

BAYLISS PARK

7 Parks, Recreation & Natural Features

Council Bluffs' parks and natural features help define the framework of the community and how residents enjoy its unique character. These natural features include the Loess Hills, Missouri River, creeks and streams, lakes, riparian areas, and open spaces.

The City's parks provide crucial green space within an urban area and offer opportunities for formal and informal community recreation.

This chapter describes the vision for the City's Parks, Recreation and Natural Features and provides recommendations for how the City can continue to build upon them.

This plan incorporates past plans, including the Parks and Recreation Master Plan and subsequent concept plans for the parks, Council Bluffs Trails Plan, Riverfront Master Plan, and the Parks and Recreation Department Strategic Plan.

There are several fundamental components that collectively contribute to the character and livability of Council Bluffs.

This chapter is structured to describe how each of these components make this contribution and the measures the Parks and Recreation Department will take to effectively manage and sustain these components.

COMPONENTS

- The Missouri Riverfront
- Park System
- Trail System
- Recreation and Events
- Natural Features and Open Space

The City's mission statement is "*To continuously improve the quality of life and attractiveness of the City of Council Bluffs*".

The Parks and Recreation Department is strategically positioned to align its operation to this mission by how it invests into the unified system of parks, trails, and the measures it takes to preserve and enhance the natural features within the City.

The historic development of Council Bluffs was significantly influenced by the natural environment and features that make Council Bluffs unique. Community improvements over the years have sought to complement existing features such as the Missouri River, Loess Hills, Lake Manawa and other features.

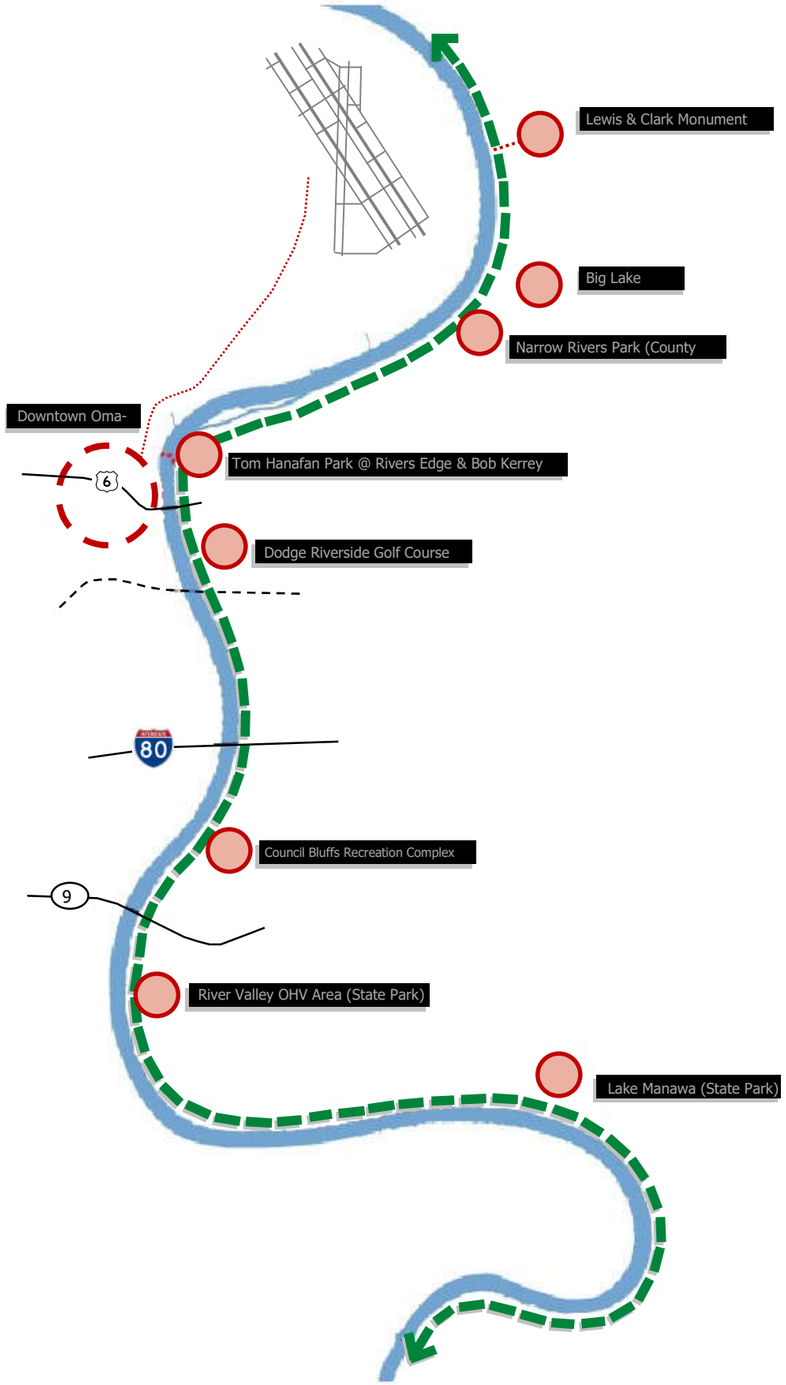
The parks and trails system has evolved to highlight natural features and provide access to these natural features.

While significant progress has been made to interweave park and trail improvements with the City's natural features, more work can be done to ensure efforts are sustained and enhanced as opportunities allow.

In some cases, the Parks and Recreation Department does not have direct management responsibilities over significant natural features such as Loess Hills and Lake Manawa.

And, it is important the Parks and Recreation Department advocates for the protection and enhancement of these nature resources. Through coordination, and collaboration, a comprehensive approach to how all the natural features are effectively managed can cross management oversight boundaries.

