

# Nielsen Memorial Preserve **MASTER PLAN**

Update: November 2020





# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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# Chapter 1 **INTRODUCTION**

## **Overview & Project Purpose**

Goodhue County's Nielsen Memorial Preserve is located on 88 acres in the southwest corner of Goodhue County in Minnesota, near the City of Kenyon. The land is a "Big Woods" remnant in Section 7 of Kenyon Township. The bulk of this property was donated to the County by the estate of Harold Nielsen in early 2016. Home to a diverse range of plants and wildlife, this preserve will provide a refuge for many different species and a location for hiking, picnicking, observing, and learning about nature for visitors. The park has diverse terrain with an even, level area towards the northern side of the park, as well as several ravines that lead down to the North Fork of the Zumbro River.

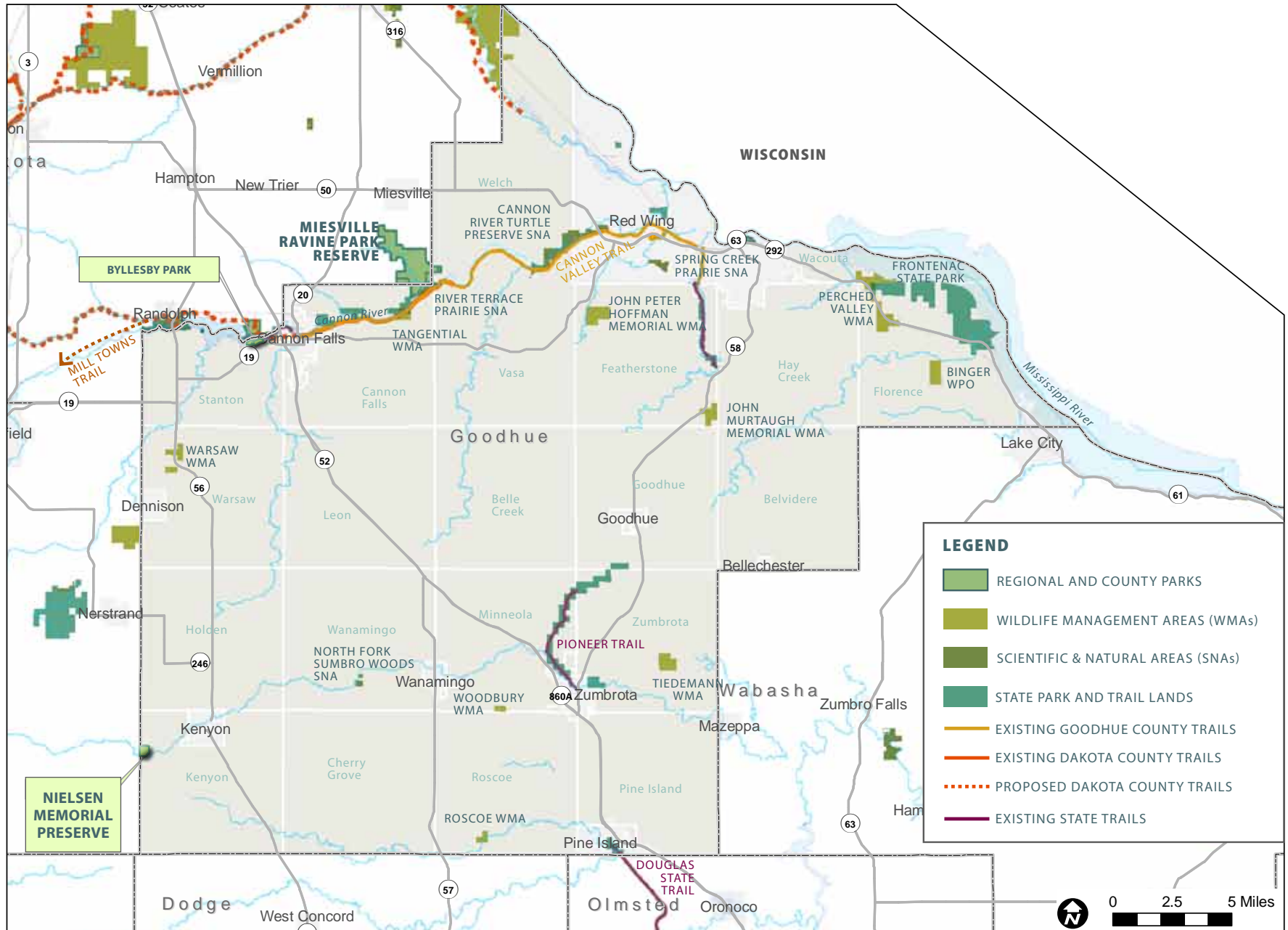
## **Master Plan Purpose**

This master plan has been developed in order to:

- » Create a unified vision for the future of the park
- » Plan for the next 10 to 25 years of park development
- » Guide County staff and elected officials in funding and capital improvement projects
- » Satisfy requirements for the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission (GMRPTC) in order to be identified as a regional park and qualify for Clean Water Land and Legacy Funds



# Goodhue County Park System Context



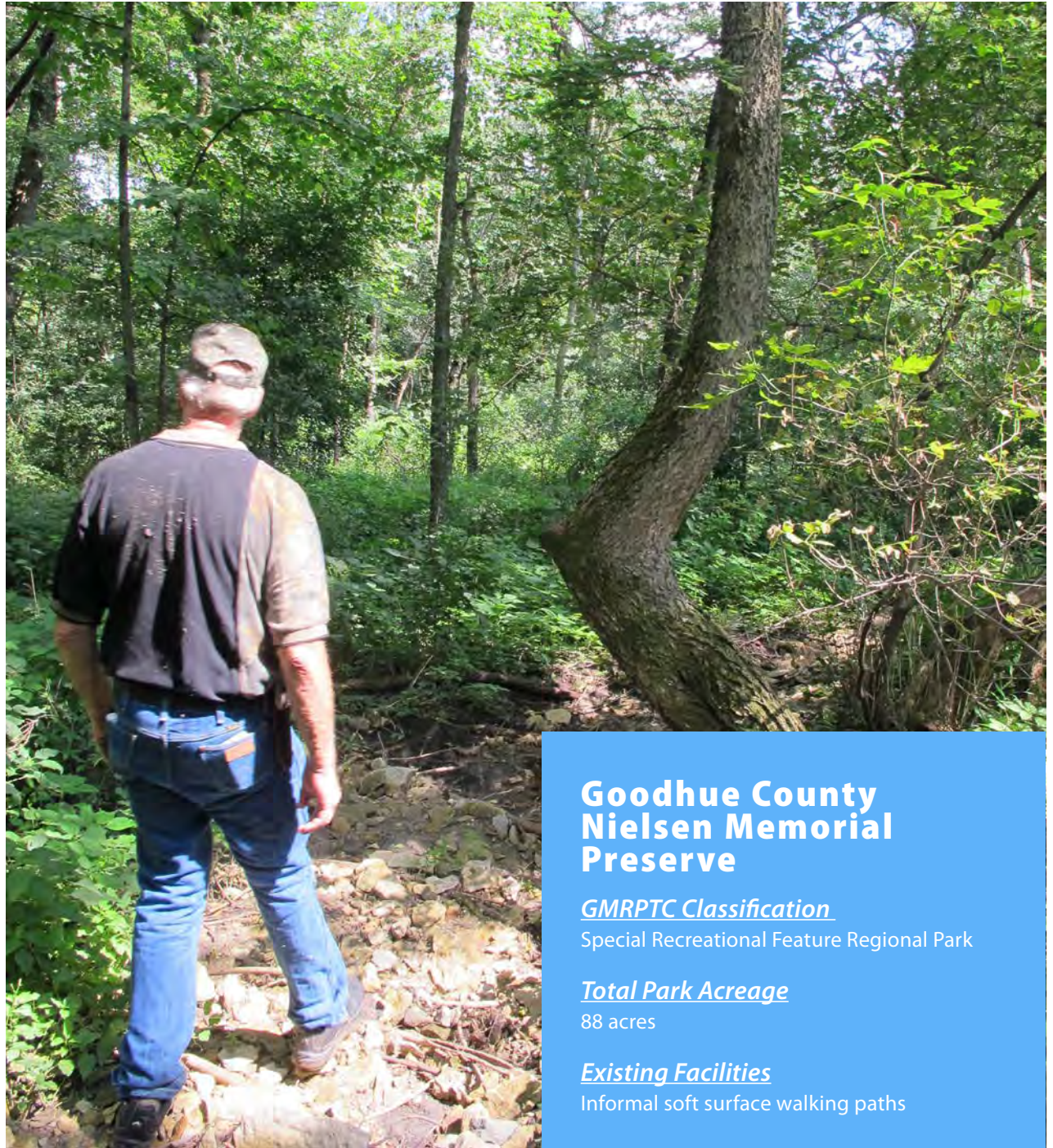


## Regional Significance

Nielsen Memorial Preserve consists of a high quality forest landscape in a matrix of agricultural crop land. Very few stands of native big woods remain in southeastern Minnesota, and remaining big woods habitats, like those at Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, are threatened by climate change. Efforts to preserve the stands that do exist and educate about their place in the Minnesota landscape is an important way to celebrate the state's natural heritage.

Within Goodhue County, there are no nature-based education facilities, and the surrounding area has few parks that pair passive outdoor recreational options with natural resource education. To fill this gap, Nielsen Memorial Preserve will pursue programs and partnerships that emphasize nature-based education to serve a wide audience of visitors from Goodhue, Rice, Dodge, and Steele Counties. As a proposed outdoor learning laboratory, the park could host school, university, and scouting groups from across the state.

Nielsen Memorial Preserve is home to more than two-dozen unique landforms known as Mima mounds. The source of these topographical phenomena is part of a robust scientific debate; and their presence on publicly-owned land provides a valuable opportunity to researchers, especially if there is a facility onsite where they can catalogue and showcase their work. The Mima mounds at Nielsen Memorial Preserve are part of the Schmidt Moundfield- the greatest concentration of Mima Mounds remaining anywhere in the Upper Midwest. Mima mounds are a fascinating part of Minnesota's natural history that has unfortunately been forgotten or ignored for a variety of reasons. Highlighting them here at Nielsen Memorial Preserve could provide an attraction for visitors and a focus for programming. More information on Mima mounds and their significance can be found on page 15.



### Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve

#### GMRPTC Classification

Special Recreational Feature Regional Park

#### Total Park Acreage

88 acres

#### Existing Facilities

Informal soft surface walking paths



## Past Planning & Related Planning Efforts

Past planning efforts have set the stage for this master plan document. These plans have impacted the decision to complete this master plan, and they will continue to impact the park in the future.

### Goodhue County Parks

The Goodhue County Public Works Department will maintain and operate Nielsen Memorial Preserve, its amenities, and its trails for recreational use. The Public Works Department is responsible for the protection and preservation of land in its natural state, while providing for high quality outdoor natural resource-oriented recreational activities.

### Mission Statement

The mission of the Goodhue County Parks, Trails, and Recreation Advisory Board is to provide a quality park, trail and recreation system which strive to preserve, protect, maintain, improve and enhance the county's park land, trails, and recreational activities, on behalf of all current and future citizens of the County of Goodhue.

### Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trail Commission (GMRPTC)

#### Regional Park classification desire: Special Recreation Feature

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission was established by the Minnesota State Legislature in 2013 in order to approve designation of regional parks and trails in Greater Minnesota and to make funding recommendations to the legislature regarding park and trail projects. The funding is provided by the Minnesota Legacy Amendment Parks and Trails Fund. Goodhue County aims to attain regional park designation for Nielsen Memorial Preserve using this

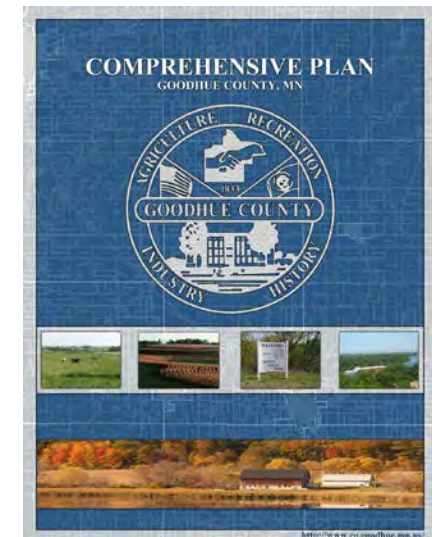
master plan. This master plan document follows the requirements set forth in the GMRPTC Strategic Plan, which was completed in 2015.

### Goodhue County Comprehensive Plan (completed in 2016)

The County's Comprehensive Plan notes that there are many proposed expansions and extensions that will eventually provide a County wide parks and trails network.

The Parks and Trails Objectives identified in the recent Comprehensive Plan include:

1. Enhance the Trail systems in the County.
2. Support safe and responsible private trail systems.
3. Encourage development of new parks.
4. Continue development of Byllesby Park according to the park's master plan.
5. Develop a master plan for the Nielsen Memorial Preserve.
6. Identify and set standards for the amount of recreation infrastructure and services that the local government should strive for on a per capita basis in order to satisfy the reasonable expectations of the public.





## Planning Process

The Nielsen Memorial Preserve master planning process was closely aligned with the process outlined for the Byllesby Park master planning, which occurred at the same time. The County hired a park planning consultant, Hoisington Koepler Group, Inc. to develop the master plan.

The goals of the planning process were to:

- » Create a visionary and strategic plan document with maps, graphics, and an executive summary.
- » Engage with the Goodhue County Board, Park Board, staff, and public throughout the process.

The phases of the project and schedule were as follows:

### Phase 1: Project Organization

Tasks in this phase included collecting and organizing background information; touring the park and observing issues and opportunities; and meeting with staff and the Advisory Group to kick off the project.

