

PRAIRIE ROSE STATE PARK RECREATIONAL USE PLAN

In advance of the 100th anniversary of Iowa state parks in 2020, the Department of Natural Resources is developing plans for future recreation opportunities that are compatible with the resources of each state park.

IOWA STATE PARK HISTORY

In 1917, the Iowa Legislature passed the landmark State Park Act, authorizing the new Board of Conservation to begin creation of an Iowa state park system. This crowned a several decade long effort to begin to protect some of Iowa's most significant and unique natural, scenic, and historic areas before they were irretrievably damaged or lost by such forces as agriculture, logging, and urbanization. One of the first things the Board did was to prepare a detailed report in 1919 describing some of these special places and establishing priorities for their acquisition. Protection of these areas was the primary goal and formal outdoor recreation facilities in early state parks were typically few. This, however, began to change as increasing economic prosperity in the 1920s created a demand for more active outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities in Iowa state parks; places to camp, swim, picnic, hike, boat and otherwise enjoy oneself in the out-of-doors.

In most of the state park system, however, facility development lagged because of the onset of the Great Depression of 1929. It was not until President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA), came onboard in 1933 that more extensive facility development began to occur in Iowa state parks. In Iowa, progress of CCC and WPA state park work was rapid, due to the Board of Conservation's past planning efforts with the preparation of The Iowa Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan in 1933. It was the first comprehensive statewide conservation plan that attempted to relate state park planning and development to broader resource conservation needs. In a sense the state conservation plan synthesized a host of ideas, dreams, and half-realized programs that

had been stirring around together throughout the 1920s. It was a stroke of immense good fortune for Iowa that this plan was completed just when President Roosevelt authorized the federal work programs, allowing Iowa to be one of the first states to qualify for these programs as a statewide comprehensive plan was a federal requirement.

The CCC put hundreds of thousands of young men to work throughout the nation. For their hard, hands on work, "enrollees" received "room and board" and \$30 per month, of which \$25 was sent home. The CCC worked on tree planting, erosion control, terrace and drainage ditch construction as well as facility development in national and state parks. In Iowa, nearly 46,000 "enrollees" worked at 46 CCC camps, 41 of which did work in state parks. They constructed a tremendous number of facilities ranging from benches and trails to shelters, lodges, beach facilities, dams, roads, and water and sewer systems. CCC camps were administered by the U.S. Army in cooperation with federal agencies such as the National Park Service and Forest Service. Nearly 700 of their facilities are still in use in Iowa.

World War II brought an end to the work of the CCC and WPA as well as a scaling back of park work in general until peace time. Then, fueled by a population eager to escape the stresses of wartime and an improving post-war economy, another era of park system expansion began with new state parks and recreation areas as well as facility expansion in many areas.

**UNDERSTANDING THE PAST TO PLAN
FOR A BETTER FUTURE >>>**

PRAIRIE ROSE STATE PARK

THE ROOTS OF THE PARK

Prairie Rose State Park in Shelby County was created during the post-World War II expansion of lake parks. A recommendation contained in the 1933 Twenty-five Year Conservation Plan for Iowa called for the construction of 12 artificial lakes throughout the south half of the state to augment Iowa's natural lakes in the north half. These lakes were envisioned as being spaced about 40 miles apart and primarily used for fishing. One recommended general location was near the Shelby-Audubon county line. Before the war, the Iowa Conservation Commission constructed four new artificial lake parks: Lake Wapello, Lake Keomah, Lake Ahquabi, and Lake of Three Fires; two more lakes, Lake Macbride and Red Haw, were constructed by other entities and donated to the state for park purposes. After the war, the Iowa Conservation Commission resumed its efforts to fulfill the 1933 recommendation, and in 1947, the legislature appropriated \$1.27 million to begin work on what would eventually become eight new man-made lake parks.

Of the artificial lake parks envisioned in the 1933 conservation plan, the Shelby-Audubon project had top priority, but construction was delayed while engineers studied feasible sites for impounding water. In 1952, the Iowa Conservation Commission finally settled on a spot in the vicinity of a short-lived village known as Prairie Rose, hence the park's name. However, the project was delayed several more years while the courts resolved land acquisition differences. The 925-foot dam, completed in 1960, created a 218-acre lake with an average depth of ten feet and seven miles of shoreline. It impounds drainage waters in the watershed of the East Branch of the West Nishnabotna River.

