Gunn Park
Management Plan
2015-2025

Itasca County
Land Department
County Park System

For more information on this management plan please contact any of the following project participants from the County Park System:

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Roger Clark - County Park System Manager

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RESOLUTION 2016-20

Gunn Park Management Plan 2015 to 2025

WHEREAS, in February 2004 the Itasca County Board acquired and designated Gunn Park as a county park for the benefit of visitors and residents of Itasca County, and

WHEREAS, a management plan is desired to coordinate the planning, development, and management of Gunn Park, and

WHEREAS, M.S. 398.31 - 398.36 provides the County Board authority to administer facilities and funds for public park purposes and related outdoor recreational purposes now, therefore be it

RESOLVED, that the Itasca County Board of Commissioners, through this resolution, adopts and will begin implementation of the Gunn Park Management Plan 2015 to 2025 dated March 22, 2015.

RESULT: ADOPTED [UNANIMOUS]
MOVER: Leo Trunl, District #3
SECONDER: Terry Snyder, District #2
AYES: Tinquist, Snyder, Trunl, Eichorn, Mandich

STATE OF MINNESOTA
Office of County Administrator
Itasca County

I, TRISH HARREN, Administrator of County of Itasca, do hereby certify that I have compared the foregoing with the original resolution filed in my office on the 22nd day of March A.D. 2016 and that the same is a true and correct copy of the whole thereof.

WITNESS MY HAND AND SEAL OF OFFICE at Grand Rapids, Minnesota, this 22nd day of March A.D. 2016

[Signature]
Administrator

By ___________________________ Deputy
Gunn Park Management Plan

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements III

Executive Summary IV
  Recommendations Summary VI

Chapter 1: Introduction 1-1
  Park Description 1-1
  Legislative Authority 1-2
  Planning Process 1-3

Chapter 2: Mission and Vision Statements 2-1
  Itasca County 2-1
  Park System 2-1
  Gunn Park 2-1

Chapter 3: Regional Analysis 3-1
  Biophysical Forestland System 3-1
  Pre-settlement vegetation 3-3
  Present vegetation 3-3
  Population Analysis 3-3
  Recreation Resources 3-4
  Education Resources 3-4

Chapter 4: Recreation Management 4-1
  Goals 4-1
  Discussion 4-1
  Proposed Development 4-3
  Management Recommendations 4-4

Chapter 5: Natural Resources Management 5-1
  Goals 5-1
  Management Recommendations 5-1

Chapter 6: Interpretive Services 6-1
  Goals 6-1
  Discussion 6-1
  Non-Personal vs. Personal Interpretive Resources 6-1
  Interpretive Themes 6-2
  Management Recommendations 6-3

Chapter 7: Gunn Park in Ten Years 7-1
  Natural and Cultural Resources in 10 years 7-1
  Visitor Experience in 10 years 7-1
  Areas of Conflict 7-1
Chapter 8: Staffing and Operations

- Staffing
- Operations
- Annual Operating Expenses
- Current Facilities
- Capital Improvement Budget Priorities
- Law Enforcement

Chapter 9: Plan Modification Process

- Major Plan Amendments
- Plan Revisions
- Plan Updates

Appendices

A  Itasca County Board of Commissioners Official Actions
B  Maintenance Contract for Gunn Park
C  Gunn Park Agreement
D  Legislative Authority Minnesota State Statutes 398.31 to 398.36

List of Figures

1. Location Map  V
2. Management Zones  VIII
3. Itasca County Biophysical Regions  3-2
4. Existing Recreation Facilities  4-2
5. Proposed Recreation Facilities  4-5
6. Existing Vegetation  5-2
7. Proposed Interpretive Facilities  6-4

References Cited
Acknowledgements

Several individuals contributed to the development of this plan and we would like to acknowledge them and thank them for their volunteer time and efforts.

The Itasca County Board of Commissioners who authorized the acquisition of Gunn Park in order to ensure its protection and management for current and future generations of county residents and visitors.

- Commissioner Robert Wilhelm District 1
- Commissioner Tom Saxhaug District 2
- Commissioner Leo Trunt District 3
- Commissioner Robert Frick District 4
- Commissioner Rusty Eichorn District 4
- Commissioner Mark Mandich District 5

The Itasca County Board of Commissioners who approved this management plan in its final form.

- Commissioner Davin Tinquist District 1
- Commissioner Terry Snyder District 2
- Commissioner Leo Trunt District 3
- Commissioner Rusty Eichorn District 4
- Commissioner Mark Mandich District 5

The Itasca County Park Commission who helped to organize this plan for future implementation.

- Robin Baker Commissioner District 1
- Les Ollila Commissioner District 2
- Brad Gustafson Commissioner District 3
- Byron Snowden Commissioner District 4
- Len Hardy Commissioner District 5
- Bob Scheierl At-Large
- John Van Nyhuis At-Large
- Jim Keenan At-Large
- Tom Nelson At-Large

The citizen members of the Gunn Park Planning Task Force who spent several hours in meetings and at the park discussing issues and developing the goals for this plan.

- Dick Simons Park and Recreation Commission
- Elmer Cone Park and Recreation Commission
- Clyde Newton Prairie Lake Association
- John Johnson Prairie Lake Association
- Kurt Stanley Arbo Township Board of Supervisors
- Tarry Edington Highway 38 Leadership Board
- Bob Olson Itasca Little League
- Connie Sutherland Itasca Little League

And the interested citizens who took the time to review and comment on the plan by phone, letter, and open meetings.
Executive Summary

Gunn Park is located in Arbo Township 3.5 miles north of the City of Grand Rapids in Itasca County, Minnesota. Located along Minnesota Highway 38, the park is 44.7 acres in size encompassing the Itasca Little League Ball Fields to the northwest. The park borders Arbo Township to the south, UPM Blandin to the north, and Prairie Lake to the east.

