



Prospect Heights Natural Resources
Commission
Prospect Heights Public Works
Plan for Improved Public Access and Enjoyment of
the Prospect Heights Slough & Hillcrest Lake
July 23, 2018

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Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission/ Public Works Plan for Improved Public Access and Enjoyment of the Prospect Heights Slough and Hillcrest Lake

Abstract: To create a plan of action to increase public access and public enjoyment of the natural areas surrounding the Slough and Hillcrest Lake.

Introduction

The City Council of Prospect Heights has requested the Natural Resources Commission, (NRC) work in conjunction with Prospect Heights Public Works to propose a plan to increase public access and public enjoyment of the natural areas surrounding the Slough and Hillcrest Lake. This proposal is the first working draft of that plan.

The Commission and its volunteers have been working on this task following NRC plans that were submitted to the City in 2016. The Slough Restoration Plan of 2016 was prepared following the recommendations of the ecological survey conducted by Hey and Associates. This plan looks to accomplish the vision of the City Council to increase access and usage of the area while building upon the principals and work that has already been accomplished in the past two years. The final version will seek input from residents and the Park District and incorporate ideas that are applicable to the plan.

The final plan will strike a balance between restoration and preservation of the Slough and lake with public access for the enjoyment of the residents. It will secure solutions that will most greatly benefit the wetlands without endangering them and will ensure its long term survival and sustainability for the enjoyment of future generations to come.

Purpose, scope and goals

The purpose of this plan is to make recommendations to the Prospect Heights City Council that will achieve the stated goals for increased public access and ways to engage the environment without damaging the restoration or the wildlife that inhabit the area.

The scope of the plan will focus on the Prospect Heights Slough and Hillcrest Lake as one entity.

The stated goals are:

- Increase public access and provide an educational, interactive experience.
- Continue to restore the habitat of both areas and improve the watershed.
- Establish and employ sound ecological principals and procedures to ensure the health and well-being of the entire wetland and its tributary watershed.

- Develop a maintenance plan that employs the PHNRC Volunteer workforce, Public Works and the Park District.
- Strategize potential funding opportunities.

Summary of the Hey report

Main Problems:

1. Shoreline erosion
2. High nutrient loads
3. Excessive native aquatic growth
4. Large goose population
5. Shallow water depth
6. Invasive plant species, land and aquatic

Recommended Solutions:

1. Removal of turf grass at the shorelines
2. Re-vegetation of shorelines with native plants
3. Reduction of goose populations
4. Removal of invasives
5. Possible treatment of aquatic vegetation at the lake
 - a. Do no treatments
 - b. Herbicide or partial herbicide
 - c. Hand controls
 - d. Raise the water levels.
 - e. Other solutions
6. Community outreach and education
7. Detain, retain or filter incoming storm water
8. Separate management plans for the Lake and Slough
9. Controlled burns or scheduled mowing

What has been accomplished over the last 2 years with the current plan

Much has been accomplished in two years. The efforts have been focused on the south Slough only due to the pending MWRD road project.

- Riparian buffers have been started in several areas on a staggered plan.
- Over 30,000 native plugs were produced in the NRC greenhouse program and planted in shoreline restoration, woodland areas and in the ephemeral pools.
- Several invasive trees have been thinned to open up the canopy and promote emerging native plants from the seed bank.
- Over 50 pounds of native seed from NRC remnant areas have been collected and sown at the site.
- Native plant species have increased some 800%.

- Birds, insects, butterflies and frogs have increased dramatically.
- Several species of endangered birds are now nesting at the Slough.
- Three prescribed burns have been conducted, increasing the health and vitality of the habitat.
- Nature trails have been installed and maintained, linking the east and west sides of the Slough to the basin area and the Isaak Walton pavilion.
- Trail markers have been installed to mark the trail system.
- Public use of the Slough area has increased in all seasons.



Overview of existing trail system



The path on the south side of the Slough starts near our original plantings and runs parallel to Hillside Ave.

It crosses over the tributary creek in the basin area and continues on into the Isaac Walton Park.



The north woodland path extends from Isaac Walton Park to Marion/Maple.

