

BELLEVUE STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN

In advance of the 100th anniversary of Iowa state parks in 2020, the Department of Natural Resources is developing plans for future recreation opportunities that are compatible with the resources of each state park.

BELLEVUE STATE PARK - A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1917, the Legislature passed the State Park Act, authorizing the new Board of Conservation to begin creation of an Iowa State Park system encompassing some of the state's most unique and threatened natural, scenic, and historic places to ensure that these would be protected for the future.

The Mississippi River bluff lands encompassed many of the most significant natural and cultural values identified by the Board for preservation and enhancement through state park designation: soaring, scenic wooded bluffs overlooking the river, with a rich array of flora and fauna as well as a long history of human presence by Native Americans and later European explorers and settlers. In 1919, the Board prepared a detailed report describing some of these special places and establishing priorities for their acquisition. The first state park, Backbone in Delaware County, was dedicated in 1920 and as the decade progressed, more followed in rapid succession.

In 1925, the Bellevue Park Association approached the Iowa Board of Conservation with an offer of 47 acres of beautiful bluff land south of the city of Bellevue. The Association had bought the tract in hopes that a state park would be established there someday so that Iowans could experience the scenic natural beauty of the dramatic wooded dolomite bluffs and majestic Mississippi River below, as well as Native American burial mounds of the Woodland Culture. The Board recognized the importance of the area and quickly accepted the Association's offer (purchase price \$1!).

Additional land was acquired over the next several

years. A road up the steep hill was built using inmate labor from the Anamosa penitentiary and the park was officially dedicated on August 24, 1928. A rustic country club building was constructed in the late 1920's by the Bellevue Country Club (again with inmate labor) which oversaw a nine hole golf course adjacent to the park. In 1929, the Board of Conservation took over the Oak Lodge which was available to the public by reservation. The park quickly became a popular destination for picnickers, hikers, sight-seers, and, later, campers.

The primary state park emphasis during the early years was acquisition of significant areas before they were irretrievably damaged or destroyed through forces such as agriculture, logging, and urbanization. Typically, formal outdoor recreation facilities were few. But, as the 1920's progressed, the economy improved as well as the state's roads and highways. Folks began to demand more recreational opportunities in their state parks.

The Great Depression of 1929 slowed state park work and it wasn't until 1933 and the "New Deal" of President Franklin Roosevelt that things began to pick up in national and state parks through programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, and the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, which put thousands to work in national and over 40 Iowa state parks building structures from park benches, to lodges, cabins, beaches, roads and dams, largely with hands-on labor and locally available materials.

At Bellevue, while the CCC and WPA did not have a presence, much significant work had already been done using inmate labor in coordination with the local community.

In the 1960's, the Iowa Conservation Commission, successor to the Board of Conservation, bought 300 acres two miles south of the original park. The new property was called the Dyas Unit after the former property owners and became the location of the park's campground which featured electricity and

modern restroom and shower facilities as well as a staff residence.

The original portion of the park was now called the Nelson Unit in honor of the late Reverend Laurence Nelson of Bellevue who had been a member of the Iowa Conservation Commission. After his death, a monument boulder with bronze plaque, flag pole and perennial plantings was dedicated in his memory on October 11, 1970.

In 1972, a new lodge was constructed at the Nelson Unit to replace the old Oak Lodge which, because of its age and deterioration, was not feasible for renovation (it was eventually destroyed by fire in 1973). A unique triangular picnic shelter was constructed in the Nelson Unit in 1976 through the assistance of State Senator Richard Norpel, Sr. of Bellevue in securing legislative funding (he also assisted in securing funds for the new lodge).

In 1984, the old Bellevue Country Club clubhouse was, with a great deal of hard work by park staff, converted into the South Bluff Nature Center to help provide visitors with a better understanding of the outstanding natural and cultural resources of the park. The state had purchased the club property in 1975 and the golf course was relocated to a location north of Bellevue.

Around that same time, the idea for a truly unique new park feature surfaced. The Garden Sanctuary for Butterflies was an idea conceived by Judy Pooler of Bellevue and pursued by park staff with the dedicated assistance of many members of the local community. Over 150 separate plots surrounding a pond were planted with more than 90 plant varieties to attract and support butterflies. The Butterfly Garden in Bellevue’s Nelson Unit has remained a focal point for the park and an inspiration for similar efforts throughout the Midwest.

Today, Bellevue State Park’s 770 acres offer a wide range of opportunities to its visitors. In addition to the Butterfly Garden and South Bluff Nature Center, the Nelson Unit has: a popular lodge; three shelters; an overlook and over two miles of trail; and, the adjacent 220 acre wildlife area with prairie plantings and wildlife food plots which is open for public hunting.

The Dyas Unit also offers over four miles of trail, two shelters with great views, and the park’s modern campground with shower building and 46 campsites, including 31 electric, plus a playground.

