

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: June 21, 2024

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Guy D. Smith, Executive Director, Milwaukee County Parks

Subject: Natural Areas 10 Year Strategic Plan

File Type: Information Report

REQUEST

This report is for informational purposes, there is no request at this time.

POLICY

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

BACKGROUND

Milwaukee County Parks (MCP) is the steward of over 15,000 acres of land in Milwaukee County. Approximately 10,000 acres of this land is managed by the department in a natural state that promotes conservation and seeks to preserve these important green spaces for residents of Milwaukee County and Southeastern Wisconsin while maintaining and improving the long-term ecological resilience of the park system.

To further the department’s conservation efforts, MCP created the Natural Areas Program (NA) in 2008. Over the past 15 years, NA has become one of the most respected and successful restoration programs in the region and grew from one full-time staffer to a team of five full-time staff and seasonals. A key part of the NA program’s growth comes from partnerships with other organizations, increasing from three in 2008 to 88 partners in 2024. Finally, over 2,000 volunteers contribute more than 15,000 hours annually towards the NA program’s land management efforts.

The NA program focuses its efforts of key priorities, including:

- Scientific research inventorying plant and wildlife populations;
- On-the-ground ecological restoration and management planning;
- Habitat management for grasslands, woodlands, and pollinator gardens;

- Wetland management and restoration; and
- Partnership development to preserve natural areas.

To sharpen the NA Program’s efforts over the next decade, MCP developed a ten-year strategic plan to establish guidelines for improving the department’s natural areas. The 11 goals of this strategic plan include:

1. Protect existing populations of locally and regionally rare species by restoring habitats;
2. Solidify conservation efforts through the placement of permanent conservation easements on MCP’s most diverse sites, including SEWRPC designated Natural Areas of Significance and Critical Species Habitat sites;
3. Acquire additional natural areas adjacent to MCP property to provide additional land protection within ecological corridors and acquire isolated natural areas with significant ecological value;
4. Develop and implement a comprehensive Urban White-tailed Deer Management Plan;
5. Expand scientific research to guide and implement habitat that promote the principles of conservation, ecological restoration, and climate change resilience;
6. Provide opportunities compatible public use that preserves ecological integrity;
7. Grow and nurture the NA program’s large volunteer core and partnerships to allow for continued restoration work, scientific research, and environmental education;
8. Actively manage MCP’s natural areas for invasive species control, wildlife habitat improvements, and developing climate change resilience;
9. Create new natural areas through the conversion of leased agricultural lands and underutilized turf grass areas into woodlands, prairies, and/or wetlands;
10. Work to eliminate internal negative impacts to natural areas by improving internal MCP practices; and
11. Mitigate existing infrastructure to reduce bird window strikes, reduce light pollution from outdoor lighting, and provide safer road crossings for wildlife.

By achieving these goals, MCP will provide a more resilient and sustainable model for natural area preservation and management for years to come. This Natural Areas Strategic Plan also supports the priorities of MCP’s 2023-2026 Strategic Plan by promoting the department’s sustainability and improving the quality of life for all Milwaukee residents.

Related File No’s:		
Associated File No’s (Including Transfer Packets):		
Previous Action Date(s):		

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Describe how the item aligns to the objectives in the [strategic plan](#):

- 1B: Create and nurture an inclusive culture across County government
3B: Enhance the County's fiscal health and sustainability

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Brian Russart, Natural Areas Supervisor, Milwaukee County Parks,
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PREPARED BY:

Peter Bratt, Director of Operations and Skilled Trades, Milwaukee County Parks

APPROVED BY:

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks *Guy Smith*

ATTACHMENTS:

Power Point Presentation

Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas Strategic Plan 2024-2033

CC: David Crowley, County Executive
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office
Sheldon Wasserman, Committee on Parks & Culture Chairperson
Steve Taylor, Committee on Parks & Culture Vice Chairperson
Felesia Martin, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Juan Miguel Martinez, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Jack Eckblad, Committee on Parks & Culture Member
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office
Allyson R. Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB