Chapter Two
Parks Profile
“St. Joseph County Parks will enrich the community and the lives of St. Joseph County residents by conserving and caring for significant natural areas, promoting understanding and stewardship of our unique natural and cultural heritage through innovative programs and services, and enhancing visitor experiences through well-maintained park facilities.”

MISSION

“Continuing the Legacy of Greatness!”

VISION
GOALS AND STRATEGIES

1. PROTECT AND ENHANCE NATURAL AND CULTURAL RESOURCES
   - Reduce invasive species
   - Maintain pond health
   - Landscape with native plants
   - Control nuisance wildlife
   - Restore stream shorelines
   - Add park land contiguous to existing parks
   - Seek opportunities to add park land in underserved areas
   - Foster green and sustainability initiatives
   - Quantify the environmental value of the parks’ green space
   - Develop interpretive displays and signage that tell the stories within the parks

2. ENCOURAGE AND PROMOTE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES THAT HIGHLIGHT NATURAL RESOURCES
   - Create programs that promote healthy lifestyles
   - Create fitness-related programs
   - Market to new user groups
   - Establish new program partnerships
   - Enhance entrance signage
   - Promote connections to nature for children
   - Design programs for the Boomer generation
   - Create cooperative programs with ND-LEEF
   - Enhance communications with teachers
   - Promote partnerships with universities
   - Develop adventure programming

3. PROVIDE FUNDING AND SOUND ADMINISTRATION OF THE PARKS, PROGRAMS, AND OPERATIONS
   - Enhance employee workspaces and environment
   - Expand volunteerism
   - Establish Beverly D. Crone Restoration Area in partnership with Department of Public Works
   - Strengthen the Park Foundations
   - Invite millennial generation into leadership roles
   - Utilize grants to fund projects and programs
   - Maximize revenue from programming
   - Implement cost-saving initiatives
   - Upgrade technology
   - Obtained costs for goose repellent treatment
   - Installed new logo signage at all parks
   - Purchased portable holes for foot golf
   - Established a trail running group (St. Patrick’s County Park)

4. IMPROVE AND UPDATE PARK FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT
   - Pave roads and parking lots
   - Upgrade picnic buildings and shelters
   - Complete infrastructure repairs and improvements
   - Upgrade snow equipment
   - Update machinery such as bulldozers, mowers, groomers
   - Create use plan for amphitheater
   - Update rental equipment, such as skis, canoes, life jackets
   - Develop amenities that establish parks as destination sites
   - Improve accessibility and address upgrades as facilities are repaired and renovated

5. DEVELOP AND ENHANCE TRAILS (WITHIN PARKS AND WITHIN THE COUNTY)
   - Improve trail signage
   - Develop surfaced and measured walking trails
   - Continue work/construction of the LaSalle Trail
   - Establish fitness trail
   - Work with like-minded entities to foster trail connections and community connectivity

2014-2018 GOALS PROGRESS SUMMARY

The St. Joseph County Parks previous Five Year Master Plan spanned from 2014 through 2018. In that plan, five goals were established for the Parks Board and/or department. A synopsis of each follows, with highlights of accomplishments on each goal.

Protect and Enhance Natural Cultural Resources

(2017) St. Joseph County Parks received the Parks, Program and Facilities Award from the Great Lakes Park Training Institute for the partnership with the University of Notre Dame-Linked Experimental Ecosystem Facility (ND-LEEF) at St. Patrick’s County Park.

(2015) A bald eagle pair established a nest within the park and fledged one young. It, along with a similar nest in 2018 at Potato Creek State Park, was the first successful bald eagle nest in St. Joseph County in approximately 80 years.

(2015) Over 2,500 evergreen saplings were planted by staff and volunteers at Bendix Woods County Park for the restoration of the Studebaker Tree Sign, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Additional progress includes:
- Removed honeysuckle and autumn olive from old barn foundation with help of Boy Scouts (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Treated phragmites at ponds and parking areas (Spicer Lake Nature Preserve)
- Brush cut around Studebaker Tree Sign to help define and clear out dead plant life (Bendix Woods County Park)
- Cleared Callery Pear trees near 9-11 Memorial (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Nest predation for goose control (St. Patrick’s County Park and Ferrettie-Baugo Creek County Park)
- Obtained costs for goose repellant treatment at Pfeil Pavilion area (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Collaborated with SBVPA and Mishawaka St. Patrick’s County Park and Ferrettie-Baugo Creek County Park
- Created Studebaker history interpretive display in Nature Center (Bendix Woods County Park)

Encourage and Promote Outdoor Activities that Highlight Natural Resources

(2017) The interpretive team launched Tales to Trails, a literacy and environmental educational program for first graders with seven visits in the classroom incorporating a book and a hands-on habitat activity, and culminating in an outdoor session at Bendix Woods County Park. Multiple lessons with students effectively re-enforce science principles and build appreciation for local natural resources.

(2017) A record 4,000 people participated in canoe/kayak or paddleboard rentals based out of St. Patrick’s County Park.

(2015) In partnership with ND-LEEF, 18 national journalists visited from around the Midwest for a conference on climate change media coverage.

Additional progress includes:
- Incorporation of Boomer programs: Adventure Series in Spring-Summer and Fall Walking Series (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Offered a 5k run / 3k walk in August each year
- Partnered with the Mayor’s Bike Ride (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Purchased portable holes for golf
- Established a trail running group (St. Patrick’s County Park)
- Held programs including: Passport to Play, fall hayrides, Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, Disc Golf Tourney, WNIT Day in the Park, and Healthwin fishing for senior living community
- Installed new logo signage at all parks
- Expanded partnerships with Tales to Trails for Perley School and middle school activities for Greene School.
- Created several programs with ND-LEEF: Science at Sunset, Science Sunday, and various programs related to bald eagle nesting (St. Patrick’s County Park)
The measure of any great community is the quality of its parks.

Provide Funding and Sound Administration of the Parks, Programs and Operations

(2017) The St. Joseph County Parks Foundation participated in Give Local St. Joseph County with 72 other area non-profits. Funds raised benefited the Parks endowment fund and the LaSalle Trail. The Parks Foundation ranked fifth overall in the number of gifts received.

(2017) Partnerships were created and significant contributions were made by Bike Michiana Coalition.

(2015) Because of ideal weather, great media coverage, and a grant from the Hotel-Motel tax fund, the Sugar Camp Days in March hosted a record 3,200 visitors (Bendix Woods County Park).

(2015) The St. Joseph County Parks Foundation raised over $86,000 during Give Local St. Joseph County for the County Parks’ endowment fund within the Community Foundation of St. Joseph County.

Improve and Update Park Facilities and Equipment

(2017) Constructed an elevated walkway to Lancaster Lake with a grant from I/N Tek I/N Kote (Spicer Lake Nature Preserve)

(2017) Installed a new eagle cam linked to the internet at the active bald eagle nest (St. Patrick’s County Park)

(2017) Re-roofed the Red Barn at St. Patrick’s County Park and the Van Paris Shelter at Bendix Woods County Park

(2016) Milled, paved, and slurry-sealed over three miles of roads and parking areas, providing a major face lift that contributed to renewed visitation interest to the park (Bendix Woods County Park)


(2015) Key construction and maintenance projects included repairs to failed electrical and water lines, installation of a dry well, roof repairs, storage building remodeling, installation of baby-changing stations, and trail bridge work.

Upgrading facilities and deferred maintenance are ongoing issues for the County Parks with new items being added to the list each year while funding remains limited. Each year the department analyzes its biggest needs and assesses the available budget to determine which projects can be completed. Many of the action items still need attention on this list, but progress is continually made.

Develop and Enhance Trails (within parks and within the county)

(2017) Completed the next phase of the LaSalle Trail between Auten and Darden Roads with lead support from Bike Michiana Coalition, the Parks Foundation, and the County Hotel-Motel Tourism Development Fund.