Gunn Park is a primary destination for day use recreation, picnics, weddings, reunions, and other large family or group gatherings. The picnic area and pavilion are a highly developed area and receive a majority of the visitor use. The wetlands and forest plantations that encompass the remainder of the park receive very little use and are relatively undisturbed. According to the management recommendations of this plan, the park will remain virtually the same as it has been for the last several years. The highest visitor use will continue in the picnic, pavilion, and lakeshore area. Some visitor services will be developed in the forest and wetlands areas through the use of interpretive signage and trails. The natural resources throughout the park will be actively managed for park aesthetics and succession forest growth.

Most of the recommendations in this plan call for regular maintenance and improvements to the existing facilities. The pavilion, picnic area, and fishing pier are a high priority to maintain and enhance. A new restroom facility and additional picnic tables are facilities recommended for future development. Self-guided interpretive signs and brochures will allow visitors to explore the wonders of nature as well as the colorful history and culture of the Prairie Lake area and historical development of the park. A proposed wetland trail with interpretive signage will provide visitors with a glimpse into this unique natural area. C.K. Blandin created the park as a gift to the community in 1956 and named it after his good friend and early Itasca County businessman Daniel Gunn. Park interpretation will celebrate this history and also promote a sense of stewardship of natural resources as well as recreation resources for future generations.

Recreation and interpretive development will be balanced with the protection and preservation of the natural resources of the park. It is a high priority of this plan to maintain the historical and current uses of the park while protecting the natural resource values within the park. While facilities and visitor use will remain relatively the same, the plan recommends that an extensive inventory be conducted and baseline data be collected on the natural resources within the park. This information will help monitor future conditions and the effects of visitor use on the resources. Visitor use data and numbers will also be collected to assist with the management of the park.

Important and valuable partnerships were developed during the planning process between Itasca County, Arbo Township, the Highway 38 Leadership Board, Itasca Little League, and the Prairie Lake Association. It is very important that these relationships are continued and further developed. Continued collaboration between these groups will only enhance the facility improvement, natural resource, interpretive, and recreation work in Gunn Park.

This plan is designed to provide a framework for future decision-making and management of Gunn Park.
Recommendations Summary
Management Zones
During the planning process it became obvious that the resources and recreational activities in Gunn Park could be designated into four management zones (Figure 2). Each zone has specific characteristics and considerations when working with the natural resources, recreation, and interpretive services. By using management zones recreation, development and natural resource protection will be balanced and the existing conditions of the park will remain. Here are brief descriptions of the management zones:

**Developed** - This zone includes the parking lot, pavilion, and surrounding picnic area. This is a high use zone where a majority of the current visitors spend their time in the park.

**Natural Area-Forest** – This zone includes all of the spruce, red pine, and scotch pine plantations on the west side of the park. The plantations will be managed as a buffer and for park aesthetics.

**Natural Area-Wetland** – This zone includes all of the lowland wooded swamp area of the park and is the largest zone in size. This zone will remain natural with very little management. An interpretive trail is the only development proposed.

**Shoreline** – This zone overlays the Natural Area-Wetland and Developed Zones and includes the entire shoreline of the park on Prairie Lake. This zone will remain natural within the Wetland area and be managed for protection in the developed area. Fishing is the most popular recreation activity that takes place along the shoreline. Preservation of the natural shoreline is a top priority.

Recreation
- Provide day-use recreation opportunities (such as picnic areas, fishing, etc.) by balancing recreational development and resource protection.
- Preserve the traditional recreational uses of the park, including fishing, pavilion rental and use, picnics, and large group gatherings.
- Preserve and maintain the pavilion as the keystone of the park facilities and because of its historical significance.
- Replace and repair the Pavilion Roof due to water damages.
- Work with the Park and Recreation Commission and park neighbors on future issues and projects within the park.
- Remove the old playground equipment and replace with current code and standard approved equipment.
- Develop kiosks and a signage plan to inform visitors about the park’s history and rules.
- Recognize the uniqueness and value of the park for day-use recreation.
Natural Resources

- Preserve the character and quality of the resources within the park by:
  - Designating visitor use zones.
  - Balancing development with resource preservation and minimizing human disturbance to the resources.
  - Recognizing Gunn Park’s resources have deep rooted, educational, and economic value for non-consumptive uses.

- Actively manage the resources of Gunn Park, when necessary, by:
  - Planting second growth forest that will eventually replace older trees.
  - Using low impact cutting and second growth planting within the forest plantations to make them conducive for park aesthetic purposes and as a road buffer.
  - Identify and control invasive species.

- Collect natural resource information on Gunn Park, by:
  - Developing natural resource baseline data on Gunn Park.
  - Coordinating ongoing resource identification and monitoring.
  - Developing partnerships to help with resource identification and evaluation.

Interpretive Services

- Develop interpretive signage for the forest plantations and Prairie Lake shoreline.

- Build a boardwalk interpretive trail through the natural area-wetlands.

- Host interpretive programs for school groups.

- Recognize educational and interpretive roles in promoting a sense of stewardship among park visitors.

- Document and interpret the cultural history of the park and Prairie Lake area.

- Work with the Highway 38 Leadership Board to make Gunn Park a “Discovery (interpretive) Site” along the National Scenic Byway.
Figure 2: Gunn Park Management Zones
Chapter 1
Introduction
Chapter 1: Introduction

Brief History
Gunn Park was developed by the Blandin Paper Company and opened to the public in 1956. The Park was part of Blandin’s continued service to the community. Over the years this park, named after Itasca County resident and former state senator Daniel Gunn, has been used for ball games, weddings, family picnics, reunions, and other activities of this nature. Around 1999 the Blandin Paper Company and UPM/Kymmene decided to sell their ownership of the park. Itasca Little League, a major user of the park’s ball fields, obtained a grant of $200,000 from the Blandin Foundation to purchase Gunn Park. The foundation stipulated in the grant that the operation of the park portion of the property would need to be partnered with a public entity and Little League could retain ownership of the ball field part of the property. In 2000 Itasca Little League approached the County Board about the possibility of deeding the park portion of the property to the County for future management and protection. After lengthy discussions, the County Board agreed to accept Gunn Park in December of 2001. The County then officially acquired the park in February of 2004. The property is designated as a county park and as such is operated by the County Park System.

