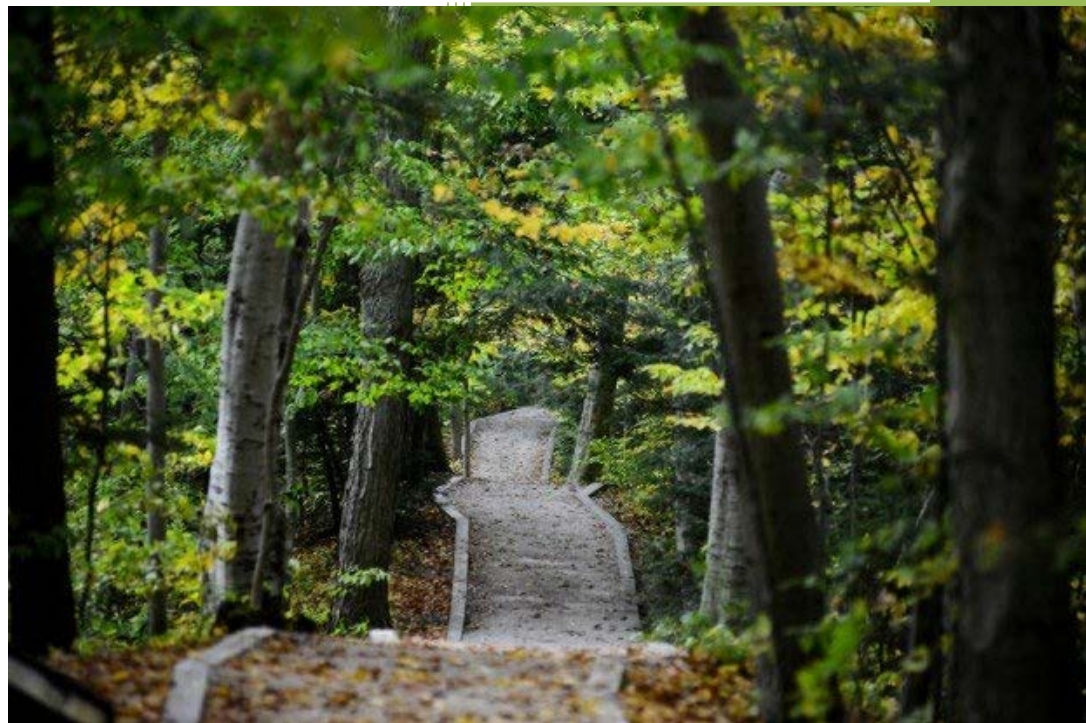


SUSTAINABILITY PLAN



OTTAWA COUNTY PARKS AND
RECREATION COMMISSION
FALL 2017

Table of Contents

Introduction

 Natural Resources

 Quality of Life

 Community

 Continuing the Mission – Sustainability

Measuring Sustainability at Ottawa County Parks

 Creating a Baseline

Goals and Objectives

 Environmental Sustainability

 Social Sustainability

 Economic Sustainability

Glossary

References

Introduction

The Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission enhances quality of life for residents and visitors, by preserving parks and open spaces and providing outdoor and natural resource-based recreation and education experiences. To carry out this mission, three goals are identified to provide a plan to reach these goals:

Goal 1: Provide natural resource-based recreational opportunities

Goal 2: Protect and restore high quality natural resource features to sustain the economic, social, and environmental health of the county

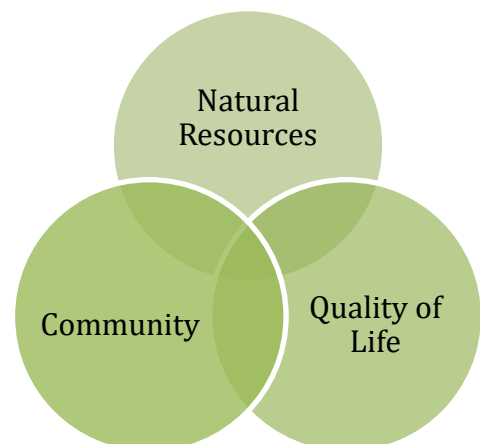
Goal 3: Engage and connect County residents and visitors with the County Parks and Open Space System.

