



Parks, Recreation, and Forestry

400 La Crosse St. , La Crosse, WI 54601 – (608) 789-7533 Fax (608) 789-7501
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City of LaCrosse
Parks, Recreation, & Forestry

Environmental Leadership Forum



Ten Year Land Management Plan for the City Owned Bluff and Marshland - Stage 1

The City of La Crosse has created a forum with multiple entities that have worked together to guide the management of the La Crosse Bluff and Marshland. Those participating in the Environmental Leadership Forum (ELF) have influenced the management decisions presented in this document.



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Mission Statement:

*Protecting our environment through
multi-resource management*



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Terminology Definitions: as it relates to wild-land management.

- *Preservation*: protecting a particular resource. May include management techniques to improve the resource, or there may be an absence of all management upon that resource.
- *Conservation*: influencing land through multi-resource management. Conserving land as it pertains to the Parks, Recreation, & Forestry Department will encompass a goal of satisfying the desires all user groups while maintaining and restoring ecosystem integrity.
- *Restoration*: implementing particular land management techniques specifically geared toward creating or improving the habitat quality for esthetic value and environmental health and sustainability.
- *Recreation*: implementing particular land management techniques specifically geared toward creating or improving recreational experiences for all user groups including but not limited to: hikers, bikers, cross country skiers, snowshoers, hunters, birdwatchers, mushroom hunters, and plant lovers.

Purpose of the Bluff and Marsh Plan

Our bluff and marsh are wildlands. The ecosystems, habitat, environmental quality, and recreational opportunity they provide for our human health should be valued. Sustainable land management should consider proper practices that satisfy the needs of all habitat types as well as ensuring that the recreational potential for user groups is all inclusive. Hikers, bikers, cross country skiers, and snowshoers are likely our largest trail users. Hunters, birdwatchers, mushroom hunters, and plant lovers are recreational user groups that also reside in our community. The City of La Crosse has just begun to create adequate habitat quality, which will support the interests of these user groups. If we manage our property on the landscape level, take our ecosystem health into consideration, build sustainable trails, and construct quality trailhead facilities we will dramatically improve the user experience. This will also, increase recreational tourism and improve our environment for future generations.

Restoration and forest management activities are not discussed in this plan because they will be addressed specifically with local natural resource experts such as the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Department of Natural Resources, and the Mississippi Valley Conservancy. Such practices are also dependent upon grant opportunities.

From 2017 onward, the La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department is committed to improving our wildland management by increasing partnership relations, conducting management on a landscape level, and considering the recreational abilities of all user groups.

Purpose of the Environmental Leadership Forum (ELF)

The La Crosse Parks, Recreation, and Forestry Department created this management plan with the influence of the Environmental Leadership Forum (ELF). This group has obtained consensus between the Federal, State, City, and community levels. The cooperation between multiple groups will streamline management practices while balancing the desires of various user groups and preserving our natural resources. This plan outlines the next 5 years for land acquisition, trailhead facility development, and priority actions for trail designs.

Environmental Leadership Forum (ELF) Contributors

- City of La Crosse Planning Department



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- Friends of the Blufflands
- Friends of the Marsh
- Grand Bluff Running
- La Crosse County
- Mississippi Valley Conservancy
- Outdoor Recreation Alliance
- Sierra Club
- University of Wisconsin Extension
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Wisconsin DNR
- WisCorps

Acquisition

The La Crosse River Marsh and Blufflands are iconic to this area, and they provide critical habitat for countless species. Many of these properties are highly valuable for building development due to their viewpoints, and logging operations due to quality oak and hickory species. By acquiring these properties, we can not only preserve and improve their environmental integrity; we can also maintain their accessibility to our citizens, tourists, and future generations.

Please note, that acquisitions are dependent upon the willingness of the landowner. If the landowner expresses disinterest, we will make note and discontinue negotiations with said landowner. If new parcels become available, the land will be brought to ELF and considered using the criteria below. Finally, recreational easement and/or conservation easement will be utilized as tools to facilitate the negotiation process and fulfill the desires of the landowner and the City.

ELF and The City of La Crosse have developed a priority list of desired parcels to be acquired. The criteria utilized to assist this decision process is as follows:

- Habitat preservation
- Recreation potential
- Adjacent to current public land
- Scenic overlook accessibility

Additional minor criteria were developed by the City's Planning department to further assist the decision process.

- Soil type
- % slope
- Portion of property with slope $\geq 50\%$
- Possible Restrictions
- Wetlands

Trailhead Facility Development



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The City of La Crosse desires to better accommodate the public during their visit to our natural areas. Building trailheads that provide restroom facilities, drinking fountains, or shelters would improve user experience and accommodate a wider range of user groups.

