



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

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## BOARD AGENDA REQUEST FORM

**PROPOSED FOR BOARD MEETING OF:** 1/09/2024

**DEPARTMENT:** Parks

**PREPARED BY:** Jaymes MacDonald

**SUBJECT:** 5-year strategic plan adoption and public hearing

**SPECIFIC ACTION REQUESTED:**

To hold a public hearing at the January 16, 2024 and to adopt the 2024-2028 Parks & Recreation Five-Year Plan as per required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTION/BACKGROUND (dollar amount, purpose):**

The Parks & Recreation Commission is required to have an approved Five-Year Plan registered with the Michigan DNR to be eligible for grant programs. Additionally, the Parks Department utilizes this document to guide decision making and project prioritization over a five-year period.

**FUNDING SOURCE IF REQUIRED (Federal, State, or Local):**

N/A

**PERSONNEL IF REQUIRED:**

(indicate if elimination or creation and list FTE; job title; grade; full-time salary range; account number)

N/A

**NEW OR RENEWAL:**

**PROCUREMENT INFORMATION:**

(indicate if the contract was bid out, if not, state reason(s) why; indicate last time contract was bid out; indicate if awarded bidder was the lowest bidder, if not, indicate why)

**CONTACT PERSON WITH PHONE NUMBER:**

Jaymes MacDonald 269-718-8034

**RECOMMENDATION** - Completed by Administrative Team

**COUNTY OF ST. JOSEPH**  
**PARKS AND RECREATION 5-YEAR PLAN ADOPTION**  
**RESOLUTION \_\_\_\_\_**

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Commissioners of St. Joseph County has undertaken a Five-year Parks and Recreation Strategic Plan, which describes the physical features, existing recreation facilities, and the desired actions to be taken to improve and maintain recreation facilities for the period of 2024 through 2028; and

**WHEREAS**, a public hearing and comment session was held January 16, 2024, at the St. Joseph County Courthouse to provide an opportunity for citizens to express opinions, ask questions, and discuss all aspects of the Recreation Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the Board of Commissioners of St. Joseph County has developed the plan for the benefit of the entire community and to adopt the plan as a document to assist in meeting the recreation needs of the community; and

**WHEREAS**, after the public hearing, the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners voted to adopt said Recreation Plan.

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners hereby adopts the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Plan as a guideline for improving recreation for residents of the County of St. Joseph.

STATE OF MICHIGAN }

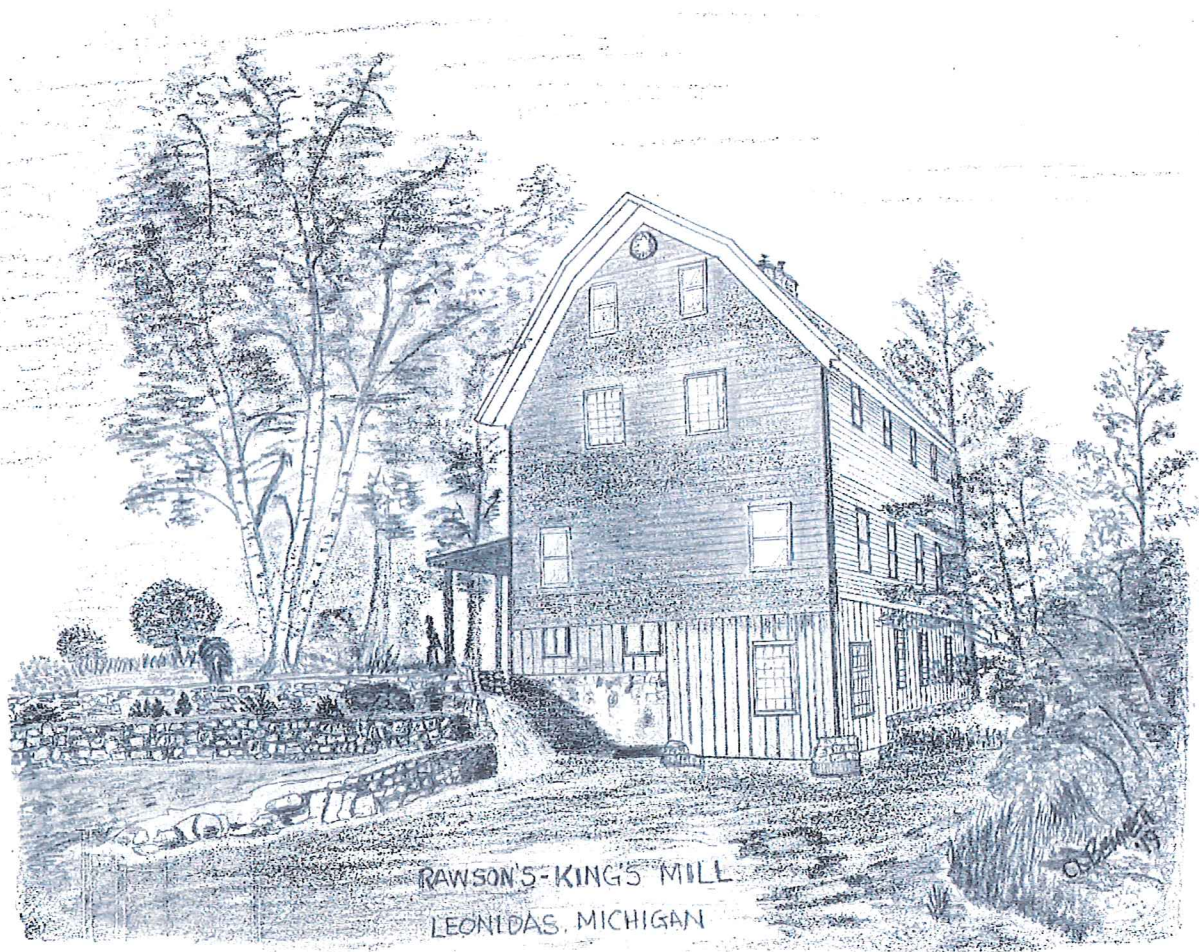
} SS

COUNTY OF ST. JOSEPH }

I, LINDSAY OSWALD, Clerk of the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners and Clerk of the County of St. Joseph, do hereby certify that the above Resolution was duly adopted by said Board on January 16, 2024.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of said County and Circuit Court at Centreville, Michigan, this 16<sup>th</sup> day of January 2024.

Lindsay Oswald, Clerk



# Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan 2024-2028

Prepared by the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission

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## **Acknowledgements**

The 2024 – 2028 St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan was the cooperative effort of the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission, the Director and staff of St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation as well as individual citizens and groups who contributed to the planning process.

### **2023 St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners**

Ken Malone, Chairman

Jared Hoffmaster, Vice Chairman

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Terrance Conklin

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### **St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission**

Jeffrey Knautz, President

Jeff Wenzel, Vice-President

Rodney Chupp

John Dobberteen

Steve Houts

Ken Malone

Rick Shaffer

Steve Zarza

### **St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Staff**

Jaymes D MacDonald, Director

Mark Harter, Lead Ranger

Tonya Barrington, Administrative Assistant

Steve Apwisch, Park Ranger

Lee Clift, Park Ranger

## Introduction

The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission was established in 1969 and provides natural resource-centered, regional parks managed by St. Joseph County government. Today, St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation takes pride in providing passive parks and recreation opportunities amid the unique natural settings of St. Joseph County, Michigan. Our parks and water access sites offer a vast array of recreational opportunities such as camping, boating, canoeing, swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, nature study, wildlife viewing, disc golf, mountain biking, picnicking, pickleball, snow tubing and more.

Many of the County's active recreation needs, such as sports and athletics, are currently met by the cities, villages and school systems. These entities are unable to satisfy the growing recreation needs that require expansive natural settings, or to operate parks that protect our valuable natural resources.

The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan identifies essential issues, defines the County's role and establishes goals and objectives for the St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Commission. The purpose of the 2024-2028 Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan is to provide a logical framework for guiding decisions concerning park and recreation facilities as well as public open space and natural areas.

The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission has developed this plan to be a working document that advances improvements and additions to the recreation facilities available to St. Joseph County residents and visitors.

*The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission strives to offer beautiful, natural parks for the residents, visitors and wildlife of St. Joseph County. Our goal is to provide visitors with the best recreation experience possible, in parks that capitalize on and protect our County's unique natural resources.*

## **Chapter 1: Community Description**

The 2024-2028 St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan focuses on the future goals and development plans for properties and facilities administered by the Parks and Recreation Commission. As a county parks and recreation agency, the priorities of the Commission are related to the development of natural resource and outdoor recreation-based opportunities and facilities for county residents and visitors alike.

St. Joseph County is located within the southern part of the Lower Peninsula, bordered on the south by Indiana and traversed by US-12 and US-131. The county is 521 square miles in size, the 12th smallest in the state, and is located roughly halfway between Chicago and Detroit metropolitan areas. Over two-thirds of the land is designated as agriculture, almost equally divided between crops and livestock. Manufacturing activities historically included a wide range of products including milk, furniture and fixtures, paper products, plastics, fabricated metals, metal-working machinery and auto-related products. A wide range of outdoor recreation opportunities are available within St. Joseph County.

St. Joseph County's natural resources provide residents with abundant outdoor recreation and natural areas. There are more navigable waterways in St. Joseph County than any other county in Michigan, and many canoeists and kayakers are attracted to these meandering corridors. Hunting, trapping and fishing are still very popular pursuits of many residents, and various conservation clubs and organizations are well supported. More than 17 square miles of lakes dot St. Joseph County's landscape. Four lakes are larger than 400 acres, with the largest reaching 830 acres. The water quality of streams, rivers and lakes is good, and some biodiversity of flora and fauna remains in woodlands, wetlands and remnant prairies.

St. Joseph County is a rural county with an agricultural history that, still today, produces a very diverse variety of food products. An abundant supply of groundwater supports a crop irrigation infrastructure that is larger than that of any other county east of the Mississippi River. The combination of modern irrigation and well-drained soils has attracted several large agricultural companies to develop an economically vital and thriving farming community. The Village of Constantine and surrounding area

has become known as the “Seed Corn Capital of the World.” The county also is home to a relatively large Amish community, which attracts travelers from around the Midwest.

The U.S. Census estimated the County’s 2020 population to be 60,939, representing a small decrease of 356 people since the 2010 census. The two largest cities are Sturgis (pop. 11,082) and Three Rivers (pop. 7,973). The villages of Burr Oak, Centreville (the county seat), Colon, Constantine, Mendon and White Pigeon have a combined population of 7,817. Roughly 44 percent of the county’s population lives “in town,” while the remaining 56 percent of residents are scattered amid rolling farmlands, wooded hills, and along streams, rivers and lakeshores.

St. Joseph County is divided into 16 townships, each with taxing authority and a Board of Supervisors. Two of the townships provide parks and recreation resources, including White Pigeon Township, which teams up with the school district and the Village of White Pigeon to provide a variety of programs and facilities. Colon Township owns and operates Palmer Lake Beach, after the lease agreement with the County was terminated in 2011.

The focus of the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission and this five-year plan is to provide natural resource-based recreation opportunities, and support historically or culturally significant lands and facilities. Traditional athletic recreational pursuits of residents are supported by city and village recreation departments as well as local school districts.

The acquisition of additional parklands is a goal of this recreation plan, although most of the objectives and tasks identified in this plan are related to the improvement and development of St. Joseph County’s existing parks and facilities. The past efforts and support of residents, elected officials, employees and the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission have created an excellent foundation of recreational resources to develop and improve upon.

