

# Brown's Woods Nature Trail Expansion and Accessibility Improvements

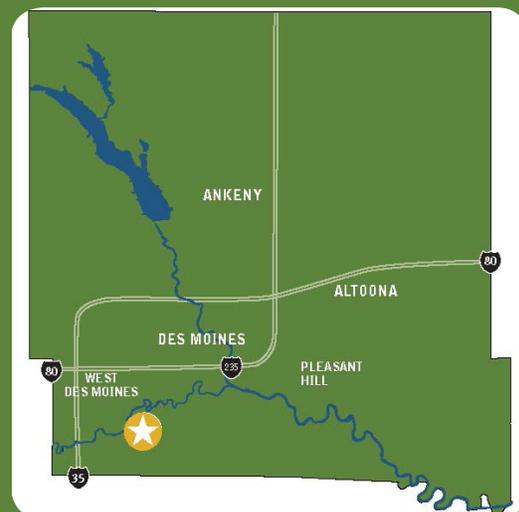


## Project Description

Brown's Woods is Iowa's largest urban forest preserve. It offers visitors two miles of scenic hiking through a mature oak and hickory woodland and alongside peaceful winding streams. Public access to this urban jewel is difficult. The park entrance is not visible, which creates safety issues, and larger vehicles such as school buses cannot access the park due to inadequate parking and steep terrain. No modern amenities exist for the public.

This project is designed to improve access and use of Brown's Woods. Lighting and improved visibility will provide increased safety for park users and neighbors. A new parking lot will handle both vehicular and bus parking and provide safe access for school children. New amenities include a modern toilet, water fountain, and additional trails. Expanded natural surface trails will provide access to an under-used portion of the park and will include interpretive information. Accessible parking and access to the Southwest Connector trail system will provide additional opportunities for paved trail users.

This project is in partnership with the City of West Des Moines.



# Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt

## Land Protection and Wildlife Enhancements



### Project Description

Polk County is the most developed county in Iowa. A lot of pressure is placed on our scarce natural areas as population increases and wildlife habitat decreases. The impacts of flooding threaten communities and infrastructure and place our drinking water at greater risk for contamination.

Chichaqua Bottoms Greenbelt is a natural resource success story with many exciting chapters still to unfold. Preservation and protection of natural areas in and around this 7,000+ acre regionally significant greenbelt now offer the public flood protection, quality wetlands, prairie, and woodlands, and increased wildlife populations for recreation and viewing. Future amenities will include an innovative wildlife viewing platform off the Hwy 65 bypass that will attract and educate people of all ages while they take part in Iowa's most popular outdoor activity. Additionally, the replacement of a marsh well pump will benefit Chichaqua and provide a high quality controlled waterfowl hunting experience for the public. Short term plans also include acquisition of priority property additions that become available.

Partner organizations include the Iowa DNR, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Audubon Society, Izaak Walton League, Mid-Iowa Retriever Club, and Jasper County.



# Easter Lake & Yeader Creek Watershed Enhancement and Protection



## Project Description

Easter Lake's watershed reaches more than 6,500 acres of urban development in the heart of Des Moines. Water quality in Easter Lake is poor. Dirt and other sediment washing in from the watershed have filled the lake. Easter Lake is considered impaired by the Iowa DNR and EPA.

A combination of restoration practices is necessary to restore this 178-acre lake and its watershed. Planned restoration measures include stream bank stabilization, promoting the use of no or low phosphorus fertilizer, storm water management, in-lake sediment detention basins, dredging existing stormwater detention basins, fish population renovation and extensive public education.

Partner organizations include the City of Des Moines, Iowa DNR, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Iowa State University, Natural Resource Conservation Service, and Polk Soil and Water Conservation District.



# Fort Des Moines Outdoor Classroom and Pond Enhancements



## Project Description

Studies show that spending time outdoors contributes to improved physical wellness, enhanced imagination and attention spans, decreased aggression, and boosted classroom performance. Polk County Conservation and Des Moines Public Schools recognize this and are teaming up to develop an innovative outdoor classroom that will better serve local school children.

