



I. Introduction

From the rolling highlands of northern Wood County to the sandy central plain of southern Wood County, the county provides a diverse landscape with a significant amount of recreational resources. Lakes, rivers, forests, wetlands, parks, recreation areas, and open spaces allow residents and visitors opportunities to enjoy a variety of recreational activities. This plan represents a comprehensive inventory and analysis of Wood County's recreation system and establishes goals, objectives and recommendations that meet the current and future recreation needs of the community. Primary emphasis is placed on the role the county is expected to play in meeting those needs. Secondary emphasis is placed on those outdoor recreation facilities provided by Wood County's towns, cities and villages, the role of those facilities, and how they might best serve users. By virtue of this plan, Wood County assumes the role of assisting to coordinate outdoor recreation planning and programming within its boundaries.



Dexter County Park

Purpose

Outdoor recreation planning stems from the core responsibility of Wood County to protect and promote the public health, safety, prosperity, and general welfare of the community. Proper planning is an important step in providing a quality county-wide recreation system. This plan was developed for the general purpose of guiding and accomplishing a coordinated and harmonious county recreation system. Moreover, proper planning helps organize efforts, financial resources, and time, creating efficiency and economy in the process of implementation. This plan is intended to serve as a guide for decision making and provides direction for recreation providers, elected officials, and stakeholders in regards to recreation management and policy over the next (5) five years. Additionally, the plan provides:

- Continued eligibility to participate in outdoor recreation grant funding programs administered by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) and other applicable federal, state and local financial assistance programs.
- Direction to guide short and long term community recreation decisions.
- A detailed inventory of the existing recreation system and services.
- A practical action program that meets the needs of residents and visitors.
- A foundation for coordinating future recreation improvements.
- A means to create additional economic, social and environmental benefits.
- An integral component of the Wood County Comprehensive Plan

Further, it is the intent of this plan to outline a program that will make wise use of the county's resources, including natural and man-made resources as well as those financial resources available through state, federal and local programs. This plan is not designed to exploit the county's natural resources to the point that a natural resource will be exhausted or to the point of endangering the habitat of the county's abundant wildlife. On the contrary, if properly implemented, the plan should maximize use of these resources while at the same time preserving their functions.

Statutory Basis

This plan was prepared pursuant to § 23.30 of the Wisconsin Statutes: *“The purpose of this section is to promote, encourage, coordinate and implement a comprehensive long-range plan to acquire, maintain and develop for public use those areas of the state best adapted to the development of a comprehensive system of state and local outdoor recreation facilities and services...”*

Plan Organization

- **Section I. Introduction:** Provides an overview of the purpose, planning process and timeframe for the development of the plan.
- **Section II. Goals and Objectives:** Presents the plan's vision along with uniquely defined outdoor recreation goals and objectives.
- **Section III. Past Plans and Accomplishments:** Reviews the history of outdoor recreation planning in Wood County. Additionally, this section summarizes completed projects/improvements since the last plan update in 2011.
- **Section IV. Description of Wood County:** Provides a glimpse into the county's past and present physical and social characteristics, which provides the background to plan for the future.
- **Section V. Inventory of Existing Recreation System and Services:** Provides an overview of the present-day outdoor recreation system focusing specifically on county parks, recreation areas and open spaces.
- **Section VI. Recreation Needs Assessment:** Summarizes gaps between existing and desired recreation system by assessing public input, outdoor recreation standards, and other relevant recreation plans.
- **Section VII. Wood County Recreation Moving Forward:** Presents an action program and implementation strategy to guide community decision making over the next several years. Additionally, this section includes recommendations and a Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) for outdoor recreation facilities and areas.
- **Section VIII. Appendices:** Contains supplementary reference material that is helpful in providing a more comprehensive understanding of information presented in the plan.

Planning Process

The planning process for the Wood County Parks, Recreation and Open Spaces Plan – 2018 spanned a little over a year starting in the fall of 2017. Initially, past plans were reviewed to see what progress had occurred since the last plan update. Updated information and data was collected on the physical and social characteristics of Wood County and their relationship to recreation. Subsequently, an extensive inventory was performed of existing county park and recreation areas/facilities. Information gathered from the inventory was utilized to develop a needs assessment, which shaped a general action/implementation program for recreation improvements for the next 5 years.