### Phase 2: Inventory and Research

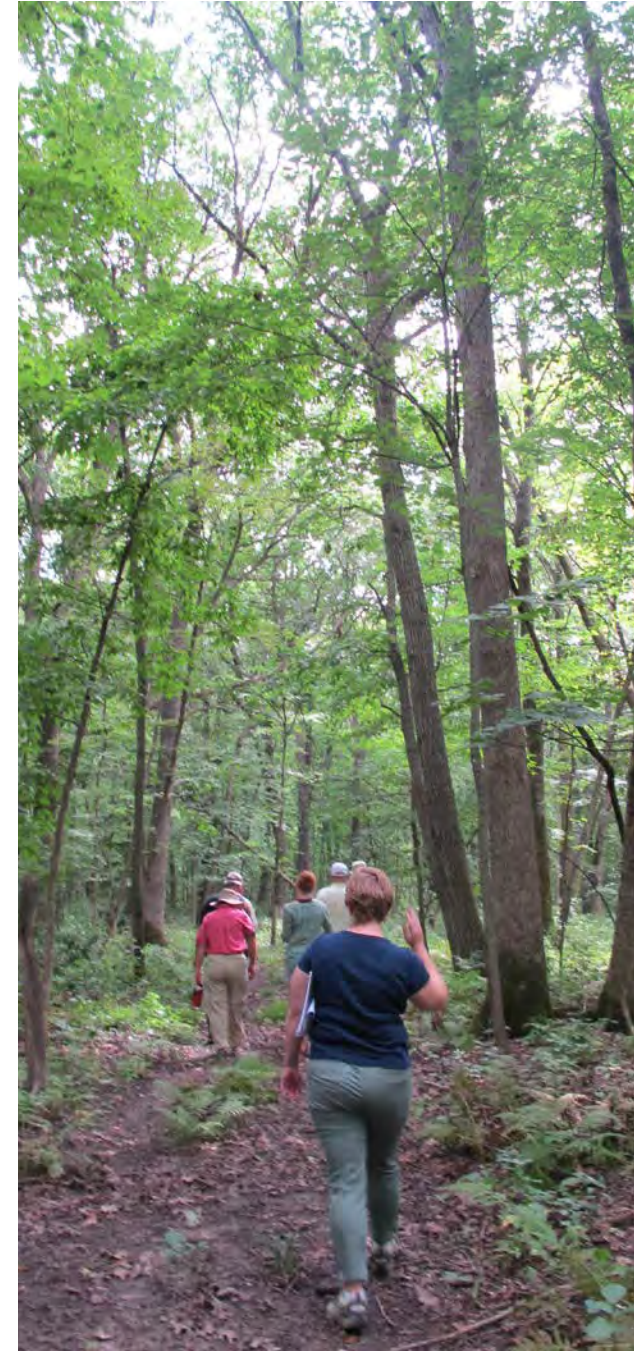
The Inventory and Research phase consisted of community engagement activities to gather input on park issues and opportunities; compilation and analysis of background data, site observations, and community input; and preparation of an Inventory and Research Report.

### Phase 3: Park Concepts

The Park Concepts phase was the time for the project team to develop ideas, options, and recommendations for the future of the park. Community engagement activities aided the project team in decision making and concept review. Meetings were held with the Advisory Group, Goodhue County staff, and the Goodhue County Board.

### Phase 4: Plan Development and Approvals

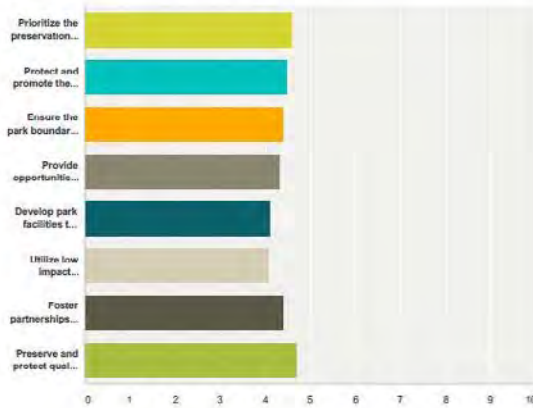
The assembly of the master plan document occurred during this phase of the project. Revisions were made in response to input from Goodhue County Staff, the Advisory Group, the Goodhue County Board, and the community. The plan was recommended by the Parks, Trails, and Recreation Advisory Board and approval sought from the Goodhue County Board.





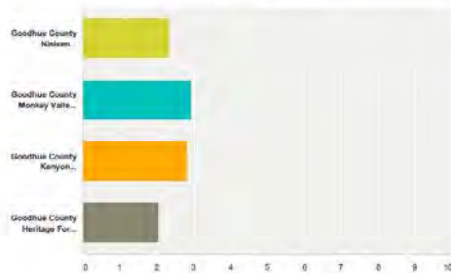
**Q2 The following Guiding Principles have been drafted to support the vision for the park. Please identify how important you think each guiding principle should be in the development of the park.**

Answered: 72 Skipped: 9



**Q8 A name for the park has not yet been chosen. Please rank the following list of potential names identified to date.**

Answered: 57 Skipped: 15



	1	2	3	4	Total	Score
Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve	25.00% 13	19.23% 10	19.23% 10	36.54% 19	52	2.33
Goodhue County Monkey Valley Preserve	40.74% 22	31.48% 17	7.41% 4	20.37% 11	54	2.93
Goodhue County Kenyon Woodlands Preserve	20.00% 10	34.58% 19	28.48% 14	16.91% 9	55	2.82
Goodhue County Heritage Forest Preserve	10.00% 5	14.00% 7	46.00% 23	30.00% 15	50	2.04

Online questionnaires collected feedback that helped to determine the guiding principles of the plan and the name of the park, among other things.

## Public Input/Participation

Community engagement for this project was built around a plan to engage and involve members of the Goodhue County Board, Parks, Trails and Recreation Advisory Board, Goodhue County staff, and the general public. This included key stakeholders, such as adjacent property owners, park user groups, and local, regional, and state agencies. Below is a summary of methods used to engage each of these groups. When possible, information about the planning process was shared with community members participating in the simultaneous Bylesby Park master planning process.

*It should be noted that one outcome of the planning process was the naming of the park. The name Kenyon Park was used until the name of Nielsen Memorial Preserve was selected. At times, input may still reference Kenyon Park.*

## Promotion & Outreach

A variety of marketing and outreach methods were employed to contact potential park users and interested parties. The County's website hosted a page with information about the park master plan, and flyers were posted and sent out.

## Goodhue County Park Board

The Goodhue County Park and Recreation Advisory Board was utilized as the Advisory Group for this project. The group met five times throughout the planning process to guide staff and consultants on important decisions, offer input on park recommendations, and represent constituents.

## Goodhue County Board of Commissioners

The Goodhue County Board was updated two times throughout the master planning project. These updates included summaries of project materials, public input, and request for approval of master plan content.

## Stakeholder Meetings

Stakeholder meetings were held on August 10, 2016, in Kenyon. The first meeting focused on soliciting input from local property owners, while the second meeting focused on interested recreation groups.

### General feedback from the stakeholder meetings included:

- » Concerns from adjacent land owners about park access, trespassing, illegal hunting in the park, and park patrol
- » Interest in natural resource preservation and management and outdoor education focus for the park
- » Preference for low impact development at the park, including nature trails, parking lot, pit toilets, picnic shelter, and potential camp sites
- » Desire to preserve the large trees, protect seasonal wet areas on the site, and maintain the natural habitat for wildlife
- » Desire to have clear park signage with rules and boundaries marked
- » Interest in partnership with local high school science class for programming and local law enforcement for patrolling
- » Thoughts and discussion about naming the park in memory of the former land owner - Harold Nielsen



## Community Open Houses

The community engagement also included information presented at open house style meetings, which were promoted to the general public. The meetings included display boards of project findings in the form of text and graphics. Meeting attendees were invited to view the materials and provide input to the project team regarding park issues and opportunities, ideas for future investments, and personal experiences in the park.

### Nielsen Open House #1 – Wednesday, August 10, 2016

After the stakeholder meetings, the general public was invited to attend an open house at Schweich Restaurant and Hotel in Kenyon. Sixteen people attended and were presented with information about the new park and invited to ask questions and provide ideas. Feedback included:

- » Support for preserving the land and protecting it from hunting and logging
- » Interest in camping, hiking, birding, mountain biking, geocaching, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and picnicking in the park
- » Concern about how to delineate the boundary and prevent trespassing on adjacent properties

### Joint Byllesby/Nielsen Open House – Monday, September 19, 2016

An open house was held at Cannon Falls City Hall for the Byllesby Park master planning project, and materials describing the Nielsen Memorial Preserve project were posted for attendees to view. Attendees were asked to give general input on the park. Comments included:

- » Enthusiasm and excitement about the idea of a new park in the County
- » Questions and comments about when the park would be developed and open for use

### Nielsen Open House #2- Thursday, March 23, 2017

A second open house was held at Schweich Restaurant and Hotel in Kenyon. Fourteen people attended. Participants had opportunities to write comments on the concept plan, as well as respond to options for the park's name, vision, and guiding principles. The plan and other information about the park was also displayed at an open house for Byllesby Park on March 30th that drew more than 40 attendees. Comments included:

- » 50-60 vehicles anticipated during group camp use by Boy Scouts
- » A rustic paddle in campsite would be welcome along the river
- » Keep site improvements low impact
- » Try to avoid fencing the park using traditional methods- will impede habitat quality and migration
  - » Consider vegetation removal to denote boundary
- » Efforts must be made to prevent OHVs/snowmobiles from using the park
- » Toilets need to be closer to camping
- » Amphitheater should be moved to work with the topography
- » Include fire pit areas and maybe a stage in the group camp area
- » Liability a concern for ropes and archery courses
- » Consider Frisbee golf
- » Most preferred "Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve" as name (then Monkey Valley, then Kenyon Woodlands)

### Joint Byllesby/Nielsen Open House- Wednesday, October 11, 2017

Another open house was held at Cannon Falls City Hall for the Byllesby Park master planning project, and updated materials describing the Nielsen Memorial Preserve project were again posted for attendees to view. Meeting attendees did not provide any specific comments on the park concept; however, an opportunity to post comments online yielded two responses. Both comments lauded the plan as being thorough and designed with care. Support was indicated for an eventual paved trail throughout the park as well as a trail from Kenyon to the Preserve.



## Online Questionnaire

Online questionnaires are developed and designed to obtain feedback from those who may not have been able or interested in attending the public meetings. There were two online questionnaires developed and promoted during the master planning process around the time of public and stakeholder meetings in order to gain input from multiple sources at the same time.

### Questionnaire #1 – August 2016

An online questionnaire was open for a few weeks in August, 2016, in order to gain input from stakeholders and the public. There were six total respondents. Comments included the desire for the park to maintain and preserve its existing natural state and to be developed as an outdoor educational facility. Concerns were listed about hunting on the site and trespassing on adjacent private land.

### Questionnaire #2 – March 2017

A link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire about the park concept was posted on the Goodhue County Website from mid-March to mid-April, and received 72 responses. Feedback from the Open House and questionnaire was combined with input from the Advisory Committee to formulate a preferred concept.

#### Questionnaire input included:

- » Significant support for the Vision and Guiding Principles, with 87% of respondents believing that the vision represented the park “Well” or “Very Well” and all of the guiding principles being rated “Important” or “Very Important”
- » A preference for “Monkey Valley Preserve” as the park’s name, with Kenyon Woodlands, Nielsen Memorial, and Heritage Forest Preserve coming in second, third, and fourth, respectively.

#### » Comments on park circulation:

- » Like the combination of paved and natural surface trails (provides variation in experience for biking & hiking)
  - » Like the river access points (may want to have a path connecting them)
  - » Since natural surface trails will be shared by bikers and pedestrians, they should be wide enough to accommodate both passing safely
  - » Phase the parking lot in if needed- people could just park along entry road initially
  - » Move southern lot entry to the south side of the proposed expansion to reduce future construction cost
  - » Re-align path near outdoor lab to provide access to turnaround/drop off
  - » Make sure there is visual separation between the group camp and the paved trail (privacy)
  - » Some concern about the quantity of paved trails, especially those far away from the main area (too far to push a wheelchair anyway)- suggestion to convert some of them to natural surface
  - » Many desire a trail from the park into town for those who would like to walk or bike to the park
  - » Quality of the trails is key to positive experience of this park. Need to be resilient and sustainably built/maintained.
- #### » Comments on Programming:
- » Two respondents mentioned allowing horseback riding
  - » Interest in winter cross country skiing
  - » Interest in geocaching
  - » Concern about liability/vandalism with low ropes and archery courses.
    - » If included, would like a staff person

- » Activities for smaller children desired- perhaps a rustic nature play area with stumps, sticks, etc. for open ended, exploratory play and fort building
  - » Topography of the southern Group Recreation Area may limit its use- move to the other side of the path (and move amphitheater south as well, for better topo and spacing between the relocated group rec area)
  - » Unsure if amphitheater is needed- could be combined with outdoor lab
    - » If built, should be moved south where there is natural topography
    - » Should also include a fire pit
  - » Some concern about mountain bikes:
    - » Not enough natural surface trails for them to really be an advertised activity
    - » Too close to pedestrians and other programming to be desirable to bikers
  - » Invasive species need to be monitored and controlled, given the introduction of people into this high quality natural area.
- #### » Comments on Accommodations:
- » One respondent desires RV camping near entrance
  - » There needs to be toilets closer to the group camp and recreation areas
  - » Needs to be water at least by the group camp, but the trail users would benefit from having water available elsewhere as well
  - » Picnic shelters that are in park interior may not be used (who wants to haul food/coolers all the way out there?)
    - » Reposition nearer to the parking lot





## Chapter 2

# EXISTING CONDITIONS

### Overview

The current state of Nielsen Memorial Preserve in 2020 is described in the following chapter. The sections below represent a summary of existing conditions:

- » **Park Context:** location and importance of the park within the region
- » **Existing Park Conditions:** description of existing features within the park today; brief history of park development, cultural resources, and natural resources
- » **Issues and Opportunities:** summary of important park issues and opportunities -- from Goodhue County staff, key stakeholders, and the public -- addressed in this master plan
- » **Key Considerations:** recommended list of decisions to make during the development of the concepts and recommendations for the master plan



