

Polk County Conservation Board Strategic Planning Retreat Minutes

9 a.m. – 2 p.m., Friday, March 1, 2024

Jester Park Nature Center

Attendees: Rich Leopold, Kami Rankin, Jessica Lown, Jill Altringer, Pam Mollenhauer, Katie Stoklasa, Greg Lewis, Ryan Crane, Paula Feltner

9:00 – 9:15 am **Welcome: PCCB Chair Jill Altringer and Director Rich Leopold**

Which global locations do you want to get back to in your lifetime?

Rich – Cambodia

Jill – Australia – Magnetic Island

Katie – Hawaii

Kami – Yellowstone

Paula – Wyoming Wilderness Area

Greg – NE IA Trout Fishing & Lafayette Square/Washington DC

Pam – Passion Island, Cancun

Jessica – Barcelona, Spain

Ryan - Alaska

9:15 – 10:30 am **Review of Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives 2020 – 2026**

It was good to have a third-party provider come in and do the Strategic Plan for this round. Jill would like to see this happen again to help PCC facilitate the strategic plan process.

10:30 -10:45 am **Break**

10:45 – 11:15 am **Brand Audit: Community Outreach Supervisor Jessica Lown. This will include Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, Athene North Shore at Easter Lake, and Polk County Conservation**

- Red Dot Agency hired to do re-branding
- PCC hosted workshops and focus groups to determine public perception/feedback/desires
- Picture of all logos *currently* used within Conservation – 28 different logos!
- **Sleepy Hollow Sports Park** – the brand identity is the personality/tone/voice of business
 - Brand Essence – “Everyday Adventure”
 - Position – “All Weather, All Fun”
 - Promise – “Find Adventure Every Day”

- Personality – “Explorer” & “Innocent”
- Pillars –
 - “Inspiring outdoor adventure without limits: Snowflex”
 - Warmly Welcoming
 - Creating Connections
- Brand Mantra – authored by Red Dot – rhyming paragraph
- Visuals – navy, turquoise, orange, light yellow, gray, white – “Drop In” tagline, animal mascots (owl, rabbit, squirrel)
- Branding evolves as the organization evolves – brand identity built anticipating Sleepy Hollow will be a fully functional ski facility in 2-3 years from now – different versions of design elements will be combined to produce advertising for the many services offered at Sleepy Hollow (Renaissance Faire, Scream Park, etc.)
- **Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake** – the brand identity is the personality/tone/voice of business
 - Brand Essence – “Pure Joy”
 - Position – “A Park For All People”
 - Promise – “You’re Welcome Here”
 - Personality – “Explorer” & “Magician” & “Caretaker”
 - Pillars –
 - Multi-activity opportunities for all abilities
 - Highly-trained, trusted, and encouraging team
 - Natural playscape nestled in an urban neighborhood
 - Brand Mantra – authored by Red Dot
 - Visuals – Logo is royal navy, periwinkle blue, white, yellow, chunky font, primitive vector iconography of outdoor objects/symbols, Color Palette: royal navy, periwinkle blue, gold, light pink, Kelly green, brown, red-orange, blue-gray
 - Branding evolves as the organization evolves – brand identity built incorporating universally accessible amenities and features at park – different versions of design elements will be combined to produce advertising for the many services offered at Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake
 - Minimal budget for marketing/advertising
- **Polk County Conservation** – the brand identity is the personality/tone/voice of business
 - Brand Essence – “Naturally Empowered”
 - Position – “A Force For Nature”
 - Promise – “Nature First”
 - Personality – “Explorer” & “Hero” & “Sage”
 - Pillars –
 - Multi-activity opportunities for all abilities
 - Highly-trained, trusted, and encouraging team
 - Natural playscape nestled in an urban neighborhood
 - Brand Mantra – authored by Red Dot

- Visuals – Logo is royal navy, periwinkle blue, white, yellow, chunky font, primitive vector iconography of outdoor objects/symbols, Color Palette: royal navy, periwinkle blue, gold, light pink, Kelly green, brown, red-orange, blue-gray
- Branding evolves as the organization evolves – the brand identity was built incorporating universally accessible amenities and features at Easter Lake Park – different versions of design elements will be combined to produce advertising for the many services offered at Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake
- Minimal budget for marketing/advertising

11:15 – 11:30 am AmeriCorps Host Site Discussion: Deputy Director Kami Rankin

PCC currently has contracts with:

- Conservation Corps MN/IA – lease old Admin Office at Jester Park
- Americorps Green Iowa – based out of Cedar Falls
- Americorps ISU Extension

One year ago Rich was contacted by Volunteer Iowa (agency that oversees Americorps) and asked if PCC would consider becoming an Americorps host agency.

PCC's goal is two-fold: accomplish work goals in PCC parks, and get Americorps members the career experience they need while working for PCC.

PCC applied for and was awarded a Planning Grant to determine feasibility of how Americorps would function with PCC as a host site.

