

## BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA 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.

### BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA - A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Iowa's first state park, Backbone, was dedicated in 1920 and more quickly followed - special places chosen for acquisition before their truly significant natural and cultural features were irretrievably lost through forces such as agriculture, logging, and urbanization. Recreation facilities were generally few in the early parks. As the 1920's progressed, however, there was a growing demand for more active things to do in state parks; pursuits like camping, swimming, and boating.

The Great Depression of 1929 stalled state park efforts, but President Roosevelt's "New Deal" programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, and the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, brought thousands to work in a rapidly expanding park system building cabins, lodges, beaches, shelters, roads, dams and a myriad other structures. World War II again slowed state park efforts, but peacetime brought another great expansion, with a number of new parks in southern Iowa. Camping became especially popular in the 1950's and 60's.

The state park emphasis on active recreation reached its peak with the early 1960's "Large Lakes" program of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Conservation of Outdoor Resources created to identify parts of the state lacking in water oriented recreation opportunities.

Initial target locations for "large lake" projects were: the Ft. Dodge/Brushy Creek area, the Sioux City area, and the Fayette County/Volga River

area in northeast Iowa. In June, 1967, the Iowa Legislature appropriated funding for lake projects at Brushy Creek, Volga River, and Big Creek near Des Moines, part of the Saylorville Lake project of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

These new areas were to feature large lakes of around 1,000 acres in size and provide a maximum of outdoor recreation opportunities through public hunting in designated portions of the sites and 24 hours lake access for anglers.

The process of development at Brushy Creek has been lengthy—from the onset of land acquisition in the early 1970's to the present day when work is proceeding on the beach complex; a story marked by controversy with many competing forces coming into play.

By the late 1970's, considerable land had been acquired and was being enjoyed by the public. Equestrian activity was a primary activity and a primitive campground was available for horseback riders; first along the banks of Brushy Creek, then at a site further north and finally at the present location west of the lake. A trail system was gradually developed, at first largely by rider activity. Brushy Creek was also becoming popular for public hunting and sight-seeing. Developed facilities were few.

Lake construction lagged due to the pace of land acquisition, slowed by the use of eminent domain for some parcels, as well as controversy over the project's effects on the environment and recreational usage. A formal Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared and a number of lake alternatives considered, with a 690 acre lake eventually selected. In addition, 1,750 acres of additional land were acquired to the south to afford additional outdoor recreation opportunities for equestrians and other area users. At 6,500 acres, Brushy Creek remains the largest unit within the Iowa state park system.

The dam was completed in 1998 and the lake, with an average depth of 29 feet and 21 miles of shoreline, was filled in April, 1999. A special

effort was made to provide quality fish habitat and shoreline protection to ensure high water quality for angling and other recreational activities.

Brushy Creek hosts 45 miles of carefully planned multi-use trails, which provide opportunities for hiking, biking, equestrian use, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling. The DNR master plan for Brushy Creek proposed two modern campgrounds for equestrians, one on the west of the lake and another in the newly acquired land to the south and these have been completed, each with a mix of electric, full hook-up, and non-electric sites, modern shower and restroom facilities, hitch rails, and other equestrian support features. The modern non-equestrian campground proposed on the south-west corner of the lake near the beach was also completed, with shower and restroom facilities as well as electric and full hook-up sites.

Several boat ramps are located on the lake as well as an accessible fishing pier. Picnic facilities, two shooting ranges, and an area office/service complex have been completed. A major beach renovation is in progress which will include improved access, a concession building, and cabanas. It is anticipated that a lodge, shelter, and cabins will also be built over the next several years.

Brushy Creek is open to public hunting activity. Habitat management leases are used as a land management tool. Approximately 1,000 acres are in row crop and forage production with 20% of the row crops left over winter for food plots. Prairie grasses and forbs have been planted on around 800 acres. The Prairie Resource Center of the DNR Wildlife Bureau located at Brushy Creek provides a source of prairie grass and flower (forb) seed for prairie propagation work by Iowa public agencies and personnel also assist in area prairie management activities.

### BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA - EXISTING FACILITIES

Existing Facilities	Quantity	Existing Facilities	Quantity
Beach	1	Non-Equestrian Campground	
Shelters	2	Total Sites	47
Playgrounds	2	Electric	39
Equestrian Day Use	2	Full Hook-up	8
Shooting Range	2	Equestrian Campgrounds (2)	
Trails	45 miles	Total Sites	217
Restroom - Seasonal	6	Electric	112
Restroom - Year-round	6	Full Hook-up	8

Table (above): Brushy Creek State Recreation Area's Existing Facilities

## A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA

### GOAL -

Enhance visitor outdoor recreation and education experiences by upgrading facilities and trails at Brushy Creek State Recreation Area. This will help to: promote visitor mental and physical health, enjoyment, and wellbeing; encourage family time and making memories; expand the availability of accessible facilities; protect natural resources for the future; and, generate economic activity in the region.

### OBJECTIVES -

#### ENTRANCE PORTALS AND ORIENTATION - CREATE APPROPRIATE STONE AND TIMBER ENTRANCE FEATURES

The park visitor experience begins with a first impression at the park entrance. Many older parks have massive stone entrance portals that signify "entrance" into a special place.