The 660-acre park was dedicated on June 16, 1962, with Gov. Norman Erbe speaking at the ceremony. The following year, 4,500 pine seedlings were planted. In 1965, the Shelby County Fish and Wildlife Club helped park staff build additional picnic tables to accommodate up to 700 people at any given time. A swimming beach was added to the lake in 1966, with a private vendor operating the beach concession. Construction of the campground, authorized in 1967, was delayed until funding was available in 1972.

The shower house awaited further funding; it was completed in 1975. However, the lack of full amenities did not hamper park use. In 1963, the first full operating year, the park logged more than 103,000 visitors, many of them local residents who made repeat visits. Thereafter, park visitation numbers leveled off: approximately 88,400 in 1964; 93,000 in 1965, and 82,000 in 1966. Even so, the numbers demonstrate that Prairie Rose quickly became a popular outdoor recreation spot.

UNFORSEEN CONSEQUENCES

The 1933 statewide conservation plan had cautioned that building artificial lakes in southwestern Iowa would require careful siting and engineering in order to control erosion and silting. Still, in 1933, there was considerable optimism that "reasonable erosion control" would produce an artificial lake with a useful life of 25 to 50 years. What planners did not foresee in the 1930s were two important shifts in agricultural practices: the steady increase in row-crop farming and the use of commercial fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, which increased the rate of soil erosion and changed the composition of sediments flowing into rivers and lakes. As early as 1968, the Iowa Conservation Commission determined that Prairie Rose Lake was already in jeopardy, noting that two catch basins constructed to protect the lake had filled up with silt.

In the 1940s, state legislators were responding to public demand when they authorized the construction of artificial lakes. Few people fully understood the future costs of sustaining these lakes, and Prairie Rose Lake was only one instance of growing water quality problems nationwide. It took some time for lawmakers and government agencies to begin to address the threats of soil erosion and water pollution. When major financial assistance came through the 1979 Rural Clean Water Program, hailed as the most significant federal soil and water conservation program since the 1930s, Prairie Rose Lake was among four projects funded in Iowa. By then, about 20 acres of the lake was filled with silt. In 1980-1981, the Prairie Rose project received \$600,000 to help farmers in the lake's 4,600-acre watershed pay for conservation practices to reduce soil erosion and help prevent polluted water from entering the lake.



Existing Camping cabin

At the same time, the commission lowered the lake, poisoned the remaining fish, installed fish habitat structures, then refilled and restocked the lake.

TAKING ACTION FOR A BRIGHTER FUTURE

These measures provided some benefit, but it was only the beginning. During the 1990s, Prairie Rose Lake was consistently plagued with poor water quality, and piecemeal efforts—shoreline riprapping in 2001, new sediment basins in 2001 and 2004—were not enough. Water quality studies conducted in 2007 led to a Water Quality/Watershed Protection Project Grant awarded to the Shelby County Soil and Water Conservation District in 2008. Thus began the multi-year Prairie Rose Water Quality Project, a collaboration of federal, state, and local agencies with private landowners, which resulted in more than 40 miles of terraces and many grassed waterways. Together, they reduced by 60 percent the amount of sediments and nutrients flowing into the lake.

Major lake improvements followed. In 2010, Pheasants Forever helped the Department of Natural Resources acquire a 77-acre dredge spoil containment site adjacent to the lake. The following year, the lake was drained, 60,000 cubic yards of sediment were removed, the shoreline was stabilized with more riprap, additional fish habitat structures were added, the spillway was modified to reduce the threat of rough fish entry, new sediment basins were constructed, and rock chute wetlands were constructed on public land located in the lake’s four



Existing playground

main drainages to further reduce sedimentation. In 2013, the lake was refilled and restocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, and channel catfish. In-lake dredging, which began in 2015, removed another 185,000 cubic yards of sediment. These measures, the cost of which totaled more than \$2 million, dramatically improved the lake’s water quality. Volunteers organized the Friends of Prairie Rose State Park in 1996 to assist park staff with operations, park maintenance and improvements, and public programming.

