft documents reviewed by staff, Park Commission, and public, and approved by County Board.

Overview of Olmsted County Park System

Olmsted County first provided park services in 1968 when the State of Minnesota turned Oronoco State Park over to county management (note - Oronoco Park is now owned by the City of Oronoco). From that initial 33 acres, the system has grown to more than 2,200 acres in multiple sites across the county. The Olmsted County Park System includes Chester Woods Park, Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo, Root River Park, and Lake Zumbro Park. In addition, Olmsted County owns Mayowood Corridor, an improved trail operated by the City of Rochester. Olmsted County parks offers a variety of natural resource based outdoor recreation and educational opportunities to southeastern Minnesota.

MISSION

The mission of Olmsted County Parks is to foster an appreciation of the natural world through environmental education, natural resource management, and public participation in the stewardship of our park lands.

VISION

Learning life-long lessons in natural places

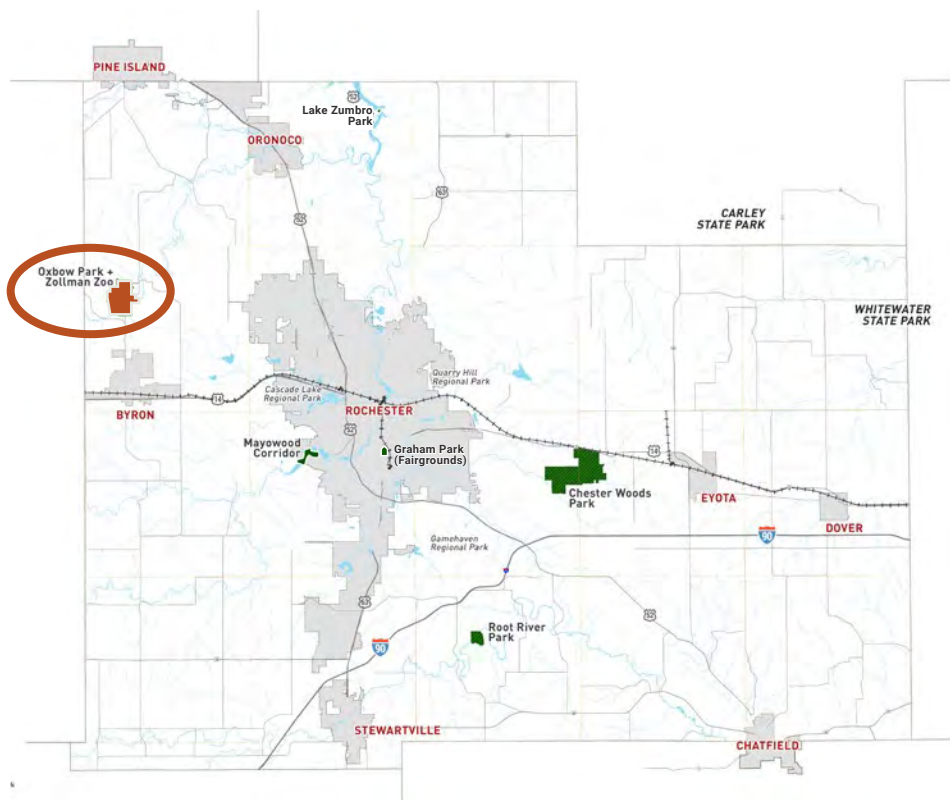


Figure 1. County Facilities

PARKS ARE OLMSTED COUNTY'S HIGHEST RATED SERVICE

Parks and recreation was rated as the top county service in the 2008, 2013, and 2016 Olmsted County Resident Surveys

GREATER MINNESOTA REGIONAL PARKS & TRAILS COMMISSION

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission was established by the Minnesota State Legislature in 2013 in order to approve designation of regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota and to make funding recommendations to the legislature regarding park and trail projects. The funding is provided by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment Parks and Trails Fund. Olmsted County aims to attain regional park designation for Oxbow Park using this master plan.

LOCATION DESCRIPTION

Located 7 miles west of Rochester, MN, Oxbow Park/Zollman Zoo is easily accessible by turning off of US Highway 14 and going 3 miles north of Byron, MN on County Road 5.

CLASSIFICATION

Special Recreational Feature Park

TOTAL ACREAGE

622 acres

In Timothy Engrav's 2005 book entitled: County Parks of Minnesota, Oxbow Park is identified as one of the favorite parks for special uses.

Park Overview & Description

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo is the second largest park in the Olmsted County Park System, totaling 622 acres. The vistas that dominate the viewscape in the Oxbow Valley include the middle branch of the Zumbro River, blufflands, floodplain meadows, restored prairies, mature maple/basswood forests, and native woodland and prairie flowers.

Oxbow's most renowned and special feature is the Dr. Paul E. Zollman Zoo and Nature Center located in the center of the Oxbow Park valley. The zoo features over 30 native species of animals indigenous to Minnesota including mammals, birds of prey, amphibians and reptiles. The animals housed at the zoo are non-releasable, and are either permanently injured or are surplus animals from other zoos and animal rehabilitation facilities. The zoo animals represent a living museum for park visitors seeking environmental programming from staff and volunteers, and also allow visitors the opportunity to see the inherent beauty of Minnesota's native wildlife population.

Oxbow's new Nature Center includes three classrooms, a large central exhibit hall, wildlife watching area, rental office, and a catering kitchen. In past years, more than 22,000 annual visitors participated in interpretive programs offered by Oxbow staff and volunteers, and the new center can accommodate roughly three times as many participants. Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo visitation exceeds 300,000 annual visitors and the park serves the 12 county region of Southeastern Minnesota, Western Wisconsin, and Northern Iowa. Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo not only hosts out of state guests but welcomes visitors from around the world who are seeking medical care at the Mayo Clinic. Additionally, the park serves local visitors and groups that include (illustrative only): girl scouts, boy scouts, boys and girls club, high school cross country teams, grade schools, senior citizens, church organizations, family YMCA and day camp participants, trail race activities, and special events designed for youth and families.



Regional Significance

Zollman Zoo and the programming associated with this special park attraction are unique in the region. Zollman Zoo is a unique public facility and is the only one of its kind in southeastern Minnesota. The nearest zoo is the Minnesota Zoo, 70 miles north in the southern metro area. While smaller animal collections are present in a few locations throughout Greater Minnesota, it is fair to say that the size and scope of the zoo, associated with the beautiful natural surroundings of a natural resource based park facility allows this park to stand out among regional parks throughout the state. In addition, its proximity to a substantial population base in the greater Rochester Area, and only an hour's ride from the southern Metropolitan area solidifies its definition as a Special Recreational Feature Regional Park.

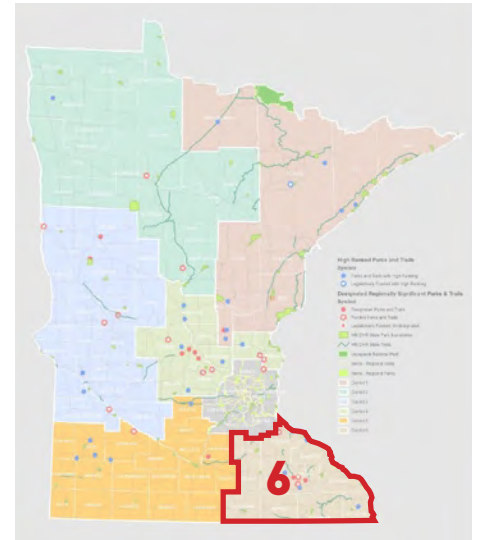
Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo receive an estimated 300,000 visitors a year. The engaging appeal of the zoo animals and the “unscripted” natural history associated with animal activity and the changing of seasons leads to frequent return visits to both the park and the zoo by many of our park visitors.

Zollman Zoo has become the center of Oxbow’s educational programming, and the animals featured are the foundation for expanding on the environmental principles associated with a comprehensive, natural resource based curriculum. The zoo animals, seen in spacious, humane exhibits, create the linkage needed for young and old minds alike to make a connection with wild places and the wildlife dependent on healthy ecosystems. In 2019, nearly 24,000 visitors participated in interpretive programs offered by Oxbow staff and volunteers, and it’s estimated that over 90% of the park’s annual visitors visit the zoo while spending time within the park’s borders.

The zoo and nature center attract visitors from beyond southeastern Minnesota. School groups from as far south as Iowa come for field trips; more than 60 different schools make the trip annually. The new nature center is sure to attract even more in the future, with its increased capacity. Patients receiving treatment at Mayo Clinic visit the park with their families while staying in Rochester, which provides the park with an international audience. Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo were voted Rochester’s Best Family Attraction by the PostBulletin in 2018.

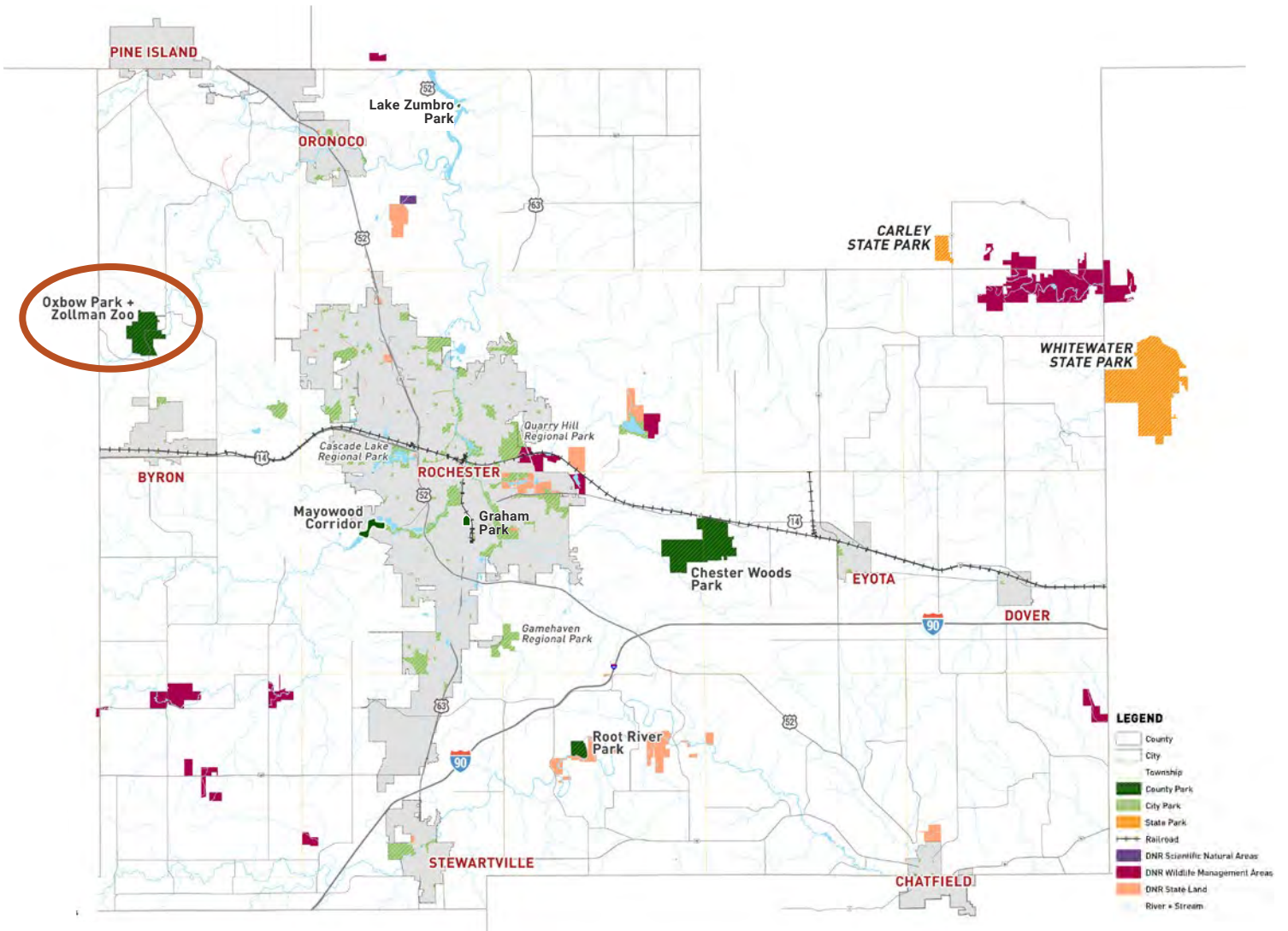
The nature center’s guest registry and comment section provides solid proof that a great portion of guests frequent the park repeatedly throughout the year, and Mayo Clinic visitors find comfort being able to return to the park.

Efforts are made to engage new park users through partnerships with organizations such as Community Education, English as a Second Language Classes, and inner-city children through travel scholarships for the Boys and Girls Club, Family YMCA, Schools, and Church related group visits.



The diagram above is taken from the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission “2016 System Plan and Work Plan.” The diagram identifies District 6 in the southeastern corner of Minnesota.

Figure 2. City, County, and State Park and Open Space Lands in Olmsted County



Regional Context

The base population served by the park is the region of southeastern Minnesota, western Wisconsin, and northern Iowa. Olmsted County is a rapidly growing destination due to the proximity of the world renowned, Mayo Clinic and its new initiative, Destination Medical Center. The District 6 population exceeds 511,000. As of 2020, Olmsted County reported 162,847 citizens. The projected population growth for Olmsted County indicates that from 2010 to 2040, the County will add over 70,000 residents, which will take it from its 2010 population of 144,248 to 215,870 people in 2040 (U.S. Decennial Census and Rochester-Olmsted Planning Department).

The County is served by three nature-based regional parks, as well as many City of Rochester regional and community parks. State land in the area includes Whitewater State Park, Carley State Park, state forests, and several WMAs and SNAs. The southeastern part of Minnesota contains a significant amount of agricultural land, but the unique geologic history of the area contributes to interesting and attractive landforms, including steep cliffs, winding streams and rivers, sinkholes, and rolling hills.