About the Park
Gunn Park has several unique characteristics; The Park serves as a picnic and gathering location for outdoor enjoyment, beautiful lakeshore, and pine plantations started by Blandin Paper Company. The Park is situated on the western edge of the Mesabi Iron Range, and borders the corridor of the Edge of the Wilderness National Scenic Byway (TH38). The Itasca Bike Trail leaves Gunn Park and travels south to the Fairgrounds Park in Grand Rapids. The Itasca Bike Trail intersects the Mesabi Bike Trail which is an asphalt trail planned to go from Grand Rapids to Ely, MN. Gunn Park represents many aspects of living, working, and visiting in Itasca County. Itasca County ownership of Gunn Park will ensure the continued protection and enhancement of the facility and its accessibility for current and future generations.

Park Description
The approximate legal description of Gunn County Park is:

All of Government Lot 5, Section Thirty-three (33), Township Fifty-six (56) North, Range Twenty-five (25) West of the Fourth Principal Meridian -and- That part of Government Lot 4 lying southerly and easterly of the following described REV DESC #2 of LOT 4.

The park is 44.07 acres in size.

Gunn Park is the flagship facility of the County Park System and is a destination park for Itasca County residents and visitors. Recreational and educational development will be balanced with natural resource protection to maintain its unique qualities.
Gunn Park is approximately three and a half miles north of Grand Rapids on Highway 38 and it is located in Arbo Township. Roughly one third of the park is comprised of a developed use area and includes a majority of the park’s lakeshore. The developed use area includes a paved entrance road, paved parking lot, picnic/day use area, large pavilion, fishing pier, playground equipment, and a mature stand of red and white pines. Another third of the park consists of red, jack, and scotch pine plantations most of which are located along Minnesota Highway 38. The final third of the park is wooded swamp bordering Prairie Lake to the east and the Itasca Bicycle Trail to the south. The pine plantations and wetlands are undeveloped. The developed use area will see improvements and enhancements to the existing facilities and a plan to start replacement trees will be outlined and implemented. Protection and interpretation of Prairie Lake and the lakeshore are also outlined goals for this use area. The pine plantations will be managed for park aesthetics, forest interpretation, and to serve as a buffer from the adjacent highway.

The park wetlands will be preserved and possibly be used for interpretation programs such as a boardwalk and self-guided tour. Overall, the plantations and wetlands will see very little development.

The improvement and enhancement of the developed use area of Gunn Park is the priority component of this plan. This area receives a lot of use throughout the summer months and some of the facilities are in need of repair or replacement. The developed use area will continue to be used frequently each and every summer so quality facilities will need to be maintained. In addition, the large trees in this area are aging; therefore a concerted effort will be made to plant trees to provide for a new generation. Protection and possible interpretation of Prairie Lake and the shoreline are a third component of the developed use area goals.

The season for Gunn Park will continue to be May through mid-October each year. This is the time of the year when the park receives its highest use. Park System staff may examine options for year-round use but no specific winter uses are detailed in this management plan. Gunn Park will also continue to be closed at sunset and open at 9am each day of the open season. Off Highway Vehicles (OHV’s) and snowmobiles are not allowed on any Park grounds, or trails., OHV’s may be allowed to enter and exit the park on the designated road and will only be allowed to park on the asphalt parking lot in the future.

Legislative Authority
Minnesota State Statutes 398.31 to 398.36 outlines the powers and abilities of the County Board to authorize, acquire, fund, and maintain parks and recreation areas for public enjoyment. Itasca County acquired the park, and the Park System operates Gunn Park under the terms of these statutes. Please see Appendix D
Planning Process
The County Park System staff, Park and Recreation Commission, and County Board outlined goals for the Park System in the County’s Recreation Resource Plan in 2002. One of the goals was to develop a management plan for Gunn Park. The Commission created a Task Force with the charge of facilitating a planning process with public input to develop a plan that guides the management of Gunn Park for the next ten years.

Directed by Itasca County’s Recreation Resource and Planning Coordinator, a task force was assembled to discuss the future of Gunn Park. Task Force membership consisted of eight citizens representing the Commission, Itasca Little League, Arbo Township, Prairie Lake Association, and the Highway 38 Leadership Board. In addition, the District 2 County Commissioner, Recreation Coordinator, and Park System Manager also participated. This group was asked to examine and discuss the mission, vision, recreation, natural resources, interpretive services, facilities, and operation of the park.

This task force met for four months to generate ideas and formulate goals for the plan.

Once the task force made management recommendations and goals, a draft plan was written and submitted for review. The task force, commission, and other interested people were given the opportunity to review the draft and provide comments. A public open house meeting was held to discuss the plan. A revised draft of the plan was then presented to the Park and Recreation Commission who then held a public hearing before making a recommendation to the County Board. In 2013 the Park and Recreation Commission revisited the Gunn Park Plan to revise changes to present to the County Board for their approval. Pending County Board approval, Park System staff will continue to implement this plan.
Chapter 2
Mission and Vision
Chapter 2: Vision and Mission

Itasca County Mission Statement
Itasca County Government strives to preserve and enhance the quality of life, the environment, and economic well-being within the community.

County Park System Vision
To provide quality park and recreation opportunities that maintain and enhance the integrity of the natural and scenic resources of Itasca County to meet the needs of current and future generations.

County Park System Mission Statement
To provide quality comprehensive recreational opportunities that are comprised of developed, semi-developed and undeveloped areas, facilities, and program services throughout the lands and waters of Itasca County to meet the needs of current and future generations. See also [Goal #3 from the Recreation Resources Plan] To plan, manage and maintain Bass Lake Park, Gunn Park, and the Fairgrounds Park.

Gunn Park Vision Statement
To maintain and enhance the integrity of Gunn Park to meet the park and recreation needs of current and future generations.

Gunn Park Mission Statement
To provide quality recreation opportunities through developed facilities and services while protecting the natural and scenic resources of the park for current and future generations.