PRAIRIE ROSE STATE PARK EXISTING FACILITIES

FACILITY	QUANTITY
Lake acreage	218
Park Land acreage	539
Beach	1
Picnic shelters	2
Boat ramps	2
Fishing jetties	8
Total Campsites	96
Full hook ups	8
Electric	77
Non-electric	18
Youth Group camp site	1
Camper cabins	2
Playgrounds	2
Trail miles	5

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF PRAIRIE ROSE STATE PARK

GOAL

Evaluate existing recreation facilities for past and current uses to create a roadmap to guide future improvements. These will enhance visitor outdoor recreation experiences by upgrading the facilities and trails at Prairie Rose State Park to promote visitor mental/physical health and well-being; encourage family time, connect with friends, and make memories; expand the availability of accessible facilities; protect natural resources for the future; and generate economic activity in the region.

Please also note that the DNR is committed to making facilities, programs and services accessible to visitors with disabilities especially as people age and need accommodations. This is part of our effort in future park improvements.

OBJECTIVES

ACCESSIBILITY: Most older park facilities are not universally accessible. The DNR is committed to making facilities, programs and services accessible to visitors with mobility impairments. This is part of the effort in future park improvements.

PROPOSAL

All new and replacement park facilities will be accessible.

PARK ENTRANCE

REDESIGN FOR A PLEASANT SENSE OF ARRIVAL

ISSUES

- > The park visitor experience begins with the first impression at the entrance. Many older parks have stone portals of various sizes and which have served well as an identifier of a state park. The wooden highway entry sign is small compared to a stone portal, so it does not attract the same attention of motorists.
- > The south entrance is awkward and confusing for visitors.

PROPOSALS

- > Add stone entrance portals at north and south entrances to replace the small wood sign.
- > Redesign the south entrance to eliminate visitor confusion and improve circulation.



Stone Entrance Portal - New Sign Guide

PICNIC AREA

IMPROVE AND ENHANCE EXISTING FACILITIES

In the past picnicking in parks was far more popular before the advent of the backyard decks and patios. While a less popular activity than decades ago, parks with lake views are still sought after for gatherings of family and friends. Today most picnickers at Prairie Rose are coming to the park to engage in additional activities such as swimming, hiking and camping.

ISSUES

- > Picnickers today want restrooms nearby that are accessible. Parking areas, restrooms and shelters need to be connected by sidewalks. Also, in demand is electricity in picnic shelters for roasters, coffee pots, etc. The beach area is one of the park's main attractions but lacks picnicking facilities such as a shelter with electricity (require 2,500' line).
- > The north picnic area needs to be upgraded with a new shelter and restrooms that are accessible.

PROPOSALS

- > Develop the beach as the premier picnic facility by adding a large rustic timber frame picnic shelter (accommodating 80 people) with electricity and replace the restroom with an accessible non-modern facility.
- > Upgrade the north picnic area by replacing the picnic shelter with a medium size rustic timber frame structure and replace the restroom with a single accessible unit.



Large shelter



Tent Platforms in Campground

OVERNIGHT FACILITIES

IMPROVE ACCOMMODATIONS

ISSUES

- > The popularity of RV camping continues to grow as baby boomers age and retire. The camping units are increasing in size with more bump – outs that require more space between campsites.
- > The west campground is underserved with restrooms and showers.
- > The tent camp sites are not utilized to capacity because the sites are on such sloping terrain and are very close together.

PROPOSALS

- > Reduce a few sites to allow more room between sites.
- > Add a shower/restroom in the west campground.
- > Redesign the tent camp area by reducing the number of sites (4) for more space in between. Renovate 6 sites by adding wooden tent platforms to create level areas. Tent platforms sizes would be a combination of 16' x 16' and 15' x 20.'

PARK ORIENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

INCREASE WAYFINDING AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUES

- > The DNR has developed a wayfinding and signage master plan for the Iowa state park system to provide consistent, recognizable, and welcoming signage to ensure a quality user experience.
- > Parks offer a natural world with plants, animals, and processes that we do not encounter in everyday life. Interpretive signage and programs can translate natural science into terms and ideas that visitors can understand to reveal relationships and new meanings. The park lacks interpretive signage to help make those connections.
- > The park also lacks wayfinding signage which could help orient visitors to the various park facilities.

PROPOSALS

- > Implement the new signage system to include: adding 3 orientation signs (vertical at the west campground, north shelter, and east trail to inform hikers. These signs will show all the trails, trail lengths, and facilities within the park with a YOU ARE HERE ARROW.
- > An interpretive plan was recently completed and recommended adding six interpretive panels throughout the parks. Subjects identified include: Iowa's Changing Landscape, Park History, Prairie Ecosystems, Pollinators, Waterfowl, and A Peak into the Prairie.