## Chapter 2: Administrative Structure

St. Joseph County is divided by population into seven districts that are each represented by an elected County Commissioner. The County Board of Commissioners is responsible for providing statutory, constitutional and non-mandated services within the context of fiscal responsibility and public trust. The County Administrator/Controller works closely with the County Board of Commissioners and is responsible for the oversight and administration of County business, including the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Department (SJCPR).

In April of 1969, the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners created by resolution, as amended in 1998, the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission in accordance with Act 261 of Public Acts of 1965. The Parks and Recreation Commission has up to ten members that serve three-year terms. The Commission includes a representative from the County Road Commission, the Planning Commission and the County Drain Commissioner. The remaining seven members are appointed by the County Board of Commissioners, and not less than one and not more than three of whom shall be members of the Board of Commissioners. The Parks and Recreation Commission meets monthly on the first Wednesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. at the Michigan State University Extension Office in Centreville. The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission is responsible for:

- Identification and planning of recreation, open space, and conservation needs in St. Joseph County.
- Setting park policies, fees, and procedures.
- The acquisition and management of real and personal property as authorized by the Board of Commissioners.
- Setting rules and regulations governing the use of parks and recreation sites and facilities as authorized by the Board of Commissioners.
- Submitting to the Board of Commissioners fiscal recommendations including general operation and capital improvement budget allocations.

SJCPR works closely with several boards and organizations that offer important input in areas of specific interest. These include the St. Joseph County Road Commission, St. Joseph County Sheriff's

Department, St. Joseph County MSU Extension, St. Joseph County Land Resource Center, the Finance Department, the Natural Resources Conservation Service and many others. Other departments of St. Joseph County's government are involved with or otherwise handle park and recreation payroll, finance, computer technology, and occasional purchasing. The governmental departments and local organizations of St. Joseph County operate with a cooperative attitude.

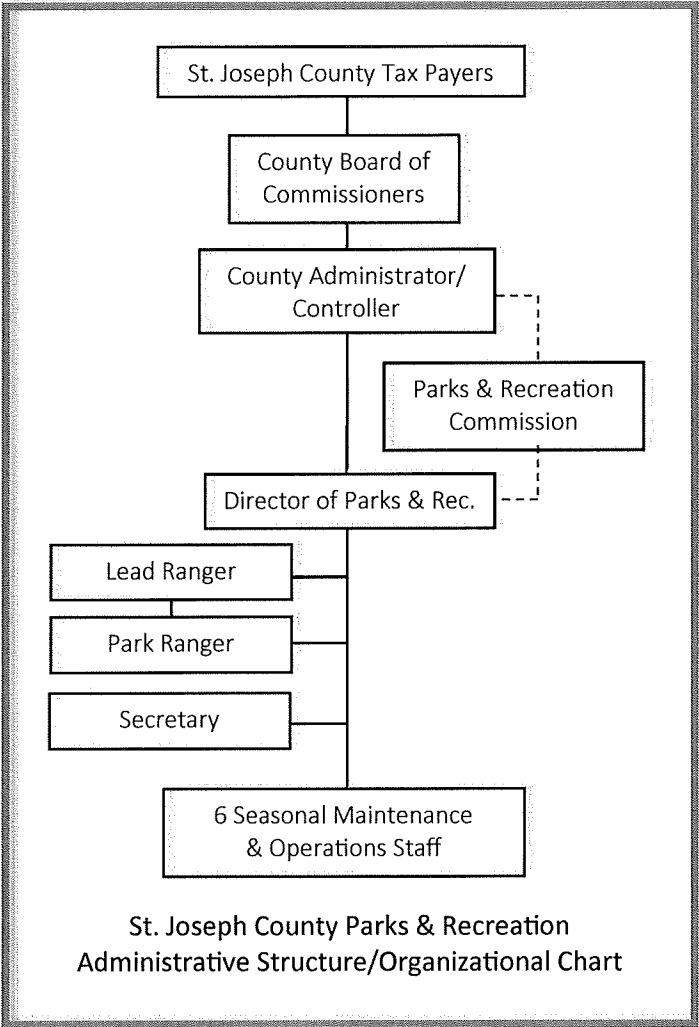
### **Parks and Recreation Personnel**

The SJ CPR Director works closely with the Parks and Recreation Commission, the County Administrator and the County Board of Commissioners. The Director is responsible for managing personnel, park maintenance, park planning, capital improvements, the park and recreation budget, special events and other park related duties. Michigan State University Extension shares a secretarial position with the Parks and Recreation Department. This position is responsible for completing administrative duties that include recording and submitting bills, handling facility reservations, data entry, desktop publishing and day to day administrative duties.

The Lead Ranger is an extension of the SJ CPR Director, assisting with management of seasonal personnel and park maintenance. The Park Rangers (8-month positions) assist with day-to-day park maintenance duties. Ranger duties include mowing, litter and refuse removal, cleaning restrooms, tree maintenance, maintaining vehicles and equipment, trail maintenance, snow removal, operating and maintaining snow tubing facilities, constructing and/or repairing buildings and structures in parks, and other park related maintenance duties. The department hires several seasonal maintenance staff during the summer to assist with grounds maintenance.

### **Funding for Parks and Recreation**

Prior to 2019, funding for SJ CPR was provided through appropriations made by the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners, as well as revenues generated from camping fees, rental fees, park entrance fees, as well as donations from park users, local businesses, and community organizations. However, the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners in late 2017 voted to levy a parks and recreations millage of .25 mil on property owners, generating approximately \$500,000 annually. The millage must be renewed every four years and was renewed in 2022.



## **Projected Annual Funding**

Funding for SJ CPR in St. Joseph County saw a brief uptick from 2015-2017, as the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners made a concerted effort to invest into natural resource-based recreation opportunities. Fortunately for SJ CPR, funding for the department will stay consistent for at least the next 4 years. Because of an increase in revenue generated from services provided to the public, SJ CPR has an opportunity to build a healthy fund balance. Nevertheless, capital improvement allocations would vary depending on scheduled projects and availability of supporting grant funds.

All departments within the county government have been affected by diminishing state revenue sharing, and reduced reserve fund balances. St. Joseph County has made efforts over the past several years to control expenses as well as pursue outside funding sources. Due to conservative fiscal management, St. Joseph County is still able and interested in pursuing land acquisition and park development projects. It is the desire of the Parks and Recreation Commission that significant capital development and improvement projects for parks and recreation facilities be pursued so that local funds can be leveraged for matching grants from outside organizations and agencies. It is the intention of the Parks and Recreation Commission to apply for state, federal and private funding assistance for significant projects identified in and supported by the Parks and Recreation Five-Year Plan.

## **Volunteers and Partnerships**

The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission benefits from working relationships it has with public and private community organizations. Many projects and tasks within the county parks are supported by assistance from persons passionate about their respective interests, ranging from disc golf to hiking to mountain biking to pickleball.

In 2012, Fabius Township and the City of Three Rivers established the River Country Recreational Authority to facilitate the development of recreational assets, particularly multiuse recreational trails in the area. The Authority has a five-member board with two persons from both the township and city, and one person appointed by the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission. The County's Director of Parks and Recreation has served on the board since its inception.

SJCPR also has an active partnership with the county's Soil and Water Conservation District to enhance and develop canoeing and kayaking infrastructure on the many streams and rivers throughout the county. It is the goal of this partnership to develop multiple put-in and take-out locations each year for the next several years, in cooperation with public and private land-owners and the county Road Commission. Since 2015, St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation has installed many canoe/kayak launches across the county, highlighting the rivers and streams within the county while stimulating economic activity.

In 2018, SJCPR partnered with the City of Sturgis to construct an 18-hole disc golf course at Cade Lake County Park. The City of Sturgis raised the funds, with SJCPR providing the labor. "Deadwood" hosted a PDGA-sanctioned event in 2019. SJCPR has also assisted the City of Three Rivers with a variety of projects, including the construction of a disc golf course within Armstrong Park.

SJCPR also partnered with Southwest Michigan Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA) to construct an 8.3-mile, single-track mountain bike course at Meyer Broadway County Park. The two organizations also constructed a "kids loop" and a "skills loop" for riders to learn or hone skillsets. Warnaar Trail has become a regional draw and is rated as one of the top mountain bike trails in Michigan.

SJCPR also assists county departments and local municipalities with parks and recreation related projects. It is an ongoing effort of SJCPR to assist and/or partner with any group needing expertise in the parks and recreation field.

### **Chapter 3: Recreation Inventory**

This inventory includes detailed information on parks owned or maintained by the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission. Additional information is included about facilities owned and operated by other public and private entities to illustrate what recreation facilities and opportunities are available to county residents. The inventory of other parks and facilities was compiled based on surveys sent to municipal and private recreation service providers.

#### **St. Joseph County Parks**

SJCPR maintains 10 parks and 17 river access points, managing a total parkland area of over 600 acres. Parks range from small river access points to large regional recreation areas with hiking, camping, disc golf, mountain biking, pickleball and swimming. Nine of the parks are located on lakes or streams, and three provide lakefront recreational opportunities. The focus of SJCPR is to provide passive recreation opportunities in natural settings.

#### **Cade Lake County Park**

Cade Lake County Park and Campground was added to the County's park system in 2002. It is a regional park located two miles east of Sturgis, south of U.S. Hwy. 12, on Plumb School Road. The 97-acre park is located in Fawn River Township on the west shore of 32-acre Cade Lake. The 2000-2005 St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Master Plan identified a lack of park facilities to serve residents in the southeast quadrant of the county. In May 2002, the Board of Commissioners purchased the site, which had previously been a private campground. Design and renovation proposals were solicited from professional engineering companies. In November 2002, Landscape Architects and Planners, Inc. was contracted to provide design, engineering and construction management services for the renovation and development of the facility. Because many of the previous campers had been staying on a seasonal or year-round basis, significant site clean-up was performed. Construction of the new facility was completed, and the park opened in July 2004.

In 2014, significant improvements continued with the addition of accessible boardwalks, trail construction, beach expansion, parking lot expansion/improvement, and general site improvement. In 2017, St. Joseph County invested close to \$500,000 to add water and sewer to

the 44 electric campsites. This project included the construction of a new wellhouse. In 2018, SJCPD remodeled the camp office, constructed a new bridge, added crushed limestone paths to the lake, boat docks and fishing piers, then partnered with the City of Sturgis to construct an 18-hole disc golf course. Today, Cade Lake provides an attractive and accessible park featuring a variety of recreational opportunities. In 2010, the county purchased 45 additional acres of natural area immediately south of the park with assistance from a DNR Trust Fund Acquisition grant. Most of the facilities and park areas meet accessibility guidelines.

**Facility Summary:**

- 97 acres
- 62 campsites
- (44 full hook-up, 18 primitive, 5 accessible)
- Cabin
- Water hydrants
- Accessible restrooms and showers
- 150-foot swimming beach
- Hiking trails
- Boat piers
- Fishing piers
- Sand volleyball, basketball, tetherball
- 18-hole disc golf course
- Kayak/canoe rentals
- Picnic tables
- Playground
- Picnic shelter
- Barbecue grills
- Fire rings

**Meyer Broadway County Park**

This 164-acre regional park is at the corner of Broadway and Roberts Road, one mile west of Three Rivers in Fabius Township. The park is leased from Waste Management Inc., the operator of Westside Landfill located south of the park. The lease was renewed in 2022 and is for a 20-year term expiring in 2042.

