

LAND STEWARDSHIP POLICY

WHEREAS, the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department serves as the public's land steward by managing park and other public property in a manner that ensures these properties will exist as a community resource for the benefit of future generations; and,

WHEREAS, a policy has been designed and developed which will assist the department in fulfilling its role which enhances the park system and other municipal properties by maintaining each individual property according to a plan that seeks to maximize the value of natural, cultural and recreational resources present; and,

WHEREAS, this policy shall serve to contribute towards a proactive approach to protect important elements of Des Moines' vanishing open space resources and serve to provide additional open space as the urban and rural communities of the region continue to grow; and,

WHEREAS, the following policy has been established for implementation as a beneficial resource for preserving open space in Des Moines and shall include:

- Section 1 - STEWARDSHIP: A DEFINITION
- Section 2 - GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THIS POLICY
- Section 3 - CREATE, ENHANCE, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE BALANCE OF RESOURCES AND DIVERSITY OF ECOSYSTEMS
- Section 4 - LANDSCAPE INVENTORY
- Section 5 - NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLANNING
- Section 6 - ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS (ERP)
 - 1) GENERAL CATEGORIES FOR APPLYING THE ERP
 - 2) GENERAL STEPS IN THE ERP
- Section 7 - OPEN SPACE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN
- Section 8 - PARK AND NATURAL AREA LANDSCAPE AND MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES
- Section 9 - PROPERTY MANAGEMENT, ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL
 - 1) MANAGING PARK PROPERTIES
 - 2) DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY
 - 3) ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY
- Section 10 - MODIFICATION OF THIS POLICY
- Appendix A - GLOSSARY

FURTHER, be it resolved that above referenced policy has been established for implementation as the LAND STEWARDSHIP POLICY.

DES MOINES PARK AND RECREATION DEPARTMENT STEWARDSHIP POLICY

SECTION 1

STEWARDSHIP: A DEFINITION

A steward is one charged by another with the safekeeping and sound management of property. The Des Moines Park and Recreation Department serves as the public's land steward by managing park and other municipal property in a manner that ensures these properties will exist as a community resource for the benefit of future generations. In fulfilling its role the department enhances the park system by maintaining each individual property according to a plan that seeks to maximize the value of natural, cultural and recreational resources present. A proactive approach to protecting important elements of Des Moines' open space resources serves to provide additional open space as the urban and rural communities of the region continue to grow. Working closely with other public conservation agencies and private protection efforts, the department works to integrate its efforts into a greater plan for protecting the resource base of central Iowa and provide recreational opportunities that are compatible with the environment.

SECTION 2

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THIS POLICY

The following sections of this policy serve to define the stewardship decision-making process in specific stages of the ongoing management function. Generally they refer to the procedures used in rendering sound management decisions when particular issues of development, public use or staff programming of a property holds the potential of negatively impacting significant resources. This section serves to establish guiding principles regarding resource stewardship on all properties managed by the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department.

The Des Moines Park and Recreation Department believes:

1. The health and well-being of people and their cultures; of other species; and of natural ecosystems are interconnected, vulnerable and dependent on each other.
2. Future generations have a right to an environment with at least the same qualities and quantities of environmental assets as present generations.
3. Long-term economic progress and the need for environmental protection must be seen as mutually interdependent.
4. Development must maintain environmental and cultural integrity.
5. Restoration of highly disturbed areas shall be actively pursued.
6. Sustainable design and management practices shall be fully considered and implemented on all facilities, grounds and lands. This shall include:
 - a. Site protection must be considered an integral aspect of every project
 - b. Project construction must be of the highest quality possible.

- c. Waste emissions and resource extraction must be minimized.
 - d. Improved efficiency of energy and water use must be pursued.
 - e. Materials and products that are non-toxic must be actively pursued.
7. Native plants species shall be used in all plantings.
 8. It is vital to enhance Des Moines' watershed by managing all natural areas in a way that preserves the highest natural ecological value both upstream and downstream from parkland.

SECTION 3

CREATE, ENHANCE, RESTORE AND MAINTAIN THE BALANCE OF RESOURCES AND DIVERSITY OF ECOSYSTEMS

Des Moines Park and Recreation provides a system of active recreation facilities, cultural arts programming and unique natural areas. To create a park system that incorporates these services in a balanced fashion, resource inventories, management plans and an environmental review process will continually assess the status of park properties. Based on this process the department will create a diversity of ecosystems representative of central Iowa's natural history and integral to providing wildlife habitat, environmental education opportunities and safer, healthier neighborhoods.