PLAYGROUNDS

EXPAND AND ENHANCE

Playing outside helps children develop their learning abilities; encourage creativity and empowerment; health benefits; develop social skills with new friends; freedom and decision making; encourages self-reliance/independence; and learn to try new things without adult guidance.

ISSUE

- > There are currently two areas with play structures – the beach and campground. The campground play structure is adequate, but the beach has a minimal piece.

PROPOSAL

- > Add climbing rocks at the beach and include an ADA transfer station.



Climbing rocks

TRAILS

IMPROVE PEDESTRAIN CIRCULATION

ISSUES

There are no paved trails for universal access, baby strollers, etc.

- > There are five miles of trails which are mown grass. To connect all park facilities, visitors must walk on the internal park roads where there are gaps in the trail; on the east side of the park however, Hwy M47 dissects two arms of the lake, which makes any future trail connection bridging economically impossible.
- > At the campground and cabin area, sidewalks are needed to connect buildings and parking lots in high use areas (especially in wet conditions)

PROPOSALS

- > Connect the campground and beach with a one-mile paved trail.
- > Add a rock pedestrian trail along the beach road – one mile.
- > Add sidewalks where needed at: 1) playground parking lot and shower bldg. in campground, 2) cabin area connecting the cabins, parking, and restroom.

PARK HEADQUARTERS

IMPROVE VISITOR ACCESS TO STAFF AND PROVIDE EFFICIENT AND SAFE OPERATIONAL WORK FACILITIES

ISSUES

- > Convenient park visitor access to staff is essential for state park customer service. Due to limited park staffing levels, it is impossible to have park staff in an office separate from the workspace

necessary for maintenance operations. To ensure public safety, ideally both functions would be located in the same building, but with two separate entrances for the park office and the staff shop workspace.

- > Currently the office is in the old ranger residence that is extremely inefficient to heat or cool and is not conducive nor function well as a park office. The staff workspace is wholly inadequate in size and spatial configuration in a building that cannot be remodeled to accommodate today's equipment and park staff needs.

PROPOSAL

- > Replace and relocate a new park headquarters and shop (west of current facility) with adequate space for large camper vehicles to enter and exit the park headquarters. New workspace will safely separate park maintenance activities and visitor access to park staff.
- > Add an equipment storage building for year-round storage of equipment.



Park headquarters - separate staff entrance/work area



Park headquarters public entrance

ELIMINATE UNNEEDED BUILDINGS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

ISSUE

- > An old pump house and underground storage tanks are no longer used and need to be removed.

PROPOSAL

- > Eliminate unused buildings.

PRAIRIE ROSE PRIORITIES

HIGH PRIORITY

Add sidewalks in cabin area & campground play/parking area	\$16,000
Add 6 wooden tent platforms in tent camp. .	\$21,000
Add 6 interpretive panels & 3 trail orientation signs	\$31,000
New/relocated park headquarters/road/utilities.	\$1,000,000
Remove unused buildings.	\$10,000/per
High Priority Subtotal	\$1,068,000

MEDIUM PRIORITY

Add large shelter at beach (80 people)	\$120,000
Add electricity to beach shelter (2,500') . . .	\$20,000
Add accessible restroom at the beach	\$65,000
Connect beach and campground with paved trail	\$480,000
Add shower/restroom in west campground	\$320,000
Reconfigure the south entrance	\$150,000
Medium Priority Subtotal	\$1,155,000

LOW PRIORITY

Add stone entrance portals at north and south entrances (2)	\$80,000
Replace north shelter (50 people)	\$110,000
Upgrade restrooms - accessible at north shelter	\$40,000
Add climbing rocks at the beach.	\$10,000
Add pedestrian trail along beach road	\$140,000
Low Priority Subtotal	\$1,340,000



Photo by Marlys Popma

RECREATION USE PLAN

Implementation of the Prairie Rose State Park Recreation Use Plan will help ensure that this classic Iowa state park remains a premier outdoor destination in the future. The draft plan for proposed improvements was prepared with the input of park staff and will have review and input from park visitors/regional stakeholders. It will be a detailed and practical blueprint for future action. All improvements will be completed with due regard for Prairie Rose’s natural resources and scenic qualities.