Table 1. City, County, and State Park and Open Space within Olmsted County Lands Inventory

Activity	City Community/ Athletic/ Neighborhood Parks	Gamehaven (under development)	Quarry Hill	Cascade Lake (under develop- ment)	Oxbow	Chester Woods	Richard J. Dorer Mem- orial Hard- wood State Forest (pub- lic and pri- vate lands)	White- water State Park	Carley State Park	Root River	Oronoco Prairie SNA	Multi- ple WMAs
	Jurisdiction	Multi	Rochester	Rochester	Rochester	OC	OC	DNR	DNR	DNR	OC	DNR
Acres	3,602	260	320	246	622	1,333	1,016,204 total (~34,500 Olmsted County)	563	209	126	80	5,897
PASSIVE RECREATION	Nature Observa- tion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Picnicking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	Canoe/ Kayaking	X	X		X	X	X			X		
	Fishing	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
	Hunting						X	X				X
TRAILS	Hiking/Walking	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	X Country Skiing/ Snowshoeing	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	
	Winter Fat Tire Biking					X						
	Horseback Riding						X	X		X		
LODGING	Camping					X	X	X	X			
NATURE CENTER/ZOO	Nature Center/ Zoo	X		X		X						
ACTIVE RECREATION	Swimming Beach	X			X		X	X				
	Playground	X	X	X	X	X			X			
	Archery	X	X									
	Mountain Biking	X	X				X					
	Disc Golf	X	X									
	Athletic Fields/ Courts	X		X								





CHAPTER 2: **EXISTING CONDITIONS**

Site Location & Context

Oxbow Park is a 622 acre county park located in west-central Olmsted County. The park is approximately seven miles west of Rochester and three miles north of Byron. County Road 105 NW runs through the park.

The park is surrounded by agricultural and open space uses. The South Branch Middle Fork of the Zumbro River winds through the park, creating the “Oxbow” that the park is named after.

Oxbow Park is the second largest park in the Olmsted County Regional Park System. The 622 total acres features 8 miles of hiking trails, 3 different and distinct picnic areas, 3 bridges leading across the river, 5 shelters, a youth camp area, a 30-site campground (featuring a modern shower and restroom), 3 ADA accessible camp sites, 15 electrical sites and 15 non-electric sites.

Oxbow’s most renowned and special feature is Zollman Zoo and Nature Center. The zoo features over 30 native species of animals indigenous to Minnesota including mammals, birds of prey, amphibians, and reptiles. The animals housed at the zoo are non-releasable, and are either permanently injured or are surplus animals from other animal facilities. The zoo animals represent a living museum for park visitors seeking environmental programming from staff and volunteers, and also allow visitors the opportunity to see the inherent beauty of Minnesota’s native wildlife.

In 2019, nearly 24,000 visitors participated in programs offered by Oxbow staff and volunteers. In addition to traditional naturalist programming, and unique to Oxbow, is the interpretation programming related to the zoo animals and their natural history. Zoo programs and the daily zoo happenings experienced by visitors include formal animal introduction sessions, and observing and assisting animal keepers as they perform their chores and feed the animals. These types of experiences and the more conventional naturalist-led nature programs provide lasting memories for our many visitors.



Maple Trail runs through the park's mature hardwood forests



Path of Imagination natural playscape

In the summer of 2015, the park's Path of Imagination natural playscape was completed. It is located close to the zoo and nature center providing additional fun and discovery based on natural sciences and the skills of play and observation. The site is approximately 2 acres in size and includes 13 features with a model of the solar system extending throughout.

A NATURAL AND HISTORIC LANDSCAPE

Established in 1967, Oxbow Park features mature hardwood forests, bluff lands, restored prairies, ample access to scenic respite/reflection areas along the River, view sheds from the bluffs along the trail system, Karst Geology, accompanying sinkholes, a documented Native American camp along the river (researched by Iowa State University) and several species of rare and endangered flora and fauna (see attachment). By design, and as an added feature, all of the custom designed zoo exhibits that house the animals displayed are constructed with limestone material, the signature geologic rock associated with southeastern Minnesota and its Karst Geology. Further, a strong emphasis is placed on resource management operations in the park, complemented by a long-established environmental education curriculum that provides interpretive programming to thousands of citizens and school aged children on an annual basis.

RECREATION AMENITIES AND FACILITIES OVERVIEW

The park includes picnicking and picnic shelters, hiking trails (natural), cross-country skiing trails, paddle launches, a Visitor/Nature Center, interpretive trails, play areas, a restroom/sanitation building, roads, and parking areas. The Zumbro River shoreline within the park's boundaries is maintained for the convenience of park visitors for fishing and wading. The Zumbro River offers a place to catch fish, most notably smallmouth bass.

Access

- » The major vehicle access to the park is off of County Road 105, with driveway access near the turn in the road. This leads vehicles to parking areas, the Zollman Zoo and Oxbow Nature Center, the campground, and other facilities.
- » Hiking areas across the river can be accessed by foot or kayak, with three bridges providing connections.
- » Nearly eight miles of developed trails wind through the prairies, meadows, and wooded hills of Oxbow Park, providing visitors with a variety of options for hiking. Oxbow Park is renowned for its splendid beauty and natural history. A hike during any time of the year promises to be a delightful experience. These trails are well maintained and marked for convenience. Trail head maps are posted as well.

Figure 3. Park-Wide Existing Conditions

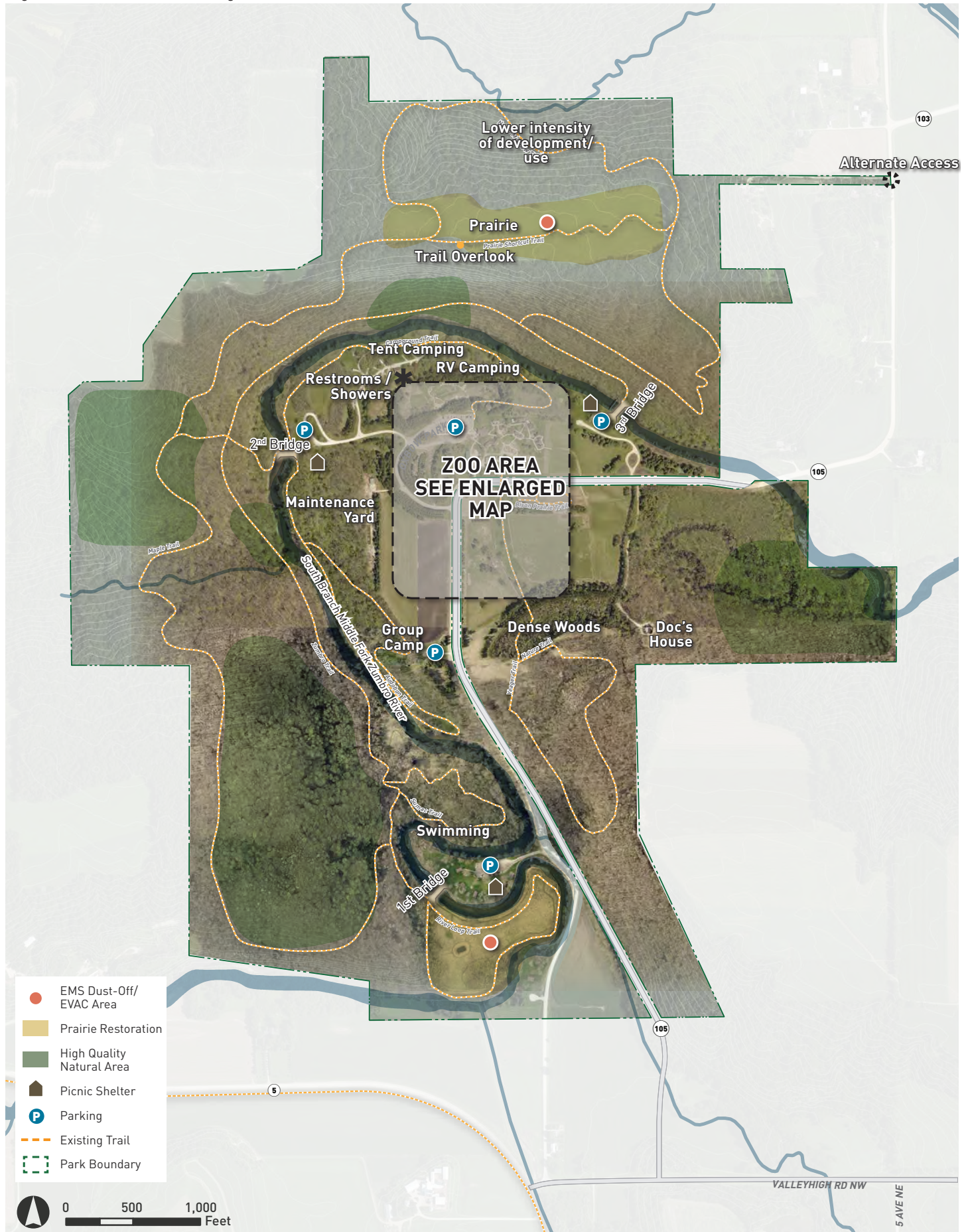
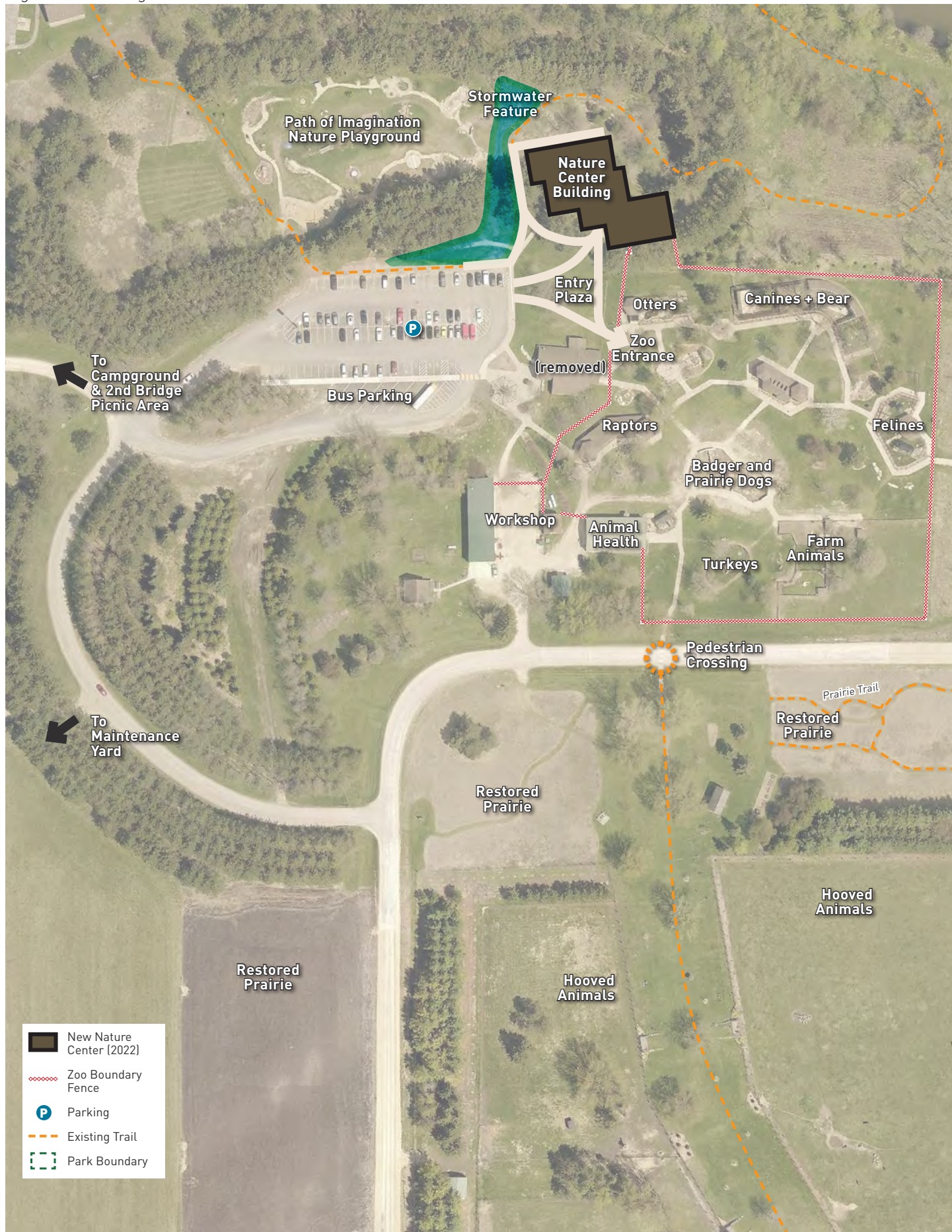


Figure 4. Existing Conditions of Zoo Area



Zollman Zoo & Nature Center

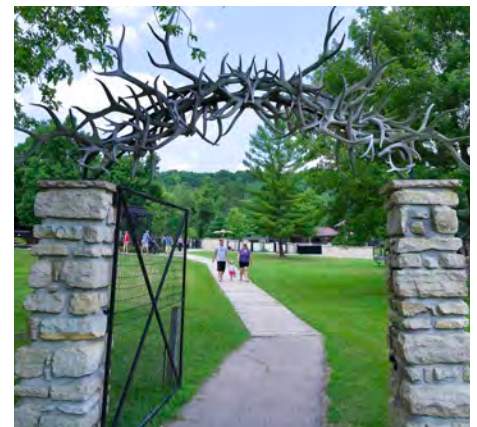
The Dr. Paul E. Zollman Zoo houses over 30 native Minnesota animal species, including mammals, birds of prey, and reptiles. Most of these animals are permanently injured, human-imprinted, or are surplus from other facilities, and therefore can never be released to the wild. These animals provide countless opportunities for learning and personal enjoyment, and are utilized in Oxbow's environmental education program. The zoo was named in honor of Dr. Paul E. Zollman, in recognition of his dedication to Olmsted County Parks and his help in the care of the animals.