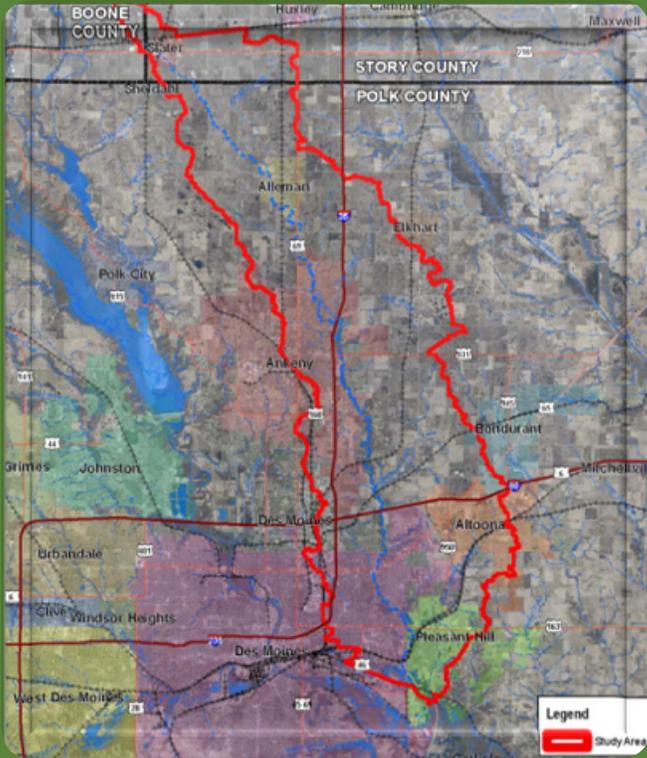
Savanna, oak woodlands, and wetland resources are already present in Fort Des Moines Park. Adding a 13-acre prairie and rain garden will provide a full range of ecosystems. An interpretive trail with interspersed learning areas will meander through these natural areas to enhance education and provide valuable recreation opportunities.

Plans also include constructing an asphalt road and parking lot northeast of the pond to provide better access, along with installation of a modern restroom, accessible fishing pier and walkway to the pond. Shoreline stabilization methods, silt dikes, and ditch checks will be used to improve the pond's water quality.

Partner organizations include Des Moines Public Schools and the Iowa DNR.



# Four Mile Creek Watershed Protection and Enhancement



## Project Description

Recent extreme rain events have resulted in excessive erosion of stream banks within the Four Mile Creek Watershed. As the stream banks continue to erode, adjacent vegetation and soil is being lost. If the rate of loss continues, wildlife habitat and existing infrastructures will be impacted.

A series of stream bank stabilization projects within the existing Four Mile Creek Greenbelt would reduce the erosion within this area, improve water quality, and protect existing wildlife habitat and infrastructure within the Greenbelt. Initial projects are planned that would restore approximately 600' of eroded stream bank. Future projects are planned farther north within the watershed in cooperation with local communities and agencies. These projects would provide additional buffer areas to Four Mile Creek with a goal of improving the water quality, increasing the amount of storm water retention and protecting the natural resources while enhancing recreational opportunities.

Partner organizations include the Natural Resource Conservation Service and the Polk Soil and Water Conservation District.