The Missouri Riverfront

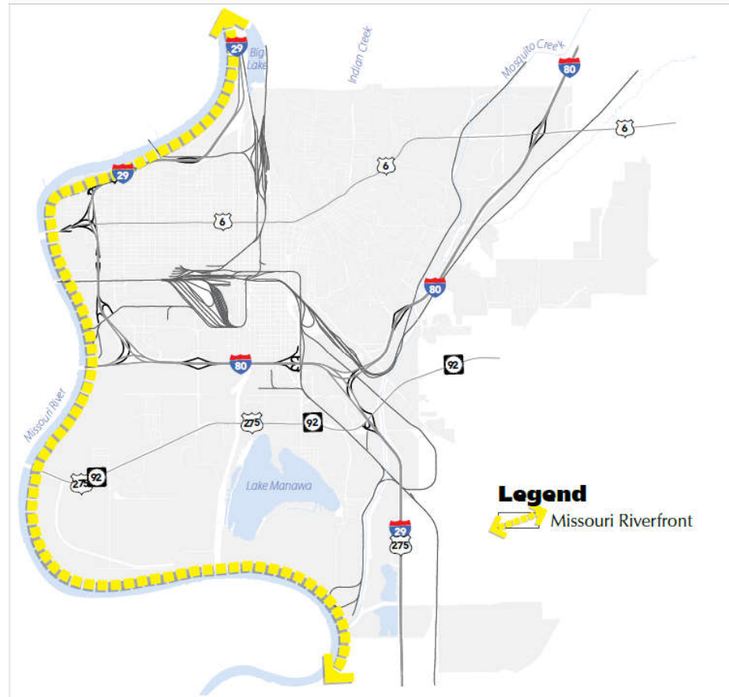


Council Bluff's has approximately 13.6 miles of Missouri riverfront along its western boundary. The Missouri River is a vital environmental asset, both locally and regionally. It supports essential wildlife and highly valued habitat, and provides Council Bluffs residents with access to an attractive and community defining feature.

The Rivers Edge Master Plan and Riverfront Master Plan have initiated incredibly important development and economic benefit to the City. The City should continue to make improvements to the Rivers Edge area and balance this development with shoreline restoration efforts and management approaches.

Future opportunities include Phase 4 of the River's Edge Development, maximizing restoration efforts along the River's Edge to the south, increasing the trail system along the Missouri river to maximize public access and enjoyment, and increasing the natural and wildlife habitats.

Phase 4 of the River's Edge Development includes and observation tower, tree top walk, and a pier. The observation tower will include recreational opportunities such as rock climbing, roll gliding, and caving.



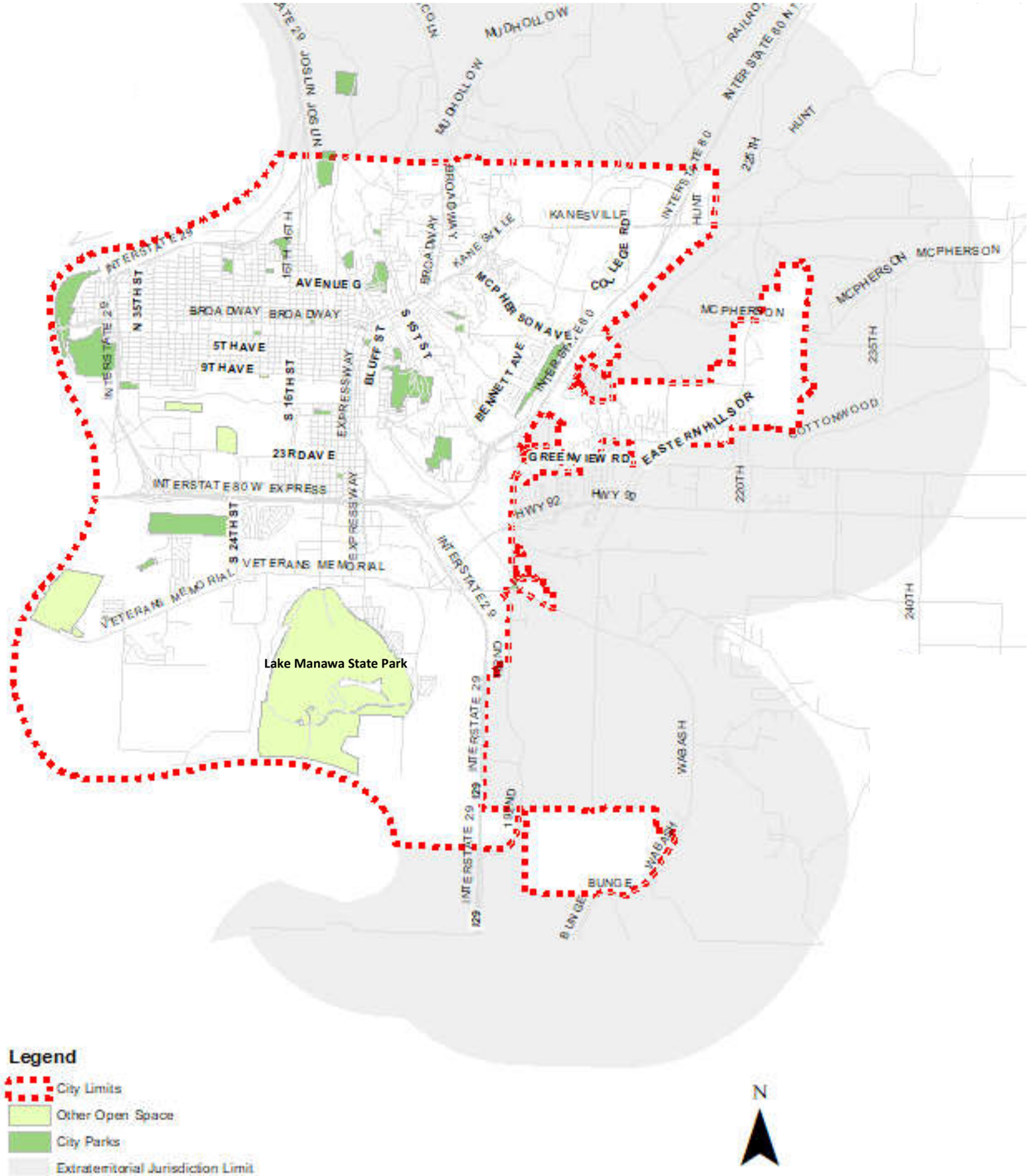
Recommendations

1. Continue the multi phase riverfront development plan and construct amenities that promote public access to the river and recreational opportunities.
2. Restore the shoreline of the river to promote habitat diversity and wildlife.
3. Work with property owners to acquire land or obtain easements to develop a shoreline trail system.
4. Limit development and improvements to those amenities allowable within a flood plain in accordance with the United States Army Corps. of Engineers.