Zollman Zoo has become the center of Oxbow's education program. Thousands of students visit the zoo each year and participate in lessons offered by park staff and volunteers. Public programs are offered on weekends and evenings throughout the year, and provide nature lovers with a wide selection of activities. Topics and activities vary from season to season but all of them allow guests the opportunity to learn more about the natural world. Across the road from the zoo proper features the zoo's large hoofed stock, which includes bison, elk, and deer.

Established in December, 1981, and relocated to a new facility in 2022, Oxbow Nature Center offers expanded educational and recreational programs and activities. School groups now participate in structured environmental education programs during each season of the year, covering not only animal life, but natural history, outdoor recreation skills, and ecology. The building includes three classrooms, a large central exhibit hall, wildlife watching area, rental office, and a catering kitchen. The expanded experiences and sheer capacity provided by the new nature center allows groups and individuals more convenient and meaningful ways to enjoy the natural world.



Zoo Exhibits



Antler Archway into Zoo

Path of Imagination Natural Playscape

- » A natural elements playground and outdoor education area that was opened in 2015
- » Provides a variety of opportunities for children of all ages to interact with nature while playing and engaging them with the natural world
- » Includes:
 - Dedication area
 - Solar System/Planets built to scale
 - Spider web
 - Music makers
 - Thematic hills with different activities
 - Puddles and streams
 - Butterfly garden
 - Bird houses
 - Frog/Turtle pond
 - Rock/Log pile
 - Archeological sand dig



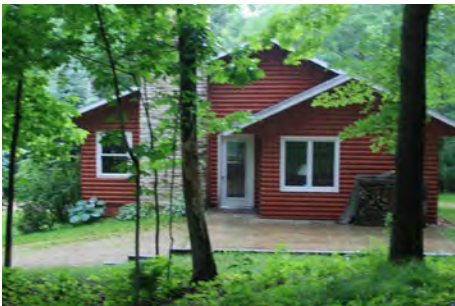
Path of Imagination Dedication Area



"Path of Imagination" natural playscape



Campground experiences heavy flooding with high seasonal rainfall



Doc's House

Campground

Oxbow has a semi-primitive area with 30 campsites available, running water, restrooms, and showers. There are also 15 electrical sites, 3 of which are ADA accessible. The camping area frequently floods with some years significantly worse than others. The last significant flooding was in July 2019, the fourth consecutive year with high seasonal rains. The flood caused damage throughout the Park, resulting in over 821 hours of manual labor to clean up and fix facilities.

In addition to the individual camping areas, Oxbow offers a group camping area that is located off of County Road 105.

Trails

Oxbow Park contains almost eight miles of trails that wind through wooded areas, restored prairies, across the river and creeks, and up steep slopes. The majority of the park land is managed as native habitat or restored native plantings. Three bridges cross the Zumbro River to allow pedestrian access to the natural areas on the west and north sides of the park. Picnic and parking areas at the south entrance/west side, at the zoo, and at the east side of the park allow day use access to hiking trails.

In the winter Oxbow offers an easy, 2-mile groomed cross country ski loop that begins and ends at the parking lot next to the Nature Center. In addition to cross-country ski rentals, the park offers snowshoe rentals. Several trails are maintained for fat tire biking during the winter months.

Doc's House

Doctor David Donald was a friend of the park and park staff during his life and, in his will, donated his house and property to the park. Dr. Donald was a veterinarian and cardiac researcher at Mayo Clinic. His desire was that the house would be used as some type of healing place for those needing a place to stay and recuperate.

Emerging from the mission of Doc's house, a new organization called Doc's Recovery House (DRH) was established and utilizes the house as their community center for programming, recovery, and volunteer work. The organization strives to better the lives of men, women and families affected by substance use disorder across Southeast Minnesota, while honoring the life and legacy of Dr. David Donald.

NATURAL RESOURCES OVERVIEW

Oxbow Park contains forest, floodplain, and prairie plant communities that provide critical habitat and refuge for a variety of flora and fauna. Certain areas within the park harbor rare plant and animal species included in the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) list of endangered, threatened, and species of special concern, and Species in Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN). The park is also included in Minnesota's Natural Areas Registry (NAR) which recognizes tracts of public land that contain exceptional scientific and educational value and natural features of statewide ecological significance. The Paul E. Zollman Zoo and Nature Center includes over 30 native Minnesota animal species and serves as the main educational feature/attraction for the park. County staff currently manages the site to preserve and restore existing plant communities and control the spread of invasive species. The park is divided into management areas that contain recommendations for site management and restoration.

Surficial Geology

The following surficial geology text is derived from the Minnesota Geological Survey. The surficial geology of the park includes floodplain alluvium, colluvium, outwash, till, and bedrock. Floodplain alluvium contains primarily fine sand and silts on floodplains, including sand and gravel that infills modern river channels. Colluvium is comprised of angular unsorted fragments of local bedrock typically overlain by massive to poorly bedded silt. Outwash contains sand, gravelly sand, and gravel deposited by glacial meltwater. Till is comprised of loam-textured diamicton with minor pebbles, cobbles, and boulders. Lenses of sorted sand and gravel occur locally. Bedrock may occur within 5 feet of the surface and is comprised of dolomite, limestone, sandstone, and shale. Several karst features are present within and adjacent to the park.

Soils

Numerous soil map units occur within the park. The primary soils that occur include Mt. Carrol silt loam, Littleton silt loam, Kegonsa silt loam, Radford silt loam, Marlean silty clay loam, Shullsburg silt loam, Elbaville silt loam, Arenzville silt loam, and Brodale flaggy sandy loam. Small percentages of other soil units also occur within the park and are generally comprised of loam, silty loam, silty clay loam, fine sandy loam, and flaggy loam.

Wildlife and Rare Features

The Natural Heritage Information System (NHIS) identifies several rare plants, animals, and plant communities within the park. Rare plants include Goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*- Endangered), American Ginseng (*Panax quinquefolius*), Handsome Sedge (*Carex formosa*- Endangered), Snow Trillium (*Trillium nivale*), and Squirrel Corn (*Dicentra canadensis*). Rare animals include Wood Turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) and Black Redhorse (*Moxostoma duquesnei*). Rare plant communities include Red Oak - Sugar Maple-Basswood (Bitternut Hickory) Forest and Sugar Maple - Basswood - (Bitternut Hickory) Forest.

OXBOW PARK NATURAL RESOURCE HIGHLIGHTS

- » *High topographic relief from bluff tops and forested gullies to prairies and floodplain forests support a variety of plant communities*
- » *Unique karst geology and associated sinkholes occur within the park. Springs and seeps are common along the lower slopes near the river*
- » *Diverse composition of plant communities including deciduous, lowland hardwood, and floodplain forests, shrublands, and restored prairies*
- » *Several rare plant and animal species are found within the park, including two species of endangered plants and one threatened reptile*
- » *Several rare natural plant communities occur including red oak-sugar maple-basswood (bitternut hickory) forest and sugar maple-basswood (bitternut hickory) forest*
- » *Diverse habitats support a variety of resident and migratory birds, pollinator species, and upland and aquatic mammals*
- » *Great fishing opportunities within the river, especially smallmouth bass*

Figure 5. Topography



Topography

As shown in Figure 7, a wide range of topographic relief occurs throughout the park which influences environmental and climatic conditions that support the various plant communities found within the park. Bluff ridges are common along the Zumbro River and several forested gullies occur in the west-central region of the park. Many seeps and springs are found along the park slopes as well as karst features along the upland ridges. The relatively flat bluff top (plateau) at the north end of the park supports a large open prairie. A wide and relatively flat floodplain occurs along the Zumbro River, particularly within the central region of the park around Zollman Zoo. Occasional lowland depressions along the river floodplain contain isolated wetlands.

Zumbro River

The Zumbro River flows through Oxbow Park and the prominent oxbow at the south end of the park provides the park its namesake. This river reach is a warmwater stream identified by the State of Minnesota as the Middle Fork of the South Branch Zumbro River (AUID 07040004-525). According to the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, this section of the Zumbro River (much longer than the park itself) does not meet its water quality standard because of the excess turbidity resulting from row cropland, stream bank erosion, and inadequate buffers near streams. Tall eroding banks, tiling and channelization in the upper watershed contribute to increased flow and additional bank erosion. Also according to a 2014 assessment conducted by the MPCA the entire reach is not supporting of macroinvertebrates but is supporting of fish. The stream has good habitat and the poor macroinvertebrate community is most likely resulting from high turbidity (TSS). A mussel survey conducted in 1988 by Minnesota Department of Natural Resources found a low density and some species extirpation with poor recruitment due to excessive siltation and unstable substrates. Long stretches of the reach are essentially devoid of mussels.

Sections of the Zumbro River within Oxbow Park have exhibited degradation caused by hydrologic changes in the watershed. To protect the river oxbow and park infrastructure, bank revetment techniques were used. Additional bank restoration projects that included bank reshaping, toe wood and native vegetation establishment were also conducted in the vicinity of the oxbow. These sections appear to be in excellent condition, stable and have a natural appearance. There are other river banks downstream of the oxbow that exhibit instability. These sites should be monitored to ensure damage does not occur to infrastructure or quality natural areas. Since turbidity and siltation are documented stressors to aquatic life, stabilizing sloughing banks and eroding gullies in park will help to improve the overall health of the Zumbro River, and is highly recommended to serve as a model for riparian health and restoration.

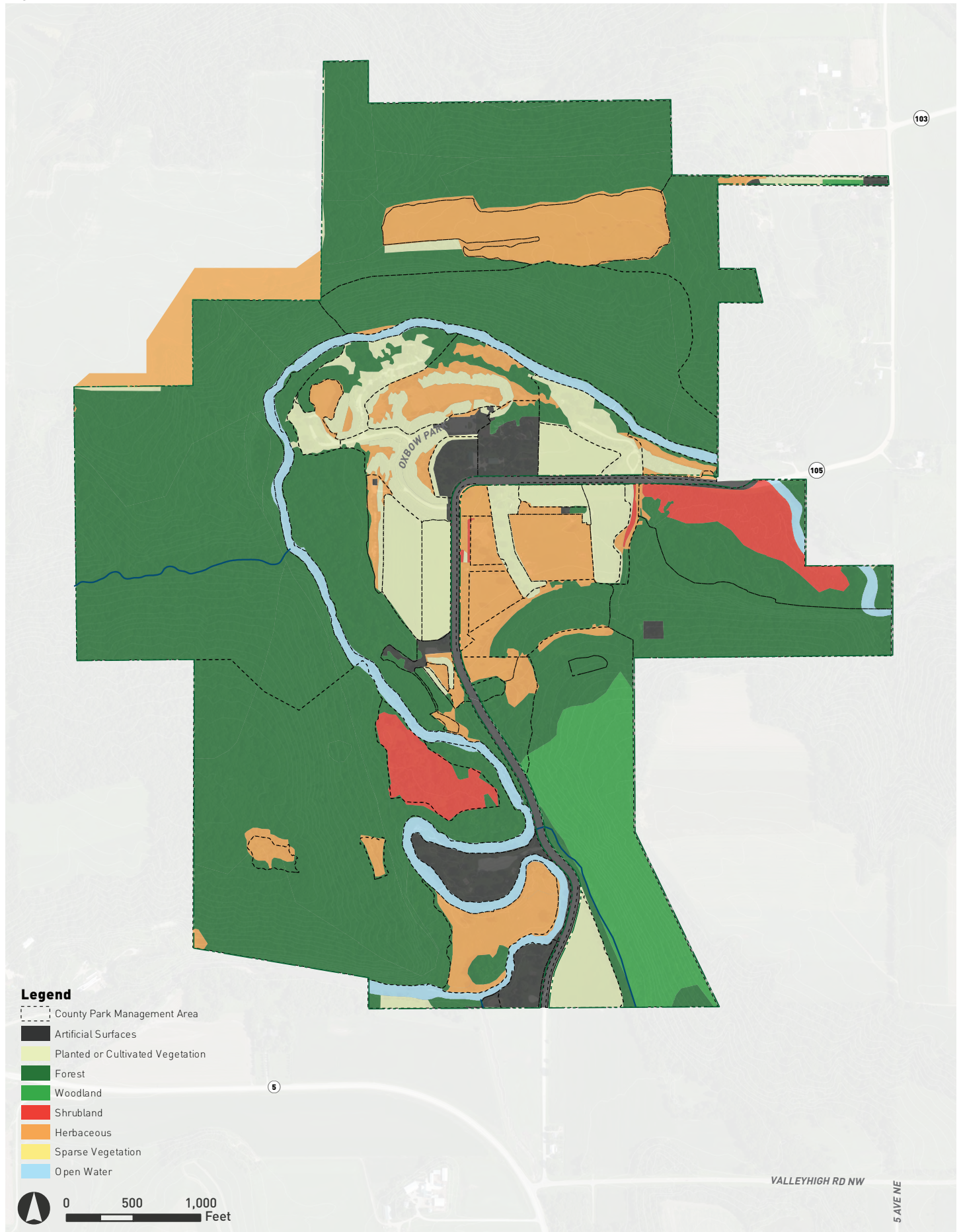


Native wildlife (above) and vegetation



Zumbro River

Figure 6. Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS)



Landcover

According to the Minnesota Land Cover Classification System (MLCCS), the park contains a diverse composition of plant communities including upland soils planted with coniferous trees, upland soils planted with deciduous trees, deciduous forest, deciduous woodland, upland deciduous woodland, upland mixed coniferous-deciduous forest, oak forest mesic subtype, oak forest dry subtype, maple-basswood forest, temporarily flooded deciduous forest, floodplain forest, floodplain forest swamp white oak subtype, lowland hardwood forest, saturated deciduous forest, seasonally flooded deciduous forest, oak woodland-brushland, deciduous shrubland, upland deciduous shrubland, saturated deciduous shrubland, medium-tall grassland, grassland with sparse deciduous trees, grassland with sparse conifer and mixed deciduous/coniferous trees, and cultivated herbaceous vegetation. Adjacent land use around the park includes agricultural fields and occasional homesteads. Figure 8 displays the extent of each MLCCS category found in the park.