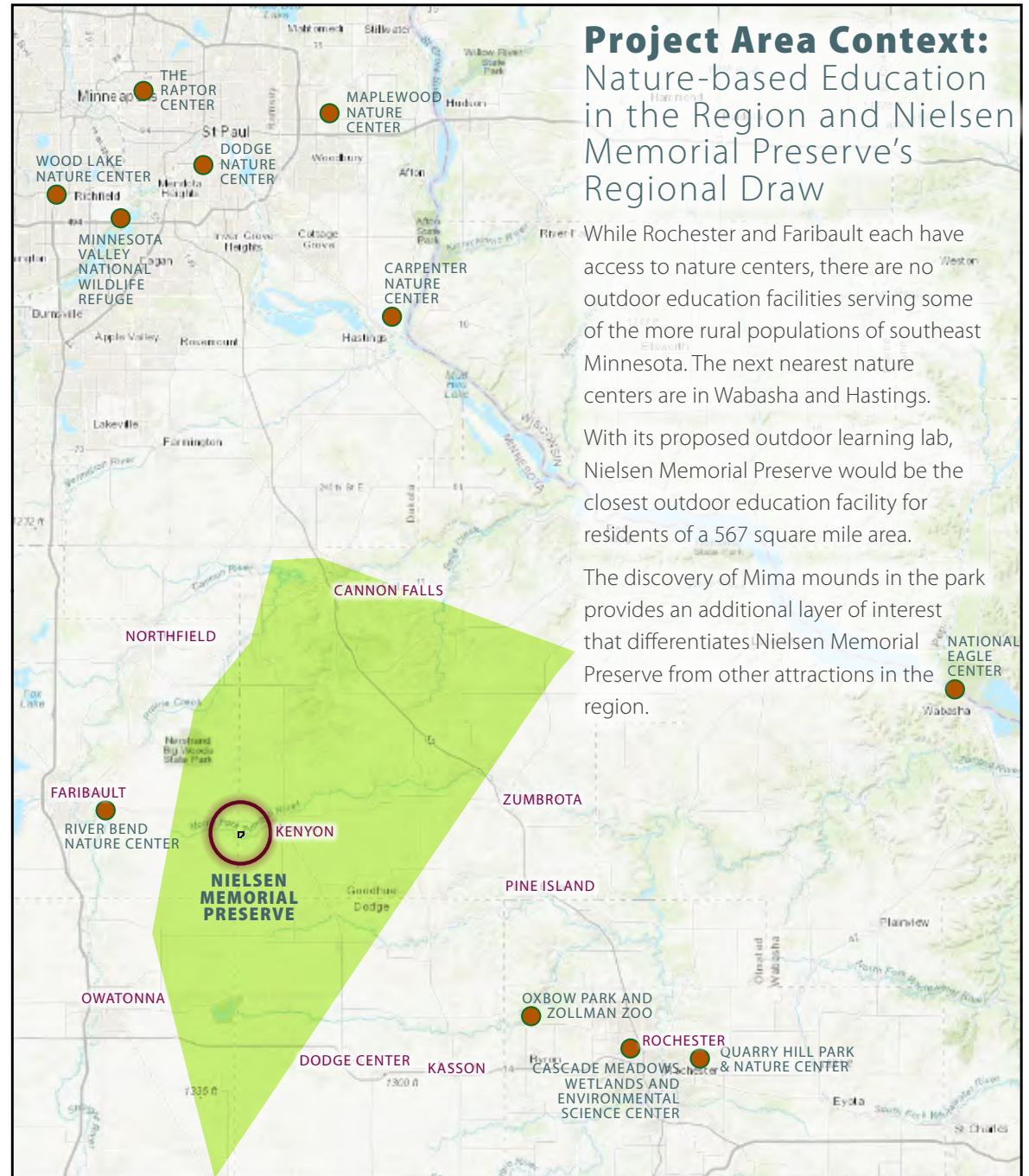
## Park Context

Located just west of the city of Kenyon, on the western border of Goodhue County, Nielsen Memorial Preserve is surrounded by agricultural land. The surrounding landscape was historically the Big Woods of Minnesota, but most of the old growth trees in the region have been cut down in favor of crops. Nielsen Memorial Preserve itself is a remnant of the Big Woods heritage forest of Minnesota, with beautiful, old growth trees and a forest floor covered in ferns and other native Minnesota species. There are many rivers and streams in the driftless landscape that covers southeastern Minnesota.

The Preserve is located in rural Minnesota, about one hour from the Twin Cities and a 40-minute drive from Rochester. The park is centrally located between the local population centers of Faribault, Northfield, Cannon Falls, Zumbrota, Pine Island, Kasson, and Owatonna. Its position in the southwest corner of Goodhue County means that Nielsen Memorial Preserve is likely to draw visitors from multiple communities, spanning Goodhue, Rice, Steele, and Dodge Counties.



*Native Jack in the Pulpit plants cover the forest floor*



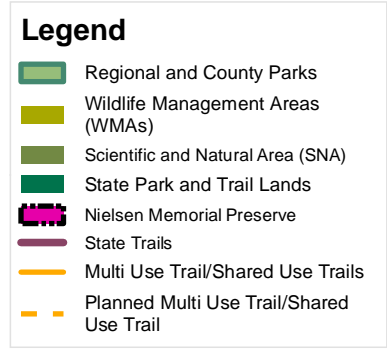
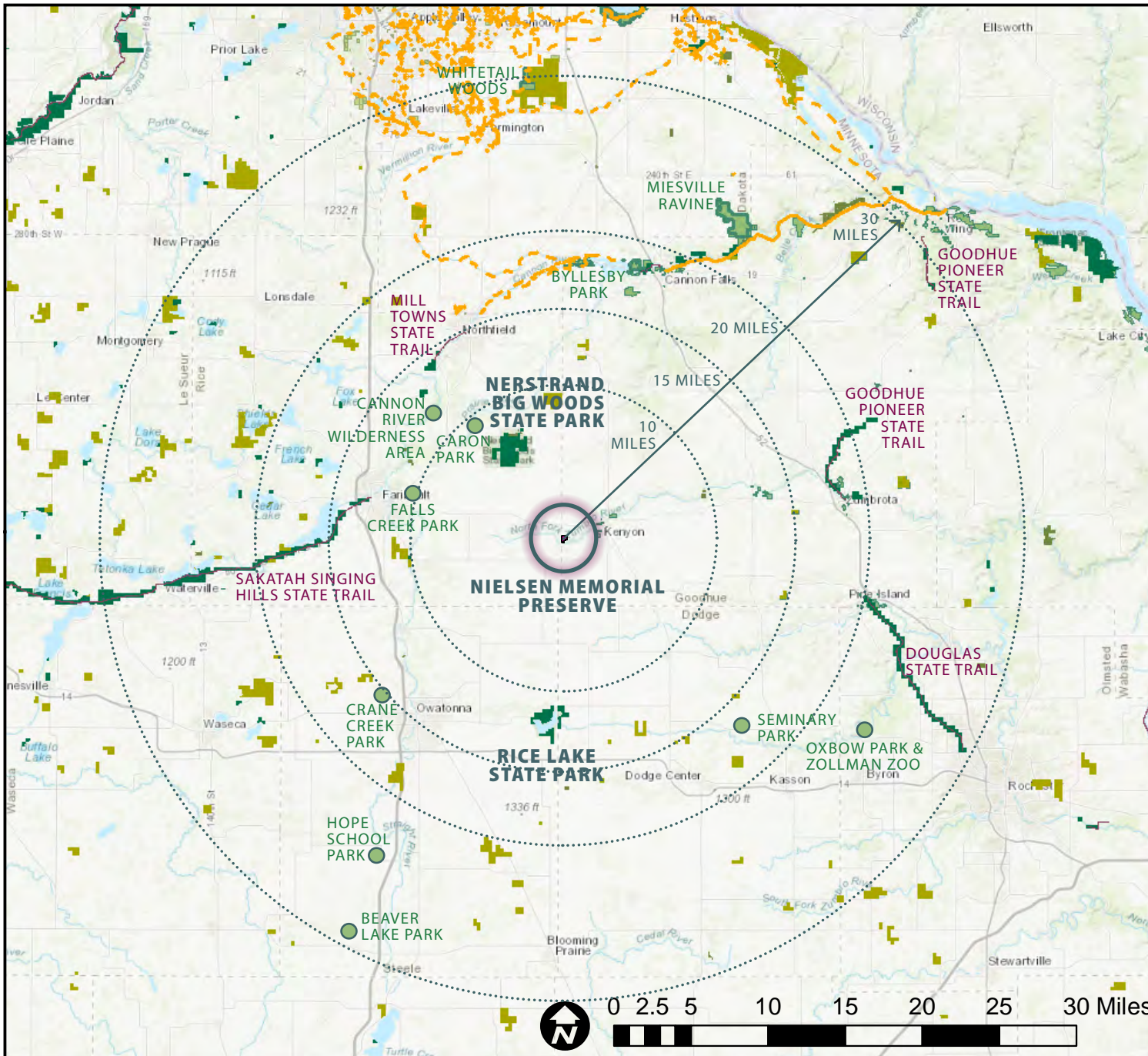
## Project Area Context: Nature-based Education in the Region and Nielsen Memorial Preserve's Regional Draw

While Rochester and Faribault each have access to nature centers, there are no outdoor education facilities serving some of the more rural populations of southeast Minnesota. The next nearest nature centers are in Wabasha and Hastings.

With its proposed outdoor learning lab, Nielsen Memorial Preserve would be the closest outdoor education facility for residents of a 567 square mile area.

The discovery of Mima mounds in the park provides an additional layer of interest that differentiates Nielsen Memorial Preserve from other attractions in the region.

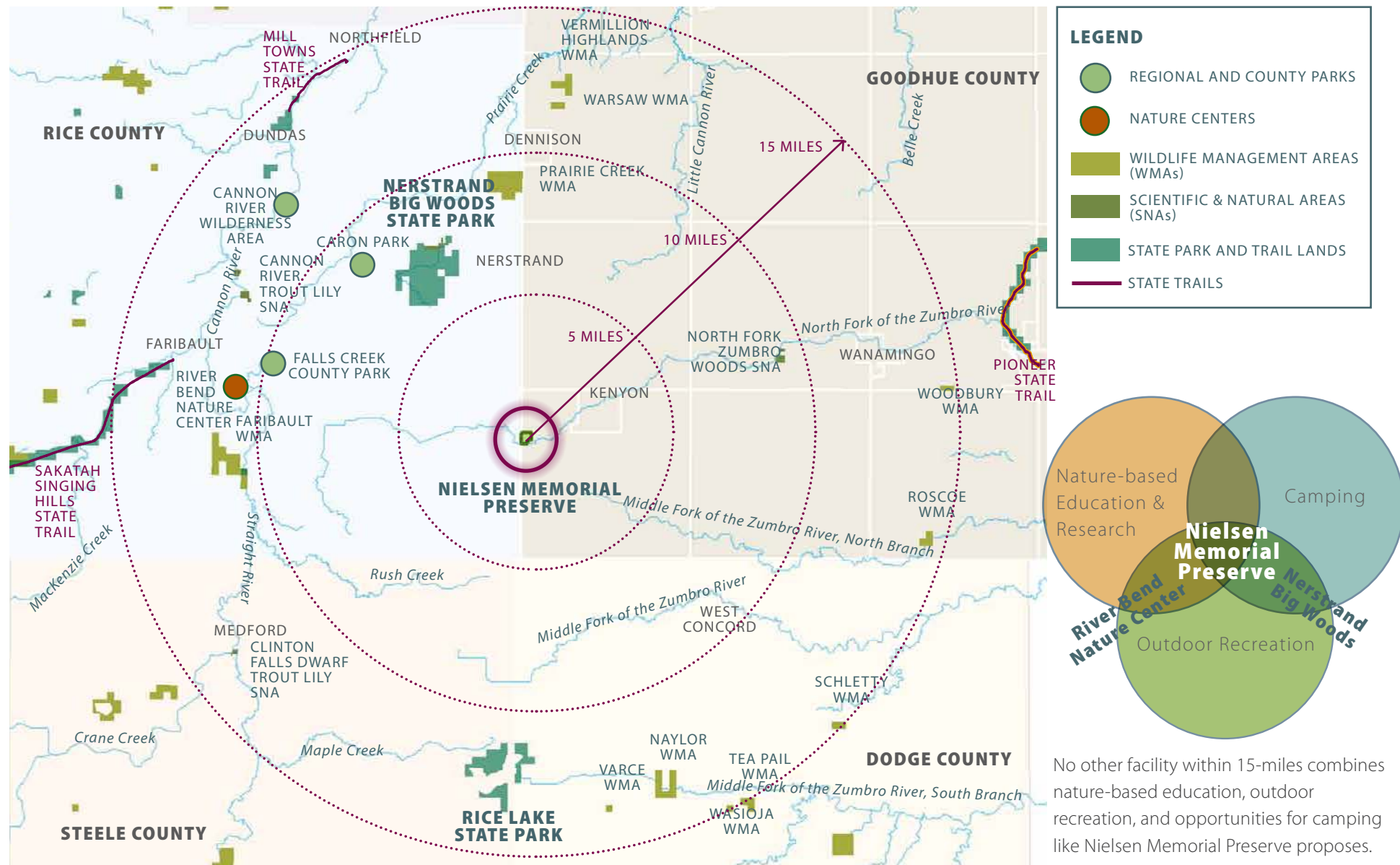




**Project Area Context: Parks, Trails, and Open Spaces within a 30-mile Radius**



## Project Area Context: Parks, Trails, and Open Space within a 15-Mile Radius



No other facility within 15-miles combines nature-based education, outdoor recreation, and opportunities for camping like Nielsen Memorial Preserve proposes.

Within a 15-mile radius, approximately a 20-30 minute drive of the park, there are several other recreational facilities, including: Kenyon city parks, Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, Rice Lake State Park, River Bend Nature Center, and DNR managed Wildlife Management Areas and Scientific and Natural Areas. The planned Mill Towns State Trail also traverses this area. While large population growth is not expected, the combined recreational opportunities provide destinations for active outdoor enthusiasts.



# Project Area Context: Recreation Types, Activities, and Programming within a 15-Mile Radius

	Activity	Kenyon Parks	Nielsen Memorial Preserve	River Bend Nature Center	Cannon River Wilderness Area	Caron Park	Falls Creek Park	Rice Lake State Park	Nerstrand Big Woods State Park	Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs)	Scientific and Natural Areas (SNAs)
	Type	Local	County	Non-profit	County	County	County	State	State	State DNR	State DNR
	Acres	varies	88 acres	743 acres	850 acres	60 acres	61 acres	1,750 acres	2,884 acres	varies	varies
Passive Recreation	Nature Observation		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Geocaching		○	X					X		
	Picnicking		○	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
	Paddle Sports			X	X			X			
	Fishing		○							X	X
	Hunting			X				X		X	X
Trails	Hiking/Walking		○	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Cross-country Skiing			X			X	X	X		X
	Skijoring/ Dogsledding										
	Snowshoeing		○	X			X	X	X		X
	Snowmobiling							X			
	Horseback Riding					X					
Lodging	Tent Camping		○		X			X	X		
	RV Camping								X		
	Camper Cabins										
Active Recreation	Swimming	X									
	Playground	X						X	X		
	Low Ropes/ Nature Play		○								
	Ice Skating	X									
	Sledding										
	Archery		○	X							
	Mountain Biking		○	X		X					
	Disc Golf	X									
	Horseshoes		○						X		
	Volleyball								X		
	Athletic Fields & Courts										
Education	Interpretation		○	X							
	Citizen Science		○	X							
	Lab/Research Space		○								

○ PROPOSED

LOCAL

STATE



## Existing Park Conditions

Nielsen Memorial Preserve is an undeveloped natural area that has been in private ownership until recently. The site's native forest landscape has varying topography, including the unique presence of Mima Mounds (see following page for additional detail). The North Fork of the Zumbro River traverses the south part of the park, but access to the river is difficult.

### Park Access

The park is accessed from the north off of State Hwy 60 by Goodhue Ave Way, which is a minimum maintenance gravel road that runs along the border of Goodhue and Rice Counties. No other road exists to access the park.

### History of Park Development

The estate of Harold Nielsen donated roughly 75 acres of land to Goodhue County in 2016 for park purposes, in order to allow people to enjoy nature and to provide a refuge for wildlife.

