

McHenry County
Conservation District

Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan

Prepared by Hitchcock Design Group
Final Plan April 17, 2008



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Executive Summary

The publication of the Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan culminates a deliberate and transparent planning process that began in July 2007. This was a true team effort in which the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD or the “District”) Board of Trustees, staff, citizens, and other stakeholders contributed considerable time and energy. The camaraderie and shared sense of purpose that this planning effort fostered are perhaps more important than the plan itself. All planning goals, objectives, and priorities ultimately change. A spirit of productive community cooperation, however, can endure and serve a vital civic asset for generations to come.

While the plan was motivated by a strong consensus among stakeholders to identify and prioritize site development and public access goals and objectives, the process itself was energized by the need to thoughtfully balance a variety of ecological and social needs and interests within the District. For example, the District’s core mission of land conservation, preservation, and education had to be carefully balanced with the passive and active recreational needs of the County’s growing population. Because of this, extensive outreach efforts were undertaken to solicit input and feedback from District stakeholders throughout the course of the project. These efforts are listed in the Research Summary section on page 106.

While balancing needs was an especially critical part of the planning process, the desire to make connections was the second major theme to emerge from District stakeholders – connecting people to MCCD sites, connecting amenities within sites, and connecting sites and other County geographic locations to each other. This is perhaps best exemplified by the list of improvements and project priorities on page 13 of the Recommendations section. Of the top 25 priorities listed, no fewer than 20 include improving public access to sites and / or trail improvements. In the entire list of 40 priorities, 24 include public access and trail improvements.

The planning horizon for this report is five years. It is important to understand that while this document represents a snapshot in time, the recommendations and priorities listed here will be regularly evaluated and updated by staff and the Board of Trustees based on the resource requirements that emerge from continued site planning and the evolving needs of District Stakeholders.

There will, of course, be challenges. Maintaining and strengthening the same spirit of collaboration that characterized the plan development process will now be needed to successfully implement the recommended improvements. These improvements are not just strategies to create a more sustainable physical environment – they are opportunities to strengthen McHenry County’s economic, social, and cultural environments as well. They were generated by and for the residents the McHenry County, and the residents of McHenry County will be the primary beneficiaries of this planning endeavor. It is with this spirit of collaboration that the MCCD Board of Trustees and staff now advance the plan recommendations towards implementation.

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of the Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan is define the recreational needs of the County that are within the McHenry County Conservation District’s mission, and secondly, to assist the District in utilizing proper planning to ensure District sites are opened to the public when the integration of safety, quality, land acquisition, natural resource protection and organizational capacity is secured to implement and maintain them.

Goals

The goals of the Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan are to:

- Analyze current conditions of recreational amenities.
- Assess current recreational and public access needs.
- Obtain Board, staff, and public input.
- Build consensus within the District.
- Serve as a tool to guide the District’s decisions on public access and recreational development over the next 5 years.

Approach

The Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan process was organized into five distinct phases that were completed between June 2007 and March 2008. The phases and scope of work were as follows:

Program Phase

The program phase included a kick-off meeting, a written summary of the meeting and the project program, a detailed project schedule that identified milestones and meeting dates, and the preparation of a refined scope of services based on District input.

Inventory and Analysis Phase

In this phase of the project, background data was collected and analyzed, including existing plans, community surveys, demographics, and maps. In addition, site visits were conducted in which amenities and conditions were inventoried and photographed.

Needs Assessment Phase

The Needs Assessment Phase included information gathering workshops with the MCCD Board of Trustees, and staff. Four community workshops were conducted in different locations throughout the County during which public input was solicited and documented. This input was summarized in a draft needs assessment and reviewed with the MCCD project team. Two additional public interest surveys were also conducted. The first was an on-line survey that the public could access through the District’s website and the second was a telephone survey conducted by American Viewpoint, Inc.

Draft Report Phase

In this phase, a set of preliminary recommendations were developed for MCCD site classification criteria, additional recreational amenities and facilities, site specific improvements, trail improvements/additions, and implementation strategies and priorities. This information was included in a draft report that was reviewed

with the MCCD project team and further refined. In addition, the recommendations were presented to MCCD staff and the Board of Trustees for review and comment. The recommendations were also presented to the general public at an open house in which further input was solicited and gathered. Comments received from the staff, Board and general public were summarized, reviewed with MCCD staff and also made available to the general public on the District’s website.