The following Goals are more specific actions against which the effectiveness of the mission can be measured. An Objective is a more detailed means to achieve a goal. Objective level information is not covered in this document and will be forthcoming in annual work plans.

Goal 1 - To be a good neighbor to Itasca Little League, Arbo Township, Prairie Lake Association, Highway 38 Edge of the Wilderness National Scenic Byway and the residents of the area by working collaboratively to protect and enhance the qualities of Gunn Park.

Goal 2 - To provide developed park facilities which are compatible with the visitor use of the park and accessible to people of all abilities.

Goal 3 - To serve as an access facility and destination for the Itasca and Mesabi Bicycle Trails.

Goal 4 - To explore and examine the possibilities for educational activities and facilities related to the natural and scenic resources.

Goal 5 - To manage, protect, and enhance the natural and scenic resources of the park including the soils, trees, plants, wetlands, lakeshore, and water that contribute to the county-wide significance of this park.

Goal 6 - To explore the possibilities of year-round usage including cross-country skiing, ice skating, and other appropriate winter activities.

Goal 7 - To maintain a proper balance between natural resource protection and recreational use.

Goal 8 - To recognize Gunn Park’s role in promoting the Land Department theme “dedicated to quality resource stewardship of our natural environment”.

2-1
Chapter 3
Regional Analysis
Chapter 3: Regional Analysis

During the planning process a regional analysis was conducted. Natural Resource characteristics, population figures, socio-economic data, and recreation and education opportunities were identified in Itasca County. Gunn Park is a destination park for the residents of Itasca County. The County is the most appropriate region to use for this analysis and has the most readily available data.

Biophysical Forestland System
Itasca County’s Land Department has developed a biophysical forestland system based upon climate and geomorphology. It is an ecological classification system that divides the county into seven biophysical regions; see www.co.itasca.mn.us/Home/Departments/Land. The Biophysical Forestland System is geographic specific to Itasca County and therefore is more applicable to specific County sites than the MnDNR’s Ecological Classification System; see http://google.dnr.state.mn.us/search?q=Ecological+system&site.

Figure 4 contains a map of the biophysical regions in Itasca County. The following is a list of these areas and basic elements that characterize them.


LAURENTIAN UPLAND NORTH: Shallow lakes and streams. Rapid response to rain events. Aspen, balsam fir, and birch forests. Moderately productive sands, gravels, and loams. More precipitation than the county’s average.

LAURENTIAN UPLAND SOUTH: Bogs with few small lakes and streams. High water storage capacity. Aspen, pine, and northern hardwood forests. Moderate to very rich silts, sands, and gravels. More precipitation than the county’s average.


WAWINA HIBBING PLAIN: Bogs and bog lakes with high water storage capacity and slow runoff rates. Aspen, lowland, and northern hardwood forests. Moderate to nutrient poor sands and gravel.

Gunn Park is located in the Laurentian Upland North region.
Water Resources
Gunn Park is located on Prairie Lake, which is also a part of the Prairie River. Prairie Lake has natural and historic significance for Itasca County as does the Prairie River. Fishing is a popular recreational pursuit on Prairie Lake and Lower Prairie Lake. The lake and river could serve as a valuable educational resource through interpretation at Gunn Park. The small wooded swamp within the park boundaries is also an untapped resource for wetland education and experience.

Pre-Settlement Vegetation
White pine-red pine forest covered large portions of the steep moraines and portions of the pitted outwash in the Gunn Park region. Aspen-birch forests also grew on the moraines, but were more common on the outwash, which has excessively well drained sandy soils. Mixed hardwood-swamp-pine forest was locally found on the moraines, generally near large lakes. Conifer swamp and bogs were scattered throughout the subsection, occupying both kettles and linear depressions in the pitted outwash and moraines: [www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecs/212/index.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/ecs/212/index.html).

Present Vegetation and Land Use
The most important land uses in the surrounding area are forestry and tourism/recreation. Gunn Park itself is a recreation destination. Through the planting efforts of the park’s creator and longtime owner Blandin Paper Company, the forest cover in the park has been protected and enhanced. Large old growth white and red pine are present on the lakeshore near the pavilion and picnic areas. Along Highway 38 spruce, red pine and scotch pine plantations now stand as a buffer from the road and example of forestry practices. A variety of other tree species are also scattered throughout the park including the densely covered wooded swamp lowland area. A complete inventory of forest and plant vegetation is needed to help manage and interpret the natural resources.

Population Analysis
Gunn Park is located in central Itasca County near the city of Grand Rapids. The county seat and largest city is Grand Rapids with a population of 45,058 in 2010. Over the past 10 years, Itasca County has experienced a 2% increase in population (www.census.gov, 2012).

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There are several municipalities within Itasca County. The 2010 Census reported the following populations for these cities:
Recreation and Education Resources

There are many recreational and educational opportunities within Itasca County. Fishing, canoeing, hunting, cross country skiing, snowmobiling, ATVing, bicycling, camping, and hiking activities can be found throughout the County. However, there are few opportunities to view and learn about lakes and wetlands.

Recreation

There are numerous outdoor recreational opportunities throughout Itasca County. These opportunities are outlined in the 2012 to 2022 Itasca County Recreation Resources Plan. Here is a summary of the recreation resources inventoried for Itasca County:

- 59 Campgrounds
- 3 State Parks (Schoolcraft, Scenic, and Hill Annex State Park)
- 80 Parks, Playgrounds, Athletic Fields (City, Township, and County)
- 27 Trails (Hiking/Hunting, Cross Country Skiing, Horseback Riding, Biking)
- 8 Golf Courses
- 319 Public Water Access Points
- 145 Undeveloped Public Water Access Points
- 1 Alpine Skiing Facility with Ski Jump
- 3 Designated Canoe Routes
- 18 Designated Forests and Wildlife Areas
- 16 Historic Sites
- 43 Snowmobile Trails (38 Grant-In-Aid Trails, 5 State Maintained Trails)
- 5 ATV Trails (4 Grant-In-Aid Trails, 1 State Maintained trail)

Gunn Park has historically served as a day use destination park for fishing, picnicking, large gatherings, and ballgames. In the future the park will continue to cater to these type activities.