Lindsey Page (PT Naturalist) was hired as a contractor by PCC to facilitate the Planning Grant process beginning in October 2023. The grant process will be completed in April, awards will be communicated at end of April/beginning of May, and Lindsey will present results to the PCC Board in May.

Lindsey will be replacing Lori Foresman-Kirpes as a FT Naturalist but will finish out the Americorps Planning Grant process.

Americorps Grant Org Chart presented to PCC Board Members by Kami.

PCC oversees the Americorps Program but members are Americorps staff funded by grant dollars.

Grant will fund two full time roles:

- FT Americorps Program Coordinator
- FT Americorps Field Coordinator

Multiple PCC departments will be using Americorps teams via this program.

- NR Department

- EE Department
- EC Department
- Athene North Shore Rec Area at Easter Lake

PCC contributes a 20% match (\$175,000) and will get 22 Americorps members for this price.

PCC pays Conservation Corps of MN/IA for 4 people = \$170,000/annually

The Americorps Grant will be set up for a three-year period and then you can renew at year three to extend contract.

Timeline:

April 30, 2024 - Planning Grant Coordinator presentation and answering Volunteer Iowa Grant questions

May – program funding notification in first two weeks of May

June-July – the Planning Grant Coordinator will continue meeting grant reporting requirements and collaborate with PCC staff to ensure onboarding of Americorps program goes smoothly

Aug-Sept – Planning grant ends Sept 2024. Americorps Program Coordinator & Field Coordinator will be onboarded to continue working on the program (pending funding).

Oct-Dec – Recruitment begins for 2025 Americorps members

Jan 2025 – grant funds available. Coordinators begin interviews and onboarding members that start their term in Feb & March

Feb 15, 2025 – First Americorps members begin their service term and begin on-boarding process

Mar-May 2025 – Coordinators will conduct second wave of interviews and begin the on-boarding process for summer members.

Additional notes – housing considerations continue to be discussed. Currently have Speck house being used by CCMI, jut obtained Karimi property with house that could be used, have discussed a dormitory structure that could be built on a PCC property.

Who will the FT Coordinators report to and where will staff be located? The FT Coordinators will report to Rich and Kami. Locations for Americorps staff to operate out of could include JPNC or River Place or the NR Shop or space could be leased somewhere. PCC will continue to look for efficient placement of Americorps staff.

11:30 – Noon

Lunch – “Asian Cuisine”

Noon – 12:30 pm

Land Acquisition: Director Rich Leopold

PCC is not actively pursuing new land acquisition but is currently focused on existing planned land acquisitions. However, if PCC is approached about land we will consider each proposal as it is presented.

12:30 – 2:00 pm Polk County Water and Land Legacy Bond Review: Director Rich Leopold and Deputy Director Kami Rankin

This BOND planning document is updated every month with Natalie McFarlane's help. Organized by two-year timeframes (amount of time PCC has to spend Bond funds from each letting).

This document does not include revenues.

Also included in the document: Itemization of projects, ICON allocations, 6 Year Project Timeframe (2026-2032), 10 Year Project Timeframe (2022-2032), Overall Distribution of Bond Funds and tracking of \$65,000,000

Chairperson Jill Altringer Comments:

Gratitude and thanks to PCC staff for giving us access to important documents to facilitate Board Member education. I appreciate hearing PCC leadership giving credit where credit is due.

Pre-Board Meeting Workshop Discussion: proposed to be scheduled for 5:00 PM on Board Meeting Wednesdays

There are certain topics that need/take more discussion:

Ex: Brenton Slough

Feedback:

- Pam likes idea of having extra time before Board Meeting to become more educated and respect staff time more and get aligned with Chairperson on discussion points.
- Ryan echoes Pam's sentiments.
- Board meetings will be more cohesive and streamlined as a result.
- Lewis sees suggestion as calling a "special meeting" because it's not advertised as a public meeting but is a gathering of more than three Board members. Proposes that due to "special meeting" status the discussion can only be on one topic.
- Paula asked for clarification on Jill's proposal for having an occasional pre-meeting workshop before PCC Board meetings:
 - **Workshop** – half hour, starts at 5:00 PM - established agenda, no action, discussion only, topic not being voted on in current month's meeting, not a public meeting
 - **Board Meeting** – established agenda, action taken, public meeting
 - **Closed Session** – closed to public, no action taken, discussion only

Polk County Conservation

2024 Strategic Plan

3-1-24 Discussion Notes

Goal 1: Top Quality Regional Parks and Facilities for All

Objective 1: Improve and expand paved recreational trails and link to the regional trail system

What have we done since 2020?