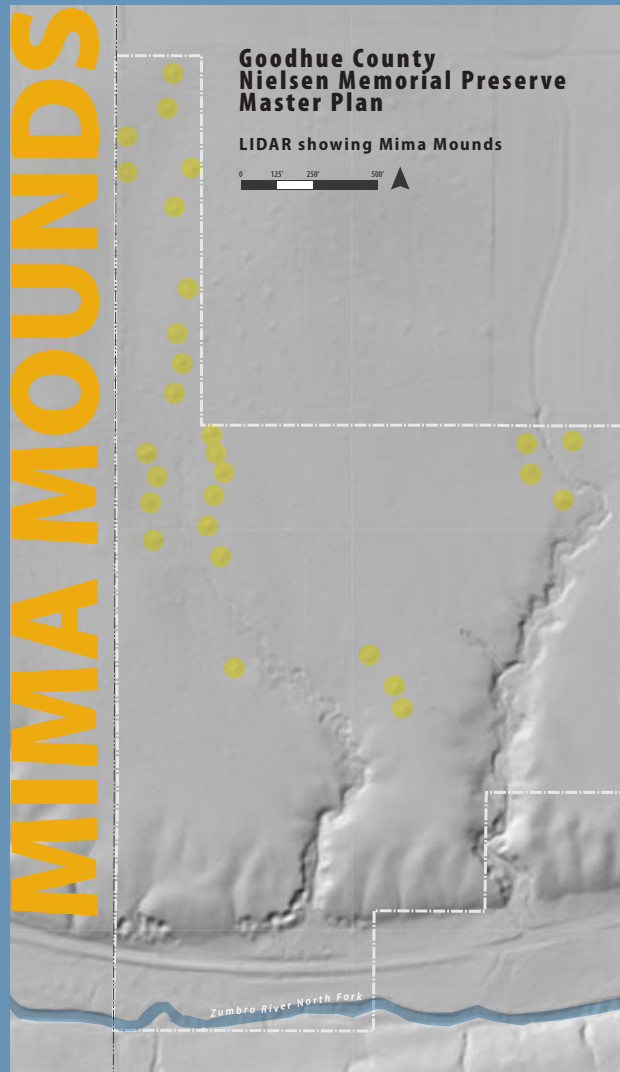
In 2018, Goodhue County acquired a 10-acre parcel to the north of the Nielsen property. While this land will be beneficial for providing park access and ensuring natural resource preservation (several additional mounds are located within the addition), the primary recreational and outdoor education improvements proposed in the master plan continue to be in the original master plan area. See Chapter 5: Implementation & Management for further details on property acquisition.

## Existing Conditions Map with Acquisitions





## Locations in the Preserve



## What are Mima Mounds?

Not to be confused with burial mounds, Mima mounds are scientifically curious, naturally formed topographical features that do not contain any cultural artifacts. They are smaller than most burial mounds (typically under 2 meters tall), and tend to appear in groups, sometimes forming patterns. There are several theories as to the mounds' origins, but studies are ongoing and a definitive answer has not yet been proven. One of the more popular theories posits that the mounds were created over hundreds of years by burrowing mammals like pocket gophers. Others attribute their formation to the shrink-swell properties of clay soils, or aeolian sediment accumulation.

The LIDAR imagery on the left shows over two-dozen mounds within Nielsen Memorial Preserve. These unique topographic features are part of the Schmidt Moundfield, a collection of more than 2,700 mounds catalogued by St. Olaf's Edward Schmidt between 1906 and 1937. The moundfield spans a roughly 25-square mile area of southern Dakota County, Rice County, and Goodhue County.

*Nielsen Memorial Preserve's mounds are part of the largest documented moundfield in the Upper Midwest.*

## A Forgotten Facet of Minnesota's Natural Landscape

Mima mounds are sometimes referred to as natural prairie mounds, and as such, are most frequently found in prairies and meadows. Agricultural practices have severely altered most of these landscapes, leading contemporary researchers attempting to locate Schmidt's mounds over the last decade to note that "nearly all have been destroyed by plowing." Fortunately, the mounds within Nielsen Memorial Preserve have been spared, due in part to their unusual presence in a heavily wooded area.

Earlier archaeologists, including Schmidt, were studying the mounds with the hope of finding artifacts. The idea that these mounds were naturally occurring and not anthropic was disappointing at the time, so little was made of their discovery. This, combined with the loss of many of these mounds due to plowing, has caused these features to be largely forgotten. However, current research into the source of these mounds is ongoing, and could be a fascinating draw for those interested in solving the mystery and exploring the natural history of Minnesota.

Regional Designation for Nielsen Memorial Preserve could help make the investments necessary to properly attract and host researchers, discover new knowledge, and teach visitors about these remnants of Minnesota's historical landscape.



A Mima mound at Minnesota's Waubun Prairie



Fields of Mima mounds in Washington State (courtesy Washington DNR)

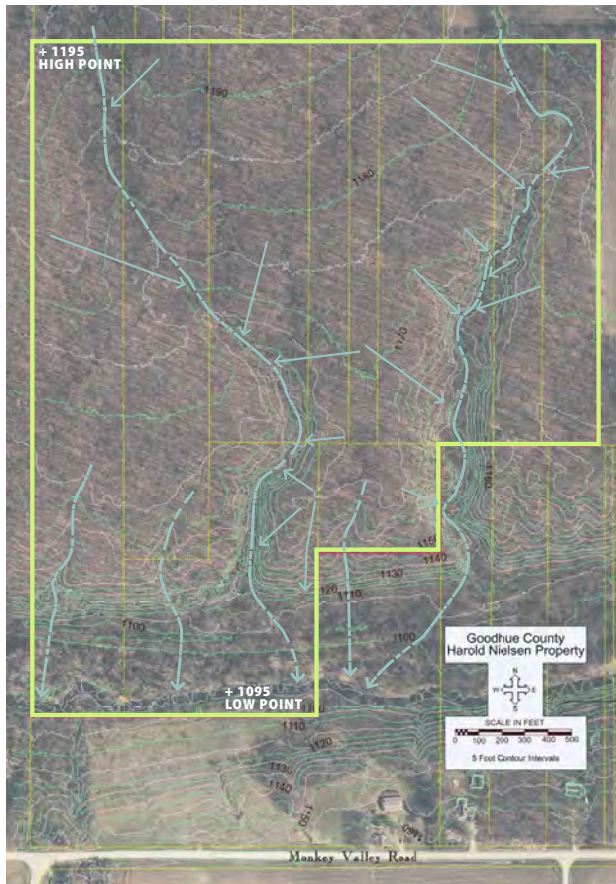


For more information on Mima mounds, see:

*Finney, Fred. (2012). The forgotten natural prairie mounds of the Upper Midwest: Their abundance, distribution, origin, and archaeological implications. 10.1130/2012.2490(05).*

## Terrain and Topography

The northern edge and most of the park site is of relatively even terrain. The topography generally is highest along the northwestern edge and slopes downward towards the southeast. A couple of ravines traverse the site drawing water from the northern part down to the Zumbro River. Along the southern edge of the site, steep 40-foot high cliffs form the boundary between the forest and the river valley. Further exploration is needed to assess how a minimally invasive trail could be constructed to the river.



*Drainage patterns and topography*

## Cultural Resources

During Edward Schmidt's research into the more than 2,700 mounds in the area (refer to page 15), he never discovered any evidence of cultural artifacts, which lends credence to the Mima Mounds hypothesis. Unlike the surrounding agricultural landscape, significant portions of the site have not been logged, which makes the plant communities and landscape of high value in the region. An old trapper's cabin along the park's eastern ravine is the only known cultural resource within the Preserve.

## Natural Resources

The Big Woods landscape at nearby Nerstrand Big Woods State Park is threatened by climate change due to flat, poorly drained areas that are unable to dry out in between rain events. About 200 acres (10-12%) of forest within that park is dying. At Nielsen Memorial Preserve, consistent grades and the two ravines provide adequate drainage for runoff, which provides protection from the standing water that is threatening this essential Minnesota ecosystem at Nerstrand Big Woods, preserving this outstanding landscape type here for future generations.



*Photo of forest death at Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, MnDNR*

The Preserve has been identified by the MnDNR as an area of "Outstanding Biodiversity Significance." Most of the site, including areas to the north, east, and west of the park, is identified as Southern Dry-Mesic Oak Forest. This ecotype is found in the southeastern corner of Minnesota up to the Twin Cities Metro Area. The characteristics of this plant community include:

- » a patchy to continuous ground layer with species such as lady fern, trefoil, sweet cicely, and wild geranium
- » a patchy to interrupted shrub layer with northern red oak and black cherry saplings, chokecherry, American hazelnut, and pagoda dogwood
- » subcanopy cover with basswood, black cherry, northern red oak, white oak, and bitternut hickory
- » a canopy cover with northern red oak, white oak, and basswood

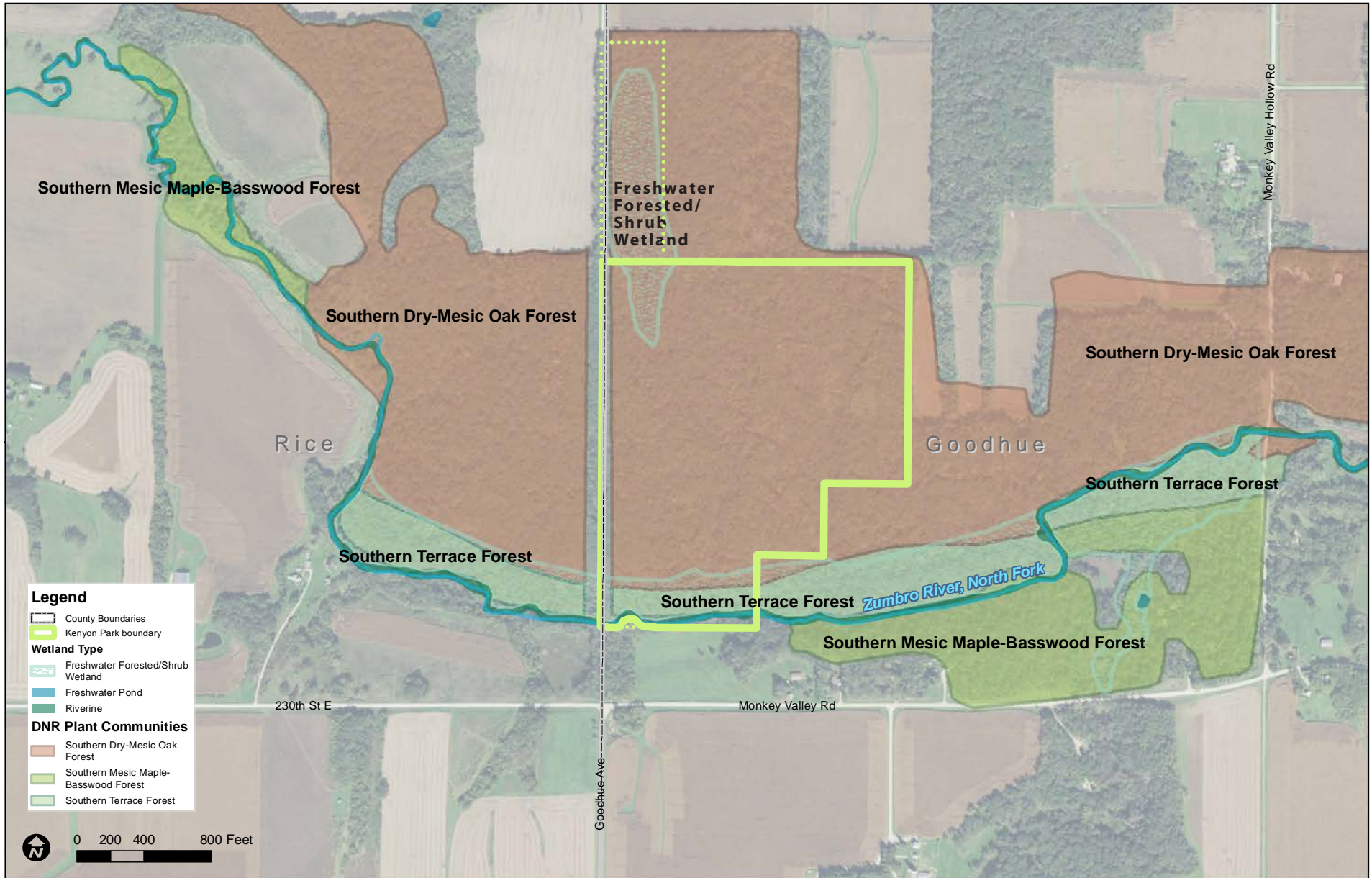
The southern edge of the park along the river consists of Southern Terrace Forest. This plant community extends east and west of the park along the Zumbro River. In Minnesota, the Southern Terrace Forest can be found throughout southeastern Minnesota west to the South Dakota border and north to the Brainerd area. This plant community consists of:

- » a ground cover that is interrupted to continuous with species such as wood nettle, Virginia waterleaf, coneflower, and blue violet
- » a patchy layer of woody vines and shrubs
- » an interrupted to continuous canopy with elm, ash, hackberry, basswood, box elder, and others

A 2019 walk-through by the MnDNR found that there is a general lack of invasive species found in the oak forested area of the park, but some reed canary grass does exist along the river bank. Invasives found were generally located along the entrance road due to surrounding farming.



# Natural Resources Map



In addition to providing access to two plant communities, river, and wetland habitat, the entire park is ranked as an area of “Outstanding Biodiversity Significance” by the MnDNR. A formal natural resource inventory is in progress as of 2020, and will document locations of spring ephemerals and other rare species in order to better inform future park development, including the placement of park trails and programming.



## Issues and Opportunities

The following lists of issues and opportunities were assembled from a variety of sources, including Goodhue County staff, elected officials, key stakeholders, and the general public.