Education

There are a variety of cultural and natural resource based educational opportunities in Itasca County. The Forest History Center operated by the Minnesota Historical Society provides programs and interpretation about the forest and lumber industries including an authentic 1900 logging camp. Exhibits at the Itasca Heritage Center relate stories and people of the past who helped shape Itasca County. The White Oak Society Fur Post & Great Hall near Deer River reenacts the early 1800’s life of the Ojibwe and voyageurs. Hill Annex State Park preserves and interprets for visitors the rich history of Iron Ore mining in Itasca County on the Western Mesabi Range. Within a 40-mile radius of Gunn Park the Forest History Center offers the only forest interpretation services and there is a lack of lake and wetland interpretive sites. Gunn Park could become a small interpretive site for lakes and wetlands in Itasca County.
Chapter 4
Recreation Management
Chapter 4: Recreation Management

Target Goals

- Offer a high quality day-use park area for residents and visitors
- Keeping the park pavilion maintained is a high priority
- Maintain the Developed Zone area facilities and grounds at a Class I level (facilities that are highly developed with modern amenities, intensive use, and high maintenance)
- Ensure the future of traditional uses within the park
- Provide bicycle trail access for the park as a destination or starting point
- Develop and implement a new Signage Plan

Discussion

Gunn Park is the flagship of the County Park System. Recreational development will be carefully balanced with natural resource management to maintain the natural qualities of the park. Visitors will be able to enjoy picnics, fishing, wetland and lake exploration, and a variety of other recreational pursuits.

Currently the park has a distinct developed area and the remaining acreage is natural or timber plantation. This plan proposes to keep these distinct areas and maintain them very similar to current conditions with some small development and ongoing maintenance. A short boardwalk trail that would give visitors access to the natural wetland area will be developed.

In the developed zone many existing picnic tables will be refurbished and new tables will be added if the demand increases. The parking lot and roadways were resurfaced in the fall of 2013. Cracks and joints will be maintained as needed to keep the asphalt in good condition. The fishing pier will need concrete refurbishing and safety signage. The current playground equipment will need to be evaluated for safety compliance. Ultimately the playground equipment will need to be replaced and upgraded in the near future. The playground surface area will be refurbished to safe playground standards. The pavilion will need to be repaired and have annual roof maintenance, regular staining, electrical upgrades, information kiosk, and floor joint refurbishing. The development of a reservations and rental policy with an attached sign will ensure consistency and fairness for users. It is also suggested that the pavilion be officially named Blandin Pavilion and a plaque should be installed highlighting its construction. A restroom facility may be added near the parking lot and pavilion on County property. All of these improvements will maintain the existing conditions and ensure the capacity for future use by people and groups of all sizes.
Discussion Continued
New signage will be put up in the park including: sign(s) along Highway 38 giving direction to the entrance, a sign on the entrance road welcoming visitors to Gunn Park and the hours of park operation, speed limits signs, park rules and regulations signs, no swimming signs and other water related safety signs, and any other signs that may be needed for park management.

Snowmobile/Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) riding within the park was discussed during the planning process. The small size of the park prevents any sort of trail development for this type of recreational use. In addition, the park is not located along any designated snowmobile trails but is adjacent to the Arbo Recreation Area where OHV’s are allowed. The recommendation at this time is to prohibit snowmobile/OHV riding within the park boundaries, but examine the possibility of allowing OHV ingress and egress on the park entrance road in the future.

Proposed Development – See Figure 6
- An interpretive boardwalk trail through the Natural Area-Wetland Zone may be considered based on cost and interest. This may include:
  - Information kiosk and trailhead at the southwest corner of the parking-lot
  - One loop trail through the Wooded Shrub Swamp

- Replace picnic tables and cooking grills where needed.

- Replacement and upgrade of playground equipment.

- Pavilion improvements, including:
  - Reservations and rental policy for users
  - Reservation information kiosk
  - Roof leak maintenance
  - Electrical upgrades
  - Staining
  - Replace roof with maintenance free roofing as soon as possible
  - Concrete floor joint refurbishing
  - Official naming and plaque detailing the construction of the pavilion

- Fishing Pier improvements, including:
  - Concrete refurbishing
  - Safety signage
  - Fence repairs

- Parking-lot and road maintenance as needed.

- Consider adding a restroom facility located on County property near the parking lot and pavilion.
Management Recommendations

- Provide day-use recreation opportunities (such as picnic areas, fishing, etc.) by balancing recreational development and resource protection.

- Preserve the traditional recreational uses of the park, including fishing, pavilion rental and use, picnics, and large group gatherings.

- Preserve and maintain the pavilion as the keystone of the park facilities, because of its historical significance.

- Work with the Park and Recreation Commission and park neighbors on future issues and projects within the park.

- Prohibit Snowmobile/OHV use within the park boundaries.

- Examine the issue of OHV ingress and egress on the park entrance road in the future.

- Develop kiosks to inform visitors about the park and the park rules.

- Recognize the uniqueness and value of the park for day-use recreation.

- Consider the development of new interpretation opportunities.
Chapter 5

Natural Resource Management
Chapter 5: Natural Resource Management

Target Goals
- Promote a sense of land and water stewardship.
- Provide an accessible educational resource.
- Manage the forest for park qualities and aesthetics.
- Preserve and enhance the lakeshore and wetland areas.
- Inventory and complete baseline data of natural resources.