Public input was utilized to narrow our focus from 6 locations (that currently exist in some capacity) down to 3 locations where we would begin improvements projects.

Trail Design and Maintenance Plans

The City of La Crosse desires to increase and improve the recreational experiences available to our trail users. We believe that obtaining trail plans for sustainable, well designed trail systems that provide user groups with an enjoyable experience takes time and planning. Quality trail designs are done best when they tackle large tracts from the beginning of development.

Public input was utilized to narrow our focus from 6 locations (currently owned by the City) down to 3 locations where we would begin improvements projects. This plan is not addressing the details of the trail designs. The further details of these designs will be determined in tandem with the environmental rehabilitation methods and the land use permissions.



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Summary of a Future Land Management Three Focus Areas

Preliminary Management Practice:

- ❖ Boundary Marking: All property currently owned by the City of La Crosse would be properly surveyed and marked with signs similar to the following:



- ❖ By marking this management practice a priority, we would likely improve relations with adjacent landowners.

Land Acquisition

Properties can be found using the La Crosse County GIS
(<http://lacrossecounty.maps.arcgis.com/>) Search Tax Parcel in parentheses

Primary Acquisition / Easement Areas

*New parcels will be evaluated/added as they become available.

1. 42 (17-10491-10)
2. 32,33,34,37,38 (9-1094-0, 9-1095-0, 9-1096-0, 9-1090-0, 9-1091-0)
3. 58, 59 (17-20267-120, 9-1383-0)
4. 86, 87, 88 (11-573-0, 11-575-0, 11-577-0)
5. 17-10297-82, 17-10297-81, 17-10298-10)
6. 73 (11-357-1) - **UNINTERESTED**
7. 99 (11-1720-0)
8. 74 (11-360-0) – **UNINTERESTED**
9. 82 (11-372-0)
10. 9-1040-0, 9-1021-0 – **UNINTERESTED**
11. 51, 52, 53 (9-1253-0, 9-1288-0, 9-1254-0)
12. 43-48 (9-1099-0, 9-1273-0)

Secondary Acquisition Areas

1. 31 (9-1086-0)
2. 54 (9-1279-0)
3. 60, 61, 62, 63 (11-329-0, 11-327-1, 11-332-0, 11-327-2)
4. 17-10315-670



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5. 11-528-0 / 17-50246-45 (Ebner Coulee)
6. 17-10315-670
7. 17-20267-90 (Bliss Road)
8. 96 (11-1163-0)
9. 90 (11-586-3)

Trailhead Facility Development

A voting process was used during the public input session on the March 22nd, 2017. Attendees were given a list of the following areas and asked to vote for their top three locations. The details of the potential management conducted at these locations were described by the presentation.

The highlighted items denote the results of the voting process.
Numbers do not represent ranking

1. **Lower Hixon (permanent restroom facility)**
2. **Upper Hixon (permanent restroom facility)**
3. **Mathy Quarry (parking improvement)**
4. Skemp/Lenox (parking improvement)
5. Dobson (parking improvement)
6. Hass Dobson (parking improvement)
7. **Rim of the City Road (parking and porta toilet)** – Staff decision to be considered as a management priority to be added to the list.

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Trail Design Areas

1. **Grandad Bluff (South)**
2. **Mathy Tract**
3. **Marsh (special projects)**
4. Skemp/Lenox Tract
5. Dobson
6. Hass/ Welch/Juniper Tract
7. **Upper Hixon** – Staff decision to be considered as a management priority to be added to the list.



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Appendix 1. Comments from the Public Input Session on March 22nd, 2017

“Would like to see more focus on land acquisition to connect North/South trail systems.”

“1st priority land acquisition for Bluffland nature conservation. 2nd priority additional marshland trails”

“I do not see myself go anti-bike but I am a hiker and that is my preference and birders are hikers. I did almost get run over by fast downhill bikers at the bottom of Miller Coulee almost down to Milston Court. Bikers are not allowed there.”

“We like to hike the Vista and x-country ski and mountain bike. It gets a lot of traffic bathrooms would be great!”

“Look at what Duluth, Minnesota has done with trails.”

“Educate all trail users of responsible trail use. More mountain bike friendly trails.”

“No new trails – improve and maintain what exists. No bathrooms on MVC easement lands. Do not ignore the existing LAPC Plan. Cooperate with a coordinated LAPC plan with that planner in overall coordination.”

