

**WAUSHARA COUNTY  
COMPREHENSIVE OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN  
2025-2030**

Prepared by  
Waushara County Facilities & Parks Management Department & Outdoor Recreation Advisory  
Committee

Adopted by Committee on: July 17, 2025  
Adopted by County Board on: August 19, 2025

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Waushara County Comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan was prepared with assistance from the Waushara County Board, and the Waushara County Outdoor Recreation Planning Committee.

### WAUSHARA COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

John Jarvis , Chairman  
Mark Kerschner, 1st Vice Chair  
Bart Peterson, 2nd Vice Chair  
Mark Piechowski  
Jenna Wakeley  
Jay Johnson  
David Bosshard  
Patrick King  
Robert Weddell  
Jesse Urban

### WAUSHARA COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION PLANNING COMMITTEE

Jeannie McBeth  
Todd Wahler  
Megan Kapp  
Bridget Olsen  
John Shipley  
Gene Wedde  
Stefanie Eldridge  
Amanda Kutcher  
Ben Mott  
Mark Piechowski  
Mike Lechner  
Jim Button  
Heidi Hensel-Buntrock  
Ruth Zouski

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 4  
Past Recreation Planning..... 4  
Purpose ..... 4  
Waushara County Geography and Demographics ..... 5  
**GOALS AND OBJECTIVES** ..... 6  
Outdoor Recreation..... 6  
Unique Natural and Cultural Resources ..... 7  
Public Participation ..... 8  
**RECREATIONAL RESOURCES** ..... 9  
County Parks ..... 9  
Municipal Parks..... 10  
State Owned Lands ..... 11  
Other Public Open Space ..... 12  
Quasi-Public and Private Recreational Facilities ..... 12  
Linear Recreational Facilities ..... 13  
**FACILITY NEEDS** ..... 15  
**RECOMMENDATIONS**..... 15  
Natural and Cultural Resources ..... 16  
Park and Recreation Growth and Development ..... 17  
Park System Policy and Management..... 18  
Local Park Projects ..... 20  
**ACTION PROGRAM**..... 20

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **PAST RECREATION PLANNING**

Waushara County's natural resources and outdoor recreational facilities provide a wide range of active and passive recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Picnicking, swimming, boating, hunting and fishing, camping, hiking, bicycling, downhill and cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling are some of the more popular recreational activities. In Waushara County the primary responsibility for accommodating recreational demand has traditionally rested with the County and local units of government and private recreational businesses. With increasing amounts of leisure time available, the demand for many types of recreational activities has grown during the past three decades. In most parts of Wisconsin the availability of recreational opportunities and facilities helps attract tourism dollars into the local economy. For smaller rural areas like Waushara County, recreational resources and facilities, both public and private, are vital to their economic health and often make tourism the area's most important industry.

Waushara County officials have come to recognize the value of the county's natural resources and recreational facilities in attracting visitors to the area. Accommodating the recreational needs of both resident and visitor is reflected by the ongoing commitment the County has made to maintain and upgrade its park system since its last Outdoor Recreation Plan adopted in March 2012.

To ensure needed recreation facilities continue to be provided in a coordinated fashion, Waushara County, with the assistance of a citizens' advisory committee, has used earlier plans prepared in 1975, 1988, 1994, 2000, 2006 and 2012 as a basis for this plan update. Like its predecessors, this version of the plan reaffirms longstanding goals and objectives, inventories existing park and recreational facilities, identifies countywide park and recreation needs and opportunities, and presents recommendations and an action program for addressing the system's growth and development.

### **PURPOSE**

Like its predecessors, the 2025 version of the Waushara County Outdoor Recreation Plan seeks to help preserve the county's natural environment and at the same time allow residents and visitors alike to play, learn, enjoy and live in harmony with it. In addition to setting forth new recommendations based on present needs, the adopted plan will enable Waushara County and its local municipalities to compete for matching funds available through the Department of Natural Resources' Stewardship Program and any other private or public grant program that may be available.

Although many County and local recreation needs have been met during the past three decades, some still exist, others have changed and, in some cases, new needs and opportunities have arisen. The purpose of this plan is to identify these changing recreational needs and to present recommendations to ensure that Waushara County will continue to provide a wide variety of recreational facilities for residents and visitors to enjoy. The plan also seeks to include municipal parks and recreation areas. Following local, County and state approval, the plan will allow the County and participating communities to retain or reestablish eligibility for the Stewardship Program and other grant programs if applicable.

To provide help in updating the Waushara County Open Space and Recreation Plan, a 13-member planning committee representing interests from throughout the county was formed. The role of the committee was to help identify present and future needs and opportunities at the county level and transform the concerns addressed above into recommendations that could be used by the Facilities and Parks Management Committee and ultimately the County Board as a framework in decision making. Implementing these recommendations is considered by the committee to be essential in ensuring that Waushara County residents and visitors continue to enjoy a wide variety of recreational opportunities in a quality environment.