Management Recommendations
- Preserve the character and quality of the resources within the park by:
  - Designating visitor use zones
  - Balancing development with resource preservation and minimizing human disturbance to the resources
  - Recognizing Gunn Park’s resources have deep-down, educational, and economic value for non-consumptive uses
- Actively manage the resources of Gunn Park, when necessary, by:
  - Planting second growth forest that will eventually replace older trees
  - Using low impact cutting and second growth planting within the forest plantations to make them conductive for park aesthetic purposes and as a road buffer
  - Identify and control invasive species
- Collect natural resource information on Gunn Park, by:
  - Developing natural resource baseline data on Gunn Park
  - Coordinating ongoing resource identification and monitoring
  - Developing partnerships to help with resource identification and evaluation

Please see Figure 9, shows existing vegetation in 2015.
Figure 9: Gunn Park
Existing Vegetation

Legend
- Red Pine planting 2012
- Red Pine Plantation
- Spruce Plantation
- Mixed Lowland Aspen
- Mixed Variety of Trees

Gunn Park Boundary

Scale: 1 inch = 200 feet

North

0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700 800 Feet
Chapter 6
Interpretive Services
Chapter 6: Interpretive Services

Target Goals
- Enhance sense of stewardship.
- Provide accessible educational resource.
- Encourage appreciation and understanding of historic stories of the area.
- Encourage appreciation and understanding of lakes, wetlands, and forests.

Discussion
The main interpretive goal of Gunn Park is to offer accessible educational opportunities for cultural/historic, wetland, lake, and forest experiences. Some school groups have used the park for natural resource education. These experiences and those of the everyday park visitor could be enhanced through additional self-guided interpretive facilities.

The major themes of Gunn Park focus on the natural history of the forest vegetation, water resources, and unique cultural heritage and history of area logging, homesteading, and creation of the park.

Gunn Park doesn’t provide a large expanse of untouched land; however it does provide an accessible snapshot of forest, wetlands, and history. Also, the lakeshore is under the threat of increasing development pressure and Gunn Park ensures the preservation and open space access of lakeshore for all residents and visitors to enjoy.

Non-Personal vs. Personal Interpretive Resources
Due to limited funding and staff, the largest exposure to interpretive services by visitors will be from non-personal sources. Non-personal interpretation is accomplished through information boards, kiosks, self-guided trails, and brochures. Obtaining outside funding through grants will be the best method of supporting the startup costs of the non-personal interpretive program at Gunn Park.

Primary Interpretive Sites - Please see Figure 10

Day use area (Lakeside picnic area and fishing pier)
**Interpretive topics:** Lake formation, shoreline management, fish, variety of tree species, logging history of Prairie Lake and the Prairie River. The best method to present this information would be through small to medium interpretive signs located along the lakeshore, on or near the pier, and within the trees east of the parking lot.

Wetland Interpretive Trail
**Interpretive topics:** Wetland ecology, hydrology and water movement, plant and tree species.
This would be a boardwalk loop trail with a self-guided brochure and interpretive signs at specific locations. Visitors would explore this trail at their own pace.
**Forest Plantations** (Along the bicycle trail route and entrance road)
**Interpretive topics:** Timber plantations, forest management, tree species. The best method of interpretation would be through the use of small interpretive signs at specific locations in the plantations. A brochure would also be useful and may be included.

**Pavilion**
**Interpretive topics:** The history of Blandin Paper Company and the creation of Gunn Park, background on the design and construction of the pavilion. A large information board or kiosk would work best for this area.

**Interpretive Themes**

**Primary Theme: Gunn Park has unique and significant local history.**
The park is located on Prairie Lake and the Prairie River, both of which were historic routes of log drives during the peak of logging.

Blandin Paper Company originally used the Gunn Park area as a nursery for tree growth and the park today still contains stands of tree plantations.

Blandin Paper Company built the park and opened it to the public in 1956. The large pavilion was added around 1968 and is the unique centerpiece of the park.

**Primary Theme: The lake and wetlands are unique features on the landscape.**
The hydrology of wetlands and lakes hold the keys to water quality and filtration. The wetlands contain a wide variety of plants, some of which are unique to this location. Prairie Lake is home to several species of fish.

**Primary Theme: Several different types of trees are located in the picnic area.**
Large red pine and white pine grow near the pavilion and lakeshore. East of the parking lot there are a wide variety of deciduous and coniferous trees that could be interpreted.
Primary Theme: Forest plantations offer a unique perspective on timber practices.
The spruce, red pine, and scotch pine plantations located in the park offer an easily accessible point to view this method of timber management.

Today these plantations are managed as a buffer and for park aesthetics rather than for timber production. Successional growth forest must be carefully planned and managed.

Interpretive Audiences
Day use local
Local residents are most likely to be fishing, picnicking, attending or participating in ball games or as a part of large gatherings at the pavilion. They might also take the opportunity to view interpretive sights in the developed area. A large majority of the park users are and will be local residents.

Day use traveler
Visitors are most likely visiting Itasca County on vacation or might be traveling through the area. They will most likely view the lake, interpretive sights, and walk on the wetlands trail. Gunn Park might also become a Discovery Sight along the Edge of the Wilderness National Scenic Byway (TH 38). This could include organized tour groups.

School K-12
These visitors have a specific goal and a set amount of time in which to make their visit. They would utilize interpretive brochures and personal interpretation services. Some area schools already use the park and this use could be expanded.

Management Recommendations

- Develop interpretive signage for the forest plantations and Prairie Lake shoreline.

- Build a boardwalk interpretive trail through the natural area-wetlands.

- Host interpretive programs for school groups.

- Recognize educational and interpretive roles in promoting a sense of stewardship among park visitors.

- Document and interpret the cultural history of the park and Prairie Lake area.

- Possibly work with the Highway 38 Leadership Board to make Gunn Park a Discovery (interpretive) Sight along the National Scenic Byway.
Figure 10: Gunn Park
Proposed Interpretive Locations

Legend
- Interpretive Sign
- Fishing Pier
- Parking
- Picnic Area
- Picnic Shelter
- Restrooms
- Bicycle Trail
- Interpretive Trail

N
0 100 200 300 400 500 600 700
Feet

6-4
Chapter 7
Gunn Park in Ten Years
Chapter 7: Gunn Park in Ten Years

Natural and Cultural Resources in 10 Years
Gunn Park’s natural resources have been well maintained over the past 60 plus years. Existing resources are well situated to remain for the next ten years. Designation and protection of the Natural Area-Wetlands Zone will ensure its future protection. The timber plantations in the Natural Area-Forest Zone will be managed for park purposes and successional forest growth. The Developed Zone will be maintained at its current level and new tree plantings will be conducted to provide for future trees in the area. A better understanding of the park’s natural and cultural resources will be established through the gathering of baseline data and the development of interpretive materials. Prairie Lake, Prairie River, and Gunn Park all have interesting histories associated with the logging era and this information will be explored and celebrated through interpretive kiosks or signage. Residents and visitors will continue to enjoy the natural resources of the park over the next ten years.