- Relocation and new tunnel of Great Western Trail with West Des Moines
 - West Des Moines paid for everything and completed project
- Trestle-to-Trestle Bridge with Johnston, MPO, Des Moines, and Polk County
 - 2.2 Mil project – insurmountable struggles with FEMA – PCC did ourselves with partners
- Addition of shared Trail & Roadside Biologist with Polk County Public Works
 - No established IRVM program until we hired this person

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Broadway trail construction including bio cells, and water quality practices
 - Goes from east side Gay Lea Wilson to Bridgestone Firestone plant
 - Constructed right now – completed in 2026 – Public Works will complete then deed over to PCC
- Connection of Broadway Trail to Neal Smith Trail; planning and possible grant writing
 - By end of 2026 a plan will be formulated regarding timing and beginning project
- Polk City spur to High Trestle Trail
 - 3 farmers aligned with development and land acquisition plans– in discussions regarding timeline and funding with Polk City – Polk City committed to funding balance of anything over appraised value for land acquisition
- Planning for Grimes, Granger, Johnston, and Jester Park connections (Esker Trail)
 - Project gaining momentum – Brenton Slough will serve as the defining greenway between Granger, Grimes, and Johnston – Esker Trail will be part of the development plan with Brenton Slough acquisition
- Repair/re-pave Great Western Trail (in possible partnership with Warren County)
 - DSM Airport delaying plans to build new runway that would affect trail, so PCC/Warren County pursuing grants in tandem to fix GWT together – PCC has \$500,000 allocated to fix our part of GWT if DOT grant funding doesn't materialize
- Possible planning on recreational trail connection from Mitchellville

- Jasper County has done a trail that goes over to Prairie City and will go to Mitchellville – PCC in discussions to continue the trail to Altoona or Thomas Mitchell Park – plan to be formulated by end of 2026 – seeking partnership with Altoona

Objective 2: Develop and expand diverse trails – soft surface nature trails, ski trails, interpretive trails, equestrian trails, etc.

What have we done since 2020?

- Environmental education unit taking over Jester Park Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center and handling cross-country skiing and snowshoe rentals
 - Environmental Education team runs ORWC
- Volunteers from the Des Moines Nordic Ski Club grooming ski trails
 - Ski Club members use PCC equipment to groom the trails
- Temporary signage created in Winter 21/22 for the ski trail system
- Soft trails committee established; formulating priorities; Polk County Water and Land Legacy (PCWLL) budget allocation
 - Polk County declined creation of Trails Coordinator role for PCC
 - Hired consultant Pete Englund to assess trails and propose changes to make trails more sustainable and reduce damage to parks: assists with National Trails Day project
 - Goal is to be proactive vs reactive to trail conditions and maintenance
 - Residents always have hiking and trails at the top of their priority list when asked about desired amenities in the community
- Green Iowa AmeriCorps Trail Crew and Conservation Corps MN/IA work at Yellow Banks Park
 - Pond has been connected to trail – trail is much improved
- Sent PCC Volunteer Coordinators to national training in Atlanta, GA
 - Melissa Dempsey & Julie Perreault received training to become certified and advise the Soft Trails Committee – goal is to help provide guidance with prioritization of funds for Trails – split focus between areas of specialty (trail maintenance, trail planning, trail construction, wildlife monitoring, seed collection, volunteer events, etc.)

What do we have left to do before 2026

- Four Mile Mountain Bike Park
 - Bid approval will be on March 2024 PCC Board Meeting Agenda
 - Construction planned for April 2024 and done by Fall 2024
- Planning for possible trail re-routes and improvements at Jester Park, Fort Des Moines Park, and Brown's Woods
 - Soft Trails Committee focusing on this

Objective 3: Maintain and upgrade Jester Park

What have we done since 2020?

- Archeology Display in lower level of Nature Center

- Raptor Mews by Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center (2 resident owls)
- Annual rotating art exhibits were established at the Nature Center
- Restroom and Showerhouse facilities at Camp Area 4
- New picnic shelters at Picnic Shelter 2 & 6
- Axe throwing range in Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center (reserved/scheduled times for this activity)
- Second added boat launch to Jester Park Discovery Pond to improve accessibility and safety
- Campground electrical upgrades and paving
- New sanitary dump station for campers

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Sensory trail around the streamscape of the Jester Park Nature Center
- Zero entry pool at end of streamscape at Jester Park Nature Center
- Bathroom renovation at Jester Park Nature Center to include adult changing table, de-escalation space, lactation room
- New entry kiosk at JPNC – done by end of 2026
- Addition of third climbing wall within the Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center

Objective 4: Preserve and expand utilization of Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

What have we done since 2020?