#### ISSUE:

- Current entrance signage does not represent the state's largest recreation area.

#### PROPOSAL:

- Construct stone and timber entrance portals following state park design guidelines at the two main entrances.



Image (above): New "Design Guide" entry portal

## OVERNIGHT ACCOMMODATIONS - CABINS FOR ALL USER GROUPS

The Brushy Creek State Recreation Area master plan included the provision of family cabins (year-round) and camping cabins (seasonal) for both equestrian and non-equestrian preferences.

### ISSUE:

- Camping is currently the only option for overnighting at the park, while cabin facilities are becoming increasingly popular across the state.

### PROPOSAL:

- Construct (12) year-round family cabins - (5) non-equestrian, (5) equestrian, and (2) four-bedroom cabins in The Pines.
- Construct (6) camping cabins (seasonal) - (3) located in beach non-equestrian and (3) in north equestrian campground.



Image (above): New "Design Guide" picnic shelter

## LAKE VIEW PICNIC AREA - FULLY DEVELOP THE AREA AS THE PREMIER DAY-USE FACILITY

The Lake View picnic area has the most accessible shoreline with one of the best lake views and is in close proximity to the beach and the non-equestrian campground and cabin area. The park's master plan identified the following facilities to be included: a lodge, large picnic shelter, restrooms, playground, and a paved walkway connecting each feature.

### ISSUE:

- Although some of the plans are underway, efforts to complete the remaining Master Plan facilities needs to continue.

### PROPOSAL:

- Add a year-round lodge with parking.
- Add a restroom for the shelter currently under construction.
- Add a "nature-themed" playground.
- Construct a 4-sided interpretive kiosk.



Image (above): New "Design Guide" restroom facility

## EQUESTRIAN FACILITIES - FULLY DEVELOP ALL OVERNIGHT AND DAY-USE FACILITIES

### ISSUE:

- North and south equestrian campgrounds do not accommodate modern camper needs.

### PROPOSAL:

- Upgrade and add 50-amp electric service to (90) campsites and add full utility hook-ups to (15) campsites in the northern campground.
- Add 50-amp electric service to (12) campsites, surface (22) existing campsites, and add a new shower facility in the southern campground.
- Add (3) camping cabins in the northern campground and (5) year-round family cabins.
- Add a shelter to northern day-use area.
- Construct check-in stations and 4-sided interpretive kiosks at both campgrounds.



Image (above): Scenic view at Brushy Creek State Recreation Area

## PARK HEADQUARTERS - ENHANCE VISITOR ACCESS AND PROVIDE EFFICIENT OPERATIONAL WORK AND EQUIPMENT STORAGE FACILITIES

### ISSUE:

- The park lacks equipment storage.

### PROPOSAL:

- Add equipment storage building.

## RECREATION USE PLAN

Implementation of the Brushy Creek Recreation Use Plan will help ensure that this classic Iowa state park remains a premier outdoor destination in the future. The draft plan was prepared with the input of park staff and will have review and input of current proposed park improvements from park visitors/regional stakeholders. It will be a detailed and practical blueprint for future action. All improvements will be completed with due regard for Brushy Creek State Recreation Area's unique natural resources and great scenic qualities.

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. Brushy Creek's plan recommendations will be accomplished as necessary funding becomes available from ongoing sources as well as through partnering opportunities which may arise.



Image (above): Brushy Creek family fun

## BRUSHY CREEK STATE RECREATION AREA RECREATION USE PLAN PROJECT PRIORITIES

High Priority (1)	Cost Estimate
Upgrade (50) campsites to 50-amp electric and (15) to full hook-up - N. Equestrian Campground	\$362,500
Pave visitor parking lot - N. Equestrian Campground	TBD
Upgrade (12) campsites to 50-amp electric and upgrade (22) sites to gravel pads -S. Equestrian Campground	\$104,000
New Lodge - Lake View Picnic Area	\$1,500,000
New restroom - seasonal - Lake View Picnic Area	\$100,000
Paved bike trail - 3 miles - Lake View Picnic Area	TBD
<b>High Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$TBD</b>
<b>Medium Priority (2)</b>	
Add (2) family cabins - The Pines	\$300,000
Add (5) family cabins - Beach Area	\$750,000
Add (5) family cabins - N. Equestrian Campground	\$750,000
New equipment storage building - Park Headquarters	\$110,000
Restrooms (2) - year-round - Shooting Range/Picnic Area	\$160,000
Add (4) 4-sided interpretive kiosks - Parkwide	\$120,000
Add (1) orientation panel - S. Day-Use	\$4,000
Add (10) interpretive panels - Trailhead/trails	\$10,000
<b>Medium Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$2,204,000</b>
<b>Low Priority (3)</b>	
Add (3) camper cabins - to both Equestrian and Non-Equestrian Beach Campground	\$210,000
Add check-in station - Each Campground (x3)	\$30,000
New shower building - S. Equestrian Campground	\$300,000
Playground - Climbing Rocks - Beach	\$30,000
Add shelter - N. Equestrian Day Use	\$80,000
Add shelter - Water Access/Picnic Area	\$80,000
<b>Low Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$730,000</b>

Table (above): Brushy Creek State Recreation Area's Project Priorities

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