### Issues:

- » Since the park is not operated as an established park today, there may be potential issues with trespassing, illegal hunting, dumping, or other trouble making
- » Basic park maintenance protocols and security/patrol need to be established
- » The access road is a minimum maintenance road and needs to be improved and maintained in order to serve as a public park access road
- » The landscape consists of high quality natural resources, which may be impacted with increased public access
- » The park is surrounded by private landowners, who want to maintain privacy on their properties and would like to see minimal usage of the park

### Opportunities:

#### Preserve and Maintain at a High Quality the Park's Natural Resources

- » Inventory existing plants in order to keep public access from disturbing the most valuable plant community locations (currently undergoing as part of the 2020 Natural Resource Inventory)
- » Reach out to the DNR's Natural Heritage and Nongame Research program to participate in the MN biological survey, Natural heritage information system, and other projects for conservation planning
- » Avoid wet areas, steep slopes, and other delicate landscape sites with new construction
- » Construct new facilities using low impact development methods and techniques

- » Interpret and educate park visitors about the history and functionality of the Preserve's Big Woods habitat and unique Mima mound formations
- » Park could be a location for a naturalist capstone project or academic research into Mima mounds or Big Woods habitats and climate change
- » Pursue designation as a MnDNR School Forest and have a DNR Forester create a stewardship plan for the park

#### Construct Basic Facilities to Serve the Park

- » Entry road
- » Parking lot
- » Basic restroom / pit toilets
- » Picnic tables / shelter / grills / fire pits / water
- » Soft surface trail network
- » Signage and wayfinding
- » Learning lab and outdoor classroom / amphitheater for nature-based education and programming
- » Explore desire for primitive camping facilities - potentially only group camping

#### Initiate Programming

- » Outdoor / natural resource-based education: NMP could be a DNR School Forest, offering nearby schools a place for hands-on science projects or studies, nature hikes, and classes. River Bend Nature Center could use NMP as a satellite site for programming. University students or researchers could use the learning lab to conduct research on Mima mounds or the Big Woods ecosystem.
- » Local clubs and organizations could complete volunteer projects, maintenance, and hold events on the site
- » Individual activities: hiking, birding, foraging, back country skiing, snowshoeing, trail running, mountain biking
- » Small group / Family activities: picnicking, camping



*The North Fork of the Zumbro River*



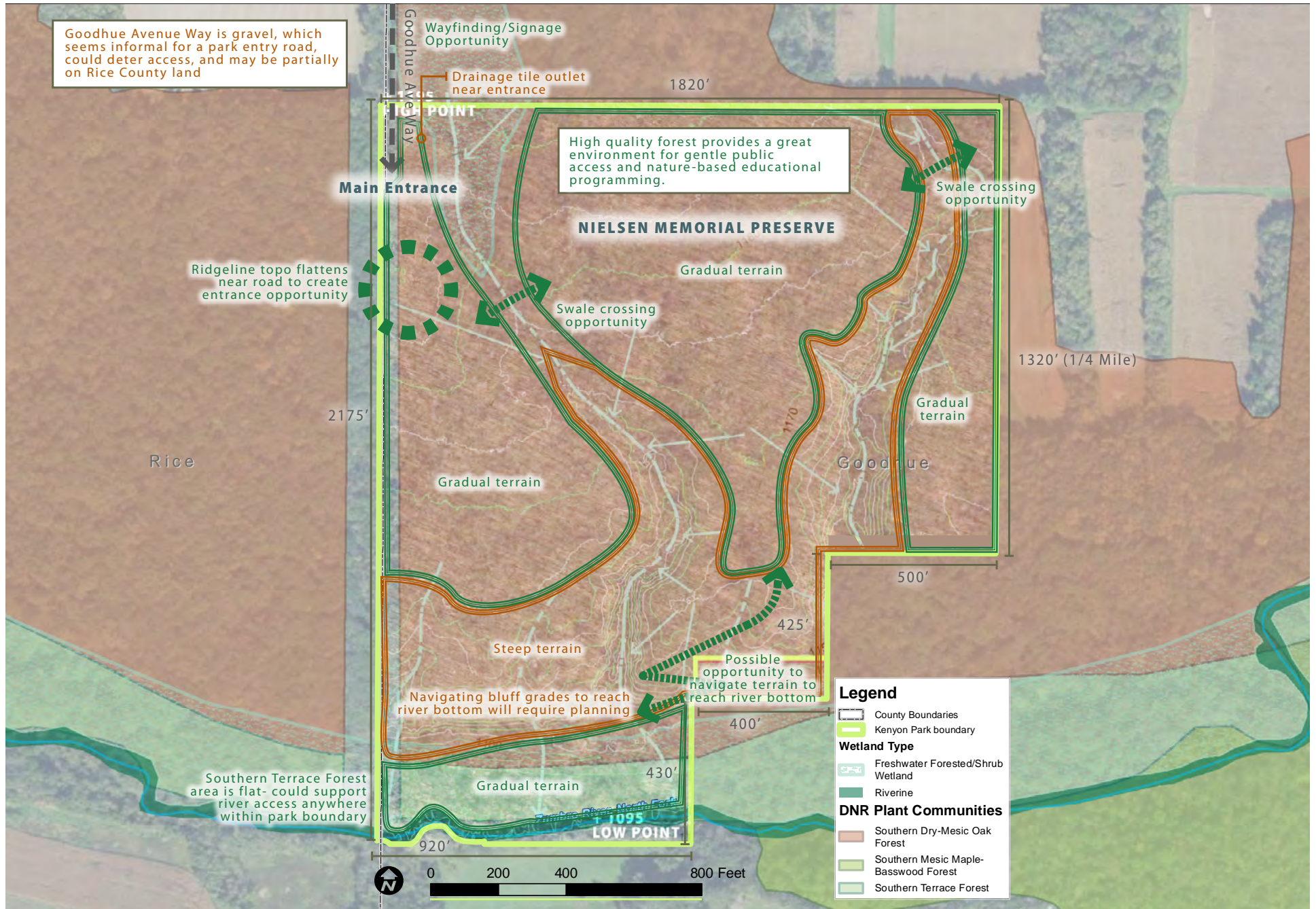
*The park is covered with old growth oaks*



*Poke Milkweed, a rare woodland native*

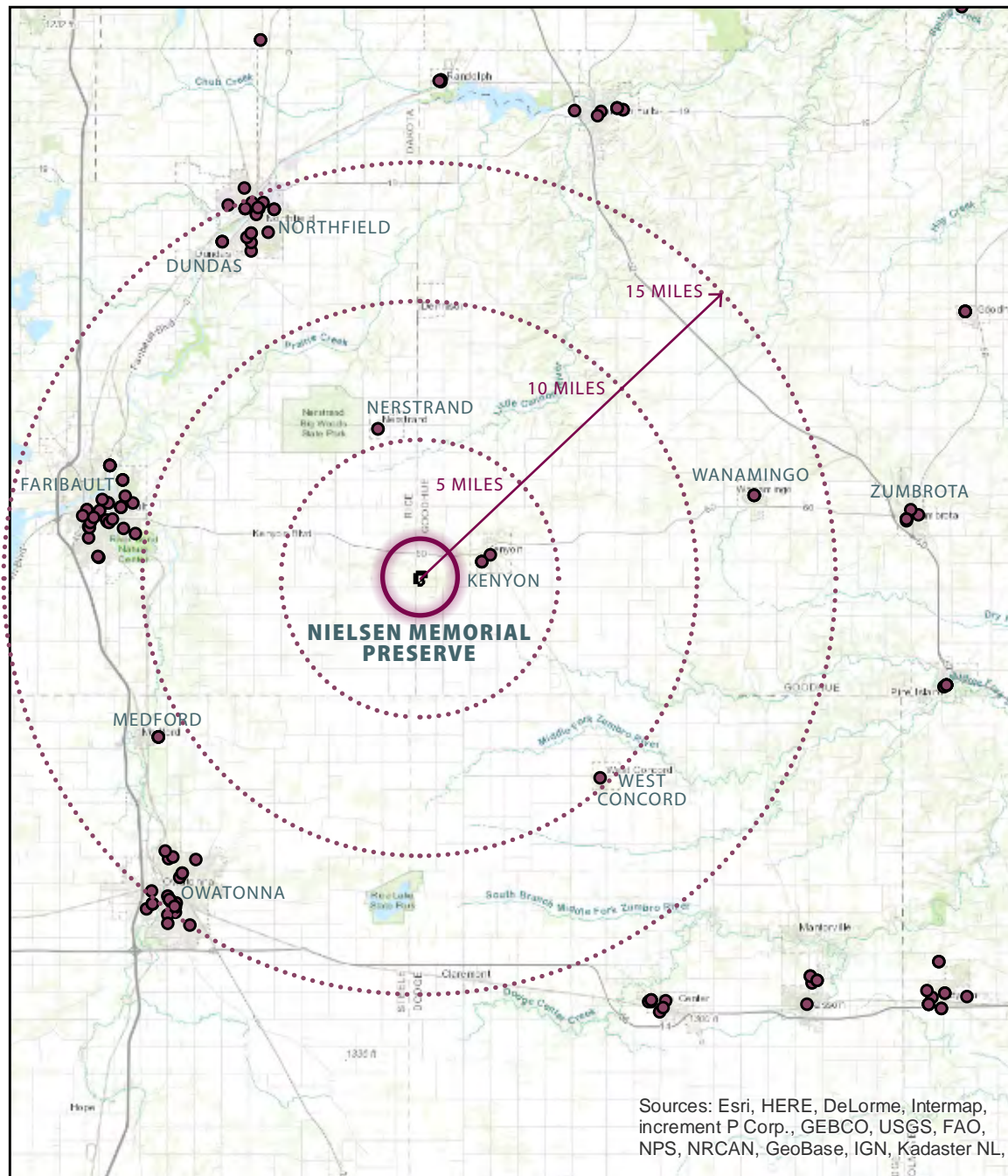


# Nielsen Memorial Preserve: Issues and Opportunities





## Potential School Forest Partners



Nearby schools present opportunities for educational partnerships that would increase the use and value of Nielsen Memorial Preserve. The MnDNR's School Forest Program has many benefits and could help facilitate educational programming at the Preserve for interested schools.

### There are 76 Schools within a 15-mile Radius:

- » Medford High School
- » Medford Elementary
- » Kenyon-Wanamingo Elementary
- » Kenyon-Wanamingo Middle School
- » Kenyon-Wanamingo High School
- » Faribault Middle School
- » Faribault High School
- » Faribault Special Ed
- » Jefferson Elementary
- » Lincoln Elementary
- » Roosevelt Elementary
- » MN Academy for the Blind
- » MN Academy for the Deaf
- » Faribault Technical College
- » Cannon River STEM Charter School
- » Nerstrand Charter School
- » Dscovery Public School Faribault (Charter)
- » Faribault Lutheran (Independent)
- » Shattuck- St. Marys (Independent)
- » Medford ESY
- » Alexander Learning Academy (Special Ed Coop)
- » CVSEC STEP (Special Ed Coop)
- » and more...

0 2.5 5 Miles





## Key Considerations

The following is a list of key considerations formulated from the existing conditions analysis and the issues and opportunities gleaned from the community engagement process. These statements will guide and inform the vision, guiding principles, and development concepts that will follow in the next chapters of this master plan:

- » Create a unified vision for the park's future with input from key stakeholders and the general public.
- » Ensure all development includes low impact construction methods and techniques in order to preserve and maintain the high quality landscape.
- » Explore partnerships with local schools, clubs, and organizations to ensure community buy in and respect for the park. Groups could include: Scouts, Lions Club, Rotary Club, River Bend Nature Center, Master Naturalists, Kenyon Wanamingo High School, Cannon River STEM School, St. Olaf Collage, Carleton College, Goodhue County Community Ed and others.
- » Create a realistic plan for park operations and maintenance, that could include hiring an additional County staff person.
- » Monitor for the effects of climate change and work to mitigate its impact on the Preserve's Big Woods habitat.
- » Secure the borders of the park with signage and partner with local law enforcement to prevent trespassing, vandalism, and illegal hunting.
- » Evaluate how to balance preserving the natural resources with gentle, yet purposeful park access and facilities.
- » Evaluate road and trail connections and access points to the park from surrounding communities- discuss the extent of regional draw for the park.



*Green Headed Coneflower in the park*

- » Reach out to academics interested in researching Mima mounds to see if Nielsen Memorial Preserve's mounds can be studied. Develop interpretation and education programs related to the presence of Mima mounds here and market the Preserve as a natural history attraction to explore.
- » Create a plan for winter recreation and park access.
- » Contact the DNR and other natural resource agencies for feedback on natural resource management.
- » Create a phased development plan with realistic goals and priorities that looks 15-20 years into the future.
- » Support wildlife by preserving and enhancing habitat throughout the park.







## Chapter 3 **VISION, TRENDS, AND PUBLIC VALUES**

### **Overview**

As part of this master planning process, Goodhue County brought together their Goodhue County Board, Parks, Trails, and Recreation Advisory Board, stakeholders, and residents to develop the vision and guiding principles that became the foundation for Goodhue County's Nielsen Memorial Preserve master plan. The Vision says what the park will be in the future ten to twenty years, while the Guiding Principles suggest how the park will achieve that vision.

### **Vision Statement**

**Nielsen Memorial Preserve is a special recreation feature regional park along the North Fork of the Zumbro River where woodlands are preserved, wildlife can find a haven, and visitors can explore and learn about nature through trails and natural-resource based educational opportunities.**



## Guiding Principles

1. Prioritize the preservation and maintenance of the site's high quality natural resources.
2. Protect and promote the site for wildlife habitat.
3. Ensure the park boundaries and rules prohibiting hunting are respected.
4. Provide opportunities for nature-based recreation and events.
5. Develop park facilities to support outdoor education and natural resource interpretation.
6. Utilize low impact development.
7. Foster partnerships to build, operate, and maintain the park.
8. Preserve and protect quality natural resources for future generations.



## Local and Regional Demographic Information

### Growing Population

The population of Goodhue County currently stands at about 49,000 residents. Goodhue's population is expected to continue to experience population growth over the next 25 years. This number is forecasted to grow to over 55,000 residents by 2045. The demand for quality park services and recreation opportunities is likely to grow in tandem with the population.

### Racial/ Ethnic Distribution

Goodhue County's population has continued to grow more and more diverse each year. Between 2000 and 2010 the growth rate in Goodhue County populations of color was over 65% higher than the national growth rate. In 2016, 7.8% of the population comprised people of color. As the population of Goodhue County changes and grows more diverse, the needs of the County parks programming and visitor services diversify and change too. Goodhue County Parks will need to address and adapt to new cultural norms and preferences of different groups.

### Children & Youth

Kids are an important part of the Goodhue County population. In 2015, residents under 18 made up more than 25% of the population. According to the Minnesota State Demographer, children will still account for more than 25% of the population by 2045. This creates an unwavering demographic that have specific needs for park services and recreation opportunities. Access to parks and age appropriate programming helps to start kids with a healthy and active lifestyle while experiencing the outdoors.

### Cost Burdened Households

Recently, Goodhue County has experienced a growth in the county poverty rate. The poverty rate almost doubled from 5% in 2000 to 9.6% in 2014. Cost burdened households with low median incomes are considered to be at a higher risk for sedentary lifestyle and related illnesses. Park access, affordability, and promotion of active living are especially important to households with less disposable income who tend to rely on county parks for health and recreational opportunities.





## Recreational Trends

Changes in the way people recreate impact the need for improvements in the park system. The following are general trends that may impact the future of Nielsen Memorial Preserve.



### Aging Actively

Baby Boomers already represent a large portion of the Goodhue County population. Like the rest of the state, Goodhue County is anticipating growth in Baby Boomer residents over the next couple of decades. As Baby Boomers age their recreation needs change. Baby Boomers will require facilities and equipment that meet their mobility needs as they age as well as programming that caters to their interests and activity level.



### Active Living

Access to parks and parks programming is growing to become more and more important. The nation as a whole is experiencing a public health crisis with obesity and sedentary lifestyle related illnesses. In 2012 over 20% of Goodhue County adults were considered obese. As a result of this change, more and more people are developing an interest in active living through integrating exercise into their daily routines. This trend yields more demand for low cost recreation options. County parks can help residents to incorporate active living and recreation into their lives for a low cost.