(2016) Completed a 1/2-mile of the LaSalle Trail was completed between Cleveland and Darden Roads, including the installation of a HAWK Crossing, with support from the Dept. of Public Works.

Additional progress includes:
- Installed sign posts for Studebaker Tree trails and St. Patrick’s Tree sign
- Obtained a grant for repairs to the park trails (Spicer Lake Nature Preserve)

Summary

Major progress was made towards achieving the goals set forth in the previous plan. Two accomplishments that had a notable impact on the parks’ success was the completion of additional phases of the LaSalle Trail and continued development of the ND-LEEF partnership. Both of these endeavors will continue to be important over the next five years. The LaSalle Trail is part of regional planning efforts to create future trail connections. The ND-LEEF partnership should continue its successful programs and offerings while looking for new ways to expand the partnership.
PARKS DEPARTMENT

The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation system was established in 1966 with the formation of the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Board. The goal of the parks system then and now is to provide facilities and programs to residents of St. Joseph County that reflect the unique natural resources in the region. St. Joseph County Parks’ programs and facilities are available to all, regardless of race, color, national origin, limited English proficiency, sex, age, or disability. It is imperative to prioritize diversity in the master planning process and provide facilities, programs, and operations that welcome all users.

With 25 park staff members and decades of experience, the St. Joseph County Parks department continually strives to enhance facilities and recreational opportunities for the residents of the County that promote the rich cultural heritage of the area and the many natural features within the parks.

The St. Joseph County Parks Main Office is located at St. Patrick’s County Park. The contact information is:
50651 Laurel Road
South Bend, IN 46637
Phone: (574) 277-4828
Website: www.sjcparks.org
Email: stjosephcountyparks@sjcparks.org

The Department is comprised of three divisions: Administrative, Park Maintenance, and Interpretive and Leisure Services Team.

Administrative Team Role:
The Administrative Team provides interrelated office functions and support services to the operations of the Parks Department and its staff. The team also provides customer service for program and facility information and reservations.

Maintenance Team Role:
The Maintenance Team is responsible for maintaining over 1,400 acres, over 100,000 square feet of facilities, and a large vehicle and equipment fleet. The Maintenance division is committed to providing well-maintained park facilities to enhance the visitor experience. It provides extensive program support and insight into each of the parks and assists in planning and development.

Interpretive and Leisure Services Team Role:
Park interpretive naturalists and leisure services staff provide programs year-round for park visitors, school groups, college classes, families and organizations. With an emphasis on the wise use of our natural resources, the programs are designed to promote awareness of the natural world and lifelong outdoor activity. The programs drive attendance to the Parks and the related revenue supports ongoing operations. A sample listing of these programs can be found on page 62 of this document.

The interpretive naturalists also design interpretive signage and displays, produce a printed quarterly activity guide, coordinate the Friends of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake, and oversee resource management activities within the County Parks.

The leisure services team also manages the part-time ranger and gate staff, coordinates volunteer projects, and supports special events organized by outside groups.

DIRECTOR
Evie Kirkwood

DEPUTY DIRECTOR
Steve Slauson

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Administrative Manager
Kelley Herrera

Leisure Services Manager
Jamie Hartzke

Interpretive Services Manager
Leslie Wiltowski

Operations Manager
Carl Stopper

Facilities Manager
Jacob Kettring

Michigan
Indiana
PARKS BOARD

HISTORY
The Parks and Recreation Board, serving as the duly constituted agency, operates under the 1965 Indiana Park and Recreation Law (36-10-3). The board provides policy and fiscal oversight and direction for the department. The following purposes and objectives serve as a general philosophy for park operations:

• Recreation is an integral part of society; therefore, it is necessary to develop and maintain a system of regional parks. The St. Joseph County Parks contribute to the quality of life in our region and help bridge the gap between municipal parks and larger scale state and national parks. The St. Joseph County Parks Board shall work in cooperation with other parks and recreation agencies and public and private organizations in the area to strive for a balance of recreational programs and facilities with a minimum of duplication.