Visitor Experience in 10 Years
Recreational use of Gunn Park is anticipated to remain constant and possibly increase over the next ten years. Local residents and visitors will continue to enjoy the use of the picnic area, pavilion, and fishing pier. The addition of interpretive sites and a wetland trail will also enhance the experience and provide educational opportunities. The integrity of the lakeshore, forest, and wetlands will continue to be protected from development and adverse impacts. The park developments outlined in this plan ensure the protection and management of the resources while providing recreational enjoyment and opportunities for visitors.

Areas of Conflict
Planning and design considerations will keep recreational and educational development away from sensitive resources and historical sites. By designating management zones this plan also ensures a balance of recreational and educational development and natural resource protection. Resources will be monitored regularly to ensure that management is preventing and controlling the impacts of visitor use.
Chapter 8
Staffing and Operations
Chapter 8: Staffing and Operations

In order to manage and maintain the park, ongoing operation and capital improvement dollars must be secured. Current Park System personnel and a seasonal contractor will handle the staffing needs in order to maintain quality service and facilities at this county park.

**Staffing**

County Land Commissioner:
- Responsible for the budget, outreach, planning, partnerships, and the overall supervision and direction of park operations.

County Park System Manager:
- Responsible for the day to day management of the park, giving direction to the Park Technician and Seasonal Contractor, and outlining repairs and projects.

Park Technician (and Seasonal Staff):
- Responsible for repairs and special projects as needed.

Seasonal Maintenance Contractor:
- Responsible for ground and lawn maintenance and care, garbage pickup, pavilion and restroom cleaning and upkeep, and the opening and closing of the gate.
- Official responsibilities are outlined in the Maintenance Contract (Appendix C) between Itasca County and Itasca Little League.

**Operations**

**Ground Maintenance** (Seasonal Maintenance Contractor)

The maintenance of Gunn Park has been to the level of a municipal park with well-maintained grounds and facilities. Itasca County will strive to provide a high quality facility at Gunn Park to meet the expectations and needs of the visitors to the park.

General grounds maintenance will include:
- Lawn Mowing - Once per week or as needed (about 8 acres)
- Weed Whipping - Once per week or as needed
- Weeding - Once per month or as needed
- Raking - Each spring and fall and as needed
- Refuse pickup - Each week and/or each event scheduled
- Pruning and other - As needed

**Park Amenities** (Park Technician / Seasonal Staff)

Maintenance of the amenities will include:
- Painting and repairs to picnic tables
- Well sanitation and testing
- Ash removal and repairs to fire grates and fireplace
- Safety inspections and repairs to the playground equipment
- Cleaning and repairs on the fishing pier
**Pavilion** (Seasonal Maintenance Contractor)
Maintenance of the pavilion will include:
- Refuse removal after each event
- Washing and scrubbing of the floor and picnic tables after each event and as needed
- Repairs and inspection of the structure will be the responsibility of the Park System Manager

**Restrooms** (Seasonal Maintenance Contractor)
Maintenance of the restrooms will include:
- General cleaning and sanitizing of facilities
- Refuse removal as needed
- Sweeping and mopping on a regular basis
- Reporting any damages or repairs needed
- Plumbing and waterline draining for winter closing

**Park Gate** (Seasonal Maintenance Contractor)
Open the gate at 9am and close it at sundown

**Parking Lot** (Park Technician / Seasonal Staff)
Maintenance of the parking lot will include:
- Sweeping the lot twice each year and as needed
- Weed control
- Asphalt patching and repairs as needed (Contracted)

**Annual Operating Expenses**
- **Electricity** with no night lighting provided $550
- **Portable Toilets** two units $850
- **Trash Removal** two units’ avg. $400/month $2,500
- **Septic Cleaning** Avg. $80/month for restrooms $500
- **Grounds Maint.** Contracted Service for 5 months $10,000
- **General Cleaning** Contracted Service (pavilion & restroom) $9,000
- **General Maint.** Repairs and projects $6,000
- **Misc.** Contingency $1,000

**TOTAL** $30,400.00

**Current Facilities** – Capital Improvements needed
**Pavilion**
Blandin Paper Company constructed the pavilion around 1968. The structure is constructed of stone/concrete pillars with laminated wood trusses and a large stone fireplace on the north end. The roof is covered with cedar shakes. The structure appears to be in fair to good condition however the roof will need repairs and replacement very soon. Some staining is needed, the concrete floor should be refurbished, and the electrical outlets upgraded. This facility is the highlight of the park and receives the most use. The Pavilion is reserved nearly every weekend of the summer. A rental policy and procedure will need to be developed to better document the use of the pavilion. Currently Little Leagues personnel are managing the reservations for the pavilion on a first come first serve bases starting each year in January. Blandin/UPM has a reserved spot for the 4th of July.
Parking Lot
The parking lot is a 175-car asphalt lot that was constructed in the mid 1970’s. In 1999 Blandin resurfaced approximately 1/3 of the lot. All of the lot was resurfaced in the fall of 2013 and is in good condition. Future maintenance will need to be monitored each year.

Fishing Pier
The fishing pier is located on Prairie Lake. It is 28’ X 58’ in size and is constructed of concrete with steel sides. There is a four-foot chain link fence on the three sides facing the lake. This facility is well used by the public and is probably the highest liability feature on the park property. The fence is an important safety feature. Safety signage is needed and the concrete surface could be refurbished.

