

***DRAFT***

**Implementation Plan**  
**ROCK RIVER PUBLIC ACCESS - WATERTOWN LANDING**  
A Glacial Heritage Area “River Based Conservation Area”



A collaborative plan by the  
Jefferson County Parks Department and the  
State of Wisconsin Department of Natural  
Resources  
for the recreational use and management  
of the Watertown Landing property

March, 2015

## **INTRODUCTION**

This “Implementation Plan” for the Rock River Public Access Site – Watertown Landing (property) provides a blueprint for moving forward with a cooperative venture between the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (Department) and Jefferson County (County) for the former Watertown Outboarders Inc. parcel of land located adjacent to the Rock River in the town of Watertown owned by the Department.

This property is located within the Glacial Heritage Area (GHA) project area and a comprehensive master plan was completed and approved by the Natural Resources Board in October 2009. The GHA master plan describes how the Department will manage and operate the 30,000 acres currently owned by the Department in the GHA (nearly all of which is within the nine State Wildlife Areas) and authorizes the Department to acquire another 32,000 acres (again, nearly all of which will be within the State Wildlife Areas). The master plan also authorizes a unique cooperative approach between the Department and the County to establish and manage seven new Conservation Parks, linking trails, and River-based Conservation Areas.

This property qualifies as a River-Based Conservation area under the GHA master plan. The primary purpose of the River-Based conservation areas in the GHA are to improve water quality, provide travel routes for wildlife, maintain and restore riparian habitat and provide recreation areas. This property was the first purchase under that acquisition authority.

This implementation plan for the property provides basic background information for the property and outlines the intended future development and management. The basis for developing an implementation plan is outlined in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was entered into between the County and the Department in June of 2013 to “set forth the agreements and understandings which have been reached ... regarding the acquisition, development and operation of State Park properties the Department purchases and the County operates in the GHA.”

Although this river access site property is not designated as a State Park and at 6.6 acres may not be one of the “larger sites” for river-based access requiring an implementation plan per Section II of the MOU, the Department and the County have determined that development of an implementation plan is beneficial to both parties to clarify roles and responsibilities and set a vision for the future development and management of the site. Furthermore, the intended park-like vision that the County has for the property is beyond just a river access put-in/take-out site as the site will include picnicking, water based access primitive camping, shore fishing as well as motorized boat access which makes this property fit well with the intent of the MOU.

The plans for this property as articulated in this document have been developed collaboratively between the County and the Department. All of the intended uses described in this document are consistent with the GHA master plan. Consistent with the requirements of the MOU, this implementation plan will be posted on the Department’s website for a period of 14 days to allow for public notification and comments on the draft implementation plan.

## **PROPERTY INFORMATION**

This 6.13 acre property is located in the Town of Watertown, within the City of Watertown's extraterritorial boundaries. It lies between the City of Watertown and the Village of Johnson Creek in the north-central part of the County (see map A).

Property address: N8625 Jefferson Road, Watertown, WI 53094

Legal description: A part of Government Lot 7, Section 17, Township 8 North, Range 15 East, Watertown Township, Jefferson County, Wisconsin.

### **A. Natural and Cultural Resources**

The property's vegetation is primarily mowed turf grass with some low, riparian woods and wetlands. It is fairly level to gently rolling from the east to the lower areas in the west. Approximately two thirds of the property is subject to seasonal flooding. The Rock River is the western boundary of the property and comprises about 600 feet of river frontage.

Currently there is a shallow lagoon adjacent to the boat landing/launch at the site. The area was dredged decades ago to create a protected area to moor boats owned by the Watertown Outboarders Club members. With each flood event, the silt from the river has filled the lagoon creating a very shallow area greatly reducing the effective use of this area for boat mooring or fishing. Department water regulation and zoning staff have evaluated the site and made a recommendation that the lagoon be returned to wetland status as it was prior to the creation of the lagoon.

The Department's Archeologist has been contacted and informed about the intended uses of the property. Records show there are two documented archeological sites on the property. A Natural Heritage Inventory (NHI) check was completed at the time of acquisition. Five species were identified in the review. (Note: Clearances from the Department's Archeologist/Bureau of NHC will be required prior to ground disturbing activities on the property.)

### **B. Facilities/Utilities**

At the time of purchase there were nine structures located on the property. Eight of these structures have been removed by the Department as they were deemed not needed or compatible with the future intended use of the property, including five of the structures that were removed because they were located in the floodplain and were all damaged by flooding in the past. Based on their condition the structures were either sold and removed from the site or demolished and landfilled.

There is an existing concrete boat ramp which will remain as a motorized and non-motorized access point for boating recreation. A gravel driveway from Jefferson Road terminates at the launch area and a gravel parking area is also located near the launch facility. An open air roofed shelter building still remains adjacent to the boat landing. This structure will be retained to provide shade and protection from the elements for property users. A chain link fence located on the east/west boundary with a sliding gate will be retained to allow the

property to be closed to vehicle traffic if needed during high water events or for other management purposes.

An overhead street lamp exists at the boat launch which was installed by the previous owners. Other non-essential electrical lines have been removed to make the area safe for public use. Telephone service is available at the site but not currently in operation. An existing drilled well was located in the floodplain near the boat landing. Due to its location in the flood prone area, it was abandoned and capped in 2014 by a licensed well installer. A septic holding tank still is located in the floodplain area. The tank has been pumped and cap locked. Abandonment of the vessel will occur in 2015 as part of the site reclamation process.

### **C. Existing Public Use of the Property**

Currently (3/2015) the property is undergoing site reclamation to make the site safe and presentable for general public use. The property is not advertised as open to public use and currently staff is not encouraging use. Upon completion of the site reclamation, the gate will be open and the general public will be able to utilize the facility. Reclamation work has been slowed due to numerous flooding events in 2014 which prohibited contractors from accomplishing the contracted work.

