

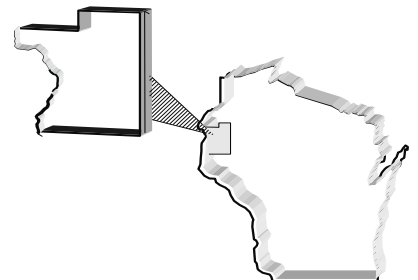
POLK COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN



2025 – 2029



*Polk County -
Gift of the Glaciers*



**Polk County
Outdoor Recreation Plan
2025-2029**

Polk County Public Safety & Public Works Committee:

Steve Warndahl – Chairperson
John Bonneprise– Vice Chair
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Jeremy Hall

Prepared by:

Polk County Forestry and Parks Department
Polk County Planning Department

Adopted: December 17, 2024

ABSTRACT

TITLE: 2025-2029 POLK COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN
Effective January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2029

SUBJECT: This report assesses the existing recreation system in Polk County, identifies recreation needs based upon public input and recreation standards, sets forth goals and objectives to be used as guidelines in formulating recreation plans, and establishes recommendations for improving the recreation system over the next five years.

Submission of this report to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources establishes eligibility for the County and local units of government for a variety of Federal and State Aids. Non-profit groups, foundations, and the general public may also use this document to coordinate their own private efforts for developing outdoor recreation facilities.

DATE: December 17, 2024

AGENCY: Polk County Parks Department
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SECTION 1.

**Copy of the adopted resolution approving the comprehensive
outdoor recreation plan**

Resolution No. ____-24

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SECTION 3. INTRODUCTION

The official Polk County Vision Statement is to:

“Improve the quality of life for all who live, work, and play in Polk County.”

Recreation is an important part of our lives. Increasing demands for outdoor recreation opportunities have led to increasing pressure on existing recreation facilities. To meet the demands that are being placed on these facilities, communities are expected to provide additional facilities or improvements that afford residents and tourists a wide range of quality recreation opportunities. Communities are also expected to provide these facilities in a manner that maintains the character and quality of life and the quality of the environment in which they live. Consequently, there is a need to provide for increasing recreation demands while protecting and enhancing the various resources for future generations.

The Need for Recreation

Taken from the 2017 National Recreation and Park Association Survey. National results.

- **Americans, on average, visit their local park and recreation facilities almost twice a month. Nearly seven in 10 survey respondents report having visited a local park and/or recreation facility within a month of participating in the survey, including nearly half having done so within the previous seven days. Millennials and parents are more frequent park users.**
- **Eighty-five percent of Americans consider high-quality park and recreation amenities as an important factor when they are choosing a new place to live.**
- **More than nine in 10 Americans agree that parks and recreation is an important service their local governments deliver.**
- **The reasons Americans visit their local park and recreation facilities are as diverse as they are: a place to be with family and friends, to be more physically active, to be closer to nature, to access quality, affordable child care, mental health and to learn a new skill or craft.**
- **What keeps people from greater enjoyment of their local park and recreation facilities is a lack of time, concerns about safety at and walking to/from the park, and a lack of awareness of park locations/offerings.**
- **Four in five Americans agree that NRPA’s Three Pillars — Conservation, Health and Wellness, and Social Equity — represent what they see as the priorities for their local park and recreation agency.**

- **Ninety-five percent of Americans agree that it is important that their local government acts to protect the natural environment, including acquiring, constructing and maintaining local parks, trails and green spaces.**
- **Eighty-seven percent of Americans support their local government and park and recreation agency in investing in critical infrastructure that would make their regions more resilient and would improve their community’s ability to withstand or recover quickly from natural disasters.**

PLAN PURPOSE

An important step in providing quality recreation opportunities is proper planning. Limited budgets at all levels of government and private agencies require that the most appropriate facility be placed in the most suitable location in order to meet the specific needs of the area that it is intended to serve.

Essential to this planning process is the development of the Polk County Outdoor Recreation Plan. The Plan is intended to serve as a guide for the development of parks and outdoor recreation facilities in Polk County. It is an update of the *2019-2024 Polk County Outdoor Recreation Plan* and ensures the continuation of an orderly procedure to identify and evaluate the need for additional or improved recreation facilities. The Plan will also provide the Polk County Board, Public safety and Public Works Committee and other local decision-making agencies and organizations with:

- Information on the status and condition of current outdoor recreation facilities;
- A foundation for coordinating recreation facility development and improvement projects; and
- The ability to participate in the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Stewardship Program and other related funding programs.

The Stewardship Program, and related components, can be used to assist in the acquisition and development of new outdoor recreation facilities, as well as for the improvement of existing recreational facilities.

For instance, adoption of this plan by the Polk County Board, and subsequent acceptance by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WIDNR), will continue eligibility of the county and its local units of government for the Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF), Aids for the Acquisition and Development of Local Parks (ADLP), Urban Green Space Program (UGS) and Urban Rivers Grant Program (URGP). Adoption by all municipalities is not necessary if they wish to cooperate with Polk County to use this plan for grant applications. Local government grant applications have a better chance of approval if Polk County applies on their behalf.

Non-profit conservation organizations (NCOs) are eligible to participate in the Knowles–Nelson Stewardship Program under the Urban Green Space and Aids for the Acquisition and Development of Local Parks programs. NCOs may adopt or carry out recommendations from a comprehensive

outdoor recreation plan of the local unit of government in which the NCO project is located or use their land management plans that are required for participation in the stewardship programs.

Statutory Basis

This Outdoor Recreation Plan (ORP) was prepared pursuant to Wisconsin Statute §23.30 Outdoor Recreation Program. This section serves to “promote, encourage, coordinate, and implement a comprehensive long-range plan to acquire, maintain, and develop for public use, those areas of the state best adapted to the development of a comprehensive system of state and local outdoor recreation facilities and services...”

Submission of this adopted ORP to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources establishes eligibility for the county and local units of government to apply for a variety of Federal and State Aids for outdoor recreation (Chapter NR 50.06(4), Wisconsin administrative code).

Plan Components

This plan addresses the outdoor recreation needs for Polk County. Background information on Polk County was compiled to develop an understanding of the environmental and social characteristics of the county and their meaning for outdoor recreation. An inventory of existing recreational facilities exists in Section 9 of this plan. The existing recreation system was analyzed to determine current and potential future deficiencies through the year 2029. A combination of public input assessments and site visits were utilized to define recreational and open space needs. Goals and objectives were created to guide the direction of recreational planning efforts within Polk County.

Provisions for Updating

An essential characteristic of any planning program is that it be on going and flexible. Periodic updating of the plan is necessary for continued refinement and course correction in the planning program, if needed. Some of the planning recommendations will not be accomplished within this five-year plan period, and additional recommendations may be added as new recreational activities come into demand or the status of existing facilities change. Review the plan recommendations and action programs on an annual basis or more often, if deemed necessary.

The Parks and Trails Department review of this information and evaluation will determine the need for proposed projects based on standards and priorities as outlined in this plan.

Updating the entire plan every five years is necessary to ensure that the plan reflects changes in the recreational needs of the county and to maintain the county's eligibility for grant programs. Additionally, it is the intention of the county to continue reinforcing the use of this plan for decision making and for the plan to be an increasingly wholistic view of outdoor recreation in the County.

SECTION 4.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The following sections of this plan demonstrate the increasing demand for outdoor recreational facilities in Polk County. With increases in population, development, and resource use come the risks of damage, depletion, and even destruction of our natural resource base. Considering these conditions and trends, this section provides general recommendations for the conservation, use, and improvement of our recreational system.

POLK COUNTY PARKS DEPARTMENT MISSION:

To develop, maintain and preserve our park, lake access, and trail systems that will meet the needs of our citizens and future generations; preserve and protect the county's open space, water, historical, natural and economic resources and provide recreation and tourism opportunities that are designed to enhance Polk County residents' quality of life.

The above mission will be accomplished in the context of the County government's overall mission statement:

'The mission of Polk County Government is to serve and represent the public with integrity.'

POLK COUNTY OUTDOOR RECREATION GOALS

This outdoor recreation plan for Polk County is designed to provide an achievable program for meeting the county's outdoor recreation needs. Agreement on basic goals is necessary to establish the general direction for developing this program. The overall program recommendations later in this section, the activity-specific recommendations in Section 9, and the facility-specific recommendation should all support the following goals.

- Goal:** Provide a variety of recreational facilities and activities for persons of all ages and abilities in a manner which balances recreation and conservation values, while taking advantage of tourism opportunities.
- Goal:** Promote greater awareness of the parks, trails and natural areas that enhance appreciation of our rural community.
- Goal:** Through the coordinated efforts of private and public recreation interests, protect the resources upon which our recreational activities depend in an efficient and cost-feasible manner.
- Goal:** Involve and engage the public in the development, maintenance, and improvement of our outdoor recreation resources and facilities through volunteerism, advocacy, and friends' groups.
- Goal:** Investigate and establish recreational trail connections. Maintain and rehabilitate existing recreational trails.

OVERALL PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations, as well as those found within Sections 9 and 11, are based on generally accepted program activities. The scope of these recommendations is large and may be beyond the immediate financial capability of the county. All recommendations are not intended for implementation during the five-year planning horizon, nor are the recommendations prioritized.

Implementation of plan recommendations will be contingent upon county priorities, feasibility, and available resources and opportunities (e.g., grants, partnerships, available land, and staff resources).

However, there are several areas in which the county government is the only agency in the fortunate position of being able to act before many problems develop. Action can be taken in these areas before patterns of use and development are fixed to such an extent that pressures make change almost impossible.

Programmatic Actions

1. **Balancing Demands.** Meeting the recreation demands of county residents should be given preference over demands originating from outside the county, though potential economic and tourism benefits should be considered in decision-making. Care will be taken to balance and provide for both passive and active recreational needs.
2. **Coordination with Private Enterprise.** Polk County will not unduly compete with but will cooperate with private enterprise in the provision of its outdoor recreation amenities. Private enterprise is better suited to provide many specialized facilities to the public (e.g., golf courses, marinas). In addition, there are opportunities to explore the use of conservation easements, Managed Forest Law, and other programs to expand recreation opportunities on private lands with willing landowners. Polk County should continue to provide a leadership role in the protection of our natural resources to ensure commercial recreation interests do not deplete or unduly threaten the quality natural resources upon which we all depend.
3. **Program Development.** With increasing population, the demand for and use of county park facilities is also increasing. Greater operational funding may be required to prevent deterioration of existing facilities, while additional new facilities will be needed in the future. However, in developing a recreation program, care should be taken that the annual cost of maintenance does not exceed an amount the county can afford or is willing to pay. Planned recreational system improvements should be prioritized and integrated into a county multi-year capital improvements program, subject to annual review.
4. **Leverage Available Resources.** Polk County should take full advantage of state and federal financial and technical aid programs in meeting recreational needs. The county's outdoor recreation plan should be updated every five years to maintain eligibility for grant funding. Partnerships with local communities, private enterprise, landowners, and other interested parties should be promoted and fully explored in order to maximize all available resources. When opportunities arise, work with Polk County Historical Society to integrate sites, events, and materials of historical interest into recreational programming.

5. **Public Outreach.** Polk County Parks Department will continue to publish and distribute informational materials on the county's outdoor recreation amenities through the county website, frequently updated brochures, periodic press releases to local media, and working in conjunction with the Polk County Information Center. In addition, the County has completed an interactive recreational viewer for users to access information about all County recreational opportunities at:
<https://polkcowi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=48d9c82d98d9404996f87e28d971cd9c>

Land Use Actions

1. **Coordination with Other Plans.** It is imperative that outdoor recreational programs are consistent with other planning efforts and related regulations, including the County Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Polk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan, Trail Network Plan, soil and water conservation plans, Land and Water Resources Management Plan, and applicable state and federal plans. Planning and official mapping can be used to protect valued resources and potential future park sites while mitigating potential land use conflicts. As part of the subdivision review process, encourage the dedication of open spaces and/or public park lands and encourage subdivision design which prevents the fragmentation of resources.
2. **Scenic Preservation.** The county's rural, scenic quality is a core component of maintaining a quality outdoor recreation experience. Applicable regulations should be enforced to prevent unsightly visual intrusions. Quarry sites should be reclaimed and restored once extraction operations are terminated. Past county outdoor recreation plans have recommended the development of a scenic easement preservation program to protect those key areas offering these greatest visual enjoyments.
3. **Waterfront Protection.** Continue to enforce applicable county regulations which mitigate water use conflicts and protect our surface water resources. Classify the county's lakes and integrate related regulatory measures into applicable ordinances. Polk County residential density around all the County's lakes continues to increase. The Polk County Shoreland and Protection Zoning Ordinance limits clearing of the total lot area to preserve water quality, aesthetics and other natural biological community components. Continue to require the dedication of public access to surface waters as part of waterfront development proposals. Prevent development in floodplain areas and promote programs which prevent streambank erosion. Work with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Lake Associations, County Land and Water resources staff as well as Lake Districts to protect water quality and coordinate water-related recreational activities

SECTION 5. DEFINITIONS

ADLP- Acquisition and Development of Local Parks

ESC – Polk County Environmental Services Committee

LWCF- Federal Land and Water Conservation Fund Program

NCO- Non-profit Conservation Organization

ORP- Outdoor Recreation Plan

PSPW- Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee

SCORP-State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan

SWOT- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

UGS- Urban Green Space Program

URGP- Urban Rivers Grant Program

WIDNR- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

SECTION 6. PLANNING PROCESS

The Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee and Polk County Department of Parks and Trails, Department of Forestry, and Department of Planning, and an online public survey were the primary sources of input for the development of the Polk County Outdoor Recreation Plan. Information about existing facilities and programs and the condition of the facilities was gathered from Public Works Department personnel and through on-site inspection of the facilities. Additional data was obtained from previous studies and inventories, published documents, and outdoor recreation plans that were completed for Polk County.

The Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee will be responsible for providing recommendations to the Polk County Board of Supervisors that ensure that the implementation of the Plan is consistent with the Plan's goals, objectives, and policies.

Plan Amendments

This Plan may be amended as necessary to meet community needs and address changing conditions to prolong the effectiveness of the parent plan. Plan amendments should require formal approval of the Polk County Board of Supervisors after consideration of an advisory recommendation from the Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee.

SECTION 7. SUMMARY OF PAST OUTDOOR REC PLANS

Polk County has been involved with outdoor recreation plans since the 1990s when ‘An Outdoor Recreation Plan for Polk County’ was compiled. Later, West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission updated several plans up to the year 2013. The previous Outdoor Recreation Plan was developed in 2019 by Polk County staff, based on public input and elected official recommendations. In the past decade, a noticeable increase in interest in outdoor recreation in the county has occurred. As a result of this interest and in addition to the Outdoor Recreation Plan, the county also developed a Comprehensive Trail Network Plan in 2022. The top priority projects from that plan have been fully completed or have been started as of the writing of this Outdoor Recreation Plan. Going forward, projects from the Trail Network Plan were considered in this planning process and the Outdoor Recreation Plan will be the main guiding document for what actions the county will pursue related to outdoor recreation.

Additional plans and laws that affect outdoor recreation in Polk County are referenced below:

- *Polk County Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2009-2029*
- *Polk County Park Ordinances*
- *Polk County Forest Comprehensive Land Use Plan 2021-2035*
- *Polk County Comprehensive Trail Network Plan*
- *Gandy Dancer State Trail Master Plan*
- *Stower Seven Lakes State Trail Master Plan*
- *Cattail State Trail Master Plan*
- *Wisconsin DNR Recreation Opportunity Analysis 2020*
- *Polk County Land and Water Resource Management Plan 2020-2029*
- *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) 2019-2023*
- *State Trails Network Plan*
- *Wisconsin Land Legacy Report 2006-2056*

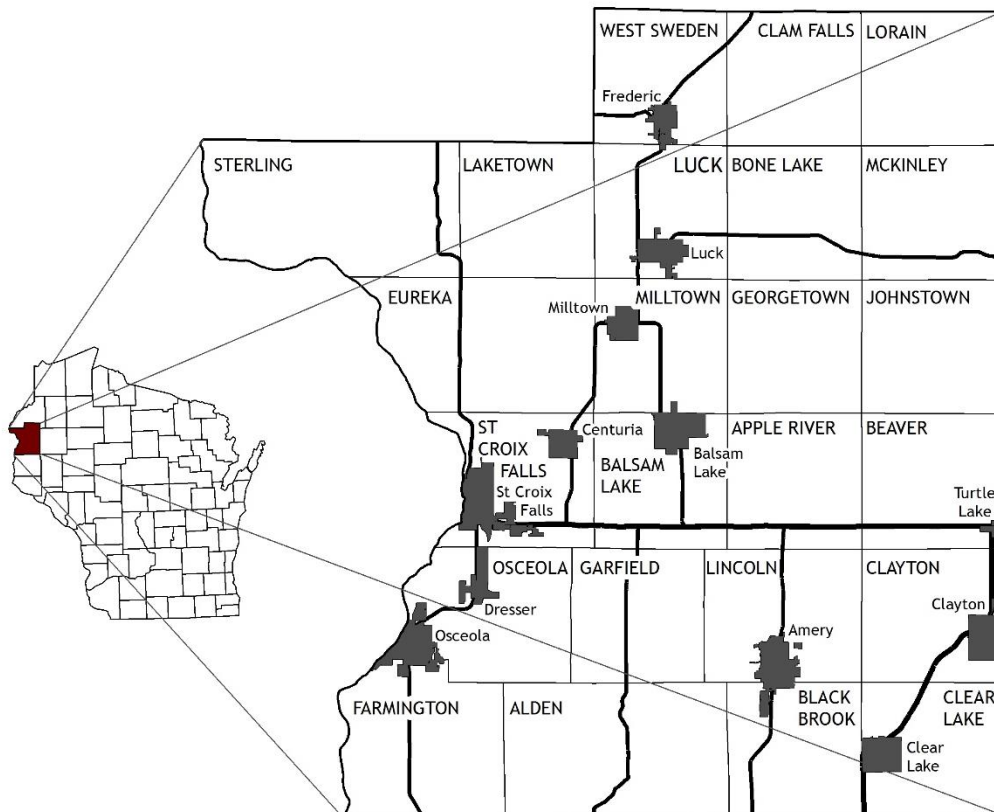
SECTION 8. DESCRIPTION OF THE PLANNING REGION

The first step in the development of the Plan is to understand the natural environment in which recreation is going to occur and the people that are going to be involved in these activities. The following are descriptions of the physical landscape, population, and economic characteristics of Polk County.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Polk County is in west-central Wisconsin along the Minnesota-Wisconsin border (see Map 1). The county has a total area of 619,520 acres, or 968 square miles, of combined land and water area. The county is bordered on the west by the St. Croix River, the north by Burnett County, the east by Barron County and the south by St. Croix County. The Minneapolis/St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area borders Polk County to the south and west.

Map 1. GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION—POLK COUNTY



Polk County is comprised of all or parts of 36 civil divisions, consisting of 24 towns, 10 villages, and 2 cities. This includes the Village of Turtle Lake that lies almost exclusively in Barron County. The Village of Balsam Lake, population 934 in the 2020 census, is the county seat. The largest community is the City of Amery, which has 2,962 people, followed closely by the village of Osceola with 2,765 people in 2020.

The climate of Polk County is classified as mid-latitude continental. Warm humid summers and cold snowy winters are the main characteristics. The average monthly temperature ranges from 15 degrees Fahrenheit in January to 73 degrees Fahrenheit in July. Annual precipitation averages 32 inches, with approximately two-thirds of this occurring as rain. Seasonal snowfall ranges from 12 to 75 inches.

PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

Local areas of Polk County are part of larger geographic structures sharing some common characteristics or connections. Physically, the county is part of the "Central Plain" and "Western Upland" physiographic regions of Wisconsin. The Central Plain region extends southeasterly from northern Polk County to south-central Wisconsin and then northeasterly to Marinette County and the Michigan border. The Western Upland region extends parallel to the Mississippi and St. Croix Rivers from Polk County to the Illinois border and to the east for 30 to 75 miles.

Surface Geology

The surface geology of Polk County is primarily the result of glacial deposition over bedrock. The modern landscape was most strongly influenced by the glaciers that invaded the county from about 25,000 to 15,000 years ago from the north and northwest and by a glacier that moved into the county from the west about 12,300 years ago. Since the last period of glacial activity, the landscape has been further sculpted by naturally occurring and man-induced erosion and drainage activity.

During the last major glacial advance, the Wisconsin stage, ice covered all of Polk County except the southeast corner. This glacial activity has left thick glacial deposits that form the primary geologic characteristics of the county.

Landforms produced by glacial activity include a diverse landscape ranging from broad, nearly level glacial outwash plains to rough, broken glacial moraines and areas of pitted outwash. The moraines are rough and broken, having abrupt hills and short, steep ridges near depressions, many of which have no outlets. Between the moraines, the landscape is more nearly level, especially in the central part of the county. Large outwash plains, formed from material carried and deposited by glacial melt water, are mostly level or undulating but in some areas are also pitted with depressions. Lakes, ponds, and bogs are common in the depressions in the moraines and areas of pitted outwash.

The most conspicuous glacial features of Polk County are two terminal moraines which extend from the southwest to the northeast. Terminal moraines mark the furthest advance of a lobe of glacial ice. Moraines are generally rough hills with numerous undrained depressions. These depressions, or kettles, were caused by voids left when ice blocks buried in the drift melted. Many of these kettles in Polk County are presently small lakes or swamps. The eastern-most terminal moraine extends from New Richmond through Clear Lake and on to Turtle Lake. The other

terminal moraine extends from a point east of St. Croix Falls to the northeast corner of the county, near Indian Creek. Between these moraines, the surface is gently rolling to level with poorly developed drainage and many lakes.

The land southeast of the eastern terminal moraine is covered with drift from earlier glacial activity. Because this drift is older, it has been thinned out and leveled off by erosion over a longer period. Subsequently, this area is characterized by slopes that are long and gentle, and well-developed drainage. The northwestern portion of the county is level sand and gravel deposits. This area, which is mostly forested, is known as the "Pine Barrens." Throughout the eastern part of the county are scattered small areas of nearly level and gently sloping glacial lacustrine plains. This area was formed through the sedimentation of old glacial lakes. The St. Croix River Valley, along the western extreme of the county, was a major glacial drainage way as the glaciers melted and receded.

Topography

Generally, the topography of Polk County is moderately rolling, becoming increasingly more rugged in the western portion of the county, particularly in the St. Croix River valley. Surface features have been formed or modified by two distinct periods of glaciation. Pitted glacial outwash covers much of the county, resulting in many lakes, wetlands, and areas of uneven topography. A series of glacial end moraines traverse the county from southwest to northeast. The area between the moraines is quite level and much of the county's best agricultural land is found here.

A band of trap rock (an intrusive igneous rock) is exposed at several points between Dresser and the Clam Falls area. Exposed dolomite limestone is found in the southwest part of the county, and the exposed sandstone bedrock in the area known as The Dalles of the St. Croix is largely responsible for the scenic beauty in this area.

Local relief in Polk County is over 600 feet, ranging from 680 feet above mean sea level at the St. Croix River on the county's western extreme to over 1,400 feet in the north-central and eastern areas.

