

LAKE MANAWA STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN

In advance of the 100th anniversary of Iowa state parks in 2020, the Department of Natural Resources is developing plans for future recreation opportunities that are compatible with the resources of each state park.

LAKE MANAWA STATE PARK - A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

In 1917, the Iowa Legislature passed the landmark State Park Act, authorizing the new Board of Conservation to begin creation of an Iowa state park system. This crowned a several decade long effort to, through public ownership, begin to protect some of Iowa's most significant and unique natural, scenic, and historic areas before they were irretrievably damaged or lost by such forces as agriculture, logging, and urbanization. One of the first things the Board did was to prepare a detailed report in 1919 describing some of these special places and establishing priorities for their acquisition.

So significant was the area that we now call Lake Manawa State Park, that the 1919 Report identified "Manawa Lake, near Council Bluffs" as a proposed state park. Lake Manawa had been formed as a result of the tremendous Missouri River floods of April, 1881. The flood waters cut a new river channel creating the new 700 acre "ox-bow" lake. For a time, portions of the lake were in both Iowa and Nebraska, until the "ownership" issue was resolved in 1919.

In its first years, the lake was known locally as "Cutoff Lake," until "Manawa," signifying "peace and comfort," was adopted. The name has been variously attributed to several local young ladies, Julie Officer, Anna Squires, and Pauline (last name unknown). The town of "Lake Manawa" was incorporated in 1889.

In the late 1880's, development began in the Manawa area with a grand 24 room hotel that was destroyed by fire in 1894. A large pavilion was constructed on the old hotel site. As the area became more and more popular for picnics and outings, a railway was

constructed from Council Bluffs. This effort proved unsuccessful, but a later effort to provide electrical streetcar service involving competing companies was successful. Over 600 acres of land were acquired in the process, in addition to "Manhattan Beach," which included a "bathing resort."

Later recreational development at the Manawa Resort was very extensive and included: two toboggan slides; the large pavilion with 800 ft. boardwalk, restaurant, soda fountain, and saloon on the site of the old hotel; band stand; the amusement park with Midway, large roller coaster, skating rink, ball room and vaudeville hall; the magnificent two story 180 foot long "Kursaal" with "refectory" and dance floor built over the water; and, the nearby Ben Marks' Casino. Lake Manawa was dubbed the "Coney Island of the Midwest." An estimated 40,000 attended July 4, 1900 festivities at the lake. Passenger launches, some powered by electricity, and steamers were also available for shuttle service and scenic rides. Two of the steamers, the Manawa and the M.F. Rohrer sank, the former with the loss of three passengers. The Kursaal was itself victim of a tragic accident in 1906 when part of the structure collapsed with the loss of six lives.

The Easter Tornado of 1913 did tremendous damage to facilities at Lake Manawa and a fire destroyed the pavilion in 1926. In addition, changing times, including World War I, greater use of automobiles, Prohibition, "blue laws" restricting dancing on weekends, and siltation in the lake all had their effect and the area's popularity gradually declined, with closure of the resort in 1927.

Lake Manawa State Park was dedicated in 1932. It was identified as an area that was an excellent waterfowl lake, fair for fishing, and valuable for recreation, and improvements were completed according to an adopted program of diking, dredging, acquisition of shore land, etc. The plan expressed major concerns over the effects of soil erosion and sedimentation into state lakes. Lake Manawa was subject to siltation from Missouri River flooding as well as water level

fluctuations. In the early 1900's, efforts were made to deepen selected shoreline areas by dragline. By the 1920's, the lake had an average depth of only four feet. In 1934, a limited dredging operation commenced there which deepened the northeast portion of the lake and created the peninsula now used for boating, angling, and picnicking.

During the first decade of Iowa state parks, primary emphasis was placed on acquisition of such significant natural, scenic, and historic places as Dolliver before they would be lost forever. Formal outdoor recreation facilities in early state parks were typically few. This, however, began to change as increasing economic prosperity in the 1920's created a demand for more active outdoor recreation opportunities and facilities in Iowa state parks; places to camp, swim, picnic, hike, boat and otherwise enjoy oneself in the out-of-doors.