Final Report Phase

Based on the feedback received from staff, the Board of Trustees and the general public, the final Comprehensive Site Development and Public Access Plan report was prepared. Additional comments to the final report were solicited in reviews with MCCD staff and a final draft of the report was presented to the MCCD Board of Trustees for approval and adoption.

McHenry County Conservation District Profile

About Illinois Conservation Districts

A conservation district is a special district with specific purposes established under Illinois statutes following a favorable public referendum. Its purpose includes the acquisition of land by purchase, lease, gift, or easement; the preservation and maintenance of wild land, other open land, scenic roadways, and pathways; and the holding of such real property, with or without public access for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public or for other open space values. To date, there are five counties in Illinois that have created such districts: Boone, Macon, McHenry, Putnam, and Vermilion.

The District is funded through an annual tax levy not to exceed 1/10th of one percent of the assessed valuation of the county and is based upon a duly adopted budget and appropriation ordinance on which there has been a public hearing. Supplemental monies may be made available through state and federal open space or recreational grants, private donations, and through the issuance of general obligation bonds approved by public referendum. The District boundaries include McHenry County and properties that lie within Lake County to the east. The District is within the standard metropolitan planning region of the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning.

The State of Illinois Conservation District Act defines open land or open space as any space or area of land or water, the preservation or the restriction of development or the use of which would maintain or enhance the conservation of natural and/or scenic resources. The acquisition of such open land can be for the purpose of protecting a natural stream or water supply, promoting the conservation of soils or wetlands and affording or enhancing public outdoor recreational activities.

General Description

Established by county-wide referendum in 1971, the District is an independent entity, the boundaries of which are coterminous with McHenry County (the “County”), encompassing an area of 610 square miles. The District is governed by a seven member Board of Trustees who are appointed by the chairperson of the McHenry County Board, with the consent of the McHenry County Board, and serve five-year staggered terms.

The District is dedicated to acquiring and maintaining land as open space for preservation, education, and recreation. In furtherance of these goals, the District owns or manages 21,338 acres, including 16 Illinois Nature Preserves and 50 District owned or managed sites (25 of which are open to the public). Sites range in

visited District sites. The District maintains the 26 mile Prairie Trail for bicycling and hiking which runs from Kane County to the Wisconsin state line, the five mile Hebron Trail for bicycling and hiking, and the 3.5 mile H.U.M. Trail connecting Marengo and Union. The District also owns another 15 miles of greenway corridor in the southwest portion of the County, a portion of which will be developed as a trail. Other trails include 43 hiking/walking interpretive trails, horseback riding at four sites and 10 miles of snowmobiling trails. Most hiking trails are available for cross-country skiing. Numerous additional recreational and environmental education activities available through by the District including camping (on seven sites), picnicking, fishing, hunting, birding, canoeing, ice skating, sledding, and public programs for all ages.

Preservation Activities

One of the primary purposes of the District is to preserve natural areas and open land. Remnant natural areas, prairies, wetlands, and wooded areas receive the highest priority in protecting the County's natural heritage. Each site is inventoried to ensure that any development plans complement the protection of any native, rare, or endangered species, or high quality natural areas.

Development plans are created utilizing the latest scientific information available to ensure that public access and use does not create unnecessary habitat fragmentation that render sites unsuitable for the life cycles of native species.

The District's Natural Ecosystem Management Policy requires that District land be managed to the highest level of ecological health possible. District staff and volunteers engage in numerous activities to further this goal, including removing invasive species, hydrological restoration, prescribed burning and re-establishing native flora and fauna. District staff also assists in managing other public and private open space properties throughout the County.

Education Activities

The educational purpose of the District is to promote the natural and cultural heritage of the County's land, helping to ensure its future protection and enrichment. The District presents a myriad of public programs throughout the County for a wide variety of audiences. These include day camps, canoe trips, night hikes, bird watching, and wildflower walks as well as larger special events. In early Spring, the Festival of the Sugar Maples demonstrates the making of maple syrup from its early history through modern day syrup production. The Trail of History attracts thousands of visitors each Fall to experience a living history portrayal of life in the Northwest Territory from its early exploration to settlement.

Many of the District's public programs as well as its school field trips and teacher workshops are held at the Wiedrich Education Center in Glacial Park, Prairieview Education Center in Silver Creek Conservation Area, and Living Land Farm in Hickory Grove Conservation Area. Self-guided learning opportunities such as loan materials, interpretive signage, and nature trails are also provided across the County. At the District's Wildlife Resource Center, the District conducts research and provides rehabilitation services for endangered, threatened, and species of conservation concern. Wildlife Resource Center and Education Services staff also present outreach programs for schools and community groups. Program listings and other educational articles can be found in the District's quarterly newsletter, *Landscapes*, which is free to the public upon request. The Research Field Station in Glacial Park provides seven day a week visitor center with seasonally changing displays.