HISTORY

The idea of a new park for Olmsted County was fostered by the Olmsted County Park Board and residents of the park area. The initial 465 acres of land was purchased in 1967. Located in the Zumbro River Valley, the area offered ideal recreational opportunities. A large bend in the river, called an “oxbow” because of its resemblance to an ox yoke, gave the park its name. This “oxbow” has been preserved through bank stabilization and now surrounds the main picnic area.

During the years since 1967, the park has been transformed from farm fields into a beautifully preserved area. A zoo was established in 1969 with the donation of native Minnesota animals by John Gilbertson, the regional game warden at that time. This zoo is now an integral part of park activities. In 1974, an additional 107 acres north of the park was purchased, protecting the park from future development.

A long time park advocate, Dr. David Donald, donated 52 acres to Oxbow in 1998 bringing the total size of the park to 622 acres. Beginning in 2022, a new nature center was built to better accommodate the current and future growth of the park. This facility expands both programming potential and work capabilities at the park and offers additional exhibit areas for public use.

FRIENDS OF OXBOW

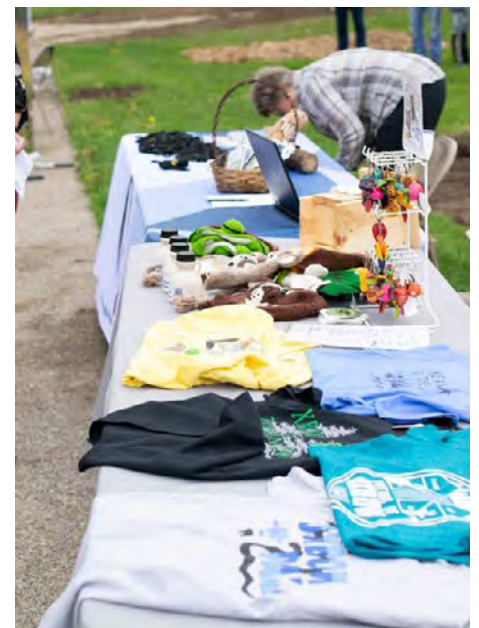
The Friends of Oxbow (FOX) is a 501(c)(3) group that was established in 1982 to provide organized volunteer labor and programming for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo. The group meets on a regular basis, collects dues, provides volunteer labor and monetary or material donations. Their members are actively involved in programming, as well as monitoring and maintaining portions of the park in coordination with park staff. FOX also sponsors fundraising events each year. The group has donated well over \$750,000 to the park in its 30+ year history.



Educational programming



Seasonal Events



Friends of Oxbow at the Nature Center's groundbreaking

Issues & Opportunities

Issues

- » Steep slopes, especially on the northern/western bank of the river, make the terrain difficult to traverse on trails, as well as present issues for erosion and park management
- » Seasonal flooding in the campgrounds, picnic areas, and trails can be disruptive and has the potential to cause major damage to the existing facilities in the park, creating cost concerns
- » Erosion into the river
- » The northern access to County Road 105 presents a challenge for Emergency Medical Services, such as ambulances, to access the drive.
- » High traffic volumes and the high speed of vehicles are major issues for Oxbow Park. These are especially concerning for the pedestrian crosswalk from the Zollman Zoo to the open pastures across County Road 105
- » Conflict between users with dogs wanting more dog access and users without dogs wanting less dog access
- » Poor signage and wayfinding, especially at zoo/nature center entry drive
- » Views of maintenance / animal care are prominent and poorly screened

Opportunities

- » There is an opportunity for a river access point at the campground site
- » There are pockets of the park which feature rare plants which should be preserved/protected
- » Forest Karst
- » Potential for water quality enhancement
- » Opportunity for expansion of the park to the southeast
- » Six beautifully restored prairies
- » Animal care facility/maintenance near nature center could be reconfigured, making room for additional zoo exhibits
- » Exhibit updates or expanding zoo collection
- » Room for zoo expansion to the east
- » Increased programming with additional staffing and technology improvements
- » The new nature center's location makes way for an expanded entry plaza to the new facility and the zoo, with better areas for large group gathering

Figure 7. Park-Wide Issues & Opportunities

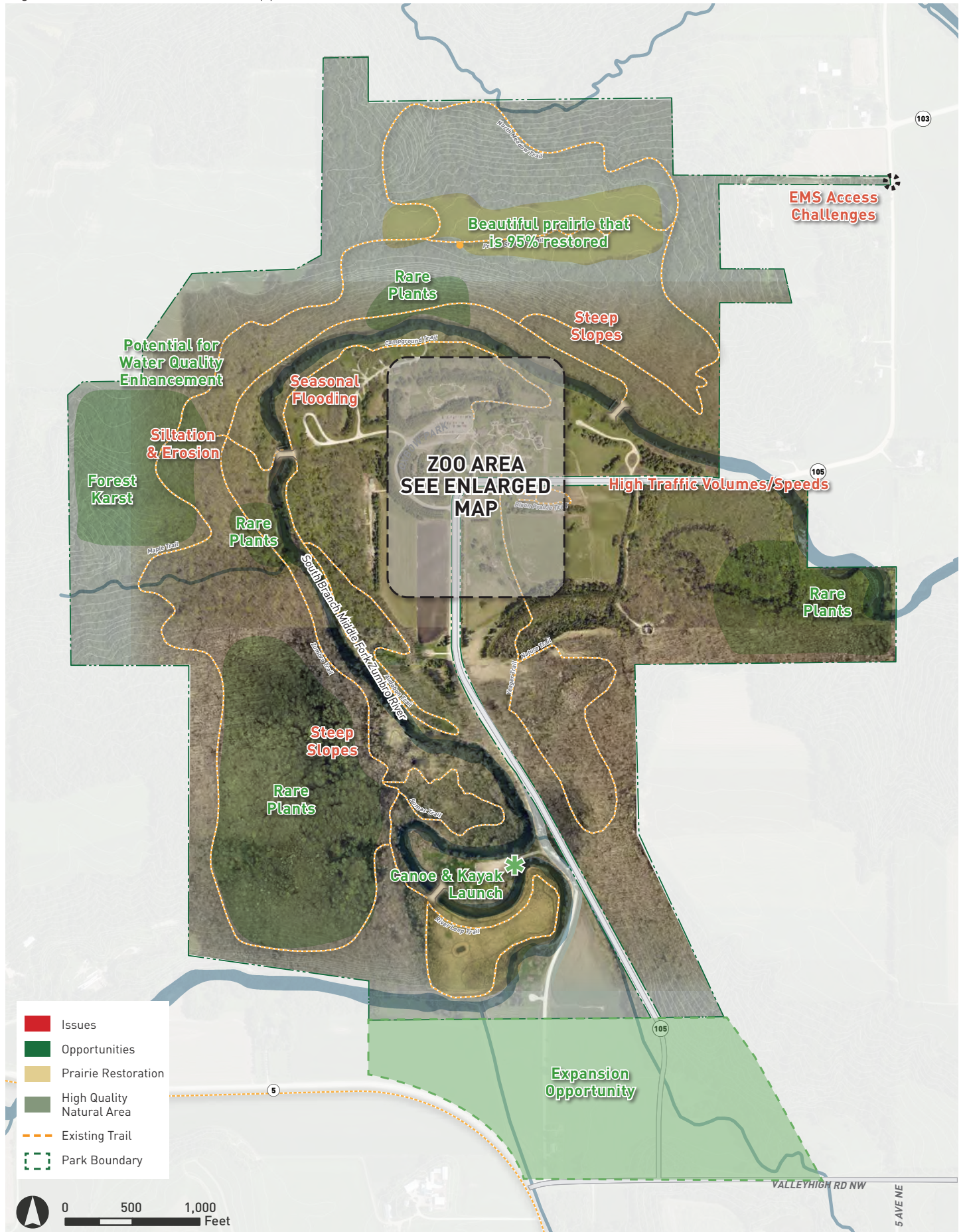
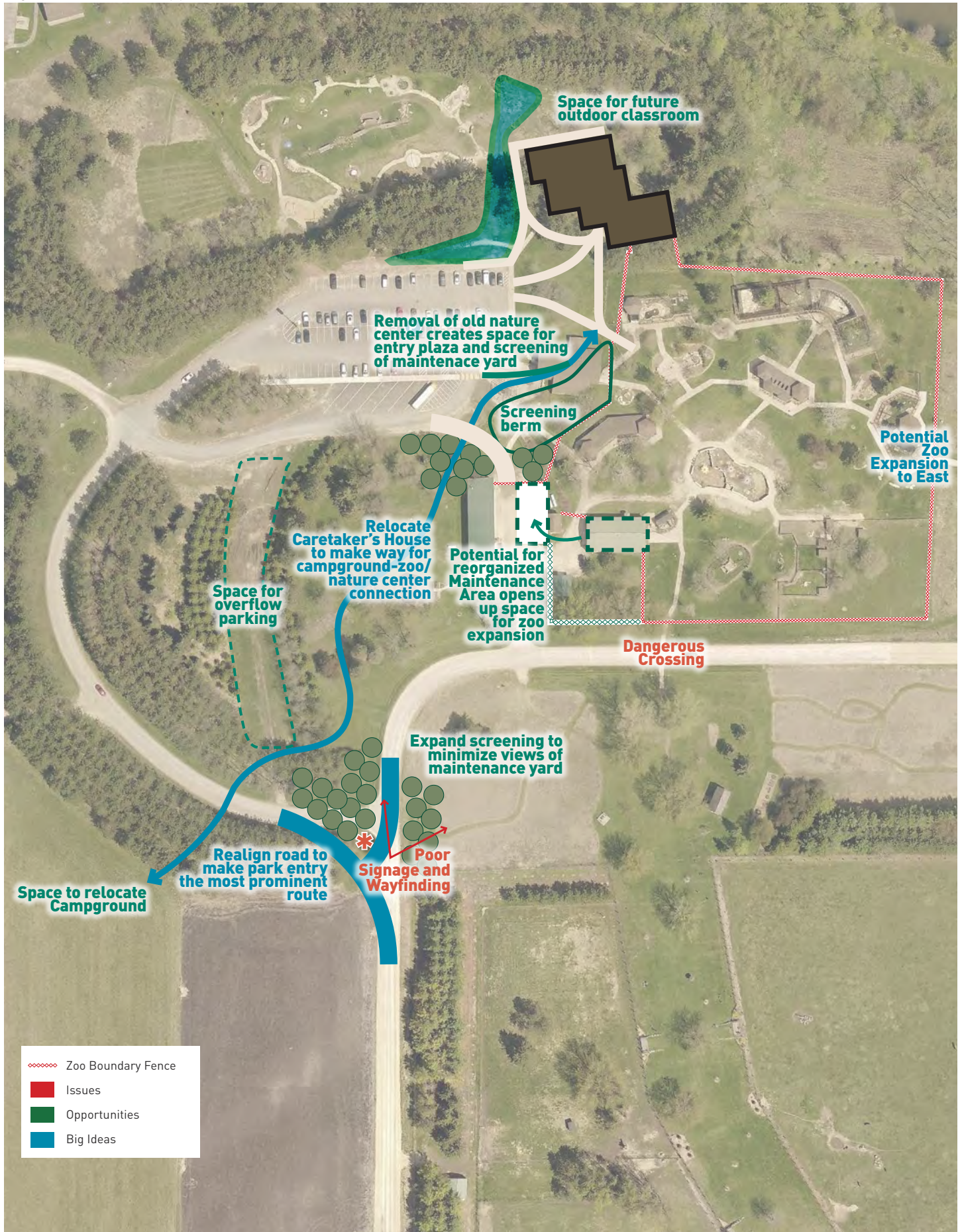
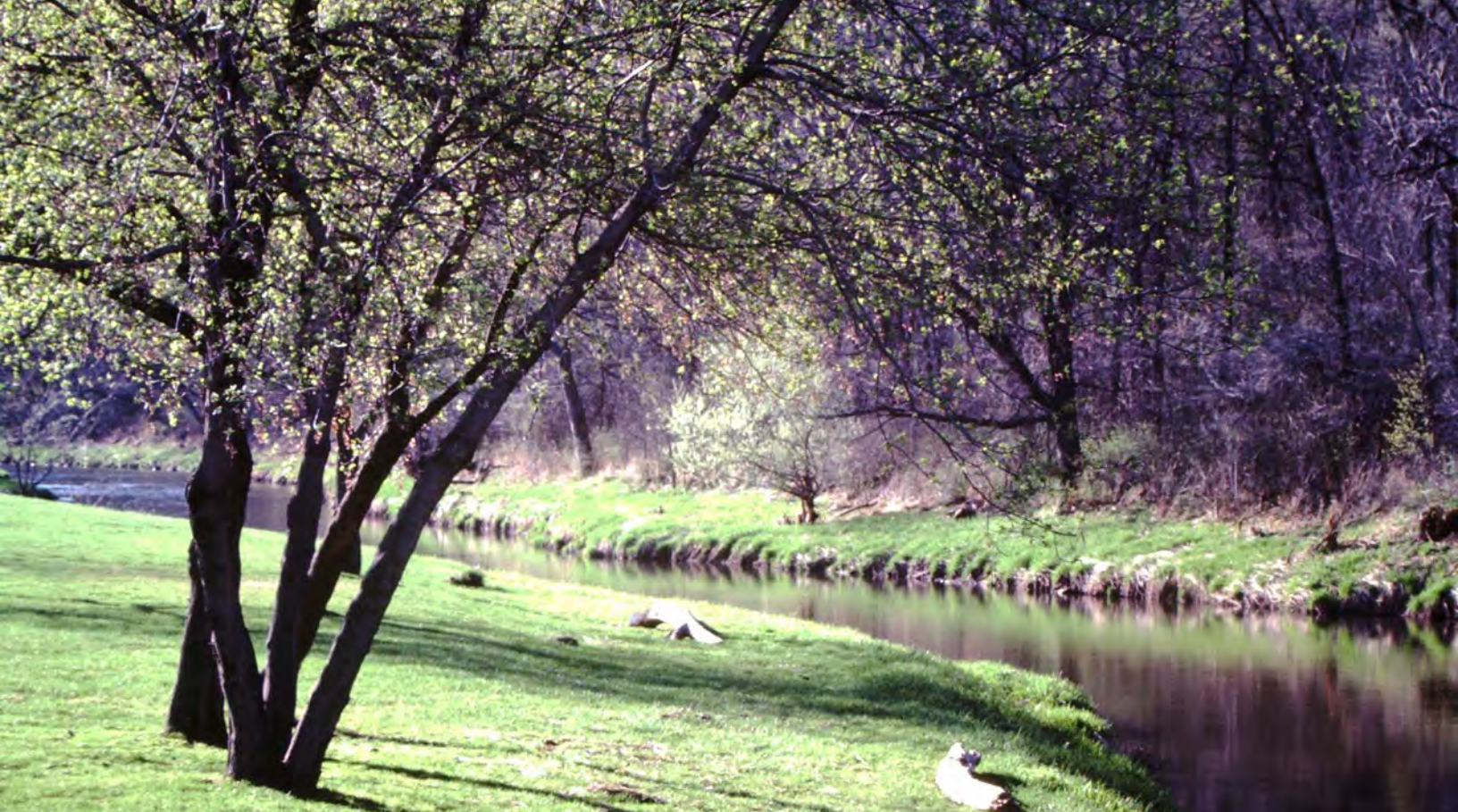