In most of the state park system, however, facility development lagged because of the onset of the Great Depression of 1929. It was not until President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "New Deal" programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) came onboard in 1933 that more extensive facility development began to occur in Iowa state parks. In Iowa, progress of CCC and WPA state park work was rapid, due to the Board of Conservation's past planning efforts as well as the preparation of The Iowa Twenty-Five Year Conservation Plan in 1933 which became a blueprint for conservation action, to include creation of the Iowa Conservation Commission, through merger of the Board of Conservation and Fish and Game Commission.

The CCC put hundreds of thousands of young men to work throughout the nation. For their hard, hands on work, "enrollees" received "room and

board" and \$30 per month, of which \$25 was sent home. In Iowa, nearly 46,000 "enrollees" worked at 46 CCC camps, 41 of which did work in state parks. They constructed a tremendous number of facilities ranging from benches and trails to shelters, lodges, beach facilities, dams roads, and water sewer systems, as well as tree planting and erosion control. CCC camps were administered by the U.S. Army in cooperation with federal agencies such as the National Park Service and Forest Service. Nearly 700 of their facilities are still in use.

The WPA typically worked out of the local communities and accomplished a wide variety of projects, from the painting of murals in civic buildings to construction of facilities, signs, water and sewer systems and roads in 27 Iowa state parks.

According to available records, two CCC companies worked at Lake Manawa. Company 1757 transferred to Camp SP5 at Council Bluffs in 1934 and worked on "reclamation and land management." The lake bed was dry in 1934 and the CCC assisted in a lake dredging effort by the Conservation Commission, which utilized matching funds from the Manawa Dredging Association. The Civil Works Administration also assisted in the CCC lake improvement work.

The dredging operation resulted in the formation of the "peninsula" on the northern shore of the lake that once included the beach and now encompasses the primary boat ramp and park area and picnic facilities. Company 769 at Camp SP18 constructed a roadway around the lake. The CCC also constructed a bath house.

The July, 1941 Iowa's State Park brochure lists Lake Manawa as a 750 acre "Recreation Reserve" offering "Fishing, supervised beach, refreshments." It later reverted back to State Park designation after another reclassification effort. World War II pretty much brought an end to the work of the CCC and WPA in Iowa state parks as well as park work in general until peace time. Then, an era of park system expansion began, including a number of new state parks and recreation areas as well as facility expansion in many parks, especially in the campgrounds.

The primary emphasis at Lake Manawa in the 1950s and 60s was lake improvement to increase its depth and to help ensure a reliable water supply with a minimum of sediment inflow from periodic Missouri



Image (above): North Peninsula of Lake Manawa

River flooding and from water intake to maintain desired lake levels. In the early 1900s, draglines were used to increase lake depth in key areas. As mentioned earlier, formal dredging took place in the 1930s. Later in the 1940s, three wells were drilled into the lake bed to help maintain water levels and water was also pumped into the lake from the Missouri River. In the 1950s, a pump was installed by the “Conservation League, Inc.”, as well as an alarm system to enable shutting off water flow in times of heavy sedimentation.

The local community has long been involved in lake improvement efforts. In the late 1970s, land was purchased for dredge spoil placement and funding was sought from the state and federal governments to accomplish the lake improvement project. In 1975, over 300 additional acres of land was acquired and a development plan for new park facilities was approved by the Conservation Commission. Dredging of approximately 364 acres of the lake to an average depth of eight feet finally completed in the 1980s. This project entailed construction of an extensive levee system to encompass dredge spoil materials. It also included a new Missouri River water pumping system. The levee now hosts a paved multi-purpose trail linking the park with the Wabash Trace Trail and the City of Council Bluffs.

A major lake dredging project is scheduled to commence in 2015, with extensive areas of the lake to be significantly deepened to depths of 15-25 ft. which will be of great benefit to lake water quality, angling, and recreational water activities. In the 1960s and 1970s Lake Manawa redevelopment effort included relocation of the beach, construction of a

beach concession building, campground, parking lots and roadways, and park office and shop, and sanitary sewer system. Later work at Manawa included construction of a number of picnic shelters available for rental, including a large shelter with kitchenette, boat ramp and parking area, and the large “Dream Playground,” planned with local input and built by staff and volunteers.