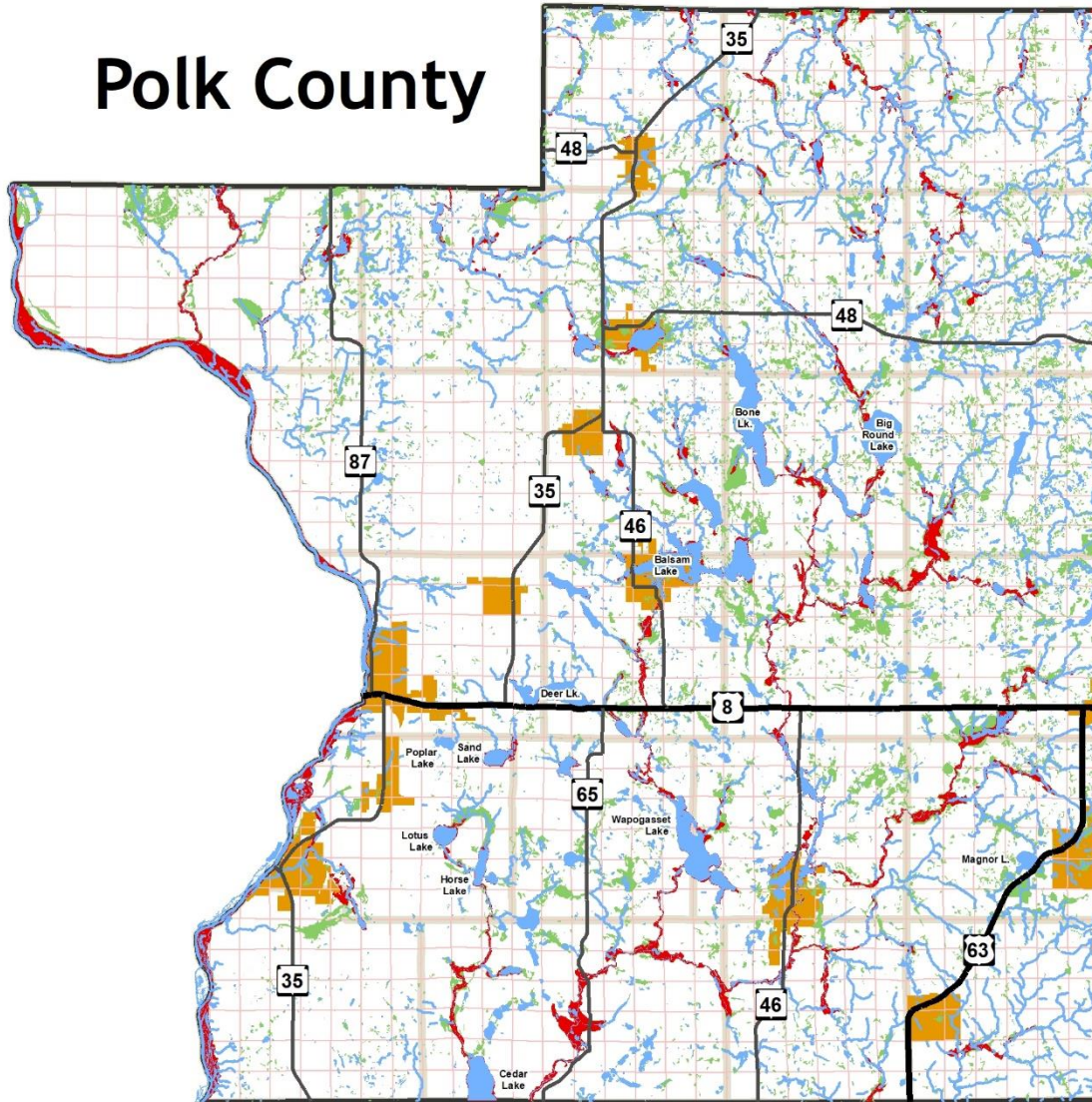
Hydrology

Polk County has a total surface water area of 22,626 acres consisting of 437 lakes (20,900 acres) and about 200 miles of rivers and streams. These surface water resources of Polk County are shown in Map 2 on the next page.

Polk County is almost entirely within the St. Croix River Basin, except for a small part of the southeast corner of the county lying within the Chippewa River Basin. The St. Croix River is the county's most significant surface water feature, bordering the county along the length of its western border. The River has been designated by Congress as the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway under the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

MAP 2. Surface Waters of Polk County

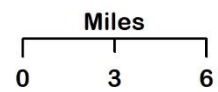
Polk County



WATER RESOURCES

- River and Streams
- Lakes and Rivers
- Floodplain (100 Year)
- Wetlands

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information, FEMA, and WisDNR 2010



Date: 9/30/2024

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

Natural Resources

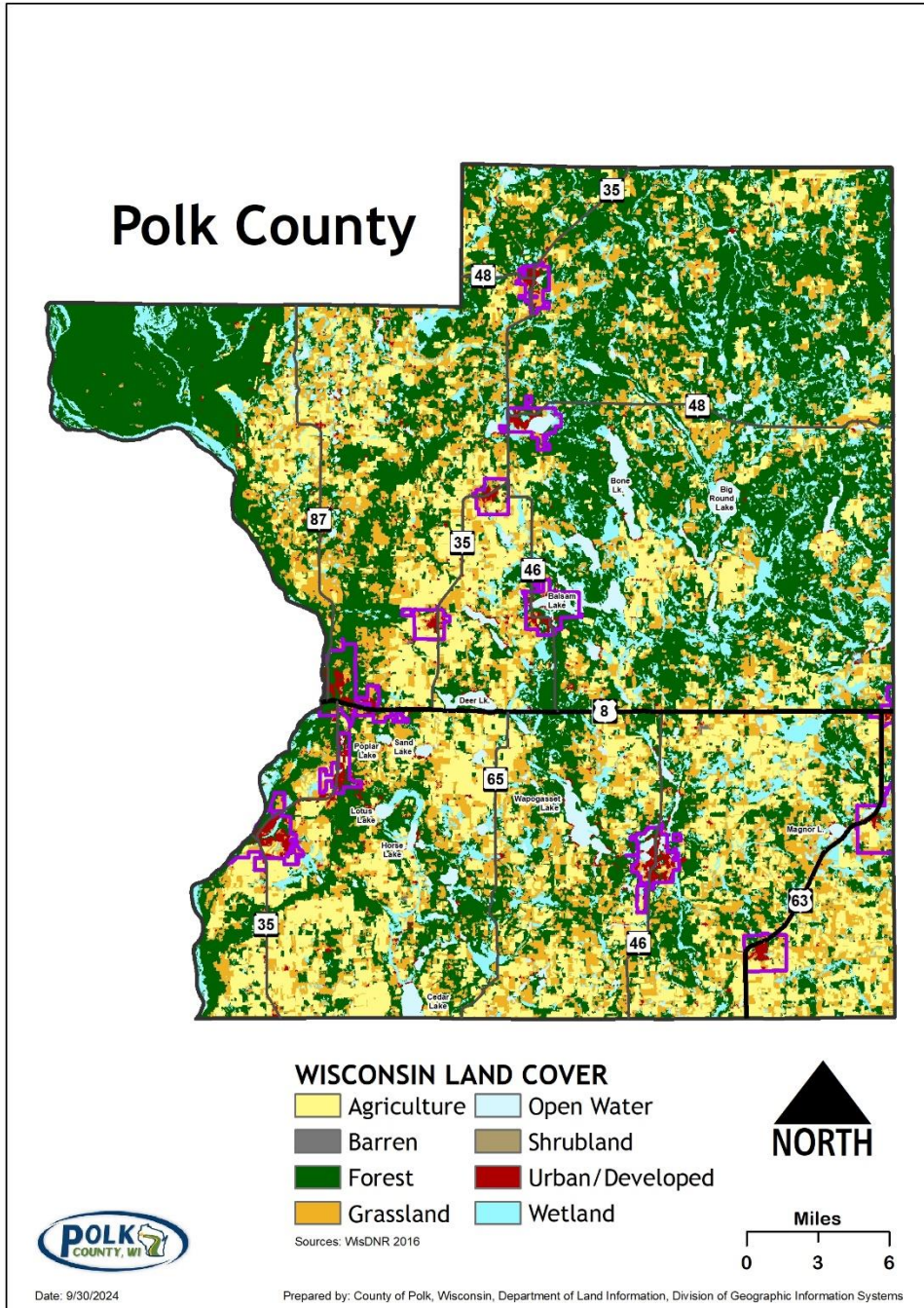
Polk County has a total area of 619,520 acres (including almost 23,000 acres of lakes and streams). While agriculture predominates the county's landscape, forest lands are the second most extensive land cover in the county, see Map 3, on the next page. Assessed private forest acreage increased by roughly 9000 acres, or just over 14 square miles, between 2007 and 2018. In 2018, the combined assessed acres in forestland amounted to 163,206 acres or thirty-two percent of the total assessed acreage for the county.

The above assessed forest acreage does not include the public natural resource lands owned by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Polk County, or a town. In 2018, the largest concentration of public lands is located in the Town of Sterling with 20,774 acres, the Town of Lorain had 6,451 acres, the Town of McKinley with 5,640 acres the Town of Johnstown with 4,416 acres and lastly the Town of Bone Lake with 4,341. The Town of West Sweden has the least amount of Public Land with 250 acres.

The forests of Polk County are predominantly of the Northern Forest type of mixed deciduous and coniferous trees. Northwest Polk County also has unique oak and Pine Barrens found on out washed sands. The forests of the county have a high potential for a multitude of forest-based recreation activities. The addition of more organized recreational developments on the county's public lands is also possible if desired or needed in the future.

A variety of wildlife can be found throughout Polk County. Species include black bear, whitetail deer, rabbit, squirrel, raccoon, beaver, fox, ruffed grouse, pheasant, muskrat, snowshoe hare, and to a lesser extent, mink and otter. In addition, the county's 22,626 acres of lakes and 200 miles of rivers and streams hold variety of game fish, such as Muskie, northern, walleye, bass, catfish, and pan fish. There are approximately 90 miles of trout streams in the county with varied size and bag limits, so as not to jeopardize the existence of the resource.

Map 3. Land Cover Polk County



POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

According to the Wisconsin Department of Administration, (WISDOA), the 2023 estimated population of Polk County is 45,233. This is a 256 person increase, from 2020 (see Table 1). Population growth has slowed dramatically compared to the 1990's and 2000's. During the 1990s, Polk County was the eighth fastest growing county in the State of Wisconsin based on percentage of population change. Polk County is projected to increase in population by 772 people from 2010 to 2020. Deaths will exceed births by 207 people and net migration into the county is projected to be 979 people. In addition, Polk County's population will continue to increase through 2040.

TABLE 1.
HISTORIC POPULATION • 1900 TO 2023
Polk County

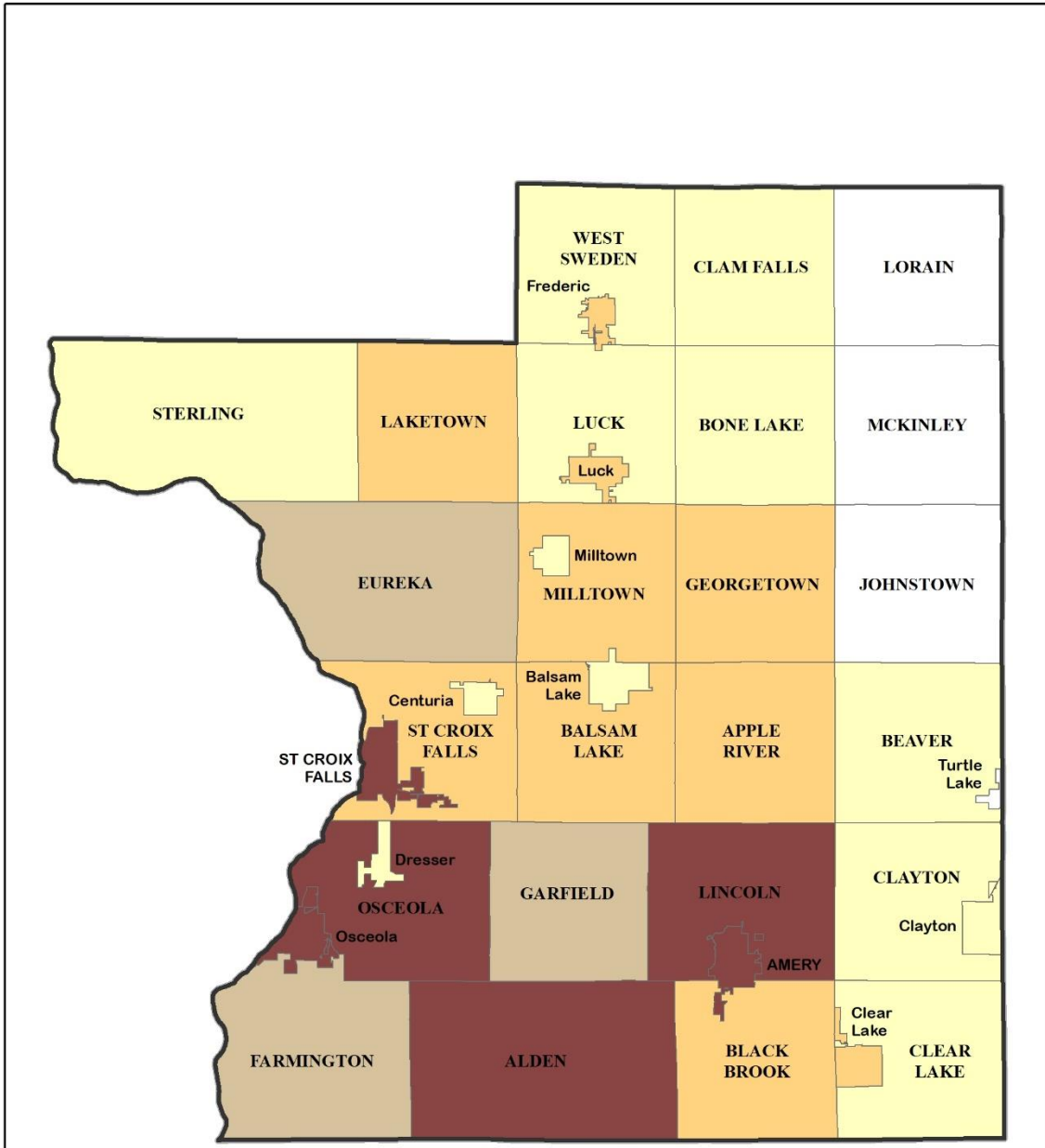
Year	Population	Numerical Change	Percent Change
1900	17,801	--	--
1910	21,367	3,566	20.0
1920	26,870	5,503	25.8
1930	26,567	-303	-1.1
1940	26,197	-370	-1.4
1950	24,944	-1,253	-4.8
1960	24,968	24	0.1
1970	26,666	1,698	6.8
1980	32,351	5,685	21.3
1990	34,773	2,422	7.5
2000	41,319	6,546	18.8
2010	44,205	2,886	7.0
2014	43,978	-227	-1.0
2020	44,977	999	2.3
*est 2023	45,233	256	0.6

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, WisDOA 2023 Estimate

**Estimates from WISDOA*

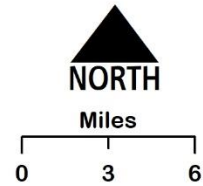
Map 4 on the following page shows the distribution of population within Polk County in 2020. The population is most concentrated in those towns and communities in the southwestern portion of the county closest to the St. Croix River and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Map 4. 2023 Polk County Population by Municipality



2023 POPULATION

- 250 - 500
- 501 - 1000
- 1001 - 1500
- 1501 - 2000
- 2001 - 3100



Date: 9/30/2024

Source: Wisconsin Department of Administration

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

When compared to Wisconsin as a whole, Polk County is similar in demographics. One notable divergence is that in 2020, 92.9% of its population is white (non-Hispanic), compared to a state average of 78.6%. The Black and Hispanic population has grown over the last seven years in Wisconsin. The county is also quite rural, with 48.3 persons per square mile in 2017, less than half the state average number of persons per square mile of 106.

For the first time, in the 1960s, the percentage urban residents surpassed the percentage rural farm residents (see Table 2 on the next page), with rural non-farm residents surpassing rural farm residents about 1970. The number of rural farm residents continued to decrease, constituting only 5.6 percent of the county’s population in 2000, a decrease from 43.3 percent in 1960. Since 1960, the urban population has overall remained quite stable as a proportion of the overall population, while the percentage of the total, non-farming population choosing rural living has increased tremendously.

Figure 1: Demographics by Ethnicity as a percent of the Total Population 2020.

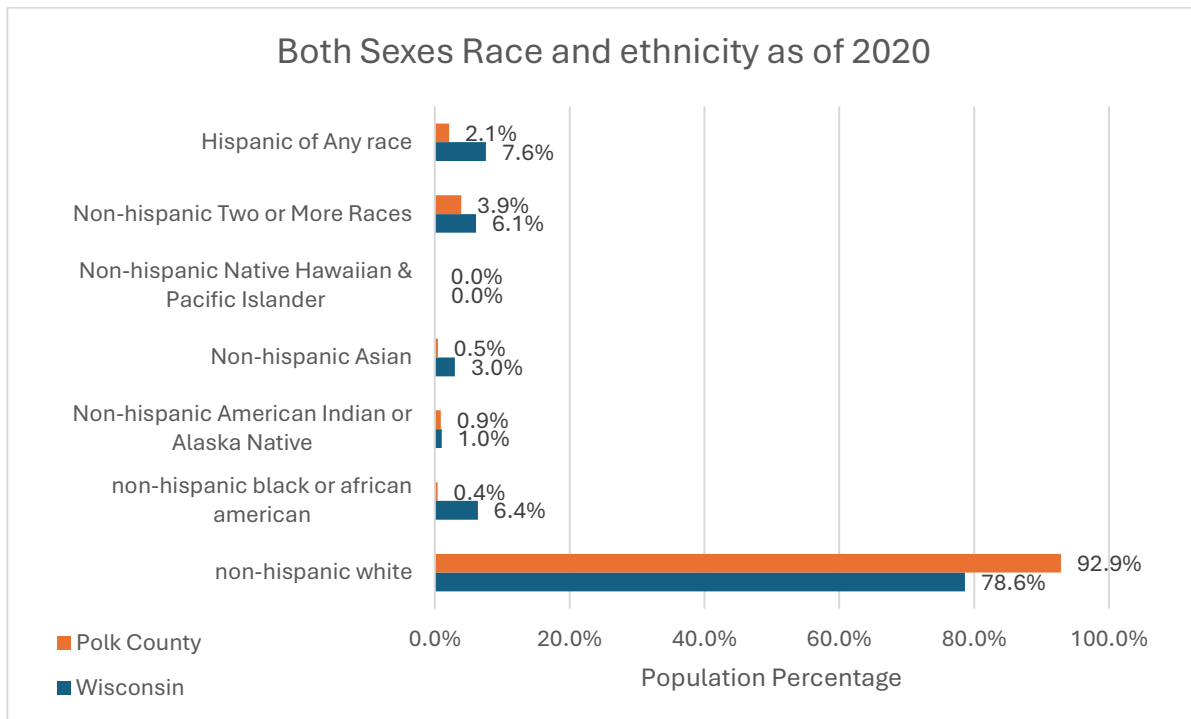


TABLE 2. Population Distribution by Incorporated and Unincorporated Communities • 1950 to 2020

Polk County

Area	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Incorporated	8,085	8,916	9,933	11,704	12,888	14,829	15,269	15,617
Unincorporated	16,859	16,052	16,733	20,647	21,885	26,490	28,843	29,360
% Incorporated	32.4	35.7	37.2	36.2	37.1	35.9	34.6	34.7

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, WisDOA Demographic Services

Table 3: below compares the age and sex distribution of Polk County in 2010 and 2022. Population significantly increased in the older age groups (65+) in addition to the (20-24) age group. In 2020, the median age of Polk County residents was 46.5 years, an increase from 38.7 years in 2000. The national trend of an aging population is reflected in Polk County. Large numbers of people will be at the typical retirement age over the next 5-10 years and may impact the type of recreational amenities offered.

**TABLE 3.
AGE DISTRIBUTION • 2022
Polk County**

Age Group	Males	Females	Total	% Change from 2010
0-14	3,711	3,400	7,111	-20%
15-19	1,423	1,304	2,727	-8%
20-24	1,189	1,036	2,225	6%
25-29	1,161	1,106	2,267	-6%
30-34	1,160	1,141	2,301	-5%
35-39	1,319	1,241	2,560	-10%
40-44	1,405	1,345	2,750	-5%
45-54	2,881	2,712	5,593	-8%
55-64	3,923	3,770	7,693	4%
65-74	3,254	3,094	6,348	10%
75-84	1,491	1,563	3,054	8%
85+	433	647	1,080	-2%
Total	23,350	22,359	45,709	

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, WisDOA Demographic Services 2022 estimates

The Wisconsin Department of Administration (WisDOA) population projections are, by state statute, the official population projections for Wisconsin. As shown in Table 4 on the following page, WisDOA projections predict a 30.3 percent increase in the Polk County population (about 12,506 more residents) between 2000 and 2040. The percentage increases within the towns are anticipated to be a bit higher on average than the villages and cities. The largest rates of increase are expected in the Towns of Beaver, Eureka, Farmington, Garfield, and Osceola, and the Village of Dresser.

TABLE 4. POLK COUNTY POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY MINOR CIVIL DIVISION • 2000 TO 2040

Municipality	2010 Census	2020 Census	2025	2030	2035	2040	Change 2000-2040	% Change 2000-2040
T Alden	2,786	2,918	3,250	3,420	3,495	3,475	860	32.9%
T Apple River	1,146	1,173	1,350	1,430	1,470	1,470	403	37.8%
T Balsam Lake	1,411	1,416	1,590	1,660	1,680	1,660	276	19.9%
T Beaver	835	798	1,015	1,085	1,125	1,140	387	51.4%
T Black Brook	1,325	1,425	1,590	1,685	1,740	1,745	537	44.5%
T Bone Lake	717	686	840	885	910	905	195	27.5%
T Clam Falls	596	554	675	700	710	700	153	28.0%
T Clayton	975	958	1,145	1,210	1,240	1,235	323	35.4%
T Clear Lake	899	888	1,060	1,125	1,155	1,155	355	44.4%
T Eureka	1,649	1,737	2,000	2,140	2,220	2,240	902	67.4%
T Farmington	1,836	1,904	2,195	2,335	2,410	2,425	800	49.2%
T Garfield	1,692	1,744	2,035	2,175	2,250	2,270	827	57.3%
T Georgetown	977	1,036	1,110	1,155	1,170	1,155	151	15.0%
T Johnstown	534	499	605	630	640	635	115	22.1%
T Laketown	961	1,024	1,085	1,130	1,140	1,120	202	22.0%
T Lincoln	2,208	2,099	2,355	2,410	2,395	2,325	21	0.9%
T Lorain	284	308	285	285	280	265	- 63	-19.2%
T Luck	930	979	1,005	1,030	1,030	1,005	124	14.1%
T McKinley	347	340	395	415	420	415	87	26.5%
T Milltown	1,226	1,219	1,415	1,490	1,520	1,510	364	31.8%
T Osceola	2,855	3,023	3,545	3,825	3,995	4,055	1,970	94.5%
T St. Croix Falls	1,165	1,164	1,315	1,370	1,385	1,370	251	22.4%
T Sterling	790	724	885	925	940	930	206	28.5%
T West Sweden	699	744	740	750	740	715	- 16	-2.2%
V Balsam Lake	1,009	934	1,135	1,185	1,200	1,185	235	24.7%
V Centuria	948	891	1,035	1,070	1,075	1,055	190	22.0%
V Clayton	571	550	670	710	730	730	223	44.0%
V Clear Lake	1,070	1,099	1,185	1,225	1,235	1,210	159	15.1%
V Dresser	895	935	1,085	1,160	1,205	1,215	483	66.0%
V Frederic	1,137	1,154	1,180	1,190	1,165	1,110	- 152	-12.0%
V Luck	1,119	1,093	1,115	1,120	1,085	1,030	- 180	-14.9%
V Milltown	917	948	1,030	1,070	1,085	1,070	182	20.5%
V Osceola	2,568	2,765	3,020	3,185	3,255	3,245	824	34.0%
V Turtle Lake	93	78	95	95	90	85	20	30.8%
C Amery	2,902	2,962	3,295	3,425	3,460	3,410	565	19.9%
C St. Croix Falls	2,133	2,208	2,430	2,540	2,585	2,560	527	25.9%
Totals	44,205	44,977	50,760	53,240	54,230	53,825	12,506	30.3%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2010 & Wisconsin Department of Administration, Demographic Services Center, 2023.
 2023 Projections are for Research and Analysis Only.

*Portion of Turtle Lake located in Polk County only.

Limited information is available on people with physical disabilities in Polk County.

In 2020, 3,240 Polk County non-institutionalized residents were classified as having a disability, many with multiple disabilities. The following distribution of disability types was reported for civilian, non-institutionalized residents ages 18-64:

sensory disabilities (e.g., blindness, deafness):	4.6% of the population
physical disabilities (e.g., impaired walking or lifting):	5.2%
mental disabilities (e.g., impaired learning):	5.1%
self-care disabilities (e.g., difficulty dressing or bathing):	2.0%

Although there is no information on the type and severity of these limitations, and there is no consistent historical data to provide a trend, this information does provide an indication that there are several people with limitations who should be considered during the development or improvement of park facilities.

ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS

Polk County is predominantly rural in nature, with agriculture as the primary land use. In 2022, there were 1,066 farms, the number of farms continues to decrease. The average farm size increased from 215 acres in 1987 to 225 acres in 2022. The amount of acreage in farmland in Polk County has fluctuated around the 50% mark of total acreage in the county, until the last ten years were the farm acreage is closer to the 40% mark of the total acreage of the county as reflected in Table 5 below.

TABLE 5.
ACRES IN FARMLAND • 1987 TO 2022
Polk County

	1987	1992	1997	2002	2007	2012	2018	2022
Acres	315,416	282,639	301,736	292,860	288,994	255,917	256,114	239,493
Percent of County Land Area	51.6%	46.2%	49.3%	47.9%	47.2%	41.8%	41.8%	39.1%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service

Shown in Table 6 is the employment by industry in Polk County from 2017 to 2022. Manufacturing and Construction showed the largest gains of 491 and 513 jobs, respectively, from 2017 to 2022. Polk County has gained manufacturing jobs since the recession of 2007 began.

TABLE 6.

EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY • 2017 TO 2022
Polk County Residents

Labor Force and Employment Sector	2017	2022	Change
Civilian employed population 16 years and over	21,257	22,277	1,020
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, and mining	932	662	-270
Construction	1,630	2,143	513
Manufacturing	5,049	5,540	491
Wholesale trade	416	512	96
Retail trade	2,298	2,249	-49
Transportation and warehousing, and utilities	899	911	12
Information	270	224	-46
Finance and insurance, and real estate and rental and leasing	754	975	221
Professional, scientific, and management, and administrative and waste management services	1,249	1,136	-113
Educational services, and health care and social assistance	4,718	4,725	7
Arts, entertainment, and recreation, and accommodation and food services	1,516	1,422	-94
Other services, except public administration	836	961	125
Public administration	690	817	127

Source: Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development

LAND USE TRENDS

Polk County is located northeast of the Minneapolis-St. Paul metropolitan area and is contiguous to the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). The Census Bureau defines a Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as a county or counties with a central city of at least 50,000 people, a total population over 100,000 people, and significant social and economic ties which exist between the central city and any outlying counties that are included. Based on that definition, St. Croix County became part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul MSA in 1980 and Pierce County in 1990. Consequently, even though Polk County is not currently a part of the MSA, it is apparent that the influence of the metro area is spreading, and that Polk County is becoming more economically and socially interconnected to the MSA.

In 2023, as seen in Table 7, the assessed residential acreage in the unincorporated areas of the county was 46,733, or 92.5 percent of the total assessed residential acreage in the county. This is down from 94.6 percent in 2014. The Towns of Alden, Eureka, Milltown, Osceola, and Farmington had significant residential acreage (4,958, 3,201, 3,027, 2,836, and 2,806, respectively) in 2023. All these towns are generally in the western part of the county in proximity to Minnesota or St. Croix County and State Highways 35, 65 and 87, and account for nearly 36 percent of the assessed residential acreage in the unincorporated part of the county. Regarding assessed residential acreage percentage increases between 1987 and 2014 in the unincorporated portion of the county, the Town of West Sweden (~60%%) had the greatest increase, followed by the Towns of St Croix Falls (44.27%).

The cities and villages in Polk County also saw dramatic growth in residential land. While the Village of Frederic saw a sevenfold increase in assessed residential acreage between 1998 and 2007, The Villages of Dresser (~200%) saw the biggest percentage increase in residentially assessed acreage from 2014-2023, followed by the City of Amery (~172%) and the Village of Clear Lake (~90%). The other cities and villages experienced increases in residential land, except for the Villages of Centuria, Frederic, and Luck, who lost residentially assessed acreage.

Though residential development has been increasing dramatically, agricultural uses in 2023 still constituted approximately 40 percent of all assessed acreage in the unincorporated areas of the county. Thirteen of Polk County's twenty-four towns have more than half of their assessed land assessed as agriculture and agricultural forest. Agriculture is a significant activity in Polk County. However, assessed agricultural land decreased by 16,000 acres between 2014 and 2023. Those towns that have lower agricultural acreage generally have at least one of the following factors present; higher non-farm acres, higher forested acres, significant surface water acres, or other significant natural resource lands.

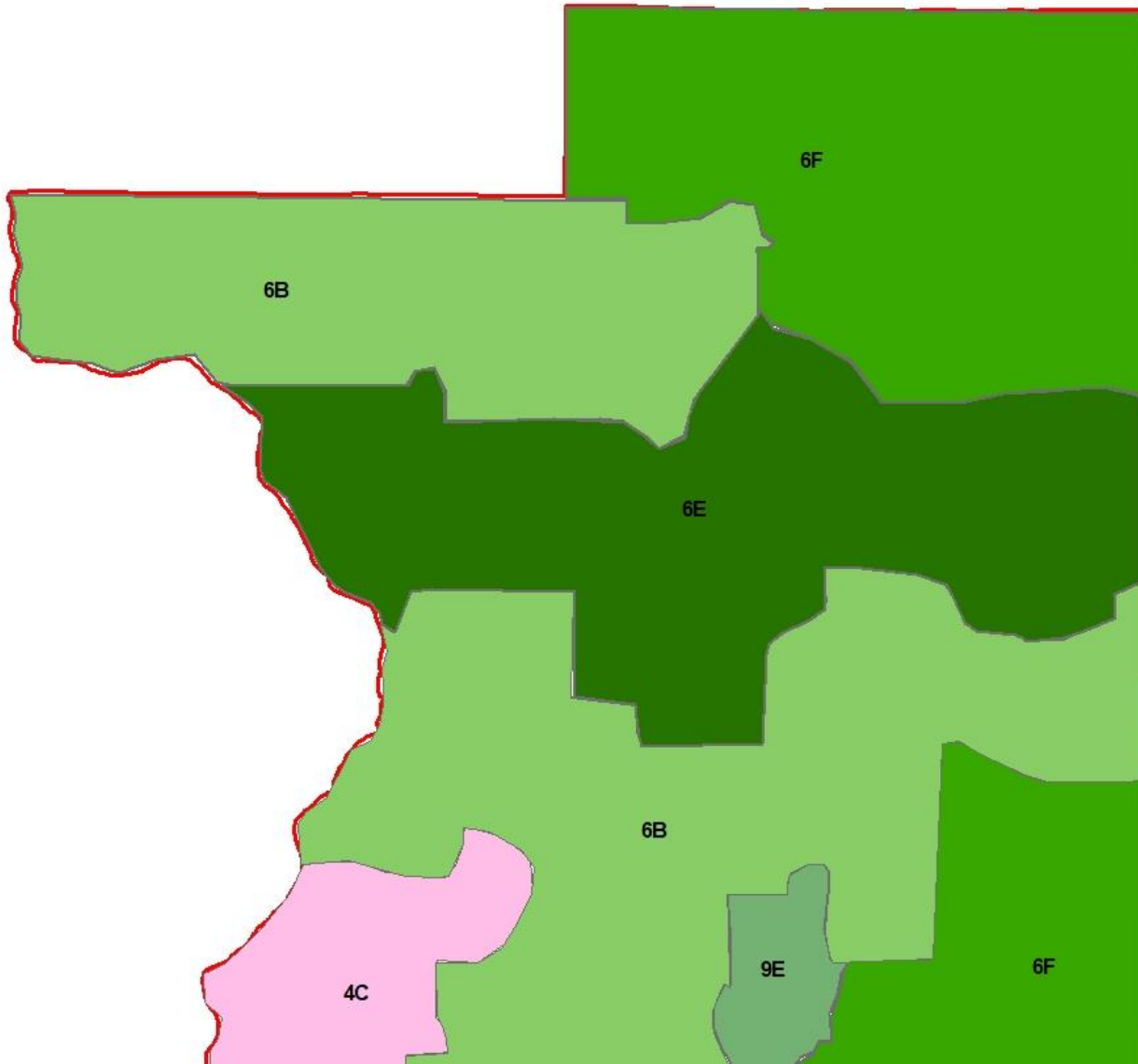
As discussed previously, forest lands was the next predominant land use in Polk County and has been slowly increasing. Larger areas of forest, grasslands, and barrens are found in the Town Sterling to the northwest and the east-northeast portion of the county. As expected, large amounts of commercial and industrial land occur in the villages and cities. Incorporated communities also generally have a greater percentage and concentration of residential uses.

**TABLE 7.
RESIDENTIAL ACREAGE CHANGE**

Municipality	Total Acres		% Change	Acreage Change
	2014	2023		
T Alden	4,541	4,958	9.18%	417
T Apple River	2,102	2,321	10.42%	219
T Balsam Lake	1,985	2,372	19.50%	387
T Beaver	1,093	1,231	12.63%	138
T Black Brook	1,796	2,044	13.81%	248
T Bone Lake	958	1,016	6.05%	58
T Clam Falls	770	804	4.42%	34
T Clayton	1,283	1,287	0.31%	4
T Clear Lake	1,178	1,070	-9.17%	-108
T Eureka	2,978	3,201	7.49%	223
T Farmington	3,064	2,806	-8.42%	-258
T Garfield	1,708	2,067	21.02%	359
T Georgetown	1,899	2,166	14.06%	267
T Johnstown	995	1,029	3.42%	34
T Laketown	1,405	1,462	4.06%	57
T Lincoln	2,650	2,737	3.28%	87
T Lorain	743	749	0.81%	6
T Luck	1,592	1,687	5.97%	95
T McKinley	650	784	20.62%	134
T Milltown	2,719	3,027	11.33%	308
T Osceola	2,809	2,836	0.96%	27
T Saint Croix Falls	1,405	2,027	44.27%	622
T Sterling	1,402	1,709	21.90%	307
T West Sweden	841	1,343	59.69%	502
V Balsam Lake	389	577	48.33%	188
V Centuria	237	214	-9.70%	-23
V Clayton	59	89	50.85%	30
V Clear Lake	166	313	88.55%	147
V Dresser	56	167	198.21%	111
V Frederic	349	332	-4.87%	-17
V Luck	336	326	-2.98%	-10
V Milltown	140	221	57.86%	81
V Osceola	258	303	17.44%	45
V Turtle Lake	3	8	166.67%	5
C Amery	166	451	171.69%	285
C St. Croix Falls	698	762	9.17%	64
COUNTY TOTAL	45,423	50,496	11.17%	5,073

Source: WI Dept of Revenue and Polk County Assessment Records

MAP 5. LIFE GROUPS- POLK COUNTY. ESRI DOMINANT LIFE GROUPS



LEGEND

- 6B SALT OF THE EARTH
- 6E RURAL RESORT DWELLERS /COZY COUNTRY LIVING
- 6F HEARTLAND COMMUNITIES/ COZY COUNTRY LIVING
- 9E RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES SENIOR STYLES
- 4C Middleburg Family Landscapes

6B Salt of the Earth

Salt of the Earth residents are entrenched in their traditional, rural lifestyles. Citizens here are older, and many have grown children that have moved away. They still cherish family time and tending to their vegetable gardens and preparing homemade meals. Residents embrace the outdoors; they spend most of their free time preparing for their next fishing, boating, or camping trip. The majority has at least a high school diploma or some college education; many have expanded their skill set during their years of employment in the manufacturing and related industries. They may be experts with DIY projects, but the latest technology is not their forte. They use it when absolutely necessary but seek face-to-face contact in their routine activities.



SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Steady employment in construction, manufacturing, and related service industries.
- Completed education: 40% with a high school diploma only.
- Household income just over the national median, while net worth is nearly double the national median.
- Spending time with family is their top priority.
- Cost-conscious consumers, loyal to brands they like, with a focus on buying American.
- Last to buy the latest and greatest products.
- Try to eat healthy, tracking the nutrition and ingredients in the food they purchase

MARKET PROFILE (Consumer preferences)

- Outdoor sports and activities, such as fishing, boating, hunting, and overnight camping trips are popular.
- To support their pastimes, truck ownership is high; many also own an ATV.
- They own the equipment to maintain their lawns and tend to their vegetable gardens.
- Residents often tackle home remodeling and improvement jobs themselves.
- Due to their locale, they own satellite dishes, and have access to high speed internet connections like DSL.
- These conservative consumers prefer to conduct their business in person rather than online. They use an agent to purchase insurance.

6E RURAL RESORT DWELLERS / COZY COUNTRY LIVING.

Although the Great Recession forced many owners of second homes to sell, Rural Resort Dwellers residents remain an active market, just a bit smaller. These communities are centered in resort areas, many in the Midwest, where the change in seasons supports a variety of outdoor activities. Retirement looms for many of these blue collar, older householders, but workers are postponing retirement or returning to work to maintain their current lifestyles. Workers are traveling further to maintain employment. They are passionate about their hobbies, like freshwater fishing and hunting, but otherwise have very simple tastes



SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Rural Resort Dwellers residents are close to retirement. They've accumulated wealth and begun to shift their portfolios to low-risk assets. These active residents continue to work in skilled occupations.
- Simple tastes and modesty characterize these blue-collar residents. They shop for timeless, comfortable clothing, but only when something must be replaced. They pay little attention to advertising and usually stick to the brands they know.
- They spend time with their spouses and maintain a social calendar.

MARKET PROFILE (Consumer preferences)

- Residents drive older domestic vehicles and prefer to spend their disposable income on gear to support their hobbies, which include freshwater fishing, hunting with a rifle or shotgun, and motorcycling.
- At home, *Rural Resort Dwellers* residents spend any free time working on their vehicles and maintaining their gear. They make frequent trips to their local hardware store for parts and tools. These hands-on consumers are also passionate about vegetable gardening.
- Due to their remote locations, these neighborhoods have satellite dishes. A few residents still rely on dial-up modems to stay connected. They don't access the Internet often but will make online purchases for items difficult to find in nearby stores.
- Their taste in TV shows reflects their hobbies—National Geographic, Discovery Channel, and the Weather Channel.

6F HEARTLAND COMMUNITIES/ COZY COUNTRY LIVING

Well settled and close-knit, Heartland Communities are semirural and semiretired. These older householders are primarily homeowners, and many have paid off their mortgages. Their children have moved away, but they have no plans to leave their homes. Their hearts are with the country; they embrace the slower pace of life here but actively participate in outdoor activities and community events. Traditional and patriotic, these residents support their local businesses, always buy American, and favor domestic driving vacations over foreign plane trips.



SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Retirees in this market depress the average labor force participation rate to less than 60% (Index 94), but the unemployment rate is comparable to the US.
- More workers are white collar than blue collar; more skilled than unskilled.
- The rural economy of this market provides employment in the manufacturing, construction, utilities, healthcare, and agriculture industries.
- These are budget savvy consumers; they stick to brands they grew up with and know the price of goods they purchase. Buying American is important.
- Daily life is busy, but routine. Working on the weekends is not uncommon.
- Residents trust TV and newspapers more than any other media.
- Skeptical about their financial future, they stick to community banks and low-risk investments.

MARKET PROFILE

- Traditional in their ways, residents of *Heartland Communities* choose to bank and pay their bills in person and purchase insurance from an agent.
- Most have high-speed Internet access at home or on their cell phone but aren't ready to go paperless.
- Many residents have paid off their home mortgages but still hold auto loans and student loans. Interest checking accounts are common.
- To support their local community, residents participate in public activities.
- Home remodeling is not a priority, but homeowners do tackle necessary maintenance work on their cherished homes. They have invested in riding lawn mowers to maintain their larger yards.
- They enjoy country music and watch CMT.
- Motorcycling, hunting, and fishing are popular; walking is the main form of exercise.
- To get around these semirural communities, residents prefer domestic trucks or SUVs.

9E RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES SENIOR STYLES

Retirement Communities neighborhoods are evenly distributed across the country. They combine single-family homes and independent living with apartments, assisted living, and continuous care nursing facilities. Over half of the housing units are in multiunit structures, and many residents have a lease. This group enjoys watching cable TV and stays up-to-date with newspapers and magazines. Residents take pride in fiscal responsibility and keep a close eye on their finances. Although income and net worth are well below national averages, residents enjoy going to the movies, fishing, and taking vacations. While some residents enjoy cooking, many have paid their dues in the kitchen and would rather dine out.



SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Brand loyal, this segment will spend a little more for their favorite brands, but most likely they will have a coupon.
- Frugal, they pay close attention to finances.
- They prefer reading magazines over interacting with computers.
- They are health conscious and prefer name brand drugs.

MARKET PROFILE (Consumer preferences)

- Enjoy hard-cover books, book clubs, crossword puzzles, and Sudoku.
- Contribute to political organizations and other groups.
- Entertainment preferences: playing cards and reading books.
- Prefer watching cable TV, including premium channels like HBO and Cinemax.
- Like to travel—including visits to foreign countries.
- Shop at diverse, large retail chains like Sears, Family Dollar, Target, and Walmart for convenience.

4C Middleburg Family Landscapes

Middleburg neighborhoods transformed from the easy pace of country living to semirural subdivisions in the last decade, when the housing boom reached out. Residents are conservative, family-oriented consumers. Still more country than rock and roll, they are thrifty but willing to carry some debt and are already investing in their futures. They rely on their smartphones and mobile devices to stay in touch and pride themselves on their expertise. They prefer to buy American and travel in the US. This market is younger, growing, and have ample disposable income.



SOCIOECONOMIC TRAITS

- Education: 65% with a high school diploma or some college.
- Unemployment rate lower at 4.7%.
- Labor force participation typical of a younger population at 66.7%.
- Traditional values are the norm here— faith, country, and family.
- Prefer to buy American and for a good price.
- Comfortable with the latest in technology, for convenience (online banking or saving money on landlines) and entertainment.

MARKET PROFILE (Consumer preferences)

- Residents are partial to domestic vehicles; they like to drive trucks, SUVs, or motorcycles.
- Entertainment is primarily family-oriented, TV and movie rentals or theme parks and family restaurants.
- Spending priorities also focus on family (children’s toys and apparel) or home DIY projects.
- Sports include hunting, fishing, bowling, and baseball.
- TV and magazines provide entertainment and information.
- Media preferences include country and Christian channels.

SECTION 9. OUTDOOR RECREATION SUPPLY INVENTORY

This section provides a brief inventory of the different land- and water-based recreational activities in Polk County, as well as related recommendations for each activity based on the previous needs assessment and program goals.

Since local municipalities are not included in the scope of this plan, the recreational facilities owned by towns, villages, and cities are generally not included in this section.

Implementation of plan recommendations will be contingent upon county priorities, feasibility, and available resources and opportunities (e.g., grants, partnerships, available land, and staff resources).

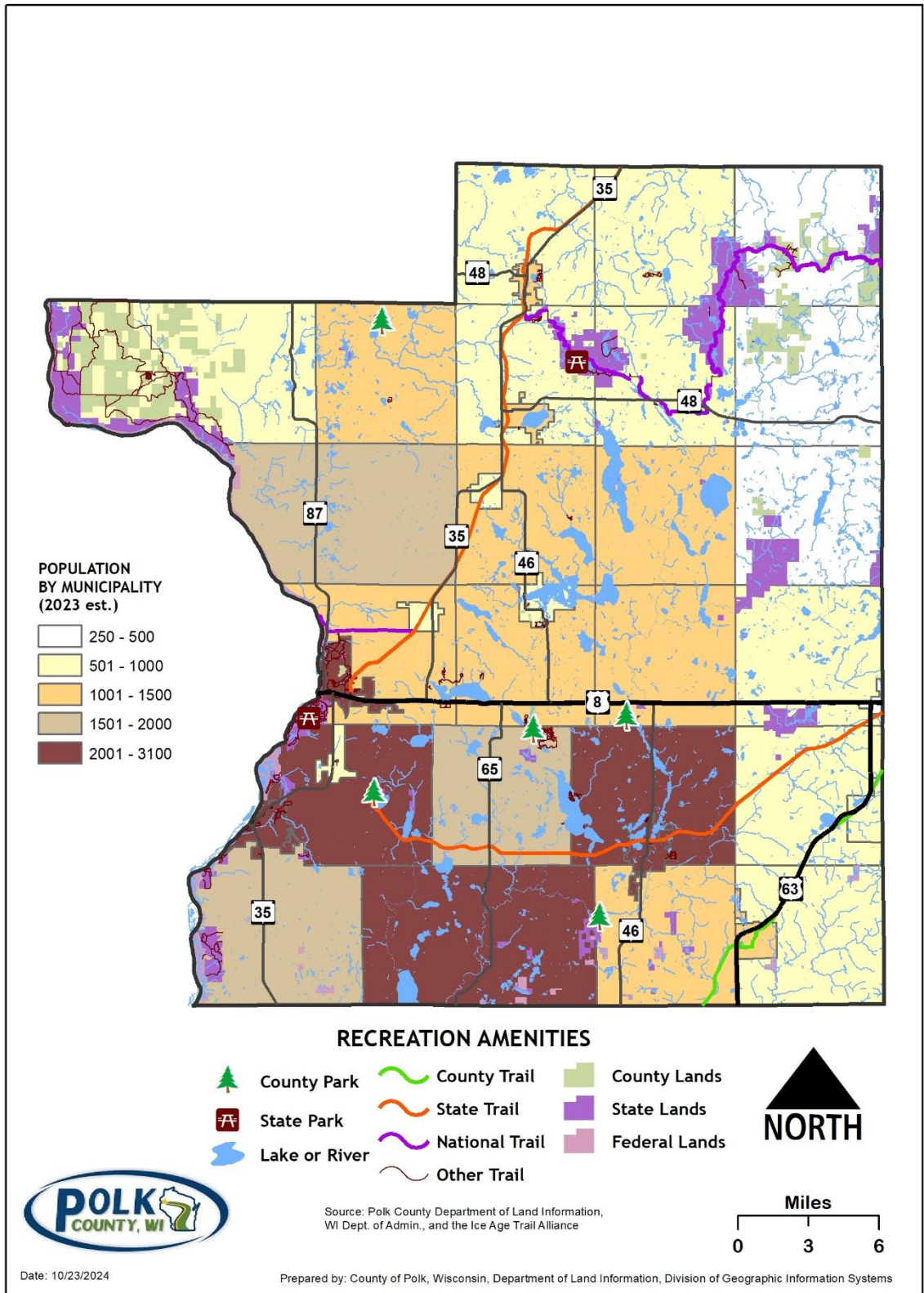
Map 6 on the next page shows the locations of the county and state parks in Polk County, as well as the State trails in relation to the population density. This map will be frequently referred to in the remainder of this report.

The Recreational Viewer is located on the Polk County website (<https://polkcowi.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=48d9c82d98d9404996f87e28d971cd9c>) and provides information on all recreational opportunities in Polk County.