Recreation Activities

Recreational opportunities are plentiful at District sites. Cross country ski programs are held throughout the winter months. Families are encouraged to picnic and camp at many of the District sites. Nearly 20 miles of canoe trails offer up to six hours of floating time by canoe. Fishing is available on the Nippersink Creek, the Fox River, the pond at Rush Creek, the Piscasaw River at Beck's Woods, or Lake Atwood at The Hollows.

Land Acquisition Activities

The District acquires fee simple ownership rights and conservation easements on lands by purchase and by gift. Purchases are funded through a combination of annual tax revenues, grants, private donations, and bond proceeds. The District has established land acquisition goals which it uses to review potential acquisitions. These goals include:

- Ecological preservation and restoration;
- Connection and consolidation to existing holdings to increase public accessibility and usefulness of habitat for native plant and animal communities;
- Water resource management potential;
- Recreational potential;
- Multiple use potential; and
- Potential to increase or protect landscape diversity that enhances the quality of life in the County.

McHenry County Conservation District Mission

McHenry County Conservation District exists to preserve, restore, and manage natural areas and open spaces for their intrinsic value and for the benefits to present and future generations.

McHenry County Conservation District Vision Statement

McHenry County Conservation District is a highly motivated and fiscally responsible organization composed of professional staff, volunteers, and Board of Trustees.

We aspire to promote the long-term viability of the County's biodiversity while encouraging and providing opportunities for responsible use of lands in concert with the natural resources.

We inspire respect for the land community through exposing people to the wonders of nature and the knowledge of sound environmental practices.

We recognize that accomplishing these efforts requires working cooperatively with both public and private initiatives to promote sound stewardship practices.

McHenry County Conservation District History

Created by a group of ecologically conscientious citizens in 1971 and supported by the Illinois Conservation District Act of 1963, the District began with the mission to preserve open space, and to provide environmental education programs and resources for recreational opportunities to the public.

The District was established by a successful countywide referendum held in conjunction with the general election of April 1971 and formally organized in July 1971.

The first land purchase was made in 1973 when 50 acres that make up a portion of Beck’s Woods Conservation Area in Chemung were acquired. Since that time, thousands of acres have been added to MCCD holdings, from the 74-acre Harrison Benwell Conservation Area to the 3,243 acre Glacial Park Conservation Area, which features wetlands, prairie, glacial kames, and the newly remeandered Nippersink Creek.

The distinctiveness of McHenry County’s natural land was a driving force in the creation of the Conservation District. That desire for preservation has continued to inspire land acquisitions. Throughout the 1970s the District protected 2,167 acres. The 80s protected 2,353 acres. The rapid growth of the 1990s magnified the importance of land preservation and the District protected 7,144 acres. Since 2000, MCCD has protected 10,004 acres.

McHenry County Conservation District Organization

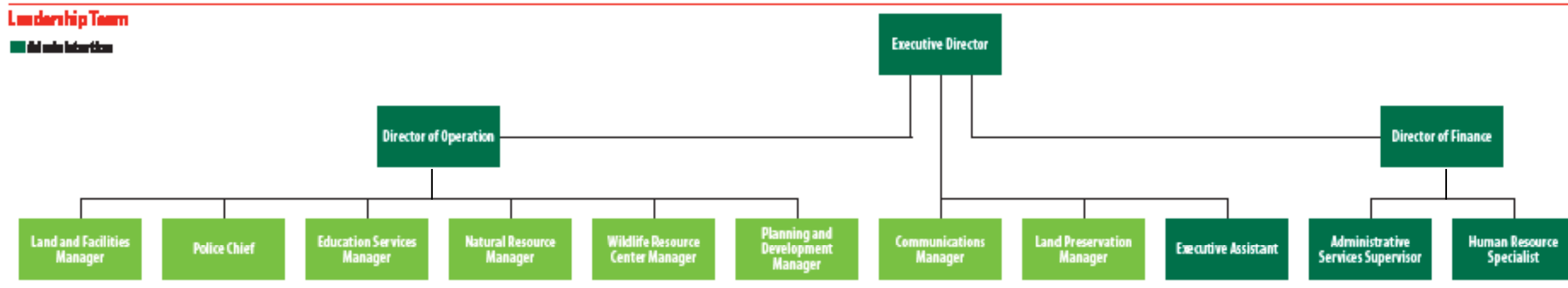
Board of Trustees

The District is governed by a board of seven trustees appointed by the Chairman of the County Board with the consent of the County Board. Trustees serve five-year terms without compensation with at least one trustee appointed each year.