After public input and extensive discussion with the park staff, the preliminary Bellevue State Park Recreation Use Plan follows.

Bellevue State Park Existing Facilities		Existing Facilities	
Existing Facilities	Quantity	Existing Facilities	Quantity
Butterfly Garden	1	Campground - Total Sites	46
Nature Center	1	Campsites - Non-Electric	14
Day-use Lodge	1	Campsites - 50 AMP Electric	31
Shelter	5	Campsites - Full Hook-up	1
Playground	2	Boat Ramp	1
Restroom - Seasonal (Flush)	2		
Restroom - Year-round	2		

Table (Above): Bellevue State Park’s Existing Facilities

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF BELLEVUE STATE PARK

GOAL –

Enhance visitor outdoor recreation and education experiences by improving or upgrading Bellevue State Park’s facilities. This will help to: promote visitor mental and physical health enjoyment and wellbeing; encourage family time and memory making in the outdoors; expand the availability of accessible facilities while protecting the natural resources for the future; create awareness of environmental issues: and, generate economic activity in the region.

OBJECTIVES –

BUTTERFLY GARDEN - CONTINUE TO PROMOTE THE BUTTERFLY GARDEN AS A PARK FOCAL POINT

ISSUES:

- Existing gravel walkway is not accessible by all visitors.
- Needs updated interpretation at the garden site.

PROPOSALS:

- Construct a paved walkway from the parking lot to the butterfly garden to enhance visitor access.
- Update interpretive signage at the garden.



Image (above): Butterfly Garden at Bellevue State Park

NATURE CENTER – PROMOTE THE NATURE CENTER AS A STRONG OUTDOOR EDUCATIONAL TOOL

ISSUES:

- Existing structure aged and deteriorated, lacks adequate classroom space and high quality interpretive exhibits.
- Parking lot does not provide sufficient capacity for current and anticipated usage levels.

PROPOSALS:

- Replace nature center with a new facility with adequate classroom space and upgraded interpretive exhibits.
- Improve and enlarge the parking lot to safely accommodate both personal vehicles and buses.

PICNICKING – ENHANCE THE POPULAR PICNIC AREAS IN THE NELSON UNIT

ISSUE:

- Existing picnic facilities are outdated and inadequate for current and anticipated levels of usage.

PROPOSALS:

- Replace brick shelter with large rustic structure with lights and electrical outlets.
- Enlarge parking area for both shelter and playground.
- Replace 2 inadequate pit restrooms (year-round) with modern flush (seasonal) and a new pit restroom (year-round).
- Renovate historic shelter near overlook.
- Provide adequate drinking fountains and hydrants.
- Link all facilities for improved accessibility.



Image (above): Replace brick shelter (above) with large, rustic shelter

OVERLOOK – PROMOTE VISITOR ACCESSIBILITY TO THE OVERLOOK

ISSUE:

- Existing gravel walkway limits visitor access to the overlook

PROPOSAL:

- Provide paved walkway from parking lot to overlook



Image (above): View from overlook at Bellevue State Park

ENHANCE ACCESS TO AND USAGE OF THE DYAS UNIT'S PICNIC, CAMPING, AND OTHER FACILITIES

ISSUE:

- Visitation to the Dyas Unit is diminished by the existing gravel access road from Highway 52.

PROPOSAL:

- Explore the possibility of improving vehicular access to the Dyas Unit, through discussion as well as possible partnerships/coordination with other public and private entities, and individuals including Jackson County.

ISSUE:

- Existing Dyas Unit picnic facilities are outdated and inadequate for current and anticipated levels of usage.

PROPOSALS:

- Renovate both shelters to include lighting and electrical systems.
- Add rustic railings at east and west shelter areas.
- Provide adequate drinking fountains and hydrants.

ISSUES:

- Dyas Unit Campground requires work to improve camper access as well as upgrade campsite utility systems.
- Small, tight campground limits vehicular maneuverability especially for larger camping units.

PROPOSALS:

- Improve maneuverability for larger campers by reducing the number of existing non-electric campsites.
- Add full service pull through RV sites by converting underutilized dead end cul-de-sac road to camping - contingent upon access road to Dyas Unit being paved.

PLAYGROUNDS - EXPAND PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PARK VISITORS

ISSUE:

- Older playgrounds with traditional equipment typically provide limited, less challenging, non-wheelchair accessible play elements.

PROPOSAL:

- Replace both outdated playgrounds with play equipment that includes enjoyable and challenging “nature themed” elements such as climbing rocks, log/tree trunks, sand, vine tunnels, and tall grasses.
- Add climbing rocks to campground.