- Continued to acquire land to piece together a more usable, cohesive land corridor (purchases include Crane Meadows and Jack Bailey properties)

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Chichaqua Master Plan: Vision/Goals, Plan Development, and Direction – Cassie Cook and James Dotzler collaborating on the master plan
- Chichaqua Master Plan elements that will be accomplished in the near term include expansion of campground area, Nature Playscape w/water feature, Jack Pine Trail restoration and expansion, mini shelter installation, new boat launch, and new campground
 - Main campground – add more sites
 - Rendezvous area (west of main campground) – turn into primitive/popup/van camping area with around ten sites
 - Add one buddy RV campsite in main campground
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Land Use Management Plan – Cassie Cook and Amanda Brown collaborating on this
- All of these plans are priority and designated staff have been assigned to each priority
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt/Thomas Mitchell/Easter Lake North Shore are all on project timelines and some will be completed before 2026 – expect to have some of these project elements come before the Board at 2024-2025 monthly Board meetings

- Staff embrace the challenge of many of these projects and the Bond funding creates a cycle/pattern of internal work flows that staff manage
- Next Bond letting in June 2024 and have two years to spend funds
- What's the difference between a Master plan and Land Use Management Plan? A Master Plan addresses how the public will use the property – what infrastructure is needed, determining use patterns, etc. A Land Use Management plan addresses the environmental impact of land use, impact to water, and impact to wildlife.

Objective 5: Acquire additional PCC land

What have we done since 2020?

- Land Acquisition Committee formed
- Acquired:
 - Crane Meadows (Chichaqua)
 - Fourmile Greenway buyouts with City of DSM (approx. 300 properties)
 - Sleepy Hollow Sports Park
 - Meeks Property (Fourmile Greenway)
 - Lockard Property (Chichaqua Valley Trail)
 - Bailey Property (Chichaqua)
 - Deaton (Fourmile Greenway)
 - Ziel property (Alleman)
 - Harding & Karimi (Army Compatible Use Buffer, Johnston)

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Land Acquisition Policy: Goals, Comprehensive Land Inventory, Report with Options, and Direction
- Trail Properties connecting Polk City to High Trestle Trail
- Brenton Slough – March 13, 5pm
- Pleasant Hill properties (4)
- Ape Cognition and Conservation Initiative
 - They have hired staff and established a budget
 - Still want to do a land transfer to PCC
 - PCC has asked for their strategic plan/right of first refusal on whole property
 - Lake is dry and will probably stay as a sand bottom area
 - Fencing plans have changed since they have a secondary containment plan
- North of Sleepy Hollow Sports Park
 - Getting appraisals currently
- Lehs property (Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt)
- Former Kimberly Properties (Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt, currently held by Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation)
 - Waiting on angel donor (from Michigan) estate mediation to play out but PCC is hopeful
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt / Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation Commitments

Objective 6: Expand and upgrade PCC camping and picnicking facilities

What have we done since 2020?

- Yellow Banks Park: moved all campsites to reservable, new campground, shower house, tent camping areas, Oakview Pond Boardwalk, and electric and pad upgrades to existing campsites, implementation of QR codes at campsites
- Trails End Mitigation Bank, Phase 1

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Thomas Mitchell Park – moved all campsites to all reservable, implementation of QR codes at campsites, new playground equipment, septic system upgrades will bring a new dump station and additional camping, sewage lagoon will be removed, new Nature Playscape by campground, new shelter by pond, new accessible kayak/canoe launch, new showerhouse at current campground, current youth campground converted into a group campground, create new youth campground south of DeVotie Drive, new primitive campground at hold home site south of DeVotie Drive, new showerhouse south of DeVotie Drive, possible pond improvements, etc.
 - Rangers and Campground hosts available to help guests without phones/computers
- Athene Easter Lake North Shore project opening
 - May 2nd 2:00PM – dignitaries, donors, and media
 - May 5th 10:00AM – 4:00PM - public
- Easter Lake South shore project to include: 2 new sets of playground equipment, renovated picnic shelters, new bathroom facilities, repair of bridge, viewscape improvement of entrance area, trail connection to Easter Lake Drive, new signage
 - A public marina at Easter Lake has been proposed by several sources but considerations include space limitations, traffic flow on lake, insurance coverage, revenue projections vs usage patterns
- Easter Lake public art installation of five exhibits
 - PCC's public art committee provides guidance on art installations
- Lauridsen Skatepark parking area and associated amenities project
- Two Rivers Park adoption from partnership of MidAmerican Energy, Polk County and the City of Des Moines
- Yellow Banks Park entrance interpretive exhibit
 - Funded with minor bond dollars and a grant secured by EE staff

Objective 7: Develop and expand water trails and public access within Polk County

What have we done since 2020?