Figure 8. Issues & Opportunities of Zoo Area





CHAPTER 3: **VISION & PUBLIC VALUES**

System Mission, Vision, and Values

As part of its mission, the Olmsted County Parks Commission developed a set of Planning Guidelines and Values to guide the development, management, and operations of the system. The mission, vision, and guidelines and value statements provided the foundation for the development of concepts for each park.

MISSION

The mission of Olmsted County Parks is to foster an appreciation of the natural world through environmental education, natural resource management, and public participation in the stewardship of our park lands.

VISION

Learning life-long lessons in natural places

GUIDELINES AND VALUES STATEMENT

- » Prioritize outcome-based planning to improve natural resources, including consideration of those listed by State and/or Federal agencies, when found to be of significant value.
- » Prioritize preservation of viewshed areas surrounding Olmsted County

OXBOW PARK AND ZOLLMAN ZOO ROLE IN OLMSTED COUNTY PARK SYSTEM

Natural resource based park with the special feature Zollman Zoo, that is focused on the preservation of high quality natural areas and enabling day and overnight visitors to be immersed in nature, participate in river related recreation, observe regionally native animals, and learn about environmental stewardship.

- » parks when making zoning and land purchase recommendations and decisions.
- » Prioritize acquisition of properties with special natural resources or historically significant structures.
- » Provide opportunities for people of all abilities and ethnicities to get outdoors and interact in sustainable ways with nature.
- » Place high value on preserving historical aspects of buildings and other features.
- » Balance broad community interests and uses with requests for specialized uses.
- » Plan corridors to connect to other natural resources in the area.
- » Maintain adequate staffing levels and quality employment, volunteer, and community service opportunities at Olmsted County parks.
- » Support current revenue sources and strategically consider future revenue sources.
- » Promote and maintain current county park unique features, resources, and dedicated missions.
- » Sustain and develop collaborative relationships with other local and regional agencies.
- » Encourage a strategy of concentrating infrastructure development within an area limited to no more than 20% of Olmsted County park acreage.
- » When acquiring new public land, consider acquisition or properties that would create access to current parks where feasible.
- » Develop collaborative arrangements with local recreation groups to seek, acquire, develop, and maintain appropriate properties for specialize uses.
- » Continue to use project population figures to drive planning for future park needs and purchases.

Local and Regional Demographic Information

Olmsted County is located in southeastern Minnesota, about a one hour drive south of the Twin Cities Metro Area. Rochester is the largest urban area, located in the center of the County. The rest of the County is mainly agricultural land use with some natural river valley areas, state forest land, and karst topography. A few other small cities and towns dot the landscape of the County. Interstate 90 and U.S. Hwy 52 cross through the County bringing national and regional commuters through the area. Western Wisconsin and northeastern Iowa are within 30 miles of the County and have similar land use and landscape patterns.

The population of the county is approximately 162,847, with almost 3/4 living in the city of Rochester. Other communities in the county include Byron, Stewartville, Eyota, Oronoco, Chatfield, Pine Island, and Dover, with the rest of the population being rural residents. Most of the County population is white, with a BIPOC population of approximately 16.4%, which is slightly under Minnesota's as a whole. The median household income is \$76,951 (2019),

which is about 8% higher than the Minnesota state median income, and 12% higher than the national average. Approximately 7% of the Olmsted County population is considered to be living in poverty, which is lower than both the state (9%) and national (10.5%) amounts.

Relevant Recreational Trends Information

AGING

As the baby boomer generation ages, there is a greater need for recreation that serves the senior population. Seniors tend to be interested in passive recreation, such as hiking, walking, and low impact active recreation, such as tennis and pickleball.

INCREASED DIVERSITY

The majority of the population in Olmsted County is white. However, immigrant populations are increasing in higher numbers than people who have been here for generations. These immigrant populations tend to be interested in picnicking and large family gatherings at natural, outdoor locations.

SUSTAINABILITY & THE ENVIRONMENT

With the increased attention paid toward climate change and sustainability, people are generally more concerned with the health of their surrounding environment. There is a high interest in Olmsted County for natural area conservation, preservation, and restoration. People are also interested in saving energy, using resources wisely, and using renewable resources. There has also been an increase in the amount of 100-year storms and natural disasters due to climate change – planning for natural areas and development that can withstand impacts due to these storms is key to resilient parks that will last for generations to come.

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Nearly one in three adult Minnesotans are considered obese; heart conditions, anxiety, and stress are on the rise; and costly gym memberships are even less attractive post-pandemic. Covid-19 opened up many people's eyes to the benefits of outdoor recreation, a trend which looks to continue. Root River Park offers miles of hiking trails and programming to get kids and families outside and moving their bodies.

Olmsted County Parks was part of a core group that initiated the development of the SE MN Parks Rx organization. A subgroup of Park Rx America, SE MN Parks Rx equips health providers with the tools they need to give prescriptions to outdoor spaces that improve a patient's health and well-being. In collaboration with Mayo Clinic, Public Health, and other health care providers, the County parks system offers activities and ideas that providers can prescribe to their clients that fit a whole spectrum of abilities and needs.



Precedent images representative of relevant recreational trends

Public Health Values

Oxbow Park offers Olmsted County and surrounding area residents many different opportunities to exercise and recreate in the outdoors: walking trails through woodland and prairie environments, canoeing/kayaking, swimming, picnicking, camping, fishing, skiing, and children’s play area.

Olmsted County parks foster and encourage the stewardship of our natural environment. Research has shown that environmental stewardship and regular interaction with natural systems, including trees, water, parks, open space, and other people recreating, creates a sense of well-being among people. (Source: Erika Svendsen, PhD, [Cultivating Health and Well-Being through Environmental Stewardship](#))

Olmsted County parks supports clean land, water, and air by conserving and managing natural plant and water resources that contribute to a healthy ecological system. Poor air and water quality have been linked to many diseases and other negative healthy impacts on humans. As Mayo Clinic attracts people to the County who are not well and more sensitive to outside health impacts, the quality of natural areas and opportunities to recreate in clean air is important to the region.

Economic Development & Tourism Opportunities

The City of Rochester is home to the world renowned Mayo Clinic, which serves over 1 million people every year. (Source: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/about-mayo-clinic/facts-statistics>) Rochester is Minnesota’s fastest growing community, with its major employers being Mayo Clinic and IBM. (Source: <http://raedi.com/rochester.html>) The city is also known for having a high quality of life.



Public Engagement

The project team sought input from park staff, volunteers, stakeholders, and the general public in order to incorporate as many perspectives and interests as possible. Following is a summary of input received during the process.

PARK STAKEHOLDERS, PARKS COMMISSION, AND STAFF INPUT

On April 5, 2016, a meeting was held with the Friends of Chester Woods and Friends of Oxbow to gain initial input on the Olmsted County park system and the issues and opportunities regarding Chester Woods, Oxbow, Root River, and White Bridge areas. These groups were also engaged at other points throughout the master planning process in order to gain input on concept ideas, recommendations, and the draft master plans.

- » Parks Commission Meeting on April 19, 2016
- » Staff and Project Team Charrette on May 3, 2016
- » Joint Meeting of the Olmsted County Parks Commission & City of Rochester Park Board on June 9, 2016
- » Parks Commission Meeting on June 21, 2016
- » Parks Commission Meeting on August 16, 2016

April 2016 Friends and Parks Commission Input

Strengths that were mentioned include the following:

- » Existing events work well and attract people to the park
- » The Zoo is popular and attracts lots of visitors

Potential opportunities for the park include:

- » Move campground to an area of higher ground to avoid flooding
- » Thin pines in order to plan for more diversity of species
- » More events could be held at the park
 - Amphitheater
 - Music
- » More programming spaces
- » Potential Zoo improvements/additions
 - Moose
 - Wolverine
 - Beaver
 - Barn-yard animals
 - Indoor/outdoor exhibits
- » Possibly add a house/ADA camping facility/retreat center - concern though that park staff would then need to become housekeepers
- » A regional water trail could connect communities in the area
- » Work needs to be done on historical building
- » Food/edible plants could be added to increase awareness of edible native species



Online input summary for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo

Issues include:

- » Road Crossing is dangerous
- » “Escape” Spots (areas of reflection/solitude)
- » Camping, picnic area, and trail flooding
- » River pollution
- » Parking expansion and reorganization is needed. While events are very difficult, even on typical days overflow is needed
- » Threat of surrounding development

June 2016 Park Commission Input on Preliminary Concepts

- » The county writes a 20-year Capital Improvement Projects (CIP), so we need to include items that could be a reality within 20 years. Hopefully, some of these concept ideas will be eligible for state funding.
- » Preference for the road realignment because it allows the zoo to be in one piece.
- » Consider the impact of moving the campground -- how much work would it take and what would the new campground settings be?
- » We should identify areas of high quality natural areas in order to prioritize land to acquire.
- » The proposed road realignment doesn't seem like a huge undertaking. Maybe we should analyze bypassing the entire park, or looking at the other park access points for what the best alternative is. We might as well be aspirational in terms of rerouting around the park. In 1992, we looked at realigning the road on the east side of the park to the south at the same time the 3rd bridge was redone, but we couldn't afford the new alignment.
- » The overflow parking could be improved by removing the first row of trees. It could be a pervious paver, or grass paver, for naturalized overflow parking areas.
- » Highly valued for buses to be kept outside of the general parking lot in order to avoid strollers/kids.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Two community meetings, with corresponding online engagement, were held as part of the park master planning process. On April 19, 2016, community members were presented the purpose for the master planning process and existing conditions at the parks. Attendees were asked to provide comments on issues and opportunities.

April 2016 community meeting and online input

- » The Zollman Zoo was identified as the most important amenity of Oxbow Park, with trails and "Path of Imagination" also ranking high
- » The hiking trails were seen as needing targeted improvements the most
- » Respondents would like more nature-focused education and programming at the park
- » Many respondents highlighted access for dogs or dog owners to be important to them – others raised concerns that dogs, especially off-leash, disturb the wildlife and other users of the park



- » Mountain biking/fat biking opportunities as well as connections for bicyclists to the facilities on roads
- » Horse trails

June 2016 community open house and online input

On June 21, 2016, a second open house was held to gain feedback from the public on preliminary concepts for improvements in the park. An online engagement questionnaire accompanied the meetings to obtain additional input from those that weren't able to attend the meetings. Below is a summary of comments received at the meeting and online:

- » Desire to mitigate speed on Co Rd 105. Preference for realigning the road around the zoo and park
- » Desire for more dog friendly hiking trails in the park
- » Add more petting zoo animals to allow kids to interact more at the zoo
- » Desire for campground improvements, including more group camp sites, a swimming area, and more electric sites
- » Concerns exist about financing the improvements
- » Approval of expanded zoo parking area moving buses to separate parking zone



Images from two public open houses



CHAPTER 4: **DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN**

Future development plans for Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo include modifications and expansions that will allow more people to use and enjoy the park. This chapter gives detailed information on the various planned improvements and potential acquisition areas for the park.

Facility Development

ACCESS

The current alignment of County Road 105 poses a number of issues for the visitors of Oxbow Park. The road currently bisects the Zollman Zoo into two, and creates a dangerous pedestrian hazard for visitors who want to explore the entire zoo. Long-term plans for the park propose a realignment of County Road 105 so that it no longer bisects the Zollman Zoo, leading to a unified zoo concept. Modifications to the current hooved animal exhibits will be needed.

If the County is able to expand the park to the south, consideration should be given to realigning the intersection between County Road 105, Valleyhigh Road NW, and County State Aid Highway 5 in order to improve safety.



Enhance connections to the "Path of Imagination"



Relocate camping facilities to higher ground to protect from future flooding



Replace park bridges in the long-term

PATH OF IMAGINATION NATURAL PLAYSCAPE

Opened in 2015, the Path of Imagination Natural Playscape is intended to remain where and as it is into the future. Maintenance and replacements should occur as needed to provide a safe and engaging environment for visitors. Annual funding has been dedicated for annual maintenance.

