

Blue Mounds State Park Citizen Advisory Group

Thursday, February 9th, 2017 (5:30-7:30pm)

Luverne Chamber and Visitors Bureau
213 East Luverne Street
Luverne, MN

Meeting #2: Park staff priorities, interpretive programming, and facilities

Citizen Advisory Group (CAG) Members Present: Jane Lanphere, Larry Lanphere, Amy Nelson, Jeanne Prekker, and Sherri Thompson

DNR Staff: Kathy Dummer, PAT Regional Management; Chris Ingebretsen, Tom Sawtelle, Dan McGuire PAT Park Management; Rachel Hopper, PAT Policy and Planning; and Alex Watson, Regional Naturalist

Meeting #2 Summary

Welcome and Meeting Goals

DNR staff welcomed the group members and the public to the second meeting of the Blue Mounds State Park Citizen Advisory Group. Staff reviewed the positive meeting evaluation results from the first meeting and briefly reviewed the agenda for the evening.

Park Staff Priority Lists

Park Manager Chris Ingebretsen summarized the list of priorities identified by park staff. This list was requested by CAG members at the first meeting, to understand what staff view to be the most important and immediate tasks to tackle. The staff priority list will be posted on the BMSP CAG webpage. Priorities and associated questions are discussed below.

1. Potable water and water infrastructure (no questions)
2. Mound Creek (Lower Mound Lake basin) restoration
 - Question: How was Lower Mound restoration paid for?
 - FEMA reimbursement possible up to 75%
 - Restoration project is out for bid to begin late fall/early winter
 - Question: If project starts by June 2018, what's the timeline for completion?
 - Approximately 1-2 years
3. Bison buggy (no questions, DNR update provided below)
4. Repair or repurpose visitor center (DNR update provided below)
 - Short-term repairs may be completed this spring, but the structure has larger issues
5. Upper dam rehabilitation
 - Question: Any plans to remove?
 - Not at this time.
6. Expand rock climber's parking lot
 - Question: Is the plan to just expand parking? Any plans to add drinking water source, etc.?
 - Not at this time. Current plan is to double parking spaces from 8 to 16.
7. Resurface visitor center road (no questions)
8. Resurface campground road (no questions)

9. Campground electric upgrade (e.g., 50 amp service)
 - Question: Is the funding for this coming from Legacy funds?
 - A combination of funding sources may be used.
10. Picnic shelter (or other feature) at picnic grounds/former beach area (no questions)
11. Storage shop for bison buggy (no questions); options in Luverne were suggested
12. Playground equipment/nature play area
 - Karen Willers (community educator) could possibly talk to us at future meeting regarding nature play areas (at campground and creek? by current sandbox?)
 - Community grants/foundations; plenty of opportunities for partnership help to develop such facilities once creek is restored

Discussion and Questions

Following the overview of the park staff's priorities, there was additional discussion of the priorities and how to successfully accomplish them. For example, members are interested in following up on the nature play area in future meetings. Members also discussed temporary options for resolving the water issues in the park, such as showering at the aquatic center and bringing in water for campers from outside the park. All of the suggestions had previously been considered by the DNR, and were not feasible due to Minnesota Dept. of Health standards, cost, or other logistical issues.

Interpretive Services Topic

Context of interpretive services and facilities

Regional Naturalist Alex Watson provided a history of the interpretive services for Blue Mounds. He explained that until 2002 budget cuts, there was a staff naturalist on-site that varied from full time to seasonal. Since 2002, interns, volunteers, and partnerships provided most of the programming services.

There are limited funds for interpretive programming in the park, due to a region-wide interpretive budget of \$10,000 to \$15,000. However, there have been several successful efforts in recent years largely due to partnerships, new interest in climbing, and a 2015 geological assessment by the University of Minnesota. The DNR is now excited to expand interpretive opportunities with the Bison Buggy. More details about this initiative will be discussed below.

There are many logistical details to confirm before the buggy is in operation, including how often it runs and on what schedule. Staff explained that it would likely begin tours on a less-frequent basis to see what type of ecological impact the vehicle has on the prairie landscape, and may increase if impacts are deemed minimal and the land is resilient.

Some members had questions regarding various aspects of the logistics, such as who would be driving the cab and if volunteers would be able to either drive or offer educational programming. Those details are still to be determined.

Interpretive programming

Bison buggy update

DNR staff provided an update on the bison buggy project, an effort that would offer a "safari-like" way for visitors to view the bison herd at the park. Kathy Dummer, parks and trails regional manager, announced that the project will be moving forward for this summer. Work to be done to prepare includes developing a safety protocol for passengers of the "buggy" and staff. For example, she ensured

that the buggy would not be driving through the herd to keep a safe distance for visitors and bison alike. She described the project as a three-year commitment for the vehicle and for the naturalist staffing the position. The naturalist will work 80% time, for the full calendar year.

Interpretive facilities: Manfred House

Another major point of discussion was the condition and usability of the Manfred House visitor center. Long-standing and recurring water problems with house have occurred as a result of architectural design. Staff shared pictures of the current state of the building, including shots of major damages from flooding and other structural issues. Staff explained the cost estimate for repairs and restoration of the building is \$400,000 to deal with the structural issues alone and total replacement would cost up to \$800,000. There was discussion among the group about whether it was feasible to put any more money into the building, or if another estimate would be less expensive, etc.

There was a suggestion related to considering a different visitor center; this has been proposed in the past. Another person suggested maybe taking the structure down and leaving the foundation as a “ruin” or historical interpretation opportunity.

The discussion concluded with the need to follow-up on the pros/cons of these issues, to communicate with the Manfred family, and to engage the broader community about this question of what to do with the building.

Meeting evaluation

CAG members completed a meeting evaluation.

Next Steps

- DNR to look at Manfred house purchase agreement related to acquisition of property and possible issues with potential future disposition
- Post meeting notes on website
- DNR to send out Meeting 3 materials to group in advance
- DNR staff to discuss ideas presented regarding the Manfred House
- CAG to send comments on next meeting topics.

Future meetings

Future meetings will be held from 5:30-7:30pm at the Luverne Chamber and Visitors Bureau on Thursday, March 9th and Thursday, April 27th.

Public comments

- Water, interpretive programming is more important than Manfred House with finite money to go around
- How to advocate for bonding money at legislature to make sure it gets funded?
- Conversation regarding how to get support at legislature