• Parks and recreation facilities and programs are engines of economic activity. The St. Joseph County Parks shall continue to contribute to regional economic growth by generating tourism and supporting a livable community that attracts and retains businesses and talent.

• Recreation within the St. Joseph County Parks is defined as leisure programs and environmental education/interpretive opportunities. Through the development and offering of recreation programs, the Parks promote attitudes, interests, knowledge, and skills that encourage life-long learning, connections to the outdoors, and wise use and understanding of our natural and cultural resources.

• Each park should be uniquely designed and developed so it exhibits its own character distinct from other parks in the system. Programs and facilities shall be developed in harmony with the natural beauty and physiography of the land, while incorporating best practices for landscaping, control of invasive species, and wildlife management to support healthy ecosystems and habitats.

• Establishing or maintaining important natural areas and areas of historical significance is an important focus for the Board. Where at all possible, only 20% of the land under Board ownership will be developed, with 80% left in a natural state. Additional land acquisition shall focus on property contiguous to existing parks or tracts of land of 100 acres or more.

• Park facilities and programs shall be designed to promote public health and general well-being through outdoor activity and connections to nature. The Board shall establish rules and regulations designed to protect park users, as well as promote appropriate use and care of facilities.

• To meet the ever-changing interests and priorities of the community, the park and recreation needs of the County will be assessed, interpreted, and expressed by a Master Plan to ensure directed growth, development, and consistency with these guidelines.

The Parks Board typically meets the third Tuesday of every month. During these meetings, the Board receives updates on department activity, reviews the budget including claims and donations, approves policies and actions of the department, and assesses the position of the department for strategic planning.

PARKS BOARD MEMBERS
Mr. Larry Catanazare - President
Mrs. Donna Pfeil - Vice President
Dr. Virginia Calvin - Secretary
Mr. John Ferrettie
Mr. John Gleissner
Mr. Thomas Panzica
Mr. Rick Kennedy

PARKS SUPPORT

ST. JOSEPH COUNTY PARKS FOUNDATION
Established in 1978, the St. Joseph County Parks Foundation is a 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization (dba Friends of St. Joseph County Parks) with the purpose of assisting the St. Joseph County Parks Board in facility and program enhancement and stewardship of natural and cultural resources. The mission of the Foundation is to raise funds, build relationships, and inspire generations of park enthusiasts.

The St. Joseph County Parks Foundation has supported the parks in many ways throughout its existence. Many capital improvement projects, program enhancements, and parks events have been made possible through Foundation donations and in-kind support. Accomplishments include land acquisition such as the 75 acres adjacent to Spicer Lake Nature Preserve, improvement projects such as the Pfeil Pavilion courtyard, LaSalle Trail, and barn-themed playground at St. Patrick’s County Park, and events such as the Running Wild 5k run/3k walk held each August at St. Patrick’s County Park. The Parks Foundation Board has also worked with the St. Joseph County Community Foundation to develop an endowment for the County Parks.

Parks Foundation Board Leadership
John Yarger - President
Kyle Copelin - Vice President
Pete Owssianowski - Secretary
Andrew Szczecichowsi - Treasurer
Additional members: Erin Bonin, Joel Bowers, David Deahl, David Fischgrund, James Goodhew, Matt Kahn, Michelle Kuehn, and Marge Riemschneider.

FRIENDS OF BENDIX WOODS AND SPICER LAKE
This organization provides support specifically for programs of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake. Through volunteer projects, assistance with programs or special events, and with fundraising activities, members of the Friends are valuable contributors to the quality of the County parks and have been since its founding.

PARK CONTRIBUTIONS
St. Joseph County Parks has a variety of funding sources available to educators to offset the cost of park program fees and transportation costs for natural and cultural history interpretive programs. The Grant and Scholarship programs have become a vital source for area educators, as they are faced with budgetary constraints and restrictions placed on offsite experiential trips.

School Scholarship Fund
The County Parks provide funding to schools to reduce educational program costs by 50%. The funding is secured through private donations.