Actions

1. Expand the Iowa Riverfront Trail from Veteran's Memorial Hwy to Indian Creek Trail.
2. Publish a shoreline trail plan.
3. Seek funding for shoreline restoration projects.
4. Publish a comprehensive education program with use of signage along key areas of the river.
5. Pursue land acquisition or easements as funding and opportunity allows to acquire or manage shoreline properties.

Park System



Council Bluffs has approximately 750 acres of park land and has 31 City parks and one State parks within City limits. The State park is Lake Manawa State Park The City parks are classified as follows:

Regional Park

1. Council Bluffs Recreation Complex
2. River's Edge

Community Parks

1. Bahnsen Park
2. Bayliss Park
3. Big Lake Park
4. Fairmount Park
5. Lewis and Clark Monument Park
6. Lincoln Monument Park
7. Roberts Park
8. Tom Hanafan Park @ Rivers Edge
9. Valley View Park

Neighborhood Parks

1. Cochran Park
2. Graham Park
3. Kimball Park
4. Kirn Park
5. Malmore Park
6. Manawa City Park
7. Peterson park
8. Prospect Park
9. Sternhill Park
10. Sunset Park
11. Trolley Park
12. Twin City Park
13. Westwood Park

Special Use Parks

1. Broadway Skate Park
2. Katelman Water Park
3. Pirate Cove Water Park

Natural Area Parks

1. Vincent Bluff Preserve
2. Cook Park

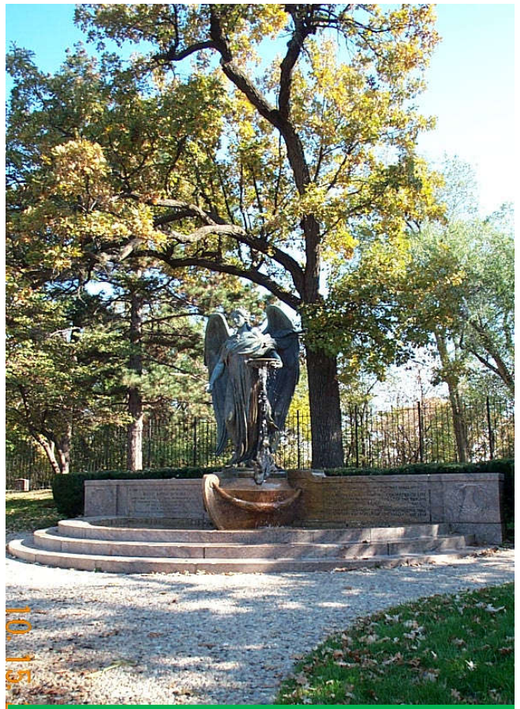
Trailheads

1. Eastern Hills Trail Stop Park
2. Gibraltar Neighborhood Association Trailhead.
3. Iowa West Foundation Trailhead Park

The Park System also includes a number of monuments and landmarks

Monuments

1. Black Angel Statue, Fairview Cemetery
2. Defenders Monument, Bayliss Park
3. Dodge Trough, Haymarket Historic District
4. Golden Spike Monument, 9th Street
5. Freedom of Honor, Rails West Museum
6. Kinsman Monument, Fairview Cemetery
7. Lewis and Clark Monument, Lewis and Clark Monument Park
8. Lincoln Monument, Lincoln Monument Park



BLACK ANGEL STATUE



LINCOLN MEMORIAL

9. Mormon Trail Monument, Bayliss Park
10. Spanish American War Monument, Bayliss Park

Landmarks

1. Bayliss Fountain, Bayliss Park
2. Clark Cemetery
3. Crossover Fountain (original Bayliss Fountain)
4. Dodge House
5. Fairview Cemetery
6. First Responders Plaza
7. Haymarket District
8. Rails West Railroad Museum
9. Veterans Plaza, Bayliss Park

The monuments and landmarks within the City contribute to the culture and history of Council Bluffs and are an important aspect and amenity to the park system. The Parks and Recreation Department partners with different agencies and organizations within the City to ensure these amenities are well maintained.

FUTURE PARKS

The City's Parks and Recreation Master Plan was completed in 2013 and provides a vision for the development of future parks.

The Master Plan is seven years old and the City should consider a full update to the plan.

Park System

In 2020, the Parks and Recreation Department completed concept plans for most of the parks. The purpose of these concept plans was to provide a visual representation for the spatial arrangement of the recommendations within the Master Plan, as well as new recommendations based on current need.

These concept plans will be used as a means to complete more defined plans for each park. Once these individual plans are reviewed and approved by the Council, then future improvements can be included into the Parks and Recreation Capital Improvement Program.

LAND AQUISITIION AND EASEMENTS

When feasible and for the purposes of increasing recreational opportunity within the City, land acquisition of property or easements across private property adjacent to or near existing parks and park facilities should be explored.

Potential property for acquisition includes the land to the north and south of the Recreation Complex. This property is owned by the State of Iowa and the City has been in discussion with the State about obtaining this property for the purposes of recreation.

If this property becomes available, then there may be a benefit for the City to obtain all or a portion of the property for recreation use and expansion of the Recreation Complex.

Should the property become privately owned and operated for recreation purposes, then the City should explore the feasibility of entering into an agreement with the owner for use of the property. A public private use agreement may allow the City to expand the use of the Recreation Complex and avoid increasing operation and maintenance costs.

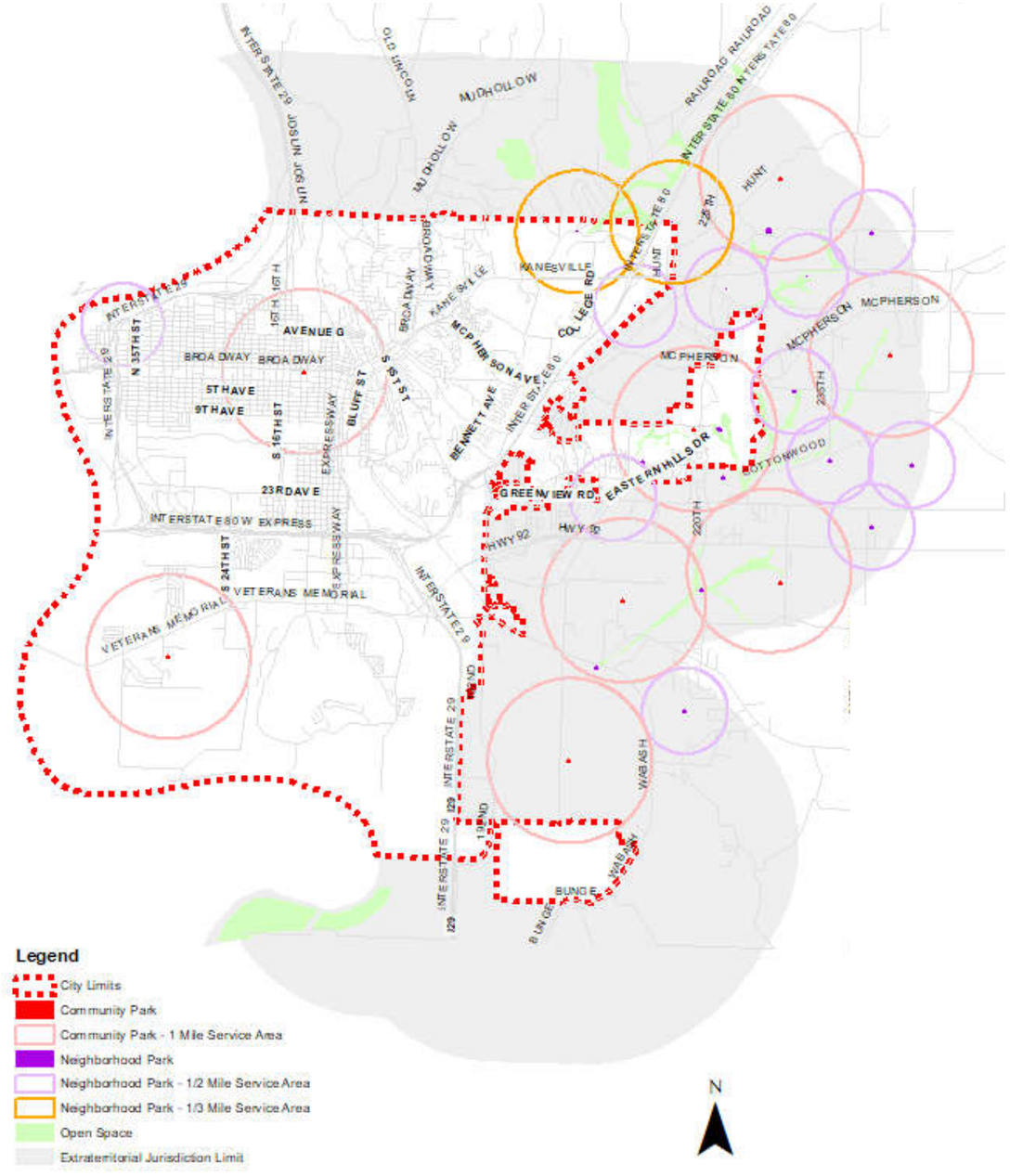
Other acquisition or easement scenarios include land near trails to be used to expand the trail system, create trailheads, or trail stop parks.

The planning and design of new parks should address several factors:

1. Focus on community need.
2. Provide recreational opportunity and open space within underserved areas and populations.
3. Become a framework for new development.
4. Be located within direct or near proximity to the trail network system.
5. Include informal recreational opportunities within the park.
6. Preserve natural open space and include natural areas within future parks.
7. Create parks that expand the overall portfolio of recreational opportunities (e.g., BMX parks, dog parks, hiking, etc.).

It is anticipated most of the future parks will be located within the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Limit in coordination with the County. Within City limits, future parks potentially include a neighborhood park on the northwest portion of the City, three Community Parks located in the central, eastern, and southern portion and southern portion of the City.

Park System



FUTURE PARKS PLAN

Other Parks in Council Bluffs

The residents of Council Bluffs have access to a number of parks and recreational opportunities in addition to the Council Bluffs park system.

- The Missouri River offers an array of water recreational opportunities.
- Lake Manawa offers water reaction, trail hiking, and a large multifaceted playground.
- Wabash Trail provides access into the County from the City and is appreciated for its natural setting and rural scenic setting.
- Dodge Riverside Golf Course is a xx acre, 18-hole golf course owned by the City and managed by a private entity.

Recommendations

1. Develop a level of service standard for the parks to ensure maintenance quality and consistency.
2. Prioritize improvements to parks based on condition assessments and maintain a condition rating of good or higher for the parks and park amenities.
3. A long-term replacement schedule should be developed for park amenities, such as playgrounds, shelters, and site furnishings.
4. Identify zoning measures that establish mechanisms for land dedication for a park within a housing development plan.
5. Explore the feasibility of creating a "pay in lieu of" mechanism for those circumstances when land is not available within a housing development project.
6. Develop park master plans for existing parks as warranted based on use of park, condition of existing amenities, and/ or the potential for expansion or repurposing of a park to a more specialized recreational use.
7. Explore the feasibility of land acquisition and/ or easements when such mechanisms can enhance or broaden recreational opportunities within the City.

Actions

1. Adopt a mechanism for developers to dedicate land for a park within housing developments.
2. Draft a Level of Service Standard Manual for the parks to identify maintenance responsibilities, frequency, and quality expectation for each park.
3. Put into place a quality inspection program to assess and implement the level of service standards.
4. Publish a long-term replacement schedule for all park amenities.
5. Maintain and enhance public access to the Missouri River.

Trail System



INDIAN CREEK TRAIL BRIDGE

Existing Trails

Council Bluffs has approximately 45 miles of trails. The trails offer an opportunity for recreational activity and alternative transportation.

In 2019, the City had 40 miles of trails and a condition assessment was completed of the entire trail network. It was determined of the 40 miles, approximately seven miles were either in poor or fair condition. Those segments found to be in good condition were in need of a higher level of maintenance to prevent degradation to a fair level.

The trail system is comprehensive and provides good access across the City. The major north—south collector is the Iowa Riverfront Trail, which extends from Big Lake Park to the Council Bluffs Recreation Complex. FIRST Ave Trail will be completed in 2022 and is the major east-west collector. It will connect the Bob Kerrey Bridge to the downtown.

Although the existing network provides good access across the City, there are opportunities to add trail segments to increase connectivity and broaden access.

Future improvements should focus on filling in "gaps" within the system and establish new connections north-south and east-west. Portions of the trail system should also be identified as specific alternative transportation corridors

An important aspect of the trail system is the recreational benefit it provides our community. The Parks and Recreation Department wants to encourage users to stay out longer on the trail system and to use the trail system when they otherwise may not do so.