Outdoor Recreation Planning Committee members included:

Name	Interest
Jeannie McBeth	Redgranite Librarian
Todd Wahler	County Zoning and Land Conservation Director
Megan Kapp	County Administrator
Bridget Olsen	County Health Coach, Citizen
John Shipley	Citizen
Gene Wedde	Citizen
Amanda Kutcher	Health Promotion Coordinator, Aging & Disability Services
Ben Mott	WDNR
Mark Piechowski	County Board, Facilities & Parks Management Committee
Mike Lechner	Facilities & Parks Management Director
Jim Button	Citizen, Evergreen Campground
Heidi Hensel-Buntrock	4-H Educator
Stefanie Eldridge	Public Health Officer

## **WAUSHARA COUNTY GEOGRAPHY AND DEMOGRAPHICS**

Waushara County is located in the east central part of Wisconsin, approximately 75 miles north of Madison and 110 and 200 miles northwest of Milwaukee and Chicago respectively. Rectangular in shape, the county is 36 miles from east to west and only 18 miles from north to south. I-39 (U.S. 51), a four-lane divided freeway paralleling the county's western boundary, and STH 21, an east-west route across its south central portion, are its two major traffic arteries. STH 22, 73, and 49 are other important through routes.

Municipalities in Waushara County include two cities, six villages, and 18 towns. The City of Wautoma is the county's retail hub and county seat and, along with the Village of Redgranite and the Town of Marion, each have slightly over 2,000 residents. A small portion of Berlin, a city of 5,524, located primarily in Green Lake County, is also in Waushara County. The county's other villages, Plainfield, Wild Rose, Hancock, Coloma, and Lohrville, are each less than 1,000 residents. In addition to the Town of Marion, seven other towns have populations exceeding 1,000 residents. These towns include Aurora, Bloomfield, Dakota, Leon, Mount Morris, Springwater, and Wautoma.

After a half century of a slow declining trend, Waushara County's population began to grow following the 1970 census. Between 1970 and 2020, the county's population increased 65.7 percent, considerably higher than the 33.4 percent growth registered by the state. Growth was particularly high in the Village of Redgranite, which more than tripled in population during that 50 year interval. Other municipalities experiencing at least a doubling of their population over that

time included the towns of Leon, Marion, Mount Morris, Richford, Rose, and Springwater. Of Waushara County's 2 cities, Berlin, the part in the county, doubled its population from 1970 to 2020.

A common characteristic of Waushara County's most rapidly growing towns is that they have significant lakeshore development. During the past few decades, much of this growth has corresponded with the conversion of seasonal residences to fulltime use. These towns have also been prime areas for new lakeshore development as well as scattered rural subdivisions and individual home sites. Between 2010 and 2020 the town having the most rapid growth was Richford (20.4%). While the County overall had a slight increase between 2010 and 2020 (.1%), most municipalities had a slight decrease during that decade.

The State DOA revised its population growth for the entire State in December of 2024 and estimates that between 2020 and 2030 Waushara County's population will decrease 5% and will decrease another 7% between 2030 and 2040.

In addition to the county's base population, its seasonal population is also an important consideration in planning for the county's open space and recreational needs. This population includes a number of large seasonally occupied campgrounds and a number of youth camps. The county's proximity to larger urban centers also attracts numerous day-visitors. Since the demand placed on recreational facilities and open space as well as many other types of services is similar to that generated by a population of 100,000 or more, it is easy to see that providing adequate recreational facilities to accommodate the demand will continue to be a major challenge of the Waushara County park system in coming years.

Another factor that must be considered when evaluating existing and future recreational needs in Waushara County is the distribution of its population by age group. This information suggests the likely demand for certain types of recreational opportunities and facilities. Proportionally, Waushara County's population is comprised of a relatively high number of elderly residents. In 2020, 30.3 percent of county residents were age 62 and over, compared to 22.1 percent for the state as a whole. At the same time, 18.2 percent were under the age of 18, while 21.7 percent of state residents were in this age group.

## **GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

The following goals and objectives are designed to serve as a guide for Waushara County officials as they set about to improve and develop the county's park and recreation system. These goals and objectives, reaffirmed with slight modifications from the county's earlier Outdoor Recreation Plans, provide a basis for establishing public policy regarding the acquisition, development and management of park and recreation lands and other important resource areas in Waushara County. They address the two components of a park and recreation system the provision of recreational opportunities and the preservation of unique natural and cultural resources. The goals are general statements indicating the type of park and recreation system the County would like to provide for local residents and visitors. Objectives are more specific statements of how the goals can be achieved.

## **OUTDOOR RECREATION**

Goal 1: Provide throughout the county a planned system of parks and recreation areas that will enable county residents and visitors alike to participate in and enjoy a diversity of recreational activities.

Objectives:

Use sound planning principles in the design and development of all parks and park facilities. As part of this objective, ensure that cost-effective measures are taken both in their initial design and in their future maintenance.

Acquire and develop recreation lands needed to meet the demand for high quality recreational facilities for permanent and seasonal residents of Waushara County. As part of this objective, cooperate with other public and private entities in identifying jurisdictional responsibility for providing needed recreational areas.

Provide recreational facilities that are lacking or in short supply. As part of this objective, ensure that all facilities, as much as possible, are designed to accommodate the special needs of disabled recreationalists and an aging population.

Encourage maximum and appropriate use of all public recreation lands within the county. As part of this objective, encourage a policy of intergovernmental cooperation, particularly between communities and adjacent towns, in providing and utilizing recreational facilities, as a way of avoiding unnecessary duplication of facilities and associated costs.

Support local municipalities maintenance, improvements and expansions of local parks and outdoor recreational facilities as feasible.