Significant improvements were completed at Meyer Broadway Park in 2003 with funding assistance provided through a \$230,800 Clean Michigan Initiative Grant awarded through the DNR. With a local match of \$160,525, the total project cost was \$391,325. The park improvement project included the following scope items: modern restrooms, picnic pavilion, gravel road and parking, paved access road, playground equipment, a 10-foot wide paved half-mile trail, landscaping, sand volleyball court and site furnishings. All improvements were developed to meet accessibility guidelines. All scope items are in excellent condition and are well-maintained. All improvements

made to this park meet accessibility guidelines. The county purchased an 11-acre parcel contiguous to and surrounded by the park on Roberts Rd in 2009.

In 2015, SJCPR added a five-acre dog park to the property. This park feature includes a one-acre area for dogs under 25 pounds and water spigots. Gravel parking areas were improved to pavement as well in 2015.

In 2008, 18 additional disc golf holes were added to the northern portion of the park, as a means of creating a more tournament-ready property, giving the property two championship courses. The park hosted the 2008 Professional Disc Golf Association (PDGA) World Championships and hosted the event again in 2015. Prior to the 2015 World Championships, SJCPR added three new holes and installed 54 concrete tee pads to the courses. Because both 18-hole courses are in the top-100 world ranking, many PDGA-sanctioned tournaments take place at Meyer Broadway throughout the summer and fall. SJCPR recently added an 18-hole “mini” course for beginners.

In July 2018, construction of a seven-mile mountain bike trail commenced on the property. SJCPR partnered with Southwest Michigan Mountain Bike Association (SWMMBA) on this project. An additional 1.3 miles was added in 2022 as well as a “kids loop” and a “skills loop.” SJCPR assists Pedal Bike and SWMMBA with an annual endurance race at the park, an event that brings hundreds of people to the area.

SJCPR has also partnered with the City of Three Rivers to create a paved trail from Beacon Health & Fitness to Meyer Broadway County Park. This project was in the works for over 10 years and recently completed in 2022. The City of Three Rivers oversaw the project, which received funding from both MDOT, the DNR, and local fundraising.

In the fall of 2023, two pickleball courts were constructed as a means of capturing the local excitement surrounding the sport. SJCPR anticipates the pickleball following in St. Joseph County and surrounding areas will continue to grow.

Other facilities available at Meyer Broadway County Park include approximately six miles of hiking trails, groomed cross country ski trails, two snow-tubing hills, two pavilions and paved roadways and parking areas. Some of the facilities in the original park area meet accessibility guidelines.

The park and facilities are in excellent condition and are well maintained. The majority of the park remains in an undeveloped state. The park fauna consists of approximately 50 percent mature forest, 50 percent abandoned pastureland with 20 percent of this land in the early stages of forest regeneration. The park's strengths include forests, outstanding natural features, wildlife, varying topography with scenic views, winter facilities, the Color Fest in October, and close proximity to the City of Three Rivers. Meyer Broadway County Park has over 300,000 visitors annually and is SJCPR's busiest park.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- 164 acres
- Regional park
- Two Pavilions
- Paved, accessible hiking trail
- Playground
- Modern restrooms
- Six miles of hiking trails
- Paved parking
- 8.3-mile mountain bike course
- Kids and skills bike loop
- Pickleball courts
- 18-hole mini disc golf course
- 5-acre dog park
- 36-hole disc golf course

### **Rawson's King Mill**

This 12-acre, historic park is located one mile west of Leonidas on King Road in Leonidas Township. Rawson's King Mill was donated to SJCPR in 1991 by Eston and Lydia Rawson. In 2005, the buildings (historic mill and a residence) and additional parcels were deeded to St. Joseph County Parks. This special-use park is in a rural setting, adjacent to primarily farmland. However, there are several private residences neighboring the park.

Rawson's King Mill provides a rich historical element to St. Joseph County's residents and visitors. The mill and grounds, with flower gardens and manicured landscaping, provides diverse opportunities to the public, including picnicking, photography and art, fishing, wedding and reunion facilities, as well as access to Nottawa Creek. In 2010, the county purchased five additional acres across the road from the mill grounds. This acquisition provided critical land for future development, including areas for parking and septic infrastructure. The original site master plan for this property proposed facilities including picnic shelters, banquet facilities, additional gardens and a new parking area. The focus was to add recreation amenities while maintaining the park's unique historical and natural character. In 2006, a \$175,000 dam renovation project was completed as

required by MDEQ. Some of the areas and facilities in this park meet accessibility guidelines (vault toilets and footbridges). When Eston Rawson passed away in 2012, he left \$250,000 to the county for future maintenance and improvement projects for the mill building.

In 2015, Parks and Recreation staff undertook several projects, including rehabilitation of mill exterior and improvements to the grounds. Damaged wood was replaced, and the entire mill building was stained. An exposed aggregate concrete patio was installed on the rear of the mill. The flower gardens were rehabilitated and native vegetation was added. Two gazebos and a pergola with exposed aggregate concrete pads were constructed within the property. A limestone parking lot and winding limestone walking paths were installed as well. On the lower side of the dam, a kayak/canoe launch was installed to provide easy access to beautiful Nottawa Creek.

Periodic flooding has become a major concern at the property. In the early spring of 2018, extensive flooding occurred, inflicting damage to many of the rock retaining walls and interior spillway turbines. An engineering firm has been engaged to design flood mitigation measures, which include seawalls, spillway repairs and dam gate improvements.

In 2019, SJCPR moved its headquarters to Rawson's King Mill, constructing a new shop and converting portions of the Mill interior to office space. SJCPR is currently implementing a DNR Trust Fund grant it received for updated restroom facilities, accessible pathways and a pavilion. This project is scheduled to be completed by the middle of 2024.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- 12 Acres
- Historic mill with functional turbines
- Parking area
- Picnic shelter
- Flower gardens
- Nottawa Creek
- Limestone paths
- Gazebos
- Vault toilet
- Kayak/canoe launch
- Picnic tables
- Benches
- Barbecue grills
- Wedding facilities
- Pergola

### **Wahbememe Historical Monument**

This park is located at the intersection of US-131 and US-12 in the Village of White Pigeon and is owned by the County. Legend has it that in the 1830's, Chief White Pigeon (Wahbememe is the Pottawatomie word for White Pigeon) was on a hunting trip near Detroit when he heard news of a brewing Indian uprising and plans to attack settlers. He ran all the way back to White Pigeon in two days, and after delivering his message he collapsed and died from his exertions. He was buried on this site, and in 1909, the Alba Columba Club installed a large boulder and monument on the Chief's burial site during a community celebration that attracted more than 4,000 area residents. The park preserves a significant historical site for the residents of and visitors to White Pigeon. Improvements were made to the park beginning in 2010. A new memorial monument to local casualties of war was constructed along with the installation of a new 50 ft. flagpole, a limestone park sign, and lighting. None of the park areas meet accessibility guidelines.

**Facilities Summary:**

- One Acre
- Split rail fence
- Historical marker and monuments
- Flag pole
- Picnic tables
- Benches
- Trash receptacle
- Paved parking area

**Hoshel Canoe Park**

This nine-acre community park is located two miles west of Centreville in Lockport Township on Hoshel Road. The park is an island on the Prairie River and is made accessible by a small footbridge. In 2015, the footbridge was replaced, and a canoe/kayak launch was installed. It is a scenic location that provides canoe and fishing access to the Prairie River. This location is part of a larger water trail running from the Village of Centreville to Sauganash Golf Club in Three Rivers. Development of the park is severely constrained by its location within the Prairie River floodplain. The bridge and pathway meet accessibility guidelines.

**Facilities Summary:**

- Nine acres
- Footbridge
- Access to the Prairie River
- Canoe/kayak launch
- Trash receptacle
- Gravel roadside parking
- Picnic tables

## **Timm Preserve**

Timm Preserve is a 95-acre natural area located at the intersection of Engle and Mintdale Roads in Florence Township. The land for this park was donated to the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission in May 2002 on condition that it be used solely for conservation and park purposes, and that any future transfer of ownership be restricted to nature-oriented organizations that will continue its intended use.

The park provides county residents with nature study, wildlife viewing and hiking opportunities. It is approximately 50 percent woodland and 50 percent wetland. The park is bisected by the lower end of the Hallwood/Hepner Drain, which was constructed decades ago to drain a large expanse of wetlands in the area. A seven-car parking lot was upgraded to crushed limestone in 2016. Prior to 2016, there was only a half-mile trail loop on the southern portion of the property. In 2016, SJCPR staff constructed and installed over 500 feet of boardwalk and a footbridge over the Hallwood/Hepner Drain to access the northern portion of the property. Following this project, extensive hiking trails were added. There are now three miles of hiking trails within the park. Interpretive signage was also added in 2016. The existing trails do not meet accessibility guidelines.

Observation towers, restroom facilities and other amenities to support passive use of the park are planned. Ecological restoration of the woodlands and wetlands are also desired to improve the health and biodiversity of this park.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- 95 acres
- Parking lot
- Three miles of hiking trails
- Boardwalks
- Limestone paths
- Interpretive signage
- Footbridge
- Trash Receptacle

## **Feek County Park**

Feek County Park is a 36-acre parcel of land located in Leonidas Township that was donated to the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission in April 2003 by Margaret Olney Feek. The property is located between the Olney Bridge and Rawson's King Mill and is bisected by

Nottawa Creek. The land was donated on the condition that it is used solely for park and recreation purposes by St. Joseph County, or that ownership be transferred to a public or charitable, nature-oriented organization.

This park was formerly part of the Olney Farm and was pasture and cropland until approximately 20 years ago. The site is currently not developed as a park, however parking areas and trails are mowed, and the local Mendon High School cross-country teams use it for practice and meets. An archaeological survey by Western Michigan University students was completed in 2011 and, despite local stories of artifacts and burial mounds, no evidence was found that the property holds significant historical or archeological value.

The parcel of land would be a major component of a desired greenway corridor along Nottawa Creek from Rawson's King Mill to Olney Road or Hwy. 60. Possible future recreational amenities to be developed include river and fishing access, trail expansion, parking areas, restrooms, a playground and a pavilion.

### **Sand Lake County Park**

Sand Lake County Park is located south of M-86 on Sand Lake in Nottawa Township. In 2013, Nottawa Township, which had previously leased the property to SJCPD, took over operation of the facility. However, in 2015, operation of the facility again shifted to SJCPD after a 50-year lease agreement was reached with Nottawa Township.

The nine-acre park had a 19-site campground, which was removed by St. Joseph County in 2016. Extensive improvements to the park commenced, including the addition of modern bathrooms, an ADA-compliant playground, new parking facilities, a motorized boat launch, a perimeter fence, a floating fishing pier, kayak launch and a picnic area with four community barbecue grills. Sand Lake County Park is one of the busiest day-use facilities within the parks system. A full-time seasonal employee works in the contact station and is responsible for general upkeep of the property as well as kayak rentals and concession sales.

## **Facilities Summary:**

- Nine acres
- Sand Lake
- Sandy beach area
- Floating fishing pier
- Kayak launch
- Motorized boat launch
- Modern restrooms
- ADA-compliant playground
- Picnic tables
- Barbecue grills
- Parking lots

## **Covered Bridge Farm**

Covered Bridge Farm is a six-acre property located in Nottawa Township. St. Joseph County purchased the property in late 2015, with goals of transforming it into the centerpiece of the County's ever-improving parks system. With over 1,000 feet of waterfront, the six-acre property is truly unique, boasting picturesque views of the iconic Langley Covered Bridge and St. Joseph River. Because of its central location in the County and close proximity to Langley Covered Bridge and St. Joseph River, it is ideally suited for this purpose.