CAMPGROUND FACILITIES

Camping is an important and popular aspect of Oxbow Park's success. The current facilities have tent camping and RV camping near the river's bend, northwest of the zoo, while group or day camp facilities are located to the south, on higher ground, with access from County Road 105.

Habitually, flooding of the river has caused major damage to the tent and RV campgrounds. The cost of rebuilding and maintaining the camping facilities within the area has become exceedingly expensive. As such, it was determined that the existing campground should be moved to higher ground to the north of the existing group and day camp area. This move will require a new shelter with restrooms and showers with a well to provide potable water.

Group and day camp facilities could also be expanded by utilizing the current campground location after the new campground facility has been built.

TRAILS

Oxbow Park has nearly eight miles of trails extending throughout the park. Given the quality natural resource areas and topography there are only a limited number of trails proposed. Expansion of trails is shown southwest of the new County Road 105 alignment. A new overlook of the river is proposed on the far eastern end of the park. To provide better accessibility in the core of the park, an existing trail is proposed to be converted and expanded to provide an ADA paved trail along the edge of the new campground, around the group picnic area, around the zoo, and along the new County Road 105. Addition to the Nature/Yeager trail will connect to the Main Picnic area and Caufield Sand Bar. Placement of a pedestrian box culvert under County Rd 105 is being discussed. A trail connection to the nature center / zoo entrance from the relocated campground should be constructed following the campground's construction and relocation of the caretaker's house.

BRIDGE REPLACEMENTS

There are currently three bridges that allow for visitors to cross the river within the park. These bridges should be replaced to provide better accessibility for park users, staff, and EMS to the portions of the park that are across the river from the parking areas.

Figure 9. Park-Wide Development Concept

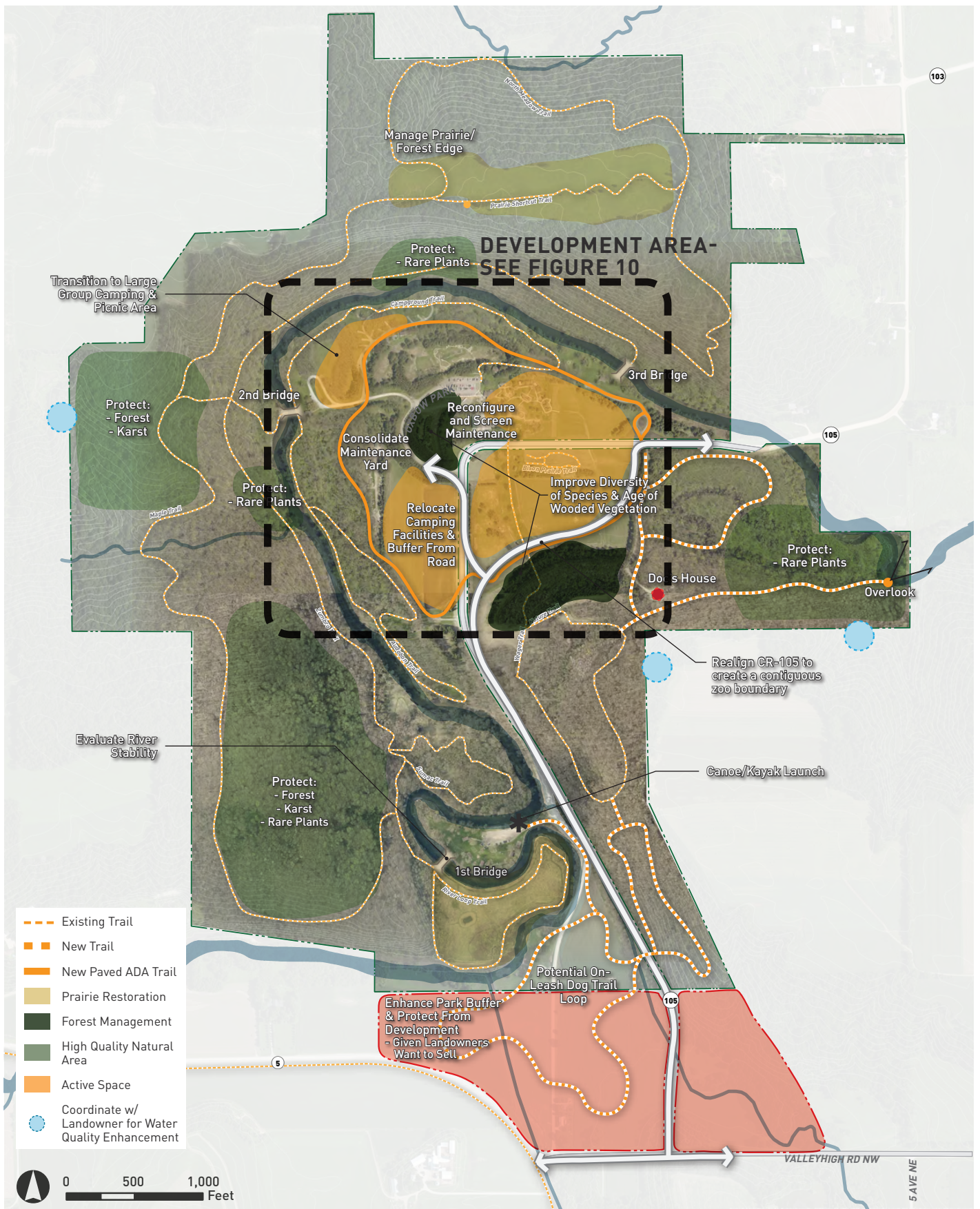
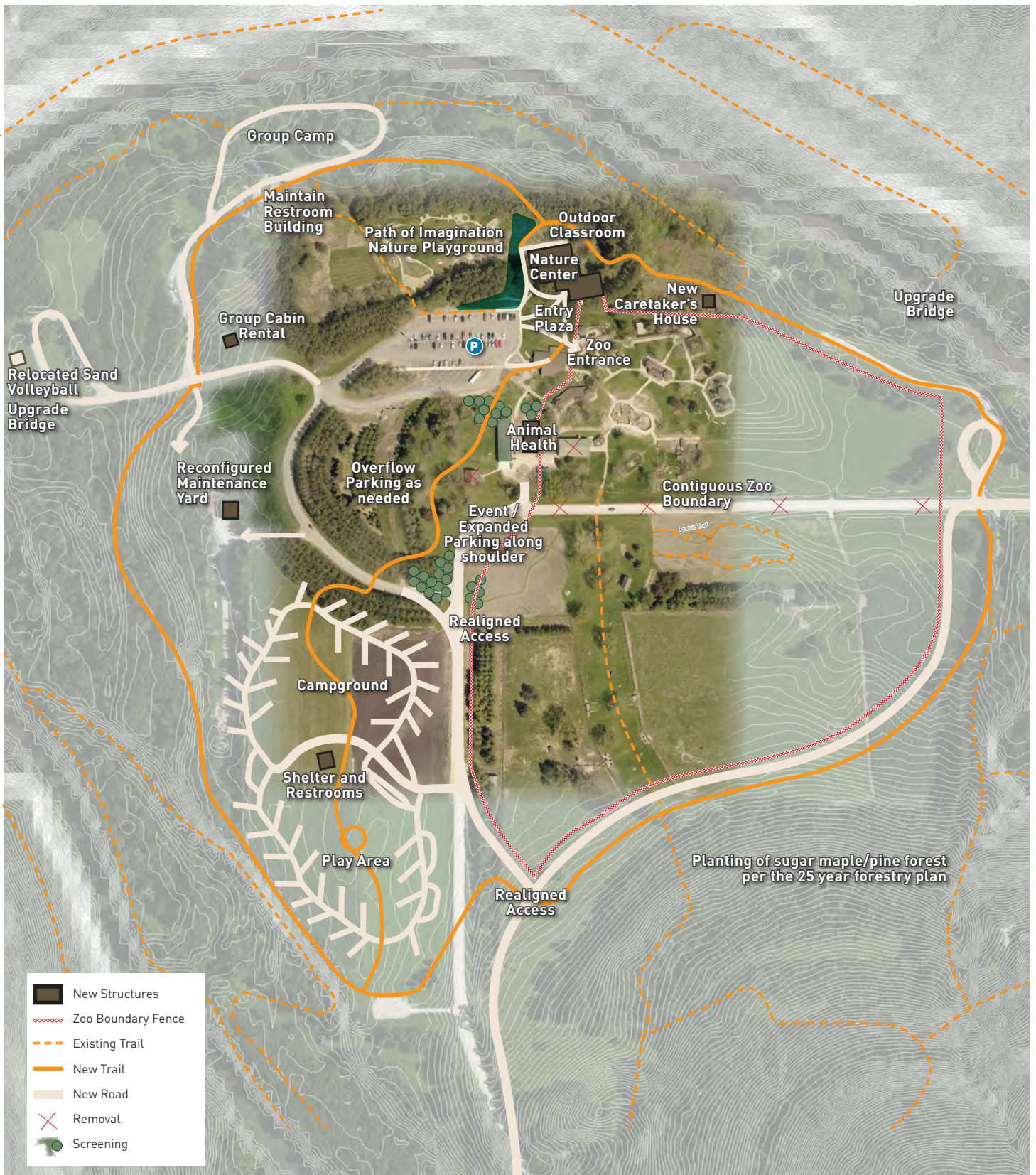


Figure 10. Concept for Development Area



RIVER ACCESS

The DNR canoe access will be moved from the former Caulfield Picnic Area to the main picnic area due to removal of the Caulfield picnic area. Small improvements like a concrete apron could make access easier. Improvements to this river access will include rocks for seating and potentially include a launch for canoes, kayaks and/or tubes.

ZOLLMAN ZOO AND NATURE CENTER

Currently, the Zoo is bisected by County Road 105 and is limited in its size. To improve safety, the concept proposes a realignment of County Road 105 south so that the entire zoo is contiguous. This will involve reconfiguring of the bison, deer, and elk exhibits. This realignment would also allow the zoo to expand if there is a desire and funding to do so. It is intended that the zoo will continue its focus on native Minnesota species.

The new nature center was under construction at the time of this update. The original nature center will be demolished following the grand opening of the new facility, making room for an expanded entry plaza with circulation into the Zoo.

ON-LEASH DOG LOOP

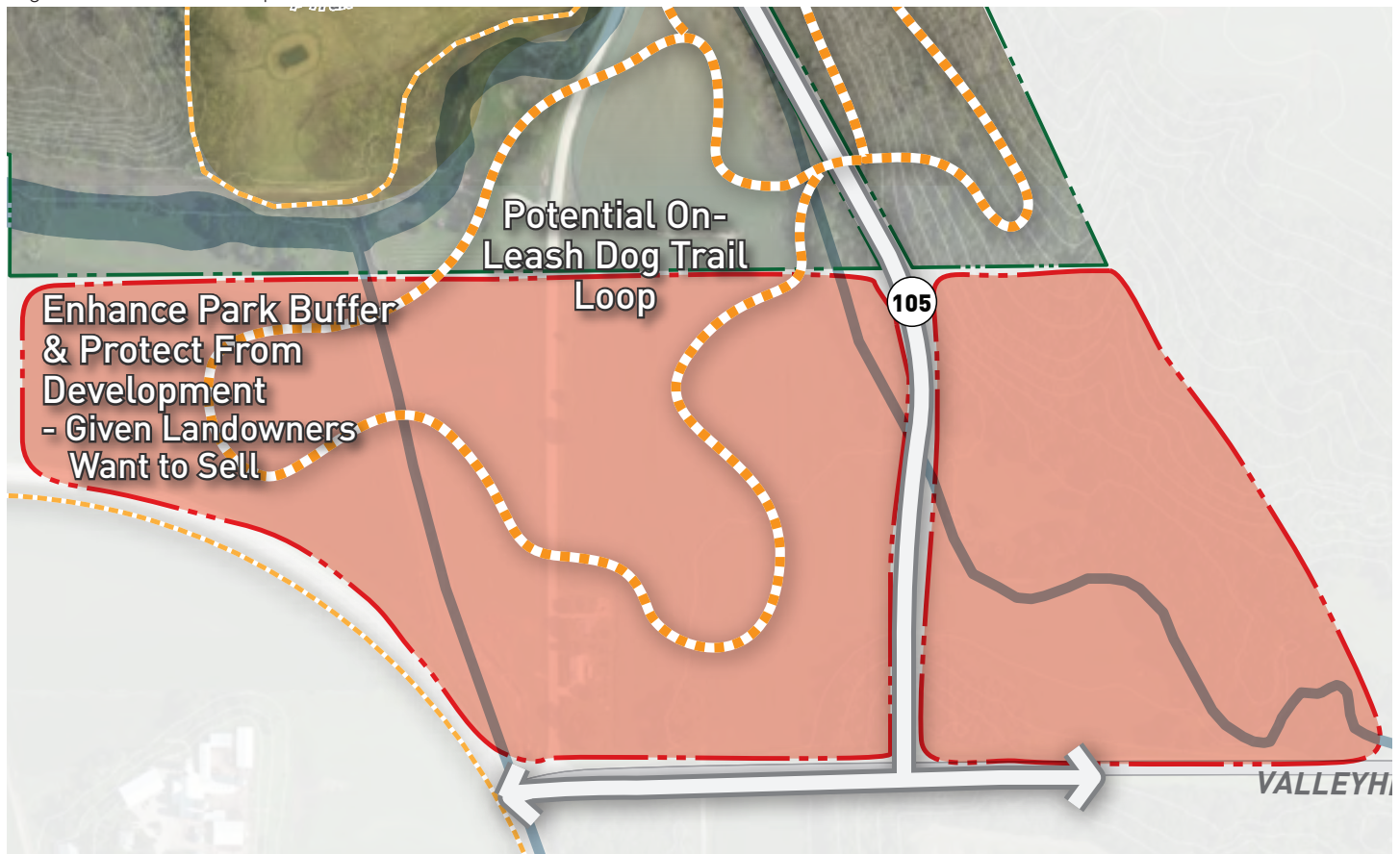
Visitors with dogs in Oxbow are allowed to be in the campground area, picnic areas, and along the park's interior roadways. Throughout the planning process some community members mentioned expanding facilities for dogs in the County parks as a high priority. Other participants raised a concern that dogs, off-leash or on-leash, can cause disturbances to other visitors.

