

DRAFT

Indian Lake County Park & Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area Master Plan 4-25-2023

I. Executive Summary

Indian Lake County Park is a 791-acre property located in northwestern Dane County in the Town of Berry. The park is classified as a Recreation Park in the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan; primarily serving users who are attracted to outdoor recreation with some expectation of developed access and facilities. The 64-acre spring fed lake is named after the frequent Native American inhabitation of the area dating back more than 10,000 years ago. Native Americans used the lands around the lake extensively for hunting and fishing some 8,000 years ago to as recent as the mid 1800's. European settlement in this region began in the mid-1800s, some of their structures still exist in various conditions, most notable are the 1857 "St. Mary of the Oaks" Chapel and the 1907 Matz family house. The park is located on the transition into the non-glaciated driftless area of Wisconsin and offers multiple panoramic views of both the lake and surrounding rugged countryside. The landscape of the properties is a mix of steep rolling wooded hills, agriculture fields, prairie, oak savanna, the lake and adjacent wetlands.

The park is close to the Madison metro area, one of the largest population bases in the state. It is heavily used during all seasons primarily for the extensive trail systems and is one of the busiest parks in the system, especially in the winter if there is snow cover. A segment of the Ice Age National Scenic Trail traverses through both the park and Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area. Vegetation management activities have primarily focused on invasive species removal and oak savanna/prairie restoration. Extensive lake management efforts have been ongoing to improve aquatic plant habitat, eradicate carp and overall improve the aquatic ecosystems.

Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area is a 148-acre property located immediately north of Indian Lake County Park. It is named after the cold water stream that originates in the area and eventually flows into Black Earth Creek. The property was originally purchased to secure a corridor for the Ice Age National Scenic Trail and is classified as a Wildlife Area in the Dane County Parks and Open Space Plan. Wildlife areas are primarily undeveloped with the exception of limited parking access along outer fringes. Recreation use consists of public hunting, hiking, foraging, non-groomed cross country skiing, snow shoeing, wildlife viewing, cultural interpretation and the Ice Age National Scenic Trail. The landscape of the wildlife area is a mix of crop fields that are being restored to prairie and steep wooded hillsides that have had some understory invasive species removal completed.

The planning process evaluated existing cultural, natural and historical features in the planning area and incorporated public, stakeholder, and staff input to create the recommendations found within this report. The process included an interactive website and series of public information, local unit of government, and stakeholder meetings from March of 2022 through spring of 2023. In addition, a survey was distributed to park patrons during the summer of 2022 to solicit comments on both existing park facilities and future management and park development ideas. Based on the public input process and staff recommendations, the following vision statement was prepared for Indian Lake County Park/Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area: *Indian Lake County Park/Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area will remain relatively undeveloped, with an emphasis on continued large scale prairie and savanna restoration in open areas and management of the existing contiguous woodlands that provide exceptional bat habitat.*

The rugged, natural landscape of this park highlights the glacial history that is interpreted through the Ice Age National Scenic Trail corridor. Providing additional hiking/snowshoe trails in the southern third of the park will allow better separation from groomed cross country ski trails during winter months and greater mileage of hiking opportunities in the summer. Existing agriculture lands will include prairie buffer strips to improve pollinator habitat and reduce sediment delivery into the Halfway Prairie creek watershed. A proposed future shelter and internal park road extension will reduce park congestion and improve accessibility to the group camp region. Trails will continue to be the primary recreation use; and will include enhanced historical, cultural and natural feature interpretive signage. Improvements to the dog park area will include fencing, a beach and relocated parking that will provide separation from the lake access area. Restoring a year round sustainable lake ecosystem is a priority.

Major plan recommendations include:

ROADWAY AND PARKING IMPROVEMENTS

- Expanded vehicle and parking access to the group camp area of the park.
- Additional parking lot at proposed future shelter site to address capacity issues.
- Maintenance road from Indian Trail Road to group camp.
- Ten to fifteen car parking lot at former greenhouse location on Indian Trail Road.

DOG PARK

- Interior fence.
- Swimming beach.
- Future relocated entrance and parking facilities.
- Vault toilet.

TRAILS

- Realigned Ice Age Trail in southern half of the park.
- Additional 1 mile of groomed cross country ski trails.
- Additional 2 miles of hiking/snow shoe trails.
- Bicycle trail connection between Indian Trail Road and existing parking lot/restroom facilities.

PARK AMENITIES

- New reservable timber frame shelter.
- Scenic overlook restoration/expansion.

SIGNAGE

- Updated interpretive signage related to the natural and cultural history of the park.
- Updated wayfinding signage.
- Investigate renaming the property with the Ho-Chunk Nation.

LAND and LAKE MANAGEMENT

- Continued oak savanna prairie restoration.
- Prairie strip/pollinator buffers at southern agriculture areas.
- Maintain and enhance large block forest habitat.
- Continued lake invasive species management.
- Dredge lake to provide sustainable aquatic ecosystems.