The seven volunteer trustees serving the District are selected after the submission of an appropriate application and a personal interview conducted by the McHenry County Planning and Development Committee whose recommendations are then submitted to the McHenry County Board Chairman for review. The trustees are appointed based on personal and technical qualifications and geographical location. After serving their term, trustees are not eligible for immediate reappointment. They must leave the board for at least one year before applying again.

McHenry County Conservation District Management Team

District staff are led by an Executive Director who is hired by the Board of Trustees on a qualifications basis. Under the Executive Director are a Director of Finance and Director of Operations. Staff are organized by following departments: Finance, Administrative and Human Resources, Land Preservation, Land and Facilities, Police, Educational Services, Natural Resource Management, Wildlife Resource Center, Planning and Development, and Communications.



Coordination with Other Planning Agencies

Internal Coordination

This plan is a tool for MCCD staff and Board of Trustees to use in conjunction with other District plans and reports to guide decisions for recreational site development and public access. The plan focuses on the recreational needs of the District and opportunities within each planning area to provide for those needs. Additional plans, reports, and other data should be reviewed to fully understand resource capability and availability, budgeting constraints, natural resource and site sensitivity, and other District needs. Some of these other plans and reports include Natural Resource Inventories and Ecosystem Management Plans, Capital Replacement, McHenry County Oak Distribution Study, McHenry County Natural Areas Inventory, MCCD Bridge Replacement Program (20 yrs.), MCCD Building Maintenance Program (25 yrs.), MCCD Asphalt Replacement Program (15 yrs.), and Maintenance and Operations.

External Coordination

The McHenry County Regional Planning Commission was appointed by the McHenry County Board to create the *McHenry County 2030 Regional Land Use Plan*. The Commission has been meeting monthly since December 2006. MCCD continues to work with the County Board and the Planning Commission to support best land resource planning and management practices.

The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's *2040 Regional Framework Plan* includes McHenry County. The plan organized major regional issues into themes that include Liveable Communities, Diversity of its People, Healthy Natural Environment, Global Competitiveness, and Governed Collaboratively. Strategies developed in support of these themes align with a geographic framework that includes "centers," "corridors," and "green areas." MCCD supports regional planning in northeastern Illinois and strives to coordinate its planning activities with the goals identified in the *2040 Regional Framework Plan*.

The 2040 Regional Framework Plan summarizes other County planning initiatives:

Previously, the 2010 Land Use Plan was adopted in 1993 and the 2010 Transportation Plan was adopted in 1995. The Unified Plan focuses on the integration of land-use and transportation planning as the key to managing the significant growth forecasted for the county.

The planning process involved the development of multiple land use scenarios and transportation models that were measured against several factors including impact on natural resources, quality of life, and the transportation network. This analysis led to the promotion of a nodal concept of development, similar to past McHenry County plans and the centers concept in the 2040 Plan. The nodal concept advocates for compact development, efficient use of infrastructure, and preservation of farmland and natural resources. The plan also talks about the importance of the nodal concept for the development of efficient and effective transportation choices.

As in other county plans and the 2040 Plan, the McHenry plan points to the importance of intergovernmental cooperation among municipalities, the county, and other regional agencies to achieve the desired land-use changes and goals of the plan.

Recommendations and Implementation

Recommendations and Implementation

Site Development Recommendations

Establishing an Evaluation Framework

During the Program, Inventory and Analysis, and Needs Assessment phases of the project, data from a number of sources was collected and evaluated. This information is detailed in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. In addition, public input was solicited using a variety of methods, including personal interviews, public workshops and presentations, surveys, and a project website. Chapters 3 and 4 summarize the data collected and analyzed for each of the District's sites that are currently accessible to the public while chapter 5 summarizes the public input results received during the needs assessment phase. The needs and recommendations identified in this document are not based on any one single source or method of data, rather, they are based on review of the data and methods as a whole and identifying needs or issues that were most common.

