JEFFERSON COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT ANNUAL REPORT September 2025

On behalf of the Jefferson County Parks Department, I'm proud to present our 2025 Annual Report. This report highlights the accomplishments of our hardworking Parks team and the valuable support of our Parks Committee, County Board, and partner departments. Together, we continue to enhance the quality of life for Jefferson County residents through recreation, conservation, and stewardship.

Our Mission: To preserve natural resources for public use and conservation, to operate and maintain a parks system with resource-oriented recreation, trails and specialty parks; and to expand the parks system for environmental and land use benefits, and the health and enjoyment of Jefferson County residents.

PARKS OVERVIEW

The Jefferson County Parks Department manages a system of 22 County Parks. Our parks vary in size from small wayside rest areas like Cold Spring Creamery Park, to the 517-acre Dorothy Carnes County Park and Rose Lake State Natural Area. Our parks feature a wide range of recreation from historic interpretation to boat launches, shelters, playgrounds, hiking trails, and much more.

Parks annual project highlights:

- Replace and update automatic gate operators at Kanow County Park
- Re-designed parking lots and access to park shop
- Rebuilding of Welcome Travelers County Park shelter and replacing parking lot
- Acquired Marsh Lake Public Access in partnership with Wisconsin DNR and Groundswell Conservancy
- Worked with our GIS department to create new online digital map resources for parks and watertrails
- Installed Flock license plate reader at the Jefferson County Dog Park for security
- Installed 5 new memorial benches in three parks
- Managed over 400 hours of volunteer work through partnerships with local businesses and volunteer organizations
- Partner with Land and Water Conservation Department to add two Boat Cleaning Stations at County Park Boat Launches
- Invested a total of $323,498.35 in the Jefferson County Parks Endowment Fund through generous donations and estate gifts
- Processed 1,718 annual dog tags, 1,401 daily dog park entries, 159 shelter reservations, 236 boat launch registrations, 87 campsite reservations, and sold 650 dog park calendars
- Applied for 4 grants with two successful applications totaling $16,850.00
- Hosted 14 community events including bike rides, information booths, education sessions, anniversary celebrations, fundraisers, and community presentations

- Created over 100 informational and promotional social media posts and press releases while growing our online followers by 10%
- Staff completed over 200 hours of staff safety training, FA/CPR, leadership courses, and ongoing education
- Worked with a group of volunteers to establish Friends of Korth Park

PARKS NATURAL RESOURCES AND FORESTRY

Jefferson County Parks manages the grounds for over 1300 acres of County Parkland, County Facilities, and Flood Mitigation Properties. We have an ISA Certified Arborist and Natural Resources Technician position that is dedicated to managing a broad range of natural resources in the parks. This position oversees multiple LTE positions and in 2024 2 student additional intern positions were added to work to accomplish the many tasks and goals outlined below.

Natural Resources and Forestry annual project highlights:

- Seeded over 15 acres of prairie and woodland as part of two ongoing restoration efforts
- Removed 64 dead or dying trees from multiple parks and facilities (mostly ash)
- Planted 36 new trees including oak, elm, and maple
- Completed 6 prescribed burns for a total of 65 acres
- Treated 55 ash trees against emerald ash borers
- Structurally pruned 50 park and facility trees
- Worked to remove obstructions from 13 miles of the bark river to increase access to paddlers
- Hosted 8 volunteer workdays completing a multitude of conservation projects with Friends of Korth park, Generac, Fort Atkinson High School, and Jefferson High School
- Ongoing chemical control of woody invasives on over 350 acres of prairie
- Ongoing monitoring and almost total control of purple loosestrife in 5 county parks
- Ongoing chemical and manual removal of wild parsnip on over 20 acres
- Hosted 3 education programs targeting high school students
- Oversaw ongoing forestry work at Garman Nature Preserve including planning, bidding, and scheduling contracted services on over 45 acres of restoration

JEFFERSON COUNTY TRAILS

Staff also manage a network of trails including the 30-mile Glacial River Bike Trail, 3-mile Glacial River Mountain Bike Trails, 11-mile Interurban Bike Trail, Jefferson County Intercommunity Bike Routes, 229 miles of Jefferson County Snowmobile trails, 18 miles of hiking and cross-country ski trails, and our Glacial Heritage Area Water Trails. These trail systems have grown to become some of our most popular offerings and silent sports like paddling, biking, birding, and hiking continuing to lead the outdoor recreation industry for popularity and days spent participating. The link between personal health and access to the outdoors continues to be an emphasis in our communities, highlighted by year over year increases in users and our ongoing status as a Gold Medal Community in the Wisconsin Healthy Communities Initiative.

Trail Systems Highlights include:

- Ongoing volunteer work on Mountain Bike Trails at Upper Rock Lake Mountain Bike Park and Glacial River Mountain Bike Trails

- Interurban Trail – Completed bridge installation on Phase III in December 2024
- Interurban Trail – Start of construction of Phase III in August 2025
- Updated wayfinding signage and maps on the Glacial River Trail, Interurban Trail, Glacial River Mountain Bike Trails, and Upper Rock Mountain Bike Trails

COUNTY FACILITIES

The Parks Department works with the County Facility managers to provide year-round grounds maintenance services on all county-owned properties. This includes general mowing, landscape maintenance, tree removals and planting, and snow removal at the County Courthouse, MIS building, Highway Department, Fairgrounds, Human Services, Workforce Development/University of Wisconsin-Extension, Sheriff's Department annex and shooting range, and the Potters Field Cemetery.

FLOOD MITIGATION AND TAX FORECLOSURES

The Parks Department also works with the Emergency Management Department to manage access to the County's 140+ flood mitigation properties and assists the Corporation Counsels office in groundskeeping and managing issues on tax foreclosures. The department provides services including compliance monitoring, reporting, enforcement of violations, response to complaints and non-compliant uses, invasive plant removals, building demolition, mowing, and mitigation of hazards such as dead trees.

Flood Mitigation Property Highlights:

- Completed Certified Surveys of 2/3 of all County owned Flood Mitigation Properties and installed boundary signage to help manage trespass issues and regulate ordinance compliance

Noteworthy Grants and Donations:

- $16,161.50 in donations from three Brew with a View fundraising events at Korth Park with Tyranena Brewery
- $15,000.00 Recreation Boating Facility Grant for Kanow County Park
- $323,498.35 of donations invested in the Jefferson County Parks Endowment fund
- $2,500 County Conservation Aid Grant for Dorothy Carnes Park East
- $612.43 Jefferson County Parks Trees for Tomorrow Fund disbursement in 2025
- $1,748.29 Jefferson County Parks Endowment Fund disbursement in 2025