SECTION 4

LANDSCAPE INVENTORY

Des Moines Park and Recreation will conduct inventories of existing natural resources on its land holdings to develop an understanding of the assets present at each site. Cultural resources and historic sites will also be recognized in this process so they may be incorporated into management plans. These inventories will comprise the basis of all natural resources management planning efforts. An inventory process will address but not be limited to the following objectives:

1. Land cover mapping to reflect the true composition of vegetation, water resources, and the built environment on the property.
2. Locations of unique or state-listed species detailing sites where these plants and animals exist on the property.
3. Property ownership status detailing the parcel information, deed restrictions, acquisition history and location of all past and present structures.
4. Archaeologic and historic sites inventory detailing all known sites that could possibly be interpreted or left undisturbed.
5. Species composition of plants and animal communities inhabiting the property including mapping their location and crucial habitats.
6. Soils mapping of the entire property utilizing existing maps.

7. Inventory of invasive species showing where problem species are established on the property.
8. Hazardous materials and dump site inventory showing where these problems exist on or abutting the property.
9. Identification and protection of significant view shed areas.
10. Identification and placement of property with respect to its watershed.

Where useful, data will be entered into a GIS database except for sensitive areas. This inventory is the essential first step in the natural resource management planning process for any property managed by the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department and will be conducted before major changes in programming, facility management or land uses impacting the natural resource base are undertaken.

SECTION 5

NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT PLANNING

The Des Moines Park and Recreation Department will develop and implement management plans to enhance and protect the diversity of native ecosystems within the department's land management responsibilities. Each management plan will address but not be limited to the following objectives:

1. Recommending low impact sustainable methods of natural areas restoration, habitat management, facility development and resource recovery as a means of conserving financial resources in the development and management of park property.
2. Minimize high maintenance vegetation.
3. Recommending development sites that indicate where, and to what level, facility development may take place.
4. Protecting the region's water resources by establishing buffer zones and runoff management strategies for agricultural areas, developed sites, rivers, streams and other bodies of water within and outside park properties.
5. Maintaining sufficient transitional (edge) vegetation between meadow and forest areas.
6. Assuring adequate meadow habitat and managed open areas for continuing meadow ecology.
7. Manage habitats such as prairie, old field, thickets, wetlands, forest and habitats of special value for the park system or for state listed or endangered plant or animal species using best management practices for the system diversity.
8. Managing existing stands of forested areas.
9. Removing, correcting or containing hazardous waste and dump according to Federal and State laws.
10. Providing objective data to the Environmental Review Process for evaluating the impact of construction projects or amenity improvements on park property.

The above objectives shall be pursued utilizing the most appropriate means available. These objectives shall guide land management practices on property controlled by the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department. Additionally, they shall serve as a standard for assessing land management practices on property abutting, or having significant impact on, the sound management of park lands.

SECTION 6

THE CITY'S ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS (ERP)

To ensure that facilities are developed with due consideration to existing natural resources, all developments will be subject to an environmental review. As natural resource inventories and management plans serve to provide baseline data and land management recommendations respectively, the ERP will provide specific site recommendations on given projects.

This process will ensure that resources present on a site are considered before a proposed development is implemented. The results of this process will be considered public information available to any person at the cost of reproduction. Composite reviews and recommendations will be incorporated into the public input process at all stages.

1. GENERAL CATEGORIES FOR APPLYING THE ERP

- A. On requests by other agencies to conduct improvements on park property, the ERP will be used to review proposed actions to determine if they should be permitted, denied or modified to comply with the goals of the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department under this policy.
- B. On new projects initiated by the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department, the ERP will be used to site facilities when natural resources are involved.
- C. On land acquisitions, the ERP will assess the contributions acquisitions could make on the department's efforts.
- D. On accessibility issues, the ERP will guide facility and program development to meet ADA standards.
- E. On hazardous materials and dump sites, the ERP will involve appropriate city/county departments in developing removal or containment plans that will effectively resolve the problem.

2. GENERAL STEPS IN THE ERP

- A. The Park and Recreation Department will coordinate a review from a natural resource and environmental impact perspective using Best Management Practices as guidelines. The Department will call upon other public agencies, academic institutions and the Urban Conservation Advisory Committee as a resource when conducting the review.
- B. All review statements will be compiled into a composite statement and recommendations will be forwarded to the Director and the Park and Recreation Board.

SECTION 7

OPEN SPACE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

An ongoing study of the existing open space will be conducted to assess where protection is needed. This open space comprehensive planning effort will be done according to but not limited by the following parameters:

1. Identification of resources such as forested lands, wetlands, stream and river corridors, critical wildlife habitats, state threatened and endangered species and cultural resources.
2. Inventories of existing open spaces managed by the federal government, the state of Iowa, Polk County, the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department, quasi-public entities (such as not-for-profit land trusts), and private entities (such as membership clubs).
3. Identification of greenway opportunities where they exist for watershed protection, non-motorized transportation, waterway protection and passive recreation use.
4. Gauging public need through surveys, public meetings, advisory boards and user groups.

The open space comprehensive plan will be used to guide the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department's efforts at providing open space opportunities, protecting valuable open space where it is threatened and creating linkages and greenways where they are needed.