### Trail Use & Access to Nature

Trails continue to be a high demand recreational feature nation wide. The increased interest in walking, running, and bicycling as a flexible, convenient recreational experience reflects the increased construction of trail projects in Minnesota and across the country.

People are increasingly interested in “getting away” or “unplugging” from technology by escaping to the natural areas that are close to home. In our increasingly developed environment, natural preserves are important spaces of respite.



## Public Health Values

### Health Benefits of Nielsen Memorial Preserve

Mental health improvements including a greater sense of well-being, lower rates of depression, improved capacity to cope with stressful events, better focus, and a reduction of attention deficit disorder symptoms are associated with access to nature (APHA's Improving Health and Wellness through Access to Nature). Nielsen Memorial Preserve provides visitors with access to old growth forest, diverse terrain, and the Zumbro River. The development concept proposes providing accessible river access, which will allow fishing, a form of recreation that has been shown to decrease symptoms of PTSD ([www.riversofrecovery.org/research-results](http://www.riversofrecovery.org/research-results)). The Outdoor Foundation reports that 38% of people who fish do it as a means of relieving stress.

Nielsen Memorial Preserve will also promote physical activity beyond walking/hiking and mountain biking. Outdoor activities like orienteering, birding, geocaching, and biocaching would be perfect for this preserve. In addition, group recreation areas provide spaces for activities like a low ropes course, horseshoes, and open nature play.

The park plan will support education by providing a Learning Lab and outdoor classroom. These facilities, combined with an amphitheatre, group recreation, and camping areas will encourage social interaction and connect visitors to the natural realm.

### Promoting Connections to the Outdoors

With Minnesota becoming increasingly urban, access to places like Nielsen Memorial Preserve that offer nature-based outdoor recreation is an advantage.

With the 2014-2018 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) reporting a downward trend in traditional outdoor recreation, it is more important than ever to find ways to introduce new populations to nature-based recreation, and to incorporate new activities that offer exposure to the outdoors.

The SCORP found that participation in nature-based activities “helps to produce citizenry with an appreciation of the natural world that raises social and political support for resource conservation activities, support that may decrease as participation decreases.” Fortunately, Nielsen Memorial Preserve is well positioned to implement many of the SCORP’s recommendations to connect people to the outdoors, which can help to maintain the relevancy and longevity of the park system for future generations.

### In order to connect people to the outdoors, the SCORP recommends that parks:

1. Develop camping facilities that have “sites for larger groups, more separation and privacy between sites, and higher quality natural surroundings to meet expectations of current and future users.”
2. “Design facilities that support numerous activities and proactively adapt to new and emerging nature-based recreation activities (e.g. Geocaching, pet-friendly parks and trails, and archery).”
3. “Develop group-based opportunities such as group campsites, picnic areas, and gathering spaces.”





## Unique and Compelling Features

The Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission seeks to designate parks in Greater Minnesota as “regional parks” that have unique and compelling features which make them important as regional destinations. Some of these features could include natural landscape characteristics, unique recreational opportunities, or attractive man-made sites. The following statements and descriptions represent what makes Nielsen Memorial Preserve a unique and compelling destination for southeastern Minnesota.

## Nielsen Memorial Preserve Provides a Special High-Quality Outdoor Recreation Experience

As an outdoor education-focused park where visitors can roam old growth Big Woods forest and see unique natural features like Mima mounds, Nielsen Memorial Preserve will introduce visitors to new facets of Minnesota’s natural history. The rustic, low impact facilities on the site will provide space for local schools, clubs, organizations, and individuals to immerse themselves in the Big Woods of Minnesota.

The undisturbed nature of the park makes it a special site for exploration and learning about Minnesota’s natural heritage.

## Nielsen Memorial Preserve Provides a Natural and Scenic Setting Offering a Compelling Sense of Place

There are few locations in the state where untouched natural landscapes exist. Nielsen Memorial Preserve offers a glimpse back in time to the Big Woods landscape that early settlers and Native Americans experienced before the development of the surrounding landscape occurred. The Preserve’s Mima mounds are valuable remnant of Minnesota’s early landscape, and their mysterious origins offer visitors a compelling topic to contemplate as they explore.





## Nielsen Memorial Preserve is Well-located to Serve a Regional Need and/or Tourist Destination

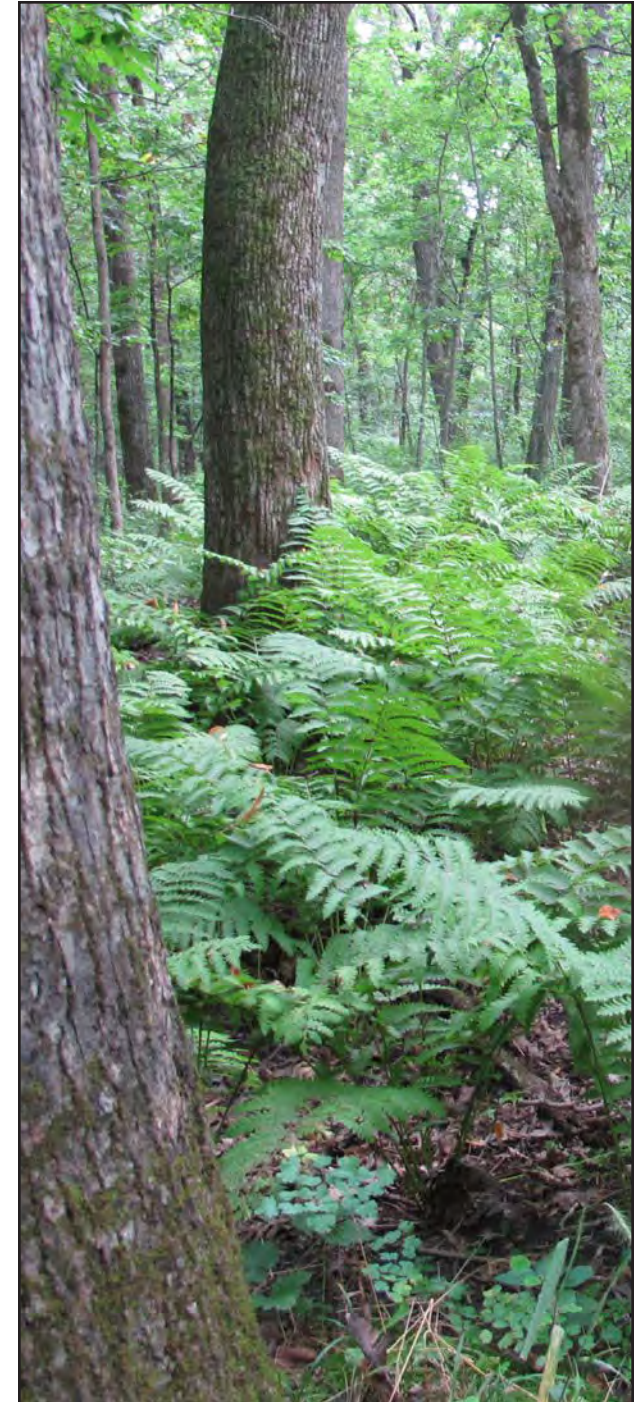
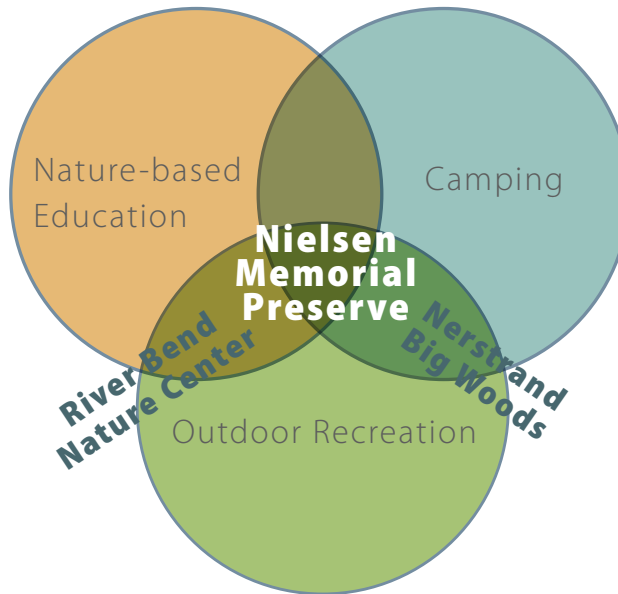
While Rochester and Faribault each have access to nature centers, there are no outdoor education facilities serving the rural populations of southeast Minnesota. With its proposed learning lab, Nielsen Memorial Preserve would be the closest outdoor education facility for residents of a 567 square mile area.

The park is about an hour's drive from the Twin Cities Metro Area, 45 minutes from Rochester, and is located 13 miles east of Interstate 35. Overnight accommodations are available in Northfield, Faribault, or camping at Nerstrand Big Woods and Rice Lake State Parks nearby. For an immersive experience, rustic camping in the park will be available to groups by reservation.



## Nielsen Memorial Preserve Fills a Gap in Recreational Opportunity within the Region

No other facility within a 15-mile radius pairs outdoor recreation in an area of outstanding biodiversity with a targeted nature-based education facility and has the opportunity to camp onsite. The development of Nielsen Memorial Preserve as an outdoor lab and learning center would serve a unique niche in the region. Its proposed recreational activities, such as hiking, picnicking, fishing, and camping are intended to be integrated into the site in a low-impact manner, maintaining the unspoiled, authentic-feeling natural environment, and providing a complement to the more developed experience offered by nearby state parks and other nature centers.







## Chapter 4

# DEVELOPMENT MASTER PLAN

### Overview

This chapter contains the development concept, outlining the specific physical and programming improvements proposed to be implemented at Nielsen Memorial Preserve. A graphic, along with a narrative description and precedent imagery will describe the desired design. Improvements to the park's natural resources, cultural resources and outdoor education, and visitor services will also be described in detail in this chapter.

### Park Development Concept

The Nielsen Memorial Preserve Master Plan envisions inviting visitors to explore the park's big woods environment with both natural surface and paved trails, strengthening their interest in the outdoors with a learning laboratory and classroom, and providing an immersive experience with rustic group camping and nature-based recreation areas.

### Nielsen Memorial Preserve Master Plan

Geared toward those seeking outdoor recreation in a high quality natural setting, Nielsen Memorial Preserve's master plan includes many ways to escape into nature. Whether taking a walk through the woods after work, spending a morning fishing the North Fork of the Zumbro, camping with a Scout troop, or exploring the park and learning about its ecology in the outdoor classroom, the Preserve provides opportunities for people to connect to the outdoors.



# Goodhue County Nielsen Memorial Preserve Master Plan

## Preferred Concept | Long-term

- Facilities and amenities to support passive and active natural resource-based use of the park are intended to allow visitors and academics to observe, learn from, and preserve Minnesota's Big Woods ecosystem and the Mima Mounds of the Schmidt Moundfield
- 25-car parking area with the potential to expand to 40 spaces
- Two picnic shelters near the parking area with an information kiosk and vault toilets
- Two rustic picnic shelters in park interior
- Paved 8' trail loop with accessible river access
- Natural surface trails built to support both hikers and mountain bikers in an effective, yet low-impact way
- Orienteering, birding, geocaching, and biocaching activities fit well with the park
- Group camping facilities for about 40 tents with tent pads and a group fire pit (available through advanced registration). Area could expand to accommodate larger groups if desired.
- Group recreation areas don't require staffing and could include archery, a low ropes course, horseshoes, open nature play/ fort building, etc.
- Learning Lab Building can be outfitted for research and has classroom seating and firepit to support group education
- Park to be closed during deer hunting season

- 2' Contour
- - - County Boundary
- - - Park Boundary
- Wetland
- Proposed Road
- Proposed Paved Trail
- Proposed Shared Natural Surface Trail for Hiking & Mountain Biking
- Parking
- Park Building
- Trail Bridge
- Mima Mound



## Accessing the Preserve

Visitors can reach Nielsen Memorial Preserve from Faribault or Kenyon by turning onto Goodhue Avenue Way from Hwy 60. The northmost 10-acres of the Preserve include several Mima mounds, which will be preserved when siting a widened entry road for access off of Goodhue Avenue Way. The proposed parking lot accommodates 25 cars, with space to expand to 40. A turnaround and drop off enables buses to unload kids for field trips or camping excursions. The entry road would be gated during the shotgun hunting season, when the park will be closed.



# Master Plan Improvements Summary

## Short Term Development:

- » Gravel entry road and parking lot
- » Portable vault toilet
- » Natural surface trail loop
- » Rustic river access
- » Park Signage

## Long Term Development:

- » Paved entry road and parking lot with turnaround and drop off
- » Trailhead kiosk
- » Learning Lab & outdoor classroom with fire pit
- » Amphitheatre
- » 5 picnic shelters (two full-sized, three rustic)
- » 2 permanent vault toilets
- » 1-acre group camp
- » Two group recreation areas (archery, low ropes course, nature play, horseshoes)
- » 1+ miles of soft surface trails
- » 1.5 miles of paved 8' wide trails
- » Accessible river access

## Natural Resources:

- » Enhanced restoration efforts around recreation areas
- » Selective clearing only as needed
- » Invasive species monitoring and management
- » All development avoids Mima mounds

## **Accommodations & Amenities**

Nielsen Memorial Preserve will have a group camping area with space for up to 40 tents. It is intended that this campsite would be available for reservation by scouting or other formal group learning programs. There is room to expand the camping area to accommodate larger groups if there is demand.

Picnic shelters and comfort amenities are focused near the parking lot for convenience and to limit degradation of the Preserve's precious natural resources. The entry road, trails, and other amenities are all sited to avoid Mima mounds and will be field adjusted according to the results of the Natural Resources Inventory (ongoing as of 2020). Visitors can stop to picnic or gather at two full-sized picnic shelters or any of three rustic (single table) picnic shelters along the park's trails. Two vault toilets serve the park. An overlook provides views from the upland forest down more than 50' to the Zumbro River below.

## **Recreation**

In addition to trail-based passive recreation, Nielsen Memorial Preserve will have two dedicated active recreation areas. Programming is intended to suit groups, such as those using the park for camping, field trips, or classes, in addition to welcoming individual users. Activities envisioned include archery, a low ropes course, horseshoes, and a creative nature play/ fort building area. The Preserve is well-suited to other nature-based recreation such as fishing at either of the park's river access points, birding, geocaching, and orienteering.

## **Outdoor Education**

The new Learning Lab building anchors the park entry, presenting visitors with park maps, ideas for self-guided activities, and information on upcoming events. It also provides space for groups to conduct nature-based educational programming like owl pellet dissection or examining microbes in river water. A portion of the Lab



*The Learning Lab building*



*Flexible classroom facility in the Learning Lab*



*Outdoor Classroom*

could be reserved for use by researchers or academics studying features in the park. An outdoor classroom and fire pit will offer a place to gather together to share and learn. The amphitheater will function as a tertiary classroom space, and could also host presentations, demonstrations, or other programming for larger groups.