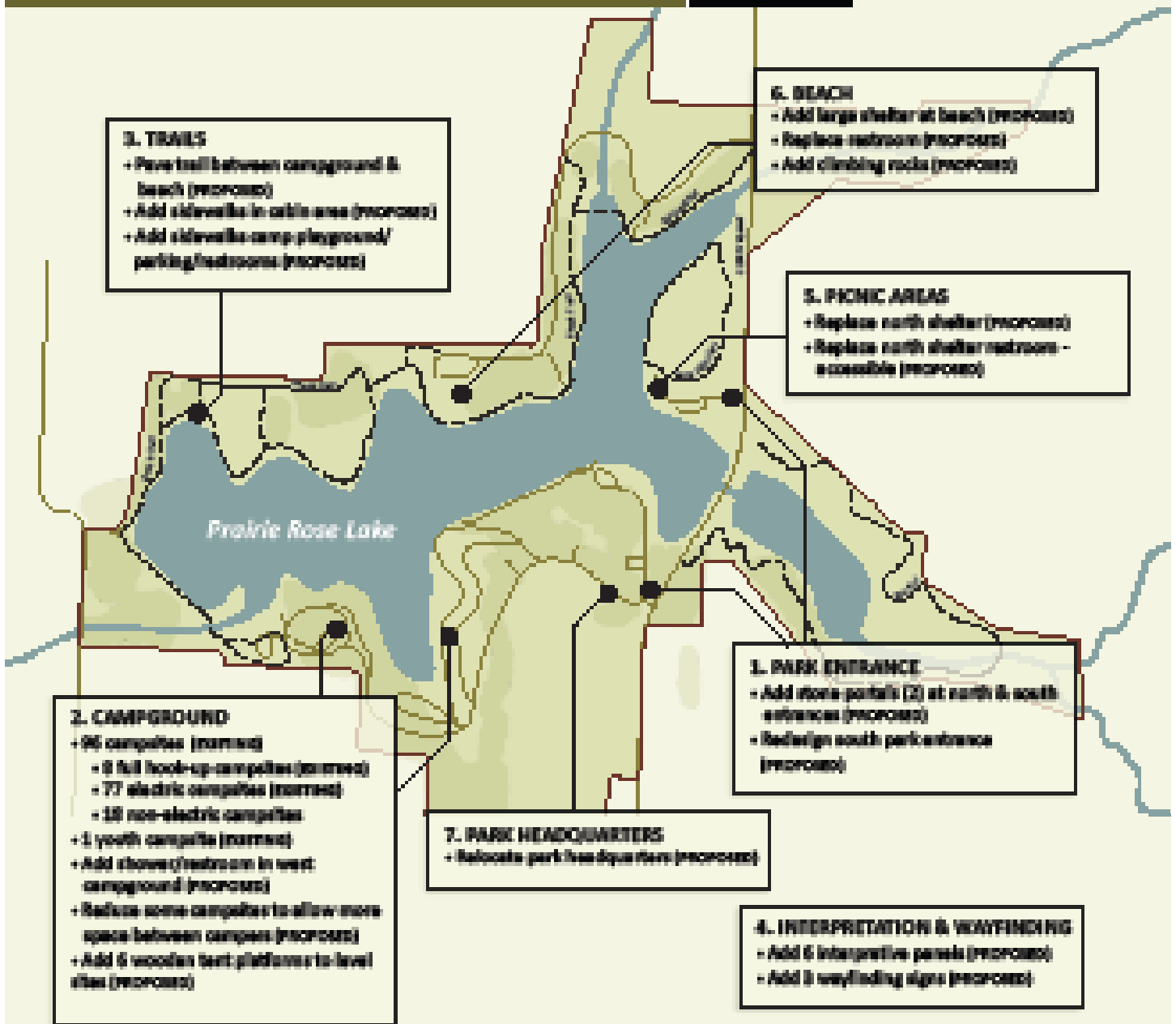
The completion of a recreation use plan for each park will help determine the most effective allocation of funds on a project-by-project basis for the Iowa state park system as a whole. Prairie Rose’s plan recommendations will be accomplished as necessary funding becomes available from ongoing sources as well as through partnering opportunities which may arise.

Prairie Rose State Park

RECREATION USE PLAN



PRAIRIE ROSE STATE PARK



LEGEND

- Historic Trails
- Roads
- Water
- Park Boundary

