

Kevin J. Gahn Memorial Recreation Area Management Plan

Ownership:	Des Moines County
Location:	Township 70, Range 3 (Flint River Township), Section 22 Parcels: 10-22-300-005, 10-27-100-015 Entrance gate location: Lat/Lon: -91.19398, 40.84115, USNG: 15TXF522226
Size:	56.33 Acres
Classification:	II – General Outdoor Recreation Area III – Natural Environment Area
Designated Use:	Park and Recreation Area

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to meet Des Moines County Conservation’s obligations as a publicly funded conservation organization to preserve the ecological integrity of property under its management while also meeting the public’s demand for outdoor recreation opportunities. This plan, when fully implemented, should achieve the purposes and mission of Des Moines County Conservation and compliment efforts to achieve established local and state ecological and outdoor recreation goals and objectives.

History

The 56 acre Gahn Refuge rests directly behind Des Moines County Conservation’s main office. Having previously been part of the county home facility, it was transferred to the conservation department for management in 1993 and named in honor of Kevin Gahn, a board member tragically killed in an auto accident the year before. The site features open fields, woodlands, and a one acre pond. Currently, it is managed as natural resources preserve and is not open to public access except during DMCC sponsored events. From 1995 to 2011, a four acre high-fenced area surrounding the pond was used as a captive trumpeter swan enclosure, part of DMCC’s participation in the Iowa DNR’s statewide trumpeter swan reintroduction efforts. When the state's swan restoration goals were met in 2010, DMCC discontinued its swan program, leaving the property sitting idle.

Existing Conditions

Current conditions on the property are as follows:

- 11 acres established native grasses that were planted shortly after the county gave the property to DMCC to manage and have since been maintained through regular use of prescribed fire.
- 19 acres of woodland, mostly surrounding the enclosure to the north and west.

- 10 acres planted trees.
- 4 acre high-fenced enclosure with shelter house built over concrete slab as well as a fishing dock in a 1 acre pond. The area around the shelter house down to the southern edge of the pond is mowed.

The rest of the property is grass/scrub/shrub vegetative cover. A path from the property's entrance gate on 137th Ave. back to the enclosure is mowed along with the area inside the enclosure. The rest of the property is left in a natural state.

Mission

Des Moines County Conservation is dedicated to the sustainability of natural resources through land stewardship, conservation education and by providing quality outdoor recreation opportunities.

Des Moines County Conservation's mission statement can be broken down into component parts to which specific goals can be applied to meet the overall mission of ensuring the sustainability of natural resources. Those component parts are: land stewardship, conservation education and outdoor recreation. The specific goals that follow are divided among the component parts of the mission statement to show clearly how specific goals are used to meet the department's broader mission.

Goals

The goals for any property under the management of Des Moines County Conservation are meant to not only achieve the department's mission but also to be consistent with broader relevant state and national goals. This is done so that unified and consistent management strategies are applied both within and beyond Des Moines County thus ensuring consistency beyond any one management entity's jurisdictional boundaries or scope of management.

Specifically, the goals for this property were developed consistent with the 2013 Iowa Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and Iowa Wildlife Action Plan (IWAP) while also taking into consideration other plans and initiatives such as Iowa's "Healthiest State" and other national health initiatives, the Iowa Open Spaces Plan and others.

I. Mission Component: Land Stewardship

Applicable plan goals, objectives and actions

SCORP Priority 2: Create places to go in Iowa that exemplify best practices in natural resource conservation while providing a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

- Goal #2: Encourage public agencies and local governments to protect the parks and natural areas within their jurisdiction, limiting resale of public lands and open spaces for other non-outdoor recreation or non-open space development.
- Goal #4: Provide high-quality, safe and affordable recreational opportunities that meet the demands, needs and diversity of experiences Iowans desire.

SCORP Priority 3: Encourage collaboration and planning efforts to advance outdoor recreation.

- Goal #2: Provide seamless delivery of outdoor recreation from all recreation providers encouraging private-public partnerships that share a common vision for high-quality, sustainable and resource benefitting opportunities.

