

Park Operations Quarterly Report June – August 2022

The Parks Operations team focused on traditional summer work activities including mowing, trimming, invasive plant control, and other maintenance and repair work. The quarter started with lower than ideal staffing numbers, due to vacancies in permanent positions and a slow pace of hiring seasonal workers. The team adapted by temporarily adjusting some service levels, for example, reduced string trimming. However, as the summer progressed, most of the permanent and seasonal openings were filled, and more normal service levels resumed. The periods of high temperatures and low rainfall required additional watering efforts to ensure the health of newly planted trees and plants, especially on State Street and the Mall Concourse.

Staff supported preparation and set-up work for numerous events this quarter. Some of the larger events included the CrossFit Games, Art Fair, PDGA Women's Disc Golf Championship, Juneteenth celebration, and the All City Dive Meet at the Goodman Pool. Thanks to the team approach across the Parks Division, these events were well-managed with limited impact to the parks.

The Operations Forward Plan for managing general parks natural areas was completed. This includes a change to the Operations reporting structure and a new approach to evaluating and prioritizing the general parks natural areas such as woodlands and "managed meadow" native plantings. The new organizational structure will allow Parks to better implement the Parks Land Management Plan, support pollinator habitat, reduce intradepartmental silos, and build greater team awareness and knowledge. The new quantitative approach to evaluating and prioritizing habitats will standardize practices across the system, and provide increased ecological benefit. Habitat Management Plans are being developed to guide the work, and a scorecard has been developed to track and document the health and function of the different management units. The draft Operations Plan was presented to the Habitat Stewardship committee and received positive feedback.

The ASSPIRE Intern completed his internship with Parks. We believe this opportunity provided the intern real life experience with the work requirements of natural area management. This was our first opportunity to host an intern, and there were some lessons learned that will help us provide a more meaningful experience in the future.

The five Parks Maintenance Worker positions were filled, as well as the Parks Worker and Facility Maintenance Worker positions. These are important positions in support of the day-to-day front-line work requirements. The new Conservation Trainee position was posted, and interviews are in process. There was strong interest in this position, resulting in 126 applicants.

The team completed preliminary winter work planning with a review of snow response priorities and the work responsibilities. We also reviewed the status of Salt Wise certification for staff involved in snow response. The Salt Wise training is designed to help staff better understand the impact of over-salting, the proper use of salt, and how to properly apply salt to reduce the environmental impact. We continue to work toward having 100% of our staff that support snow and ice operations certified. Recently hired staff will need to attend the training.

CONSERVATION

Staff worked on seasonal invasive species control, including knotweed, hedge parsley, sweet clover, and wild parsnip. They patrolled the upper Yahara River and detected and controlled only a handful of purple loosestrife plants, as usual. Crown vetch was mowed to suppress seed production, and then later sprayed when the plants grew back. Trails were mowed and trimmed regularly, and downed trees were removed after a few storm events. In August, staff focused on mowing brush to control particularly aggressive stands of sumac and aspen in otherwise healthy prairies at Edna Taylor, Prairie Ridge and Cherokee Marsh, and to control overgrown areas that are not yet being burned at Cherokee Mendota, Heritage Prairie, and Knollwood. Conversely, native shrubs were installed by contractors in portions of Acewood and Owen to restore a diverse canopy structure and increase diversity.

The prescribed grazing program continued to expand to include 60 acres across eight parks - Acewood, Cherokee Marsh South Unit, Door Creek, Edna Taylor, Knollwood, Owen, Prairie Ridge, and Turville Point. Goat grazing is used in lower quality management units to reduce the abundance of shrubs – particularly invasive bush honeysuckle and buckthorn – in order to prepare the site for effective prescribed burning and addition of native plants and seed.

Volunteers and the Operation Fresh Start crew complemented staff efforts to control Himalayan pokeweed and burdock at Turville and Owen. The Friends of Cherokee Marsh sponsored Prairie Partners interns again this year and complemented efforts on a variety of invasive species at Cherokee Marsh.

There was considerable collaboration across Parks' operations sections this quarter with Conservation staff providing site review and advice to Golf staff at The Glen, working with Land Stewardship Technicians to develop a management plan for Managed Meadow pollinator habitat in general parks, and participating in Parks Planning efforts for Glenway Woods. In addition, Parks hosted an AASPIRE intern for the first time this year. The intern worked alongside conservation staff and Land Stewardship Technicians on planning, invasive species control, trail maintenance, plant monitoring, biocontrol monitoring and release, native plant installation, and goose management.

CONSTRUCTION

Staff completed a number of capital improvement projects including work to improve the drainage along the Cannonball Path west of Aldo Leopold Park. Cement pads were poured and seven new memorial benches were installed at Acewood, Olin, Yahara Place, Wingra and Garner Parks, and Bernie's Beach and N. Livingston street-end. The Rennebohm west tennis court was removed to support contractor paving work, a new natural play area was added to Elvehjem Park, the Sycamore dog park outer walking path was revitalized, and new mats were added throughout the playground system to reduce the maintenance cost of replacing the material kicked out from under the swings.