*Amphitheatre*



*Rustic Picnic Shelter & Overlook*



*Rustic River Access*



*Picnic Shelter*



*Group Campsite*



*Rustic Picnic Shelter*



*Vault Toilets*



*Accessible River Access*





*Trail bridges over ravines*



*Paved trails through woods*



*Shared use sustainably built natural surface trails*



*Invasive species removal efforts*

## Trails

The Preserve’s proposed trail network will allow visitors to explore the park on paved or natural surface trails, offering several loop experiences of varying distances. Two bridges help visitors navigate the park’s ravines. Trails will be shared between hikers and mountain bikes, with an ADA accessible segment linking the parking lot with the Learning Lab/classroom, fire pit, amphitheatre, and river access. Trails will not be cleared in the winter, but will be open to snowshoers or back country skiers. A trailhead kiosk off of the parking lot orients visitors to the trail network.

## Programming Plan

The Learning Lab and outdoor classroom, once built, will be well-suited to hosting researchers from nearby universities, classes from area elementary or high schools, citizen scientists, and other groups interested in nature-focused gatherings. Coordination of its use will be managed by Goodhue County staff.

### The Zumbro River Watershed

Goodhue County will partner with the Zumbro River Watershed on projects or research they may wish to undertake on park land. Education programs through the Zumbro Watershed Partnership could be held at the learning lab, outdoor classroom, or amphitheater.

### River Bend Nature Center

Goodhue County staff have coordinated with the Executive Director at River Bend Nature Center regarding the opportunity to partner together on outdoor education. River Bend has expressed willingness to help develop complimentary programs to those offered at the Nature Center, including having one of River Bend’s naturalists come out to Nielsen Memorial Preserve to facilitate. Use of Nielsen Memorial Preserve as a satellite location for Nature Center programming could be



marketed as “River Bend on the Road” and include school field trips tailored to Nielsen’s unique landscape.

River Bend Nature Center has also offered use of their buildings as alternate program locations if a scheduled Nielsen Memorial Preserve program faces a rain day prior to the Learning Lab being built on site. River Bend Nature Center believes that partnering with Nielsen Memorial Preserve will help increase awareness of both facilities, and will help to get more people outdoors.

### The MN Department of Natural Resources

The MnDNR’s School Forest Program has many benefits and could help facilitate educational programming at the Preserve for interested schools. Goodhue County staff are open to connecting with local educators and administrations to pursue a Joint Powers Agreement (JPA) for their use of Nielsen Memorial Preserve as a School Forest. Once built, the Learning Lab could store a variety of equipment for School Forest programs, including:

- » Plastic Tubs for water/specimen collection
- » Magnifying glasses
- » Microscopes
- » A projector and screen for presentations
- » White board(s) and markers
- » Easels and writing utensils
- » Waders
- » Snowshoes
- » Archery equipment
- » Binoculars
- » Books and other resources
- » Bug spray, sunscreen, hats, and spare winter gear
- » Exploration backpacks



*A low ropes course and/or nature play area is proposed for one of the group recreation areas*



*Orienteering*



*Low ropes courses promote teamwork*



*Free play using found materials*



*Archery is proposed as a potential group recreation activity*



Programming coordinated by typical School Forest educators is not contingent on there being a building available onsite, and includes:

- » Scavenger Hunts
- » Orienteering
- » Camping trips for kids and parents
- » Project Learning Tree lessons
- » Project WET lessons
- » School Forest Club
- » Summer Urban Wilderness Camp

### Local Schools

Kenyon-Wanamingo High School's biology teacher says the Preserve would be an "excellent resource for their environmental curriculum." Goodhue County staff is supportive of his vision of using the park to provide hands on learning for ISD 2172 students on the following topics and programs:

- » Water quality
- » Forest ecology
- » Climate change
- » Flora and fauna
- » Dwarf trout lily census
- » Song bird census
- » Outdoor skills
- » Winter survival
- » Photography
- » Maple syruping
- » Mapping
- » Orienteering
- » Night hikes
- » Interdisciplinary school projects
- » Special units with multi-generational participation
- » History of the Land (elders tell their stories)

The Cannon River STEM School is also interested in potentially using Nielsen Memorial Preserve for education. They have a naturalist on staff who used to work for River Bend Nature Center and could guide their students in nature-focused outdoor learning.

### Scout Groups

The Boy Scouts of America have expressed interest in reserving the Preserve's group camping area and utilizing the park's group recreation areas for outings or camping trips. Natural resource based activities like birding, orienteering, geocaching, and biocaching can be conducted on site with minimal infrastructure and virtually no impact to the environment.

### Kenyon-Wanamingo Community Education

Nielsen Memorial Preserve can host Kenyon-Wanamingo Community Education programs that draw participants from across the County, offering events including:

- » Intergenerational Fishing Programs / Take a Kid Fishing Day
- » Photography classes
- » Family camping night
- » Nature art programs
- » Historical Days (Volunteers in traditional dress participating in teepee, lumberjack, trapper pelts, candle making demonstrations, etc.)
- » Volunteer Days (Earth day, Buckthorn busts, etc.)
- » Mushroom hunting and foraging
- » Birdhouse/Bathhouse building
- » Snowshoes and cider events
- » ECFE storytime walks
- » No-school day programs
- » Fitness classes (yoga, zumba, guided hikes)
- » Kids intro to mountain biking
- » Low ropes course team building

## Interpretive Plan

Nielsen Memorial Preserve intends to offer a variety of interpretive methods including signage panels, topical exploration prompts, and app-based learning in order to help interpretive messages engage a larger variety of visitors. Signage and interpretive media on a variety of topics will be developed as trails and programming are implemented. Subjects like the Mima mounds, spring ephemerals, big woods habitat, and guarding against invasive species will be essential to explore. Features that assist with interpretation, such as overlooks, can be designed to integrate interpretive elements. Exploration backpacks with gear and educational prompts could be checked out from the Learning Lab to guide visitors interested in specific topics. And even before formal infrastructure investments are made in the park, Nielsen Memorial Preserve-specific projects can be created in iNaturalist or other smart phone apps in order to help to guide exploration and learning on site.

## Marketing & Signage

Goodhue County will promote use of the Nielsen Memorial Preserve through their websites, wayfinding, signage, direct mail, and public events and meetings. A ribbon cutting will be held upon completion of the park's entry as a formal grand opening to the Preserve.

Nielsen Memorial Preserve social media accounts on Facebook and Instagram will share updates on park progress, photos, events, and programming.

Partnerships with local institutions, such as schools, local fitness organizations, community centers, and the Goodhue County Health and Human Services Department will encourage local residents to engage in healthy activities and learn about nature by visiting the Preserve.



Signs directing people to Nielsen Memorial Preserve along Hwy 60/ Kenyon Blvd will allow for easy recognition and access by travelers. Brochures and other marketing materials for the Preserve could be posted in complementary recreation facilities like Nerstrand Big Woods State Park, River Bend Nature Center, and Rice Lake State Park, for those who would like to expand their visit to include similar nearby attractions.

## Ecological and Land Resources Plan

The Nielsen Memorial Preserve was so named because the land was acquired from Harold Nielsen, who donated this undeveloped forestland to the County in the interest of maintaining it for public enjoyment. Because the land is relatively untouched, restoration is not needed, making monitoring and management of the existing landscape the focus of any natural resource related efforts.

The phasing of the park was designed to facilitate gentle public use while limiting unnecessary disturbance, with soft surface trails being developed first, and then selectively paved in later stages. Trails will be sustainably designed and field staked in order to minimize tree clearing and prevent erosion. If cultural resources are encountered during park development, they will be protected, and avoided wherever possible. Interpretation regarding these features would enrich the park experience for visitors. Care will be taken to limit clearing in active recreation areas and to preserve quality oaks and other native trees. As areas of the park get developed, restoration of adjacent habitat disturbed due to construction will be necessary.

Goodhue County Staff has reached out to DNR ecologists, and is open to participating in the DNR's Natural Heritage and Nongame Research program to contribute to the MN Biological Survey, Natural Heritage

Information System, and other projects for conservation planning. Discussions are also beginning about using the Preserve for species identification training. Additionally, if a JPA is reached with a school for participation in the DNR's School Forest program, Nielsen Memorial Preserve will work with the DNR to create a stewardship plan for the park.

Bringing visitors into an environment like this can be a risk, as they have the potential to bring invasive species with them into the park, especially along trails. Providing [interpretive signage](#) about preventing the spread of invasive species will help to educate visitors. Nielsen Memorial Preserve could become a PlayCleanGo partner (like nearby River Bend Nature Center), to show their commitment to promoting environmental best practices in the park. Boot brushes will be installed at key locations and paired with informative signage, and the kiosk at the park's entry can hold informational materials. Monitoring the most trafficked areas for introduced species like garlic mustard, cutleaf teasel, tansy, buckthorn, tatarian honeysuckle, reed canary grass, phragmites, and other invasives will be essential to maintaining the land in its current state of outstanding quality. An additional County staff member may be considered to assist with park operations and maintenance.

Because hunting is not allowed within the park boundary, the deer population will be monitored. If overpopulation is a concern and deer begin to affect the quality of the understory, culling the herd should be considered to stabilize the population.

# GIVE INVASIVE SPECIES THE BRUSH OFF.

Clean Your Gear Before Entering And Before Leaving The Recreation Site.



**Help Prevent The Spread Of Invasive Plants And Animals.**

- **REMOVE** plants, animals & mud from boots, gear, pets & vehicle.
- **CLEAN** your gear before entering & leaving the recreation site.
- **STAY** on designated roads & trails.
- **USE CERTIFIED** or local firewood & hay



**STOP INVASIVE SPECIES IN YOUR TRACKS.**  
PlayCleanGo.org

## GIVE INVASIVE SPECIES THE BRUSH OFF.

Shoes can carry the seeds of invasive plants like garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). Please brush them off before entering and leaving this area.



**Wild Parrot**  
*Perisoreus canadensis*



Wild parrot has an iridescent blue-green color that is often mistaken for a blue jay. It is a native species and is not considered an invasive species.

**What's The Problem?**

Garlic mustard is a non-native species that is highly invasive. It is a non-native species that is highly invasive. It is a non-native species that is highly invasive.

- Non-native seed and plant parts are carried from one place to another on our shoes, vehicle tires, by the wind and other means.
- Garlic mustard is a non-native invasive plant—one of many that were introduced or inadvertently introduced to Minnesota.



**Garlic Mustard**  
*Alliaria petiolata*



Garlic mustard has a white flower and leaves that are often mistaken for a blue jay. It is a native species and is not considered an invasive species.



**Cutleaf Teasel**  
*Rudbeckia laciniata*



Cutleaf teasel has a white flower and leaves that are often mistaken for a blue jay. It is a native species and is not considered an invasive species.



**Tansy**  
*Tanacetum vulgare*



Tansy has a white flower and leaves that are often mistaken for a blue jay. It is a native species and is not considered an invasive species.



**Buckthorn**  
*Rhamnus cathartica*



Common buckthorn has a white flower and leaves that are often mistaken for a blue jay. It is a native species and is not considered an invasive species.

Other Invasive Plants On The Move...



**STOP INVASIVE SPECIES IN YOUR TRACKS.**  
PlayCleanGo.org

Clean Your Gear Before Entering And Before Leaving The Recreation Site

Examples of interpretive signage available through PlayCleanGo to educate people on best practices for preventing the spread of invasive species





## Chapter 5 **IMPLEMENTATION & MANAGEMENT**

### Overview

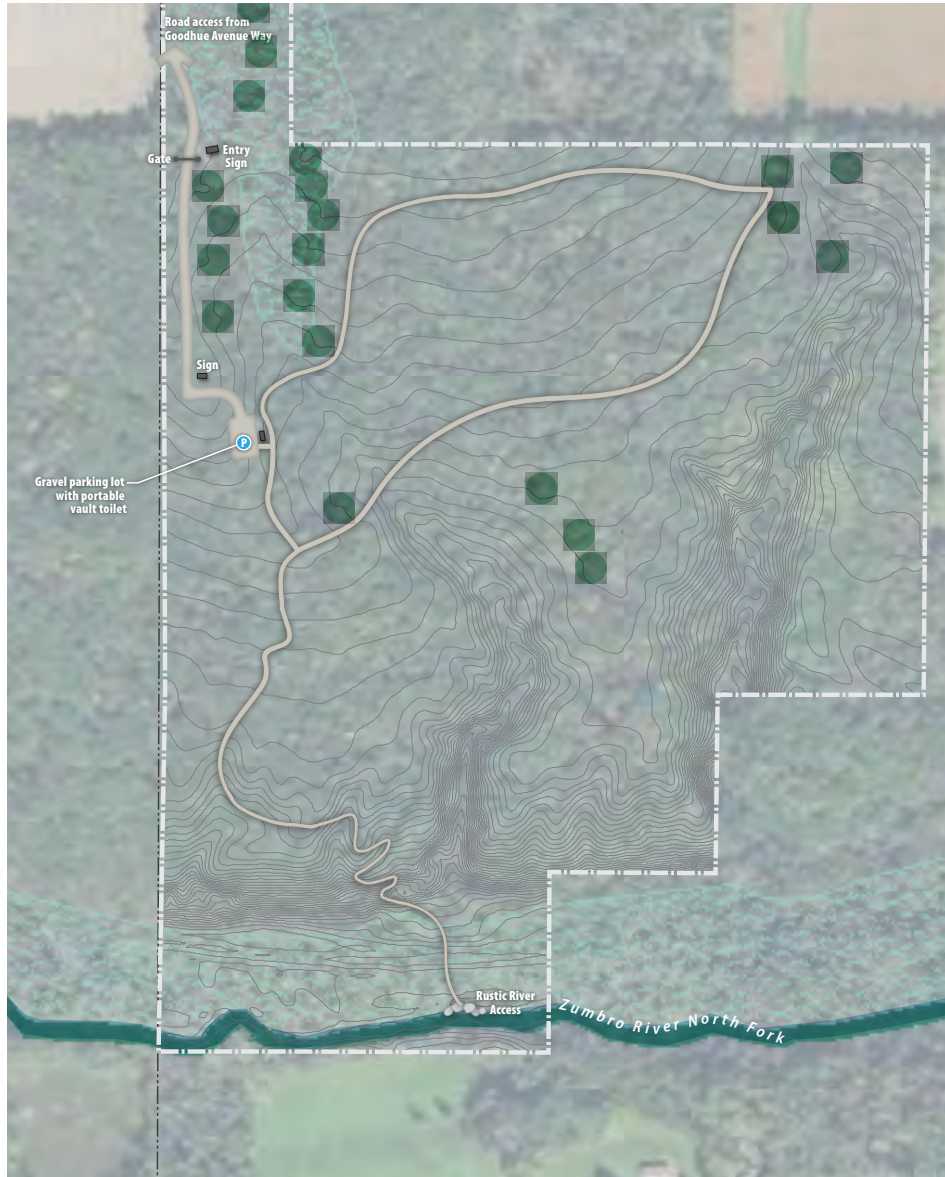
The elements in the Nielsen Memorial Preserve Master Plan are proposed to be implemented according to the phasing and priorities listed in this chapter, but will remain flexible to accommodate changes in funding and availability over the coming years.