Identify and establish priorities for acquiring or developing needed recreation areas and facilities.

Preserve or obtain and develop an appropriate level of public access to rivers, lakes, and streams to maximize their potential as recreational resources.

Link major county and community recreation areas by utilizing natural watercourses, geologic features, and transportation or utility rights-of-way.

Encourage a high standard of maintenance in the county park system as a way of promoting the county's park and recreation facilities.

Promote linkages to trails on-street and off where appropriate, to provide a county network.

Maintain and expand ADA compliant trails and boat landings to accommodate individuals who are physically challenged by providing a safe recreational activity making it accessible to all.

**UNIQUE NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Goal 2: Preserve scarce and valuable resources important to the ecological, sociological, and economic life of the county.

Objectives:

Encourage the acquisition, preservation and restoration of archaeological and other historic sites by public agencies and private organizations.

Encourage the preservation and enhancement of the county's natural features and protect them from encroachment by all man-made development including both public and private intensive recreational development.

Promote an awareness of the importance of maintaining high quality natural areas free from intensive development.

Protect and preserve the intrinsic value of the county's wildlife and fishery resources.

Conserve trees and other vegetation needed to prevent erosion, siltation and floods, and to protect air and water quality.

Use timber harvesting as a silvicultural tool by means to maintain healthy woodlots throughout the County.

Maintain the quality of the county's lakes, including the means to prevent or minimize the introduction of invasive species.

Preserve wetlands necessary for continued fisheries and wildlife habitat and for groundwater recharge purposes.

Conserve other important ecological areas containing sensitive plant life or unique and irreplaceable plant and animal communities.

Preserve unique or unusual geological features.

Promote the scientific and educational value of the county's unique ecological, geological and historical areas in the schools.

Encourage wise land use planning practices in the placement of structures for all types of development activity to prevent problems such as excessive erosion on steep slopes, pollution of both surface water and groundwater, and flood magnification.

Use Waushara County's Geographic Information System (GIS) to identify all archeological and historical sites in the county, including cemeteries.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Goal 3: To encourage continued involvement of County residents when planning for parks and recreational development.

Objectives:

Encourage ongoing participation by all residents at County Facilities and Parks Management Committee meetings, i.e., continue with notices online and using social media to engage the community.

Explore the support of community groups, service organizations, and volunteers for ways of funding and/or for making improvements to the county parks system by increasing the amount of recreational opportunities.

Continue to solicit comments from residents on all aspects of park and recreational programming and management via website comments, online polis , surveys, etc.

Create an App that allows community to be interactive with Parks Systems

## RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

### COUNTY PARKS

Waushara County's park system is comprised of 15 sites containing a total of approximately 808 acres. Mt. Morris County Park, which contains 383 acres, is one of the largest county-operated parks in the state. Kusel Lake Park, 92 acres, and Sorenson Natural Area, 71 acres, are other sizable parcels. The county park system is considered to primarily provide active recreational opportunities. Mt. Morris County Park, which remains largely in its natural state, Sorenson Natural Area, and Buehler Natural Area, presently undeveloped, are exceptions.

Upgrading existing facilities to make them more attractive and maintenance-free has been a priority. Consistency in signing, painting, and standards of maintenance has increased awareness of the county's park system and has been well received by park visitors. In 2022 the County received a CDBG grant as part of a revolving loan closure program to increase accessibility in the County Park System. This grant provided almost \$300,000.00 of funding and improvements in 9 parks.

### COUNTY PARKS 2025

<b>Park/Recreational Site</b>	<b>Acres</b>	<b>General Recreational Use</b>
Marl Lake County Park	24	Primarily active recreation
Curtis Lake County Park	1	Primarily boat access/swimming
Waushara County Fairgrounds	35	Fairgrounds, exposition site
Sorenson Natural Area	71	Lake walk-in access; passive recreation
Bannerman Trail (7 miles)	63	Multi-use recreational trail
Flynn's Quarry Property	40	Primarily passive recreation, Scuba diving
Lake Alpine County Park	17	Primarily active recreation
Otto Brey County Park	6	Primarily active recreation
Mt. Morris County Park	383	Active/passive recreation
Willow Creek County Park	1	Primarily walk-in stream access
Big Hills Lake County Park	5	Primarily active recreation
Kusel Lake County Park	92	Primarily active recreation
Pony Creek County Park	16	Shore fishing, other active recreation
Buehler Natural Area	6	Hiking trails, and fishing
West Point Quarry	48	Primarily passive recreation, Scuba diving

Total Acres: 808

## **MUNICIPAL PARKS 2025**

### *Town of Bloomfield*

Public Boat launches

### *Town of Coloma*

Pleasant Lake Beach

Pleasant Lake Boat Launch

### *Town of Marion*

Boat Launches

### *Town of Mt. Morris*

Morris Lake Park

Boat launches on Lake Napowan, Johns Lake, Porters Lake, Morris Lake and Lake Irogami

### *Town of Oasis*

Plainfield Tunnel Channel Lake State Natural Area

Huron Lake Boat Launch

### *Town of Poy Sippi*

Badger Drive Boat Landing – east of 35thD Drive

### *Town of Richford*

Community Center with playground, ball field, picnic tables and outdoor grill

### *Town of Rose*

Town Forest – only open to Town residents

### *Town of Springwater*

Covered Bridge Park

### *Village of Coloma*

Village Park – 300 S Front Street

### *Village of Hancock*

Whistler Mounds Park

Hetzel Memorial Field

Fish Lake Park

### *Village of Lohrville*

123 Park Road (baseball diamond, tennis courts, playground)

Corner of County Road N and EE (playground)

