

## **Park Operations Quarterly Report December 2022 – February 2023**

The team demonstrated flexibility and adaptability throughout this reporting period. The changing weather varied the work responsibilities from snow and ice to brush clearing, pruning and power washing. The limited snow cover provided an excellent opportunity to prepare managed natural areas for additional spring restoration work. When the weather conditions allowed, the team put extra effort into supporting skating rinks and ski trails.

There has been an additional focus on breaking down section silos and a clear demonstration of improved teamwork across the Operations sections. The Operations sections worked together to support snow grooming, snow clearing, ice maintenance and natural area work, not traditionally shared.

With the changing temperatures, ice safety becomes a bigger consideration. As a result, staff from East and Central Parks received ice rescue training from the Madison Fire Department. Both sections perform ice maintenance on lagoons where water is much deeper, and therefore more dangerous than the other styles of rinks. The Fire Department trained staff on methods of self-rescue as well as rescuing others. Various techniques for rescue were discussed, such as using throw ropes, life rings, ice picks, and ladders. The training was recommended by the Parks Safety Committee, was very well done, and was appreciated by staff. Rescue throw bags were purchased to support rescue response if needed, and the rescue process was documented.

We continued to increase Operations' focus on managed prairies through additional planning and work plan execution. Several Operations sections teamed up to clear invasive brush from three parks, covering a total of 1.5 acres. In addition, progress was made on the Parks Land Management Plan revision and to further develop the General Parks Habitat Plans and annual work plans. These plans are a demonstration of our increased focus and planned approach to our ecology efforts. This increased intentional focus will have a lasting positive impact on the ecology of parklands and reduce the impacts of climate change.

The team worked on the plan to transition street medians to a new Public Works team. This is a significant undertaking, which will result in the transfer of responsibility for up to 190 acres of mowed medians and terraces from Parks to the Streets Division, as approved in the 2023 budget. This change will also result in a joint effort between the Parks and Streets Divisions to support approximately 240 planted beds in the street medians. Permanent staff will be utilized, rather than seasonal employees, and new work plans and communications to support staff's positive transition to their new work requirements are being developed. The work plans will be finalized in the coming month and the hiring process to secure the staff has started.

The team completed its second year of the new City Employee Check-in process with all Operations staff. The process formalized the employee coaching and feedback process, and again this year the feedback from staff and supervisors was favorable with staff feeling value and valued from the exchange.

Parks continues to support scientific research that has broad applications. This quarter, a UW Madison student project measured soil pH and vegetation density in proximity to roads at three parks. The team found a negative correlation between traffic volume and these variables. In January, the DNR provided results of their acoustic survey for bat species conducted last summer at Cherokee Marsh. Eight species were detected, the most prevalent by far being the Big Brown Bat and the Hoary Bat.

## **CONSERVATION**

Cross-country ski trails were open and groomed intermittently throughout this season. Promising snow fall events were continually followed by periods of warm weather, causing the rapid deterioration of ski conditions. However, thanks to staff across all sections and volunteers, fee sites (Elver, Odana and Door Creek) were groomed almost daily whenever conditions allowed. At Door Creek the expanded ski trails and complementary trails designated for walking and snowshoeing were popular. The Park Rangers assisted in public education to help the different uses co-exist in the same park with minimal conflict.

Parks staff partnered with MadNorSki to host a “Madison Area Groomers Conference” at Elver Park on January 17. Ski trail groomers from Dane County Parks, Blackhawk Country Club, MadNorSki, and Madison Parks gathered to discuss their respective sites, challenges, strategies, and equipment used to add value to natural snow through increased recreation opportunities.

When not grooming, staff worked on winter conservation tasks including invasive woody species removal at Cherokee Marsh, trail improvements at Knollwood, brush pile burning at Edna Taylor, and removal of non-native spruce trees encroaching into a prairie restoration at Bitzer Family Preserve. Volunteers continued to clear and burn brush piles at Meadow Ridge and Owen. The Operation Fresh Start conservation crew complemented the work they did last winter on the east side of Heritage Prairie by clearing invasive shrubs from the west side of the park. This work will release pasque-flowers and other species and allow open-grown oaks to successfully reproduce.

Large scale contracted projects included removal of the invasive woody understory from the oak woodland at Elvehjem Sanctuary, forestry mowing encroaching brush in and around prairie habitat at Kettle Pond, canopy thinning to increase light to necessary levels in oak woodlands at Owen and Knollwood, and invasive shrub removal at Sandburg Woods and Moraine Woods. At Owen and Knollwood, downed woody debris was also removed or reduced to volumes that support wildlife habitat while allowing sustainable and required management with prescribed fire.



Kettle Pond forestry mowing



Elvehjem understory restoration - this oak can now reproduce



A note of recognition for Brandon Mann, who has taken a position elsewhere after helping to build the Conservation program for the past 11 years. He is leaving Parks well positioned to succeed into the future, thanks to his efforts.

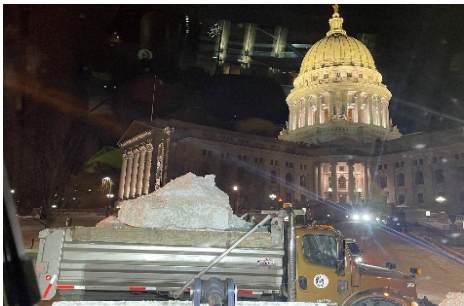
## **CONSTRUCTION**

Approximately 15,000 cubic yards of topsoil donated by a developer were received and piled at the Door Creek Park storage site. This was a significant and worthwhile work effort. These donations reduce Parks' topsoil costs and support park renovations and new construction. The donation will also contribute to the shredded top soil supply for the Streets Division, which uses it to reclaim areas after tree stump grinding.

