

## LEDGES 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.

### LEDGES STATE PARK - A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1917, the Iowa Legislature passed the landmark State Park Act, authorizing the new Board of Conservation to begin creation of a state park system that would protect some of Iowa's most significant and unique natural, scenic, and historic places before they were to be lost by forces such as agriculture, logging, and urbanization.

One of those special places was the scenic "Ledges" in Boone County, a place of unique beauty with its dramatic wooded sandstone bluffs along the Des Moines River and the Pea's Creek canyon and long Native American presence.

The first land acquisition took place in 1921 and dedication of the new Ledges State Park occurred with great fanfare on November 9, 1924. During the first decade of Iowa state parks, primary attention was placed on acquisition of significant natural and cultural areas and recreation facilities were typically few. This began to change as the increasing economic prosperity in the 1920's created a demand for more opportunities to camp, swim, picnic, hike, boat and otherwise enjoy oneself in the out-of-doors.

The Great Depression of 1929 stalled state park efforts. But, when President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps, the CCC, and the Works Progress Administration, the WPA, came onboard in 1933, a new era of Iowa state parks began.

The CCC and WPA put thousands to work in national and state parks. They constructed a tremendous number of facilities ranging from

benches, signs, and trails to shelters, lodges, beach facilities, dams, roads, and water and sewer systems.

The CCC constructed a stone shelter and concession building in lower Ledges, the picnic shelter in the Oak Woods Picnic area, concrete fords and bridges in the Pea's Creek canyon, the beautiful stone arch footbridge, the Lost Lake dam, park entry portals and checking station, and other structures. The WPA provided some incidental brush clearing effort.

World War II brought an end to the CCC and WPA as well as park work in general until peace time, when, an era of park system expansion began, including new parks and an explosion of visitation, especially in the campgrounds.

The controversial federal Saylorville Lake Flood Control project of the late 1960's brought major changes to Ledges. The new dam would result in periodic flooding in the lower Ledges. While this had occurred prior to the impoundment, flooding duration would now be longer resulting in more potential damage to park facilities and vegetation. After extensive negotiation with the Corps of Engineers, an agreement was reached whereby the state would receive funding for an additional 385 acres of land, facility relocation and construction, vegetative restoration work, as well as a downstream corridor to Des Moines.

The Conservation Commission (now DNR) had prepared a Ledges State Park Master Plan in 1972 to help provide guidance during the ongoing Saylorville dam process/controversy. In 1981, the plan was revised to assist in the Ledges State Park mitigation/redevelopment effort and to help resolve issues such as vehicular traffic in the canyon. Ultimately, the road was opened to one-way traffic with a period of closure during the winter months.

A campground was constructed on the newly acquired land with 95 sites (40 electric, one full hook-up, and 42 non-electric and 12 walk-in sites), two shower and toilet buildings, and a playground on lands acquired as a result of the Saylorville

agreement. The stone shelter and concession building in the lower Ledges, which had been so affected by flooding, was painstakingly disassembled and relocated to higher ground where it has once again become a popular park facility.

Ledges, as one of the original state parks, had experienced tremendous use since the 1920's. Much of the focus of this activity was the Pea's Creek canyon area where visitors had literally worn soil down to bedrock levels in some places, creating not only aesthetic but also safety problems. In the 1980's, an effort began to "rescue" this and other deteriorated segments of the Ledges trail system, with tons of rock, railroad ties, and other materials to surface trails, build water bars, step systems, and railings, on an intuitive, "design with nature" basis. In addition, a handicapped accessible trail was constructed at the Lost Lake Area in the southern part of the park.

### LEDGES STATE PARK- EXISTING FACILITIES

Existing Facilities	Quantity	Existing Facilities	Quantity
Shelters	2	Campground	
Playground	1	Total Sites	95
Trails	4.5 miles	Hike-in	12
Restrooms		Electric	40
Seasonal (Flush)	5	Youth Group	1
Year-round	1		

Table (Above): Ledges State Park Existing Facilities

## A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF LEDGES STATE PARK

### GOAL -

The over-riding goal of the recreation use plan is the enhancement of visitor outdoor recreation and educational experiences by improving facilities and trails at Ledges State Park. This will promote visitor mental and physical health; encourage family time and making memories; protect natural resources for the future; create awareness and appreciation of the park's unique resources; and, generate economic activity in the region.

The previous master plans for Ledges shared goals consistent with the 2015 Recreation Use Plan: 1) protect, enhance and interpret the site's unique, rare, and significant cultural and natural resources in order to ensure their future, as well as increase visitor understanding and appreciation, 2) provide traditional recreation facilities compatible with the resources, and 3) undertake comprehensive resource management.