This was due primarily to two factors. First, some of the methods received a relatively low turn-out or response rate representing a very small percentage of the County. And secondly, there was a wide range of needs and issues identified as a result of this process, but within that range a number of consistent themes emerged as the planning process advanced. Collectively, the themes served as an organizing framework for conducting additional analysis and, ultimately, creating the final site development and public access recommendations. While land preservation and restoration continued to be identified as a priority throughout this process, the following needs and recommendations are specific to site development and public access for recreational purposes to remain consistent with the purpose of this document. The themes were as follows and are listed in alphabetical order:

- Camping
- Canoeing/kayaking
- Education centers, programming and signage
- Fishing
- General site improvements and planning
- Hiking and multi-use trails
- Off leash dog areas

The recommendations and implementation strategy that follows is identified in three steps: First, the needs and recommendations are briefly summarized as they relate to each of the primary themes (see this page). Secondly, each recommendation is described in more detail individually by which site the need is being addressed at (see page 12) Finally, the recommendations are organized in order of District priority (see page 13). To begin, the needs and issues are summarized as follows:

Camping

- Redevelop and update current facilities to improve screening and separation between individual sites, increased shade, electrical service (where feasible), new restroom facilities, and improved ADA access between campsites and support amenities.
- Consider adding facilities to support increased RV camping.
- Focus redevelopment at sites with highest use.
- Consider adding support amenities and recreation opportunities to sites receiving low use or developing camping facilities at sites with higher number of support amenities and recreation opportunities.

Canoeing and Kayaking

- Redevelop and update current facilities to provide ADA access, replace aging facilities, and repair bank erosion.
- Consider adding facilities at: Hickory Grove, Swanson Quarry, Camp Algonquin, Coon Creek, Brookdale, Beck's Woods, County Line
- Study feasibility of rental facilities at sites with infrastructure, resources, and support amenities. Consider partnerships with local outfitters to provide the community increased opportunities and locations for rentals and trips.

Education Centers, Programming, and Signage

- Conduct a study to evaluate the future addition of an education center in the western region of the County. Pleasant Valley is the primary site for consideration with Rush Creek and Brookdale as secondary options.
- Input and comments on the community's needs and interests for additional educational programming varied throughout the process making it challenging to identify specific needs. Consider conducting a more focused study to better define the community's interests and needs between programmed education, self guided education, and the education type.

Fishing

- An interest in additional facilities was expressed during the needs assessment. Education and outreach should be addressed to increase public awareness and use of the current facilities, and to solicit additional guidance from this user group on what type of facilities are desired and where.
- In addition to increasing promotion of the current facilities, develop additional fishing access at the available ponds, rivers, and streams throughout the District.

General Site Improvements and Planning

- The range of ADA accessibility for recreational amenities varies from site to site. In addition, some sites have more difficult topography and grade change making it challenging to provide accessibility to all amenities. Trails and parking areas throughout the District should be improved to increase the level of ADA accessibility between primary recreational amenities, parking locations, other trails systems, and support facilities such as restrooms.
- Many facilities vary in materials, style, and type among the various District sites including shelters, site furnishings, landscape treatment, parking and restroom facilities, and signage. Design guidelines should be developed to create consistency among these elements.
- Update internal guidelines and procedures for site master planning to improve inter-office coordination related to programming, management, and maintenance of site improvements.
- Update guidelines for site development to allow public access to occur within a shorter time frame following new site acquisitions.

Hiking and Multi Use Trails

- The District has many planned trail improvements currently in-progress and others awaiting funding. Provide education and outreach to the public to increase awareness regarding these planned improvements.
- When appropriate, provide trail access to new sites as an interim step to allow for public access while awaiting planning and funding for full site development.
- Update regional trails plan to identify other facility and trail connections and coordination with other communities planned trails. Pursue additional partnerships with local communities to further develop planned trail connections and obtain financial assistance for trail development and maintenance.
- Input and comments on the community's needs and interests for additional trails and trail improvements varied throughout the process. Solicit additional guidance from this user group on what type of improvements and where additional trails are desired.

Off Leash Dog Areas

- A desire for off leash dog areas were expressed across many of the methods utilized to obtain public input. Comments varied and included an interest in larger facilities that allowed training for hunting. This type of recreation is provided at the local level through some park districts and municipalities, but the expressed interest represents a potential need in other areas of the District. The District has already conducted a partial feasibility study. This study should be expanded upon to identify potential partnerships with local municipalities and park districts to expand this service throughout the District, identify potential sites that may accommodate this use, and additional outreach to user groups for additional input on the type and location of the desired facilities.