A masterplan for the property was completed by Edgewater Resources in 2016 and development commenced in 2017. A barn, originally constructed in 1870, was restored and now serves as an excellent venue for public and private events. Modern bathrooms, a riverside pavilion, an elevated river walk, parking areas, a kayak/canoe launch and flower gardens/landscaping were also added to the property. All park features meet accessibility guidelines. There is also a farmhouse located on the property, which was built in 1856. A caretaker resides on-site and maintains the property.

SJCPR received a DNR Trust Fund grant for the addition of a floating wheelchair accessible kayak launch on the western portion of the property. SJCPR partnered with the Village of Mendon to install a similar launch system at Reed Park, creating an accessible water trail from Mendon to Three Rivers. This project was completed in 2019.

SJCPR has received numerous recognitions from the State and local agencies for its efforts in developing Covered Bridge Farm. It has become a destination for residents and visitors alike.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- Six acres
- 1,000 feet of St. Joseph River frontage
- Kayak/canoe launch
- 1870 Event Barn
- Modern restrooms
- Elevated river walk
- Pavilion
- Parking areas

### **Plumb Lake County Park**

With the aid of a DNR Trust Fund Acquisition grant, St. Joseph County purchased 126-acre Plumb Lake County Park in 2015. SJCPR's goal was to create a passive use, nature-centric park, similar to that of Meyer Broadway County Park located in Fabius Township. With this in mind, SJCPR partnered with the Michigan DNR and planted a 60-acre short-grass prairie over what had historically been farmland. The prairie provides great habitat for the wildlife that resides within the park's borders and is a sight to behold in full bloom. It is the goal of the SJCPR to preserve not only the prairie but also the expanse of wetland and upland areas to ensure the long-term health of flora and fauna within the park.

Edgewater Resources and SJCPR completed the park's masterplan in 2016. Public input was sought for the property and those comments were integrated into the plan. Because of the park's acreage and unique and ever-changing landscape, Plumb Lake County Park is well-suited for an elaborate trail system. St. Joseph County citizens have expressed the need for expanded trail systems, and Plumb Lake County Park provides a perfect environment for such a project. SJCPR began development of the property in 2017. Over 500 feet of boardwalk was installed over wetlands to provide access to the northern upland portion of the property. The upland areas are thick with mature walnut, oak, and maple varieties, which help shape trail characteristics. Following boardwalk installation, a two-mile trail loop was installed on the northern portion of

property. Two bridges were constructed over the streams. A second boardwalk section was installed by park staff in 2023. This second section of boardwalk links all trail segments.

In addition to trail construction, two pavilions, two Greenflush restrooms, a rocks and ropes playground, entry drives, parking areas, a floating fishing pier, a floating kayak launch and sidewalks were installed in 2017. In 2018, an elevated viewing platform was constructed by SJCPD on the western portion of the property. A second platform was installed with views of Plumb Lake in 2019. The pavilion and bathroom areas meet accessibility guidelines.

Future plans for the park include a 10-foot wide, multi-use path bordering the prairie, beach creation, interpretive signage and a mountain bike trail.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- 126 acres
- Private Plumb Lake
- Six miles of hiking trails
- 60-acre shortgrass prairie
- Lakeside pavilion
- Woodland pavilion
- Elevated viewing platform
- Boardwalks
- Bridges
- Two Greenflush bathrooms
- Floating fishing pier
- Kayak launch
- Parking areas
- Sidewalks
- Playground
- Picnic tables
- Trash receptacles

### **Kettles County Park**

In 2019, with the aid of land donation and a DNR Trust Fund Acquisition grant, SJCPD was able to acquire 54-acre Kettles Park, located in Fabius Township just south of the City of Three Rivers. This park boasts over 3,500 feet of frontage on the St. Joseph River and has two groundwater-fed streams running through it. There are large areas of wetland and remnant prairie

as well as large stands of evergreen trees and mature hardwoods. In 2022-2023, SJCPR staff developed a 3-mile trail system with two bridges crossing the streams as well as a crushed limestone parking lot. SJCPR intends on leaving the property rustic. There are plans to add boardwalks and a kayak/canoe launch.

### **Facilities Summary:**

- 54 acres
- 3500 feet of St. Joseph River frontage
- Three miles of hiking trails
- Pedestrian bridges
- Groundwater-fed streams
- Parking area
- Trash Receptacles
- Benches

### **Water Trails**

In 2014, the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners employed Edgewater Resources to complete a Water Trail masterplan. With its numerous rivers, streams and lakes, St. Joseph County boasts more navigable waterways than any other county in Michigan. It is the goal of SJCPR to highlight these abundant natural resources as a means of attracting people to the County while increasing economic activity. In 2015, SJCPR began the development of water trail sites throughout St. Joseph County. Partnerships with private landowners and various municipalities has proven to be fruitful for all parties involved. Since 2015, SJCPR has installed 17 access points throughout St. Joseph County, tying communities together. SJCPR is responsible for the maintenance of the sites it installs. Many more access points are planned for development.

### **Access Sites installed and maintained:**

- Parkville Rd (Portage River)
- N Fisher Lake Rd (Portage River)
- Covered Bridge Rd (Prairie River)
- Hoshel Canoe Park (Prairie River)
- Sauganash Golf Club (Prairie River)

- Rawson's King Mill, upper and lower (Nottawa Creek)
- Olney Rd (Nottawa Creek)
- Watt Rd (Fawn River)
- Fawn River Rd (2, Fawn River)
- Kime Rd (Fawn River)
- Big Hill Rd (Fawn River)
- Haybridge Rd (Fawn River)
- Covered Bridge Farm (St. Joseph River)
- Withers Rd (St. Joseph River)
- Null Rd (Rocky River)

### **Former Park Facilities**

During the period 2001- 2004, the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission reverted management and maintenance of several parks to the actual owners of the properties. This was deemed necessary due to the limited financial resources and personnel available to the Commission. The parks and facilities identified in previous master plans that are no longer managed and maintained by St. Joseph County include Covered Bridge Park, Pahl Point Park, Mottville Park, Mill Creek Park, Vistula Bridge Park, Constantine Portage Park and Prairie River Park. In 2010, the lease agreement with Colon Township for Palmer Lake Beach was terminated.

### **Other Public Parks and Recreation Service Providers**

#### **Colon Township**

Palmer Lake Beach is a small community park that provides residents in the northeast quadrant of the county with swimming access. The property is located on the east side of the Village of Colon, on the east shore of Palmer Lake. The property is owned and managed by Colon Township. Private residences surround the park. This park is two acres in size and features a swimming beach, picnic pavilion, barbeque grills, vault toilets and parking.

#### **Village of Burr Oak**

The Village of Burr Oak maintains 6 parks encompassing over 25 acres. The Village employs two full time employees to maintain the entire village. Boyer Field is used by the community and the

Burr Oak Community School system for baseball, softball and football and is lighted for night games. It includes a pavilion, concession stand, rest rooms, tennis courts and playground equipment. River Park North and South host a walkway along the Prairie River with benches. Church Park is located in the center of Burr Oak and hosts a pavilion, swings, slide, and other equipment. Railroad Park is located along the south side of town close to the main downtown business area. This park has a gazebo, a basketball court, swings, volleyball court and is the main area used for festival activities and vendors. Pie Park is a fully shaded area used by area neighbors.

### **Village of Centreville**

The Village of Centreville maintains three parks encompassing approximately five acres. Facilities include four ball fields, basketball, volleyball, a picnic shelter and river access.

### **Village of Colon**

The Village of Colon maintains three parks encompassing approximately two acres. The Village hires seasonal employees to assist with the maintenance of grounds and facilities. Facilities include a playground, a boat ramp on Palmer Lake, as well as a picnic shelter with grills and tables.

### **Village of Constantine**

The Village maintains approximately 35 acres of parks at 11 sites. Parks are maintained by the Department of Public Works. The Village has a current recreation plan and has completed significant improvements at Riverview Park. Facilities provided include basketball, volleyball, tennis, baseball, Born to Learn Trail, Life Trail System, three playgrounds, picnic pavilions, and river access, nature trails with a wooden boardwalk and accessible fishing areas.

### **Village of Mendon**

The Village provides three park sites totaling approximately five acres, which include Reed River Park, Mill Street Park and Water Tower Park. The parks are maintained through the Department of Public Works. The Village has a current recreation plan and is continuing to make improvements, particularly at Reed River Park. Facilities include modern restrooms, a riverside boardwalk, fishing and river access, picnic shelters, a wheelchair accessible kayak/canoe launch and two playgrounds.

A large pavilion here also hosts a farmer's market during the growing season. The village also provides recreation programming and special events.

### **Village of White Pigeon**

The Village of White Pigeon maintains two parks with approximately three acres. Facilities include a tennis court, a playground, two picnic pavilions, a roller hockey rink and a basketball court. The Village participates in cooperative efforts with the township and school district to provide programs and facilities.

### **City of Sturgis**

The City maintains 15 parks with a total of 106 acres, as well as the 75,000 sq ft Doyle Community Center. The City of Sturgis Parks and Recreation Department is guided by a Community Recreation Plan. The City is a major provider of recreation programs and offers a variety of indoor and outdoor activities. The Doyle Community Center provides facilities to host many of the recreation programs as well as special activities such as 5K runs/walks. Sports leagues, open recreation, fitness, youth development, and skill specific programs are offered year-round. Wall Fields Park provides an improved sports complex where student softball and baseball leagues are in full swing in the spring and summer. Franks Park is home to the independent Soccer and Rocket football programs. Spence Field hosts adult softball leagues during the summer months. The City maintains an ice rink during the winter months for open skating and hockey. The City of Sturgis also maintains Covered Bridge and Pahl Point Parks as part of the operations of the Sturgis hydroelectric dam on the St Joseph River. The City of Sturgis has seven picnic shelters located at various parks available for events, and an outdoor amphitheater that can be reserved for weddings or concerts.

### **City of Three Rivers**

The City of Three Rivers maintains 12 parks with a total of 51 acres. Park operations and maintenance fall under the Department of Public Services and its employees. Three Rivers maintains a current parks and recreation master plan and has made significant improvements to some of its parks in recent years. The City of Three Rivers provides recreation facilities and programs in coordinated efforts with Three Rivers Community Schools. Summer youth programs, preschool programs, and sport programs are offered, primarily during the summer months.

Facilities include seven picnic pavilions, basketball courts, three baseball fields, three boat launch sites, numerous fishing access points (some are ADA accessible), four playgrounds, a skateboard park, a Farmers Market, a small petting zoo, as well as Scidmore and Memory Isle Parks where several community festivals and special events are held each year. The City also oversees the 38-acre Hidden Marsh Sanctuary, which is owned by the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, and is located just north of town on Portage Rd. The City also constructed Armstrong Field, which hosts a variety of youth athletic events, including football, soccer, baseball and softball.

### **Burr Oak Community Schools**

Burr Oak Community Schools recreation facilities include a small and large gymnasium and general meeting areas. Outdoor facilities include Boyer Field, which has track and football facilities as well as a playground. Recreation programs are provided in cooperation with the Village of Colon.

### **Centreville Public Schools**

Indoor facilities include a gym and meeting areas. Outdoor facilities include a running track and football field, two tennis courts and two playgrounds. A 13-acre baseball and softball facility was constructed in 2010.

### **Colon Public Schools**

Colon Public Schools provides a small multi-purpose gymnasium that hosts some community activities after school hours. Outdoor facilities include a playground and play area that is available to the community. The Leonidas Elementary School has soccer, baseball and softball fields that are available for community use. The middle/high school provides a gymnasium and outdoor facilities include a running track, football field, baseball and softball diamonds and three open practice/soccer fields. All of these facilities are available for community activities after school hours.