## OBJECTIVES, ISSUES, AND OPPORTUNITIES

### OBJECTIVES -

#### HISTORIC STRUCTURES - MAINTAIN THE INTEGRITY OF THE PARK'S HISTORIC STRUCTURES

The majority of stone and log structures at Ledges State Park were completed between 1933 and 1937 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). These structures are a legacy to be treasured and enrich the park visitor experience. Previous restoration efforts were completed at the Henning shelter (1998, 2001), the Oak Woods shelter (1998), and the stone arch bridge (2009).

### ISSUE:

- Historically significant structures and trails require ongoing maintenance and periodic restoration efforts to preserve their integrity.

### PROPOSALS:

- Restore (2) entrance portals and add a stone feature marking the entrance to the canyon in Oak Woods Picnic Area.
- Document and restore the unique carved stone trailhead monuments.
- Remove deteriorating stone restroom and repurpose the stone material.
- Continually monitor historic structures to identify necessary restoration efforts such as log rot replacement and tuck pointing.

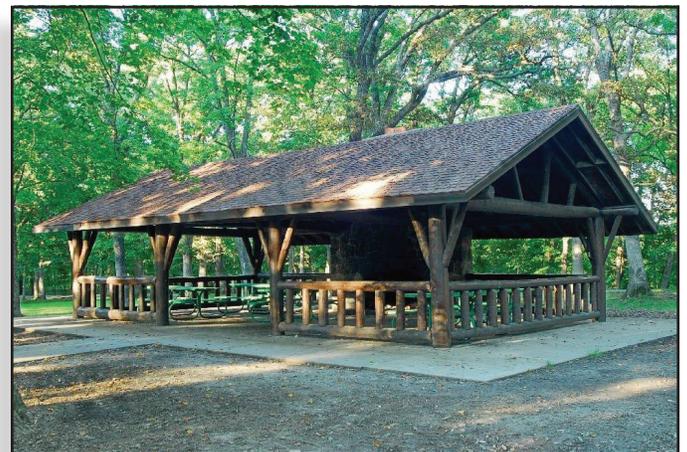


Image (above): Existing Oak Woods shelter at Ledges State Park

## PARK ORIENTATION AND INTERPRETATION - INCREASE WAY-FINDING AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES PARK-WIDE

### ISSUE:

- In a park filled with natural and cultural resources, there are prime locations where signage would provide interpretive and educative opportunities.

### PROPOSALS:

- Construct 4-sided interpretive kiosks at the Oak Woods picnic area, the Henning shelter, and Lost Lake nature trail.
- Add interpretive panels at Inspiration Point (2), and Dragon Trail.

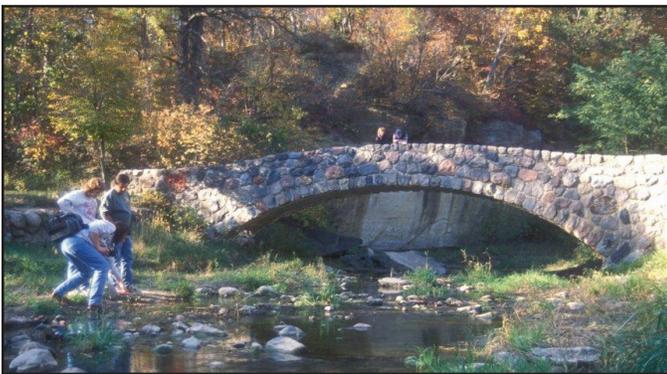


Image (above): Stone Bridge at Ledges State Park

## CAMPGROUND - UPDATE EXISTING CAMPGROUND TO MEET THE NEEDS OF MODERN CAMPERS

### ISSUES:

- Developed in 1985, the existing campground's facilities are in need of upgrades.
- The campground's current roadway is narrow and difficult for larger recreation vehicles (RV) to maneuver.

### PROPOSALS:

- Add check-in station, remodel (2) shower buildings, replace playground, replace year-round restroom, replace and expand the RV dump station.
- Upgrade the RV campsite loop's (40) existing electric campsites to 50-amp electric service, add full hook-up services to (11) campsites, and add rock surface camp pads to the campsites.
- Upgrade the tent loop's (10) non-electric campsites to 50-amp electric service.
- Widen the campground roadways.

## PICNIC AREAS - ENHANCE THE EXISTING PICNIC AREA FACILITIES

### ISSUE:

- The park's picnic areas need updating to provide the best possible picnicking and recreational opportunities for park users.

### PROPOSALS:

- Replace year-round restroom - Upper Picnic Area.
- Renovate seasonal restroom - Oak Woods Picnic Area.
- Replace playground in the Upper Picnic Area with play equipment that includes "nature-themed" elements such as climbing rocks, log/tree trunks, sand, vine tunnels, and tall grasses.