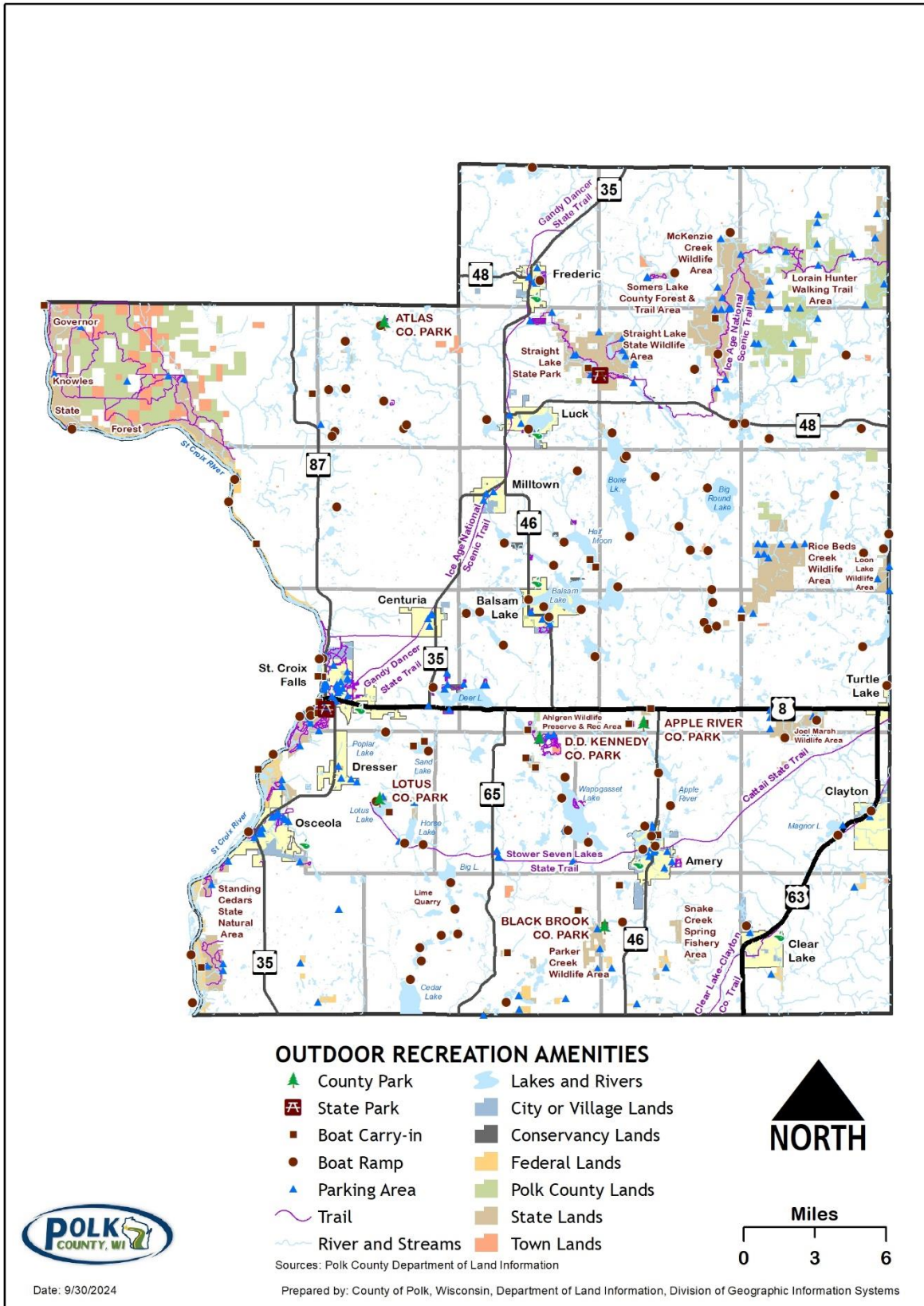
AVAILABILITY OF COUNTY RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

Map 7 on page 41 provides a general reference to the availability of, recreation lands and trails. Six of the county's nine recreational facilities are in the southern half of the county which generally has a higher number of residents per community and has been experiencing more growth. However, the map also shows a general lack of the trail system connecting the communities of southwestern Polk County. As expected, the public and private forest lands are more concentrated in the more sparsely populated areas.

MAP 6. POPULATION BY MUNICIPALITY POPULATION & OUTDOOR RECREATIONAL AMENITIES DISTRIBUTION.



MAP 7. Outdoor Recreation Amenities in Polk County



WATER-BASED ACTIVITIES

Water Resources

Polk County has extensive and high-quality surface water resources (see Map 2 page 23). They provide abundant water-related recreation opportunities for the local citizens as well as for numerous non-resident visitors. The county has over 473 lakes and 200 miles of streams. The total surface water area of the county is 23,619.8 acres. The lake surface represents 21,893.7 acres, while 1,726.1 acres are in stream surface.

Of the 473 lakes, there are 232 named lakes and 241 unnamed lakes. Of the 232 named lakes, there are 91 with public access, though not all have a boat ramp (see Table 9). Table 9 on the following page lists the Polk County lakes of 100 acres or greater. There are 89.9 miles of trout streams. Of these, 26.4 miles are Class I (see Table 10 on page 48).

TABLE 8. POLK COUNTY LAKE SUPPLY

	Number	% With Public Access	Total Acres	% Acres w/ Public Access
Named Inland Lakes	232	39	22,303	82%

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Wisconsin Lakes, 20015.

Water-Based Activities Recommendations

The Polk County Parks Department manages eight boat landings on the following lakes: Staples, Little Mirror, Little Butternut, Magnor, Atlas, Black Brook, Lotus, and North White Ash. These boat landings should continue to be maintained and supported. Specific recommendations for each landing can be found in Section 9.

**TABLE 9. LAKES OF 100 ACRES OR MORE
Polk County**

Lake	Acreage	Maximum Depth	Public Access
Antler (Pine)	101	22	X
Apple River Flowage	639	18	X
Balsam	2,054	37	X
Bass (T36N, R5W, S31)	138	19	-
Bear	160	n.a.	-
Bear Trap	241	25	X
Big	259	24	X
Big Butternut	378	19	X
Big Round	1,015	17	X
Blake	217	14	X
Blom (Bloom)	208	13	-
Bone (T35N, R16W, S06)	1,781	43	X
Cedar	1,107	28	X
Church Pine	107	45	X
Clam Falls Flowage	137	14	X
Deer (T34N, R17W, S29)	807	46	X
Diamond	126	15	X
Elbow	233	8	-
Freedom No. 2	106	4	-
Garfield (Big Horseshoe)	120	8	-
Glenton (Rice S20, T35, R17)	128	10	X
Half Moon	579	60	X
Horse	228	11	X
Horseshoe (T34N, R14W, S06)	377	57	
Indianhead Flowage	776	57	X
Largon	129	10	X
Little Butternut	189	23	X
Long (T34N, R17W, S06)	272	17	X
Long Trade	153	13	X
Lotus (T33N, R18W, S21)	246	15	X
Loveless (Bass)	141	20	X
Magnor (Richardson)	231	26	X
North (North White Ash)	119	9	X
North Twin	135	27	X
Pike	159	33	X
Pine (T36N, R16W, S24)	153	53	-
Pipe	290	68	X
Poplar	125	34	X
Sand	187	58	X
Somers	101	12	X
Staples	305	17	X
Straight	107	12	X
Wapogasset	1,186	32	X
White Ash	153	9	X
Wild Goose	182	12	X
TOTALS	16,585		36

Sources: Department of Natural Resources, *Wisconsin Lakes, 2001*

Canoeing/Kayaking

Excellent canoeing/kayaking water exists in Polk County. The four major canoeing/kayaking areas are the Apple River with 42 miles, the Trade River with 5 miles, the St. Croix with 39 miles, and Wolf Creek with 5 miles. There are canoe campsites and landings on the Apple and St. Croix Rivers.

Of course, other waters in the county are capable of floating a canoe/kayak; but only the rivers listed have the width, adequate water levels, stream movement, scenic quality and attendant features to provide a high-quality canoeing/kayaking experience.

TABLE 10.
STREAMS IN POLK COUNTY

Streams	Miles
Class I	26.4
Class II	51.9
Class III	11.6
Trout Streams	89.9
Non-Trout Streams	110.1
TOTAL	200.0

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

Canoeing/Kayaking Recommendations

The use of rivers and streams by paddlers depends not only on water conditions, but upon the quality of the surrounding lands. Therefore, efforts should be taken to prevent excessive stream bank development that would detract from an enjoyable paddling experience. Polk County should identify, map, and promote desirable paddling routes in the County. Once identified, focus should be placed on enhancing these routes with adequate access points, pullover stops, and portages. Particular focus should be placed on the Apple River as Polk County is well positioned to enhance this route with multiple properties along this waterway. Partnerships, easements, and acquisitions should all be considered in enhancing waterway paddling routes.

Water Skiing & Boating

These two distinct outdoor recreation activities are discussed together because they have similar spatial requirements and are frequently carried on simultaneously during a single recreation occasion. The lakes that are most suitable for water skiing are those which have 200+ acres of surface water and are free from most obstacles (see Table 11).

The twelve lakes listed in Table 11 have a total acreage of 9,925 acres, and all have public access boat ramps. Boating opportunities can be found on any lake in Table 9 with boat ramps, in addition to numerous additional lakes with boat ramps less than 100 acres in size.

**TABLE 11 MOST SUITABLE BOATING & WATER SKIING LAKES
Polk County**

Lakes	Acres	Lakes	Acres
Balsam Lake	2,054	Half Moon Lake	579
Bear Trap Lake	241	Long Lake	272
Big Butternut Lake	378	Magnor Lake	231
Big Round Lake	1,015	Pipe Lake	281
Bone Lake	1,781	Wapogasset Lake	1,186
Cedar Lake	1,100		
Deer Lake	807	TOTAL	9,925

Sources: Department of Natural Resources, *Wisconsin Lakes, 2001*

Fishing

The surface waters of Polk County provide excellent fishing opportunities. Above-average trout and walleye fishing are available, along with good-quality northern pike, largemouth bass and bluegill fishing. Some lake sturgeon fishing is also available on the St. Croix River and Clam River.

Trout fishing is available in 36 streams (89.9 miles). The most notable streams include McKenzie Creek, Sand Creek, Parker Creek, Clam River, Trade River, Wolf Creek, Cowan Creek, and Cold Creek. The various species of fish found in Polk County's lakes are summarized in Table 12.

**TABLE 12 NUMBER OF LAKES CONTAINING VARIOUS FISH SPECIES
Polk County**

Type of Fish	Number of Lakes	Type of Fish	Number of Lakes
Bass (LM/SM)	121/2	Pan Fish	122
Musky	11	Trout	8
Northern Pike	99	Walleye	29

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. *Wisconsin Lakes, 2001*.

Swimming

Most of the major lakes and rivers in Polk County have public swimming beaches. The existing supply of public beaches is currently twelve. The acreage of these beaches is estimated to be 14.6 acres at the present time (see Table 13).

TABLE 13 BEACH SUPPLY & ACREAGE-Polk County

Beaches	Number of Toilet Units	Acres	Bath House Units
1. Balsam Lake	1	1.0	1
2. Big Butternut	1	.5	-
3. Bone Lake, North End	1	.3	-
4. Clear Lake	-	.5	-
5. Half Moon Lake	-	1.0	-
6. Interstate, Lake of the Dells	1	1.0	1
7. Interstate, St. Croix River	1	2.0	-
8. Magnor Lake	1	1.3	1
9. Sand Lake	1	7.0	-
10. Osceola Landing	1	2.0	-
11. Dwight Lake	1	.5	-
12. Pipe Lake	-	1.0	-
TOTAL	9	18.1	3

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

Swimming Recommendations

While people occasionally swim in the river at Apple River Park, Polk County does not currently manage any formal swimming facilities. Currently, it appears that swimming facilities are being adequately supplied in Polk County by other entities. While it is not currently necessary, should the opportunity present itself, Polk County could consider adding swimming facilities to increase the supply.

LAND-BASED ACTIVITIES

Public and Private Campgrounds

As referenced in Table 14 seen below, Polk County has a total of 24 licensed public, private, and group campgrounds, with a total of 823 sites and 26 tourist boarding cabins. This is an increase in the number of campgrounds and sites since 1998, but still lower than the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The campgrounds of Polk County vary in quality from site to site; but in general, most sites include picnic tables, toilet facilities, playground equipment, and lake or stream access for swimming, boating and fishing. A limited number of campgrounds specialize in group events and activities.

Most Polk County campgrounds are privately owned. Most of the campgrounds are relatively small, with the largest campground in Polk County licensed for 93 sites. Polk County Parks maintains one campground with 15 sites within the Apple River Park & Campground.

According to the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds, the most influential factors in selecting a campground or RV Park are:

- Closeness to nature
- The location of clean, high quality restrooms within the premises.

-Camp ground safety

Polk County managed facility:

Apple River Park-15 sites

TABLE 14. CAMPGROUNDS Polk County

Campgrounds	1986	1991	1998	2004	2018
Establishments	32	28	17	23	24
Number of Sites	1,065	937	645	838	823
Average Sites	33.3	33.5	37.9	36.4	34.3

Source: Recreation Resources Center, UW-Extension

Campground Recommendations

The major concerns with public and private campgrounds are the number of available sites and the quality of these sites within Polk County. The popularity of camping grew substantially with the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to be popular, placing campsites in high demand. Polk County should work closely with Polk County Tourism to identify trends and demands for campsites in Polk County and take appropriate action to increase the supply, if necessary. Such actions can include enhancing the existing campground at Apple River Park, expanding the campground at Apple River Park, and exploring the addition of a campground at Atlas Park. Additionally, if the opportunity presents itself, land acquisition of a high-quality recreational property for campground development could be considered.

Picnicking

In Polk County, both public and private picnic areas are available. Picnicking areas are provided by local, county, state and private sources. Many of the picnic areas are publicly owned. There are a total of approximately 47 city, village, and township parks.

Polk County managed facilities:

- Atlas Park
- Alhgren Wildlife Preserve
- Apple River Park & Campground
- Black Brook Park
- Lotus Lake Park
- DD Kennedy Park
- Somers Lake Recreation Area
- Sterling ATV/UTV Trailhead

Picnicking Recommendations

Currently, it appears that picnicking facilities are being adequately supplied in Polk County by multiple entities at the local, county, state and private level. It is recommended that Polk County continues to maintain, enhance, and upgrade its current facilities. While it is not currently necessary, should the opportunity present itself, Polk County could consider adding picnicking facilities in the southern parts of the county where supply is lower.

Hunting

Polk County provides very good hunting opportunities. There are approximately 66,000 acres of public land available for hunting (see Table 15 & Map 7). Polk County Manages 17,182 acres of County Forest. The entire County Forest is open for regulated hunting, except for areas developed for high public use such as the Apple River Park & Campground. All state hunting regulations apply. The game species most prevalent in these areas are deer, squirrel, fox, raccoon, ducks, geese, ruffed grouse, woodcock, and some pheasants. Some of the Wisconsin DNR wildlife areas listed in Table 15 includes the lease of private land. In addition, there are thousands of acres of privately-owned land open to public hunting under the State Managed Forest Tax Law Programs where acreages change on an annual basis. Much of the hunting in Polk County is done on private land. It is impossible to supply enough public land for all the hunters in the county. In this situation, it is important to encourage land owners to allow hunting on their land and hunters to respect the land owners' rights.

TABLE 15. PUBLIC LANDS AVAILABLE FOR HUNTING Polk County 2019

Area	Acres
DNR – Interstate Park	1324
DNR – Garfield Township, hunting and fishing	175
DNR – Land South of Black Brook, hunting and fishing	181
DNR – Snake Creek Fishery Area	200
DNR – St. Croix River State Forest (approximate potential)	6,000
DNR – Rice Beds Creek Wildlife Area	3,119
DNR – McKenzie Creek Wildlife Area	5,620
DNR – Sand Creek Fishery Area (Polk & Burnett County)	1,326
DNR – Loon Lake Wildlife Area (Polk & Barron County)	2,752
DNR – Behning Creek Fishery Area	171
DNR – Balsam Branch Wildlife Area	180
DNR – Joel Marsh Wildlife Area	1,347
DNR – Wagon Landing Springs Fishery Area	67
DNR – Parker Creek Fishery Area	219
DNR – Governor Knowles State Forest (Polk County portion)	abt. 11,000
DNR—Straight Lake State Park/Wildlife Area	3425
DNR—Private Open MFL 2019	5,686
Polk County Forest	17,182
Town of Sterling Forest	4767
Clam Falls	139
Scattered Parks (county or township owned undeveloped land) 1,134	1,134
TOTAL	abt. 66,000

Source: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

Shooting Ranges

There are six shooting ranges in Polk County, all run by private clubs: Balsam Lake Rod & Gun Club, Fox Creek Gun Club, Osceola Gun Club, Cushing Rifle Club, Richardson/Clayton Gun Club, South Fork Sporting Club, and Amery Club. Currently, it appears that shooting range facilities are being adequately supplied in Polk County by other entities.

Downhill Skiing and Snowboarding

Trollhaugen is the only downhill ski resort in the county. It is located at Dresser and serves between 1,300 and 1,400 skiers and snowboarders on an average weekend day. There are a total of 22 runs at Trollhaugen.

One characteristics of the downhill skiing enthusiast is the willingness to travel long distances to ski. Therefore, this inventory would not be complete without mentioning the nearby facilities in

neighboring counties. Wild Mountain ski area is located in Chisago County, Minnesota, to the west. In addition, there is Afton Alps about an hour south of the County, also in Minnesota.

Cross Country Skiing & Snowshoeing

Cross country skiing is a recreational activity that is increasing in popularity. Many areas in the county are available for this use with over 44 miles available (see Table 16). Many of these trails may also be available for snowshoeing. As of October 2024, there are five cross country ski trails. The Cattail and the Gandy Dancer are open to cross country skiers but many skiers chose not to ski these trails as they are open to Snowmobiles and or ATV's. Currently, the majority of the 17,182 acres of Polk County Forest is open to ungroomed cross country skiing and snowshoeing.

**TABLE 16 CROSS COUNTRY SKI TRAILS
Polk County**

Trails	Groomed Miles
1. Balsam Branch	12.0
2. Interstate Park	10.9
3. Trade River Trail	8.0
4. Stower 7 Lakes Trail	13.0
5. DD Kennedy Park	1.0
6. Ahlgren Wildlife Area	2.0
TOTAL	46.9

Source: West Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

In addition to these, Interstate Park has two miles of snowshoeing trails; and many of the walking trails discussed in the next section are also available for snowshoeing.

Cross Country Skiing & Snowshoeing Recommendations

The recommendation for Polk County is to continue enhancing and expanding opportunities through stakeholder partnerships and planning. Where feasible, communities are encouraged to establish trail systems in or near their vicinities.

Snowshoeing, by virtue of the sport, does not require any sort of trail system; all that is needed is open space. Non groomed cross-country skiing and snowshoeing is open to all user within the Polk County Forest.

Hiking/ Walking/Running

Hiking trails in Polk County are used for casual walking, nature study, bird watching, hunting, photography and many other uses.

Approximately 95 trails exist within the county. Many of these 95 trails exist within villages, cities and Conservancy lands. These trails are mapped out and can be found within the Polk County recreational viewer. The most notable trails are located at Apple River County Park, Lotus Lake County Park, Gandy Dancer State Trail, the Stower Seven Lakes State Trail, and Interstate Park. Other trails exist on county forest land and parks (see Table 17 and Map 7), and three miles in Governor Knowles State Forest. It is recognized the Ice Age National Scenic Trail (IANST) provides some 59 miles of nationally and state designated trail in Polk County for hiking and cross country skiing and it is an integral aspect of the county recreational trail network. The Ice Age NST is supported by a triad of the National Park Service (as a unit of the NPS it has a superintendent), the Wisconsin DNR and the Ice Age Trail Alliance (IATA). The IATA Indianhead Chapter, one of its 21 chapters across the state of Wisconsin, is based in Polk County. Some 6.5 miles of the IANST in Polk County are on County Forest lands. The county considers the trail segments that cross county lands (as well as the rest of the trail in the county) to be of ongoing importance to the recreation plans of the county and to the integrity of the 1,000 mile trail across Wisconsin that has its western terminus in Interstate Park. (See Map 7).

The Stower Seven Lakes State Trail is a natural westward extension of the Cattail Trail and terminates approximate one mile east of Dresser on 90th Avenue. This county-operated trail has limestone base and has been brushed and graded. It is maintained for walking, hiking, running biking, and cross-country skiing. Motorized vehicles (e.g., ATVs, snowmobiles) are not allowed. Additional trails near population centers are likely to be the most frequently used. Hiking is also allowed on the Polk County Forest. All developed trails and roads are open to use by hikers. Trails are maintained through volunteer organizations and periodically by the Parks department. Hiking and walking are allowed on the Cattail and Sawmill trail; however it should be noted that walking and hiking on the Cattail is not recommended by the WIDNR.

**Table 17. Hiking /Walking/ Running Trails
Polk County**

Area	Miles
Apple River County Park	1
Alhgren County Park	1
DD Kennedy County Park	1.5
Cattail Trail	12
County Forest	25
Gandy Dancer Trail	30
Stower Seven Lakes Trail	13
Lotus Lake County Park	1
Garfield Recreation Area	5
Ice Age Trail	59
DNR McKenzie Creek	6
DNR Straight Lake	5
DNR Interstate Park	10
DNR Governor Knowles	3
Villages & Cities	Abt.1
Total	167.5

**Does not add to 187.5 miles due to the ice age trail being on part of the County Forest mileage and the Gandy Dancer mileage.*

Hiking / Walking/ Running Recommendations

Work with Polk County cities, villages, towns and adjacent Counties to develop a comprehensive plan that provides trail interlinks. Future examples include working with adjacent Counties such as Burnett, Barron, St. Croix and Chisago County as well as the cities and villages within Polk County. Continue to provide trails that are safe, long enough for runners that are training, and provide for community events/fundraisers.

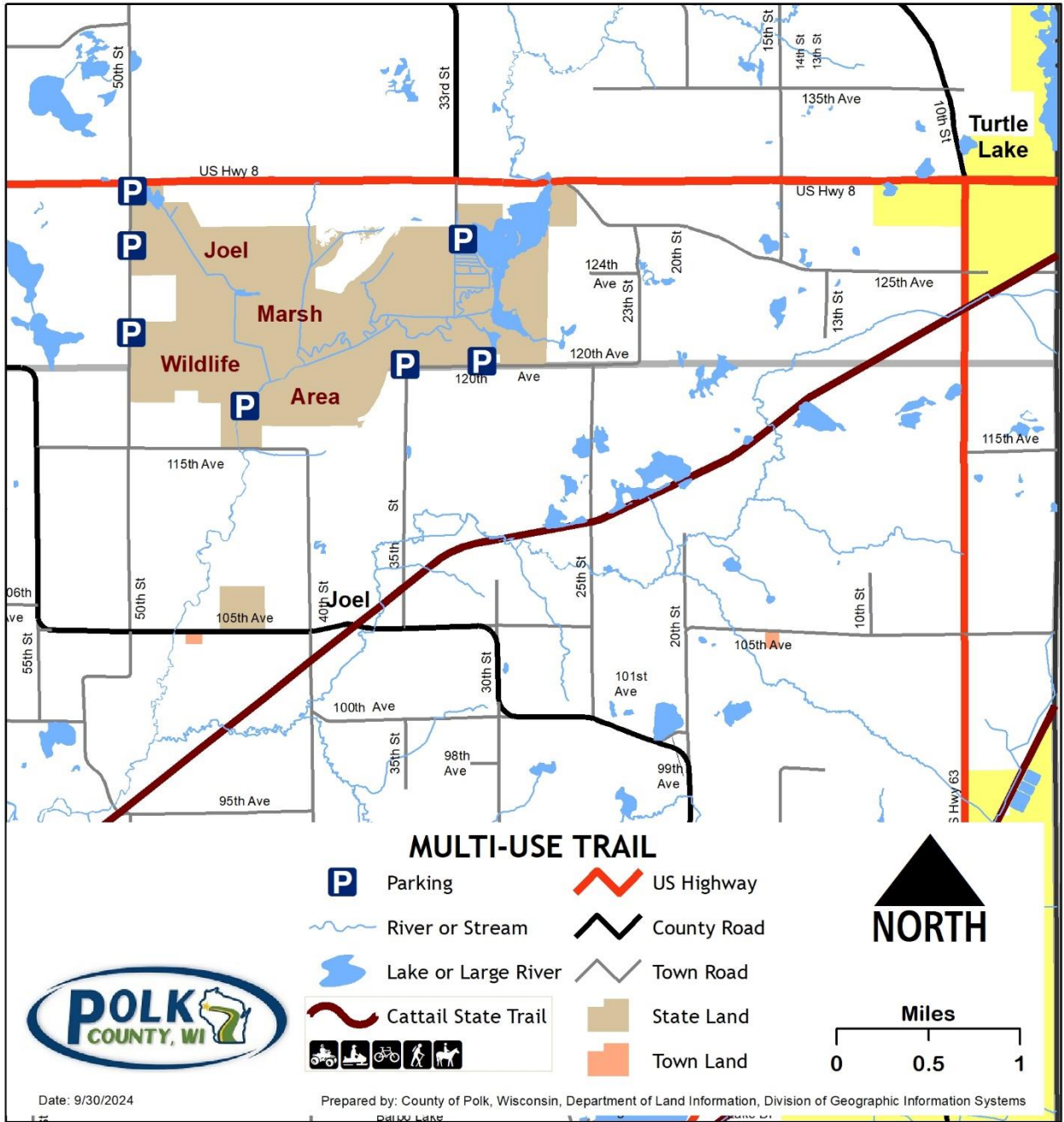
Horseback Riding

The interest in horseback riding in Polk County is apparent by the heavy use of trails within the Town of Sterling. Most of the designated horseback riding occurs on the maintained Trade River Equestrian Trail System (40 miles) located within the Governor Knowles State Forest (Polk and Burnett Counties), the Polk County Forest, the Town of Sterling Forest. Other designated trail segments include Somers Lake Recreation Area and the Cattail Trail from Joel to the county-line. Currently, the majority of the 17,182 acres of Polk County Forest is open to non-designated off-trail horseback riding. Governor Knowles States Forest contains a dedicated camping area for Equestrian use.