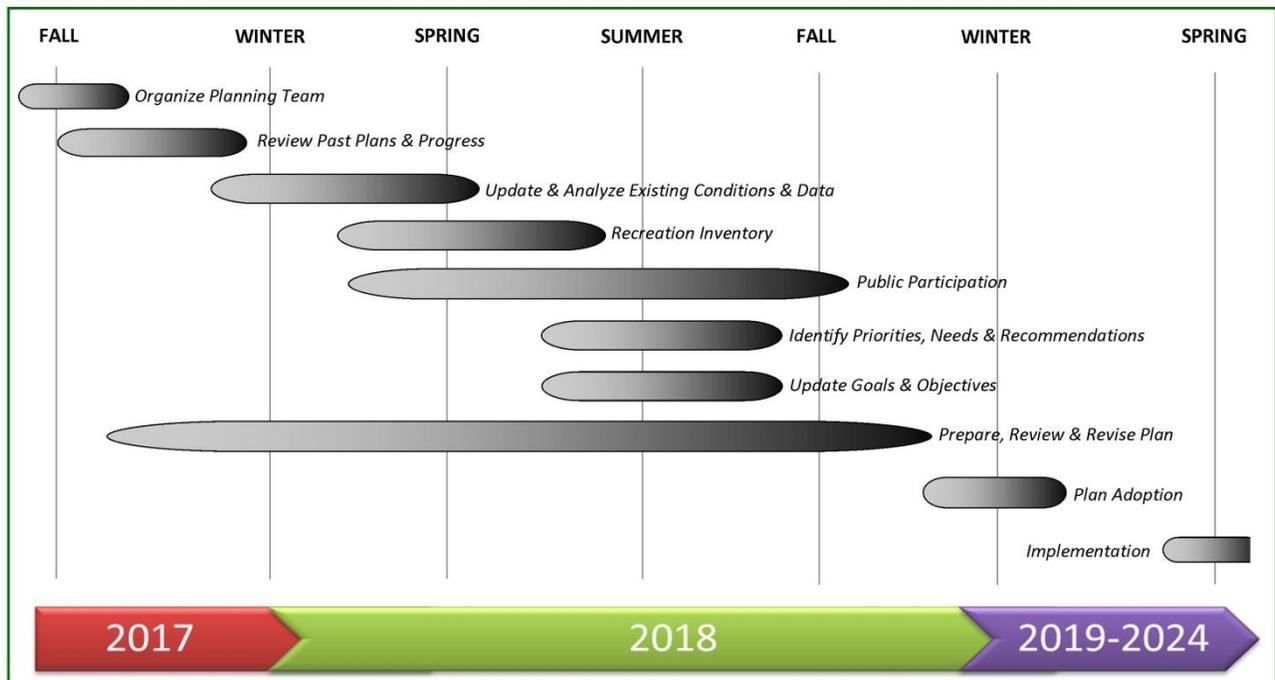
Each of these plan layers builds on the findings and conclusions from the previous to identify goals, objectives and recommendations intended to guide future recreational planning efforts. A timeline of the planning process is presented in (Figure 1) below.

Wood County recognizes public participation as one of the most important aspects of the planning process. High importance was placed on fostering public participation in every stage of the plan update. Public involvement is important to assure that the plan continues to truly reflect community needs and input from the public. Therefore, a public participation strategy was developed to assure public input is responded to and incorporated into the plan. This strategy is presented in (Section VI.) of this plan.

The planning process is not finished with the completion or adoption of this plan. The Wood County Highway Infrastructure and Recreation Committee, in conjunction with Wood County staff, will be responsible for providing direction and guidance to the Wood County Board of Supervisors on outdoor recreation related decisions. This will ensure that implementation of the plan is consistent with its goals, objectives and recommendations.

This plan shall also be submitted to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources for approval and acceptance.

Figure 1: Planning Process Timeline



Updating & Amending the Plan

This plan should be updated and reassessed every (5) five years to ensure its effectiveness. In fact, changing trends and attitudes in outdoor recreation may require updates sooner.

Should the need arise for unforeseen projects to be added to this document within the 5-year time frame, an amendment to the plan will be needed. Plan amendments are common and should be considered part of the planning process. They represent good plan implementation and should be acceptable for consideration by community decision makers. Amendments can prolong the effectiveness of the initial plan, consequently averting a full comprehensive plan update. Potential amendments should be brought to the attention of the Wood County Highway, Infrastructure and Recreation Committee or the Wood County Conservation, Education and Economic Development Committee. Staff will review the proposal for conflicts or duplication of services and recommend to the committee the inclusion, alteration, or rejection of the project. If accepted, the plan will be updated, and notice of the update will be sent to the Department of Natural Resources for inclusion in their copy.

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