Image (above): "Nature-themed" play elements: climbing rocks

## FLOOD PREVENTION - STRATEGIC PLANNING TO REDUCE FUTURE FLOOD DAMAGE

Ledges State Park has a long history of being flooded by the nearby Des Moines River. The major flood water levels have been recorded on a "flood pole" located in the lower area of the park.

### ISSUE:

- The lower area of Ledges State Park is prone to flooding from the Des Moines River.

### PROPOSALS:

- Minimize flood damage through pre-planning efforts involving careful selection of locations and elevations for all new and replacement park facilities.

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

### ISSUE:

- The visitor entrance to the park office needs to be separate from the staff shop work space for public safety reasons.

### PROPOSAL:

- Construct a new park office separate from the current multi-use building and utilize existing building for shop only.

## RECREATION USE PLAN

Implementation of the Ledges State Park 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 Ledges State Park'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. Ledges'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): Scenic Pea's Creek Canyon view

## LEDGES STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN PROJECT PRIORITIES

High Priority (1)	Cost Estimate
Upgrade (50) campsites to 50-amp electric and (11) to full hook-up - Campground	\$332,500
Add crushed rock camp pad surfaces to campsites - Campground	TBD
Remodel (2) shower buildings	\$200,000
Replace playground	\$80,000
Add year-round restroom - Campground	\$60,000
Widen roadway - Campground	TBD
Replace/enlarge RV dump station - Campground	\$50,000
<b>High Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$TBD</b>
<b>Medium Priority (2)</b>	
Restore (2) entrance portals	\$160,000
Add stone feature - Canyon Road Entrance	TBD
Restore stone trailhead monuments	TBD
Remove stone restroom and repurpose materials	\$10,000
Add playground - Upper Picnic Area	\$80,000
Replace year-round restroom - Upper Picnic Area	\$60,000
Renovate restroom - Oak Woods Picnic Area	TBD
<b>Medium Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$TBD</b>
<b>Low Priority (3)</b>	
Add (3) 4-sided interpretive kiosks	\$90,000
Add (3) interpretive panels	\$12,000
Replace park office	\$510,000
Add equipment storage building - park headquarters	\$110,000
<b>Low Priority Total:</b>	<b>\$722,000</b>

Table (above): Ledges State Park's Project Priorities

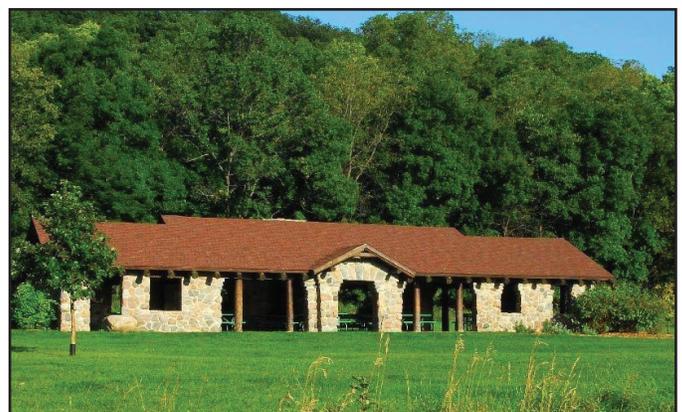


Image (above): Existing Henning Shelter

# LEDGES STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN



LEDGES

## CAMPGROUND

- Upgrade Campsites to 50 AMP Electric **(Proposed 2016)**
- Upgrade 11 Campsites to Full Hook-up **(Proposed)**
- Add New Campground Check-in Station **(Proposed)**
- Replace Restroom with Year-round **(Proposed)**
- Remodel Shower Building **(Proposed)**
- Replace Playground **(Proposed)**
- Replace and Widen Roadway **(Proposed)**
- Replace and Expand Existing Dump Station with Double Station **(Proposed)**

## OAK WOODS PICNIC AREA

- Renovate Restroom - Seasonal **(Proposed)**
- Add 4-Sided Interpretive Kiosk **(Proposed)**

## HISTORIC CCC RESTROOM

- Remove Existing Building and Repurpose Materials **(Proposed)**

## HENNING PICNIC AREA

- Add 4-Sided Interpretive Kiosk **(Proposed)**

## LOST LAKE

- Add 4-Sided Interpretive Kiosk **(Proposed)**

## UPPER PICNIC AREA

- Replace playground **(Proposed)**
- Replace Restroom with Double Year-round **(Proposed)**

## PARK OFFICE / SHOP

- Replace Office **(Proposed)**
- Add Equipment Storage Building **(Proposed)**

## LEGEND

- TRAILS
- ROAD
- WATER
- - - PARK BOUNDARY



0 mi. 1/8 mi. 1/4 mi.

