

Blue Mounds State Park

2016 Annual Report

Region 4

District 10

Park Manager- Chris Ingebretsen, NR Supervisor 3

Assistant Manager- Tom Sawtelle, NR Supervisor 2

Technician- Dan McGuire

OAS- Kathy Deuschle

Parks Worker – Gerald Sassaman

Parks Worker – Velma Sassaman

Parks Worker – Eric Kiers

Parks Worker, temporary – Callan Sawtelle

Building and Grounds Worker – Ezra Breyfogle

Laborer – Robert Arkfeld

Laborer – Cole Walgrave

Greenview Worker – Keith Bosch

Greenview Worker – Jack Mulligan

Greenview Worker – William Predmore

Greenview Worker – Steve Earl

Greenview Worker – Jerome Wieneke

Other units managed: *Split Rock Creek State Park*



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Administration

The park has recovered much of its day use recreational opportunities after rebuilding trails and day use facilities in 2015. However visitation was lower than expected due to continued problems with the park's drinking water systems. In previous years, the Minnesota Department of Health allowed the park to provide showers by treating e. coli contaminated water with a chlorination system. Minnesota Department of Health changed its recommendations in May, 2016, and showers were not provided in the campground, resulting in a loss of visitors. Over the summer of 2016, the Department of Natural Resources made a decision to remove the failed Lower Mound Lake Dam, restore the Mound Creek channel, and replace the Mound Creek Bridge.

Community Involvement and Partnerships

The park continues to be a member of the Luverne Chamber of Commerce and the manager and assistant share a seat on the Luverne Chamber and Visitors Bureau board.

The park manager and regional naturalist partnered on shared events with Pipestone National Monument.

Outdoor Recreation

State Park visitation, participation and use- percent change from previous year:

Vehicle use: --13% Day Visits: --9% Night visits -39% Campsite Occupancy: -19%
Group Camp: -16%

Other activities.

Approximately 675 climbing permits were given out. Climbing remains a popular activity at Blue Mounds. In 2016, the park manager served on a workgroup which studied how climbers utilized climbing parks and how we can better attract and serve this audience.

Interpretation, Conservation Education and Outreach

Parks and trails hosted an open house in February to inform the public of project alternatives and solicit opinion on the Lower Mound Dam. We also activated an informational webpage for the public to view alternatives and submit public comment.

The Luverne Chamber and Visitors bureau sponsored many interpretive programs throughout the summer and their efforts to bring presenters to the park was a strong success and appreciated by our visitors! Master Naturalist Jeanne Prekker provided an evening hike as well as special programs for inner city youth in the Outward Bound program. The park manager provided three bison related programs. The park partnered with Pipestone National Monument to provide a First Day Hike, and a special geology tour. The I Can Climb program continued this year and remains an important program to teach Rock Climbing Skills.

Number of programs: 14

Total program participation: 706

Programs offered: First Day Hike, The Blue Mounds Bison Story, Minnesota State of Wonders, Discover Blue Mounds and Pipestone Auto Tour, Teddy Roosevelt – America’s Great Conservationist, Teddy Live, Sing the Real West, Unusual Snakes and Plants on the Mound, A View of the Stone Fence, Moonlight Hike.

Work and planning continued this year on bringing first person bison interpretation to the park. Tour vehicle options were explored and the first draft of a position description was developed for a temporary Interpretive Naturalist 2.

Regional Naturalist Alex Watson and the park manager awarded a contract to a private contractor to develop bison interpretive sign panels. The signs are at 50% design status and will be completed by summer 2017.

Natural and Cultural Resource Management

- Completed a 104 acre burn in RMU 10 (lower cliff line).
- 10 youth hunters harvested 6 deer
- Continued genetic testing of bison calves in partnership with the Minnesota Zoo to develop stud books for the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd.
- Processed 113 bison in the bison roundup, inoculating for pink eye and mycoplasma, and sorted 30 animals for auction.
- Installed and implemented a new hydraulic bison squeeze chute.
- DNR waters and fisheries staff completed biological and stream geomorphological surveys of Mound Creek in preparation for design work of the stream restoration project
- Archeological work was completed for the stream restoration project.
- Exotic/invasive species were physically or chemically treated throughout the prairie.

Enforcement and Emergency Services Overview

- Multiple occurrences of alcohol violations, noise violations and pet violations were addressed using low key verbal enforcement techniques.

Physical Plant Management

- Rock County Rural Water completed a feasibility study to extend a rural water line to the park.
- DNR engineering staff completed a design to replace the water line distribution system for the shop, office, residence, and main campground, as well as to connect those lines with the lines serving the cart-in campground, group camp, and picnic grounds.
- Work has commenced on a multi-disciplinary project to design and plan for removing the lower mound dam, install a bridge to reconnect the Mound Creek Trail, and restore the Mound Creek channel through the old Lower Mound Lake basin.
- As part of the Guaranteed Camping project, the self-registration station was relocated to be adjacent to the park courtesy phone.

Opportunities for Improvement

- Extend a rural water line to the park and replace and connect the park water line distribution systems. The largest issue facing the park at present is the absence of potable drinking water. As previously mentioned design work has been completed to extend a Rock County Rural Water line to the park. Design work has also been completed to replace much of the water distribution system and connect all water systems together so they can all be served by rural water and meet current MN Department of Health standards. Funding needs to be secured to complete this very important project.
- Remove Lower Mound Dam, restore Mound Creek and replace the Mound Creek Trail Bridge. As previously mentioned, design work has been started on this process, and we hope to complete it in the next few months, with construction possibly starting in the winter of 2017.
- Bison pasture tours. Headway was made on this outstanding goal this year. In 2017 we hope to purchase a vehicle and hire an Interpretive Naturalist 2 to begin providing pasture tours.
- Visitor Center. The visitor center was closed all of 2016 after structural issues were identified in 2015. DNR engineering has developed initial plans to stabilize the building with steel beams. The significant cost of addressing these and other structural issues require additional discussion on the future of this building.

Innovation

- Tipis. We added a third tipi this year. Tipi rentals continued to be very popular and over 90% of available nights were utilized in June, July, and August.
- Guaranteed camping: Parks and Trails implemented guaranteed camping state wide, allowing campers to reserve a site at any time. The switch to guaranteed camping required staff and campers alike to learn some new procedures, but was an overall success and will quickly become the norm in future years.

Planning and Policies

Completed

- The park manager, assistant manager and technician continued to work with the bison work group. The expansion of the Minnesota Bison Conservation herd to Minneopa State Park has been fully completed and successful.

Safety

- The park staff celebrated a year without injuries or accidents. Larger efforts were made to discuss safety each morning and how it related to staff's daily activities.

Personnel

Blue Mounds State Park is fortunate to have a seasoned crew who provide high quality outdoor recreation experiences to the public.

Early in 2016, Dave Banck announced he was retiring and would not return to his Greenview position for the season. Keith Bosch was hired to replace him and had a good first year at the park. At this time all staff have indicated that they will be returning in 2017.