Staff also continued to support operating projects including the work to re-establish lake access for canoers and kayakers along the Law Park shoreline, and worked with the Streets Division to move approximately 4,000 yards of donated topsoil onto Parks property. The team added sand to the volleyball courts at Garner and Manchester Parks and continued to perform playground route maintenance and graffiti removal.



Law Park Lake Access Improvement



Sycamore Dog Park Path Repair



Rennebohm Park – Tennis Court Work



Cannonball Path and Ditch Line Work

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE

The team worked on capital projects, special projects, and annual maintenance this quarter. The capital projects included upgrades to the Brittingham boat house, a new drinking fountain at Peace Park, replacement of lighting and window screen at Warner Park, and tennis bounding board replacement at Reindahl Park.

The team also completed the annual start-up of the pool and supported daily inspections of the pool and splash pads. In addition, the Warner Beach enclosure system required daily inspections, and like any new system, there was a learning curve to overcome.

Staff also supported special projects that included renovation work at The Glen clubhouse, securing newly acquired Parks properties on Baldwin and Milwaukee Streets, and painting and carpentry work at the new Olin Facility. The team also fabricated and installed a memorial sign for Jack Hurst at the Warner Park Lagoon and a sign for the new Aldo Leopold Park pump track.



The Glen Club House Painting



Jack Hurst Memorial Sign



Aldo Leopold Sign

GENERAL PARKS

The staff primarily focused on completing mow routes, performing routine maintenance, and supporting reservations throughout the system. With the warm dry weather the grass growth slowed and the team was able to keep up with the 7-10 day mowing cycle. String trimming was delayed due to resource levels and other work priorities.

The Land Stewardship Technicians continued to maintain the general park managed meadows. The main focus this quarter was on spot mowing invasive and harmful species such as Canada thistle, crown vetch, and wild parsnip to prevent seed set and remove hazards to park users.

The organic athletic field trial program at Flagstone and Olbrich Parks is ongoing. Staff applied compost tea to the trial fields and aerified the soil monthly to help nourish the soil's microbiome. This work will help organically feed the grass and should reduce weed populations that tend to grow in compacted soils. This grant project is helping us gain insight into organic applications, costs, opportunities, and challenges.

The Landscape Maintenance Workers (LMWs), along with help from the Parks Arborists, completed spring planting of 250 trees. The LMWs also worked on landscape bed maintenance and performed various beautification projects across the parks system. The first phase of a large project was completed at the Goodman Pool, where landscape beds were redesigned and in some areas reduced, to ease overgrowth, lessen the maintenance requirements, and provide extra space for pool patrons. Phase Two of the plan is scheduled to be completed this fall. Additional beautification projects were completed at Cardinal Glenn, Giddings, Olin, Olive Jones, Sandstone, Sunset, Swallowtail, and Warner Parks, with a focus on landscaping upgrades on signature sign beds.

Parks hosted a variety of events this quarter that required staff support for preparation and cleanup. A few of the larger events included: Outreach Magic Festival at Warner Park, the PDGA Women's Disc Golf Championship at Hiestand and Elver Parks, the Juneteenth celebration at Penn Park, La Fete de Marquette and the Sessions at McPike Park, Marquette Waterfront Festival at Yahara Place Park, and the All City Dive Meet at the Goodman Pool. Staff also installed and removed the stage ramp for the Disability Pride Fest at Warner Park.

Parks was very appreciative of the volunteer efforts we received this quarter. A volunteer who maintains the Sid Boyum statues rehabilitated the hippo statue at Wirth Court Park. The statue was stripped of the old paint, washed, and painted with a paint that lets the concrete breathe to prevent spalling and also repels graffiti. Wild Warner partnered with the Clean Lakes Alliance to clean up garbage at Warner Lagoon and volunteers removed invasive species along the

shoreline, pruned in mulch beds, and picked up litter at Tenney Park. We are also fortunate to have a new volunteer group at Riendahl Park who will be picking up litter one day a month through fall.



Aerating Organic Fields



Beautification Project



Tree Planting



Clean Lakes Alliance – Warner Lagoon Clean-up



Refurbished Hippo

MALL CONCOURSE

The team focused on maintenance, planting, and a lot of planter and flower bed watering due to the hot dry weather. The sidewalk power washing program continued with over 90% of the area complete.

Staff assisted cleanup for many large events including the Madison Night Market and Art Fair on the Square. The CrossFit games returned to Madison with athletic events held on the Concourse and State Street attracting a significant number of attendees.

Olbrich Gardens assisted with the transition from the spring to summer annuals, creating beautiful planter displays in the downtown sidewalk areas. Seasonal light pole banners were also changed for summer.



Summer Banners and Plantings