IWAP Vision for the Future #1: *A Vision for Iowa's Wildlife* – By 2030 Iowa will have viable wildlife populations that are compatible with modern landscapes and human social tolerance.

- *Goals:*
 - Common species will continue to be common.
 - Populations of Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) will increase to viable (self-sustaining) levels.
 - The abundance and distribution of wildlife will be balanced with its impact on the economic livelihood and social tolerance of Iowans.
- *Applicable Conservation Actions:*
 - Develop a balanced program of wildlife conservation by increasing the emphasis on species of greatest conservation need.
 - Develop scientifically reliable knowledge on the distribution, abundance and ecological needs of all wildlife species.
 - Focus on protection, restoration, reconstruction and enhancement of native plant communities and wildlife habitats.
 - Protect ecosystem stability by developing invasive species management plans that provide early detection strategies to control exotic invasive species.

IWAP Vision for the Future #2: *A Vision for Wildlife Habitats* – By 2030 Iowa will have healthy ecosystems that incorporate diverse, native habitats capable of sustaining viable wildlife populations.

- *Goals:*
 - The amount of permanently protected wildlife habitat in Iowa will be doubled to 4% of the state's land area.
 - Protected habitats will be diverse, representative, native plant communities in large and small blocks on public and privately owned land and waters.
- *Applicable Conservation Actions:*
 - Permanently protect, restore, reconstruct and enhance large areas of wildlife habitat – systems that include large core tracts, watershed and greenbelt corridors, and other associated travel corridors – that can be managed for biodiversity.
 - Provide technical guidance and supplemental cost share programs to private landowners to maximize the benefits to wildlife from Federal land conservation programs.

- Coordinate public land acquisition and private land habitat programs to provide habitat on a landscape scale.

IWAP Vision for the Future #3: A Vision for Wildlife Management – Diverse wildlife communities will be developed on public and private lands and waters through the use of adaptive ecological management principles.

- *Goal:*
 - Wildlife and fisheries management will be based on science.
- *Applicable Conservation Actions:*
 - Establish wildlife population and habitat management goals for public and private lands and evaluate their effectiveness.
 - Develop and implement management plans on public and privately owned lands and waters that promote biodiversity and improve the status of species of greatest conservation need.

Land Stewardship Management Strategies

Management Strategy 1.1: Conduct ecological surveys on the property and surrounding landscape to determine, to the extent feasible, the presence, abundance and distribution of local plant and animal species. Use the results of these surveys to guide and refine specific components of Management Strategies 1.2-1.5, with emphasis on species of greatest conservation need.

Action Items:

- Seek assistance from volunteers and specialists in various fields to help identify and document specific species of plants and animals on and around the property.
- Conduct surveys (such as bird counts) via public “events” through the department’s Environmental Education division.

Management Strategy 1.2: Apply management to the property’s open acres that promotes native plant communities similar to Iowa’s native prairies, taking into account results of surveys conducted as part of Management Strategy 1.1.

Action Items:

- Establish necessary firebreaks, utilizing existing mowed areas to the extent feasible, to allow for the application of prescribed fire.
- Utilize prescribed fire or other acceptable best management practices to achieve desired management objectives.
- Seek cooperative assistance from other agencies, organizations and/or volunteers in applying management.

Management Strategy 1.3: Apply management to the property's forested/wooded acres that promotes plant/forest health and native plant communities, taking into account results of surveys conducted as part of Management Strategy 1.1.

Action Items:

- Conduct a forest inventory and assessment to determine current forest resource condition.
- Develop and implement a Forest Stewardship Plan.
- Seek cooperative assistance from other agencies and organizations during assessments and management application.

Management Strategy 1.4: Identify invasive species on the property and apply practices to reduce or eliminate their abundance.

Action Items:

- Conduct invasive species assessment of entire property.
- Develop and implement control methods in conjunction with, or in addition to Management Strategies 1.2 and 1.3.