### *Village of Plainfield*

Veterans Park – 418 S Woodward Ave

Mill Street Park – 328 W Mill St

Waterman's Park – 314 S Main St

Meadow Acres Park – 527 E East Rd

Garden Square Park – 128 W North St

*Village of Redgranite*  
 Veterans Memorial Park  
 East Side Park  
 Redgranite Quarry Park

*Village of Wild Rose*  
 Roberts Park  
 Pearl and George Dopp Memorial Park

*City of Berlin* (none located in the Waushara County portion of city)  
 Riverside Walking Trail  
 Mascoutin Walking Trail  
 Riverside Campground  
 Berlin Aquatic Center  
 Riverside Park  
 Nathan Strong Park  
 Berlin Locks  
 Longcraft Park  
 Forsyth Park  
 Mound Park  
 Firefighter's Park  
 Volunteer Park

*City of Wautoma*  
 Bird Creek Park  
 Dog Park

**STATE OWNED LANDS**

Land owned by DNR in Waushara County totals 18,400 acres. Nearly 11,600 acres are designated as state fishery areas while an additional 5,000 acres are state wildlife areas. Other significant holdings include State Natural Areas (359 acres), the Leach Natural Resource Center (356 acres), and the Wild Rose Fish Hatchery (235 acres). The largest contiguous block is the Poygan Marsh State Wildlife Area, which closely follows the outline of the Poygan Marsh.

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES LAND  
 Waushara County Acres

Greenwood State Wildlife Area	1441
Poygan Marsh State Wildlife Area	3512
White River Fishery Area	2981
Mecan River Fishery Area	3528
Pine River Fishery Area	1927
Willow Creek Fishery Area	2172
Big Roche A Cri Creek Fishery Area	502
Carter Creek Fishery Area	240
Little Silver Creek Fishery Area	219
Pony Creek Fishery Area	16
Thorstead Creek Fishery Area	47
Bass Lake Scientific Area	82
Plainfield Tunnel Channel Lakes S.A.	88
Lunch Creek Scientific Area	149
Karner Blue Scientific Area	40

Ice Age Trail (existing trail miles 615)	105
Leach Natural Resource Center	356
State Fish Hatchery	235
Other DNR Owned Lands	759
<b>TOTAL DNR OWNED LANDS</b>	<b>18,400</b>

Source: DNR, 2010.

**OTHER RURAL PUBLIC OPEN SPACE**

Undeveloped Rural Open Space Acreage	Acres	
Tri-County School Forest		230
Wild Rose School Forest		128
Coloma School District		40
Town of Rose Forest		421
	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>819</b>

**QUASI-PUBLIC AND PRIVATE RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

Waushara County has nearly 4,000 acres of regionally important recreational land in private ownership. This total includes a tract purchased by the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA), land enrolled in the Forest Cropland and Open Managed Forest Lands Programs, and private recreational facilities available for public use. In Waushara County the major private facilities include about a dozen campgrounds, three golf courses, Nordic Mountain Ski Hill, and numerous resorts. The county also has private recreational land that is not generally available for public use. Church and youth camps as well as land owned by sportsmen's clubs and other conservation organizations comprise the bulk of this acreage. Other private recreational land includes an untold number of privately owned hunting tracts.

**Forest Cropland/Open Managed Forest Lands**

Waushara County has 200 acres of privately owned wooded land in the Forest Cropland Program and an additional 1272.053 acres of land in the Managed Forest Land Program that is open to the public. Parcels in the Forest Cropland Program are available to the public for hunting and fishing only while lands in the Managed Forest Land Program are available for walk-in activities such as hunting, fishing, hiking, sight-seeing, and cross-country skiing. The financial benefits to participating landowners as well as other specifics of each program are detailed in Chapter 77 of the State Statutes. While these programs make a valuable contribution in the amount of land available for outdoor recreation, most of the acreage is located in the western third of the county.

**Campgrounds**

According to the Waushara County Health Department, there are sixteen licensed campgrounds and one permitted special event campground providing an estimated 2100 camping sites. Another large private campground just south of the county line in Marquette County and several campgrounds in the Waupaca area, including the state-operated facility at Hartman Creek State Park, are convenient to other recreational opportunities in Waushara County. Because a high proportion of the campground sites in Waushara County are seasonal rentals, a shortage of overnight or short-term campsites continues to exist in the county. Most of the campgrounds offer a diversity of recreational activities including swimming, boating and fishing.

## Golf Courses

There are three golf courses presently located in Waushara County. Waushara Country Club, located on STH 21 east of Wautoma is a 27-hole facility. Although the course is semi-private, guests are always welcome, Two Oaks North Golf Course, located on CTH F about four miles southeast of Wautoma, is an 18-hole facility. The par 72 course measures 6,582 yards from the back tees. Marl Links, a par 3 course located near Marl Lake, is also available for public play.