- Fourmile Creek Access at Malley's Park
- Water Trail Video Project using drones
- ICON water trails crew work along Fourmile Greenway

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- ICON Water Trail Plan/Development: Goals/Outcomes, Report with Options, Direction, and Actions

- PCC partnering with ICON on operational and logistical considerations
- Water Trails Access on Raccoon River off Fleur Avenue (with ICON as Project Lead)
 - Adam Fendrick overseeing
 - Construction will occur in 2025, and area will come under PCC's oversight in 2026
 - \$27,000,000 project = \$2 million land acquisition (30+ acres) + \$25,000,000 for in-water improvements: remove low-head dam, install water features such as flash boards to increase water levels for Des Moines Water Works and create fish habitats to encourage local fishing
 - Projected use patterns were originally over-inflated but spurred discussions on appropriate infrastructure for the area
- Water Trails Access on Raccoon River north of Brown's Woods along 63rd St (with West Des Moines)
 - + or - 10 acres
 - Boat ramp and parking area
 - WDSM will do all project management/construction/development and then hand over location to PCC for future management
 - Done by end of 2025
- Establish ongoing water monitoring within PCC and ICON
 - Suggestion was made to have U of I State Hygienic Laboratory get involved with ICON operations to consult on water monitoring practices (James Luzier). Since PCC is already conducting a robust water monitoring program in Polk County logic dictates an ongoing water monitoring partnership between PCC and ICON should be established and maintained.
 - Christine Curry with Izaak Walton League was also suggested as a potential water monitoring resource – she currently serves on the PCC Community Advisory Committee
- ICON Art Piece at Lauridsen Skatepark
 - \$100,000 art piece paid for with National Endowment for Public Art Grant
- Fourmile accesses at Fourmile Community Center and Sleepy Hollow Park
 - PCC will use \$5,000,000 from Bond for bathrooms, trail development, further incorporation with Water Trails
 - Water Trails logistics/operational needs will continue to evolve as ICON projects come to completion.

OTHER COMMENTS:

The ICON location at Center Street (by the Women of Achievement Bridge) will be a feature-rich site that is incredibly expensive and complex. Management, construction, infrastructure, and use-pattern needs all still need to be worked through to figure out the finer details.

The US Army Corps of Engineers will be involved with the Center Street ICON project due to Birdland Marina water levels needing to be maintained. They have not participated in shoreline discussions yet, however.

There is a proposal to do a zipline over the water features for ICON but no decisive plans on where Point A and Point B will be.

Challenges at many of the sites PCC will manage will include homeless population management, staffing logistics, etc.

Objective 8: Expand and upgrade PCC play equipment and park venues (all of these items have been covered under separate objective headings)

Objective 9: Develop new PCC parks and park venues (all of these items have been covered under separate objective headings)

Objective 10: Maintain and upgrade Jester Park Equestrian Center

What have we done since 2020?

- New roof on EC arena
- New offices
- Heating of EC arena
- New lighting, sound systems, and ventilation for arena

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Parking area and stormwater drainage improvement
- Brandon Lay Challenge Trail – dedication scheduled for Sept 2024

Objective 11: Secure funding for future PCC park development and upgrades. Develop funding mechanisms through local organizations and agencies.

PCC has on-going discussions with Polk County Budgetary Staff to oversee Bond dollars. PCC has expectations of leveraging Bond funds to create around \$130,000,000 in spending from the \$65,000,000 Bond.

What have we done since 2020?

- Polk County Water and Land Legacy bond; \$65M over 10 years, passed by 81.3%
- Establishment of Polk County Enterprise Fund for Sleepy Hollow Sports Park
 - Self-sustaining business enterprise
 - Phase 1 = lose money, Phase 2 = break even, Phase 3 = make money
 - PCC will end up paying Polk County around \$5-7 million for loaned funds before profits can be recorded for Sleepy Hollow
 - Once profits are being generated, allocations will be negotiated with Polk County for how those profits will be divided up.
- Trails End Mitigation Bank Phase 1
 - Revenue sources:
 - \$3,000,000 from DOT from dirt sales
 - \$500,000 from Altoona – sewer line credits and settlement funds

- Mitigation Bank credit sales – once permitted, PCC can sell 15% annually until all credits are sold. Forecasted revenue projections are being formulated currently.
 - Mitigation banks enable PCC to rehabilitate land quickly versus trying to use other funding resources to improve the land over several years.
- Sandy Creek LLC partnership on Trails End Mitigation Bank Phase 2 and Alleman site mitigation bank
 - PCC will get money back for all acquisition costs of land and permitting processes PCC has completed so far (\$200,000/annually for first three years)
 - PCC will get 13% of revenue from the beginning of credit sales
 - Mitigation Bank Phase 1 & 2 – 10% of credit sale total goes into a bank to be paid to PCC (managing entity) after all credits are sold (like an endowment)
- Athene Easter Lake North Shore partnership with Great Outdoors Foundation
 - \$8,100,000 fundraised
 - Devon Boes hired by GOF to oversee Adaptive Programming
 - Setting up business plan - scheduled to be completed in April 2024

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Private and public fundraising effort for Sleepy Hollow Sports Park
 - Feasibility Study currently underway
 - Capital Campaign plans late 2024
- Continue grant, donor, and partnership work in attempts to leverage PCWLL bond 1:1

Objective 12: Have safe, secure and healthy PCC parks and facilities

What have we done since 2020?