Towards this end, amenities are being added along the trail system to encourage more frequent and longer duration of use.

CORRIDORS

The Fall Color Corridor was added along South Side Trail near S. 8th Street and 14th Ave in 2020. The corridor is a collection of tree plantings that display a brilliant fall color.

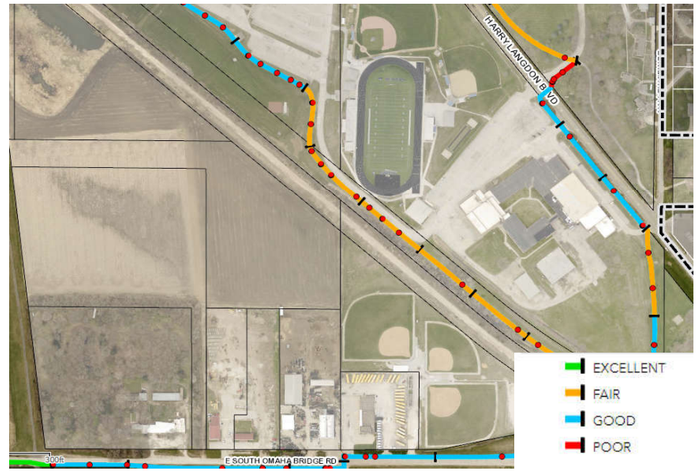
A Spring Color Corridor will be designed along Mid City Trail from 2nd Ave to Ave G. This corridor will include trees that display a spring bloom.

TRAIL STOP PARKS

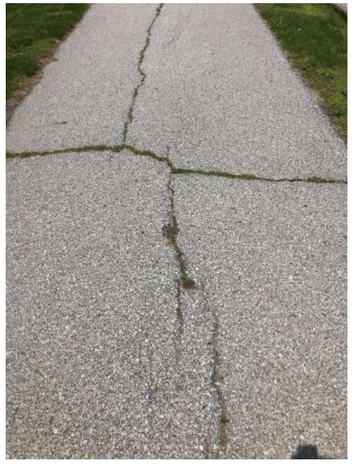
In addition to the corridors, trail stop parks are being added along the trail system. The first trail stop park will be constructed in the Spring of 2022 and is located near the Eastern Hills Drive and Greenview Road roundabout, along Eastern Hills Trail.

Trail stop parks will provide an area of respite and will include picnic shelters, and play structures.

Condition Assessment



2019 Trail Condition Rating - 40 Miles of Trail				
Rating	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Miles	24	9	6	1
Percent	60%	22%	15%	2%



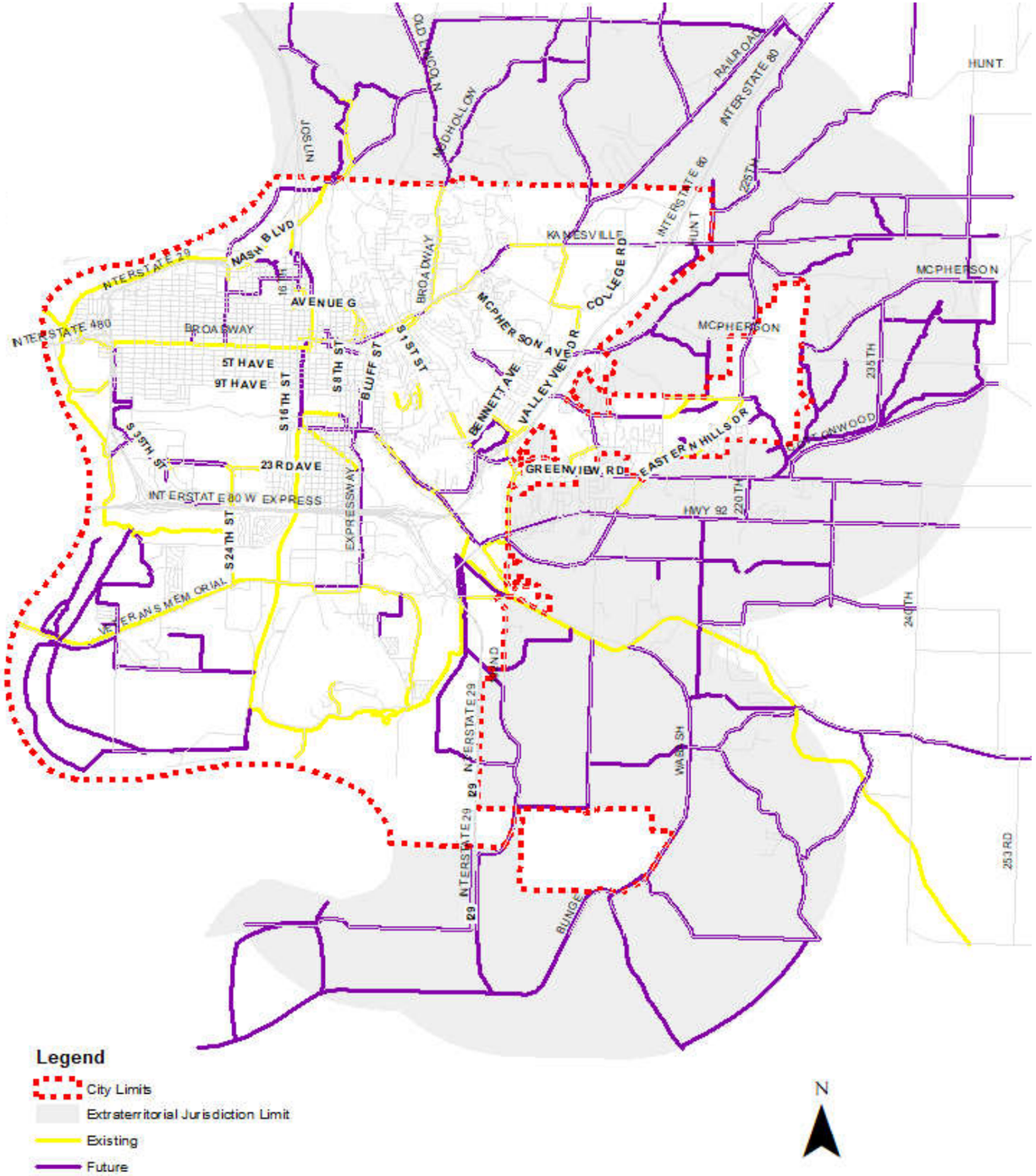
Spot Check - LEWIS CENTRAL

TRAIL NAME	LEWIS CENTRAL
SPOT CONDITION	CRACK
COMMENTS	Transverse crack
DATE COLLECTED	May 6, 2019
Creator	bwalter_fhu

Attachments:
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In addition to the overall rating, the condition assessment includes spot checks. These check points identify specific areas of and the Parks and Recreation Department will complete point specific repairs as well as full segment replacement repairs.