Educational Supplies Program
The supply program allows program staff to purchase educational items to enhance natural and cultural history interpretive programs, such as binoculars for birding, and science and art supplies for creative programming for children and adults.

Transportation Assistance Grants
The Friends of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake fund a grant program to provide transportation cost assistance to school groups to travel to the County Parks for interpretive programs.
**COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Communities are finding that partnerships are effective and essential for maintaining and building the park system and its programs. Partnerships take many forms and may be long or short term. Partnership support may include:

- Donations (funds, materials, equipment, new amenities, land)
- Volunteers (events, maintenance, administrative)
- Programming, advocacy, fundraising

St. Joseph County Parks has a long-standing history of working with the community to develop partnerships and leverage available resources. Parks are integral to the quality of the community, and many individuals, groups, and organizations enjoy being involved to help make the parks the best they can be. A partial list of partnerships includes:

- ArcelorMittal
- Apple Cider Century Ride
- Better World Books
- Bike Michiana Coalition
- Center for Hospice
- Clay Fire Territory
- Davey Resources Group
- HealthWorks! Kids Museum
- Friends of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake
- Friends of St. Joseph County Parks
- I/N Tek I/N Kote
- Indiana University South Bend
- The History Museum
- Indiana Audubon Society
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Joint Institute for Nuclear Astrophysics at University of Notre Dame
- Memorial Children’s Hospital
- Martin’s Supermarkets
- Michiana Astronomical Society
- Michiana Watershed
- NIPSCO
- Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association
- New Carlisle Lions Club
- Notre Dame Linked Experimental Ecosystem Facility
- Orbis Environmental Consulting
- Orienteering Cincinnati
- Outpost Sports
- Pets Connect
- Shirley Heinze Land Trust
- South Bend Adventure Club
- South Bend-Elkhart Audubon Society
- South Bend Brew Werks
- South Bend Fire Department
- South Bend Venues, Parks & Arts
- Studebaker National Museum
- Running for Life
- Southside Disc Golf Club
- St. Joseph County Health Department
- St. Joseph County Public Library
- St. Joseph County Soil & Water Conservation District
- Saint Mary’s College
- Strombeck Photography
- University of Notre Dame Center for Social Concerns
- University of Notre Dame Office of Community & Public Affairs
- University of Notre Dame
- Visit South Bend-Mishawaka
- Wild Birds Unlimited
- WNIT Public Television

**BUDGET REVIEW**

St. Joseph County Parks Board receives the majority of its funding through property tax levies. The Parks General Fund is used to finance day-to-day maintenance, and administration expenses. The fund is sourced by property tax, financial institutions tax, and excise tax. The County Parks also has a Non-Reverting Fund derived from user fees to supplement operations. In order to supplement the budget and maintain necessary services and operations, the Board may seek other revenue/funding sources, which include:

- User fees including gate fees, program fees, and reservations
- Financial and in-kind support from the Parks Foundation and Friends of Bendix Woods & Spicer Lake
- Community partnerships
- Grants and/or donations to fund capital expense projects

Through its “Parks as Partners” program, the County Parks provide discounted or free programming through donations and sponsorships or direct write-off to community organizations including Center for the Homeless, Jewish Federation, Healthwin, Logan Center, St. Margaret’s House, SOLO, Team RWB Local Veterans, the YWCA, and many schools.

**Volunteering in the Parks**

Many groups listed on this page and many other community groups and individuals provide volunteer efforts every year. In 2018, the total volunteer hours tracked was 3,300. At the rate of $23.73 per hour, as determined by The Independent Sector, the value of the volunteer effort equaled $78,309.

**SUMMARY**

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<th>Year</th>
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Budget development and review takes place in the spring and summer and approval of the next year’s budget occurs in fall. In 2019, the Parks and Recreation Board budget is $1,971,968. The budget is allocated into the following categories:

- 1000 - Personnel Services (Salaries/Benefits)
- 2000 - Supplies
- 3000 - Services and Charges
- 4000 - Equipment and Vehicles