- Easter Lake Park automated gates
- Water quality monitoring at PCC parks and within nearby watersheds
- Created universal design principles and checklist (through Athene North Shore at Easter Lake) for all future projects
- Rangers and ranger vehicles now have cameras and rangers have bodycams
- Hiring of off-duty officers to patrol Lauridsen Skatepark. Capital upgrades included constant lighting of skatepark, installed lighting under I-235 bridge, auto-lock restroom doors, and installed additional high-resolution cameras.
- Enhanced security at Sleepy Hollow Sports Park and Fourmile Creek Greenway with new Ranger, Steve Green
 - Park Rangers keep monthly log of all incidents and will provide to PCC leadership when asked. There are areas of concern at Fort Des Moines, Easter Lake, Lauridsen Skatepark. PCC has an internal notification process for serious incidents involving Park Rangers. PCC partners with Polk County General Services to circumvent vandalism and navigate maintenance costs. Polk County provides \$200,000 annually for Lauridsen Skatepark maintenance needs. If PCC expends more, the agreement is that Polk County will pay for additional costs. Partnerships with the Sheriff's Department, Des Moines Police Department, and other groups will continue

to be priority to keep crime rates low. Enhanced camera technology is essential to enable facial recognition and license plate identification when crimes are reported. Use patterns will be monitored at Sleepy Hollow and Two Rivers Park as services evolve.

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Fort Des Moines Park and Lauridsen Skatepark automatic gates

Goal 2: High Performing Conservation Team

Objective 1: Financially sound, efficient responsive and responsible organization

What have we done since 2020?

- Adopted and institutionalized Strategic Plan
- Weathered COVID with no lay-offs, minimal impairment of services, maintaining budget, and significant visitation increase within PCC parks and trails
- Revised Employee Manual and administrative policies
- Identify and implement purchase patterns across several budget lines, to more accurately forecast budget amounts (Uniforms, Meetings Employee Training, Office Supplies)
- Update procurement policies, including contingency provisions
- Identified part-time staffing budget shortfalls and secured funding from Polk City
- Established PCC intern program
- Developed a 5-year Staffing Plan which was presented and activated with Polk County Human Resources Department
- Participated in Polk County Class and Compensation Survey Process – still no results
- Formation of several Internal staff committees including Sustainability, Land Acquisition, DEIA, Public Art, Soft Trails, Signage, etc.
- Solar power installations providing offsets of over 95% at most facilities
- Began conversion of all light duty fleet vehicles to electric by 2030
- Installation of numerous electric vehicle charging stations within system

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Construction and Maintenance Operations Shop
 - Will be built over existing CMO shop site
 - Ravine remediation will occur during construction

Objective 2: Develop and retain a top-quality workforce

What have we done since 2020?

- DEI employee interviews, surveys, and follow-up. Next steps now being implemented.
- Numerous new hires and newly created positions
- New and improved employee on-boarding procedures
- Selection of two employees every two years to receive Advanced Leadership training

- Employee survey and employee input QR code
- Implement ongoing internships to supplement workforce and promote the field with new workers

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- All full-time employees will have a Performance Plan and annual work plan
- Launch Americorps host site program which will include two full-time and twenty-two part-time Americorps employees
- Provide hiring managers with in-depth DEIA training pilot program termed “Building Bridges”

Objective 3: Up-to-date Technology

What have we done since 2020?

- Converted majority of desktop workstations to laptops with docking stations
- Webex Conversion
- Adoption of Owl technology to facilitate Zoom meetings
- Implementation of CivicRec software to enable point of sale transactions
- Upgraded desktop scanning technology to facilitate archiving of documents
- Several units using Field Maps app to map infrastructure, invasive plants, hazard trees, rare plants, etc.
- New cloud-based digital asset management system for more efficient and effective organization of images, videos, and brand assets
- Acquired and utilized drone for recon, filming, publicity, and other uses
- Use of QR codes to track program feedback, promote upcoming programs, and link to YouTube videos
- Formation of Technology Committee to identify areas of alignment, gaps, needed improvements, and ongoing training needs
- Offered internal Microsoft 365 training to PCC staff to foster improved communications and efficiencies

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Upgrade internet capacity solutions for all PCC offices

Objective 4: Develop effective partnerships

What have we done since 2020?

- Renewed PCC Art Committee, identified and allocated a budget for public art
- Developed partnerships with organizations to integrate Universal Design principals into PCC projects
- Developed partnerships with organizations for collaboration on health and mental wellness programs at the Equestrian Center
- Strengthened relationship with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service resulting in grants and cost-sharing opportunities.