That area contains a wide range of native species, very unique views of the slough and an abundance of wildlife because of the diversity.

The trails are marked with the Nature Trail signs but do not have any interactive features.

Proposed plan for increasing public access and enjoyment.

NOTE: The City Council has expressed interest in having the plan include parking for people that currently park and fish on Willow Road. Problematic to developing this plan is the pending MWRD road reconstruction project which to

date, has not been implemented and clear plans of intent have not been presented to the NRC which makes it close to impossible to plan anything relevant for the Willow Road area. The NRC would welcome an opportunity to discuss the plan with the MWRD in the hopes of arriving at the best possible solution to meet the stated goals of this proposal.

This plan makes the following recommendations:



1. The continuation of the deep rooted riparian system (green marking) to improve wildlife habitat, absorb and filter runoff, arrest erosion and create visual interest.
 - a. All new riparian buffers start with the removal of invasive buckthorn.
 - b. At Hillcrest Lake the buffers would feature shorter native plantings in the sight lines of residences and taller species where view is not a direct consideration. Pending MWRD plans for the southeast corner of the lake, the NRC would look to remove the invasives thickets and create a fishing area from the two lots that are owned by an absentee owner.
2. The continuation of the existing trail system around the rest of the Slough and onto Hillcrest Lake. (blue marking)
 - a. Extension from Marion/Maple through to Willow road and east on the south side of Willow once the MWRD project has been clarified.
 - b. At Hillcrest Lake, simple mow paths that extend from Hillcrest Drive down to the water would be provided for every resident located around the lake.
3. The installation of raised boardwalks in the known areas of the Slough prone to moderate to heavy fluctuation in water levels. This would significantly extend the number of days of access to the trail system.
4. Continued development of the riparian buffers (orange marking) at the Slough.
5. Provisions for limited public parking at Hillcrest Drive on the residents side of the street to keep cars off of Willow Road. (purple marking)
6. Installation of benches, garbage cans and solar lighting at strategic locations on the Lake. Final placement would be determined on practicality, non-threatening locations to wildlife and resident feedback and safety.
7. Interactive signage, plant ID signs and trail markers throughout both areas to increase the educational component.

Funding.

1. Once the plan has been decided, a comprehensive budget can be created. The following items would be considered.
 - a. Native seed would be collected and sown by the NRC as a

- function of its regular work days.
- b. Native plugs would be grown in the NRC Greenhouse program.
- c. The NRC would use its volunteer work force and all of its resources as part of their normal work days.
- d. All of these measures will significantly reduce costs.

2. The NRC will reach out to its scout troops in search of potential Eagle Scout projects.

Implementation and Maintenance Program.

1. The Natural Resources Commission would look to implement and maintain the project as part of the regularly scheduled calendar year. This would include:

- a. Invasive removal.
- b. Herbicide application.
- c. Trail creation.
- d. Growing native plugs.
- e. Seeding and plugging of native species.
- f. Annual prescribed burns.
- g. Installation of interactive features.

2. Public Works would assist in the following ways:

- a. Tree removal.
- b. Cut brush and invasive chipping the during summer months
- c. Mowing

3. The Park District would assist in the following ways:

- a. Mowing
- b. Tree removal

4. Upon approval, the City Council would assist with securing funding.

Next steps and timeline

1. A comprehensive understanding of the MWRD plan and timeline must be known so it can be accounted for in the master plan.

2. Feedback from the City Council and residents leading to detailing, budgeting and a finalization of the plan is necessary.

3. Upon approval, funding needs to be secured.

4. The Natural Resources Commission will continue its regularly scheduled workdays and is ready to proceed with all of the areas of this plan that only need approval and not necessary funding at this time. This would include invasive removal in the buffer zones, herbiciding and seeding.

Summary

As the guardians and advocates for this historically significant sliver of natural wetland, we have a deep conviction to ensure its health and well-being, not only for future generations, but for the reptiles, amphibians, macroinvertebrates, insects, fish, birds, mammals and all of the wildlife that call it home.

This plan looks to protect at all costs the habitat and the inhabitants while maximizing the opportunities for residents and the public to enjoy all that has been preserved.