Sustainability meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. All three of the goals stated above meet the basic standards of sustainability and recognize the ecological, social, and economic impacts that may affect our future. These concepts will be incorporated in the strategy to create a sustainable future for the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission. This document is intended to be the framework for sustainability and resilience of the Ottawa County Parks in order to identify shared principles and goals, along with fundamental strategies to ensure these principles are met.

Natural Resources

Ottawa County is located on 565 square miles of the Lower Peninsula and consists of 24 miles of Lake Michigan coastline, the Grand River crossing the entire county, and an abundance of unique natural communities. The county's lakes, rivers, streams, sand dunes, wetlands, forests, grasslands, and agricultural areas create this unique location that is in need of protection and conservation. Natural features and resources provide benefits to all social, environmental, and economic areas of a community. The protection of natural areas will create a sustained environment that will promote a healthy community and economy.

The County Parks Commission oversees 25 parks, two of which are undeveloped, equating to a total of 3,917 acres. There are also 14 open spaces that account for an additional 2,538 acres of undeveloped land. This significant amount of natural land needs to be protected for the future of the environment and surrounding community.



Quality of Life

Destroying natural features creates a negative impact on the future and Ottawa County strives to counteract this by encouraging areas of low development for the benefit of natural areas and the surrounding community. A healthy community will have nature within its reach, along with programs to allow for its residents to be active and involved. Research has demonstrated that frequent and active exposure to the outdoors can improve one's mental and physical health and general quality of life. It is important for a community to have natural lands and the ability to preserve them.

Ottawa County lacks any national park areas; however, two Lake Michigan beach-oriented state parks make up for this. Holland and Grand Haven State Parks are the most highly visited state parks in Michigan, which helps to assure an abundance of recreational opportunities for local communities.

Community

Sustainability meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Ottawa County continues to experience significant population growth, which has an effect on the County's natural resources. With the increasing population comes the need to improve the planning and maintenance of recreational facilities and services. Continuing growth is a factor that the County must plan for in order to sustain the area's natural features and promote healthy outdoor recreation activities. Current human interference with water quality, wildlife habitat, and other natural resources can cause a diminished attractiveness for tourism and other economic development. An increase in awareness and inclusiveness of Ottawa County's natural and open space features will ensure the protection of the community and its valuable land features.

Continuing the Mission – Sustainability

The Park's Mission:

The Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission enhances quality of life for residents and visitors, by preserving parks and open spaces and providing natural resource based recreation and education opportunities.

Preserving and restoring parkland, protecting critical watersheds, maintaining native wildlife and plant species, and providing high quality recreational activities is important for the future of the parks. The purpose of the Sustainability Plan is to ensure that Ottawa County will be able to maintain its current practices, and develop a strategy for future opportunities. In order to plan for the future, there must be an assessment and measurement of current resources as well as resources that the parks are lacking.

Measuring Sustainability at Ottawa County Parks

Creating a Baseline

The first step to address sustainability is accounting for resources that are currently used within the parks and open spaces. Measuring the improvements required of the Sustainability Goals and Objectives will require an accurate report and compilation of data to compare to later. The parks use of water, energy, waste, fossil fuels, and people affect what can be done to improve or continue the mission of Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission.

To reach the goals stated in this plan, it is necessary to begin a collection of solid data to represent resources used. The Parks currently keep track of the usage of resources as illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3. It is important to continue collecting this data in order to develop an accurate baseline.

As park visitation increases, more resources will be spent, more land will be acquired, and more waste will be created. This calls for an increase in planning to track necessary data, which would then be used to raise awareness and promote sustainable practices to ensure the success of the parks.