- Initiated relationship with Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship resulting in grants and cost-sharing opportunities
- Trail & Roadside Biologist shared position with Polk County Public Works
- Continued to participate with the Des Moines Urban Wildlife Partnership, all Watershed Management Authorities, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and many other groups/organizations
- Began partnering with Public Works/John Swanson on wetland creation and streambank restoration
- Worked with the Veteran's Administration to allow use of the Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center for shooting sports
- Worked with Polk County Extension to host a Master Conservationist program series
- Formal MOU with SkateDSM to provide programming at Lauridsen Skatepark
- Work with Blank Park Zoo to offer a Teacher Workshop at Nature Center
- Established agreement with Des Moines Rowing for Athene North Shore at Easter Lake Programming
- Established relationships with dozens of veteran-focused and disability service agencies in preparation for Athene North Shore at Easter Lake grand opening
- Kudos to PCC staff for initiating, developing, and maintaining all of the partnerships that help PCC fulfill its mission!

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Continue identifying and fostering partnerships with service providers who can collaborate on programming/operations at Easter Lake (DART, ChildServe, etc.)
- Continue identifying and fostering partnerships with service providers who can collaborate on programming/operations at Sleepy Hollow
- Continue identifying and fostering partnerships with underserved populations for programming and outreach DEI initiatives

Objective 5: Improve community's awareness of lands, natural resources, trails, facilities, services, and programs

What have we done since 2020?

- Created and implemented campaign for Polk County Water & Land Legacy Bond with 81.3% approval
- Implementation of Community Outreach Strategic Plan: Greater focus on video production (in coordination with County Video Team) and cabin, camping, and trails videos and photos
- Spanish translation of brochures and maps
- Rotating/Remote work locations to enable better knowledge of unit work and location happenings
- Branding of Sleepy Hollow Sports Park and Athene North Shore at Easter Lake
 - Kudos to Jessica and team on the progress made between this time last year and now – fabulous job and wonderful brand identity!
- Refresh/organization of Polk County Conservation brands via comprehensive style guide

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Build up b-roll library of video (cross country skiing, snow shoeing, Timber Stand Improvements, controlled burn, fishing, paddling, etc.)
- Support openings of new or newly renovated parks facilities (Sleepy Hollow Sports Park, Fourmile Mountain Bike Park, Athene North Shore at Easter Lake).
 - Includes social media and website takeover and revamp and documenting transition and legacy story

Goal 3: Protection of Our Natural Heritage

Objective 1: Preserve, protect, and enhance Polk County natural areas

What have we done since 2020?

- Browns Woods Land Use Management Plan
- Ongoing water monitoring
- ICON water monitoring
- Restoration projects; Eagle Roost tree planting, Eagle Roost DOT tree bank & wetland project, Easter Lake turf conversion, Fourmile Greenway Phase 1 & 2 restorations, Fourmile Greenway forestry mowing, Thomas Mitchell Park brome conversion, Fort Des Moines Park prairie planting
- Multi-species inventory study completed in partnership with Dr. Keith Summerville at Drake University
- Trails End Mitigation Bank – Phase 1

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Restoration projects; Crane Meadows, Dykstra, Land, and Switchgrass restorations at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt
- Timber Stand Improvement projects – all parks
- Easter Lake North Shore savanna restoration
- Trails End Mitigation Bank – Phase 2 and Alleman Mitigation Bank outsources to Sandy Creek LLC
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt Land Use Management Plan
- Fourmile Creek Greenway ravine remediation projects
- Prairie and savanna restoration at Yellow Banks Park
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt drainage alterations to rehydrate old channels & meanders
- Fourmile Greenway Phases 3 & 4 restoration
- Watershed and Flood Prevention Operations (WFPO) streambank remediation projects (Fourmile, Little Fourmile & Camp Creeks and wetland in Fourmile Creek Greenway)
- Easter Lake Project 319 work – Timber Stand Improvement & turf conversion
- Fort Des Moines Park habitat improvement projects – State Wildlife Grant (DNR)
- Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt controlled marsh well replacement and basin-deepening
- Climate change vulnerability assessment

DISCUSSION MOVED TO BOND PLANNING DOCUMENT HERE.

Objective 2: Improve water quality and flood resilience in rivers, streams, wetlands, ponds and lake in Polk County

What have we done since 2020?

- Fourmile Greenway established & restoration has begun
- Active participation in all Watershed Management Authorities (Walnut Creek, Fourmile Creek, Beaver Creek, Raccoon River Mud / Spring / Camp Creeks) and restorations
- Support of Yeader Creek Watershed Project including restoration

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Evaluate options and determine water quality strategy for Thomas Mitchell Pond
- Implement water quality and upland water retention strategies at Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

Objective 3: Control and reduce the impacts of invasive species within Polk County natural areas

What have we done since 2020?

- Use of Field Maps app to ID infestations and track treatment
- Research plots on efficacy of treatments for Reed canary grass
- Selective treatment of high-value ash trees for Emerald Ash Borer, removal of dead/dying ash trees
- Active and responsive treatments

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Develop a Spray Calendar to help insure timely treatment of invasive plant species
- Oak wilt remediation project initiation – Browns Woods & other parks
- Integration of mapping hardware & software for chemical applications

Objective 4: Enhance communication to local leaders, private landowners and community partners

What have we done since 2020?