### **Constantine Public Schools**

The Constantine school system consists of two elementary schools, a middle school and high school, which combine to provide five gymnasiums with basketball courts. Outdoor facilities that are available to the community include two playgrounds, two ball diamonds, basketball goals, two playgrounds, three tennis courts, a football stadium with two practice fields, a running track and one

picnic shelter. Constantine Public Schools also operates a 45-acre outdoor laboratory that provides a large natural area for educational purposes.

### **Mendon Public Schools**

The Mendon Elementary School operates a gymnasium with a stage area and an all-purpose room. Outdoor facilities include a playground, softball/baseball field and a nature trail along the Little Portage River. The middle/high school provides a gymnasium and stage. Outdoor facilities include athletic fields for softball, baseball, football and track.

### **Nottawa Community School**

This K – 8 school operates a gymnasium and general meeting areas. Outdoor facilities are limited to a softball field and a playground.

### **Sturgis Public Schools**

The Sturgis Public Schools consist of seven elementary schools, a new middle school and one high school. Facilities available to the community include eight playgrounds, nine gymnasiums, a football field, two ball diamonds, tennis courts, a running track and athletic practice areas. The School District also operates the Sturgis Community Pool, which includes a year-round indoor pool and an outdoor pool for summertime use. Sturgis Public Schools is continuing to improve and develop additional recreation facilities. Camp Fort Hill is a 228-acre residential camp facility with a nature center that is operated for the youth of St. Joseph County under Sturgis Public Schools. The facility provides the community with a large natural area, three miles of hiking trails, an archery range, an adventure climbing tower, a swimming beach and access to Tamarack Lake. Numerous facilities are available for rent.

### **Three Rivers Community Schools**

In Three Rivers, each of the four elementary schools has a small gymnasium for basketball and volleyball. Outdoor facilities that are available to the public on evenings and weekends include playgrounds, basketball courts, three soccer areas and tennis courts. The new middle school/high school complex provides excellent recreation facilities to the community, and include two auditoriums, three gymnasiums with six basketball courts, seven volleyball courts, as well as a

wrestling/tumbling room with mats. Outdoor facilities include 14 tennis courts, an all-weather running track, seven ball diamonds, three soccer fields and three football fields. The school system provides a large variety of community recreation programs available on a year-round basis.

### **White Pigeon Public Schools**

In White Pigeon, the elementary school provides a high school-size gymnasium for athletic and community activities. The cafeteria is also used for activities after school hours. Outdoor facilities include a ball diamond, playground, soccer field and other play areas. Programs are offered in cooperation with the Village and Township and include arts and crafts, basketball, field trips, baseball, soccer and other summer programs. The middle and high school share facilities and serve 481 students. Facilities include a gymnasium, cafeteria/multipurpose room and an outdoor athletic complex that provides tennis courts, ice skating, ball diamonds, a football field, a soccer field, concession stands and a paved walking path.

### **State Game Areas**

The Three Rivers State Game Area is in the western portion of the County. The Crane Pond State Game Area is just west of St. Joseph County in Cass County. The Fulton State Game Area and Gourdneck State Game Area are located in Kalamazoo County

- Three Rivers State Game Area
- Crane Pond State Game Area
- Gourdneck State Game Area
- Fulton State Game Area

### **State Parks**

There are no State parks available in St. Joseph County or in neighboring counties. The State of Michigan provides six parks within 50 miles of St. Joseph County. Fort Custer is the closest at 25 miles, Van Buren State Park is 45 miles and the remaining four are all 50 miles from the County. This plan addresses the limited availability of State recreation facilities available in St. Joseph County.

- Fort Custer, 3,033 acres
- Grand Mere State Park, 985 acres
- Van Buren State Park, 407 acres
- Warren Dunes State Park, 1,952 acres
- Warren Woods Natural Area, 311 acres

- Yankee Springs Rec. Area, 5,017 acres

**Water Access**

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources provides 18 public access sites on lakes and rivers in St. Joseph County. The County and other municipalities provide many additional public access sites.

**Public Lake Access**

- |                 |      |                      |              |
|-----------------|------|----------------------|--------------|
| • Clear Lake    | MDNR | • Noah Lake          | MDNR         |
| • Corey Lake    | MDNR | • Omena Lake         | MDNR         |
| • Fish Lake     | MDNR | • Palmer Lake        | MDNR         |
| • Fisher’s Lake | MDNR | • Perrin Lake        | Amigo Center |
| • Klinger Lake  | MDNR | • Pleasant Lake      | MDNR         |
| • Lee Lake      | MDNR | • Portage Lake       | MDNR         |
| • Long Lake     | MDNR | • Prairie River Lake | MDNR         |
| • Mud Lake      | MDNR | • Thompson Lake      | MDNR         |

**Public River Access**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| • St. Joseph River, Stump Bay,<br>MDNR                      | • St. Joseph River, Mottville Park,<br>American Electric Power Company |
| • St. Joseph River, Mendon, MDNR                            | • St. Joseph River, Constantine  |
| • St. Joseph River, Centreville, MDNR                       | • St. Joseph River, S. River Rd.,<br>MDNR                              |
| • St. Joseph River, Covered Bridge<br>Park, City of Sturgis | • St. Joseph River, Mendon, S.<br>Railroad St., MDNR                   |

**Nature Preserves**

**Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy**

- Hidden Marsh Sanctuary: 38 acres in Three Rivers, open to public.
- Coon Hollow Preserve: Nine acres in Fabius Township, open to public.
- Corey Lake Preserve: 17 acres in Fabius Township, open to public.
- Lacey Preserve: Five acres in Park Township with limited access.

**Residential Camps**

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| • Amigo Centre   | • Camp Tavor    |
| • Camp Fort Hill | • Camp Wakeshma |
| • Camp Eberhart  |                 |

## **Golf Courses**

There are six golf courses distributed throughout St. Joseph County. All are privately owned and only Klinger Lake is a member's only facility.

- Green Valley Golf Club, Sturgis
- Island Hills Golf Course, Centreville
- Klinger Lake, Sturgis
- Pineview Golf Club, Three Rivers
- Sauganansh, Three Rivers
- St. Joe Valley Golf Club, Nottawa

## **Ski Areas**

There are no ski areas within St. Joseph County, but Swiss Valley Ski Resort is located just west of St. Joseph County in Jones, Michigan. Bittersweet and Timber Ridge, in the Kalamazoo area, provide regional downhill ski facilities.

## **Campgrounds**

There are 14 campgrounds in St. Joseph County and all are privately owned with the exception Cade Lake County Park and Campground.

- Amigo Park
- Cade Lake County Park
- Atbalsis Echo Valley
- Eddie's Hideaway
- Green Valley Campground
- Kline's Resort
- Leidy Lake Park
- Nottawa Sand Lake Park
- Ponderosa
- Robert's Corey Lake Campground
- Rocky's Hideaway
- St. Joseph County Grange Fair
- Sweet Lake Campground
- Twin Lakes Campground

Although there are over 500 campsites provided in St. Joseph County, less than one-half of these sites are available for short-term recreational use. The majority of campsites in the county are rented on a seasonal basis.

## **Chapter 4: Resource Inventory**

### **Topography**

An important element of recreation master planning is a study of the regional topography. Many recreation activities are enhanced by changes in grade. Further, the visual aspects of open space are strengthened by vistas and topography.

The surface relief of St. Joseph County is characterized as rolling plains. The topography varies with relief of 0 to 50 feet on the Flowerfield and White Pigeon prairies going to variations of up to 200 feet on the Kalamazoo and Sturgis Moraines. The Sturgis Moraine north of the city rises to an elevation over 1,000 feet above mean sea level, as does the Kalamazoo Moraine in parts of Fabius Township. The lowest point in the County is along the banks of the St. Joseph River where it leaves the County at Mottville. The river falls from 836 feet above sea level as it enters Colon Township to 798 feet at the Three Rivers east city limit to 760 feet at the Cass County line in Mottville. (Source: St. Joseph County 1997 Master Plan).

The general topographic features in the majority of St. Joseph County present no significant barrier to recreation improvements or opportunities but should be considered and evaluated when planning recreation facilities.

### **Soils**

The majority of soils in St. Joseph County are nearly level and well drained and have only slight to moderate limitations for recreation development. The northwestern portion of the County has the most limitations, primarily due to undulating and rolling topography. The County's soil survey should be consulted prior to planning new parks or recreation facilities to determine possible limitations. Appropriate soil testing should be completed before construction of recreation facilities. Soil types of similar composition and drainage characteristics were combined to form the simplified soils map that is presented with this plan. Below is a list of soil association names and characteristics as described in the Soil Survey of St. Joseph County Michigan.

<b>SOIL ASSOCIATION</b>	<b>GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS</b>
Adrian-Granby	Nearly level, very poorly drained and poorly drained mucky and loamy soils; in bogs and depressions and on outwash plains and lake plains
Oshtemo-Spinks	Nearly level to gently rolling, well drained loamy and sandy soils; on outwash plains and moraines
Hillsdale-Elmdale	Nearly level to gently rolling, well drained and moderately well drained loamy soils; on till plains and moraines
Elmdale-Teasdale	Nearly level and undulating, moderately well drained and somewhat poorly drained loamy soils; on till plains and moraines
Elston	Nearly level, well drained loamy soils; on outwash plains
Sebewa-Cohoctah	Nearly level, very poorly drained and poorly drained loamy soils; on outwash plains and flood plains
Kalamazoo-Oshtemo	Nearly level to rolling, well drained loamy soils; on outwash plains and moraines
Hillsdale-Riddles	Undulating to rolling, well drained loamy soils; on till plains and moraines

### **Water Features**

Lakes, rivers, and streams are in high demand to meet today's recreation needs. St. Joseph County is fortunate to have a large quantity and variety of natural water features.

The County also has over fifty lakes and reservoirs. Fifteen lakes have surface areas exceeding 200 acres. Klinger Lake is the largest natural lake with 830 acres. Man-made Lake Templene is 1,050 acres. Although most of the lakes are surrounded by seasonal and year-round homes, public boat access is available on many of the lakes. Public access for boating and fishing is available at 27 locations. Of these, 17 are on lakes and 10 are on rivers. The abundance of many species of game fish makes the inland lakes and streams extremely popular for recreational fishing. The following lakes all have free public boat access sites, operated by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources:

## MDNR Public Access Sites

Water Body	Size (Acres)
Clear Lake	240
Corey Lake	630
Fish Lake	153
Fishers Lake	327
Klinger Lake	830
Long Lake (Colon)	222
Long Lake (Three Rivers)	211
Omena Lake	128
Palmer Lake	448
Portage Lake	510
Pleasant Lake	262
Prairie River Lake	136

Many of St. Joseph County's lakes and streams provide beautiful natural settings, making them ideal for park sites. The 27 access sites on lakes and rivers in St. Joseph County are designated for boat access only. There is conflict between boaters and swimmers at these public access sites and no swimming restrictions are enforced. St. Joseph County currently has only three public swimming beach facilities.

### Flora and Fauna

Originally, many areas of the county were covered with deciduous woodlands. As the land was cleared for farming and timber, the areas of forest were replaced by croplands, pastures, lawns and smaller forested areas containing both deciduous and coniferous trees. There remain many forested areas, especially along the St. Joseph River and other waterways. The higher well-drained areas consist predominantly of oak varieties, sugar maple, beach and white pine. Areas of low relief support pine, aspen, basswood and maples. The floodplain areas consist of ash, silver maple, sycamore and oak varieties.