Utilities Used

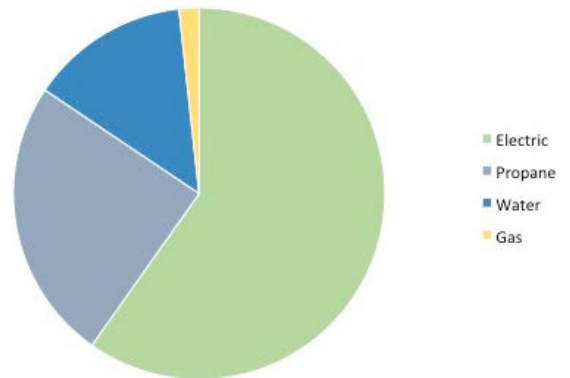


Figure 1

Water

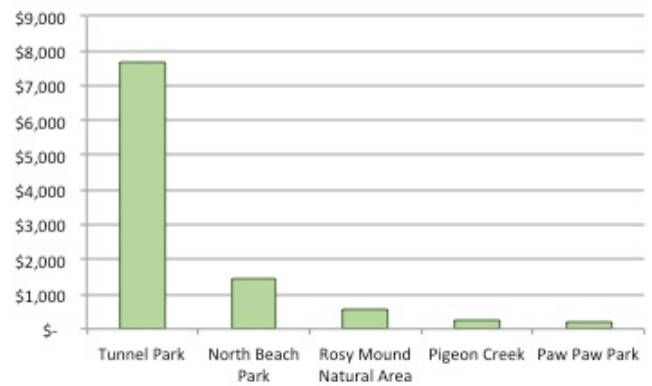


Figure 2

Electric

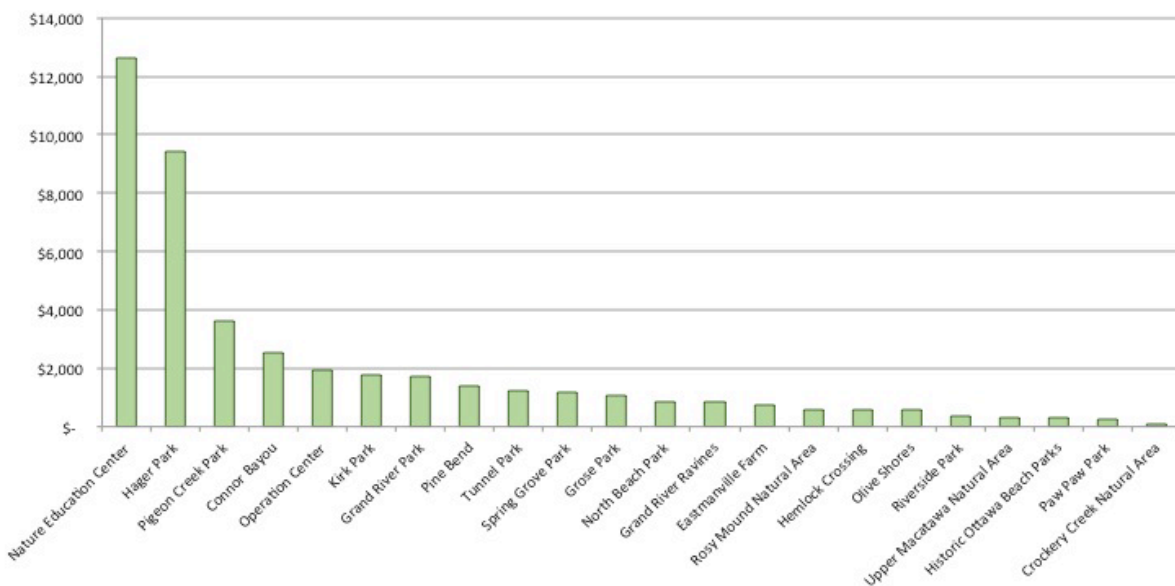


Figure 3

Goals and Objectives

Ottawa County Parks is dedicated to environmental stewardship and demonstrates efforts to strive toward a better future for all. As a park system, concerns regarding environmental, economic, and social impacts can be properly managed to promote the resiliency of Ottawa County. Finding linkages between all three impacts is key to the success of a sustainable system. The true nature of the parks' existing values and objectives has always supported the fundamental qualities of sustainability. Continued practice of these values will ensure the success of the community as a whole, and emphasizing the different areas of sustainability will guarantee that the goals of Ottawa County Parks will be achieved.