Trail System



FUTURE TRAILS PLAN

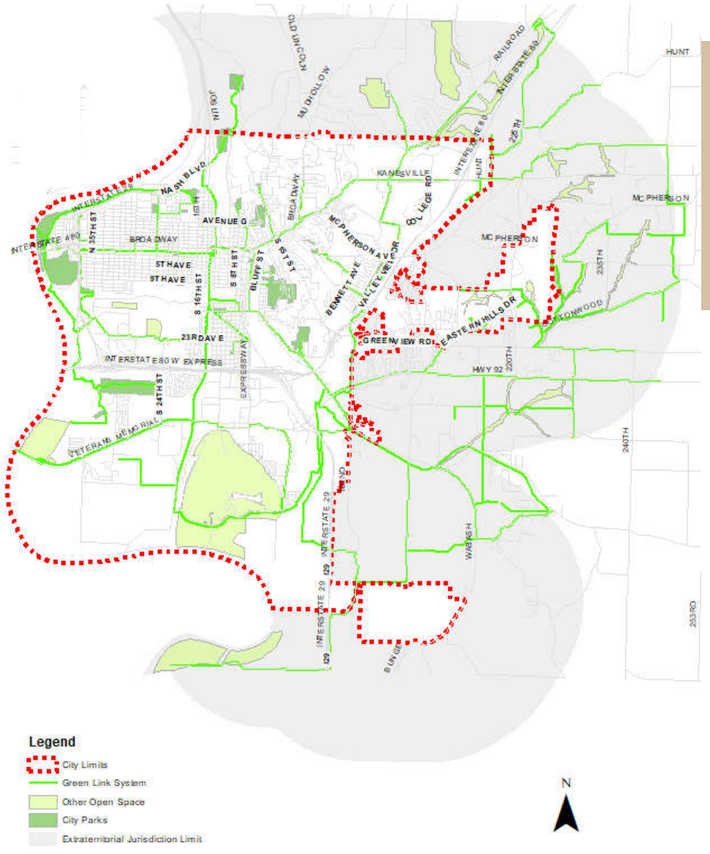
Future Trails

The future trails plan has two areas of focus. The first area is within City limits and addresses connectivity. Within the City, the objective is to expand the network of trails by making key connections within the existing trail network and thereby expanding the reach of the trail system. The City network will also coincide with street improvements to enhance alternative transportation options across the City.

The other focus is to lengthen existing trail segments into the Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Limit.

There are a couple of key connections within the City. The first is to lengthen the Iowa Riverfront Trail from the Recreation Complex to Lake Manawa, along the riverfront. The second is to complete the connection between the Missouri River and the eastern edge of the City.

An aspect of the overall goal for the City's trail system is to create connection among the parks and open spaces. This "Green Link" system will be a combination of existing and future trails, as well as bicycle lanes and sidewalks. When completed, the Green Link system will provide pedestrian access between and among each of the parks.



The Green Link System extends into the extraterritorial jurisdiction limit, and has the potential to connect future park sites within the limit area with City parks

This type of connection is key when assessing the trail system on a regional basis and how it increases recreational opportunity, and potentially reducing the use of the automobile.

Trail System



INDIAN CREEK TRAIL



VALLEY VIEW TRAIL



MID CITY TRAIL



IOWA RIVERFRONT TRAIL

Recommendations

1. Continue to identify locations along the trail system for trail stop parks and corridors.
2. Work with public works to identify sidewalks within the Green Link System that can be widened or improved.
3. Create amenities along the trail system to enhance a users' experience.
4. Expand the wayfinding system along the entire trail system.
5. Identify zoning measures that establish mechanisms for land dedication or easements for a new trail segment when development is adjacent to existing trails or future planned trails.
6. Explore the feasibility of creating a "pay in lieu of" mechanism for those circumstances when land is not available within adjacent to development for a trail or when constructing a trail at the time of development is not practical.

Actions

1. Review the Future Trail Map and prioritize improvements supporting connectivity among and between parks and open spaces.
2. Adopt a mechanism for developers to contribute to the construction of a trail segment adjacent to development.
3. Allocate funding for annual reinvestment into the trail system.
4. Publish a Trail Amenities Plan that identifies locations for future trail amenities. Appropriately fund the operation and maintenance of the trail system.
5. Draft a Green Link System Improvement Plan that identifies the improvements of sidewalks, trails, and addition of bicycle lanes within the system.
6. Coordinate with Public Works on street improvement projects in order to maximize resources when planning and constructing future trails.

Recreation and Events



TEE BALL LEAGUE

The Recreation and Events Division is charged with providing no fee or low fee recreation programs and community events.

A community's livability and quality of life is closely tied to recreational opportunities and how a person will experience the community or sense of place.

The events program is designed to provide residents with an enjoyable experience of our parks and social interaction.

RECREATION

The Parks and Recreation Department offers youth baseball, basketball, and tennis, as well as girl's softball. There are two adult softball leagues (Summer and Fall), and recently a Pickleball League was launched in cooperation with the Council Bluffs' Area Pickleblall Club.

The primary focus for recreation is creating community recreation opportunities for children of all ages. Towards this end, the future recreation programming will focus on bringing recreation to underserved areas within Council Bluffs, expanding programming to informal recreational opportunities within our parks, and increase the use of our *Recreation On the Move* vehicle , which has the ability to bring recreational activities closer to users within underserved areas.

An area of expansion is the creation of a Community Recreation Center. The Center can offer no fee or low fee recreation programs, arts and crafts, and fitness programs.

EVENTS

The Parks and Recreation Department offers a wide range of community events, including Summerfest, Comedy in the Park, Winterfest, and RECtoberfest.