St. Joseph County's wildlife is typical of that found in most of Lower Michigan. Common wildlife includes deer, raccoons, opossums, rabbits, muskrats, otter, beavers, squirrels, rodents and other small mammals. The area is home to a variety of birds including owls, hawks, wild turkeys, sandhill cranes and countless others. For the past few years, bald eagles have been year-round residents on the St. Joseph River, in the area downstream from the Sturgis dam. The area is also a seasonal home to many species of migratory waterfowl and songbirds.

## **Climate**

St. Joseph County's weather influences recreational activities with a wide range of seasonal conditions. The area supports a variety of outdoor activities throughout the year from swimming to cross-country skiing. Climate data gathered by a state reporting station located near Three Rivers provides an accurate description of the climate of St. Joseph County and is presented below.

Three Rivers, located in west central St. Joseph County of the South Central Lower Climatic Division, is about 13 miles north of the Indiana border and 45 miles east of southern Lake Michigan. The lake effect on Three Rivers' climate is significant throughout much of the year even though it is east of the "Lake Snow Belt". The prevailing westerly winds, in combination with Lake Michigan 45 miles to the west, produce this lake effect. The lake effect increases cloudiness and snowfall during the fall and winter, moderating the temperature throughout most of the year.

Because the day-to-day weather is controlled by the movement of pressure systems across the nation, this area seldom experiences prolonged periods of hot, humid weather in the summer or extreme cold during the winter. The prevailing wind is south-westerly, averaging 10 mph.

Summers are dominated by moderately warm temperatures with a 1951-80 average of 15 days exceeding the 90 Fahrenheit mark. Based on the 1951-80 period, the average date of the last freezing temperature in the spring was May 7, while the average date of the

first freezing temperature in the fall was October 1. The freeze-free period, or growing season, averaged 146 days annually.

Precipitation was well distributed throughout the year with the crop season, April-September, receiving an average of 20.39 inches or 61% of the average annual total for the 1951-80 period. During this same period the average wettest month was June with 3.95 inches, while the average driest month was February with 1.49 inches.

Summer precipitation comes mainly in the form of afternoon showers and thundershowers. Annually, thunderstorms will occur on an average of 36 days. The 1950-51 through 1979-80 average seasonal snowfall was 45.9 inches. During this period, 59 days per season averaged one inch or more of snow on the ground but varied greatly from season to season. (Edited Source: Michigan Dept. of Agriculture, Climatology Program, MSU)

### **Resource Conservation**

St. Joseph County is a rural county with outstanding agricultural and natural resources. The productive woodlands, wetlands, streams, rivers and lakes attracted Native Americans and early white settlers alike. Today, although much of the original woodlands have been harvested and the land converted to agricultural use, the county still has an abundance of wetlands, lakes and woodlands. Nearly all of the native prairies have been lost to agriculture because of their fertile soils and lack of trees.

St. Joseph County covers 521 square miles, and the county has 17.4 square miles of open waters of lakes and rivers. The County is divided into 12 full land survey townships and portions of four others. Original surveyors of the county recorded detailed descriptions of the landscape, and that information was used to make the historical vegetation map included with this plan. When compared to similar maps of neighboring counties, it is clear that St. Joseph County once supported an incredible diversity of plants and animals. Thirteen vegetative communities were identified, and some of those can be further divided today to define more specialized ecological communities. The communities identified in the surveys of the early 1800's include the following:

- Beech-sugar maple forest
- Black ash swamp
- Black oak barren
- Grassland/prairie
- Lake/river
- Mixed conifer swamp
- Mixed hardwood swamp
- Mixed oak savanna
- Muskeg/bog
- Oak – hickory forest
- Shrub swamp/emergent marsh
- Wet prairie

Some remnants of these communities undoubtedly remain today, however, fragmentation of large, contiguous natural areas has diminished the ability of plants and animals to sustain viable populations. A list of species of special concern, and threatened or endangered species, developed by the Michigan Natural Features Inventory, is included with this plan as a reference to the biodiversity supported by the county's remaining natural areas.

### **Priority Conservation Areas**

Large contiguous tracts of woodlands are becoming rarer each year as timber is harvested or woodlands are cleared for development and agriculture. Wetlands continue to be impacted by hydrologic impacts, development pressure and seemingly far-removed drainage improvements. Small prairie remnants are confined mostly to old railroad right-of-ways that have not been impacted by herbicide applications. It is likely that ecologically valuable areas of wet prairies and fens still survive on the perimeters of privately owned wetlands and marshes throughout the county.

Areas of significant conservation value are likely to be found in and around remaining large tracts of woodlands and wetlands. Based on 1990 land cover data, three regions of the county stand out as priority conservation areas worthy of study by regional public and private planning, conservation and land management organizations.

- The northeast quadrant of Flowerfield Township contains remnant oak-hickory forests that historically transitioned to oak savanna toward the east. The area is bisected by the Rocky River, which is escorted southward by a variety of bordering wetlands, marshes, swamps and open water.
- The northwest quadrant of Fabius Township still has relatively large contiguous areas of oak-hickory woodlands. These areas still exist due to the rolling topography of the land,

which discouraged clearing for agriculture. Current development pressures could threaten to further fragment these remaining woodlands.

- A third region of the county that should be studied for its potential conservation values stretches from Klinger Lake northeastward for approximately seven miles to the area northeast of Perrin Lake in Sherman Township. This area of land contains Tamarack Lake, Thompson Lake and Perrin Lake and contains another relatively intact area of woodlands and wetlands.

### **Stream and River Corridors**

The river system of St. Joseph County has 292 miles of streams including the St. Joseph River and several of its larger tributaries. The entire County is within the St. Joseph River drainage basin. The St. Joseph River has four significant dams that provide hydroelectric power generation in St. Joseph County. The Sturgis Dam north of Centreville, AEP's Dam in Constantine, AEP's dam in Mottville and the Grand Point Power dam in Three Rivers are all regulated by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and are required by Federal Regulations to provide and maintain recreation opportunities at each site. The dams provide water related recreation opportunities on the reservoirs upstream from the dams.

The County's major rivers include the St. Joseph River, Pigeon River, Rocky River, Portage River, Prairie River and the Fawn River. Minor streams include Bear Creek, Christian Creek, Little Portage Creek, Big Swan Creek, Nottawa Creek, Mill Creek, Flowerfield Creek, Spring Creek, Trout Creek and Wood Lake Creek.

The importance of stream and river corridor protection has become important across St. Joseph County in recent years, as efforts are made to reduce water pollution and conserve wildlife habitat. A stream corridor includes the stream channel itself, as well as the associated habitats of wetlands, flood plains and forests. These function together as an ecological and hydrologic system. Forests and wetlands in stream corridors protect against pollution from erosion and sediment deposition and reduce the erosion of streambeds and banks. Protecting stream corridors will also displace activities that present potential sources of non-point source pollution, spill accidents and illegal dumping. The shade provided by vegetated stream corridors also

directly impacts aquatic health by preventing water temperatures from rising, which reduces oxygen levels in the water.

### **The MDNR Wildlife Action Program**

While it is beyond the ability of St. Joseph County to preserve all remaining significant natural areas within the county, it is possible to engage the combined resources of public and private landowners and organizations to reduce the loss of wildlife habitat and biodiversity. For this reason, information is presented in this section to explain current species and habitat conservation methods, and identify available resources for assistance. The information presented below is from the MDNR website: [www.michigan.gov/dnr](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr).

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources coordinated a two-year strategic planning process aimed at identifying and prioritizing the conservation needs of wildlife and their habitats, especially those species with low or declining populations. Development of Michigan's Wildlife Action Plan (WAP) was a collective endeavor of Michigan's conservation partners, including state, federal and tribal agencies, local governments, universities, private landowners, conservation organizations and interested individuals.

By considering a broad range of wildlife, a broad range of habitats, and a broad range of scales (including species-level, habitat-level, statewide-level or Great Lakes basin-level), the action plan comprehensively assesses the status of wildlife and their habitats in the state.

Invasive species and habitat fragmentation were repeatedly identified as the highest priority threats to wildlife and their habitats in both aquatic and terrestrial systems throughout Michigan. Other priority threats include: filling, draining and other changes to wetlands; increased levels of sediments in rivers, streams and lakes from erosion and other sources; suppression of fire in natural communities that are dependant on it and difficulties with using prescribed fire as a management tool; and a lack of understanding of life-history patterns of species of greatest conservation need, and how these species are affected by threats and other ecological processes.

### **Coarse Filter/Fine Filter Approach**

Historically, wildlife conservation efforts have tended to focus on single species. However, as humans continue to change the landscape, a species-by-species approach may not be the most effective means to conserve biodiversity (Franklin, 1993). Maintenance of ecological processes rather than management for individual species may be a more effective way of using limited resources to benefit the greatest number of species. The WAP was developed upon this premise. A comprehensive planning effort for each of the species of greatest conservation need (SGCN) was not feasible, nor would that approach have achieved the goal of addressing the full array of wildlife in Michigan. Additionally, species have requirements for survival that are inextricably tied to their habitats, and degradation or loss of habitat is often the primary threat to species viability. Therefore, the WAP primarily uses a coarse-filter approach based on the habitat needs of wildlife (by definition, both aquatic and terrestrial species) to more effectively conserve rare, declining and common species statewide.

Individual wildlife species, however, cannot be ignored, and the set of SGCN provides a complementary fine-filter approach. Some species' needs may not be sufficiently met through habitat- or ecosystem-based approaches (Herkert 1994, Swengel & Swengel 1997), and the goal of this action plan is to address conservation needs of all wildlife species in Michigan.

When particular species do not respond positively to habitat- or ecosystem-based conservation approaches, additional management specifically directed toward their unique requirements will be necessary. These unique species include those that respond to very specific changes within their habitat or ecosystem, species for which degradation or loss of habitat is not the primary threat, and species that do not share habitat associations with other SGCN, and, therefore, may not be adequately conserved through efforts for species assemblages.

Using a species-based fine filter to assess and address the needs of these species in conjunction with the habitat-based coarse filter will allow comprehensive conservation of Michigan's wildlife diversity.

### **Incentives for Conservation in Michigan**

The following information is provided for agencies or individuals interested in protecting wildlife species and habitat in St. Joseph County. Source:  
[www.biodiversitypartners.org/state/mi/incentives.shtml](http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/state/mi/incentives.shtml)

### **The Native Grass, No Till Drill Program**

The Department of Natural Resources rents specialized planting equipment for planting prairie grass and forbs at a nominal cost to landowners. The program has been available for three years and operates to restore grassland habitats of one-acre plantings or larger. Last year 300 landowners participated, and 5,000 acres were impacted. Funding comes from Game and Fish funds, Pheasants Forever and Ducks Unlimited.

### **The Michigan Habitat Improvement Fund**

The program offers grants to landowners for fisheries projects on the Manistee, Muskegon and AuSable rivers. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Fisheries Division offers the grants for projects within the vicinity of the 11 Consumers Energy Company hydropower projects. There is no minimum or maximum amount for grants. The funding source for the program is the Game and Fish Settlement Fund.

### **The Inland Fisheries Grant Program**

The program is offered by the Department of Natural Resources Fisheries Division and provides cost share to owners of inland fish communities. The maximum available is \$30,000 per project. Applicants must demonstrate they can contribute at least 50 percent of the project's cost as a match of the state grant. Funding comes from the legislature with annual appropriations of \$200,000.

### **Zoning for Sustainable Land Uses and Land/Development Rights Acquisition**

Michigan authorizes cities, villages, townships and counties to establish zoning districts to encourage the proper use of land and natural resources and provides for the acquisition of land or development rights. MICH. COMP. LAWS §§ 125.310; 125.240; 125.282; 125.600. In addition, developers who agree not to develop a portion of their property are allowed to increase the density on the remaining portion. The undeveloped land must remain perpetually in an undeveloped state by means of a conservation easement, plat dedication, restrictive covenant or other legal means running with the land.