This section identifies the goals Ottawa County Parks aspires to accomplish within five years, at which time the plan will be reviewed. The goals are organized into Environmental, Economic, and Social Sustainability. Objectives and Actions have been included to specify the exact steps that must be taken in order to reach the indicated goals.

Environmental Sustainability

Ottawa County Parks and Open Spaces are areas that protect natural resources, provide environmental services, and promote a respect for nature. Ottawa County continues to preserve natural resources, which supports environmental sustainability and guarantees open space areas. The parks have been built on the principals of environmental stewardship that have sustained a connection between people and their surrounding environment. These principals remain necessary for the future of parks and open spaces. The following goals, objectives, and actions are focused towards the top priorities regarding the natural environment.

Goal One: Conserve natural areas in Ottawa County

Objective 1: Protect significant natural areas

Target: Acquire additional parkland

Target: Collaborate with partners

Target: Take preventative measures for invasives

Objective 2: Restore and enhance native communities and biodiversity

Target: Remove invasive species

Task 1: Prioritize through EDRR protocol

Task 2: Prioritize areas of significant biodiversity

Target: Plant native, local genotype species

Target: Incorporate vegetation (ex. pine plantation removal) and wildlife (ex. deer management) management techniques

Goal Two: Plan and design projects to reduce environmental impact

Objective 1: Create green infrastructure that provides ecological services

Target: Establish greenways that provide natural buffers and corridors

Target: Utilize natural storm water techniques where appropriate

Target: Utilize native plants for carbon sequestration

Objective 2: Utilize technology and construction techniques that minimize impact when appropriate

Target: Develop a checklist for projects

Target: Keep current with available technologies and costs

Goal Three: Adopt sustainable operations

Objective 1: Reduce energy consumption

Target: Reduce energy use relative to user demand

Task: Research remote control of HVAC systems

Target: Increase energy efficiency

Objective 2: Increase renewable energy sources

Target: Identify areas where possible renewable energy sources could be used

Target: Research partnerships to mitigate the costs of renewable energy

Objective 3: Reduce waste

Target: Collect data on the types of waste generated at park facilities to establish a baseline. Once a baseline is created, identify opportunities for source reduction and diversion

Target: Create strategies to reduce waste through alternative purchasing, collection, maintenance, and education

Objective 4: Increase efficiency of water usage

Target: Establish systems to reduce water use and consumption

Target: Search for ways to implement water collection systems

Objective 5: Use low impact products when possible

Target: Use products that have a low impact on the environment

Task: Research the Responsible Purchasing Network

Target: Use and dispose of products in such a way as to limit negative effects to the environment

Goal Four: Increase awareness of sustainable practices

Objective 1: Develop staff training of sustainability and provide resources to achieve sustainability.

Target: Validate that all involved are aware of the purpose of sustainability

Task: Utilize *kahoots* in training)

Target: Incorporate in new employee training

Target: All staff annual training

Objective 2: Educate staff and residents about Ottawa County Parks sustainability practices.

Target: Create a sustainability update in quarterly newsletter and Annual Report

Target: Create display in the Nature Education Center

“In wildness is the preservation of the world.”

—Henry David Thoreau

Social Sustainability

Parks are more than simple areas to enjoy nature and outdoor recreation. They are also public areas that support connections with people, their environment, and their community. Parks strengthen the social structure of a region and promote healthy, active lifestyles. Making parks and natural resources equally accessible to all citizens allows for full participation in these areas and promotes a higher quality of life. Increased accessibility involves the entire community and creates civic engagement that ensures the success of the park system’s future.