Playground Equipment
The playground equipment consists of an eight-place swing set and a small wood structured jungle gym. Both of these facilities appear to be in fair condition and should be removed and updated for safety concerns. It is anticipated that the equipment will need to be replaced in the next 2-3 years to meet current standards.

Well Pump House
The well pump house structure supports, a faucet, and a standalone well. The well should be considered for abandonment. A new well located on Little League property is now connected to the faucet and the water line leading to the Pavilion. The water from the well is tested each year by the State Public Health Department for public use.

Picnic Tables
There are 32 picnic tables located in the park. All of the tables are metal framed with painted wood tops and seats. The tables are in good to fair condition and over time the tops and seats will need repainting and replacement.

Benches
There are four benches on the park property. All of the benches are constructed of metal frames with painted wood tops. The benches are in need of repairs.

Fire Grates
There are 7 pedestal charcoal fire grates located on the park property and they are in fair condition and some of them will need replacement.

Volleyball Court
The court is sand covered and in good condition. A net has always been provided each year. The stand pipe structures and net tensioner will need to be reset and improved to fit current net sizes.

Trash Canisters
There are two large canisters provided for trash removal at the park. Waste Management of Cohasset services these large canisters. There are also several small trashcans located throughout the park that are emptied by the Seasonal Maintenance Contractor each week. The small trashcans should have lids to keep rainwater out. Recycling containers are also needed to promote recycling and reduction in waste.
Portable Satellite Toilets
To supplement the restroom facility on Little League property one portable satellite toilets is provided for park users. Groups who plan very large gatherings are encouraged to rent additional satellite toilets at their own expense. There is a need for an additional restroom facility in the next 3-5 years.

Capital Improvements Budget Priorities
Several capital improvements are outlined below with their estimated costs. They are ranked in order of importance for completion over the next ten years.

1. Pavilion Improvements $150,000.00 to $200,000.00
   a. Remove and repair roof structure
   b. Replace cedar shakes with structured metal roofing.
   c. Staining and eave replacement
   d. Leak repair near fireplace
   e. Electrical upgrades
   f. Construct an information board/kiosk

2. County Park System Signage $10,000
   a. Safety signs
   b. Entrance signs
   c. Park Regulations signs

3. Well and Water System Improvements $5,000
4. Information Boards and Kiosks $5,000
5. Playground Equipment Replacement $25,000+
6. Tree Plantings $25,000
7. Wetlands Interpretive Trail $20,000
8. Interpretive Signage $10,000
   a. Lakeshore and wetland conservation
   b. History interpretation
   c. Picnic Area Trees
   d. Plantations
9. Refurbishment of the Pavilion $10,000
   a. Concrete floor work
   b. Extend water line to pavilion

10. Fishing Pier Improvements $10,000
11. Additional Picnic Tables and Grills $10,000

10 Year Total Capital Improvements $330,000

Law Enforcement
Law enforcement within Gunn Park will comply with Minnesota State Statutes and Laws and the Itasca County Park Ordinance (when it is enacted).
Generally, Park System Staff will provide monitoring for compliance with park rules and the Park Ordinance. When official assistance is needed the Itasca County Sheriff’s Department will provide the enforcement actions for laws and ordinances. Regular patrols by Deputy Sheriffs are recommended to maintain a law enforcement presence at the park.
Chapter 9
Plan Modification Process
Chapter 9: Plan Modification Process

The Gunn Park Management Plan was created through the cooperation of representatives from several groups and individual citizen comments. The Park and Recreation Commission and Park System Staff can generally make minor plan revisions. If a proposed change to the management plan meets any of the criteria below, it must follow the Plan Amendment Process. To maintain consistency among plans and processes, all revisions and amendments should be conducted through the Park System Manager.

**Major Plan Amendments**

**Criteria for Major Plan Amendments**
A proposed change must be approved through the management plan amendment process outlined below if it meets any of the following criteria:

1. Alters the park mission, vision, goals, or specific management objectives outlined in the plan;
2. Is controversial among elected officials and boards, park user groups, the public, other county departments; or
3. Directly affects other county departments.

**Management Plan Amendment Process**

1. County Park System Initial Step: Review the amendment and then determine which stakeholders potentially have major concerns and how those concerns should be addressed.
2. If the proposed change involves other County Departments, the issue should be resolved by staff and approved by department heads and the Park and Recreation Commission.
3. If the proposed change is potentially controversial among elected boards, park users groups, or the public, the Park and Recreation Commission should discuss the proposed change and attend an open house forum that is advertised in the official newspaper of the County. Following the open house the Park and Recreation Commission will make a recommendation to the County Board on the proposed change. The County Board will make the final decision on the proposed change.
4. All plan amendments should be conducted, documented, and distributed by the County Park System.

**Plan Revisions**

If a plan change is recommended that does not meet the amendment criteria above and generally follows the intent of the park management plan (through mission, vision, goals, and objectives), the Park System Staff and Park and Recreation Commission have the discretion to modify the plan without a major planning process.

**Program Chapter Revisions**

The Recreation Management, Natural Resources Management, and Interpretive Services chapters should be updated periodically as needed. Park System Staff will determine when an update is needed and coordinate the revision with necessary partners. Chapters should be rewritten in a format consistent with the plan as originally approved.
Plan Updates

It is recommended that the Park and Recreation Commission and Park System Staff lead a plan update planning process in the year 2024. At this time the entire plan should be reviewed and updated for the next ten years.

Appendices

A  Itasca County Board of Commissioners Official Actions
B  Maintenance Contract for Gunn Park
C  Gunn Park Agreement
D  Legislative Authority Minnesota State Statutes 398.31 to 398.36

List of Figures

1. Location Map V
2. Management Zones VIII
3. Itasca County Biophysical Regions 3-2
4. Existing Recreation Facilities 4-2
5. Proposed Recreation Facilities 4-5
6. Existing Vegetation 5-2
7. Proposed Interpretive Facilities 6-4
References Cited

Itasca County Land Department. (2015) http://www.co.itasca.mn.us