## **Conservation Easements and Property Tax Benefits**

Conservation easements are statutorily authorized. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 324.2140. Owners of open space who place an easement on their property may receive property tax benefits. MICH. COMP. LAWS § 324.36106. The Farmland and Open Space Preservation Program also offers property tax benefits for conservation easements. Easements may be used for fish or wildlife habitat preservation. Easements granted for open space development rights to local government are exempt from taxation.

## **Property Tax Benefits for Forest Lands Management**

The Department of Natural Resources, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management Division, offers property tax incentives to owners of forested lands if they agree to properly manage their commercial forest lands for recreation or wildlife. Forest species benefit from this program, such as deer, turkey, grouse, nongame forest birds, amphibians, reptiles, etc. Owners receive a reduced property tax of \$1.10/acre on forest lands greater than 40 acres, if a management plan is developed. Cutting of trees is approved by permit only. Presently 2.2 million acres are impacted by the incentive.

## **Agencies to Contact for Conservation Assistance**

MI Department of Agriculture  
P.O. Box 3001  
Lansing, MI 48909  
(517) 373-9799  
[www.mda.state.mi.us](http://www.mda.state.mi.us)

Cooperative Resource Management  
Initiative  
<http://www.msue.msu.edu/CRMI/>

Wildlife Division  
MI Dept. of Natural Resources  
P.O. Box 30028  
Lansing, MI 48909-7528  
(517) 373-2457  
<http://www.michigandnr.com>

Native Grass, No Till Drill  
MI Dept. of Natural Resources  
(517) 241-0666

Habitat Improvement Fund Project  
Grants  
MI Dept. of Natural Resources  
Fisheries Division  
(517) 826-3211

Inland Fisheries Program  
Fisheries Division  
(517) 373-6762

Nongame Wildlife Fund Grants  
Wildlife Division

(517) 373-9418

## **Chapter 5: Planning Process and Methods**

St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation began the masterplan planning process in January 2022. An organized process was followed to collect data, gather public input and involve appropriate individuals and organizations. Parks and Recreation staff completed the planning process with assistance from the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission, Land Resource Center staff, municipalities, school districts and county residents.

The planning process for the 2024-2028 masterplan was comprised of four major elements. The first was a review of goals and objectives identified by the previous masterplan. Although properties and priorities change over time, it is important to identify former priorities and incorporate these with updated plans if warranted. Goals and objectives are identified and discussed in the next chapter.

The second component of the planning process was a review of the handicapped accessibility of our parks and facilities. Due to the inherent nature of natural resource-based parks, it is not always possible to create barrier free access. Nevertheless, as new facilities are developed, or improvements are made to existing facilities, standards of universal design must be used to ensure accessibility requirements. However, older facilities often need basic accessibility modifications to provide access for all residents and visitors.

The third element of the planning process was a public input survey created and posted in June 2023 to gather input from interested residents and organizations. This survey was advertised via social media and St. Joseph County's website with a link to complete. This survey provided new contributions and ideas for staff and the Parks and Recreation Commission to utilize during the development of the current master plan.

An additional public input survey was distributed at the 2023 Animal Rescue Fund fundraiser, the 2023 Road Commission fundraiser, the 2023 Color Tour as well as the 2023 St. Joseph County Grange Fair in Centreville.

Finally, a review of recreation standards was done at county parks to identify deficiencies in the facilities and services provided by the county.

## Accessibility Evaluation

Park Name	Date	Parking Designated	Facilities Paths to Accessible	Trails Accessible	Slopes Excessive Stairs or	Restrooms Accessible	Pavilion Accessible	Buildings Accessible	Playground Accessible
Cade Lake County Park	2023	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Covered Bridge Farm	2023	Yes	Yes	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Feek County Park	2023	No	No	No	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Hoshel Canoe Park	2023	No	Yes	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Meyer Broadway County Park	2023	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Plumb Lake County Park	2023	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rawson's King Mill	2023	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
Sand Lake County Park	2023	Yes	Yes	N/A	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Timm Preserve	2023	No	No	No	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wahbememe Memorial	2023	Yes	No	N/A	No	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

## **Cade Lake County Park & Campground**

Cade Lake was designed and renovated using principles of universal design. All facilities are accessible, however, some site improvements are needed to create a completely barrier free park. In 2015, accessible E-Z Docks replaced the boating and fishing piers. Boardwalks were also added to the fishing piers to improve access. Additionally, in 2015 the northern hiking trail was topped with crushed aggregate to create an improved surface. An accessible, crushed limestone path was installed in 2017 from the parking area to the beach and playground as well as to the boating and fishing piers. Additionally, in 2017, gravel parking lots and campsites were replaced with crushed limestone on the lower portion of the campground. Due to the natural terrain of the property, the disc golf course installed in 2018 does not meet accessibility guidelines.

## **Hoshel Canoe Park**

An accessible, crushed limestone path and footbridge were installed in 2015. An additional crushed limestone path was installed leading to the water's edge and canoe/kayak launch. Picnic tables at the site are accessible, however, there is grass separating the tables from the limestone walkways. Improvements required for accessible parking along the roadside may not be possible due to existing slopes and water.

## **Timm Preserve**

A small gravel parking area was installed in 2005 but upgraded to crushed limestone in 2016. Currently, the southern trail loop meets width and slope requirements, but the surface is compacted soil, and crushed limestone should be added to provide firmer ground. The boardwalks and bridge that were installed in 2016 meet width and surface requirements. However, until these park components are tied together with crushed limestone, universal access to more remote locations within the park is not feasible.

## **Meyer Broadway County Park**

All improvements made to this park in 2003 were based on universal design, and the park provides barrier free recreation opportunities for the public. Older, original facilities in the park are of mixed accessibility. There is a paved, half-mile loop traversing around the northern

community area. Paved parking areas were added to the dog park and northern community area in 2015. Due to the natural terrain of the park, the mountain bike course, hiking trails and disc golf courses do not meet accessibility guidelines.

### **Rawson's King Mill**

There are signs designating handicapped parking locations. Extensive renovations to the grounds took place in 2015, which included improving access paths and the parking area from gravel to crushed limestone. Due to the natural terrain of the park, all limestone pathways are sloped. All three bridges in the park are accessible. A crushed limestone path needs to be added to existing vault toilet. The canoe portage is not accessible, and firm surfaces are needed in locations along the creek for fishing. Plans for public use of the historic mill building will require substantial accessibility modifications.

### **Wahbememe Historical Park**

Signs designating handicapped parking are provided. An accessible path and picnic table could be added.

### **Feek County Park**

This property is currently used only by the local high school cross country team for practices. A plan specific to this property to be developed will include provisions for universal access to the public.

### **Sand Lake County Park**

The majority of facilities at this park meet accessibility guidelines. An ADA playground with crushed limestone access pathway was installed in 2017. There is a designated concrete stall for handicap parking. The floating fishing pier has a crushed limestone access pathway leading to it from the parking area. The parking lots were improved in 2017 as well, with crushed limestone being added. The bathroom facility meets accessibility guidelines, however, an access path from the upper parking area would improve access. Additionally, an access pathway from the main parking area to the bathroom facility would improve accessibility.

## **Covered Bridge Farm**

Improvements made to this park in 2017 were based on universal design. The entry drive to the park is paved. The main parking lot is crushed aggregate, however, there are two concrete handicap stalls with a concrete sidewalk that ties into the paved drive. The river walk is eight feet wide and was designed to meet accessibility guidelines. However, the east and west entry points to the boardwalk are grass. All other facilities meet accessibility guidelines.

## **Plumb Lake County Park**

The lakeside and woodland community areas meet accessibility guidelines. Both areas contain a pavilion, sidewalks and an accessible bathroom. In 2017, an accessible, floating fishing pier was installed, which is accessed via a crushed limestone path and boardwalk. Due to the ever-changing landscape, trails do not meet accessibility guidelines. However, much of the prairie trail meets width and slope requirements. Improving the prairie trail to crushed limestone would provide an accessible three-mile loop.

## **Public Survey**

Nearly 300 surveys were received from the public representing 43 zip codes. A sample of the survey is included. Respondents ranged in age from 18 to 70+ years. The most popular parks among respondents were:

1. Meyer Broadway County Park
2. Sand Lake County Park
3. Covered Bridge Farm
4. Plumb Lake County Park
5. Rawson's King Mill
6. Cade Lake County Park
7. Timm Preserve
8. Kettles County Park
9. Water Trail Sites

## 10. Feek County Park

Almost all respondents reported they had visited a park on multiple occasions over the past year.

The main interests of the respondents included the following:

1. Running/walking/hiking – 222
2. Wildlife/Nature - 163
3. Canoeing/kayaking – 122
4. Wildlife/Nature – 72
5. Playgrounds -- 103
6. Swimming – 84
7. Biking – 73
8. Fishing – 72
9. Camping – 63
10. Winter Activities – 56
11. Athletics – 41
12. Other – 4

Respondents were asked to identify the facilities/park components they wanted implemented throughout the County. The summary of the responses is as follows:

1. Bike Trails - 44
2. Splash Pad – 43
3. Multi-Use Trails – 39
4. Swimming Beaches – 30
5. Natural Areas – 29
6. Canoeing/Kayaking – 24
7. Purchase/Preserve natural areas – 21
8. Equestrian Trails – 19
9. Pickleball – 19
10. Disc Golf – 17

11. Programming – 15
12. Hunting – 9
13. Indoor Facilities – 8
14. Pavilions – 7
15. Other (dog park) – 1
16. Other (swimming pool) – 1

Respondents were asked about future funding of St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation. There were differing opinions, which are illustrated below:

1. Donations – 100
2. User Fee – 65
3. Millage – 91
4. General Fund w/ no user fee – 205
5. Private sponsorship – 1
6. Other (combination) – 25

In summary, the hiking trails continue to be the most popular feature with the county parks system. It is clear most respondents favor nature-based recreation. A large constituency of park patrons would like to see the development of additional bike trails, likely attributable to the overwhelming success of Warnaar Trail at Meyer Broadway. Canoeing and kayaking continues to grow with the Parks and Recreation Department's implementation of its Water Trail initiative. Interest in the development of additional mountain bike trails and playgrounds, splash pads, public beaches and hiking trails is quite strong, which aligns with long-term departmental goals. Opinions on park funding continue to be wide-ranging.

### **Recreation Standards**

Recreation Standards have typically been used as one method to determine the number of park acres and facilities needed to serve an area. The standards have been developed by the National Park and Recreation Association and are widely used and accepted. 30 standards have been developed, but St. Joseph County has selected 20 standards that apply to resource-based

recreation activities. The standards were developed for a variety of community types, including large metropolitan areas with very high population densities. These standards are constructive, but they should also be applied practically since they do not necessarily reflect the real needs of St. Joseph County's population.

The table below shows St. Joseph County is currently meeting many of the established park and recreation standards. Some of the deficiencies identified would be satisfied by including facilities provided by municipalities and schools, particularly playgrounds. The deficiency of picnic tables also does not reflect that many are provided in the numerous municipal parks around the county. Acquiring additional land would benefit underserved townships, connect currently separated parklands, enlarge and enhance existing community parks, as well as protect stream corridors or significant natural areas. Deficiencies particularly concerning in the county park system include equestrian trails and snowmobile trails. The development of linear parks and regional multi-purpose recreation trails would help to satisfy these needs. Although there are three public swimming beaches available, there are more than 50 lakes in St. Joseph County, and residents have expressed the desire for more locations to go swimming. The existing beaches are relatively small and become very crowded on hot summer days.