“No more trails or infrastructure, no restrooms and no more pavement & development. Post boundaries and fix what is already there. Fix the existing erosion, trails. Stop building more, more and more.”

“Mountain bike access and a corridor are my top priorities. Thank you for your work!”

“Invasive species control is a priority. I am a hiker, not a biker. Habitat improvement is critical!”

“Could we please have some lower Hixon trails designated as ski only from December 1 – March 15th. Hiker and ski sharing is not working – which is why nearly all public ski trails are not shared use.”

“As a local, I have used all the trails and would love to see more interconnected multi-use trails. Mountain biking is definitely growing – please keep in mind that beginners need appropriately challenging trails. They’re also not as invasive as more difficult trails.”

“Multi-use trails – allow mountain biking. Bikes do not erode the trails. Bikers and hikers need to respect each other. I’d never seen biking restrictions in any other place I’ve lived and was shocked to see it here and very saddened.”

“I own a bike shop in town and improving trails that do not allow mountain bikes directly affects the livelihood and my family.”

“There needs to be more clear communication between Park and Recreation with the County/Bluffland Coalition.”



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“I am most interested in additional opportunity for mountain biking (non-motorized).”

“Who did you contact in Shelby? Medary? What is the yearly upkeep on the trails now?”

“Allow all users everywhere including bicycles.”

“Keep doing the restoration!”

“Buckthorn removal on City property to make it easier for us to keep our property clean.”

“Top priority: Conservation of nature and natural trees, plants, animals, walking, non-motorized, least physical destruction, slow activities.”

“I think that the City of La Crosse needs to extend an invitation to surrounding townships (Medary, Shelby, etc.) to get on board with maintenance and conservation work – not acquisition but actual physical support in the shape of volunteers, conservation groups, etc. We need to extend a hand to our neighbors who reside and also pay taxes for this land.”

“Revise ordinance to allow for climbing access on Grandad Bluff and surrounding areas (not including west face of Grandads Bluff.”

“Opening up rock climbing to the public is a great way to increase tourism. Winona is a local example. They opened up Sugar Loaf and have had excellent results in a short time. La Crosse has a great opportunity below Grandad’s Bluff to the south to SSE.”

“I understand some of the restrictions and issues you are running into, but I cannot support areas that won’t allow bikers. There does NOT have to be a division in this community. I am BOTH a hiker and biker but see the undisputed value of a multi-use trail system for a community. Multi-use trails will equal more people, families and users in general on trails as well as all those invested in the maintenance and upkeep, which will equal better/safer/cleaner trails and less problems as well as less rogue trails and better impact on environment.”

“There is clearly animosity against mountain bikers. I won’t vote for access if it doesn’t level the playing field for a user group that contributes, puts heads in beds and grows the community.”

“I really enjoy hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing.”

“In favor of any expansion or acquisition of property that ONLY allows multi-purpose recreational uses (including biking).”

“Thank you for this forum. I do believe you need more transparency with the public. This helps but there’s still issues on how this correlates to the LAPC plan (which has some serious issues with true conversancy and instead is a push for the mountain biking) and maintenance plans.”

“Great presentation!” – A La Crosse Rock Climber



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“This was awesome – but why can’t some of these funds go to saving memorial pool! There is no areas for decent adult swim in the community. Thank you”

“I hike the marsh trails 3-4 times/week. At least once/week my husband and I have a close call with a biker. I have heard many stories from my friends about nearly being hit or actually being hit by a bike”

“Focus on ways/places people can access without a car. Parking is an incredibly expensive development with very little pay off. Focus land acquisition on quality access points first, then on extending boundaries.”

Comments by email after the Session:

“Just wanted to say I think you did as good a job as anyone possibly could have at diffusing the tension and apprehension in the public hearing tonight. I was very impressed and swayed by your delivery. Keep fighting the buckthorn!!”

“My hats off to both of you for last night’s meeting -- you had to field some really tough questions and did a great job explaining the restrictions on MVC easement/DNR-funded sites. THANK YOU! Steve – your comment about the distinction of partnering with MVC for preservation/conservation goals as opposed to recreational sites will really help to clarify the differing roles in bluffland preservation, and eliminate the misperceptions out there. I’m interested to hear the results of the feedback from the attendees. Again, thank you for all of your efforts in educating the public – I believe the meeting will go a long way toward building a more productive dialogue with residents and user groups.”

“Trails make good firebreaks. Bikers shouldn't run over hikers. Hikers shouldn't leave the trails. Everybody should leave the snakes alone. There are too many invasive species. There isn't enough fire. *Savanna restoration would improve visibility to help reduce user conflict, while helping the other stuff listed above*”.