Horseback Riding Recommendations

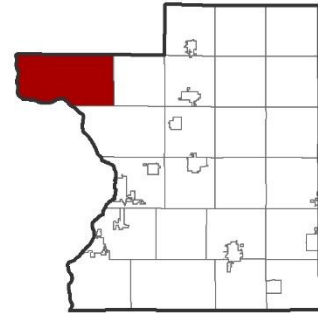
Polk County will continue to support horseback riding on the Governor Knowles equestrian trails. With Polk County recently adding horseback riding as a designated use on the Somers Lake Recreation Area trail system, it is recommended to continue providing and maintaining adequate amenities for equestrians.

Map 8. Horseback riding portion allowed on the Cattail Trail Joel to the Barron County

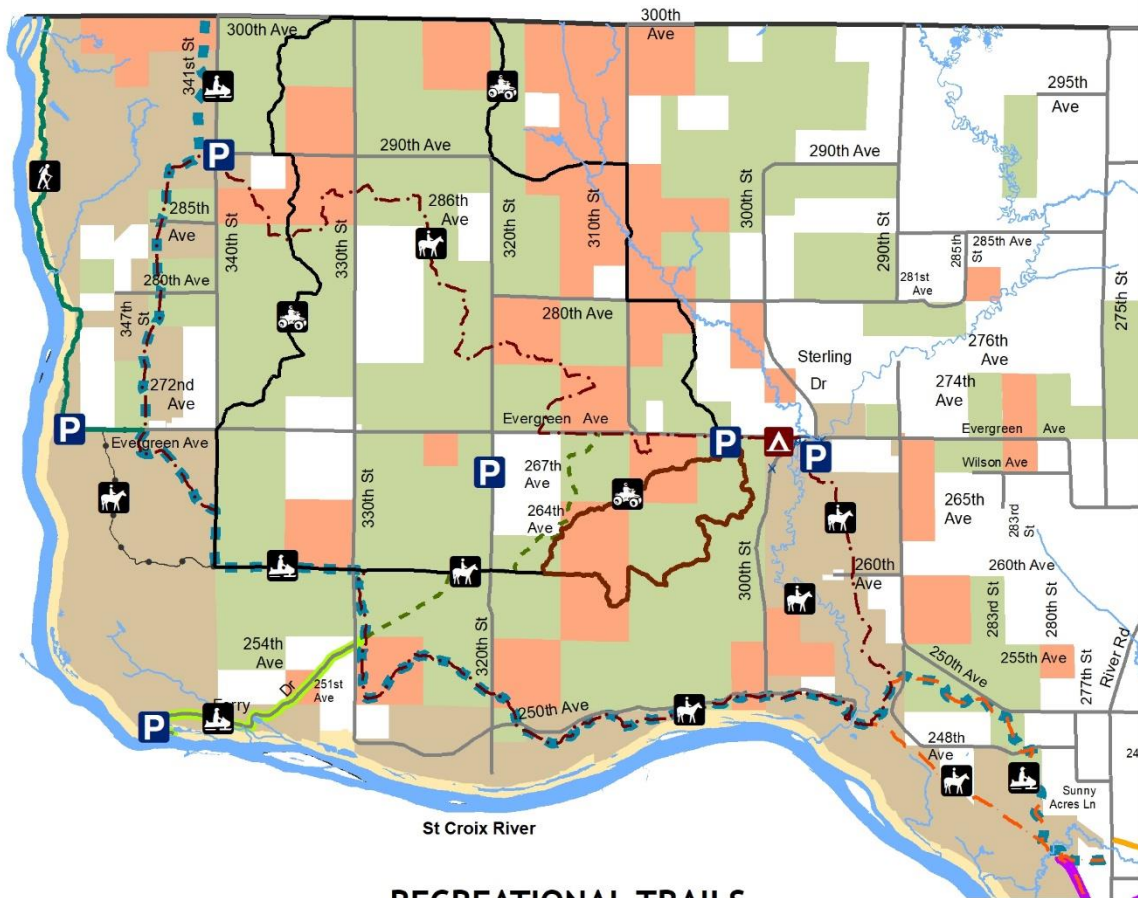


Map 9. Horse Trails and ATV Loop Town of Sterling

Town of Sterling Polk County

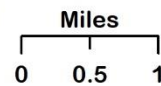


- Equestrian Campground
- Lake or Large River
- Parking
- Federal Land
- County Road
- County Land
- Town Road
- State Land
- River or Stream
- Town Land



RECREATIONAL TRAILS

- Barrens Loop Horse Trail
- Harris Loop Horse Trail
- Lagoos Creek Hiking Trail
- River Horse Trail
- Sunrise Shortcut Horse Trail
- Wolf Creek Horse Trail
- Jack Pine Loop ATV Trail
- Sterling ATV Trail
- Snowmobile Club Trail
- Snowmobile Funded Trail
- Snowmobile State Trail



Date: 9/30/2024

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

Bicycling/Mountain Biking/Fat Tire

Bicycling is another activity that is increasing in popularity. There are two dedicated bike paths in the county, The Gandy Dancer Trail and the Stower Seven Lakes State Trail are available for bicycling. The ‘gandy’ is a 97-mile, trail running from St. Croix Falls to Superior along a former Soo Line Railbed. The 48 mile section in Polk and Burnett counties is a limestone surfaced state trail, requiring a state trail pass for bike riders ages 16 and over. Approximately 30 miles of the Gandy traverse Polk County. The ‘S7LT’ stretches from one mile east of Dresser to Amery, a span of just over 13 miles. This trail is compacted limestone and is open year round. The Cattail Trail, as well as the newly named Sawmill Trail are open to bicycles. The Garfield Recreational area is also open to mountain and fat tire biking. Clubs such as the Woolly bike club have established trails in St Croix Falls. The club has established a 6.8 miles of closed loop trail within the City of St Croix Falls for mountain and fat tire biking.

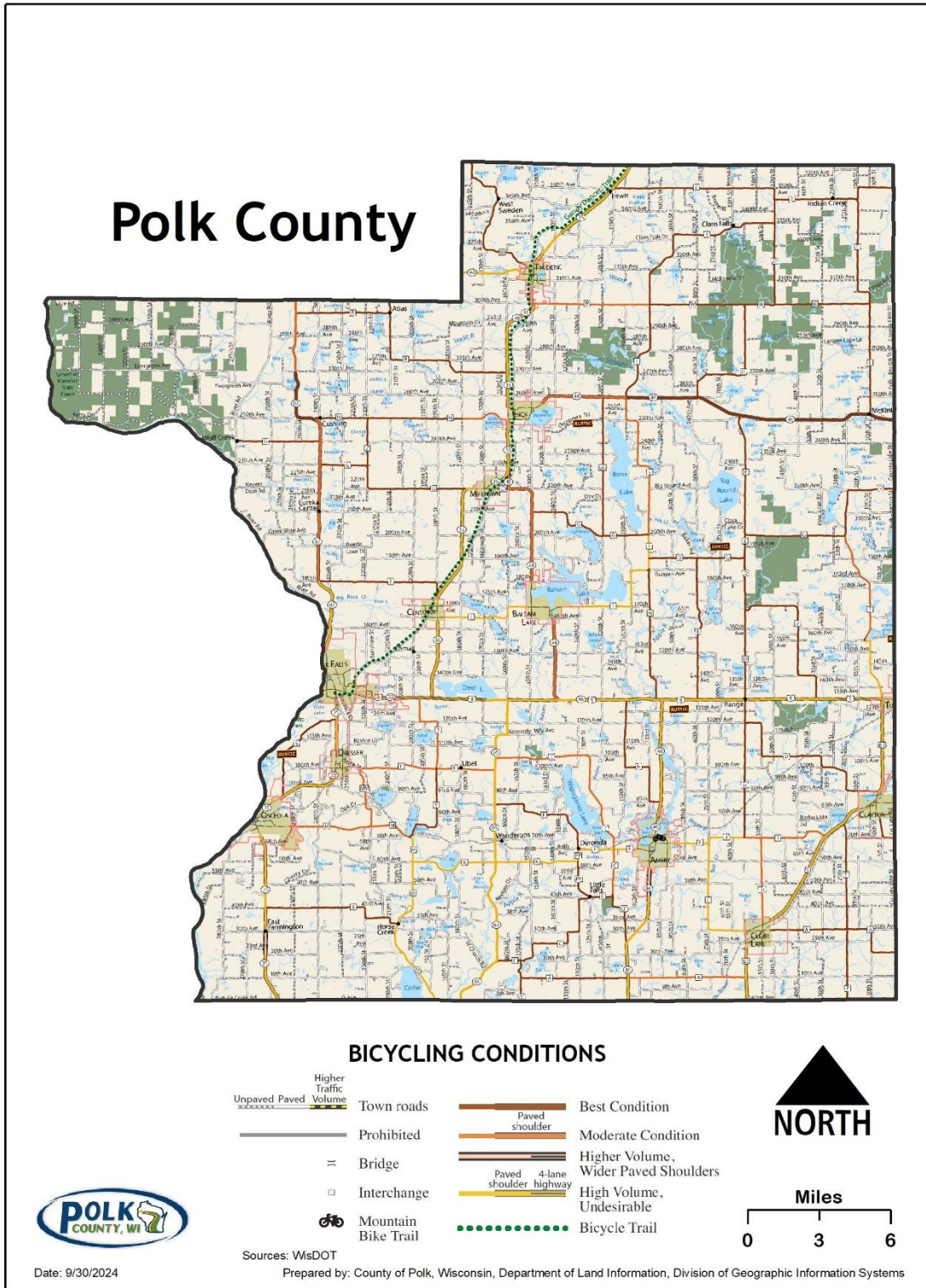
In addition to trail riding, there are also many miles of scenic county and local roads that are available for bicycle touring. However, riders should be careful since these routes may not be specifically designed for bicycle use. Information on the most suitable touring routes is available from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (See Map 10 on the next page).

Off-road riding is another form of bicycling that has increased in popularity during the past few years. The forest roads, logging access trails, and other trails throughout the county forest provide many miles of off-road biking opportunities. Opportunities exist to connect bicycle trails on Polk County properties with adjoining public properties and bicycle routes on local roads and state highways.

Bicycling Recommendations

Although owned by the State, Polk County maintains and manages the segments of the Gandy Dancer State Trail, Cattail State Trail, and Stower Seven Lakes State Trail that run through the county. Polk County should continue to maintain and enhance these trail segments for high quality riding. It is also recommended that Polk County, cities, villages, local bike clubs and adjacent Counties help develop a comprehensive plan that links existing bicycle paths.

MAP 10. Bicycling Conditions for Polk County State Trails and County Roads



Snowmobiling

There are over 380 miles of state funded snowmobile trails within Polk County; excluding club trails (see Map 12). Many of these trails are connected to other counties as part of the statewide trail system and serve enthusiasts statewide.

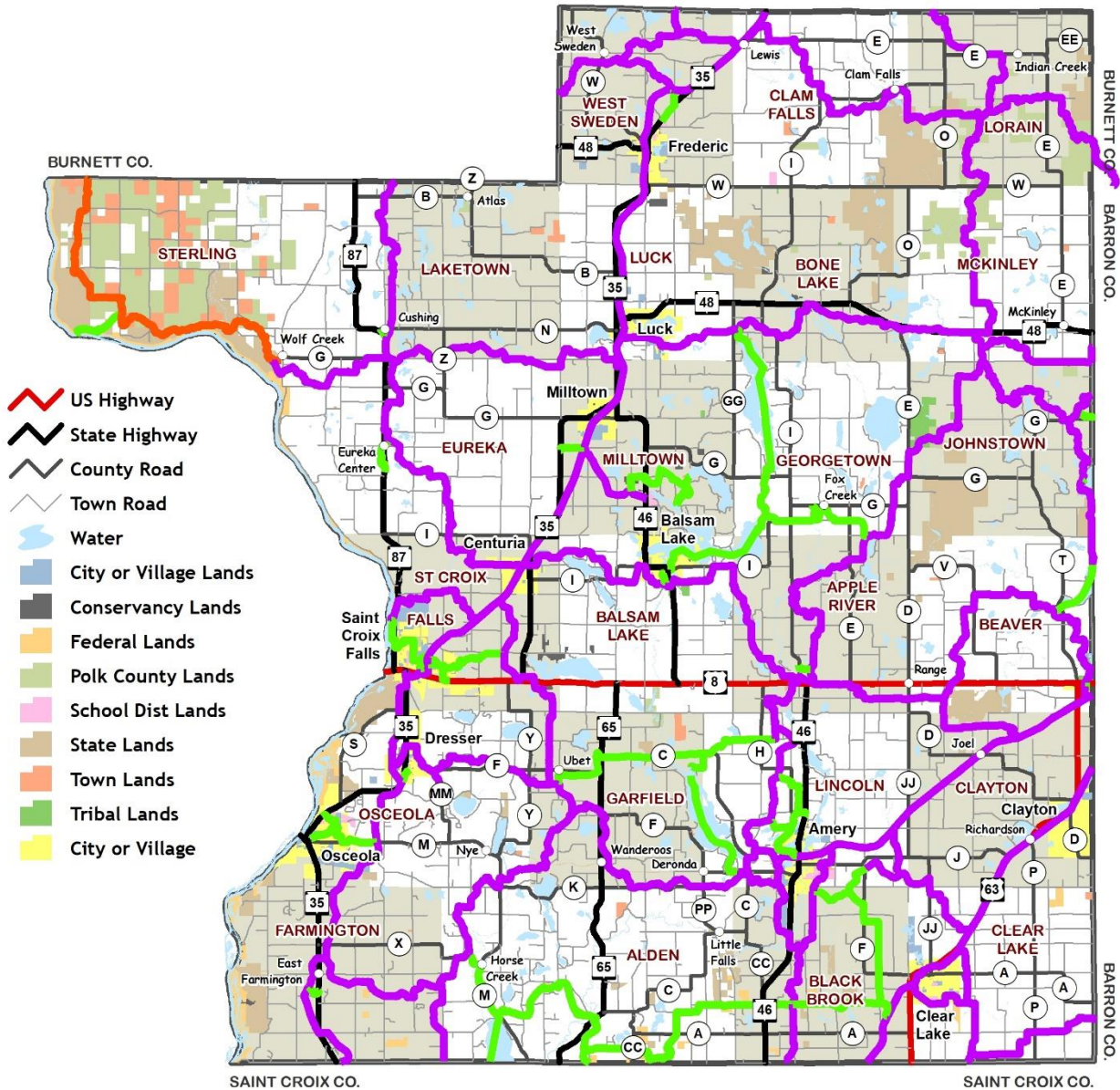
Snowmobiling Recommendations

Polk County manages an active and ambitious snowmobile trail development program. It is recommended that the county continues to maintain the existing trail system as well as pursue state funding on club trails with snowmobile trail aid grants.

The priorities for development of the Polk County snowmobile trail system were formulated by state program priorities and local desires. The criteria used for prioritizing future development are as follows:

1. To complete all point-to-point trails which give access to all population centers and support facilities.
2. To provide tie-ins with adjoining county systems.
3. To develop scenic trail loops within the county.
4. To develop trails on public land as best as feasible.

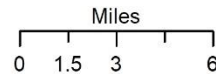
MAP 11. SNOWMOBILE TRAILS Polk County



SNOWMOBILE TRAIL CLASSIFICATION



-  CLUB TRAIL
-  FUNDED TRAIL
-  STATE TRAIL



Date: 11/4/2024

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

ATV/UTV/OFF HIGHWAY MOTORCYCLES

In 2019, there are 6238 ATV's and 1583 UTV's registered in Polk County. This is up from 5127 ATV's registered in 2008. The following is a brief summary of the ATV trails found in Polk County:

1. *Sterling Loop*. This is a seven-mile trail with a picnic area, restroom and parking area at the trailhead. The trail is open year-round but is only maintained in the summer months. Closed to off highway motorcycles. See Map #9 on page 54
2. *Jack Pine Loop*. This newly developed trail segment features thirteen miles of trail and takes off at the same trailhead terminus as the Sterling Loop. The trail is open year-round but is only maintained in the summer months. Closed to off highway motorcycles. See Map #9 on page 54
3. *Polk County Intensive Use Area*. This is a 60-acre newly developed ATV/UTV play area that has three distinct tracks, and a sand pit. It features a beginner's course, ATV/UTV track, and a challenge course.
4. *Cattail Trail*. This 11.8-mile trail is open year-round for ATV and motorcycle use and for snowmobile use during snow cover.
5. *Sawmill*. This eleven-mile multi-use trail is open year-round for ATV/UTV's and off highway motorcycle use. This trail segment is also a state funded snowmobile trail.
6. County Roads ATV/UTV Routes. Ordinance 32-18 allows for ATV/UTV's to use County Roads. Riders must stay on pavement and the speed limit is 35 miles per hour. 320 miles were added to the system.
7. Most town roads and county forest roads located in the Town of Sterling are open to ATV/UTV use. Please refer to local ordinances for what is open or closed to ATV/UTV's.
8. City and Villages (see city and village websites for latest information)
 - City of Amery- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed on streets
 - City of St Croix Falls -ATV/UTV traffic is allowed on limited roads per ordinance.
 - Village of Centuria- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed except for Main Street from Superior to Polk Ave.
 - Village of Clayton- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed in accordance with their Ordinance V1 Chapter 494.
 - Village of Clear Lake- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed only on approved routes through the Village.
 - Village of Dresser- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed under Municipal Code Sec 7.14
 - Village of Frederic- ATV/UTV traffic is allowed on all village streets but excludes State Highways.
 - Village of Luck- ATV/UTV is allowed except for main street and State Highways
 - Village of Milltown- ATV/UTV are allowed on routes planned by ATV club.
 - Village of Osceola- ATV/UTV is allowed except for by the schools and State Highways

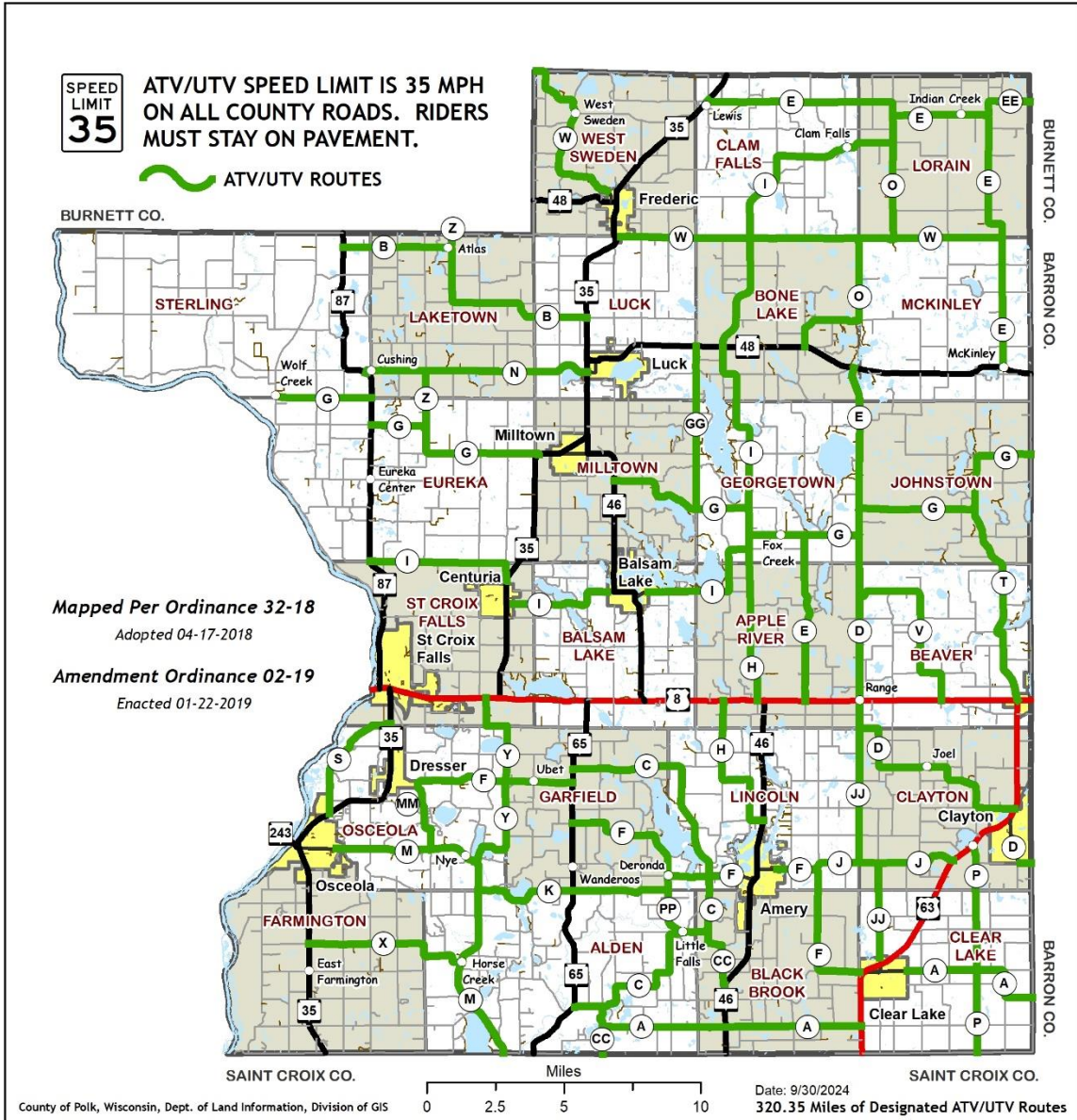
ATV/UTV/OHM Recommendations

Polk County manages an ATV/UTV trail development program which includes 34.5 miles of summer ATV/UTV trails, 4.9 miles of troutes and 53.2 miles of winter ATV/UTV trails. These segments are all state funded through motorized recreation grants. It is recommended that the county continues to maintain the existing trail system as well as pursue opportunities that connect segments into adjacent counties.

Polk County has designated some areas for Off Highway Motorcycle usage. The county should continue to assess the needs of this activity and plan accordingly.

There is a growing demand for riding opportunities. Polk County as well as a number of towns, cities and villages allowing ATV's/UTV's has increased. Most ATV/UTV riders prefer trails or routes that are winding and narrower rather than straight and wide. However local roads, even if they are straight and wide, that provide connection from one desirable location to another is generally considered an acceptable riding experience.

Map 12. Polk County Highway ATV/UTV Routes



ACCESSIBILITY FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Polk County is committed to providing persons with disabilities access to park amenities. Most of Polk County’s park facilities are dated and improvements are needed to meet current accessibility standards. All parks should be evaluated for accessibility and a transition plan should be developed to address any deficiencies identified. Deficiencies should be corrected anytime an existing facility is upgraded or renovated and all new facilities should be constructed to meet ADA design guidelines.

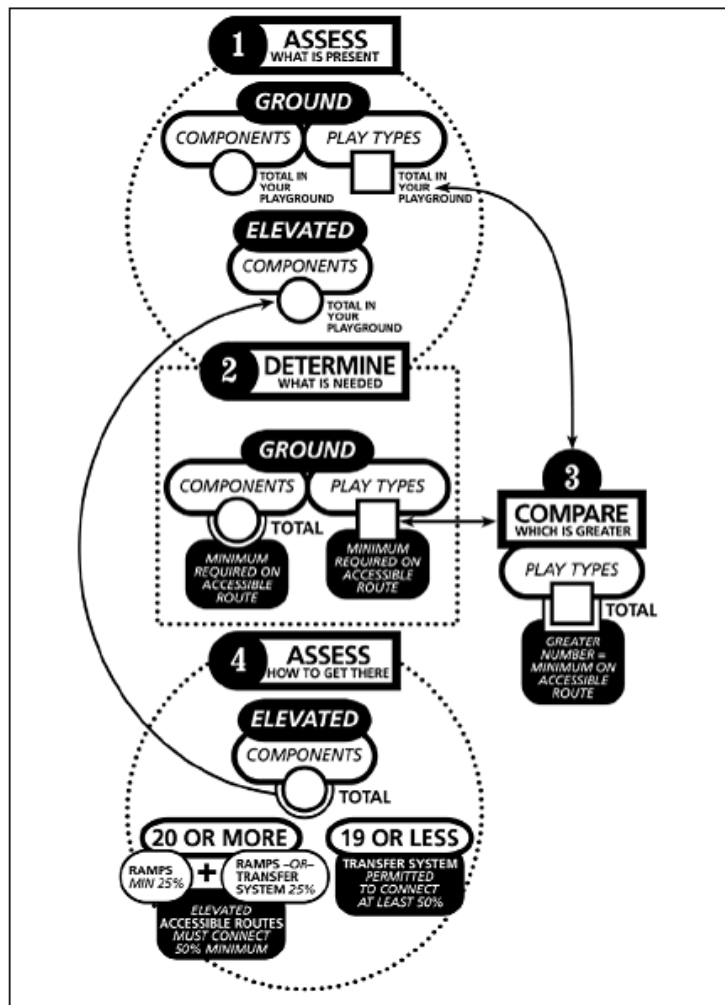
As can be seen in the diagram to the right, ADA design guidelines for park and playground accessibility contain many details and can be complicated.