Goal One: Encourage social interaction in and with the natural environment

Objective 1: Provide areas that promote community and inclusive environments

Target: Consider designing areas that promote social interaction using specific landscaping methods

Target: Research and evaluate natural playscapes

Target: Consider opportunities for community native plant gardens

Objective 2: Improve technology to increase convenience and engagement for visitors

Target: Engage people in citizen science (i.e. herp atlas, MISIN, etc.)

Target: Engage people in social media

Target: Research park mobile apps (ex. interpretation, mapping)

Objective 3: Develop a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) statement and a long-term DEI plan

Target: Continue to educate staff and volunteers about DEI as it relates to parks

Target: Work with Ottawa County Administration in evaluating hiring practices

Goal Two: Increase education and outreach

Objective 1: Continue to develop programs, based on the needs of the community, that engage residents with the natural environment

Target: Develop a diversity of programs that engage people that are not typical park users

Target: Continue to develop and expand programs geographically throughout the county

Objective 2: Continue to develop service-based learning opportunities.

Target: Teach the community the skills and knowledge needed to reflect on the goals of the park system
(ex. invasive species management)

Target: Partner with schools to enhance their existing service-based learning programs within the parks.

Objective 3: Develop and a plan to address economic barriers to attending programs promote (ex. low-income fee waiver)

Goal Three: Work with partners for increased community support

Objectives 1: Develop partnerships with key organizations to connect to populations that are currently under-represented as parks users

Target: Identify key organizations that include a mission to reach under-represented populations

Target: Work with partners to identify barriers to park use by under-represented user groups

Target: Work with partners to develop programs and infrastructure that meet the needs of under-represented groups

Objective 2: Continue to work with existing partners

Target: Identify key partners and what they have to offer

Target: Identify the needs of the partners

Target: Develop programming that works to meet the needs of both organizations

Goal Four: Expand greenway initiatives

Objective 1: Provide recreational activities

Objective 2: Protect historic land along high priority river corridors

Objective 3: Encourage connectivity between communities

Goal Five: Promote healthy lifestyles for Improved Public Health

Objective 1: Continue to work with organizations that promote public health (ex. Ottawa County Health Department) through nature-based recreation

Target: Provide opportunities for users to learn about the health benefits of outdoor recreation. (ex. Priority Health)

Objective 2: Encourage physical fitness by providing accessible-outdoor activities

Target: Continue to develop and maintain non-motorized trails to connect the community with nature

Target: Continue to develop programming that encourages outdoor recreation to improve health

“The primary purpose of the park is to provide the best practicable means of healthful recreation, for the inhabitants of the city, of all classes.”

– Frederick Law Olmsted

Economic Sustainability

Through proper investment, Ottawa County Parks will continue to grow and attract visitors. The high-quality natural areas and recreational activities are only profitable if properly managed. Maintaining responsible financial management supports the conservation and protection of Ottawa County's natural areas for the enjoyment of all.

Goal One: Ensure reliable sources of funding

Objective 1: Review and develop fee policy that promotes cost recovery for services that provide individual benefits

Objective 2: Maintain and develop a diversified financial base

Target 1: Strengthen and expand partnerships

Target 2: Increase private donations

Task: Continue to find projects that interest foundations

Task: Continue to work with Friends Of Ottawa County Parks

Task: Develop sponsorships and scholarships

Target 3: Maximize grant funding

Goal Two: Increase volunteer activity

Objective 1: Efficiently utilize volunteers to reduce costs and increase capacity for projects

Target: Evaluate volunteer projects for effectiveness and value added to the park system

Target: Develop volunteer leadership program

Objective 2: Increase engagement to build public support of Ottawa County Parks

Goal Three: Proportionally reduce operation and material costs

Objective 1: Educate staff on sustainable practices in order to reduce costs and maximize efficiency.