Site Development Recommendations Summary

To create final site development and public access recommendations, all MCCD facilities within each planning area were evaluated against the specific needs and issues that had been grouped by topic. Several factors were taken into consideration while evaluating which recommendations to advance and what the priorities should be. Among the most important factors were:

- The facilities and amenities that MCCD stakeholders identified as the most desirable.
- The location and convenience of the recreational facilities available to the public within each planning area.
- The planning area population.
- MCCD resources.
- The existing levels of access to and amenities within each facility.
- Facility classification ratings.
- Projects already planned, funded or in progress

The tables on the following page summarize the recommendations and implementation priorities for the facilities within each planning area. The recommendations are further organized into three categories: site development projects, region wide planning projects, and trail projects.

SiteDevelopmentRecommendationsSummary

Category	Area	Facility Name	Recommendation	Priority	
Site Development Projects	1	Glacial Park	Relocate the north campground to an area with improved visitor access	33	
			Consider adding additional fishing areas around the various ponds including ADA accessible facilities	33	
			Redevelop the Keystone Road and Pioneer Landing canoe launches for ADA accessibility	33	
			Develop trails within the park for hiking and connections to each public facility and amenity	33	
			Complete the adaptive re-use study for the lodge to enhance current and expand on educational programming opportunities within the facility	5	
			Harrison Benwell	Implement general site improvements. Improve the existing conditions of the campground and trail system	40
			Nippersink Canoe Base-Kattner	Install ADA accessible trail and canoe launches in accordance with current grant project	12
			Nippersink North Branch	Complete Nippersink North Branch Master Plan implementation which includes a restroom, drinking fountain, picnic area, safety watch building, signage and a bicycle camping area	3
	2	Stickney Run	Develop the planned trail and improvements in accordance with the existing master plan	29	
			Enhance the pond for improved fish habitat including dredging, shoreline plantings, and management program for control of aquatic weeds	29	
			Complete the restoration of the historic Mosgrove Cemetery and headstones	4	
	3	Detrana Fen	Develop public access and planned ADA trail and loop the connection to the existing trail system at Fel-Pro RRR in accordance with the current grant project	17	
			Fox Bluff	Develop accessible canoe launch, trails, and erosion control repair along the river bank	37
			Hickory Grove (Lions Prairie and March)	Develop an accessible fishing pier and canoe Launch along the Fox River. Coordinate these improvements in accordance with Illinois State Nature Preserve requirements	39
			The Hollows	Enhance the camp site with electrical service and plantings for improved screening, shade, and separation	31
				Redevelop the canoe launch for accessibility and repair of bank erosion	31
			L.I.T.H. Fen (Rothschild)	Develop the planned trail in accordance with the current grant project	9
			Silvercreek (Prairieview Education Center)	Develop accessible fishing piers, trails, and canoe launch including trail connection between the south entrance, north entrance, and Fox River	34
				Investigate opportunities to provide RV camping at this location	34
	4	Bailey Woods (Sobel Parcel)	Develop the planned trail head improvements including parking lot, shelter, restroom, and signage in accordance with the current grant project	10	
			Boger Bog	Complete the development of signage, trails, and drinking fountain which is currently in progress	2
			Boone Creek (Wold Parcel)	Develop the planned parking area and trails in accordance with the current grant project	14
			Dufield Pond/ McConnel Woods	Ensure pond is stocked to accommodate fishing. Install ADA accessible fishing pier	13
				Develop the planned parking area, shelter, restroom, and nature trails in accordance with the current grant project	13
		Kishwaukee Headquarters	Develop the planned parking area, restroom, trail head, and signage in accordance with the current grant project	8	
6		Exner Marsh	Provide accessible trail connection from the west entrance to the LITH trail	38	
			Study the potential to close the north parking lot after the trail connection is completed	38	
		Pleasant Valley	Develop the planned parking, restroom; multi-use hiking/bicycling/cross country skiing trails; wild life viewing, fishing, and picnicking amenities in accordance with the current Henrici/Timmerman grant project	15	
			Repair existing ADA trail from parking lot to amphitheater	20	
7	Beck's Woods	Enhance the existing campsites for improved screening, shade, and separation	41		
		Brookdale	Ensure pond is stocked to accommodate fishing	35	
			Develop and ADA accessible canoe launch	35	
	Highpoint-Compere	Develop the planned parking, restrooms, interpretive signage, and trails in accordance with the current grant project	11		