Over the last couple of years, we have increased the level of donations and sponsors for our events and we look to increase this in the future.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Council Buffs has a number of other recreational opportunities including the YMCA, Iowa West Field House and Soccer Complex, the Council Bluffs Soccer Club, and the Council Bluffs Area Pickleball Club.

These partners offer an array of recreational activities and help to expand the portfolio of recreation the City can offer to the community.

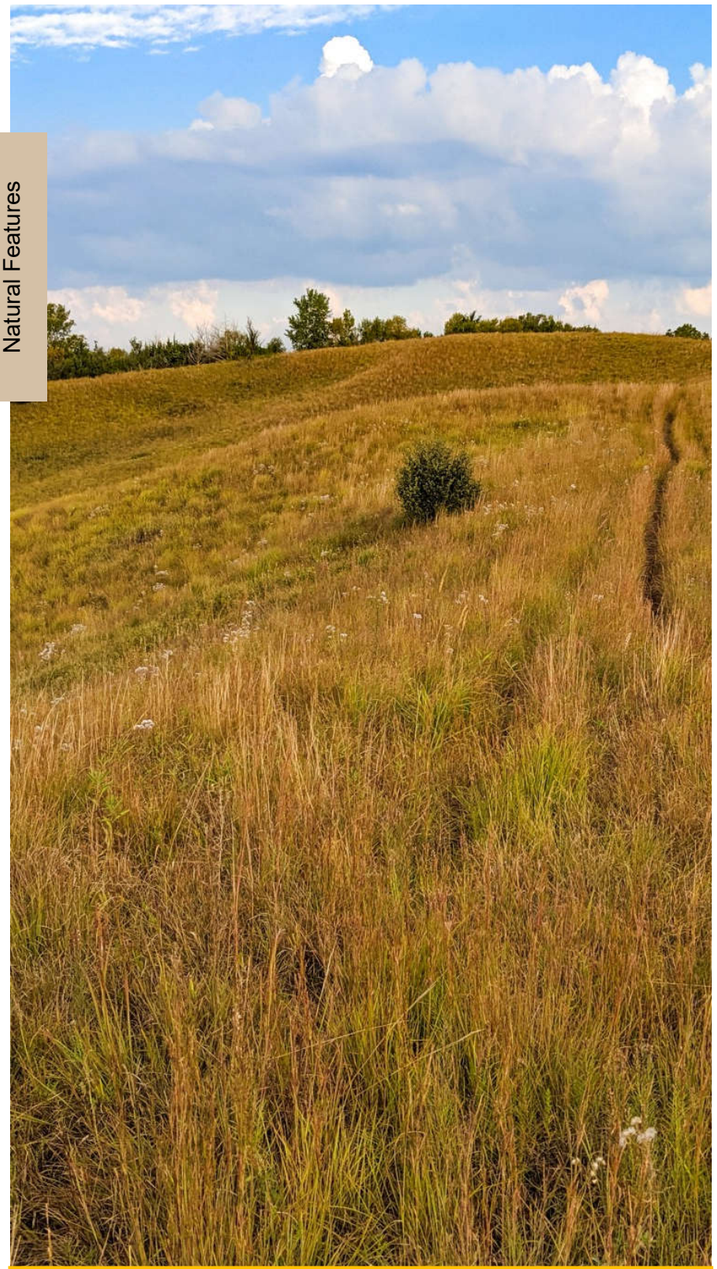
Recommendations

1. Complete a Community Recreation Survey.
2. Draft a Recreation Master Plan to structure a long-term approach and implementation of our Community Recreation program.
3. Partner with other recreation providers within Council Bluffs to enhance recreational opportunities within the City.
4. Explore the feasibility of developing a Community Recreation Center.
5. Seek grants and donations to help support our Community Recreation programs.
6. Maintain the annual events schedule.
7. Increase the level of exposure on social media for our events.
8. Partner with community service organizations (e.g., local food pantries, charitable organizations, etc.) when hosting an event.
9. Increase the occurrence of events within parks in underserved areas.
10. Collect data on the number of attendees and the area within the City attendees reside in order to ensure our events are serving and reaching as many residents as possible.

Actions

1. Publish a Community Recreation Survey and seek public input.
2. Publish a Recreation Master Plan that describes how we will meet the recreational needs of the community over the next five—ten years.
3. Complete a feasibility assessment of developing a Community Recreation Center and the appropriate programs for the Center.
4. Upgrade our sports fields and sports courts to support the youth sports programs and encourage informal community recreation activities.
5. Create a grants program to maximize funding opportunities.
6. Create a scholarship fund dedicated to support youth sport involvement of low income families.
7. Publish the annual schedule of events January of each year.
8. Contact community service organizations to collaborate opportunities such as a local food drive, cloth donations, etc.
9. Develop at least two events for each youth age cohort within Council Bluffs.
10. Offer events for adults.

Natural Features and Open Space



Vincent Bluff Preserve

The Loess Hills delineates the eastern edge of Council Bluffs. It is important the Parks and Recreation Department ensures the sustainability of high value natural areas such as Loess Hills, Vincent Bluff Preserve and riparian areas along the Missouri River.

Other key natural features and open spaces include Lake Manawa, Big Lake, and Dodge Riverside Golf Course.

In order to comprehensively assess existing natural features and plan for future open space a Natural Resources Master Plan should be drafted. Such areas as the Habitat Corridor within Valley View Park should be expanded and habitat corridors should link together other natural features to broaden potential wildlife habitat an ecological diversity within the City.

The Future Parks Plan includes open space locations that have the potential to establish a framework for future development. When reviewing future development plans these open space areas should be included and become part of the development area and managed by the City.

Existing landscapes within parks should be evaluated and assessed for their potential to be changed to a native or prairie landscape. In addition, the native planting areas should replace turf grass when possible to increase the native plant species and to reduce the turf grass maintenance.

LOESS HILLS

The Loess Hills look down on the Downtown and west end of Council Bluffs.



BIG LAKE PARK

The Loess Hills Preservation Plan identifies several recommendations aimed at preserving the hill's ecological value and unique environment. Future projects and policies should reinforce this objective by ensuring the natural topography is preserved to the greatest extent possible and impacts from development is mitigated. The hills are a significant visual element of the community and can be seen from throughout the City. Important public spaces such as Lincoln Memorial Park, Lewis and Clark Monument Park and Fairview Cemetery all benefit from the topography of Loess Hills.