These guidelines include details such as surface types, surface widths, slopes, handrails, and transfer stations. At least one of each type of ground-level play component that is present in the play area must be on an accessible route. However, the number and variety of ground-level play components required to be on an accessible route is also determined by the number of elevated components provided in the play area.

The U.S. Access Board has issued a guide to the ADA accessibility guidelines for play areas which is available at their website: www.access-board.gov.

Municipalities may be required to obtain professional assistance in meeting these guidelines.

Figure 2. Evaluating a Play Area for ADA Accessibility



Source: U.S. Access Board, <http://www.access-board.gov/>

Section 10

OUTDOOR RECREATION NEEDS ASSESSMENT

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

INTRODUCTION

Recreational needs within the county have been identified with input from: 1) public input – informal and needs assessment surveys; 2) on-going facility assessment; and 3) a review of past plans – including the Wisconsin SCORP 2019-2023 and the Wisconsin DNR Recreation Opportunities Analysis 2020.

PUBLIC INPUT ASSESSMENT

Polk County Parks Department staff continuously receives public input from users about its parks and forest resources. Valuable input for this report came from these informal conversations and interactions.

Also, in order to gauge perception of park lands and operations within the County, Polk County staff conducted a survey online. The survey was filled out by 427 respondents online and by seven people who attended the input meeting. The survey was developed to gain insights into the opinions regarding recreational policy and issues from the users of Polk County recreation facilities. The online survey asked the following questions:

1. How often have you and/or a member of your household visited the following Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties in the last year?
2. Which of the following reasons prevents you or members of your household from using Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?
3. What activities do you and/or a member of your household participate in when using Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?
4. How would you rate the overall maintenance and condition of Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?
5. Which of the following Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties need improvement?
6. Which of the following facilities or activities would you like to see offered or expanded as part of Polk County's outdoor recreational opportunities?
7. Where do you reside?
8. How old are you?
9. How many people reside in your household?
10. How do you seek information about outdoor recreation opportunities?
11. Please provide any other comments to help us improve outdoor recreation opportunities in Polk County.

FACILITY ASSESSMENT

Every year, County staff visit all recreational sites to conduct an assessment of all properties. Since the 1960's, an accepted practice has been to adopt a uniform national land standard, such as 10 acres per 1000 population, for park planning. A standard amount of land for parks and recreation cannot be universal for a park. A standard land measure is only useful for specific

facilities like determining how much land is needed for a specific use like a baseball diamond. The number of baseball diamonds and other facilities are not the same among similar sized communities nationally. The basis of this revised approach to park and recreation standards is to create a level of service as defined by the customers' needs rather than an arbitrary standard. The level of service is generated locally for each type of park, trail, or public access to a water body. Public input is collected in multiple ways and the needs for a particular park, trail, or public access to a water body are determined. When specific facilities are needed, then facility standards are used to design the facility and budget for the necessary land, materials, and labor to satisfy that need. A needs driven and facilities based park planning approach presents the current demand for park and recreation opportunities. The size of a park site is determined by the number of facilities needed to satisfy the active recreation demand within the service area of each park.

The size of a park is determined by three criteria:

1. Physical geography. Does the site have steep hills, woodlands, or wetlands? Such natural features are useful for exploration, conservation, and aesthetic buffers.
2. Park facilities. What activities are allowed or will be allowed? How much land is needed for each use?
3. Buffers. How much land within the park is needed to separate different uses? How much land is needed for future expansion? Maybe a park will not expand within 2-years, but within 10-20 years expansion may be imminent. When the opportunity to buy land exists, then reaction must be swift to seize the opportunity. A park growth boundary should be created for this reason.

INPUT AT PUBLIC HEARING

The Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee held a public hearing on December 3rd, 2024, at 5:00pm. A public hearing notice was posted and it noted that the draft plan was available on the County website for the public to view and comment on.

Public Notice

On December 3rd at 5:00 pm, the Polk County Public Safety and Public Works Committee will be holding a special meeting to obtain input from the public concerning the Polk County Outdoor Recreation Plan 2025-2029. The meeting will be held at the Polk County Government Center in the County Board Room #112. The draft plan can be viewed at:

<https://www.co.polk.wi.us/parks>

Comments can also be emailed to polk.recreation@co.polk.wi.us

Summary of Public Comments

As part of the development of this update to the Polk County Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, public opinion was gathered from a variety of sources. Polk County conducted an online survey from mid-Jul to Mid-August that consisted of eleven questions. The results are shown in the Appendix of this plan, as well as on the Polk County Parks website. The survey received 427 responses and continued to show that interest in outdoor recreation in the county remains strong. A few highlights from the survey include:

- There is still a lot of enthusiasm for outdoor recreation in the County.
- People are passionate about their recreation activities and enjoy what the county has to offer.
- Most reported engaging in their activity daily, weekly, or monthly.
- Trails were still a popular topic for respondents with accessibility, compatibility, and maintenance mentioned frequently.
- 70% feel that the county is doing well with maintaining their facilities
- Not surprisingly, most want additional opportunities for the activities they enjoy
- 65% of respondents were 40-70 years old
- 75% of respondents were county residents

The high or growing participation rates outlined by the 2017 Recreational Opportunity Analysis for the Great Northwest Region from WDNR were reinforced by the Polk County Survey results. The Polk County survey results showed a strong desire for facilities that promoted hiking, walking, running, biking, cross country skiing, snowmobiling and ATV usage.

The response numbers for other uses such as fishing, hunting, picnicking, canoeing, swimming, birding, and photography recreation were considerably lower than the response numbers associated with trail activities, however, many survey respondents indicated the importance of the activities just mentioned. Polk County will have to continue balancing recreational amenities available today as well into the future for the diverse recreational experiences desired.

STATE COMPREHENSIVE OUTDOOR RECREATION PLAN (SCORP)

Assessing the outdoor recreation needs of Wisconsin's residents and visitors is a major component of the *Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)*. Outdoor recreation is a very broad concept. Activities range from shooting buckets to shooting bears, from just relaxing to rock climbing, or from solitary hiking to trekking at the State Fair. With many, often competing interests, it is necessary to assess the needs, plans, and issues involving outdoor recreation in the region.

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources guidelines for outdoor recreation planning encourage local planning efforts to consider the needs, issues, and priorities identified in the SCORP. The 2019-2023 SCORP identified the following trends in Wisconsin outdoor recreation activities.

Table 18. Activity demand from the 2017 Recreational Opportunity Analysis (Statewide).

Increasing Demand 	Adventure racing	Popular as both an individual and a group activity.
	Driving for pleasure	An easy activity for the aging baby boomer generation.
	Developed/RV camping	Baby boomers are a continued driving force for this growth.
	Kayaking	Cheaper entry points have attracted more participants.
	Visit a dog park	Urban residents continue to demand more of these areas.
	Soccer outdoors	Youth growth is still strong in urban areas.
	BMX biking	X Games popularity may be driving this growth.
	Climbing	Indoor climbing walls have led to an outdoor resurgence.
	Stand up paddling/paddleboarding	A fast growing water sport sweeping the country.
	Triathlon (on- and off-road)	Varying distance events have allowed for growth.
	Off-highway vehicle driving	Post recession growth continues.
Gardening or landscaping for pleasure	The "grow local" concept is taking hold at many levels.	
Stable Demand 	Walk for pleasure	Market saturation does not allow for large growth.
	Running or jogging	Gen Y is replacing the baby boomers for this activity.
	Water parks	Recession may have caused this growth to slow.
	Motorboating	Still easy access in a water-based state.
	Day hiking	Popular with many generations.
	Golf	Time constraints do not allow for growth.
	Tent camping	Continues to be stable, but growth is illusive.
	Snowboarding	May have peaked after 20 years of growth.
	Trail running	A stable niche activity with Gen Y.
	View/photograph wildlife	An easy activity that spans generations.
	Bicycling (road and non-paved)	Popular with many generations – access is still key.
	Snowshoeing	After large growth, this has stabilized.
Decreasing Demand 	Hunting	Continues to struggle with generational loss and private access.
	Inline skating	A large decrease in the last six years, the bottom may be near.
	Skateboarding/skate parks	Gen M is free-skating with longboards.
	Horseback riding on trails	Recession impacts have caused this to decrease with no rebound.
	Softball	Baby boomers continue to leave this sport.
	Downhill skiing	Gen Y does not have the numbers to replace aging baby boomers.

While by no means is this a complete analysis, these issues should foster future discussions between recreation providers about how to better serve various recreation interests. By identifying issues of statewide and regional significance, county and local outdoor recreation providers can better identify individual roles for providing high quality recreation resources, and for continually improving the recreational opportunities offered to our citizens, now and into the future.

Recreation Opportunity Analysis (ROA)

*Taken from the 2016 Wisconsin DNR Recreation Opportunity Analysis

Table 19. Recreational Activities with a **higher** participation rate in the Great Northwest Region compared to the state average.

- 4WD driving
- ATV/UTV riding
- Bird/wildlife watching
- Cross-country skiing/ snowshoeing
- Fishing – lake from a boat, canoe or kayak
- Fishing – ice fishing
- Harvesting berries/mushrooms, etc.
- Hunting – big game
- Hunting – migratory bird
- Hunting – small game
- Motorboating including pontoons
- Target shooting - firearms • Target shooting - archery
- Snowmobiling
- Trapping

Table 20. Recreational Activities with a **lower** participation rate in the Great Northwest Region compared to the state average.

- Swimming in community pools
- Visiting a dog park

Table 21. Future Recreational needs in the Great Northwest Region.

High

ATV/UTV riding
 Bicycling - bicycle touring/road riding
 Bicycling - mountain biking/off-road biking
 Bird or wildlife watching
 Camping - developed
 Camping - primitive
 Canoeing or kayaking
 Fishing - lake fishing from a boat, canoe or kayak
 Fishing - lake fishing from shore or a pier
 Fishing - stream or river fishing from shore or wading
 Four-wheel vehicle driving
 Hiking, walking, trail running, backpacking
 Hunting - big game
 Motorboating (waterski/tubing, personal watercraft)
 Off-highway motorcycle riding
 Swimming in lakes and rivers

Medium

Cross country skiing
 Dog walking
 Fishing - ice fishing
 Fishing - river fishing from a boat, canoe or kayak
 Gather mushrooms, berries, etc.
 Horseback riding
 Hunting - migratory birds
 Hunting - small game
 Nature photography
 Participating in nature-based education programs
 Picnicking
 Snowmobiling
 Snowshoeing
 Target shooting - firearms
 Visiting a beach, beach walking

Low

Bicycling - fat tire/snow biking -winter
 Dog sledding/skijoring
 Dog training
 Dog trialing
 Geocaching
 Horse cart driving
 Hunting - turkey
 Rock climbing
 Sailing, windsurfing, rowing, stand-up paddling
 Scuba diving/snorkeling
 Target shooting - archery
 Trapping
 Whitewater rafting

SUMMARY OF THE GREAT NORTHWEST REGION ROA

With a diversity of public conservation lands, the Great Northwest Region has been an outdoor recreation destination, particularly for those in the Minneapolis-St. Paul Metro Area, dating back to Wisconsin's earliest days. Hosting a diverse set of long distance and loop trails, the region is hailed for its hiking, hunting, and motorized riding opportunities to escape into the wilderness.

Although the region is rich in current opportunities, several needs were expressed by residents. Topping the list of needs are: hiking, walking, and running trails bicycling trails, hunting, fishing, camping, boating, motorized recreation trails, and swimming.

SECTION 11. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OUTDOOR RECREATION FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of this outdoor recreation plan is to guide the acquisition and development of land and facilities needed to satisfy the parks and outdoor recreation needs of Polk County, and to protect and enhance the County's important natural resources. The following recommendations take into consideration the information of the previous chapters while considering the recommendations of past and present park planning efforts, park and recreation needs standards, public comments, suggestions and issues, and site visits by staff.

Implementation of plan recommendations will be contingent upon county priorities, feasibility, and available resources and opportunities (e.g., grants, partnerships, available land, and staff resources).

The recommendations for each facility are a combination of several types of projects. These projects should be prioritized according to their importance and priority in the overall development of the facility. Projects are generally prioritized as follows:

1. Improvements to existing facilities:
 - a) To correct health and safety hazards
 - b) To update deficient facilities
 - c) To modernize adequate but outdated facilities
2. Installation of facilities as deemed necessary through citizen participation.
3. Development of new facilities as found necessary through comparison to park and recreation standards.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase the promotion of parks and outdoor recreation facilities to enhance tourism in Polk County
- Evaluate and enhance wayfinding signage to park properties from State and/or County highways
- Develop signage that is consistent from park to park
- Identify and sign property lines where appropriate
- Develop master plans for all parks and properties
- Conduct an assessment of ADA accessibility and develop a transition plan for correcting barriers to accessibility
- Beautification projects, such as flower bed plantings, should be started and maintained
- Develop property management plans to identify and control invasive species, manage and enhance natural landscapes, and protect sensitive areas.

PARK PROPERTIES

Polk County currently manages and maintains seven park properties that vary in size and recreational offerings.

Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve

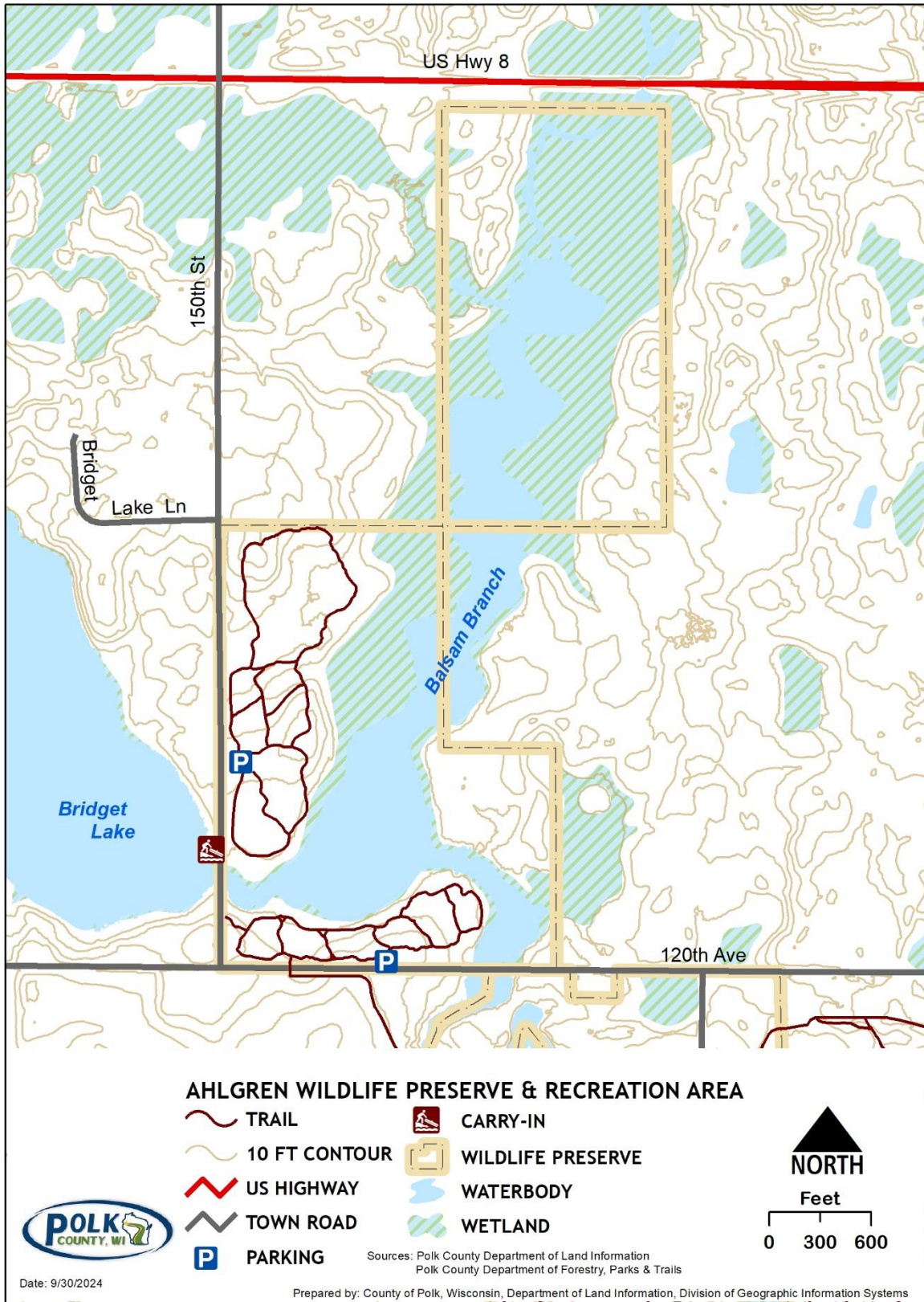
The Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve is a 180-acre parcel that was donated to Polk County by the Ahlgren Family in 2014 for the purpose of preserving the forest, water, and wildlife. The Park is located 0.75 miles south of Highway 8 on 150th Street in the Town of Balsam Lake. The property is managed for non-motorized recreation, forestry, and educational purposes. Existing facilities include off street parking, picnic tables, and more than 2 miles of walking trails. Current recreational opportunities include walking, hiking, cross country skiing, shoeshoeing, wildlife viewing, and non-firearm hunting.

Recommendations:

- Install park sign
- Add trail signage
- Add information to kiosk
- Relocate property information sign
- Develop and install interpretive signage
- Add picnic tables and benches
- Pave the parking lot
- Add a small picnic shelter
- Add a restroom facility



Map 13. Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve



Apple River Park

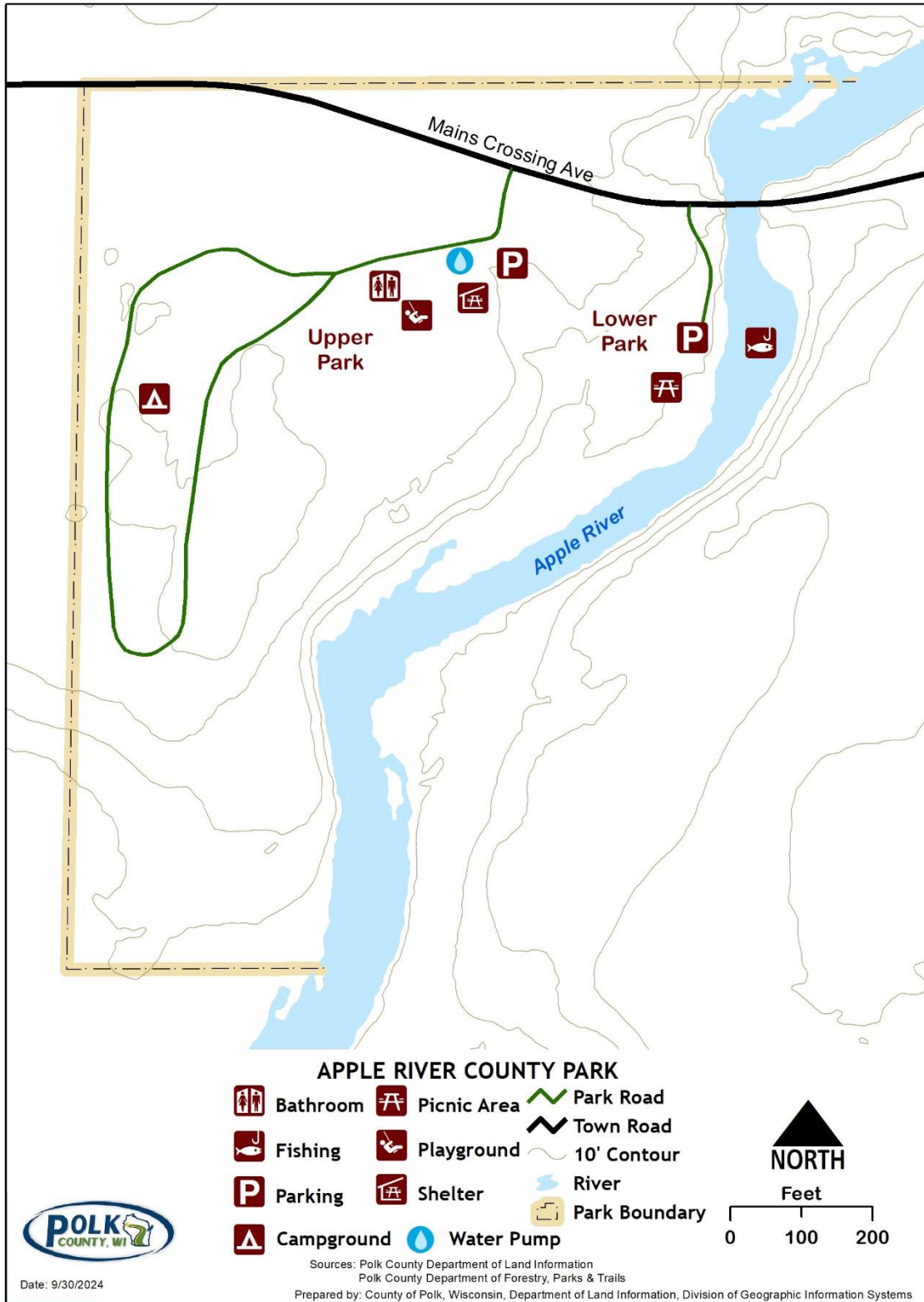
Apple River Park is a 20 acre park located along the Apple River north of Amery in the Town of Apple River. Apple River Park is within the Polk County Forest and is classified as a special use property. Existing facilities include two off street parking lots, picnic shelter, playground, hiking trail, river access, and a 15 site campground. Recreational opportunities include camping, hiking, picnicking, and river access for fishing, canoeing/kayaking, and swimming.

Recommendations:

- Remove/replace old amenities (tables, benches)
- Remove old concrete horseshoe pit remnants
- Add picnic tables to the pavilion
- Reestablish and sign the hiking trail
- Paint parking stalls in the lower lot
- Pave upper parking area and road
- Construct accessible access to pavilion, restrooms, and play area
- Upgrade the well
- Replace restrooms with a modern facility
- Reconfigure campsites to accommodate one way travel, add one way signage, and renumber campsites to reflect direction of travel
- Consider acquiring land to expand and upgrade the campground
 - Add additional electrical service
 - Build a shower/restroom facility
 - Build a dump station
 - Add water source to meet public campground code



Map #14. Apple River County Park



Atlas Park

Atlas Park a 78-acre park located the northern part of the county along the Trade River and Long Trade Lake. Existing facilities include off street parking, picnic area, restrooms, playground, hiking trails, boat landing, open play space, and natural areas. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, hiking, fishing, and boating.