## Nordic Mountain Ski Hill

Located on the north flank of Mt. Morris on land leased from the County, Nordic Mountain (1,135 ft. above sea level) is one of Central Wisconsin's finest downhill ski hills. Thirteen lighted runs with vertical drops up to 250 feet accommodate a range of skill levels and are served by a variety of lifts, along with tubing runs and a terrain park area for snow boarders. The site also serves as a trailhead for 7.4 km. of County-maintained cross-country ski trails. The County has had a lease with the same operator, Nordic Mountain LLC since 2005. Summer recreational activities such as a disc golf course and mountain biking trails make it a year-around destination. The tenant is currently working on adding an enlarged chalet/restaurant to the site.

## Church and Youth Camps

Waushara County has long been a popular area for churches and other organizations to develop camps and retreats for members and their children. There are a number of these facilities in the county, collectively occupying nearly 2,000 acres of land. While the facilities they provide are generally not available to the public, the county benefits from goods and services they obtain from local vendors.

## Sportsmen's Clubs, Conservation Organizations, and Private Hunting Clubs

Over a dozen parcels in the county are owned by a variety of sportsmen's and conservation groups and private hunting clubs. These sites total an estimated 800 acres and accommodate a variety of uses, including trap and other shooting ranges, a snowmobile club, hunting and fishing grounds, areas set aside for preservation and, in the case of private hunting clubs, hunting opportunities on a fee basis. Some of the hunting clubs also provide overnight accommodations. Depending on the activity each site provides and the user groups it accommodates, it can make a noticeable contribution to the local economy. Because some of these lands provide public recreational opportunities at times, they also help reduce user pressure on public land holdings.

## **LINEAR RECREATIONAL FACILITIES**

Forms of recreation in which participants can travel great distances before reaching their destination or returning to their point of origin including pleasure driving and touring, snowmobiling, bicycling, hiking/backpacking, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing continue to be activities pursued by numbers of people. To varying extents, opportunities exist to partake in these activities in Waushara County.

## Snowmobile Trails

About 289 miles of state-funded public snowmobile trails are available in Waushara County. The

public trail network and 50 miles of interconnecting privately maintained club trails are readily accessible to all portions of the county and link up with trails of surrounding counties as part of a statewide system. Most of the public trails are wintertime easements which cross private property. A notable exception is the previously discussed Bannerman Trail between Redgranite and Neshkoro. Snow permitting, the public snowmobile trail system has a major impact on the county's economy during the winter months.

### Cross-country Ski Trails

The Waushara County Parks Department maintains about 12.4 km. of cross-country ski trail. Trailheads are located at Nordic Mountain (Mt. Morris) and Kusel Lake County Park. There is an additional 4.75 miles in the Coloma area maintained by the Coloma Pathfinders. Opportunities for developing a more extensive trail system on public and private lands abound in the county, particularly if user groups can be found for undertaking trail maintenance and grooming.

### Bicycle Routes

Opportunities for bike touring in Waushara County is abundant and promotion of this activity attracts visitors to the county. Waushara County Bike Routes, a booklet created in 1997 by the Waushara County Parks Department is updated and distributed by the Waushara County Public Health Department each year. The booklet and a webpage with GPS maps to download the routes provide detailed information on the ten bike routes or "loops" that span across the county. All ten routes now have signage designating the direction which way a bicyclist should go at all stops signs and or turn offs.

### UTV/ATV ROUTES

In September of 2022 the County Board adopted an ordinance opening all County Roads to UTV/ATV travel. Many of the townships have followed suit and have opened all or some of their roads. While the county's Parks Department and GIS Department have attempted to keep up with the changes to have a full map, this has not been fully accomplished. The best source of information continues to be through the local ATV clubs, such as the Waushara County ATV Association and the neighboring Marquette County ATV Club and the Saratoga ATV/UTV Riders Club.

### Rustic Roads

The Rustic Roads System was created by the state legislature in 1973 to help citizens and local units of government preserve scenic lightly traveled country roads for the leisurely enjoyment of bicyclists, hikers and motorists. They offer excellent opportunities to travel through an attractive rustic area by car, bicycle, or foot. The scenic qualities of these roads are protected by agreement with bordering property owners and by controlling roadside maintenance practices so that wildflowers and other native flora are allowed to extend to the edge of the pavement. A town road (26th Rd.) in Saxeville, beginning at County Highway H northwest to County Highway W, is currently enrolled in the Rustic Roads program as well as in the Town of Richford Cumberland Road and 7th Avenue off of STH 21 are in the program. Other roads in the county may have the same potential.

### Ice Age Trail

A 1,200-mile dream that traces Wisconsin's rich glacial history, the Ice Age Trail is a foot trail

that angles across Waushara County as it loops through the state from Sturgeon Bay to Interstate Park on the St. Croix River. The completed trail will use a combination of public land, easements across private property and, where necessary, low volume highways to provide a unique and exceptional resource for recreationalists wishing to hike its entire length or merely a small portion of it. At the present time, about 27 miles of trail have been designated in Waushara County, including segments near Chaffee and Wedde Creeks, the Mecan Springs area, the Greenwood Wildlife Area, the Bohn Lake area and across private lands in the Town of Deerfield.

The completed trail is expected to be approximately 50 miles long, traversing the best examples of Waushara County's glacial landscape from the I-39 rest area near the Marquette County line to Heffron on the Portage County line. Updated information on the trail can be found on the Ice Age Trail Alliance website.