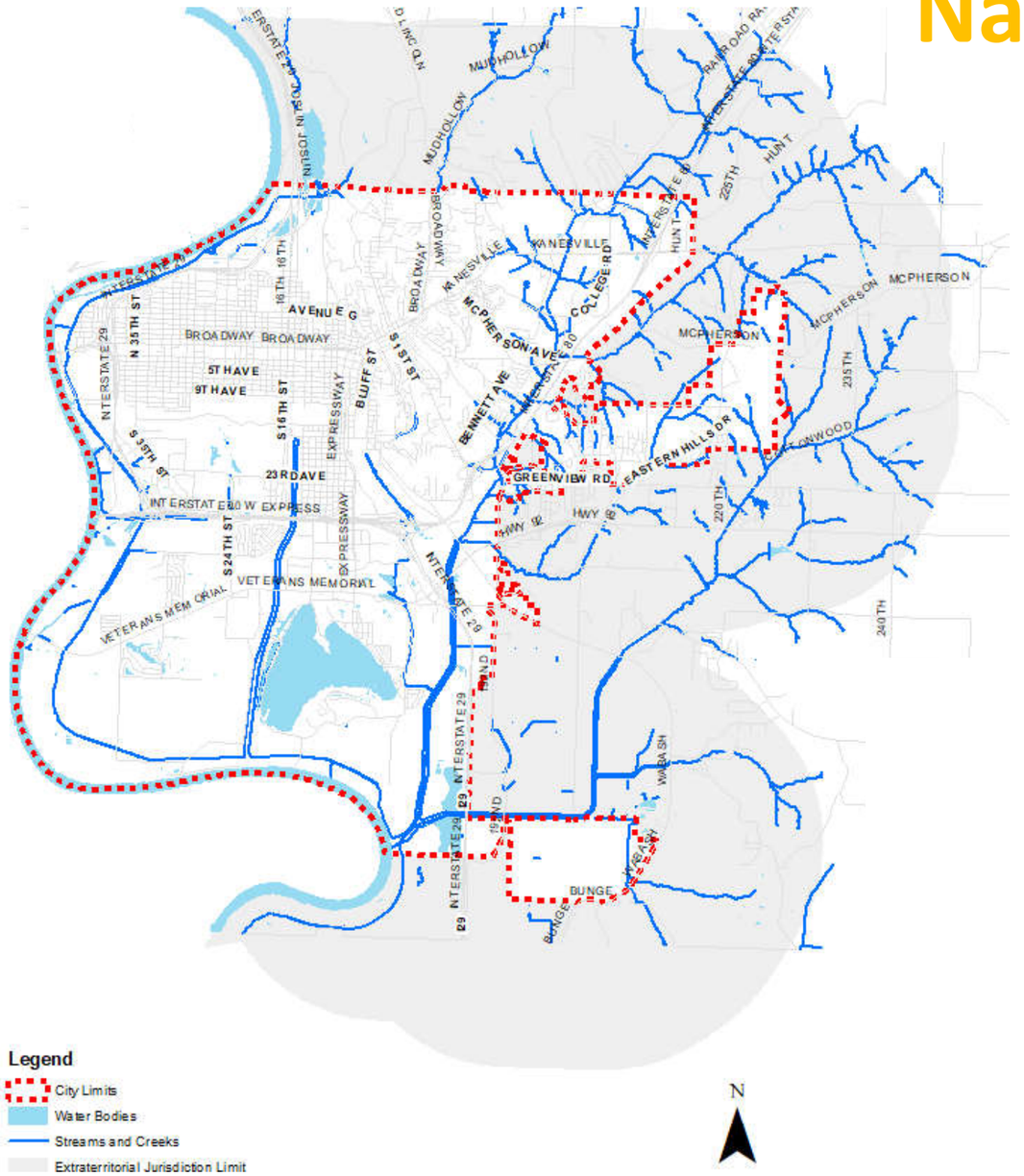
LAKE MANAWA

Lake Manawa is 740 acres in size (1.16 square miles) and abuts a variety of activities and uses. Older neighborhoods, new subdivisions, local open spaces and a state park all take advantage of the unique setting created by Lake Manawa.

BIG LAKE

Big Lake and other local lakes provide similar benefits on a smaller scale. The City should aim to preserve Lake Manawa and other bodies of water through stormwater management and land use controls so the lakes can continue to be a centerpiece of recreation and resource for education about the natural environment.

Natural Features and Open Space



LOCAL STREAMS AND CREEKS MAP

LOCAL CREEKS AND STREAMS

Indian Creek, Mosquito Creek and other creeks and streams navigate their way throughout the community and provide an opportunity to link other natural amenities, parks, neighborhoods, and commercial areas.

These creeks and streams should be viewed as a habitat corridor that offer benefits, including migratory paths for wildlife, storm water management, ecological sustainability, and the potential for trails.

PARKS FOR POLLINATORS

The Parks and Recreation Department is establishing pollinator landscapes within our parks and along trails to increase native planting areas and native prairie plantings. These plantings demonstrate how to incorporate pollinator plants in a typical landscape. New and rejuvenated landscapes will include plant species known to attract bees, butterflies, beetles, and other insects.

BEE CITY

The City of Council Bluffs has received a Bee City USA® designation in recognition of its commitment to improving landscapes for pollinators. The City will continue to promote pollinators and restoration efforts to increase our diverse ecosystem.

Recommendations

1. Locate existing and potential natural areas within parks and other public property suitable for restoration.
2. Seek grants and funding from Department of Natural Resources to support the creation of new or enhanced natural areas.
3. Identify areas to develop additional Habitat Corridors within the City.
4. Utilize native species plants when creating or renovating park landscapes.
5. Develop a comprehensive environmental education system for the natural features and areas within our park system.

Actions

1. Map all natural areas within the park system. Include in this mapping areas suitable for conversion from maintained park area to a natural, prairie type landscape.
2. Publish a Natural Resources and Features Management Plan that outlines how natural features will be managed, protected and enhanced.
3. Develop a Habitat Corridor Plan.
4. Identify appropriate locations to develop Iowa-prairie habitats.
5. Develop management plans for areas previously restored through the Department of Natural Resources Resource Enhancement and Protection grants.
6. Prepare an Integrated Pest Management Plan.
7. Promote pollinator landscapes and plantings in order to increase the pollinator population, thus supporting the City's Bee City designation.