- Legislator meetings

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Legislator List – serve with timely communications

Goal 4: Expand outdoor experiences and opportunities for all

Objective 1: Expand wintertime programs and activities

What have we done since 2020?

- Volunteers from the Des Moines Nordic Ski Club grooming ski trails
- Temporary signage created for the ski trail system
- Increased public programming during winter months

- Installation of Indoor Axe-Throwing at Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center
- Begun construction of SnowFlex tubing hill at Sleepy Hollow

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Expansion of winter offerings at Sleepy Hollow including ski hill and lift
- Integration of accessible winter programming in partnership with Athene North Shore at Easter Lake

Objective 2: Expand new opportunities for all residents – equitable access for all

What have we done since 2020?

- Purchase of Sleepy Hollow Park
- Jester Park Sensory Trail

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Construction of universally accessible Athene North Shore Recreation Area at Easter Lake Park
- Renovated bathrooms/adult changing table/de-escalation space/lactation room at Jester Park Nature Center
- ICON Water Trails

Goal 5: Expanded conservation education

Objective 1: Expand environmental / conservation programs

What have we done since 2020?

- Programs and participation numbers rebounded post-COVID as schools begin to allow outside speakers back into the classroom and the public begins to feel safe attending group activities
- Over a dozen interpretive signs have been created for variety of parks
- In 2022 alone, over 34 new programs and seven new summer camps were created
- Working with 4-H AmeriCorps program to expand staffing opportunities

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Continue fostering partnerships across units to increase education and programming
- Begin offering more environmental education programming at Athene North Shore at Easter Lake

Objective 2: Expand outreach to Polk County diverse populations

What have we done since 2020?

- Closed captioning added to all YouTube videos for hearing-impaired
- Established “Wild Pride” program series that strives to provide a safe and affirming space in the Des Moines metro for the LGBTQ+ families (including guardians or youth)
- Creation of Moore Afterschool Nature Club

- Partnership with Veteran's Affairs of Iowa to provide space for veterans to utilize our shooting range at the Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center
- Expanded programming at Jester Park Equestrian Center for veterans, first responders, and human trafficking victims
- Began cultural diversity programming series such as Chinese New Year, Day of the Dead, Holidays Around The World, etc.

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Public programming targeted at parks in under-served communities
- Creation of Brandon Lay Challenge Trail at Jester Park Equestrian Center
- Naturalists and AmeriCorps members training on working with mentally and physically disabled students

Objective 3: Expand volunteer participation

What have we done since 2020?

- Natural resource monitoring programs
- Use of volunteers leading field trips rotations

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Equestrian Center Volunteer Program
- Begin paved recreation trails volunteer program
- Develop new stewardship group for Fourmile Mountain Bike Park
- Develop targeted approach to corporate involvement
- Develop targeted approach to bring volunteer programming to underserved communities
- Develop Fourmile Greenway steward group

Objective 4: Expand use of technology and virtual programs

What have we done since 2020?

- Implementation of CivicRec software
- Implementation of QR codes in campgrounds
- Converted more campsites to 100% reservable (Jester Park, Thomas Mitchell Park, Yellow Banks Park)
- Implementation of Water Monitoring App
- Honed virtual programming and interactive platforms, vital during the pandemic
- Created library of At-Home learning videos and materials to help caregivers with science and nature education during pandemic
- Created series of river videos to help paddlers navigate Central Iowa Rivers
- Establish a Technology Committee to reduce redundancies

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Provide programming for urban youth during off-season

Objective 5: Expand Youth Conservation Corps

What have we done since 2020?

- Youth Conservation Corps flourished during COVID as students needed to make social connections
- Expand the program by offering a summer service trip
- Integrated Silver Chord service nights to create networking and recruitment opportunities
- Developed more robust recruitment effort by going to numerous high school and college career fairs

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Provide programming for urban youth during off-season

Objective 6: Expand outreach to wellness and fitness connections

What have we done since 2020?

- Established partnership with Unity Point to aid in marketing and financial support
- Expand recreation opportunities at the Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center

What do we have left to do before 2026?

- Offer creative and innovative programming
- Addition of third climbing wall at Outdoor Recreation and Wellness Center

PARKING LOT ITEMS:

Explanation to Board Members on what AmeriCorps does for PCC vs what Conservation Corps MN/IA does for PCC

Water Trails \$\$\$

More sophisticated surveys/understandings of demographics

Discussion: Youth Corps program suggestion – institute a program that follows participants over a 5-year timeframe to see if Youth Corps experience helps propel participants forward in a positive way. Board members interested in development of Youth Corps program, expansive reach, demographic reach. The PCC DEIA committee looks at demographic representation within PCC's parks, hiring practices, survey methods, and outreach opportunities. PCC is always looking to enhance ways of collecting demographic data (more sophisticated survey platform, engaging with local underserved populations).