

Park Operations Quarterly Report December 2021 – February 2022

The team focused on maintaining winter recreation amenities and continuing land conservation efforts, with less focus on snow plowing due to minimal snowfall this quarter. The Division continued to offer quality cross-country ski trails in a number of the parks, although some trails were closed at times due to the lack of snow. Thanks to the grooming expertise of both Parks staff and MadNorSki volunteers, Elver Park offered the best option for cross-country skiing throughout this sub-par season. Maintaining quality ice skating rinks was also a challenge due to the temperature fluctuations. The team worked hard to open and maintain the ice, and was able to keep most ice open for the duration of the season. Deteriorating conditions in late February caused ice rinks and ski trails to close, but overall, given the limited snow and periods of warm temperatures, Parks was able to provide the community with enjoyable outdoor winter recreation.

As noted in previous communications, Parks, MadNorSki, and CXC jointly agreed not to create the machine-made cross-country ski loop this year. Initial feedback from the clubs was favorable. MadNorSki had record ski lesson attendance, and the club felt this could not have been supported on the machine-made loop. However, the continued lack of snow and warm temperatures may sway this opinion as trails close for the season. Parks will work with the clubs as future options are evaluated.

Parks Operations has experienced a significant number of staff openings over the winter; due to promotions, retirements, and resignations, 18 positions became vacant. Significant time and effort was committed to filling these openings. Leadership continued to assess the organizational structure to assure we maintain efficient and quality services. The team also continued to assess the evolution of equipment technologies, which may offer future efficiency gains. Staff are piloting several pieces of battery-operated equipment. In addition to possible efficiency gains, these tools will reduce noise and other worker and environmental impacts. Currently these benefits come with a price premium.

The hiring process for the hourly seasonal staff began. Our initial job posting attracted only eight applicants - far below our need. We will continue to post these positions and work with the HR Department on ideas to attract candidates. Meanwhile, we are assessing potential changes to the services supported, in the event we are unable to hire enough seasonal staff.

The team continued to advance plans for general parks natural areas. This is part of our increased effort to establish and better maintain natural areas and native vegetation in the general parks. This work will be focused and intentional to assure the areas selected can be managed and maintained with the resources available. As part of this effort, Parks submitted an application for a Dane County Environmental Council Capital Equipment Grant for additional equipment to outfit burn crews. The grant will allow Parks to expand the use of prescribed burns as a management tool in targeted general park natural areas maintained by our Land Stewardship Technicians and volunteers. This grant and our increased focus to expand the cooperation between the Parks Conservation and General Parks teams' will further the integration of vegetation management within Parks. The grant request is a match of the \$1,500 provided by the Madison Parks Foundation.

The team completed the new employee check-in process with all operations staff. The process formalized the employee coaching and feedback process. While there was some initial trepidation by staff, those concerns gave way to productive and engaging employee conversations. The feedback from staff was favorable with regard to the end-results.

CONSERVATION

Ski trails opened in December with the first snowfall. However, snowfall was limited, causing staff to open and close trails throughout the season. Even with the difficult conditions, skillful grooming helped keep the trails open longer than expected, given the limited snow to work with. In February, a series of warm spells closed most cross-country trails, and the team then focused solely on Elver and Odana fee trails, where the greatest benefit could be gained.

With the reduced grooming workload, staff was able to focus on some winter conservation tasks. They removed excess woody debris that had accumulated in fire-suppressed oak woodlands throughout the decade, and burned brush piles generated throughout the year by invasive species control work at Cherokee Marsh, Knollwood, Prairie Ridge, Stricker's Pond and Turville Point. Volunteers burned additional brush piles at Meadow Ridge and Owen, to dispose of slash generated by their invasive shrub removal efforts at these sites as well. The woody debris removal is focused on restoring the appropriate habitat characteristics to the oak woodlands, and on fuel reduction to limit the potential severity of fires. Larger, decaying logs are generally left in place to maintain existing habitat for small mammals and insects, especially native bee species that nest or overwinter in woody debris.



Volunteers have completed a 4-acre buckthorn removal project at Prairie Ridge. The area will be burned, grazed and seeded in 2022.

The Operation Fresh Start conservation crew assigned to Parks sowed native seed in restoration areas at several sites, including Acewood, Cherokee Marsh – South Unit, Owen, Paunack Marsh, and Turville Point. They also cut, stacked, and burned buckthorn and honeysuckle on approximately six acres at Heritage Prairie, Knollwood and Turville Point.



Operation Fresh Start removing honeysuckle at Heritage Prairie.

Contractors completed several larger-scale woody invasive species removal projects across 66 acres at Acewood, Cherokee Marsh (North and South units), Moraine Woods, Owen, Sandburg Woods and Turville Point. This work complements the prescribed grazing regime being used at several of these sites, and has initialized or returned active management to large portions of the project areas, especially at Cherokee Marsh, Moraine Woods, and Turville Point. Several of these areas will be burned, and then seeded, in 2022.

Permits for burning and wildlife management were secured, and staff began preparing for these activities in 2022.