SECTION 8

PARK AND NATURAL AREA LANDSCAPE AND MAINTENANCE GUIDELINES

Vegetation on park and other public property under the jurisdiction of the Des Moines Department of Parks and Recreation constitute a valued and significant resource that improves the quality of life of all residents and visitors to our city. The General Specifications are as follows:

- A. Maintenance standards will be followed to promote public safety and long term vegetative health and must be followed by persons, companies or city personnel when doing vegetative management located within parks and other public places.
- B. Native species of vegetation will be used in the landscape based upon site conditions and availability of plants using local sources of seed to the extent possible;
- C. Existing vegetation shall be managed in such a manner as to promote their general health by providing the necessary cultural practices.
- D. Authorized work on or with public vegetation shall be preformed properly and safely by competent personnel in a manner as to cause the least possible interference with or annoyance to others;
- E. No vegetation shall be removed from public property unless they constitute a hazard to life or property, a public nuisance, are an exotic and become invasive or because removal is part of an overall management plan approved by the Director.

1. VEGETATION TYPES AND STANDARDS

Des Moines Park and Recreation Department personnel will refer to the City of Des Moines Park and Recreation Department Vegetation Management Standards when evaluating vegetation planting and maintenance.

SECTION 9

PROPERTY MANAGEMENT, ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL

In the interest of managing all its property in a manner consistent with this policy, the following strategies will be used for managing, disposing of and acquiring property. Such actions will be considered on a case-by-case basis with full attention to present and planned future uses established in accordance with the subsections of this policy.

1. MANAGING PARK PROPERTIES

- A. Consolidating parcels where contiguous park properties are an amalgamation of multiple parcels, Des Moines Park and Recreation will seek to consolidate these parcels onto new parcels that more correctly define the land management needs of the department.
- B. Promoting restricting deeds in perpetuity on lands of high natural resource value (endangered plants and animals, watershed protection, flood control, historic sites, irreplaceable recreation amenities, etc.) through the use of conservation easements, nature preserve designations and other appropriate instruments.
- C. Splitting out lots where unwanted property can be disposed of at maximized return.
- D. Describing multiple use parcels where city departments have either expressed present need or can demonstrate planned future needs that do not negatively impact Des Moines Park and Recreation's mission.
- E. Granting easements to other organizations such as utilities, other city departments, private citizens and corporations on a case-by-case basis and keeping the interests of Des Moines Park and Recreation in mind at all times.
- F. Land identified as possessing marginal natural resource value may be designated as sites for potential development.

2. DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY

- A. Negotiating exchange or joint management of lands with other city/county departments.
- B. Sale or trade of lands by Des Moines Park and Recreation to other public agencies that can demonstrate a need for the property in providing improved services to the public.
- C. Sale at auction of land possessing marginal natural resource value and residential or commercial properties that do not serve to further the mission of the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department.

3. ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY

- A. Fee simple acquisition of open space will be used as a last resort when condemnation is the only other recourse to acquire lands essential to Des Moines Park and Recreation's mission.
- B. Acquisition through grants and sponsorships by foundations, federal agencies and corporations will be pursued.
- C. Donations by landowners and developers wishing to take advantage of tax incentives under Federal Conservation Purposes tax law will be encouraged.
- D. Condemnation of property essential to Des Moines Park and Recreation's mission will be used when no other recourse exists and community need for the property is clearly demonstrated through the public input process.

SECTION 10

MODIFICATION OF THIS POLICY

This policy shall become effective upon its adoption by the Des Moines Park and Recreation Board. As with all other official policies, staff shall endeavor to incorporate the letter and spirit of this policy into the ongoing functions of the department. This policy serves to support, through planned program implementation, the mission of the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department. All future modifications of this policy shall reflect this support by enhancing the department's ability to protect open space and to improve the environmental quality of Des Moines for the benefit of future generations.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY

Cultural Assets - These refer to the customs, traditions, and indigenous knowledge that are specific to the community. Language is a cultural asset, as is indigenous intellectual property. Cultural assets are often "intangible" elements that underpin a community. However, the material expressions of culture can generate income and other assets.

Environmental Assets - source of environmental services in the possession of local residents

Exotic species - a species that did not originally occur in the areas in which it is now found, but that arrived as a direct or indirect result of human activity.

Greenway - A linear open space; a corridor composed of natural vegetation. Greenways can be used to create connected networks of open space that include traditional parks and natural areas.

Invasive Species- means an alien species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

Native - ingenious to Polk County at the time of settlement.

Open Space - Undeveloped land or common areas in a planned community reserved for parks, walking paths or other natural uses.

State Listed Species – Endangered or Threatened Species, which are any species of fish, plant life or wildlife which is in danger of extinction, or likely to become endangered within the foreseeable future, throughout all or a significant part of its range

Unique Species- those species found in just a few localities in central Iowa or those species that are both native and conservative (meaning indicative of relatively undisturbed native habitat).

Watershed - A watershed is a region of land that is crisscrossed by smaller waterways that drain into a larger body of water.

Waterway - a natural or man-made place for water to run through (such as rive, stream, creek, or channel)