To provide more access to visitors with dogs while still respecting the existing dog-free zones of the park, the Master Plan proposes to add an on-leash dog trail loop to the southeast corner of the park. This trail will have its own parking area and it will be an entirely self-contained loop, keeping on-leash dogs separate from the other trails within the park. The first phase of the loop is located on existing park property, while the second phase is located on a potential expansion area to the south.

INTERPRETIVE ELEMENTS

Oxbow Park contains a variety of historic and naturally significant landmarks that are currently not highlighted, including Doc's House, the river "oxbow", and a creamery located in the future acquisition area. The addition of interpretive elements that guide visitors to these landmarks and describe them upon arrival will help highlight the significance of these park features. New interpretive features could be incorporated into the expanded zoo and nature center entry plaza upon its construction, extending the nature center's interior educational opportunities to the outdoors.

Figure 11. Potential Aquisition Area



MAINTENANCE AREAS

Oxbow currently has two maintenance and operations areas. The one adjacent to the zoo and nature center will be reconfigured. The animal care barn will be relocated to provide more room in the zoo and better access and flow with the maintenance shed. Trees were planted in 2020 to establish initial screening near the bus dropoff. Additional screening along the future entry plaza, at the entry drive, and adjacent to new trails should be considered to provide visual and safety separation for visitors.

Acquisition Plan

The County will look to expand the park and acquire more land as opportunities become available. Specifically, parcels to the south of the existing park boundary could be acquired to reconfigure and improve the park entrance. **County staff will only entertain park land acquisition in the case of willing sellers, and all purchases will need to be approved by the Olmsted County Board.**

Completed Projects Since the Plan's Initial 2016 Adoption

ACCESS

County Road 105 from Valley High Rd (Co. Rd 4) is currently being reconstructed to prevent future flooding. The creek is being re-meandered (per DNR requirements) to assist with flood prevention. This project resulted in the elimination of the former Caulfield Picnic Area.

NEW NATURE CENTER AND PARKING

The Zoo and Nature Center received an expanded and reconfigured parking lot in 2019. The project included separation of buses and individual vehicles for improved safety.

The new Nature Center was constructed from 2021-2022.

HISTORIC HELLICKSON HOUSE

The Hellickson House was removed in 2020 due to safety concerns and restoration funding issues.

DOC'S HOUSE

Located on the southeast side of the park, Doc's House offers a quiet respite from the more active uses in other areas. Since 2019, the house has been designated a health and healing destination, which honors the family that donated the home and land to the park.

MAINTENANCE AREAS

To facilitate the movement of the campground to higher ground, the main park maintenance yard west of the main entrance road and south of the existing campground is being consolidated and reoriented to the north of the existing building. Screening is underway to provide a visual and safety separation for visitors.



Plans for reconstruction of CR 105



Doc's Recovery House



Groundbreaking for the new Nature Center



Rendering of the new Nature Center



CHAPTER 5: **NATURAL RESOURCES PLAN**

Ecological Stewardship

While Oxbow Park may be best known for its zoo and campgrounds, the park also boasts expansive areas of open space, which are prime for ecological preservation and habitat restoration.

- » Areas have been identified throughout the park as priority protection areas, to protect forest species as well as rare plants
- » The uplands north of the river have been designated for prairie and forest edge management
- » Mono-culture timber plantations within the center of the park will be the focus of future forest management
 - These areas currently lack diversity in tree species, making them vulnerable to diseases
 - As management focuses on diversifying the tree species in the area, they will become more robust and able to withstand a variety of challenges
- » The possible southern expansion area has the potential to become an Oak Savanna landscape in the future
- » With county road 105 realignment near zoo, the area currently occupied by Bison and Elk will be restored into forest and prairie biomes.

LAND MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Primary management goals for Oxbow Park should include the protection, enhancement, and restoration of the native plant communities, protection of rare plants and animals, and the control of invasive species. It is imperative that protection and restoration of the natural plant communities occur to ensure that the ecological integrity of the plant communities remains intact. Preserving and restoring the native plant communities will also benefit the rare species that occur within the park and provide critical habitat to ensure long-term population survival. Data privacy and sharing in regards to rare species, particularly state listed endangered species is strongly recommended to protect the rare species in the park. Consult with the MNDNR before disseminating any information about rare species. **Careful planning of infrastructure, trails, or other improvements will be needed to prevent additional loss of biodiversity, habitat fragmentation, and incidental spread of invasive species within the park.**

Olmsted County staff currently manages the various plant communities within the park. The entire park is divided into management areas that vary in size from less than an acre to over 80 acres. Major vegetation and habitat descriptions should be written for each management area and include specific lists of native and invasive species that occur in each area. Primary management activities may include prescribed burns, prairie planting and mowing, native seed harvest for use in restoration sites, native tree planting, timber stand improvements, and invasive species control. These management activities should follow the natural disturbance regimes associated with the respective plant communities and follow appropriate management techniques.

The continued use of prescribed burns is strongly recommended to enhance and restore prairie habitat. Prescribed burning will encourage native plant growth, promote nutrient cycling, and limit the spread of most herbaceous and woody invasive species, particularly in management areas vulnerable to woody invasive species encroachment. The timing of the burns should be carefully planned to reduce the impact to sensitive native plant, animal, and pollinator species. The MNDNR has recently published a guidance document titled **“DNR Pollinator Best Management Practices and Habitat Restoration Guidelines”** that outlines methods for enhancing and restoring habitat for insect pollinators. Important considerations outlined in the document pertaining to prescribed burns include the timing and rotation schedule of the burn, patch avoidance for insect and plant refugia, and selective habitat management. Similar to prescribed burns, it is recommended any mowing activities should be planned around sensitive flora and fauna. The timing of mowing, mow height, and patch refugia should be considered to limit the impact to sensitive species. Please refer to the MNDNR guidance document mentioned above for additional mowing techniques and considerations. The use of local native seed is recommended for prairie establishment and restoration activities. Ideally the seed should be sourced within 50 miles of the park.





It is recommended invasive species management remain a top priority in all designated management areas in the park. The existing trail systems, watercourses, roads, and maintenance activities all provide potential pathways for invasive species distribution. Early detection and routine surveys should be conducted to monitor and control the spread of both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species. Proper management techniques should be followed for each target species based on the most recent management guidelines available. Many guidance documents have been produced in recent years that include new management approaches and techniques based on field research. Mowing, cut stump treatments, hand pulling, and prescribed burns are recommended to manage herbaceous and woody invasive species. Biological control techniques should be considered if applicable to the target invasive species. Any herbicide treatment selected should be as target-specific as possible and applied to the smallest area possible to limit incidental impact to native species.

Specific recommendations for park management and restoration based on the site visit include:

- » Develop clear vision, goals, and strategies for park management
- » Dredge, stabilize, and secure the river “oxbow” as necessary to maintain natural form and water quality
- » Collaboration with adjacent land owners to maximize erosion control efforts.
- » Continue to survey and document native plant communities and rare flora and fauna
- » Ensure protection of existing rare species, especially Goldenseal and Handsome Sedge (both listed as endangered species in Minnesota)
- » Continue to support and enhance exceptional pollinator habitat in North Prairie
- » Continue invasive shrub management in forests and woodlands, particularly along the edges
- » Flag and protect native tree and shrub species in areas of invasive shrub management
- » Manage reed canary grass along nature trail area and ash seepage swamps
- » Remove planted pine and spruce groves and consider uses for local timber source. Replace planted conifers with native tree and shrub species
- » Restore floodplain forest along river corridor where feasible
- » Review river corridor for restoration and habitat enhancement opportunities
- » Review all spring creeks and drainage ways for stability
- » Gully stabilization with trail crossing is needed at three locations along west boundary
- » Upstream storage needed at locations of gullies and trail crossings. Consider CWF grants and working with SWCD to install retention basins
- » Support and promote river fishing by improving access and in-stream habitat
- » Support and promote local birding interests
- » Plant fruit bearing shrubs to support wildlife
- » **It is strongly recommended that Olmsted County Parks continue to safeguard information about the presence of endangered species in the park to protect against “root diggers.” Consult with the MNDNR before disseminating any information about rare species.**



CHAPTER 6: IMPLEMENTATION, MANAGEMENT, & SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Overview

The Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo Master Plan presents a long-term vision for the park. While phasing of improvements is suggested, Olmsted County Parks should remain flexible to respond to funding and partnership opportunities, as well as changing trends. The investments outlined in the plan have been organized into the following three phases:

- » Short-term indicates that the project should be started in the next 1 to 5 years due to sensitive resources, desire for use, or the improvement needs to happen before another project.
- » Mid-term indicates that the project should be started in the next 6 to 15 years. These projects may be just as important as Short-term projects, but they may be more expensive or more planning needs to be completed before they can be implemented.
- » Long-term or Visionary projects are those that will be completed after 16 years. These are projects that may be difficult to complete due to land ownership, funding, or community support. More planning will need to be done in the next decade in order to determine if these projects will become reality.

Figure 12. Park-Wide Priorities

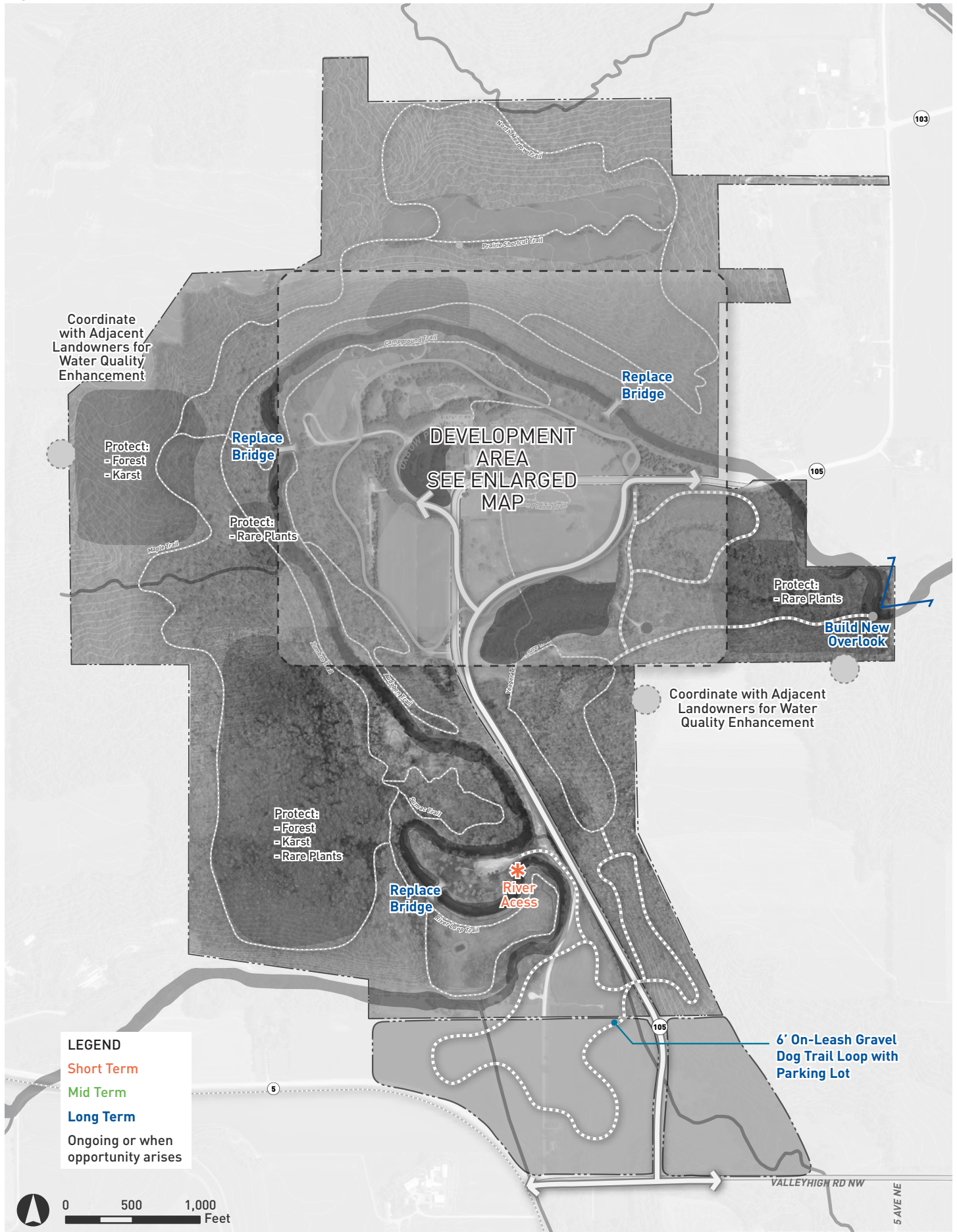
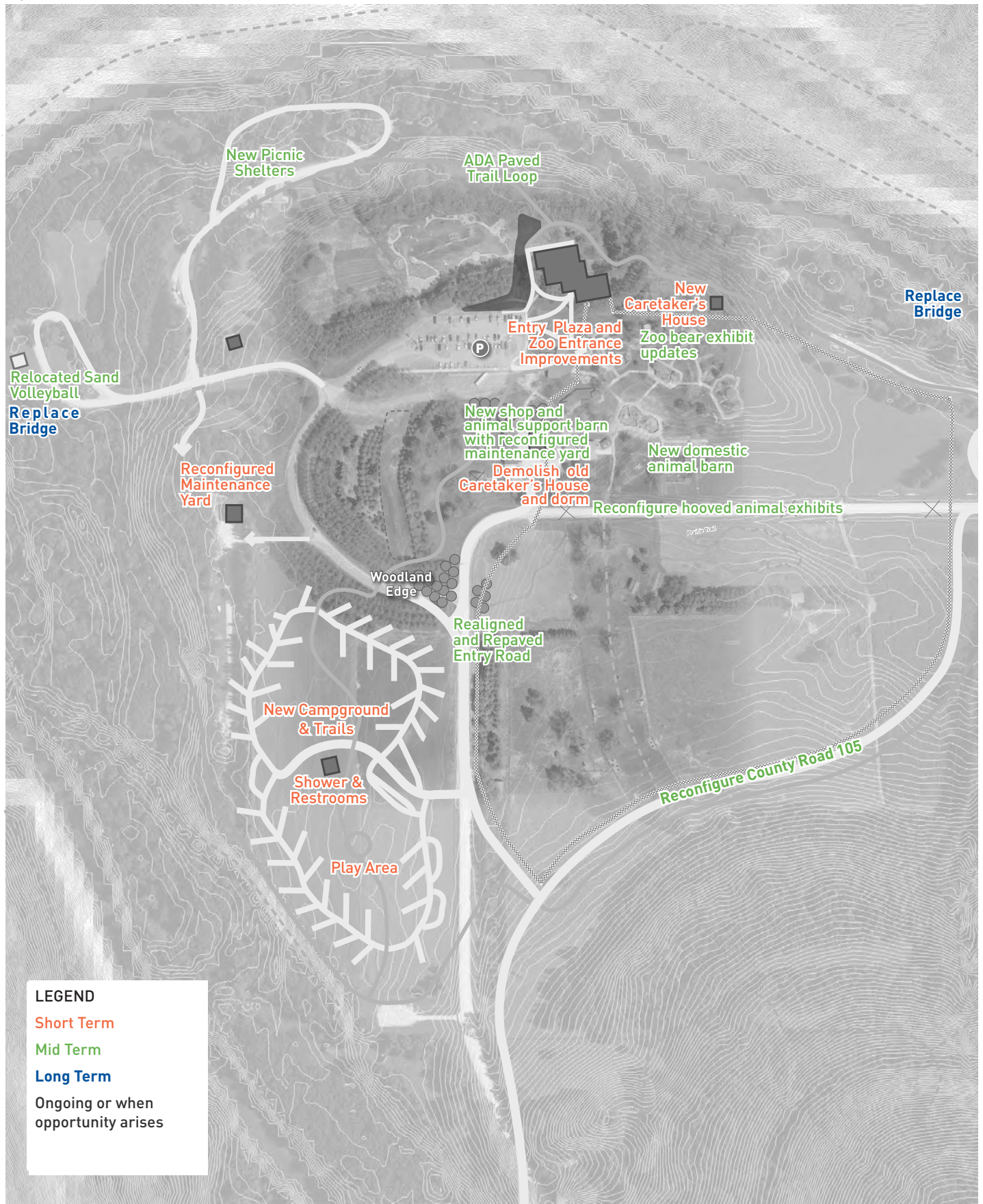