### **D. Real Estate Considerations**

The property was purchased in 2013 by the Department with Stewardship funding and funds donated by the Quirk Foundation. The access driveway from Jefferson Road to the property boundary is located on a deeded easement. The easement is granted to the Department and to the adjacent landowner to the south by the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. At the time of signing of this implementation plan, there was no formal maintenance agreement in place for maintenance of the gravel driveway. The adjacent landowner uses the access for agricultural purposes.

## **SIGNIFICANT MANAGEMENT ISSUE OR NEEDS**

Much of the property is in the floodplain and is seasonally flooded during high water level periods on the Rock River. Although the water recedes fairly rapidly, the surrounding turf areas remain saturated and unusable until the moisture levels decline. There is also an accumulation of mud and silt in some of the flood prone areas left when the water recedes. This will limit the development potential of the western two thirds of the property and may result in periods of closure to use to reduce property turf damage.

## **PROPERTY OVERVIEW**

A primary purpose of the property is to provide non-motorized and motorized access to the Rock River. The site will also be developed and maintained to accommodate low intensity, park-like day use opportunities. Shore fishing will be abundant with 600 feet of river frontage and the development of a fishing pier. The open turf areas will serve as gathering and free play places for users. Picnic tables will be provided in strategic locations throughout the property. Additionally, a limited number of primitive camp sites will be developed for visitors who arrive by non-motorized watercraft allowing for extended trips on the river for water enthusiasts.

## **INTENDED RECREATIONAL USE AND MANAGEMENT**

The property amenities will include the following:

- a motorized/non-motorized boat access ramp (existing)
- ADA accessible floating boat launch pier
- parking area for 20 vehicles with or without trailers (existing)
- picnic tables
- roofed open shelter building (existing)
- street pole lighting (existing) and possibly additional lighting
- shore fishing opportunities (existing)
- ADA accessible hard surface parking stall near launch with walkway to pier
- 2-4 primitive campsites-water access sites only. Fire ring, picnic table and tent pad
- drilled well with a hand pump
- single stall vault toilet
- small gravel parking area off entrance road out of the floodplain

The property will need minimal development to provide the amenities listed above. The existing site has well established turf grass for both the picnic areas and the camp site area. The existing gravel entrance road and parking area near the launch are also in good condition. The existing boat ramp is operational and the funds for a pier were donated by the former WTO Club organization. Department engineers are developing a design and will soon bid out the pier project. The Quirk Foundation has provided the County's Parks Department with a donation to cover the costs of installing a well/hand pump, vault toilet and the campground amenities for the sites.

Longer term development will include removal of old concrete slabs on the river shoreline to be replaced with natural rock rip-rap. The lagoon will also be restored to wetland habitat. The Department will take the lead on these two projects and attempt to secure funding to accomplish the projects.

It is important to note that during periods of high water, the lower portion of the property will be unavailable for user groups. The upper area (east side) will still provide a place for canoe/kayaks to launch and the camp sites can likely remain open.

See map B for location of existing facilities and approximate location of future facilities.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

This is a cooperative venture between the Department and the County. Responsibilities of each party are outlined here and can be amended by agreement of both parties.

After approval of this plan, the Department and the County will enter into a formal easement agreement which will provide the County with the right to manage the lands and develop and operate the property.

### **A. Property Maintenance/Management**

County: Routine maintenance including, but not limited to turf maintenance, building cleaning, trash/recycling removal, snow removal, pier maintenance, roofing, tree

removal/trimming, road and lot maintenance, utility costs, and the associated management responsibilities typically associated with public lands.

Department: Project boundary posting with GHA signs and provide replacement signs as needed. Sign design will include either the logo or text recognizing the Department and the County's Parks Department as well as including the GHA logo. Signs must conform with Department standards.

## **B. Development**

All development on the property will be in accordance with applicable state and federal regulations and will adhere to local land use (zoning) ordinances as practicable and consistent with Department policy.

Archeological clearance will be required when soil disturbance work is required that may impact the cultural resources as identified on the mapped sites from the Historical Society.

Development is subject to obtaining adequate funding.

### **a. Division of responsibilities**

County: Drinking water well/pump, vault toilet and campground development. The County will work with and seek concurrence from the Department on the design and placement of new facilities.

Department: Shoreline restoration (rip-rap) lagoon restoration, floating ADA accessible pier, hard surface parking stall and walkway.

## **ADDITIONAL COMMENTS**

The County will work with the Department to appropriately name the property. Naming or re-naming of a property is subject to Natural Resources Board approval and must be consistent with the Department's naming policies found in MC 2281.1.

The County intends to honor the Quirk Foundation's donations with appropriate signage at the property, and will work toward this with the Foundation and the Department.

Consistent with the requirements outlined in the MOU, prior to signature by both parties, this draft plan will be public noticed and posted on the Department's web site allowing for public comment.

## **DEPARTMENT PROPERTY CONTACT**

Dave Borsecnik, Recreation Specialist Sr., Fitchburg, 608-275-3249

## **COUNTY PROPERTY CONTACT**

Joe Nehmer, Park Director, Jefferson County, 920-674-7260

The Department hereby agrees to this implementation plan and has caused this instrument to be executed on its behalf this \_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_\_, 2015.

State of Wisconsin  
Department of Natural Resources  
For the Secretary

By \_\_\_\_\_

The County hereby agrees to this implementation plan and has caused this instrument to be executed on its behalf this \_\_\_\_ day \_\_\_\_\_, 2015.

Jefferson County  
County Board Chair

By \_\_\_\_\_