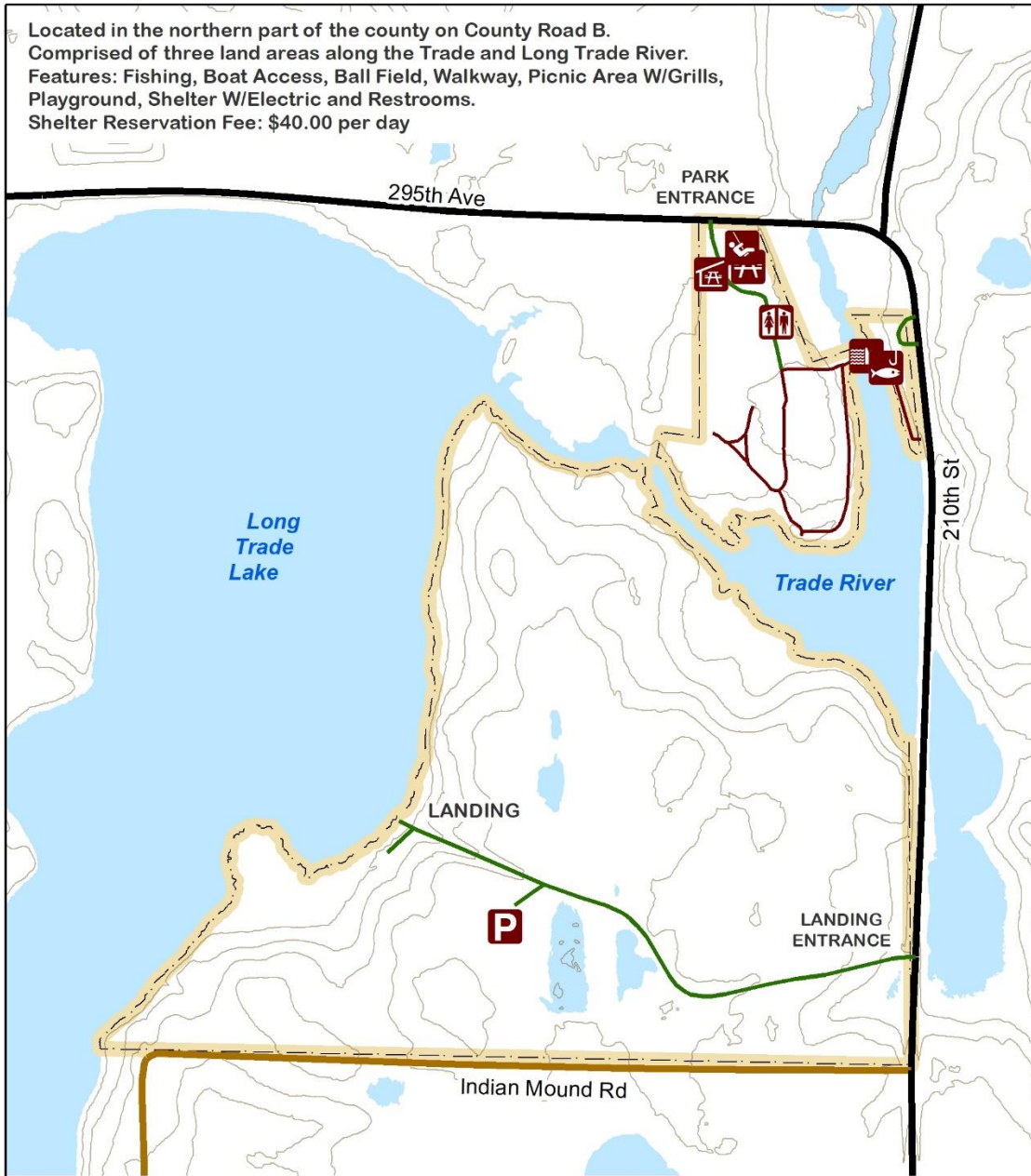
Recommendations:

- Develop a master plan for the park
- North Picnic Area
 - Replace trail signs/interpretive signage
 - Remove old ball field lighting
 - Convert old ball field into natural area with trails
 - Remove ash trees and replant
 - Replace playground
 - Construct a paved parking lot and pave driveway
 - Update well/replace drinking fountain
- East Picnic Area
 - Repair dam
 - Update signage
 - Add picnic tables
 - Plant trees
 - Construct a fishing pier
- South Area/Boat Landing
 - Install a trail system through the natural area
 - Continue to manage the grassland habitat
 - Construct a trail bridge to connect north and south use areas
 - Explore and consider development of a family campground



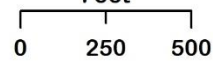
Map 15. Atlas County Park

Located in the northern part of the county on County Road B.
 Comprised of three land areas along the Trade and Long Trade River.
 Features: Fishing, Boat Access, Ball Field, Walkway, Picnic Area W/Grills,
 Playground, Shelter W/Electric and Restrooms.
 Shelter Reservation Fee: \$40.00 per day



ATLAS COUNTY PARK

- | | | | |
|--------------|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| Boat Landing | Parking | Dam | 10 ft Contour |
| Ball Field | Picnic Area | Trail | Park Boundary |
| Bathroom | Playground | County Road | Lake or River |
| Fishing | Shelter | Park Road | NORTH |
| | | Private Road | Feet |



Date: 9/30/2024

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information
 Polk County Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

Black Brook Park

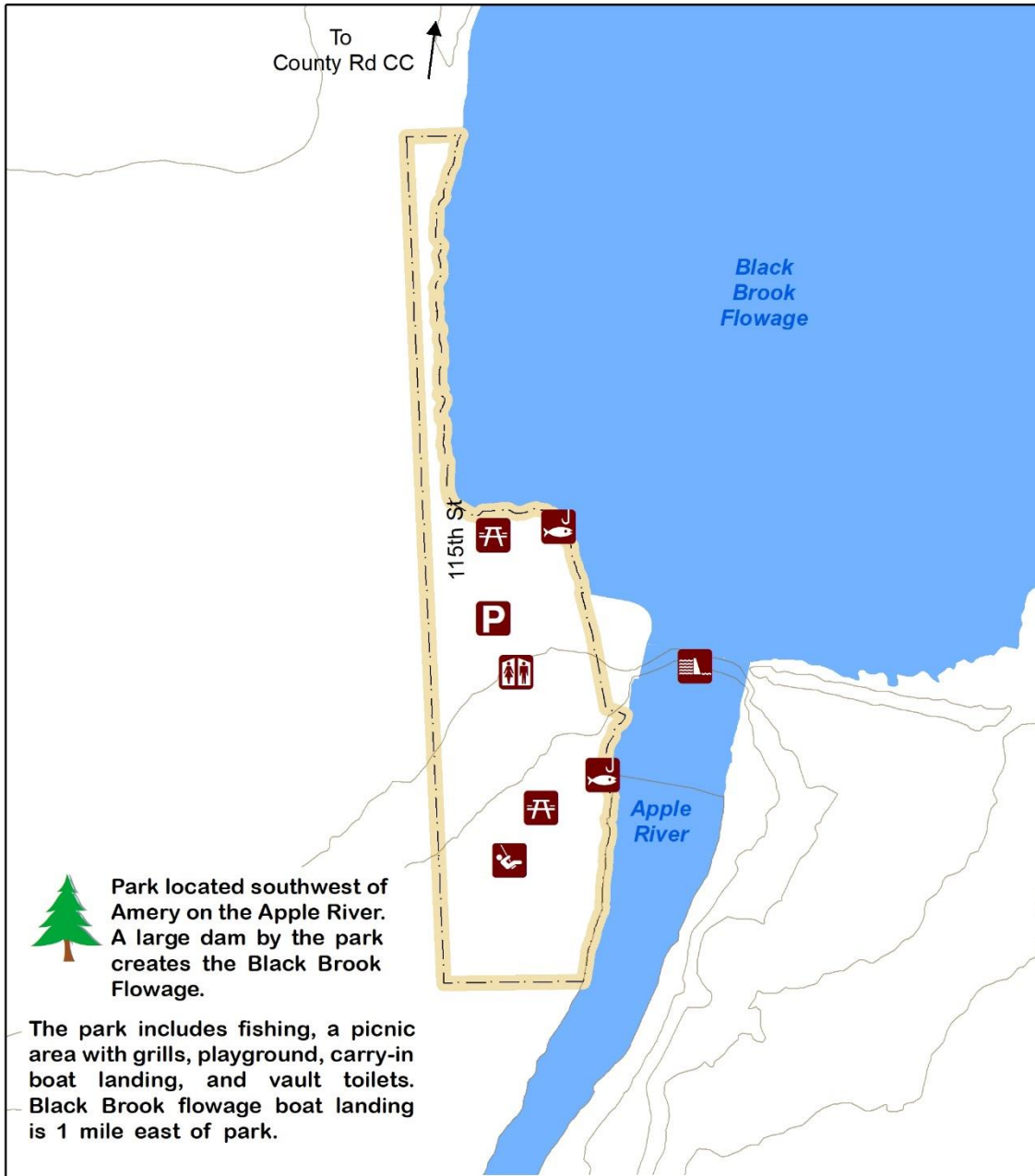
Black Brook Park is a small 3-acre park split between two locations along the Apple River southwest of Amery. The main park area is located adjacent to a dam that creates the Black Brook Flowage. Existing facilities include off street parking, picnic area, restrooms, playground, and access to both the Apple River and Black Brook Flowage. Upriver, a boat landing provides access to the flowage. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, fishing, and boating.

Recommendations:

- Remove old playground equipment
- Remove ash trees
- Remove grills
- Remove old stairs and construct an accessible walk to lower park
- Improve the river access for fishing and canoe/kayak launch
- Redesign parking lot for more efficient parking stalls
- Add a fishing pier
- Construct a small picnic shelter
- Upgrade well
- Replace restroom with modern facility
- Boat landing recommendations:
 - Add picnic table
 - Add portable toilet
 - Identify and grade parking area
 - Pave roadway and parking area



Map 16. Black Brook County Park

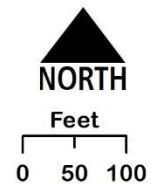


Park located southwest of Amery on the Apple River. A large dam by the park creates the Black Brook Flowage.

The park includes fishing, a picnic area with grills, playground, carry-in boat landing, and vault toilets. Black Brook flowage boat landing is 1 mile east of park.

BLACK BROOK COUNTY PARK

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------------|
| Carry-in Landing | Parking | Dam |
| Bathroom | Picnic Area | Town Road |
| Fishing | Playground | 10 ft Contour |
| | | Park Boundary |
| | | Lake or River |



Date: 9/30/2024

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information
Polk County Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

DD Kennedy Park

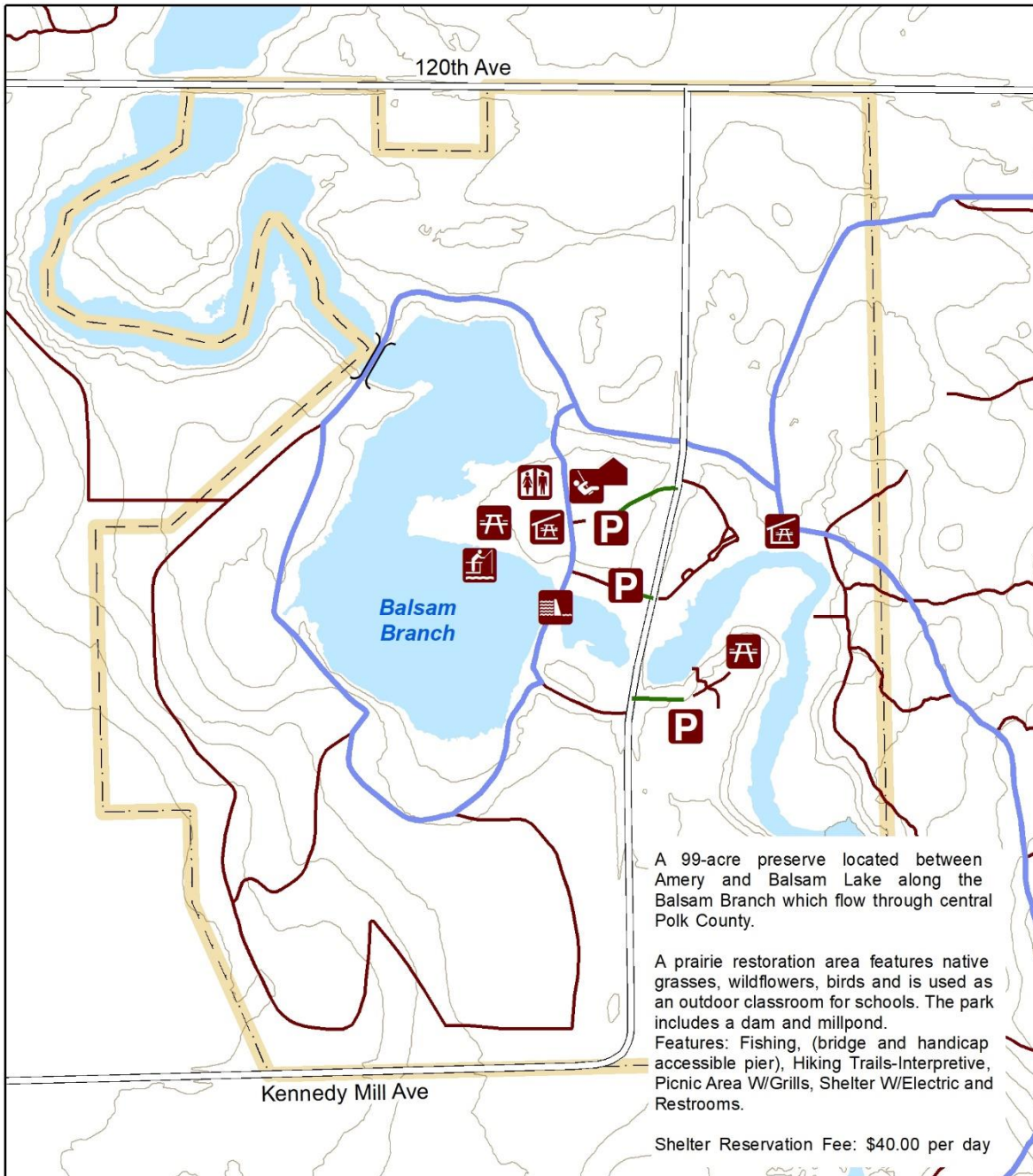
DD Kennedy Park is a 100-acre park located along the Balsam Branch between Amery and Balsam Lake. The property contains woodland, open prairie, river bottom, a mill pond, and developed park space. Existing facilities include off street parking, paved walking trails, hiking trails, picnic area, modern restrooms, picnic shelter, playground, and fishing pier. The park also has an Education Building that can be rented for small events. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, walking/hiking, cross country skiing, shoe shoeing, fishing, and wildlife viewing. DD Kennedy Park is located directly adjacent to and integrated with the Balsam Branch Ski Area, providing direct access to this trail system.

Recommendations:

- Replace pedestrian bridge
- Construct service drive to restroom
- Add picnic tables to pavilion
- Pave walk to pavilion and from pavilion to restroom
- Remove/replace interpretive signs
- Paint education building
- Continue management of prairie area
- Replace decking on fishing pier
- Pave walk from lower lot
- Improve and pave lower lot
- Provide accessible route to the fishing pier
- Acquire additional land to provide a connection to Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve
- Develop a plan to better utilize the Education Building
- Add fishing access below the dam
- Develop a plan for the east side
 - Replace access to the river
 - Replace the kiosk
 - Improve trails – signage, remove/replace boardwalk



Map 17. DD Kennedy County Park



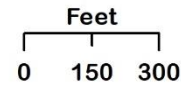
A 99-acre preserve located between Amery and Balsam Lake along the Balsam Branch which flow through central Polk County.

A prairie restoration area features native grasses, wildflowers, birds and is used as an outdoor classroom for schools. The park includes a dam and millpond. Features: Fishing, (bridge and handicap accessible pier), Hiking Trails-Interpretive, Picnic Area W/Grills, Shelter W/Electric and Restrooms.

Shelter Reservation Fee: \$40.00 per day

D.D. KENNEDY COUNTY PARK

- | | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Dam | Parking | Bridge | Ski Trail |
| Bathroom | Picnic Area | Town Road | Hiking Trail |
| Fishing Pier | Playground | Park Road | Park Boundary |
| Education Building | Shelter | 10 ft Contour | River |



Date: 9/30/2024

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information and Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails
 Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

Lotus Lake Park

Lotus Lake Park is a 14-acre park located along the northwest shore of Lotus Lake east of Osceola. The park provides a view of the American Lotus beds growing in the lake. The park also provides nearby access to the Stower Seven Lakes State Trail. Existing facilities include off street parking, picnic shelter, playground, vault toilets, hiking trail, and a boat landing.

Recreational opportunities include picnicking, hiking, fishing, and boating.

Recommendations:

- Add additional trash receptacles
- Remove dead, dying and stunted trees
- Remove old playground equipment, replace swing set
- Install accessible surfacing for playground
- Improve/expand trail system
- Redesign and improve parking lot
- Construct an observation/fishing pier
- Install sidewalks to the pavilion, restrooms and playground

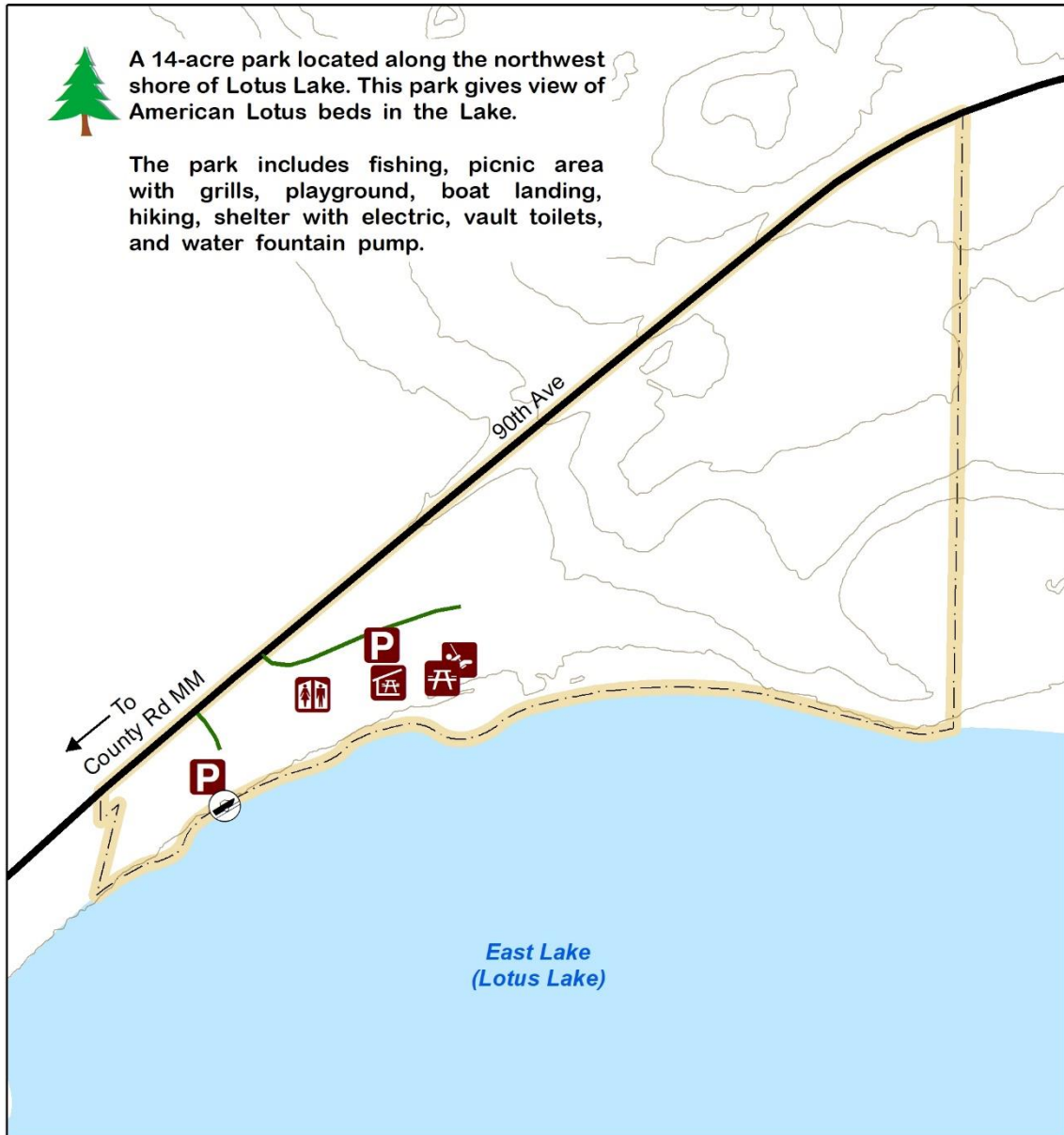


Map 18. Lotus Lake County Park



A 14-acre park located along the northwest shore of Lotus Lake. This park gives view of American Lotus beds in the Lake.

The park includes fishing, picnic area with grills, playground, boat landing, hiking, shelter with electric, vault toilets, and water fountain pump.



LOTUS COUNTY PARK

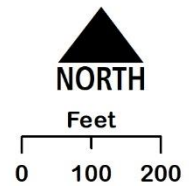
- | | | | |
|----------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Bathroom | Picnic Area | Boat Landing | Park Boundary |
| Fishing | Playground | Park Road | Lake |
| Parking | Shelter | Town Road | |
| | | 10 ft Contour | |

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information
Polk County Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails



Date: 10/23/2024

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems



Woodley Dam Property

The Woodley Dam Property is an 8 acre property located along the Apple River at the intersection of US 8 and CTH H. Existing facilities include a large parking lot, river access, bridge across the river and access to the snowmobile trail system. Recreational opportunities include snowmobile trail access and parking, and river access.

Recommendations:

- Adopt an official name and designate as a park
- Install park signage and wayfinding signage from the highway
- Install an information kiosk
- Add a hiking trail
- Improve access to the river for canoe/kayak launch
- Add restroom and picnic facilities
- Acquire additional land if the opportunity presents itself



TRAILS

In addition to the many miles of multiuse trails associated with park properties and recreation areas, Polk County is also responsible for managing and maintaining X miles of railbed trails consisting of three State Trails and one County Trail.

Stower Seven Lakes State Trail

The Stower Seven Lakes State Trail is a 13-mile limestone trail that runs from the City of Amery to the Village of Dresser. The trail passes through forests, wetlands, prairies, farmlands, and past several picturesque lakes. The trail is open to hiking, biking, cross country skiing, and snow shoeing.

Recommendations:

- Update and replace signage for consistency
- Install wayfinding signage to parking areas from the highway
- Install new information kiosks at parking areas
- Update drinking fountains
- Pave parking lots
- Assess rustic trail for possible removal

Gandy Dancer State Trail

The Gandy Dancer State Trail is a 98 mile railbed trail that runs from the City of St. Croix Falls north to the City of Superior. Polk County is responsible for a 23 mile stretch of the trail that runs from St. Croix Falls to the county line north of Lewis. This segment has a crushed limestone surface and is open to hiking and biking year-round. In the winter, the trail is open to snowmobiles and ATV/UTV's when the ground is frozen.

Recommendations:

- Wayfinding signage to parking areas from the highway
- Update and replace trail signage for consistency
- Identify sections for resurfacing
- Work with local municipalities on developing trail parking facilities

Cattail State Trail

The Cattail State Trail is a gravel surfaced trail that runs for 18 miles from the City of Amery east to Almena in Barron County. The trail is open to ATV/UTV use year-round, snowmobiles in the winter, and off road motorcycles spring through fall.

Recommendations:

- Decommission old restroom building
- Update trailhead signage
- Inspect bridges for redecking
- Pave approaches to paved road crossings
- Grade/resurface sections of trail with erosion issues

Sawmill County Trail

The Sawmill County Trail is a gravel surfaced trail that runs for 14 miles from Clear Lake to Clayton. The trail is open to ATV/UTV use year-round, snowmobiles in the winter, and off road motorcycles spring through fall.

Recommendations:

- Update signage
- Pave approaches to paved road crossings
- Surface the trail from CTH A south to St. Croix County line

White Pine Trail

The White Pine Trail is a short 0.35 mile limestone trail located on the grounds of the Polk County Government Center in Balsam Lake. The trail is open to walking and used primarily by Polk County staff.

Recommendations:

- Replace trailhead sign
- Consider paving and removing snow for year-round use
- Timber stand improvement

BOAT LANDINGS

In addition to the three boat landings associated with park properties, Polk County also manages and maintains an additional five stand alone boat landings located throughout the county. Below are recommendations for each of these landings.

Magnor Lake

- Replace the dock
- Remove old swing set
- Remove old concrete foundation
- Provide accessible walk to the fishing pier
- Pave and line parking stalls

Staples Lake

- Pave and line parking stalls
- Explore the potential for adding additional parking

Little Butternut Lake

- Update signage
- Pave parking lot and line parking stalls
- Add a fishing pier
- Add a portable toilet

Little Mirror Lake

- Update signage

North White Ash Lake

- Continue agreement with Lake Association to manage this landing

COUNTY FOREST RECREATION AREAS

The mission of the Polk County Forest is to provide, protect and manage forest resources for the environmental and social benefits, on a sustainable basis for present and future generations.