Image (above): Example of artificial climbing rock play element

RECREATION USE PLAN

Implementation of the Bellevue Recreation Use Plan will help ensure that this classic Iowa state park remains a premier outdoor destination in the future. It was prepared with the input of park staff as well as park visitors/regional stakeholders and will act as a detailed and practical blueprint for future action. All improvements will be completed with due regard for Bellevue State Park’s unique natural resources and great scenic qualities. In addition, because of the significant Native American presence there, all necessary archaeological investigations will be completed prior to project initiation.

The completion of a recreation use plan for each park will help determine the most effective allocation of funds on a project-by-project basis for the Iowa state park system as a whole. Bellevue’s plan recommendations will be accomplished as necessary funding becomes available from ongoing sources as well as through partnering opportunities which may arise.

High Priority	Cost Estimate
Nelson Unit	
Restroom - Seasonal (Flush) - New	\$150,000
Restroom - Year-round - Replace	\$30,000
Septic Tank and Field Filter - New	\$35,000
Shelter - Large - Replace Brick Shelter	\$150,000
Shelter Parking Lot - Pave	\$90,000
Nature Center/Park Office - Replace	\$750,000
Dyas Unit	
Shower Building - Replace	\$310,000
Electricity to Overlook Shelter - Add	\$2,250
4-Sided Interpretive Kiosk - Campground - New	\$30,000
Park wide	
Interpretive Panels - New (14)	\$56,000
Park Orientation Panels - New (3)	\$3,000
High Priority Total: \$1,606,250	
Medium Priority	
Nelson Unit	
Lodge - Remodel	\$75,000
Butterfly Garden - Pave Trail	\$160,000
Historic Shelter - Restore	\$62,500
Lodge/Overlook Parking Lots - Provide	
Accessible Parking	\$53,064
Dyas Unit	
Restroom - Year-round - New (2)	\$74,000
Wastewater Gravity Line - Replace	\$280,000
Medium Priority Total: \$704,564	
Low Priority	
Nelson Unit	
Park Office/Shop - Replace	\$510,000
Electricity to Shelters - Add	\$22,500
Electric Line - Butterfly Garden - Add	\$9,000
Dyas Unit	
Renovate Shelter (Existing)	\$20,000
Renovate Shelter (Existing)	\$20,000
Playground - Replace	\$80,000
Play Rock in Campground - New	\$20,000
Camp Pad Full Hook-up - Upgrade (15)	\$75,000
Camp Pad Non-Electric - Upgrade (10)	\$20,000
Lift Station - Campground - New	\$25,000
Sewage Lagoon - Replace	\$250,000
Low Priority Total: \$1,051,500	

Table (above): Bellevue State Park Project Priorities

BELLEVUE STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN



BELLEVUE

NELSON UNIT

PARK SHOP
 • Replace Existing Shop (**Proposed**)

PICNIC AREA (A)
 • 1 Overlook Shelter - Historic (Existing)
 ○ Renovate (**Proposed**)
 • Walkway to Overlook - Paved (**Proposed**)

PICNIC AREA (B)
 • 1 Restroom - Year-round (Existing)
 ○ Replace (**Proposed**)

MISSISSIPPI RIVER ACCESS
 • 1 Boat Ramp (Existing)
 • 1 Restroom - Seasonal (Existing)
 ○ Replace (**In Process**)

PARK RESIDENCE

DAY - USE LODGE
 • 1 Day-Use Lodge (Existing)

INTERPRETIVE AREA
 • 1 Butterfly Garden (Existing)
 • Nature Center/Park Office (Existing)
 ○ Replace (**Proposed**)
 • 1 Interpretive Trail (Existing)
 ○ Pave Trail (**Proposed**)

PICNIC AREA (C)
 • 1 Brick Shelter (Existing)
 ○ Replace (**Proposed**)
 • Replace Year-round Restroom with Seasonal (Flush) Restroom (**Proposed**)

DYAS UNIT

RIVERVIEW CAMPGROUND
 • Renovate Shelter (Existing)
 • 1 Restroom - Year-round (**Proposed**)
 • Full Hook-up Campsites (**Proposed**)
 • Trail - Unpaved (**Proposed**)
 ○ Remove dead end/cul-de-sac road with unpaved trail
 • 1 Overlook Railing (**Proposed**)

PICNIC AREA (D)
 • Renovate Shelter (Existing)
 • 1 Playground (Existing)
 ○ Replace (**Proposed**)

CAMPGROUND
 • 31 Campsites - Electric (Existing)
 • 15 Campsites - Non-Electric (Existing)
 ○ Reduce Non-Electric Campsites (**Proposed**)
 • 1 Shower Building - Seasonal (Existing)
 ○ Replace Shower Building (**Proposed**)
 • Add 10 Full Hook-Up Campsites (**Proposed**)
 • 1 Small Playground - Play Rock (**Proposed**)

PARK RESIDENCE

LEGEND

- Park Boundary
- Trails (Existing)
- Roads
- Water