The Lake Manawa campground has long been a popular camping destination and is among the top 10 state park campgrounds in visitation. It currently features 72 sites, 37 of which are electric, a modern shower building, and a trailer dump station. The DNR had proposed moving the campground to the more spacious “peninsula” area on the north shore of the lake. However, environmental concerns made such a move infeasible.

Lake Manawa continues to enjoy its status as the major water oriented outdoor recreation facility in the Omaha-Council Bluffs Metropolitan Area and one of the most heavily visited Iowa state parks.

Lake Manawa State Park Existing Facilities	Quantity
Campground (electric – 35) - Campsite total	72
Youth group campsite	1
Beach – supervised	1
Beach concession	1
Boat Ramps	3
Picnic shelters	9
Playgrounds	2
Trails (Paved – 3.2 miles) (Mountain bike – 5 miles) - Total	8.2 miles

Table (above): Lake Manawa State Park Existing Facilities

A ROADMAP FOR THE FUTURE OF LAKE MANAWA STATE PARK

The over-riding goal of the recreation use plan is to enhance visitor outdoor recreation and education experiences by improving the facilities and trails at Lake Manawa State Park. This will promote visitor mental and physical health; encourage family time and making memories; protect natural resources for the future; create awareness and appreciation of the park’s unique resources; and, generate economic activity in the region.



Image (above): Lake Manawa State Park “Dream Playground”

OVERNIGHT FACILITIES – ENHANCE CAMPING OPPORTUNITIES

ISSUES:

- The existing campground electricity was installed in 1970 with 35 30-amp service campsites that do not meet the needs of modern campers.
- The campsites are small, too close together, and cramped for space.

PROPOSALS:

- Re-configure the campground roadway and camp pads to make larger sites, which will reduce the number of campsites by one third, but will greatly improve the quality of the camping experience and help to accommodate larger vehicles.
- Upgrade all campsites to 50 amp electrical service, and add full utility hook-ups for sewer and water where possible.
- Plant a deciduous vegetative shrub screen to visually separate the campground and the adjacent housing development.
- Replace camper check-in station.
- Remodel and upgrade the shower building.



Image (above): Lake Manawa State Park Shelter Area

PICNIC AREAS – ENHANCE THE EXISTING FACILITIES

Lake Manawa has some of the most robust day-use picnic activity in the state, due in part to its excellent lake views as well as location within a major metropolitan area.

ISSUE:

- Eight of the existing picnic shelters are 27 years old and lack electricity.

PROPOSALS:

- Make the North Peninsula the premier picnic area in the park, by constructing an extra-large capacity picnic shelter that will accommodate 150 – 200 people, remodeling the existing modern restroom, adding a year-round restroom near the boat ramp, and eliminating the shelter near the boat ramp which creates parking conflicts when in use.
- Replace the other seven older shelters and include electrical outlets.



Image (above): Standard New Picnic Shelter

PLAYGROUNDS – EXPAND PLAY OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PARK VISITORS

ISSUES:

- The playground on the North Peninsula is old and is a traditional composition that is less challenging and enjoyable and lacks wheelchair accessible play opportunities.
- The Dream Playground is incredibly popular. However, it is 22 years-old and annual maintenance required is becoming more extensive and costly.

PROPOSALS:

- Replace existing play equipment on the North Peninsula with a playground that includes enjoyable and challenging “nature-themed” elements such as climbing rocks, log/tree trunks, sand, vine-covered tunnels and tall grasses.
- Conduct a structural analysis of the Dream Playground to determine short and long-term maintenance needs and alternatives.

PARK ORIENTATION AND INTERPRETATION – INCREASE WAY-FINDING AND EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

Lake Manawa has some of the most robust day-use picnic activity in the state, due in part to its excellent lake views as well as location within a major metropolitan area.

ISSUE:

- There are locations in the park where signage would provide interpretive and educational information as well as general way-finding.

PROPOSALS:

- Add a four-sided interpretive kiosk at the campground to tell the natural resource story and provide park facility and trail information.
- Add two orientation signs at main trailheads.
- Replace three interpretive panels that are old, faded and hard to read.

IMPROVE TRAIL EXPERIENCES AND VEHICULAR ACCESS FOR VISITORS

ISSUES:

- The main park roadway is narrow and in critical need of replacement. All consideration will be given to widening to accommodate bicycle traffic wherever possible.
- Trailheads lack restroom facilities.