Management Strategy 1.5: Encourage the protection, restoration, reconstruction and enhancement of adjacent and nearby properties in an effort to provide habitat on a landscape scale.

Action Items:

- Provide technical assistance and/or conservation services to nearby private landowners, encouraging them to utilize available conservation programs and management strategies.
- Seek to acquire or otherwise permanently protect adjacent or nearby parcels and habitat corridors.

II. Mission Component: Conservation Education

Applicable plan goals, objectives and actions

SCORP Priority 3: Encourage collaboration and planning efforts to advance outdoor recreation.

- Goal #2: Provide seamless delivery of outdoor recreation from all recreation providers encouraging private-public partnerships that share a common vision for high-quality, sustainable and resource benefitting opportunities.

SCORP Priority 5: Better understand Iowans' outdoor recreation wants and needs, and develop effective tools that connect them to Iowa's natural resource opportunities, based on their unique demographics and interests.

- Goal #2: Using a multi-faceted approach (formal and informal educational processes), promote youth participation in the outdoors striving for a greater understanding, appreciation and use of Iowa's resources.

IWAP Vision for the Future #5: A Vision for Wildlife Education – Iowans will respect wildlife for its many values and they will advocate effectively for conservation of wildlife and wildlife habitats.

- *Goal:*
 - Iowans will understand the relationships between land use, wildlife diversity and abundance, the quality of life for all citizens, and the positive effects wildlife has on Iowa's economy.
- *Applicable Conservation Actions:*
 - Work with stakeholders to develop consistent messages about the value of wildlife and their associated habitat that convey health, wellness, economic and other *quality of life* benefits.
 - Refine and expand current wildlife education efforts targeted to formal and non-formal education venues.

Conservation Education Management Strategies

Management Strategy 2.1: Utilize the property to build within the public a greater understanding of natural resources and their management via the applications of Management Strategies 1.1-1.4.

Action Items:

- Utilize volunteers and service groups in application of land stewardship management strategies, ensuring that participants understand the reasons for, and value of such management.
- Collaborate with local youth organizations to host youth events/programs on the property designed to connect participants with the outdoors.
- Host formal programs on the property designed to teach the public about local natural resources and their sustainable management.

Management Strategy 2.2: Utilize the property to deliver educational programs focused on outdoor education topics.

Action Items:

- Collaborate with local organizations to deliver applicable programs.
- Conduct DMCC-hosted outdoor education programs on the property.

III. Mission Component: Outdoor Recreation

Applicable plan goals, objectives and actions

SCORP Priority 2: Create places to go in Iowa that exemplify best practices in natural resource conservation while providing a variety of opportunities for outdoor recreation.

- Goal #2: Encourage public agencies and local governments to protect the parks and natural areas within their jurisdiction, limiting resale of public lands and open spaces for other non-outdoor recreation or non-open space development.
- Goal #4: Provide high-quality, safe and affordable recreational opportunities that meet the demands, needs and diversity of experiences Iowans desire.

SCORP Priority 3: Encourage collaboration and planning efforts to advance outdoor recreation.

- Goal #2: Provide seamless delivery of outdoor recreation from all recreation providers encouraging private-public partnerships that share a common vision for high-quality, sustainable and resource benefitting opportunities.

SCORP Priority 4: Promote outdoor recreation as a means to achieve a healthier lifestyle, enhancing the quality of life for all Iowans.

- Goal #1: Link outdoor recreation and participation to desired wellness and public health benefits.
- Goal #2: Collaborate with existing Healthy Iowans, state and county initiatives to promote outdoor recreation and increase participation.

SCORP Priority 5: Better understand Iowans' outdoor recreation wants and needs, and develop effective tools that connect them to Iowa's natural resource opportunities, based on their unique demographics and interests.

- Goal #2: Using a multi-faceted approach (formal and informal educational processes), promote youth participation in the outdoors striving for a greater understanding, appreciation and use of Iowa's resources.