Category	Area	Facility Name	Recommendation	Priority
Site Development Projects (cont.)	7	Rush Creek	Update restroom in the campground	30
			Install ADA accessible fishing pier and trails where feasible	30
	8	Coral Woods	Consider a new location for the entrance drive	36
		Kishwaukee Corridor County Line Access	Remove log jams, provide an accessible canoe launch, and coordinate with City of Marengo and Openlands for canoe trail opportunities between Route 23 and County Line Road	27
			Install new ADA compliant trail Kishwaukee River	27
		Marengo Ridge	Develop the planned parking and trail additions in accordance with the current grant project	16
			Per Tristano grant project, implement trails through south prairie	16
Region Wide Planning Projects		Education Center	Conduct a study to determine feasibility for an education/nature center in the northwest corner of the County	23
		Off Leash Dog Area	Conduct additional research on the feasibility for developing an off-leash dog area	28
		Office Space Needs	Plan for implementing space allocation recommendations, as outlined in the Office Space Allocation Study	24
Trail Development Projects		Crystal Lake to Woodstock Trailhead development (Woodman Parcel)	Complete the planned phase one trail from Oak Street in Crystal Lake to the McHenry County College in accordance with the current grant project	6
			Plan for and develop additional phases of the trail. Implement trailhead at Oak Street	26
		Harvard / Boone Trail	Development of phase one is currently in progress	1
		Hebron Trail	Implement repairs to the existing trail system including regrading and resurfacing	21
			Pursue opportunities to develop trailhead with parking, signage, and other support amenities in Hebron	42
		H.U.M. Trail	Develop trailhead at Prospect Street in Marengo	25
			Implement repairs to existing trail	7
		Nippersink Canoe Trail	Install ADA accessible trail and canoe launches where feasible	32
		Prairie Trail North	Implement repairs to the existing trail system including drainage improvements and trail elevation adjustments	22
		Prairie Trail South	Develop an Inter Governmental Agreement with Crystal Lake for the proposed improvements and relocation of the existing trail due to road / highway improvements	18
	Develop an Inter Governmental Agreement with Lake In The Hills for the proposed improvements and relocation of the existing trail due to road / highway improvements		19	

Priorities

In order to develop an implementation strategy for these recommendations the District compared these recommended projects to other related projects already in progress or planned. Then the following criteria were considered to develop this prioritized listing:

- Current status / in progress
- Plan completed
- Funding obtained or planned
- Need (based on this and past studies or input)
- Replacement needed
- Opportunity
- Available MCCD resources

Priority Ranking	Implementation Priorities	Amenity / Access	Planning Area
1	Harvard to Boone Trail Phase 1 (under contract)	Regional trail	7
2	Complete Boger Bog Master Plan Implementation, including entrance sign, kiosk, interpretive signs, and drinking fountain (under contract)	Public access, nature trails, and intimate educational programming	5
3	Complete Nippersink North Branch Master Plan Implementation Phase II, including restroom and safety watch building (under contract)	Public access, regional trail, and bicycle camping	1
4	Complete Stickney Run Cemetery Restoration (under contract)	Site security	2
5	Implement adaptive reuse, remodeling, and additions to the Glacial Park Conference Center (under contract)	Public access, office space needs, trails, and educational programming	1
6	Crystal Lake to Woodstock Trail Phase I (under contract)	Regional trail	3
7	Implement repairs to existing H.U.M. trail (under contract)	Regional trail	8
8	Kishwaukee Headwaters	Public access, trails, and educational programming	5
9	Lake in the Hills Fen (Rothschild Parcel)	Public access and trails	3
10	Bailey Wood's (Sobel Parcel)	Public access and trails	4
11	Highpoint-Compere	Public access and trails	7
12	Nippersink Canoe Base (Kattner Parcel)	Public access, fishing, and trails	1
13	Dufield Pond / McConnel Woods	Public access, fishing, and trails	5
14	Boone Creek (Wold Parcel)	Public access and trails	5
15	Pleasant Valley-Henrici / Timmerman	Public access and trails	6
16	Marengo Ridge-Tristano	Public access and trails	8
17	Detrana Fen	General site improvements / planning, public access, and trails	3
18	Relocate Prairie Trail-Mainstreet (IGA)	Regional trail	3
19	Relocate Prairie Trail-LITH (IGA)	Regional trail	3
20	Pleasant Valley ADA path assessment needs	General site improvements	6
21	Hebron Trail North repairs	Regional trail	4
22	Prairie Trail North	Regional trail	1
23	Conduct feasibility study for an education center in the west part of the County	Education center / programming and signage / office space needs	7
24	Plan for implementing space allocation recommendations, as outlined in the Office Space Allocation Study	General site improvements / planning and office space needs	7
25	H.U.M. Trailhead Prospect Street in Marengo	Regional trail	8
26	Crystal Lake to Woodstock Trailhead development (Woodman Parcel)	Regional trail	3
27	Kishwaukee Corridor-County Line access canoe launch / amenity improvements	Public access and canoeing / kayaking	8
28	Conduct additional research on the feasibility of developing an off leash dog area	New recreational potential	TBD
29	Complete Stickney Run Master Plan improvements	Fishing and trails and general site improvements	2
30	Rush Creek improvements	General site improvements / planning, camping, and fishing	7
31	The Hollows improvements	General site improvements	3
32	Nippersink Canoe Trail canoe launch replacements / improvements	General site improvements / planning and canoeing / kayaking	1
33	Glacial Park improvements	General site improvements, camping, fishing and trails	1
34	Silver Creek / Prairieview improvements	Camping, fishing, canoeing / kayaking, and trails	3
35	Brookdale improvements	Fishing and education center / programming	7
36	Coral Woods improvements	General site improvements / planning and public access	8
37	Fox Bluff improvements	Canoeing / kayaking and trails	3
38	Exner Marsh improvements	Public access	6
39	Hickory Grove / Lyon's Prairie Marsh improvements	Fishing	3
40	Harrison Benwell improvements	General site improvements, camping, and trails	1
41	Beck's Woods improvements	Camping	7
42	Hebron Trailhead	Regional trail	4