Target 1: Evaluate and improve purchasing processes

Target 2: Establish cost-effective maintenance practices that address landscaping, mowing, and equipment costs

Objective 2: Provide paperless/convenient options for all departments and park users

Goal Four: Evaluate economic practices

Objective 1: Ensure park system development stays within limits of what can be maintained with assumed funding sources

Target 1: Maintain an accurate Capital Improvement Plan

Target 2: Provide accurate revenue projections for all funding sources

Target 3: Utilize construction methods and materials that maximize long-term value.

Objective 2: Assess new projects and programs to ensure they fit within the Parks Commission's mission.

“We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.”

—Aldo Leopold

Glossary

Citizen Science

The collection and analysis of data relating to the natural world by members of the general public, typically as part of a collaborative project with professional scientists.

Community Native Plant Gardens

An opportunity to preserve biodiversity by having community members create a native garden to support and sustain the native landscape of an area. Community members can learn about gardening with native plants and receive seeds and plants for their own yards. Other Benefits: Low maintenance, creating a healthier community, helping the climate, and conserving water.

Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR)

A policy to monitor properties regularly to detect new invasive species promptly. The sooner a species is detected, the lower the costs of removing it and the least amount of resources are used.

Greenway (*see Green Infrastructure*)

A corridor of undeveloped land preserved for recreational use or environmental protection.

Green Infrastructure (*or Blue- Green Infrastructure*)

Green Infrastructure is an alternative infrastructure that protects the water quality of our streams, rivers and drinking water supplies. It supports the diversity of plants and animals, protects air quality, and contributes to the health and quality of life for the region's citizens.

All of these services, sometimes referred to as ecosystem services or natural capital, contribute to the region's economy by increasing property values, avoiding costly environmental clean-ups, and providing services at no cost to the public.

Impervious Surface

The characteristic of a material that prevents the infiltration or passage of liquid through it. This may apply to roads, streets, parking lots, rooftops and sidewalks.

Kahoots (*in training*)

A group of trained volunteers responsible for educating other volunteers in specific tasks to increase efficiency.

Low Impact Development

Refers to systems and practices that use or mimic natural processes that result in the infiltration, evapotranspiration or use of stormwater in order to protect water quality and associated aquatic habitat.

Natural Playscapes

Spaces designed with as little man made components as possible with the intent of bringing children and people back to nature. Using native plants, rolling hills, lots of trees; playscapes represent a natural place such as a forest.

Stormwater

Precipitation that accumulates in natural and/or constructed storage and stormwater systems during and immediately following a storm event.

Watershed

Geographical area that drains to a specified point on a water course, usually a confluence of streams or rivers, can also be known as drainage area, catchments, or a river basin.

Resources

A Plan for Sustainable Practices within NYC Parks

https://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_about/sustainable_parks/Sustainable_Parks_Plan.pdf

Audubon Society

<http://www.audubon.org/content/why-native-plants-matter>

Department of Ecology – State of Washington

<http://www.ecy.wa.gov/>

Developing Sustainable Park Systems in Oregon

https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/PLANS/docs/scorp/20132018_SCORP/Developing_Sustainable_Park_Systems.pdf

Green infrastructure. (n.d.) Illustrated Dictionary of Architecture. (2012, 2002, 1998).

Michigan Department of Transportation

<http://sp.mdot.ms.gov/Environmental/Stormwater%20Resources/Stormwater%20Management%20Terms%20And%20Definitions.pdf>

Michigan Invasive Species Coalition

<http://www.michiganinvasives.org/facts/>

Schaumburg Park District Sustainability Plan

http://www.parkfun.com/docs/about/2011/03/14/Green_Light_Sustainability_Plan.pdf?Status=Master

Sustainable Chicago 2015

<https://www.cityofchicago.org/content/dam/city/progs/env/SustainableChicago2015.pdf>

Three Rivers Park District Sustainability Plan

<https://www.threeriversparks.org/>

Washington State Parks

<http://parks.state.wa.us/281/Parks>