CONSTRUCTION

The crew worked on relocating 30,000 yards of donated topsoil - thought to be the largest donation of topsoil the City has ever received from a developer. The material will be stored until used for field renovations and new construction, or shredded for use by the Streets Division to restore sites where tree stumps have been removed. A new quad-axle dump truck (pictured below) replaced an older unit last year, and has been critical to hauling the topsoil. This new truck allows the team to move double the amount of material in the same time, reducing labor cost and environmental impact.

The Playground Technician finalized the 2021 playground audits and began developing a summer season work plan, focused on inspections and repairs to assure safe playground equipment.

The team also assisted the Streets Division with a general plow effort, which was the only general plow support needed this winter season. The team also transported snow from the Capital Square to maintain safe pedestrian and vehicle passage.



Transporting donated topsoil



Snow clearing - Capital Square

FACILITIES MAINTENANCE

The team focused on capital improvement projects and annual maintenance work. The capital projects included the replacement of old drinking fountains with accessible bottle filling stations at Tenney, Wingra and Westmorland shelters. The team also installed a new furnace at Westmorland and refurbished the James Madison Park pier – an amenity that will be eagerly welcomed back this spring. The team also replaced the park signature sign at Morrison Park.

Annual maintenance work included facility preparation for winter recreation, daily facility checks, and inspection of fire extinguishers. The team also performed various project work for the Madison Parks Foundation.

The Facilities team hired a new Welder Maintenance Mechanic and a new Parks Maintenance Mechanic, to replace two staff members who retired.



GENERAL PARKS

Early season skate ice was a challenge, but the colder temperatures and limited snow provided additional time for ice maintenance across the system. Public feedback was very favorable, and often noted as the best ice conditions users could remember. Parks-sponsored Groove and Glide events were held at Elver, Olbrich, Rennebohm, Vilas, and Westmorland ice rinks. February started out cold, but fluctuating temperatures throughout the month led to the eventual closure of all ice rinks.

During the warm and dry periods this quarter, staff worked on native plant restoration projects at Apple Ridge and 1,000 Oaks Parks. The work focused on cleanup and invasive shrub removal. Staff also worked on bench inventory and maintenance, and pruning oak and elm trees, which needs to be performed during the winter due to the susceptibility of these species to insect borne diseases.

With the support of the Conservation team, the Land Stewardship Technicians (LSTs) began creating habitat management plans for general park natural areas. They also worked together to apply for burn permits, to expand Parks' fire management to include more units in general parks, specifically: Blackhawk, Burrows, Demetral, High Crossing, Hill Creek, Hudson, Huegel, Odana, Reindahl, and Warner parks.

A local artist and volunteers created a ninety-foot-wide labyrinth made from the branches of donated holiday trees at Olbrich Park. The trees formed the walls marking the

walking path. The art installation received a lot of positive feedback and people walked the pathway every day it was open.

Follow-up meetings were held with Stonyfield Organic to review the Organic Turf Project status and to make any needed adjustments to the treatments at Olbrich and Flagstone parks. Soil samples are taken each year to measure how the turf is responding to the organic treatments. Adjustments are then made to the program inputs in order make the grass thrive and noxious weeds naturally decrease over time without the use of synthetic fertilizers or herbicides.

The Parks Arborists continue to collaborate with Golf staff on the Glenway Golf Park project. Work is to be completed this winter before the ground thaws, in order to prevent damage to newly planted grass and forb plugs.

The colder temperatures and lighter snow cover required additional work by the Forest Hill staff. The heater equipment was needed for the first time in three years to thaw the ground before excavating gravesites.

As part of a pilot project, Fleet Services installed a biodiesel fuel tank on West Parks' garbage truck. The pilot project is to assess the viability of biodiesel as an alternative fuel for the City of Madison vehicles. Both West and Central Parks' truck operators participated in the training on using the biodiesel.



Apple Ridge before



Apple Ridge after



1000 Oaks before



1000 Oaks after



Forest Hill ground thawing



Elver Grove and Glide



Olbrich Artist Labyrinth



Plaining ice



Tenney skate ice



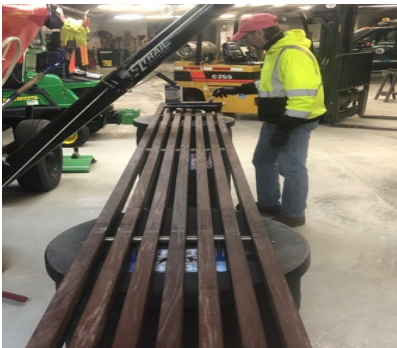
Winter tree pruning

MALL CONCOURSE

Although below average in accumulation, occasional snowfalls have kept the Mall crew busy with snow and ice removal. The team worked with Forestry to assess dead or dying trees in the service area and plan for pruning or removal. Staff also refurbished the iconic wooden benches with a fresh coat of teak oil.

In mid-January, the BID's "Shine On" event ended and the holiday trees were removed. The winter planter décor was then updated with strings of lights woven into re-purposed metal flower baskets. The lights will remain until the spring pansies are planted.

The Mall Maintenance crew continued to respond to new snowfall, while preparing for spring with sidewalk sweeping, winter debris clean-up, and replacing damaged bike racks, benches, and other amenities.



Wood bench refurbishing



Holiday Planters



Mall snow removal