Public Access

Background

Determining the level of access the public should have to sites is one of the most challenging administrative and operational tasks that MCCD undertakes. Illinois conservation districts are unique, and this is reflected in the enabling legislation for conservation districts, the Illinois Conservation District Act:

“The purpose of this Act is to provide for the creation of conservation districts. Such districts may, and their principal purpose is to, acquire in fee or a lesser right or interest, preserve and maintain wildland, other open land, scenic roadways and pathways; hold such real property, with or without public access, for the education, pleasure and recreation of the public or for other open space values; preserve portions thereof in their natural condition and undertake development of other portions thereof; manage and use such real property in such manner and with such restrictions as will leave it unimpaired for the benefit of future generations; and otherwise promote the conservation of nature, flora and fauna, natural environment and natural resources of the district.”

Public Access Criteria

All MCCD facilities are accessible to the public, though access to some sites is restricted. A key objective of this project was to provide a framework for standardizing the methodology used for determining what level of public access is appropriate for new and/or existing sites. Based on the research conducted and feedback provided by stakeholders, six criteria have been identified for evaluating levels of public access assigned to MCCD sites. They are:

1) Environmental Quality

Environmental quality refers to the quality and sensitivity of the ecosystem (vegetation, animals, soils, hydrology), habitat and other environmental value such as ground water recharge, wetlands, floodplain, threatened and endangered species, prime agricultural land, archaeological, and historical significance.

2) Available MCCD Resources

The levels of staffing, equipment, and finances that are available to provide and maintain safe, secure public access—and the associated recreational amenities—are critical elements in determining levels of public access.

3) Available Infrastructure

Providing the necessary infrastructure such as roads, utilities, and structures to ensure sites have attractive amenities that are safe and convenient to access is one of MCCD’s most resource intensive responsibilities. The availability, quantity, and quality of existing infrastructure is therefore one of the prime considerations in determining which sites should have the highest levels of public access.

4) Site Conditions

Site conditions such as topography, vegetation, soils, hydrology, and the presence of hazardous materials or levels of site contamination are factors that help determine a site’s potential for recreational development and the appropriate corresponding level of public access.

5) Public Need and Demand

The level of expressed public interest for recreational amenities, the levels at which the amenities are convenient and available, and nationally recognized standards for levels of service are all important considerations in determining the level of public access a site should be assigned.

6) Jurisdictional and Legal Restrictions

Sites may be constrained by the jurisdictional controls that agencies such as the Army Corps of Engineers (U.S. waterways, wetlands) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (floodplains, floodways, and threatened and endangered species) have over MCCD facility resources. Other Federal and State agencies, McHenry County, and local municipalities may also have jurisdictional controls. Some sites may also have constraints placed upon them by special covenants, easements, or funding sources.

Site Development and Public Access Phasing

Public access to MCCD sites typically evolves in phases based on a site’s ability to provide safe and convenient access and recreational amenities. Going forward, this framework should be further refined and used to develop a detailed and formalized process for determining the level of recreation and public access. As part of that process, the District should create policies for both recreational use and public access to guide decision making and development.