The unseasonably warm weather allowed the team to add needed mulch to many playgrounds including Brentwood, Brigham, Lucy Lincoln, Sheridan Triangle, Tenney, Waldorf, Washington Manor and Woodland Hills parks. The team also finalized 2022 audit reports and created the 2023 work plan for playground inspections and audits.

The team assisted the Streets Division with four general street plow events and hauled larger piles of snow from the Capital Square and Mall Concourse.

A special recognition and appreciation for Andy Champeau for providing Commercial Driver's License training for 14 year training over 30 Parks employees. Andy has decided to step down from this added responsibility. Parks has benefited and greatly appreciated Andy's support.



Capital Mall Snow Hauling



Top Soil Storage



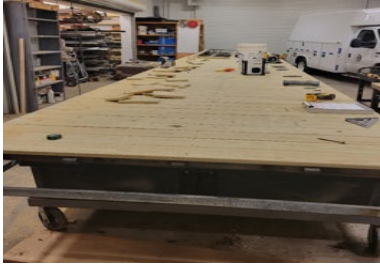
Adding Playground Mulch

## **FACILITIES MAINTENANCE**

The team worked on a number of capital projects including upgrades to the Warner Park baseball field restrooms, accessibility upgrades to the Warner Park "crayon" shelter, the construction of a warming bench for ice skating at Wexford Park, and refurbishing the Law Park pier. The team also completed maintenance and replacement of the signature signs at Beilfuss, Cherokee, Olin, and Turville parks.

The team played a significant role in the opening of the new Parks Olin facility. Staff painted all of the offices and other areas not included in the capital renovation project, and completed plumbing upgrades by adding bottle fill stations and custodial sinks. The team also supported the Parks staff move from the City County Building, assembling desks and shelving units, and installing art work, bulletin boards and white boards. Employees attended trainings on the new equipment at the Olin facility and implemented the first keyscan access control system for the Parks. A Facility Maintenance Worker is being hired to support the maintenance and custodial responsibilities for the Olin Facility, as well as support for other park facility projects.

The team also worked on annual maintenance and project work that included winter recreation preparation, daily facility checks, fire extinguisher inspections, and memorial project work for the Madison Parks Foundation.



Law Park Pier Refurbishing



Wexford Warming Bench



Parks Olin Facility

### **GENERAL PARKS**

As a result of the unseasonably warm weather, the skate rinks were delayed due to the time it took to build ice depth to safely perform the maintenance required. Based on the number of days ice was available for skating at each location, it was clear Nice Rinks provided significantly more skating opportunities when compared to floating rinks, land based rinks and lagoons. The late winter provided an opportunity for the team to focus on tree pruning, brush removal, fence line cleanups, and natural area restoration in numerous parks across the City.

The team supported preparation for a number of winter events including candlelight snowshoe hikes at Aldo Leopold Nature Center/Edna Taylor Conservation Park and Warner Park, Fantasy in Lights and Polar Plunge at Olin Park, Meet the UW Women's Hockey Team event at Vilas Park, Learn to Play Hockey event at Tenney Park, Learn to Ice Fish events at Brittingham Park, and the Learn to Cross-Country Ski event at Elver Park, to name a few.

The Parks Ecology Team coordinated with East Parks to continue working on an oak savanna restoration project at Door Creek Park. The area is being cleared of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle, along with other brush that has grown dense in the absence of fire. The area will be grazed in the spring and summer to control regrowth of unwanted vegetation without the use of herbicide. The Parks Ecology Team also coordinated with West Parks to remove a quarter acre of buckthorn and honeysuckle encroaching into the managed meadow at Raymond Ridge Park.

The Landscape Maintenance Workers and Parks Arborists, were able to prune hundreds of small trees throughout the system for health and proper structure. The inability to perform work off-pavement this winter, due to lack of frozen ground, restricted the tree removal work the Parks Arborists were able to perform.

A Spider Lift was purchased, which will increase efficiency and productivity of the Parks Arborist team. The lift will allow the Arborists to work in areas that were otherwise inaccessible. The lift can fit into smaller areas, can travel through a typical backyard fence gate, and travel over wet or unfrozen ground with minimal damage. The spider lift can work off-pavement most of the winter regardless of changing ground conditions, which should dramatically increase production and provide better adaptation to climate change.





Spider Lift



Door Creek Restoration



Vilas hockey board



Filling Elver Hockey

## **MALL CONCOURSE**

The crew kept busy with fluctuating work requirements. During snow events, the crew removed snow and ice from sidewalks and other areas, piling and hauling snow from the Capital Square. Several of the events resulted in heavy wet snow that froze and turned to ice if not quickly removed. All Mall staff are Salt Wise Certified and used only the amount of salt product needed to keep sidewalks safe and clear of ice. During warmer periods, staff focused on needed power washing of bus shelters, trash can, and bike racks, clearing them of salt and other debris.

Downtown events were sparse during the winter months, but Mall Maintenance teamed up with the BID for winter displays. The 100 block of State Street had a new holiday theme look, with newly refurbished snowflake lights on display and multiple trees decorated with lights. After the BID's "Shine On" event, Mall Maintenance decorated the remaining planters with landscape lighting to welcome daily visitors.

Support was provided to the Downtown District Committee with their evaluation of converting part of State Street to a pedestrian mall. The proposal could add attractive options for State Street, but any plan would need to address access for trash and recycle collection on State Street and hopefully fund any added work resulting from the change. A number of City Agencies provided input with Parks Operations specifically focused on the maintenance impact.



Snow Removal Operations



New Decorative Lighting