## **FACILITY NEEDS**

The committee segregated the identification of facility needs into general facilities and site-specific facilities. In assessing general facility needs, the committee determined that certain types of recreational opportunities presently are not available or are in limited supply in the county. These general needs are not necessarily intended to be provided in the county park system nor is their provision necessarily the sole responsibility of the County or other governmental unit. Among general facility needs identified were:

The ongoing commitment to meeting ADA compliance in all county parks and facilities needs to continue. The Waushara County Facilities and Parks Maintenance Department utilized a CDBG grant in 2021-2022 to make multiple ADA accessibility improvements across the park system to accommodate the needs of disabled and elderly recreationalists.

There is a need to provide recreational opportunities for the county's high proportion of aging residents. Designing facilities that can easily be used by this segment of the population is one way to address this need, which should include additional seating,

The level of facility maintenance in the County's park system needs to be maintained or increased. There needs to be a continued effort to replace, repair and maintain parking surfaces throughout the system.

Additional swimming opportunities are needed throughout the county.

Debris removal and/or additional public access are needed to provide or enhance canoeing opportunities on downstream portions of selected headwaters trout streams.

Additional and improved shoreline fishing opportunities are needed.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

Recommendations for improving Waushara County's recreational system are intended to serve as a guide for the future growth and development of park and recreation land and recreational opportunities in the county. Consistent with the goals and objectives outlined earlier in this document, they are designed to meet the present and future recreational needs of Waushara County residents and visitors while conserving, protecting and enhancing the environmental, historical and cultural resources of the county.

## **NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES**

Waushara County's numerous natural and cultural resources make it a popular recreation area and an attractive area in which to live. The county's natural resources offer a wide variety of passive recreational opportunities that require a minimum amount of development while its cultural resources provide insight into the county's past. The County, therefore, should take an active role in preserving and enhancing these unique resources. To do this, the County should:

Work with local municipalities to encourage changes/updates to adopted local land use plans, which can be used to provide insight into the outdoor recreation countywide plan. These plans will all become due for update during the period of this plan and should take into consideration future land use proposals and outdoor recreation needs

Encourage innovative development proposals that protect important resources, such as wetlands, lakeshores, river corridors, prime agricultural lands, and other areas of natural or cultural significance. Strategies that stimulate this type of development should be encouraged in all local land use plans and, if necessary, appropriate language added to County-administered zoning and subdivision ordinances. The County's Solid Waste Management Plan, Farmland Preservation Plan, and the Land and Water Resources Management Plan are three existing documents that should be updated regularly to provide a sound basis for wise resource use.

Continue to encourage farmers to implement good agricultural practices, particularly those that control erosion and protect groundwater through the County's Land and Water Resources Management Plan.

Continue to support efforts by the DNR and other public and private entities to ensure the long-term protection of the county's high quality wildlife and fishery resources. These resources not only have intrinsic values that support the quality of life enjoyed by county residents, they also provide recreational opportunities and contribute to local economies.

Continue to work with the DNR, other state agencies, and the private sector in providing multi-use facilities for activities such as hiking, nature study, cross-country skiing, hunting, and fishing on county and state-owned lands.

Make educational and technical assistance available to the Waushara County Watershed Lakes Council, lake districts, and lake property owners associations that wish to address water quality, invasive species, and other related environmental issues, as well as use conflicts, and support the concept of a regional effort to address aquatic invasive species. Addressing these types of concern not only helps protect and maintain an important county resource, it also serves to create a more enjoyable environment for recreationalists and lakeshore property owners.

Make use of the County's Geographic Information System (GIS) to identify all archeological and historical sites in the county, including cemeteries. As a component of this activity, encourage local historical societies to work closely with the County to update the inventory of these sites. Steps should be taken to have significant sites enrolled on the National Register of Historic Places. Additional promotion of important historic sites should also be considered.

Maintain efforts to identify, prioritize, survey, and clearly mark existing county park boundaries. Marked boundary lines are important not only for park users and maintenance personnel, but also for adjacent property owners.

## **PARK AND RECREATION GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

For the most part, the recommendations developed by the committee call for actions to improve rather than expand the existing county park system. The committee believes that, given the County's policy of fiscal restraint, it important to focus efforts on maintaining and improving existing facilities. When improvements occur, attention should be given to minimizing the need for ongoing long-term maintenance.

The committee has also made recommendations to address those recreational opportunities that are not necessarily dependent on publicly owned land. These opportunities, too, are an important ingredient of the county's overall recreational system and help attract visitor dollars into the local economy.

### **Other Recreational Opportunities**

#### **Ice Age Trail**

The committee recommends that the Waushara County Facilities and Parks Maintenance Department work with the Waushara County Chapter of the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA) to continue the development of the Ice Age Trail within its borders. A linking spur to Hartford Lake in the George Sorenson Natural Area (Town of Deerfield) would be the next natural addition.

#### **Rustic Roads Program**

The committee encourages the County through the Public Works Committee to seek out new candidates for inclusion in the Rustic Roads Program. The updating of the comprehensive plans during the period of this plan provides an excellent opportunity to evaluate potential candidates.