**Michigan Recreation Opportunity Standards**

<b>Opportunity</b>	<b>Standard</b>	<b>Recommended for 2020 pop. of 61,000</b>	<b>Provided in County</b>	<b>Deficiencies</b>
Local Park Land (acres) (b)	10/1,000	610	609 <small>(county-owned)</small>	1
Archery Ranges (a)	1/50,000	1.2	2	Satisfied
Bicycle Trails (miles)	1/40,000	1.5	7	Satisfied
Golf Courses (a)	1/25,000	2	7	Satisfied
Outdoor Ice Rinks (b)	1/20,000	3	0	3
Picnic Areas (tables) (b)	1/200	310	170	140
Playgrounds (b)	1/3,000	20	6	14
Rifle/Shotgun Ranges (a)	1/50,000	1	1	Satisfied
Sledding Hills (b)	1/40,000	1.5	3	Satisfied
Boat Launch Parking	1/400	155	175+	Satisfied
Campsites (a)	1/150	413	81	Satisfied
Cross Country Ski Trails	1/10,000	6	5	1
Fishing Access (feet)	1,000/1,000	62,000		Satisfied

Fishing Piers	1/100,000	1	2	Satisfied
Hiking Trails (miles)	1/5,000	13	17	Satisfied
Horse Riding Trails (miles)	1/20,000	3	0	3
Nature Areas	1/50,000	1.2	2	Satisfied
Nature Trails (miles)	1/20,000	3	15	Satisfied
Snowmobile Trails (miles)	1/3,000	20	0	20
Swimming Beaches	1/25,000	2.4	3 (small)	Satisfied
(a) Includes consideration of private providers (b) Does not include school or municipalities				

SOURCE: Michigan Department of Natural Resources; National Recreation and Park Association

## **Chapter 6: Goals and Objectives**

Goals and objectives provide the foundation for planning, and those presented in this plan have grown from the mission and history of the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission, as well as the current desires of county residents. Many of the goals listed below have been carried over from one master plan to the next because they are worthy, accurate and reliable. However, because the desires of the public and the funding to support parks and recreation are dynamic, the goals and objectives for SJCPR are always changing and evolving. The goals of this five-year masterplan include new and revised items developed through the public input survey and public review period. Specifically, the goals focus on four areas:

1. Facility Development
2. Programming and Community Involvement
3. Funding
4. Administration

The goals are printed in bold text, and are followed by specific, attainable objectives.

### **Facility Development Goals**

#### ***Land Acquisition and Review of Current Parks***

1. Acquire property to meet the recreation needs of St. Joseph County residents.
2. Pursue acquisition of undeveloped land contiguous to lakes and streams and to preserve remaining natural areas in the county.
3. Pursue acquisition of land contiguous to existing parks.
4. Acquisition of new parklands should promote larger parks versus many small parks. Larger regional parks improve efficiency, reduce costs, protect resources and provide a wider range of recreational opportunities.
5. Investigate benefits of purchasing sites with high conservation or ecological value.

6. Utilize state and federal grant funding assistance for land acquisition.

### ***Improve and Enhance Existing Facilities***

1. Continue to make improvements identified in site development plans for all county parks.
2. Improve, plan and develop all parks and facilities to meet universal design standards established by the ADA.
3. Update outdated playground and bathroom facilities.
4. Improve and increase hiking trails and access to natural areas.
5. Develop signs and facilities to interpret significant natural or historical features in appropriate areas.
6. Produce and maintain park development plans for all parks.
7. Develop ecological restoration plans for natural areas in parks.
8. Continue to improve infrastructures such as parking lots, road access, water supplies, etc.

### ***Develop Multi-use Facilities Appropriate for a Natural Resource-based Park System***

1. Promote and fund development of water-based recreation with facilities that compliment water trails with access points.
2. Design facilities to co-exist appropriately with the natural or historical features of each site.
3. Provide innovative recreational facilities in large, regional parks as appropriate.
4. Develop park facilities that encourage year-round and multiple uses.
5. Continue to develop facilities for popular recreation activities.

## **Programming and Community Involvement Goals**

### ***Promote Natural Resource-based Recreation to Existing and Potential Users***

1. Develop partnerships with local agencies, municipalities and businesses to develop recreation infrastructure, particularly for canoeing/kayaking, hiking and mountain biking.

2. Continue to work with and assist the River Country Recreational Authority to develop non-motorized trails.
3. Regularly use social media, press releases and community calendars to promote parks, special events or seasonal activities.
4. Continue to work with the local Chambers of Commerce, Waste Management, governmental agencies, and businesses to promote recreation opportunities and events.
5. Continue to develop strategic partnerships with local parks and recreation entities, user groups, service organizations, businesses and interest groups.
6. Use park logo on all brochures, literature, signage, displays and vehicles.
7. Increase the visibility of all parks with identification signs at strategic vehicle and pedestrian locations. Develop directional signs from cities and state highways.
8. Revise and improve park literature regularly.
9. Promote parks and facilities through special events and seasonal activities.
10. Provide leadership in the coordination of meetings between various recreation providers in the county.
11. Conduct community surveys when needed to determine interests in and knowledge of parks, facilities, and events.
12. Communicate regularly with county government and local governments to raise awareness and support.
13. Promote the benefits of preserving and protecting natural features and cultural heritage.

## **Funding Goals**

### ***Develop and strengthen current funding sources and opportunities.***

1. Continue to seek strong support for operations and capital improvements from the St. Joseph County Board of Commissioners.
2. Increase the amount of funding available by using State, Federal and private grants where feasible.

3. Maintain and provide new facilities to increase support for new investment in parks.
4. Develop cost-efficient facilities that feature low operation and maintenance costs, while producing revenue for funding.
5. Utilize user fees as necessary and where appropriate to increase revenue for park improvements.
6. Develop joint government projects to avoid possible duplication of facilities and to share costs with townships, cities and villages.
7. Continue to solicit donations from individuals, organizations and businesses to help finance future acquisition and development.

#### ***Explore and Develop New Funding Sources and Opportunities***

1. Establish separate funds for future land acquisition and park development.
2. Promote cooperation with volunteer organizations and private groups to assist with operation, maintenance, security and financial assistance.
3. Develop regional parks that provide multiple recreation opportunities, reduce maintenance and operations costs and maximize revenue potential.

#### **Administration**

##### ***Maintain Quality Staff***

1. Continue to invest in training and continuing education for all personnel to develop a skilled and knowledgeable staff.
2. Hire additional parks and recreation staff when and where necessary to maintain new facilities and provide recreation programs and services.
3. Obtain and maintain professional parks and recreation certifications.

##### ***Continue to Use Recognized Planning Tools and Methods to Meet the Recreation Needs of St. Joseph County***

1. Continue to develop, update, and implement site development plans for all county parks.

2. Update the Parks and Recreation masterplan every five years.

***Continue to set and achieve high departmental standards***

1. Continue to maintain and improve all aspects of all parks and water trail sites.

## **Chapter 7: 2024 - 2028 Action Plan**

The information presented in this chapter identifies how the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Commission intends to work toward achieving the goals and objectives set forth in this masterplan over the next five years. Specific tasks and projects defined by or related to the stated goals and objectives are presented and prioritized below.

### **Parks and Facility Planning**

#### ***High Priority***

- Continue planning implementation of St. Joseph County’s Water Trail masterplan in cooperation with St. Joseph County Conservation District, St. Joseph County Road Commission and municipalities.
- Continue working with surrounding municipalities on non-motorized trail network to link areas of interest in St. Joseph County and bordering counties.
- Create habitat restoration plan for Timm Preserve, Kettles County Park, Plumb Lake County Park and Meyer Broadway County Park.
- Develop plan for mountain bike trail at Plumb Lake County Park.
- Develop plan for equestrian trails.
- Continue creating high-quality trail maps and interpretive signage at all necessary locations.

#### ***Moderate Priority***

- Support the development of the St. Joseph County Masterplan to encourage preservation of remaining natural areas.
- Partner with Michigan Department of Natural Resources on development plan for Sweder Preserve.
- Identify park property to implement “Dark Sky” initiative
- Determine feasibility of converting to wind and solar power at county parks with electrical infrastructure to reduce operation costs.
- Develop plan to offer free swimming lessons to area residents.

- Support surrounding townships in retaining open space and preserving potential parklands.
- Assist and support the implementation of watershed and invasive species management plans with the St. Joseph County Conservation District.

## **Capital Improvement Plan**

### ***High Priority***

- Complete phased development of canoe/kayak access points throughout the county by working with the St. Joseph County Conservation District, St. Joseph County Road Commission, surrounding municipalities and private landowners to provide at least ten improved access locations, with primary focus on the Pigeon River.
- Construct mountain bike trail at Plumb Lake County Park.
- Construct accessible trail around perimeter of Plumb Lake County Park.
- Construct additional parking areas at Meyer Broadway County Park and Sand Lake County Park.
- Complete structural repairs to Rawson's King Mill building and spillway areas.
- Construct viewing platform at Timm Preserve.
- Install new playground at Meyer Broadway County Park.
- Install new playground at Cade Lake County Park.
- Install pickleball courts at Cade Lake County Park.
- Install fishing platform at Covered Bridge Farm.
- Install sand volleyball court at Sand Lake County Park.
- Construct canoe/kayak launch at Kettles Preserve.
- Continue to reduce accessibility barriers in all parks through 2028.

### ***Moderate Priority***

- Construct additional rental cabins at Cade Lake County Park.
- Construct shade structure at Covered Bridge Farm.
- Construct amphitheater at Covered Bridge Farm.

- Complete site development of Feek County Park.
- Plant tall grass prairie at Kettles Preserve.
- Construct fishing pier and hiking trails at Sweder Preserve.
- Construct improved bathroom facilities at Rawson's King Mill.
- Install video surveillance at high-loss potential locations.

## **Land Acquisition**

### ***High Priority***

- Acquire undeveloped land contiguous to streams, lakes or existing parks as a means of developing water trails and park expansion.
- Pursue land acquisition within underserved areas of St. Joseph County, particularly Constantine Township.
- Pursue available land and/or conservation easement contiguous to Rawson's Mill and Feek Property for development of linear/regional park along Nottawa Creek.

### ***Moderate Priority***

- Acquire appropriate and available property to meet the recreation needs of St. Joseph County residents, particularly in priority conservation areas or properties contiguous to existing parks.

## **Programming and Community Involvement**

### ***High Priority***

- Work with municipalities, local agencies and commissions to develop water access infrastructure for water trail users.
- Continue partnering with local disc golf organizations and municipalities to host Professional Disc Golf Association-sanctioned tournaments at Meyer Broadway County Park.
- Continue hosting annual bike race with Southwest Michigan Mountain Bike Association.

- Form additional partnerships with mountain bike organizations focused on developing youth.
- Develop “music in the park” program for Covered Bridge Farm.
- Continue to partner with Three Rivers Chamber of Commerce for Fall Color Festival.
- Develop plan for interpretive programs at natural resource-rich parks.

### ***Moderate Priority***

- Develop promotional programs utilizing internet based social media.
- Continue to produce new, full-color brochures to describe and promote parks, facilities and events.
- Continue to build St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation brand through various marketing campaigns.
- Develop parks-centered annual triathlon.
- Develop “put & take” program for pheasants.
- Develop memorial benches/trees program.
- Support city, village and township parks and recreation planning and development efforts and support inter-agency projects to avoid duplication of facilities and share costs.
- Partner with public and private agencies to promote development of parks and recreation facilities while preserving ecologically significant natural areas.