Image (above): Children playing in Lake Manawa

PROPOSALS:

- Replace the park roadway surface and expand its width wherever possible to allow for a safe shared roadway with bicycles.
- Add year-round restroom facilities at the east bike trailhead and at the river boat ramp/mountain bike trailhead.

PARKWIDE FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

ISSUES:

- Both entrances should be improved to enhance the important visitor “first impression” of the park.
- The park office/work shop has all entry doors on the same side of the building which inevitably creates situations that mix park visitors and staff performing maintenance and works projects when garage doors are open in summer.
- There are a number of unused parking lots that serve no practical purpose, are isolated from view, and are difficult to monitor and patrol.
- There are locations within the park that could be gated to provide enhanced night time safety.
- The beach concession building was built in 1987 and is in need of remodeling and updated plumbing and electrical systems for a safer and more efficient delivery of services.

PROPOSALS:

- Add stone portals at both entrances.
- Add a new park visitor entrance/foyer on the end of the existing office to help eliminate potential conflicts and safety concerns.
- Remove unused and unnecessary parking lots.
- Add roadway gates to enable controlled access after-hours.
- Remodel and upgrade the beach concession building.

RECREATION USE PLAN

This draft plan was prepared with input of DNR staff, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Army Corps of Engineers. Several public meetings were previously held. The DNR is currently seeking input from park visitors and stakeholders. In addition, a public meeting will be held May 7, 2015 at 6:30 PM at the Western Historic Trail Center located at 3434 Richard Downing Ave, Council Bluffs, IA 51501.

When finalized the implementation of the Lake Manawa Recreation Use Plan will help ensure that this popular Iowa state park remains an outdoor destination in the future. This will act as a detailed and practical blueprint for future action. All improvements will be completed with due regard for Lake Manawa State Park’s natural resources and scenic qualities.

The completion of a recreation use plan for each park will help determine the most effective allocation of funds on a project-by-project basis for the Iowa state park system as a whole. Lake Manawa’s plan recommendations will be accomplished as necessary funding becomes available from ongoing sources as well as through partnering opportunities.



Image (above): Example of artificial climbing rock play element

High Priority (1)	Cost Estimate
Upgrade existing campground to 40 full hook-up sites + 5 electric	\$250,000
New campground roadway	\$400,000
North Peninsula picnic area enhancements	\$220,000
Replace North Peninsula playground	\$30,000
Add interpretive kiosk and panels	\$30,000
High Priority Total:	\$930,000
Medium Priority (2)	
Add restrooms at trailheads (2)	\$70,000
Entrance portals (2) & reconfigure north entrance roadway	\$80,000
Remodel shower building	\$75,000
Remodel beach concession (2,000 SF)	\$150,000
Medium Priority Total:	\$365,000
Low Priority (3)	
Replace main park shelters (5), add electricity	\$250,000
Add park office visitor foyer	\$20,000
Low Priority Total:	\$270,000

Table (above): Lake Manawa State Park’s Project Priorities

LAKE MANAWA STATE PARK RECREATION USE PLAN



PARK ENTRANCE

- Enhance both entrances with entrance portals and signage **(Proposed)**

NORTH PENINSULA

- Redevelop picnic area to a premier facility with extra large picnic shelter **(Proposed)**
- Replace lakeshore picnic restroom and shelter **(Proposed)**
- Add year-round restroom at boat ramp **(Proposed)**
- Replace playground **(Proposed)**

MOUNTAIN BIKE AND RIVER BOAT RAMP AREA

- Restroom (Existing)

LEGEND

- - - - Park Boundary
- - - - Trails (Existing)
- Roads
- Water

880 ft.
0 mi. 1/3 mi.



CAMPGROUND - UPGRADE

- Remodel showers **(Proposed)**
- Reconfigure roadway and enlarge campsites **(Proposed)**
- Upgrade all sites to 50 AMP electrical service **(Proposed)**
- Plant visual screen between campground and residential development **(Proposed)**

BEACH AND PICNIC AREA

- Replace 5 shelters - old **(Proposed)**
- Shelter/Kitchenette (Existing)
- Dream Playground (Existing)
- Double boat ramp (Existing)