#### **Designated County Bicycle Routes.**

As a next step, it is recommended that the route system be expanded to provide linkage between the existing loops as well as to link population centers with recreation areas, other points of interest, routes in adjacent counties and possibly bike maintenance stations along the route(s). Most town roads presently are capable of safely accommodating bicyclists with no special improvements required. For more heavily traveled highways, however, the Facilities and Parks Maintenance Committee should work with the County's Public Works Committee to ensure that, as these roads are upgraded, improvements to accommodate safe bicycling, such as striped and paved shoulders, are undertaken. Although striped and paved shoulders are generally not required when daily traffic volumes are less than 1,000 vehicles, they should be considered in areas of concentrated development, such as around the county's lakes, where on-road use by pedestrians and bicyclists is high.

#### **Improved Public Access**

The committee recommends that the County continue to assess opportunities to provide public access on lakes that presently have none. Norwegian Lake is the only county lake over 50 acres without access. Steps should also be taken to expand parking areas at several boat ramps to accommodate day use activities. Lakes that may benefit from additional parking capacity include Irogami, Pleasant, Johns, Long Lake (Plainfield), Napowan, Porters, Big Silver, Upper White River Pond, and Wilson. The County and/or town should contact the DNR about available funding programs and technical assistance. The County should continue to use its

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) capability to update the data layer(s) that identifies all existing public access sites on surface waters and keep it published to the website.

### **Canoe Stream Clean-up**

Recognizing that Waushara County's streams offer potentially many miles of excellent canoeing, the committee acknowledges that many of these streams are presently unusable because of overhanging and fallen trees and debris. Among streams believed to offer the most potential are portions of the White, Pine, and Mekan rivers and Willow Creek. The committee recommends that the County take the lead in verifying and coordinating an effort of stream clean-up activities. Because many of the streams are also trout waters, perhaps an even more valuable resource, only those portions downstream from prime trout habitat should be considered for clean-up activities. Given the State's commitment to preserving trout waters, the County should work closely with DNR to ensure that resource management objectives are not compromised and the interests of anglers and private landowners are considered in selecting candidates for clean-up.

### **County Snowmobile Trails**

Waushara County should continue to work with local clubs to maintain its existing public snowmobile trail network. These trails serve all areas of the county and, while minor changes in routing are inevitable from year to year, the scope of the trail network should remain intact.

### **ATV/UTV Routes**

Waushara County has opened all county roads and many townships have opened their roads as well. This should continue to be monitored and mapped with the look at connecting all routes to travel from one end of the county to the other and connect with neighboring county routes.

## **PARK SYSTEM POLICY AND MANAGEMENT**

### **Unique Opportunities for Parkland Acquisition**

The County should continue to evaluate opportunities to expand its park acreage when parcels that meet its criteria for parcel size, attractiveness, and/or location become available. Several unique parcels would have excellent potential as county parks or expansion for existing parks and recreation areas.

### **Opportunities for Augmenting Park Funding / Volunteers**

There are a number of avenues that may be available to provide additional funding to the Waushara County Facilities and Parks Maintenance Department, local entities, and support groups to acquire and develop new sites and facilities, perform needed improvements, and address other management issues. Each of the examples cited below should be explored in more detail in the near future.

The County's room tax could be a potential funding source to further promote the area. These funds could be used for administrative and promotional literature and activities, to expand and improve the number and types of facilities that attract visitors and their dollars into the local economy. Projects such as the development of new facilities are candidates for these funds, which can be used as all or part of a local match to reduce reliance on tax dollars.

User fees, such as requiring a fee to launch a boat or hike a trail, are another source of funding. In general, however, the committee does not favor implementing mandatory user fees because the revenue generated may not be adequate to offset the collection cost, let alone outweigh the anticipated adverse public reaction. However, the use of collection boxes where voluntary contributions can be solicited may help provide a revenue stream, particularly if the boxes specify what and where the funds are targeted. For example, boxes at boat launches that solicit funds for the eradication of invasive species, which are often introduced by trailered boats, could be expected to draw some interest, particularly by recreationalists that are concerned about the problem the funds are targeted to address.

The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin could possibly be another source of funding or volunteer work for conservation in the County. Since 1960, it has protected more than 243,069 acres of forests, wetlands, prairies, lakes and streams for current and future generations to enjoy.

The Northeast Wisconsin Land Trust is another potential source as it works with landowners to create voluntary conservation agreements that protect special places and specialize in permanent conservation agreements.

### **Park System Management**

The planning committee recommends that the following opportunities for controlling operational costs be explored by the Outdoor Recreation Planning Committee:

Local service clubs, youth groups, betterment organizations and recreational interests should be encouraged to provide or assist with funding for facility development in the county park system. They should be made aware that, for most types of development, their contributions can constitute the local share of funding programs available through DNR, effectively doubling the value of their assistance. Opportunities for utilizing these groups as a source of manpower should not be overlooked. Assistance with the development and maintenance of the Ice Age Trail and canoe stream clean-up efforts are two examples where this approach could be effectively utilized.

The appearance of well-maintained parks and facilities should be viewed as an important component of County and local efforts to attract visitors and visitor dollars. A number of the county parks are leased from the town in which they are located. The County will need to continue to assess the appropriateness of leases with Townships for park space to ensure the areas meet the needs of the county including those at Marl, Kusel, and Curtis. Because of the economic impact of visitors to the county, it is in the County's interest that parks receive consistent levels of maintenance. The committee recommends that future lease renewals have a minimum 25-year target life to provide the assurances the County needs to undertake major capital expenditures.