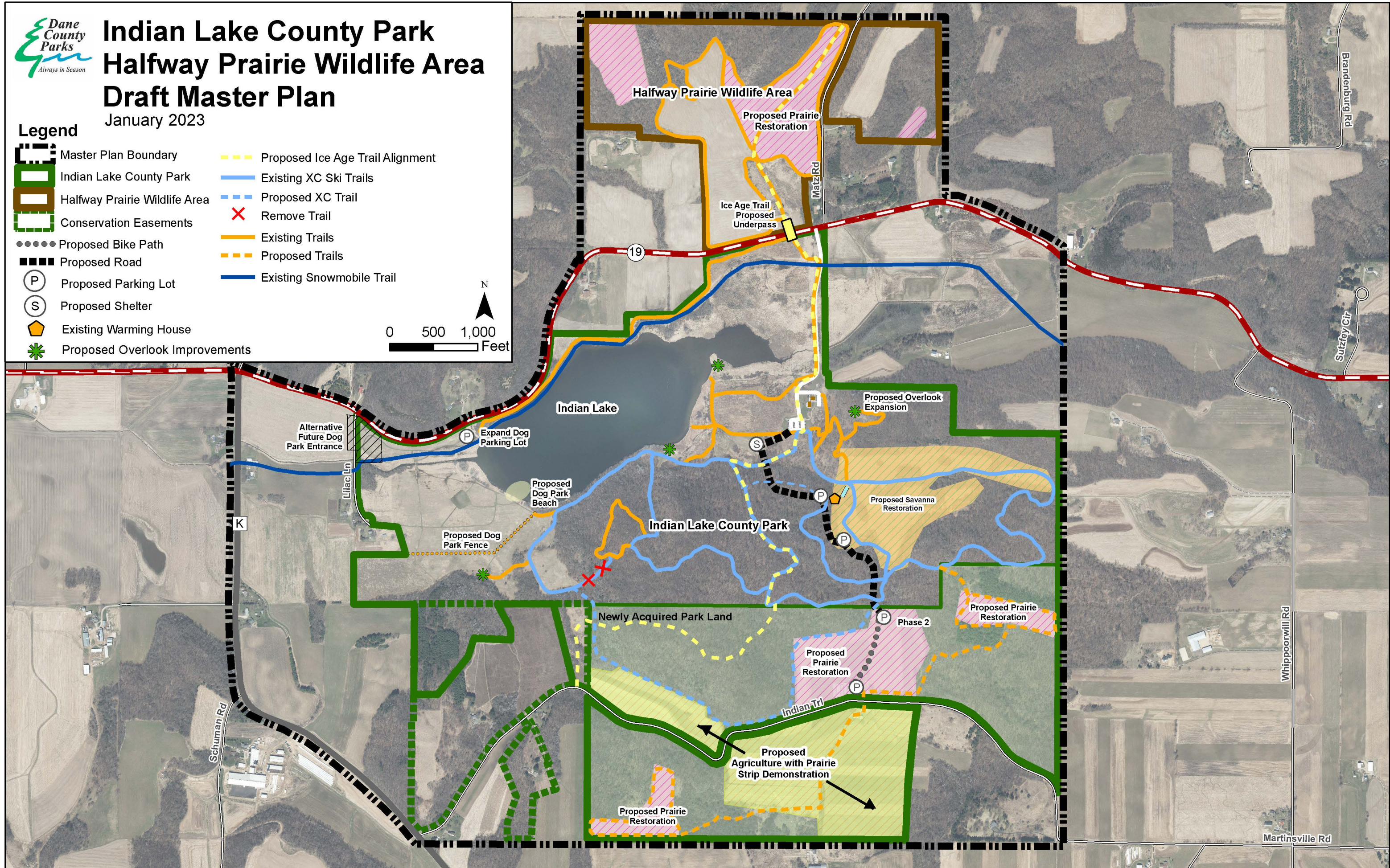
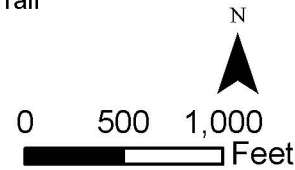


Indian Lake County Park Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area Draft Master Plan

January 2023

Legend

- Master Plan Boundary
- Indian Lake County Park
- Halfway Prairie Wildlife Area
- Conservation Easements
- Proposed Bike Path
- Proposed Road
- Proposed Parking Lot (P)
- Proposed Shelter (S)
- Existing Warming House
- Proposed Overlook Improvements
- Proposed Ice Age Trail Alignment
- Existing XC Ski Trails
- Proposed XC Trail
- Remove Trail (X)
- Existing Trails
- Proposed Trails
- Existing Snowmobile Trail





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May 2023

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