IWAP Vision for the Future #4: *A Vision for Wildlife-Associated Recreation* – More Iowans will participate in wildlife-associated recreation, and all Iowans will have access to publicly owned recreation areas to enjoy wildlife in its many forms.

- *Goals:*
 - The number of Iowans participating in wildlife-associated recreation (wildlife viewing, photography, hiking, outdoor classrooms, hunting, fishing etc.) will increase 50 percent by 2030;
 - Wildlife-associated recreation will be available to all Iowans on public lands near their home;
 - Increasing wildlife-associated recreation will improve public health.

- *Applicable Conservation Actions:*
 - Coordinate wildlife population, habitat and management goals for public lands with potential recreational uses to assure that all recreation is compatible with sound wildlife management and to minimize conflicts between users.

Outdoor Recreation Management Strategies

Management Strategy 3.1: Allow public access to the property as a whole for compatible (largely passive) uses via DMCC-hosted events.

Action Items:

- Approve and post rules governing the public's use of the property.
- Create/acquire and post necessary signage to clearly show the property boundaries, rules, emergency contact information, etc.
- Establish a parking area at the primary public access point.
- Establish and maintain minimal trails/access paths to provide for public access, keeping ecological objectives in mind.
- Coordinate patrol efforts with Park Rangers and local law enforcement agencies to enforce rules and prevent vandalism.

Management Strategy 3.2: Allow use of the existing enclosure and associated facilities by organized groups via a reservation system similar to those associated with other reservable department facilities (shelter houses, shooting range, etc.). In addition to the passive uses described in Management Strategy 3.1, compatible group activities within the developed enclosure area could include camping, picnicking, fishing, canoeing/kayaking and/or others as approved by the Board.

Action Items:

- Approve and post fee structure and rules governing the reservation and use of the facilities.
- Establish internal system to manage reservations, collect fees, and monitor use of the facilities.
- Create/acquire and post necessary signage to clearly show the property boundaries, rules, emergency contact information, etc.
- Coordinate patrol efforts with Park Rangers and local law enforcement agencies to enforce rules, prevent vandalism and ensure public safety.

Management Strategy 3.3: Improve/enhance or expand upon the available facilities at the developed area inside the enclosure to the extent that public use/demand necessitates.

Action Items:

- Remove/control vegetation encroachment within and around the developed area as a component of Management Strategies 1.3 and 1.4.
- Install electricity to the shelter house area by running wiring underground from the nearest available service.

- Install lights and outlets in/around the shelter house.
- Install water service and meter to the shelter house area by running water lines from the nearest available service.
- Install temporary or permanent restroom/sanitation facilities.
- Utilize volunteer and donated labor and material to the extent practical to improve and enhance the developed area.
- Restrict extensive development to the area within the fenced enclosure in an effort to balance outdoor recreation objectives with ecological objectives.

Timing

The recommended improvements identified in this plan are anticipated to be implemented over time. Some recommendations require more detailed planning and design which would extend implementation of those recommendations. Projects that require less planning and design and can be done with limited financial and staff resources may be completed earlier.

Priorities

Higher priorities are assigned to those recommendations that are more responsive to the goals of the plan. Projects related to restoring the natural environment, enhancing education/interpretation, building recreation opportunities and fostering partnerships are considered priorities. Additionally, those projects that improve park access, provide greater accessibility for people with disabilities and generate increased revenues also rank higher on the priority list. Management priorities will be considered comprehensively across the entire Des Moines County Conservation park system annually and incorporated into strategic plans accordingly.

Funding Strategy Options

The proposed improvements within this plan must be integrated into the overall budget/program needs of Des Moines County Conservation. As master plans are completed for other parks within the Des Moines County Conservation park system, the proposed improvements will be considered comprehensively across the entire system. Additionally, the needs associated with maintaining the existing facilities within the park system will be considered along with the proposed improvements.

Some recommendations may be completed through the annual program of work as part of the continuing operations and maintenance of Des Moines County Conservation parks.

Potential funding sources include annual appropriations, user fees, grants, partnerships and long-term public financing.