The Facilities and Parks Maintenance Department should work closely with UW-Extension, DNR and groups such as the Wisconsin Family Forest Program and the Waushara County Watershed Lakes Council to conduct periodic education programs to familiarize park personnel and the public at large with the identification of and effective eradication techniques available for curtailing the spread of exotic/evasive species.

The Facilities and Parks Management Department and other action groups such as area lake associations should pursue potential funding sources available through the WDNR's Aquatic Invasive Species program or Waterways Commission for controlling exotic/invasive species.

## **Recreational Programming**

Although the Facilities and Parks Management Department presently is not adequately staffed to assume a recreational programming function, it can assist on a limited basis with groups such as the Waushara Prevention Council. With additional staffing, it may be possible for the County Facilities and Parks Management Department to assume a more expanded role either directly or indirectly in countywide recreational programming activities in the future. Offering certain programs at the county level, with its broader population base, may increase viability. An example of an indirect role may be to provide a clearinghouse or coordinative function for programs offered by local communities and other public and private providers. Volunteers from local communities could also assist.

## **LOCAL PARK PROJECTS**

As part of this Outdoor Recreation Plan update, the planning committee contacted local communities throughout the county to determine if there were specific projects that should be considered for acquisition and/or development during the next several years.

### **Village of Coloma**

Improving Village Park to include a splash pad and accessible playground. Re-surface tennis courts and improve shelter house.

### **Village of Hancock**

A bandshell/amphitheater will be completed at the Fish Lake Park with assistance of the Hancock Park Restoration Inc group.

### **Village of Plainfield**

Plan to update all park facilities over period of plan. Specifically:

Waterman's Park - update amenities in shelter house, paint all structures, add lighting on paths, update playground equipment

Meadow Acres Park – add bathrooms

Other future local park projects may be taken in consideration with priorities listed in the action plan and recommendations made from communities not listed above. Funding, staff time and land acquisition should be considered and based on environmental aesthetics, unique features, and if areas are close by to county owned facilities. Stewardship grant funds should be sought to offset costs for any future projects.

## **ACTION PROGRAM**

Priorities for improving park and recreational facilities in Waushara County for the next five years form the basis for the Action Program. These are projects that the County deemed as important but are only to be used as a guideline for planning. Budget funds and time of staff may vary from year to year to allow these improvements to occur.

The Five-Year Action Program outlines the priorities to meet the goals identified in this plan. Some of the projects identified in the Action Program would be eligible to receive matching funds through a component of WDNR's Stewardship Program. Local tax dollars can be further maximized by using private donations of funds or land to augment the local share. In addition, the Action Program identifies several other projects that could be cost-effectively accomplished using existing Facilities and Park Management crews.

FIVE YEAR ACTION PROGRAM  
(Fall of 2025-2030)

**ENTIRE PARK SYSTEM**

- Continue to assess, improve and maintain paved areas
- Continue to assess and improve/modernize bathroom facilities
- Continue to assess permanent seating options in parks
- Develop an App to promote and track park use
- Place QR Codes on entrance signage to track use
- Work with County Surveyor to clarify all property lines for parks

**BIG HILLS LAKE**

- Continue with beach area clean-up
- Relocate donation box to be more accessible and visible by boaters
- Playground equipment upgrade
- Review and upgrade signage for parking located across the street
- Consider land acquisition for additional parking
- Explore options to utilize park property up the hill from the beach

**CURTIS LAKE**

- Add hitching posts
- Consider adding a volleyball court
- Work with Amish community on possible shelter

**KUSEL LAKE**

- Improve boat launch
- Add garbage cans
- Assess and improve lower level playground equipment
- Add disc golf course to meadow area

**LAKE ALPINE**

- Consider possible uses and/or access to the islands
- Improve/maintain beach area

**MARL LAKE**

- Improve boat launch
- Beach area clean-up
- Consider adding electricity to shelter

**MT. MORRIS**

- Resurface pickleball courts
- Implement a new use for existing baseball field, such as soccer or gaga pit or better promote availability to get use out of field
- Add uses that compliment/expand Town park in the area

**OTTO BREY**

- Upgrade playground equipment
- Implement new use for existing baseball field, perhaps relocating existing volleyball court
- Highlight existing artisan well

- Address concrete trip hazards/remove concrete from small shelter

#### **PONY CREEK**

- Maintain and improve trails
- Clean-up along creek to expand shore fishing areas
- Improve canoe launch area

#### **WILLOW CREEK**

- Clean-up ditch area near ski hill
- Improve access to creek
- Move entrance sign to a more visible area

#### **FAIRGROUNDS**

- Add climate controlled four season building with restrooms
- Assess the ability to seek sponsorship for improvements or partnership with local groups
- Continue to review winter storage fees
- Increase marketing to groups for additional events throughout the year

#### **BANNERMAN TRAIL**

- Improve visibility of signage
- Improve communication on parking location

#### **SORENSEN NATURAL AREA**

- Consider installing additional recreational activities such as 3 par golf or disc golf
- Improve accessibility for kayak access
- Assess viability of rustic camping

#### **FLYNN'S & WESTPOINT QUARRIES**

- Review leases to determine propriety
- Consider more public use as leases come due
- Work with townships to ensure safe use and maximize benefit to residents and visitors