# Jester Park Education Center

*Platform for Discovery, Gateway to Wonder*

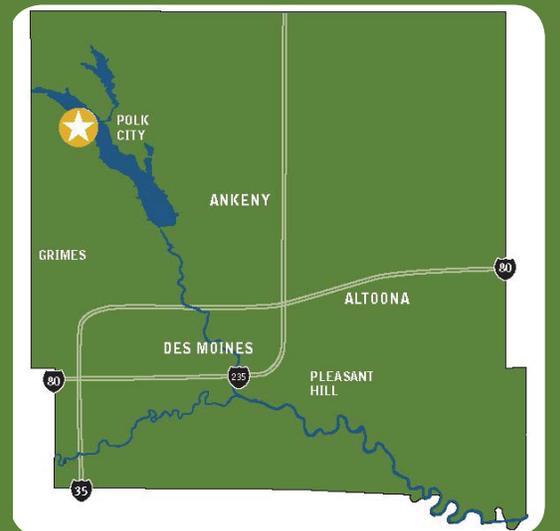


## Project Description

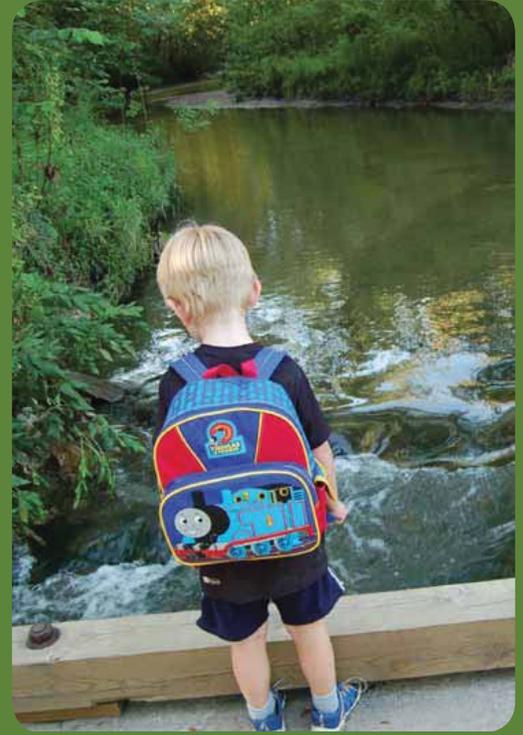
Polk County Conservation is a statewide and regional leader in outdoor education, but unfortunately does not provide an education and welcome center that draws attention to this. A Conservation Center would enhance their education excellence, demonstrate conservation and sustainable design, serve as a significant tourist attraction and community resource, and provide a safe haven to park users during severe weather.

The Center would be located just inside a new relocated main entrance to Jester Park. Immersed in prairie, the Center will be connected to wetlands, a pond, and woodlands by means of hiking trails. The Center's upper level will be home to Conservation headquarters where the public can have immediate access to staff, resources, and interpretive areas. The lower level will serve as an educational staging area for science, arts, history, and a gateway to the great outdoors. Public rental space and a safe room will provide a secure environment for all users.

Partnership opportunities include private donors & grant funding.



# Thomas Mitchell Park Accessible Recreation and Water Quality Enhancements



## Project Description

Thomas Mitchell Park is located in rapidly-growing eastern Polk County. Recent restoration efforts to the 6-acre pond have set the stage to move forward with a series of new recreation amenities, accessibility enhancements, and water quality improvements to Camp Creek.

Initial projects, as part of the recently completed master plan, call for an accessible trail around the pond that connects to the existing woodland trail system. Combined, these trails will provide over 3 miles of recreational enjoyment. Picnic shelters, rental cabins, and fishing piers will be installed within close proximity of the pond. Renovations to the popular Camp Creek low water crossing will create separate safe and engaging spots for pedestrian and vehicular access through the park alongside a moving stream. Streambank stabilization practices will take place downstream from the crossing which will improve water quality and protect recreation amenities.

Partner organizations include the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Polk Soil and Water Conservation District, and Metro Waste Authority.



# Community Trail Connections



## Project Description

Polk County has played a vital role in the success of the Central Iowa Trails Network which links multiple communities and counties throughout the Des Moines metro area and beyond. A few key connections still remain that would help complete this extensive trails network.

A 2.5 mile segment of the Gay Lea Wilson Trail from 29th Avenue to Aurora Avenue would connect the Ankeny and Des Moines trail systems. A recently acquired 5.5 mile Union Pacific rail corridor, now called the Chichaqua Valley Trail Connector, would serve as the link from Ankeny and Des Moines to Bondurant and Jasper County. Lastly, a 4.8 mile paved trail around Easter Lake and through Ewing Park would continue efforts towards connecting this popular park to downtown Des Moines and Carlisle. All of these trails would encourage active living, enhance quality of life and environmental quality, create new opportunities for outdoor recreation, and provide safe routes for commuters.

Partner organizations include the Cities of Des Moines, Ankeny, Bondurant, Carlisle, Jasper County and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation.