Figure 13. Priorities for Development Area



LEGEND

- Short Term
- Mid Term
- Long Term
- Ongoing or when opportunity arises

Operations & Maintenance

It is envisioned that management and operations will be primarily the responsibility of the Olmsted County Parks Division, in coordination with several existing and future volunteers, including the Friends of Oxbow.

MANAGEMENT

The Olmsted County Board of Commissioners establishes policies and goals for its park system and through an annual budget provide capital and operational funds for parks and trails.

GENERAL OPERATIONS

Olmsted County Parks Department staff will be responsible for the operation of Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo. Where there are opportunities for operational partnerships, Olmsted County will enter a joint powers agreement with partner agencies. When possible, the County will encourage and advocate for volunteers to assist with improvements, outdoor education programs, patrol, park clean-ups and special events. This will primarily be accomplished through existing partnerships with Friends groups, business service days, Sentence to Serve crews, and CWS clients.



OPERATING HOURS

The park hours will be according to Olmsted County park ordinances or policies. Campgrounds are open 24 hours during the camping season.

MAINTENANCE

Regular maintenance activities for the park will include:

- » Maintain wild animal care and husbandry to U.S. Department of Agriculture and state standards
- » Mowing
- » Trash collection
- » Tree trimming
- » Winter road and trail clearing
- » Trail repair and erosion control
- » Bridge repair
- » Sign maintenance
- » Park facility repair and maintenance

PAVEMENT MANAGEMENT

There are several paved roads and parking areas within the Olmsted County Park system. Pavement deteriorates as it ages. Regular pavement maintenance can prolong the surface's lifespan in a cost effective manner. The Olmsted County Public Works Department will work with the Parks Division to manage the paved areas in the parks.

ENFORCEMENT AND SECURITY

Visitors will be informed of park and trail rules and regulations through postings at park facilities and strategically located signs that address specific information about hours, trails, permitted and prohibited activities, and directions. Local law enforcement and public safety agencies will be responsible for emergency and criminal complaints within the park.

Parks have onsite caretakers that manage security during the non-staffed park times.

CONFLICTS

Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo is compatible with surrounding, primarily rural agricultural land uses. Minor conflicts will occasionally arise from private property owners' or neighboring residents' sensitivity to park recreation or maintenance uses. Olmsted County will work with individual landowners to resolve these issues case by case as the park is developed and expanded.

Programming, Marketing, & Evaluation

PROGRAMMING PLAN

Olmsted County Parks provide many programming opportunities. Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo cater to school groups of all ages with environmental and animal related educational classes and tours aimed at bringing families and people of all ages into the natural area and familiarizing them with activities and resources in the outdoors. Friends of Oxbow assists Oxbow Park's staff with programs. The new Nature Center will enable expansion of future programming beyond its previous capacity.

Programming at Oxbow Park and Zollman Zoo offers a wide range of opportunities for families, schools, and other groups. In 2015 there were 5,315 participants in school and group classes and 3,748 in public program participants. There are more than a dozen group classes with topics related to specific zoo or nature center animals, such as general environmental education topics, life cycles or animal classification, and scavenger hunts. In addition, public programs are offered most Saturdays on a wide range of topics depending on the season. Activities and program topics include geocaching, night hikes, bee keeping, invasive species, canoeing/kayaking, seed collecting, hibernation, wildflowers, fall colors, and winter adaptations.



MARKETING & PUBLIC AWARENESS

Olmsted County will promote use of the park through their websites, social media, Public Service Announcements, brochures, and public events and meetings. Olmsted County Parks Staff regularly participate in radio broadcasts and have stories in the local media frequently throughout the year. Public awareness is also achieved through its partnerships with local institutions including schools, scouting groups, youth organizations, etc.

RESEARCH PLAN

Olmsted County will participate in the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission research initiatives (visitation counts, use profiles, recreation demands, and trends surveys, etc.) as these programs are developed over time. The County may continue to monitor park use and conduct more surveys or questionnaires in line with the physical development of elements within this park master plan.

Funding

Funding for initial capital cost and ongoing operations and maintenance costs is essential for a successful regional park. Funding will be primarily the responsibility of Olmsted County, including donations acquired at Zollman Zoo and potential large donations from local business and landowners. There will be an emphasis on seeking outside funding in the form of grants. Costshare roles will be determined by the strengths of each agency and circumstances of each project. In-kind contributions of land, easement, design, engineering, construction and maintenance and operations are encouraged and will be outlined in joint powers agreements among agencies.

It is anticipated that most future capital projects will be well positioned to secure regional, state and federal funds for recreation, transportation, water and habitat and that these sources will account for a majority of capital construction costs. Examples of outside funding sources include:

- » Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds
- » Foundations and non-profits

Funding for operating and maintaining the park and trail facilities will be the County's responsibility. Annual operating costs will be funded through Olmsted County's annual budget.

PARTNERSHIPS

Olmsted County Parks currently partners with Friends groups to provide park services and maintenance. Other partnerships, where applicable, will be sought with other agencies.

COST ESTIMATES

The cost estimates indicate projected capital costs for various development proposals listed in this plan. The cost estimates are planning level and do not reflect construction level documents, nor do they include design and engineering costs (approximately 15-20% of capital cost).

Table 2. Development Concept Capital Cost Estimate

	Short Term Action	Number	Unit*	\$ Per Unit	Total Cost	Notes
PARK IMPROVEMENTS	Improve river access point by former Caulfield Picnic Area	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000	Develop/improve canoe/kayak/tubing launching and opportunities for wading
	New Caretaker's House	1	LS	\$225,000	\$225,000	
	Demolition of old caretaker's house and dorm	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000	
	Nature Center entry plaza and zoo entry improvements	1	LS	\$300,000	\$300,000	Phase 2 of Nature Center plans. Costs per DD cost estimate.
NEW CAMPGROUND	New Campground, including camp sites with picnic tables and fire rings, shower/restroom building, play area, drive and parking, dump station, signage, and landscaping	1	LS	\$2,849,253	\$2,849,250	Sanitary service enabled by connection to new force-main to Byron to rather than septic fields (completed as part of nature center project). Pricing from 5/11/21 cost estimate- includes 10% contingency
	Reconfigure Maintenance Yard	1	LS	\$10,000	\$10,000	

SHORT TERM SUBTOTAL \$3,424,250

	Mid Term Action	Number	Unit*	\$ Per Unit	Total Cost	Notes
REALIGNMENT OF CR 105	Realign County Road 105	1	LS	\$332,500	\$332,500	Eliminate bisection of Zoo; Engineer's estimate, includes culverts
	Reconfigure hooved animal exhibits	1	LS	\$260,000	\$260,000	
ZOO UPDATES	Zoo bear exhibit upgrades	1	LS	\$150,000	\$150,000	
	New shop and animal support barn with reconfigured maintenance yard	1	LS	\$150,000	\$150,000	
	New domestic animal barn	1	LS	\$150,000	\$150,000	
	Newly paved entry road from main parking lot to CR 105	1000	LF	\$225	\$225,000	
OLD CAMPGROUND	Build new Picnic Shelters	1	EA	\$40,000	\$40,000	Group Picnic sites near river; 20'x20' shelter with concrete pad, picnic tables, trash/recycling, grills
	Build New Sand Volleyball Court at Group Picnic site	1	LS	\$5,000	\$5,000	
	Build New 8' Bituminous Trail	6,600	LF	\$60	\$396,000	Paved ADA Trail

MID TERM SUBTOTAL \$1,708,500

	Long Term Action	Number	Unit*	\$ Per Unit	Total Cost	Notes
DOG LOOP	Build New 6' Gravel Trail	2,000	LF	\$10	\$20,000	New on-leash dog loop in southeast (pending future property acquisition)
	Build New Paved Parking Lot	10	Space	\$3,500	\$35,000	Adjacent on-leash dog loop
	Add User Amenities (benches, trash/recycling, lighting)	1	Set	\$30,000	\$30,000	In on-leash dog loop area
PARK IMPROVEMENTS	Replace bridges	3	EA	\$650,000	\$1,950,000	Includes removal of old bridges and grading for accessibility
	Build New Overlook	1	LS	\$30,000	\$30,000	East side of park by Doc's House

* LS is Lump Sum, LF is Linear Feet, EA is each, AC is acres

LONG TERM SUBTOTAL \$2,065,000

\$3,424,250	SHORT SUBTOTAL
\$1,708,500	MID SUBTOTAL
\$2,065,000	LONG SUBTOTAL
\$7,197,750	TOTAL

Table 3. Natural Resource Recommendations Cost Estimate

Olmsted Parks Natural Resource Recommendations and Costs	Staff Hrs	Initial Cost	Periodic Costs	Annual Costs	Notes
Develop clear vision, goals, and strategies for park management	24		\$2,840		Internal meetings, develop consensus on strategies
Continue to survey and document native plant communities and rare flora and fauna	16		\$6,400		Request DNR support as alternate to consultant fees or have staff do it
Ensure protection of existing rare species, especially Goldenseal and Handsome Sedge (endangered species in Minnesota)	4			\$300	
Support and enhance exceptional pollinator habitat in North Prairie	8	\$2,000		\$2,600	
Invasive shrub management in forests and woodlands, particularly along the edges	60	\$2,000	\$6,500		
Flag and protect native tree and shrub species in areas of invasive shrub management	8		\$600		
Manage reed canary grass along nature trail area and ash seepage swamps	16	\$500		\$1,700	
Remove planted pine and spruce groves and consider uses for local timber source. Replace planted conifers with native tree and shrub species	24	\$5,000	\$6,800		Implement patchy removal of aged conifers and seedling replanting annually.
Restore floodplain forest along river corridor where feasible	40	\$10,000	\$15,080		Periodically implement small forest restoration areas.
Review river corridor for restoration and habitat enhancement opportunities	24		\$4,920		Work with MnDNR regarding funding sources for river bank stabilization.
Review all spring creeks and drainage ways for stability	24		\$7,000		
Gully stabilization with trail crossing is needed at three locations along west boundary	60	\$410,000			Partner with SWCD, Pursue CWF.
Upstream storage needed at locations of gullies and trail crossings. Consider CWF grants and working with SWCD to install retention basins.	60	\$169,700			Not including land cost/easements. Annual followup with SWCD staff regarding available grants and funding. Pursue CWF.
Support and promote river fishing by improving access and in-stream habitat	40	\$12,040			
Support and promote local birding interests	16			\$1,200	
Plant fruit bearing shrubs to support wildlife	40	\$3,000	\$6,000		Work with CCM annually on erosion/habitat improvement projects. Partner with SWCD.
SUBTOTALS	468	\$614,240	\$56,140	\$5,800	



OXBOW PARK & ZOLLMAN ZOO **MASTER PLAN**