Although driven by managing sustainable forest resources, the Polk County Forest provides a vast amount of multi-use opportunities of designated and non-designated general uses such as hunting, fishing, non-groomed cross-country skiing/snowshoeing, horseback riding, hiking, mushroom gathering, firewood gathering, kayaking/canoeing and more. Many secondary logging roads with active forest management creates opportunities for these various uses.

Somers Lake Recreation Area

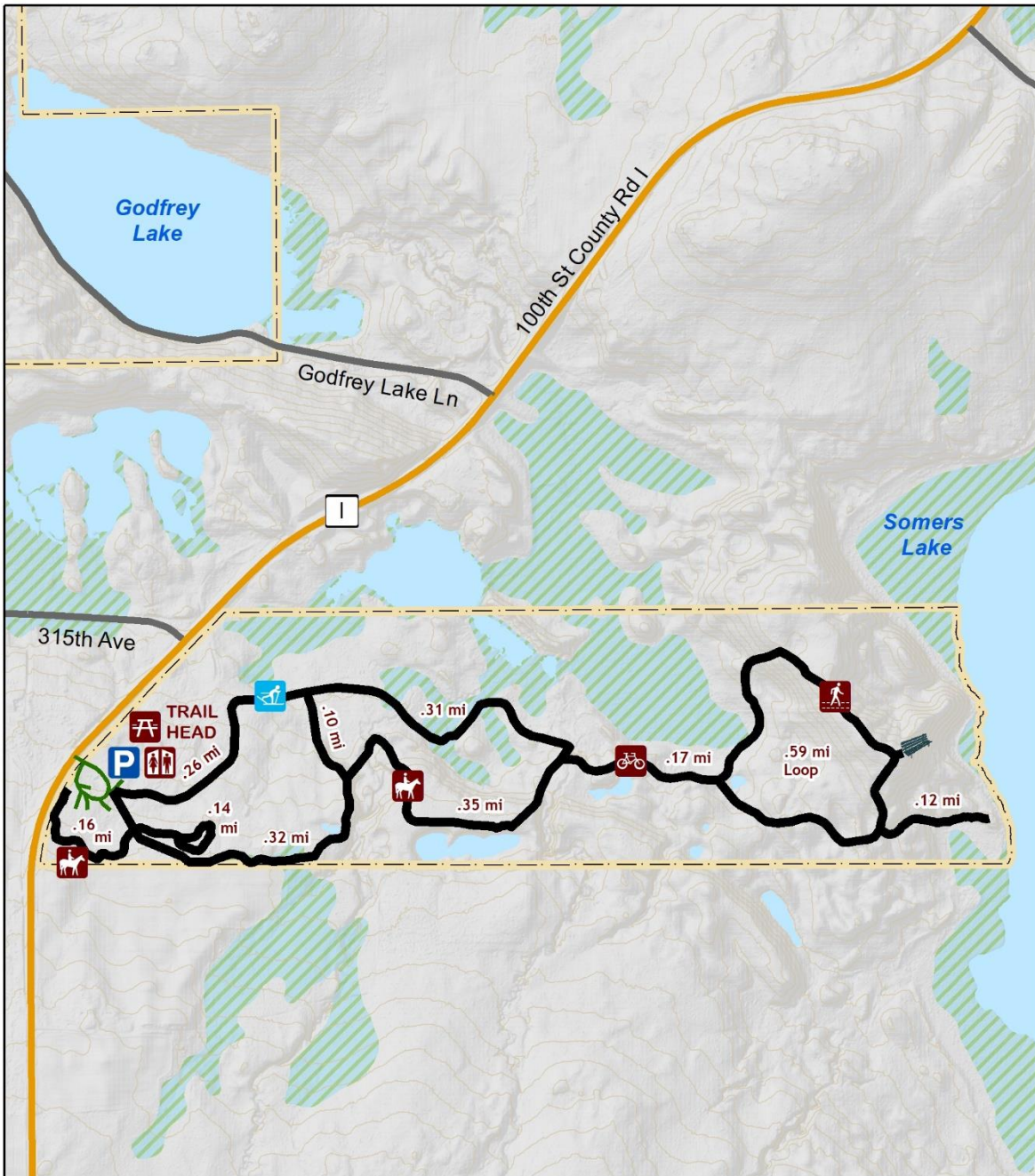
Somers Lake Recreation Area is a 138-acre property enrolled in the County Forest system that is designated as a special use area. It is located in the northern part of the County in the Town of Clam Falls and has access to Somers Lake. Existing facilities include off street parking, picnic area, restroom, equestrian obstacle trail, and more than two miles of multiuse trails. Recreational opportunities include picnicking, hunting, hiking, equestrian, biking, shoe shoeing, and cross country skiing.

Recommendations:

- Update park and trail signage
- Replace picnic tables
- Add trail access to the lake
- Add a picnic table to the lake area
- Improve equestrian facilities
- Install signage for equestrian parking
- Redesign and add gravel to parking lot and stalls
- Upgrade well
- Replace restrooms with modern facility

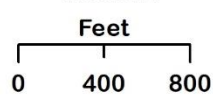


Map 19. Somers Lake Recreation Area



SOMERS LAKE RECREATION AREA

-  Forest Area
-  County Road
-  10' Contour
-  TRAIL
-  Town Road
-  Waterbody
-  Park Rd
-  Wetland



Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information
Polk County Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails

Date: 10/30/2024

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

Sterling ATV/UTV Trailhead

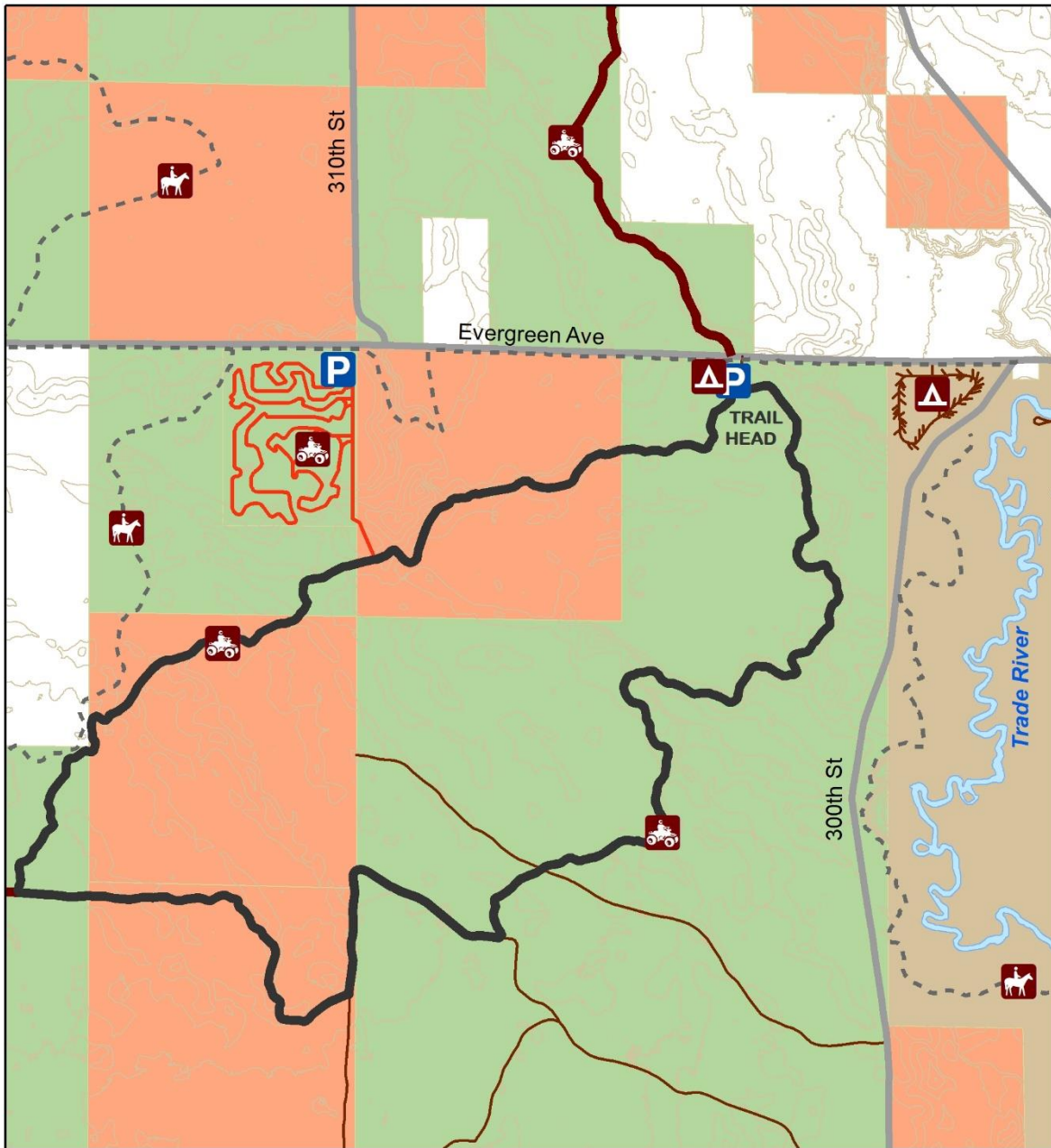
The Sterling ATV/UTV Trailhead is located on Evergreen Ave. in the Town of Sterling and provides access to approximately 19 miles of ATV/UTV trails. This is the only area in the County Forest open to ATV/UTV use. Existing facilities include a parking area, picnic area, restroom, and a small campground under construction. When complete, the campground will consist of 4 trailer sites with electricity and 2 walk in tent sites.

Recommendations:

- Remove/replace old picnic tables
- Plant trees
- Construct a small picnic shelter
- Build two walk in tent camping sites
 - Construct parking stalls for sites
- Install a well to provide water for the campground and an ATV wash station
- Replace the restroom with a modern facility



Map 21. Sterling ATV Trailhead and Intensive Use Park



STERLING ATV/UTV TRAILHEAD

Sterling ATV Trail	ATV Trail	Public Access Road	County Forest
ATV/UTV Intensive Use Area	Campground	Town Road	State Land
Jack Pine ATV Trail	Equestrian	Trade River	Town Land
Equestrian Trail	Parking	10' Contour	

NORTH
Feet
0 5001,000



Date: 10/23/2024

Sources: Polk County Department of Land Information
Polk County Department of Forestry, Parks & Trails

Prepared by: County of Polk, Wisconsin, Department of Land Information, Division of Geographic Information Systems

ATV/UTV Intensive Use Area

Located a mile west of the Sterling ATV/UTV Trailhead on Evergreen Ave. in the Town of Sterling, the ATV/UTV Intensive Use Area is situated on 60 acres of County Forest land and features three distinct tracks as well as a sand pit. The Beginners Course, designed for young and inexperienced riders, features banked corners and small jumps. The ATV/UTV Track is designed for more experienced riders, is longer and features larger jumps and ramps. The Challenge Course is for the more advanced riders and features unique obstacles with tires, rip rap and logs. All of the obstacles and features on the trails have bypasses, allowing users to tailor their experience to their comfort level. Additional facilities include parking lot, information kiosk, and picnic table.

Recommendations:

- Build a restroom facility or add a portable toilet



Accessible Hunting Stand

Located at 3247 Evergreen Ave. in the Town of Sterling, this accessible hunting stand hold 2-3 people and is available to rent at no charge.

Recommendations:

- Improve road and walkway to the stand
- Habitat management around the stand



County Facility Accomplishments

The following is a list of projects that were implemented from previous Polk County Outdoor Recreation Plans:

ATLAS PARK AND BOAT LANDING

Project:

Paved boat ramp and parking lot

Date Completed

2022

AHLGREN WILDLIFE PRESERVE

Project:

Resurfaced gravel parking lot

Added additional trails to trail system

Date Completed

2022

2022-2023

D.D. KENNEDY ENVIRONMENTAL AREA

Project:

Resurfaced parking lot

Resurfaced 1.6 miles of paved walking path

Installed new warming shelter

Installed new playground equipment

Installed new bathroom facility

Date Completed

2022

2023

2023

2023

2024

LITTLE BUTTERNUT LAKE

Project:

Installed new dock

Date Completed

2021

LITTLE MIRROR LAKE

Project:

Resurfaced gravel parking lot

Installed new dock

Date Completed

2022

2024

LOTUS LAKE PARK AND BOAT LANDING

Project:

Installed new playground equipment

Installed new dock

Date Completed

2022

2024

MAGNOR LAKE

Project:

Paved parking lot

Date Completed

2022

STAPLES LAKE

Project:

Installed new dock

Date Completed

2022

SOMERS LAKE RECREATION AREA

Project:

Added equestrian parking

Date Completed

2022

STERLING ATV/UTV TRAILHEAD

Project:

Added the 13-mile Jack Pine Loop

Date Completed

2022

ATV/UTV INTENSIVE USE AREA

Project:

Added a 60-acre ATV/UTV Intensive Use Area in Town of Sterling

Date Completed

2024

ACCESSIBLE HUNTER STAND

Project:

Added an accessible hunter stand in the Town of Sterling

Date Completed

2023

WOODLEY DAM

Project:

Added new parking lot

Date Completed

2023

APPLE RIVER PARK AND CAMPGROUND

Project:

Added new fire rings

Refurbished pavilion

Date Completed

2022

2022-2023

CATTAIL STATE TRAIL

Project:

Paved parking lot at Amery trailhead

Trail rehab of washouts

Date Completed

2022

2023

GANDY DANCER STATE TRAIL

Project:

Added new parking lot in Milltown

Assisted with adding restroom facility at the Polk County Information Center

Date Completed

2022

2023

STOWER SEVEN LAKES STATE TRAIL

Project:

Added additional parking in Wanderoos

Date Completed

2022-2023

SAWMILL COUNTY TRAIL

Project:

Trail rehab of road surface, ditches and right-of-way

Date Completed

2022-2023

Funding

The Polk County Outdoor Recreational Plan serves as guiding document for the County Forestry and Parks Department when developing its annual budget and for Capital Improvement Planning. Whenever applicable, Polk County will apply for grants to financially subsidize projects and recommendations listed in the Outdoor Recreational Plan. Below is a list of Outdoor Recreation Grant Programs Administered by the WDNR that Polk County will consider:

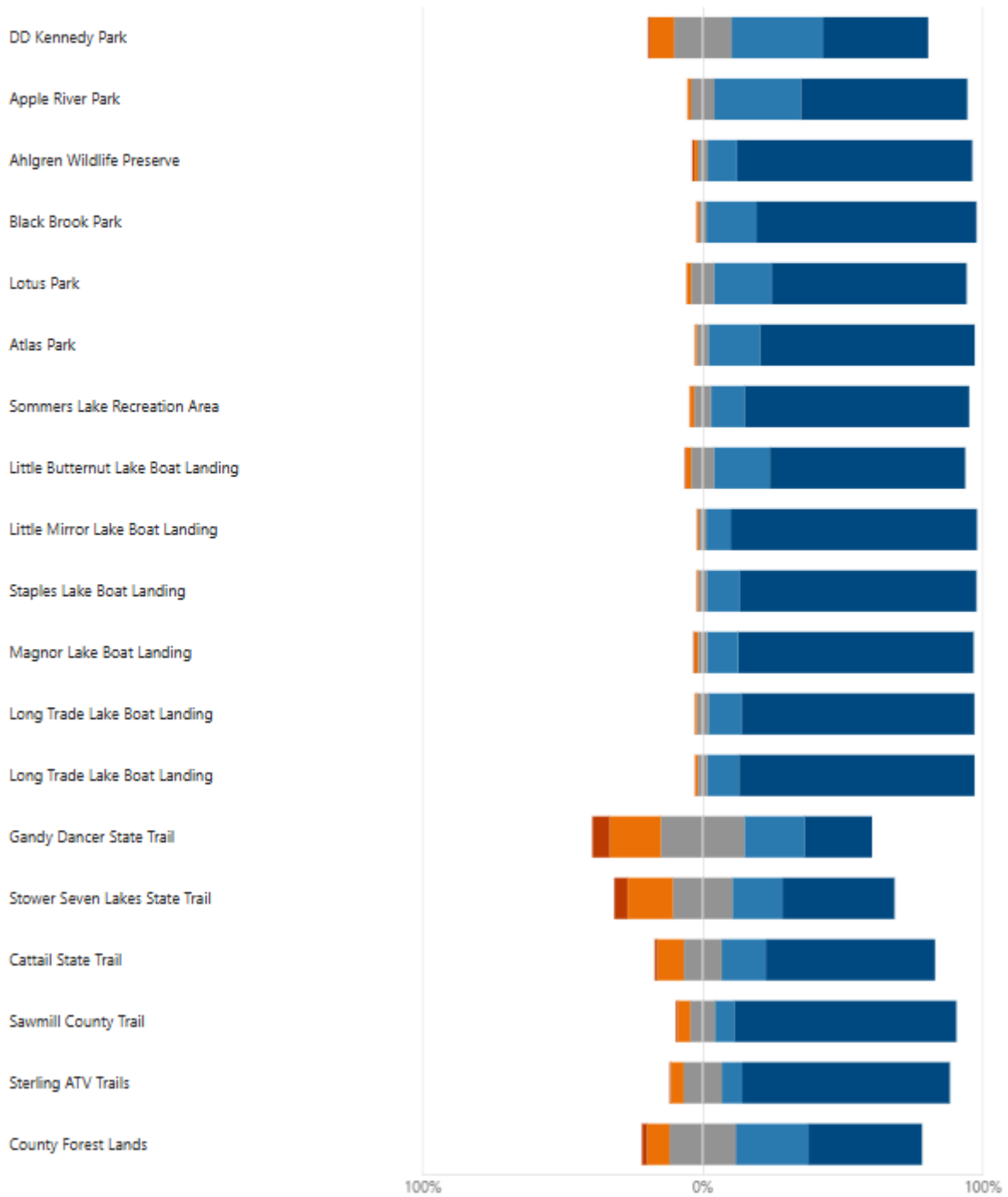
- *Acquisition and Development of Local Parks*
- *ATV/UTV Trails*
- *ATV/Boat/Snowmobile/Enforcement Patrol*
- *County Conservation Aids*
- *Friends of State Lands*
- *Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Local Assistance*
- *Friends of State Lands*
- *Programs: Acquisition and Development of Local Park*
- *Programs: Urban Green Space*
- *Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF)*
- *Recreational Trails Program*
- *Snowmobile Trail Aids*
- *Sport Fish Restoration*
- *Municipal Dam Grant Program*
- *Polk County Parks will explore additional grant opportunities*

APPENDIX

How often have you and/or a member of your household visited the following Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties in the last year?

[More Details](#)

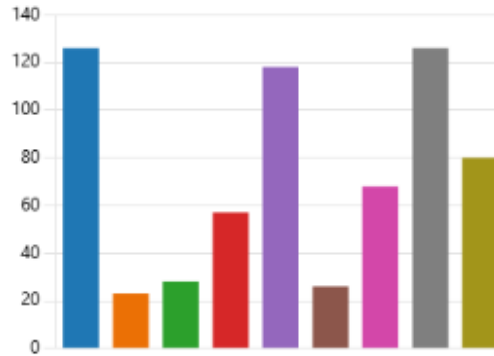
■ Daily
 ■ Once a Week
 ■ Once a Month
 ■ Once a Year
 ■ Never



Which of the following reasons prevents you or members of your household from using Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?

More Details

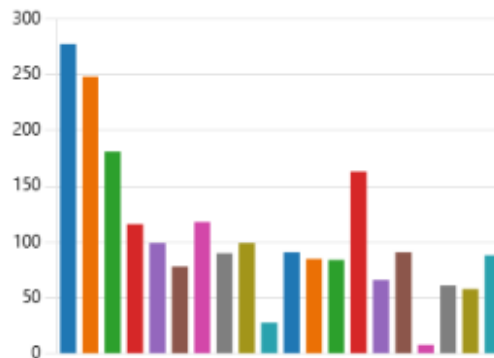
● Not enough information on wh...	126
● Lack of accessibility	23
● Don't feel safe	28
● Too busy/not interested	57
● Desired activities/facilities not o...	118
● Facilities are in poor condition	26
● Too far away	68
● Go elsewhere for outdoor recre...	126
● Other	80



What activities do you and/or a member of your household participate in when using Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?

More Details

● Walking	277
● Hiking	248
● Bicycling	181
● Snowshoeing	116
● Cross Country Skiing	99
● Snowmobiling	78
● ATV/UTV Riding	118
● Camping	90
● Picnicking	99
● Shelter Rental	28
● Nature Study/Birding	91
● Photography	85
● Boating (motor)	84
● Kayak/Canoeing	163
● Shoreline Fishing	66
● Hunting	91
● Firewood Gathering	8
● Foraging (berries, mushrooms, e...	61
● Playgrounds	58
● Other	88



How would you rate the overall maintenance and condition of Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties?

[More Details](#)

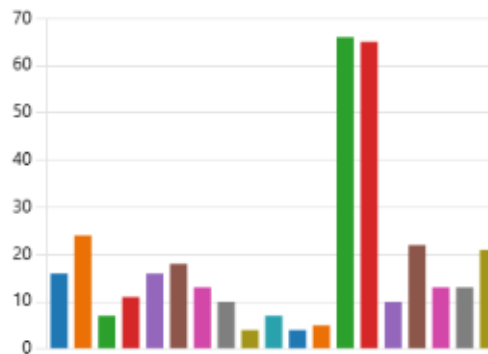
● Excellent	50
● Good	256
● Fair	86
● Needs Improvement	32
● Poor	3



Which of the following Polk County Parks, Trails and Properties need improvement?

[More Details](#)

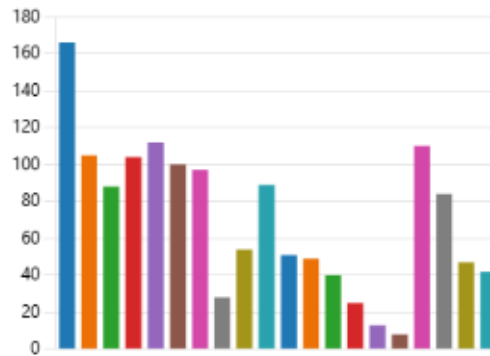
● DD Kennedy Park	16
● Apple River Park	24
● Ahlgren Wildlife Preserve	7
● Black Brook Park	11
● Lotus Park	16
● Atlas Park	18
● Sommers Lake Recreation Area	13
● Little Butternut Lake Boat Landing	10
● Little Mirror Lake Boat Landing	4
● Staples Lake Boat Landing	7
● Magnor Lake Boat Landing	4
● Long Trade Lake Boat Landing	5
● Gandy Dancer State Trail	66
● Stower Seven Lakes State Trail	65
● Option 15	10
● Cattail State Trail	22
● Sawmill County Trail	13
● Sterling ATV Trails	13
● County Forest Lands	21



Which of the following facilities or activities would you like to see offered or expanded as part of Polk County's outdoor recreational opportunities?

More Details

● Hiking trails	166
● Off-road bike trails	105
● Campgrounds	88
● Horse trails	104
● ATV trails	112
● Kayak/canoe launches	100
● Beaches	97
● Boat ramps	28
● Shoreline fishing facilities	54
● Snowshoe/Cross country ski trails	89
● Playgrounds	51
● Picnic facilities	49
● Shelters	40
● Disc golf	25
● Volleyball facilities	13
● Horseshoe pits	8
● Modern restrooms	110
● Natural areas	84
● Parking	47
● Dog park	42



Where do you reside?

More Details

● Polk County	326
● Wisconsin County adjacent to P...	48
● Other Wisconsin County	24
● Minnesota	23
● Other	6



How old are you?

[More Details](#)

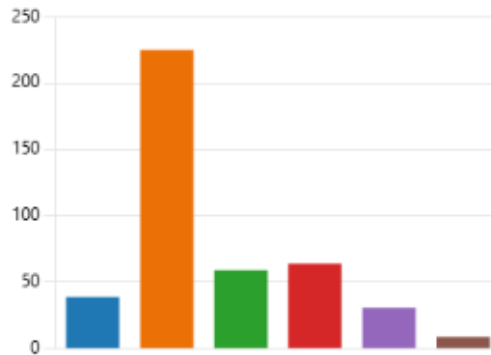
Under 25	13
25-39	83
40-54	117
55-70	163
70+	51



How many people reside in your household?

[More Details](#)

1	39
2	225
3	59
4	64
5	31
6+	9



How do you seek information about outdoor recreation opportunities?

[More Details](#)

Facebook/social media	318
Newspaper	76
Word of mouth	268
Email	70
Tourism publications	103
Polk County website	147
Other	48