Phasing indicates when the project will be implemented. The action items have been organized into short and long-term phases:

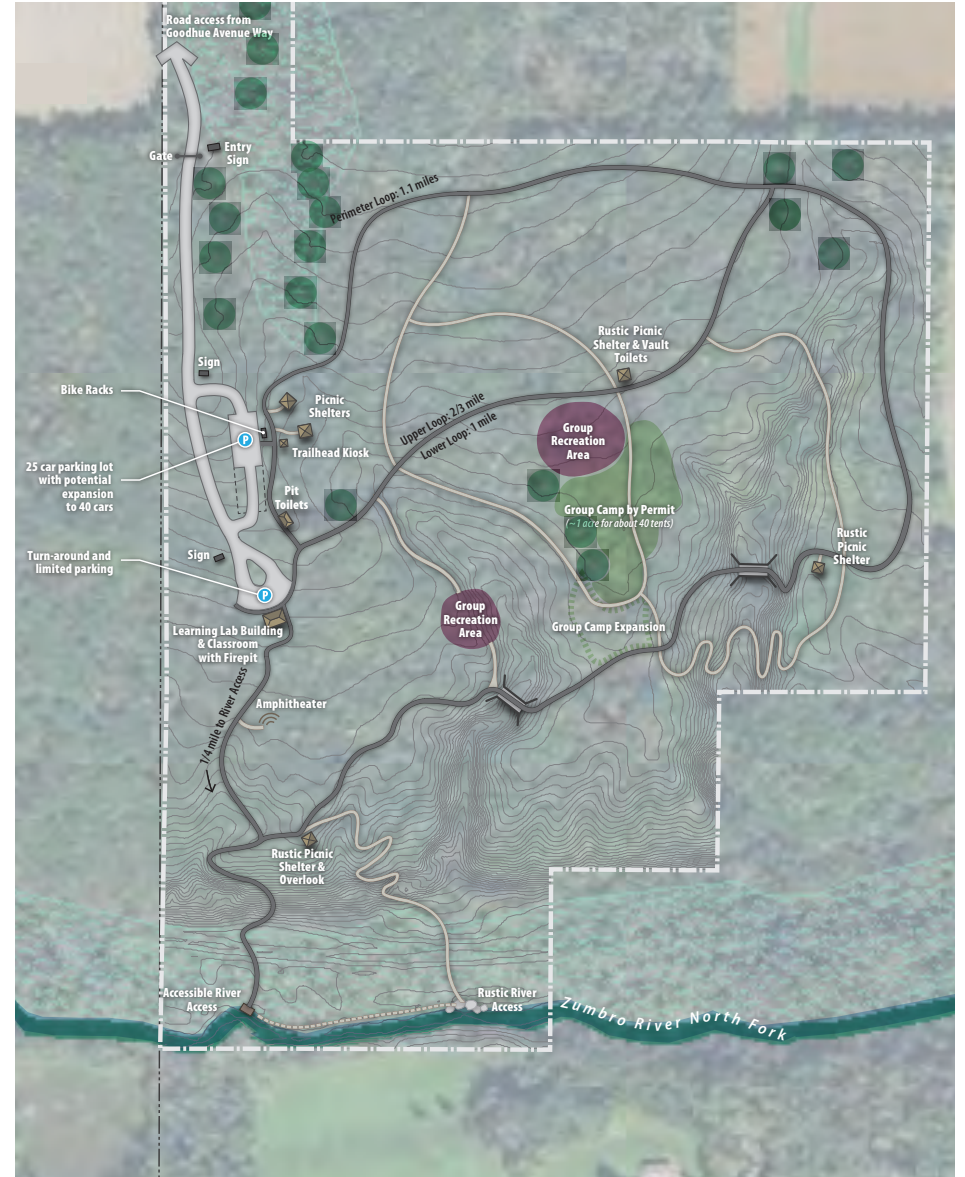
- » Short-term projects should occur first, based on available resources, desire for use, or needing to happen before another project.
- » Long-term projects are those that will be completed after the short-term projects have been established. These are projects that will require significantly more time to gather resources, funds, and conduct further planning in order to be realized.



# Phasing



Short-term



Long-term



**PHASING COSTS SUMMARY**

<b>TOTAL SHORT-TERM ESTIMATE</b>	<b>\$327,600</b>
<b>TOTAL LONG-TERM ESTIMATE</b>	<b>\$5,197,400</b>
<b>TOTAL MASTER PLAN COST ESTIMATE</b>	<b>\$5,525,000</b>

**Short-term Improvements**

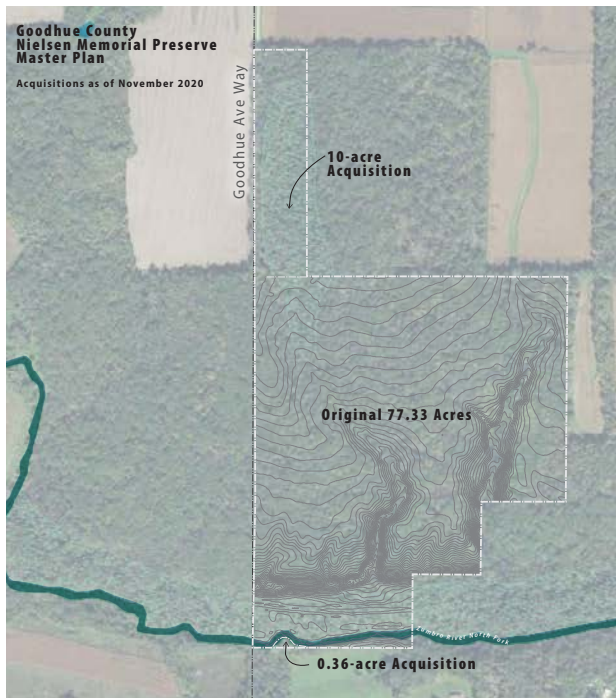
PARK AREA	AMENITY	ESTIMATED COST
<b>Park Access</b>	Monument Sign on Hwy 60	\$20,000
<b>General</b>	Trash and recycling receptacles	\$12,000
<b>Entry Area</b>	Gravel Entry Road	\$75,000
	Signage	\$15,000
	Gate	\$2,500
	Trailhead Kiosk	\$15,000
	Gravel Parking Lot	\$7,500
	Port-a-potty	\$2,500
<b>Trails</b>	Phase 1 Soft Surface Upper Trail Loop	\$92,500
<b>River Access</b>	Rustic River Access	\$10,000
<b>Short-term Improvements Costs</b>	<b>Short Term Improvements Subtotal</b>	<b>\$252,000</b>
	<b>10% Contingency</b>	<b>\$25,200</b>
	<b>20% Engineering &amp; Design</b>	<b>\$50,400</b>
	<b>Short-term Improvements Total</b>	<b>\$327,600</b>



## Long-term Improvements

PARK AREA	AMENITY	ESTIMATED COST
<b>Park Access</b>	Paved roadway from Hwy 60/ Kenyon Blvd to Park Entry Drive	\$585,000
<b>Entry Area</b>	Paved Entry Drive	\$225,000
	Paved Parking Lot	\$101,500
	Well	\$50,000
	Vault Toilets	\$25,000
	Picnic Shelters	\$125,000
	Bike Racks	\$2,000
	Bus Turnaround	\$87,500
	Bus Drop Off	\$55,500
	Learning Lab	\$1,250,000
	Outdoor Classroom/Amphitheatre	\$20,000
Fire Pit at Outdoor Classroom	\$5,000	
<b>Trails</b>	Phase 2 Soft Surface Lower Trail Loop	\$157,500
	Soft Surface walking/biking trails (middle loop to access group camp)	\$87,500
	Upper Loop Paved walking/biking trails	\$222,000
	Ped/ Bike Bridges	\$60,000
	Soft Surface walking/biking trails (outer loop)	\$105,000
	Lower Loop Paved walking/biking trail	\$337,500
	Rustic Picnic Shelter	\$15,000
<b>Group Camp</b>	1-acre Group Camp	\$50,000
	Rustic Picnic Shelter with Vault Toilets	\$50,000
	Two Group Recreation Areas	\$30,000
<b>River Access</b>	Accessible River Access	\$12,000
	Rustic Picnic Shelter & Overlook	\$50,000
<b>General</b>	Benches and Lighting	\$40,000
	Natural Resource Restoration & Management	\$250,000
<b>Long-term Improvements Costs</b>	<b>Long Term Improvements Subtotal</b>	\$3,998,000
	<b>10% Contingency</b>	\$399,800
	<b>20% Engineering &amp; Design</b>	\$799,600
	<b>Long-term Improvements Total</b>	<b>\$5,197,400</b>





## Acquisition

Two acquisitions have been made since the gifting of the original parcel of land in 2016. 10 acres were acquired in 2018 along Goodhue Avenue Way. An additional acquisition of a small, 0.36-acre parcel south of the river was also completed. Together, these acquisitions expanded the boundary of Nielsen Memorial Preserve as noted above, making the total area of the park 87.69 acres.

For natural resource protection, there would also be value in acquiring adjacent properties of similar quality to the existing preserve, especially wooded properties to the north or east, which also contain Mima mounds, as well as areas along the river.

In all cases, Staff will entertain park land acquisition in the case of willing sellers. All purchases will need to be approved by the Goodhue County Board.

## Park Ordinances

Goodhue County has a park ordinance for Nielsen Memorial Preserve, and may revise or update it as development occurs within the park.

## Research Plan

Goodhue County will participate in the Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission research initiatives (visitation counts, use profiles, recreation demands, and trends surveys, etc.) as these programs are developed over time. The County may monitor park use and conduct more surveys or questionnaires in line with the physical development of elements within this park master plan.

## Operations & Management

It is envisioned that management and operations will be primarily the responsibility of the Goodhue County Public Works Department, in coordination with any future volunteers. The County will consider hiring an additional staff member who could coordinate and carry out park operations and maintenance, including monitoring and maintaining natural resources.

## Management

Goodhue County establishes policies and goals for its park system and through an annual budget provides capital and operating funds for parks and trails.

## General Operations

Goodhue County staff will be responsible for the operation of Nielsen Memorial Preserve.

Where there are opportunities for operational partnerships, perhaps with later stage development like the Learning Lab and outdoor classroom, Goodhue County may enter a joint powers agreement with partner agencies. When possible, the County will

encourage and advocate for volunteers to assist with outdoor education programs, patrol, park clean-ups and special events.

## Maintenance

Regular maintenance activities for the park will include:

- » Trash collection
- » Tree trimming
- » Trail and pavement repair
- » Sign maintenance
- » Building/shelter repair and maintenance
- » Invasive species management and removal

## Natural Resource Management

Nielsen Memorial Preserve is currently a highly functional ecosystem that provides habitat, water quality, and other ecological benefits to the area. Promoting human access to this landscape will help to connect people to nature, but also requires careful management so that impacts to the ecosystem are reduced.

Once built, trails should be monitored for signs of erosion, and repaired as needed. The plant communities in the Preserve should be surveyed for invasive species, especially where visitor traffic is present (i.e. along trails). County staff may need plant identification training to learn how to properly identify invasive species. Specialized management activities, like controlled burns or targeted invasive removal, may be contracted as needed. Aggressive, non-native species such as buckthorn should be removed seasonally in order to prevent spread. This can be done as part of a maintenance contract, or by a volunteer crew led by an experienced natural resource professional.

Developing a written management plan that prescribes specific protocol for care of the Preserve is suggested as



the park is developed. The [DNR Forester](#) may be a good resource for development of a Woodland Stewardship Plan. The DNR also has regional plant ecologists who can offer [ecological assistance](#). Managing and preventing the spread of invasive species should be included in such a plan, as well as protocol for monitoring and controlling deer populations, should they become problematic for the park.

### **Water Quality**

The site's ravines will be monitored for erosion as the park develops. The County may reach out to Goodhue County Soil & Water Conservation District if it has concerns about erosion or sediment loading to the river, and will endeavor to prevent overall water quality impacts in park construction and management.

### **Pavement Management**

Nielsen Memorial Preserve contains both natural surface and paved trails, in addition to a parking lot. Pavement deteriorates as it ages. Regular pavement maintenance can prolong its lifespan in a cost effective manner.

### **Enforcement and Security**

Visitors will be informed of park and trail rules and regulations through strategically located kiosks and signs that address specific information about hours, trails, permitted and prohibited activities, and directions. Local law enforcement and public safety agencies will be responsible for emergency and criminal complaints within the Preserve. While the Preserve will be the responsibility of the Goodhue County Sheriff, collaboration with the Kenyon Police Department is anticipated to assist with providing a local law enforcement presence.

A locking gate at the Preserve's entrance is proposed so that County staff can reinforce the park's open and close times if needed and keep the area secure during hunting season and overnight use by youth groups.

### **Public Awareness**

Goodhue County will promote use of the park and trail through their websites, wayfinding signage, direct mail, and public events and meetings. Partnerships with local institutions, such as schools, local fitness organizations, and the Goodhue County Health and Human Services Department will encourage local residents to engage in healthy activities by using the Preserve and its trails.

### **Conflicts**

The existing park location is compatible with surrounding land uses, including private residences, whose owners participated in this master planning process. Minor conflicts will occasionally arise from private property owners' or neighboring residents' sensitivity to park and trail recreation or maintenance uses. Goodhue County will continue to work with individual landowners to resolve these issues case by case as the park is developed.

### **Public Services**

There may be a need for additional public services as park facilities are developed. Sustainable building materials and methods, eco-friendly options such as solar powered lighting, self-composting toilets or wells, and other low impact development will be considered. Stormwater will be treated on site.

## **Programming**

Nielsen Memorial Preserve contains passive recreational amenities that allow users to choose how and when to access the park and its trails, and for how long. Potential programming of the Preserve and its trails includes:

- » Nature-based education
- » Camping
- » Walking/hiking groups
- » Introductory or family mountain biking
- » Fishing
- » Birding
- » Orienteering
- » Citizen science
- » Restoration/maintenance volunteering

In order to fully realize the above programming options, the County may seek to partner with the following groups or others:

- » MnDNR's School Forest Program
- » Kenyon-Wanamingo Community Ed
- » River Bend Nature Center
- » Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR)
- » Zumbro River Watershed
- » Boy Scouts of America
- » Carleton College
- » St. Olaf University
- » University of Minnesota- Rochester
- » Local school districts (ISD 2172) and schools
- » Minnesota Orienteering Club
- » Capable Partners (local non-profit that supports accessible outdoor recreation)
- » Volunteer groups
- » Master Naturalists of Minnesota



## VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

The development of Nielsen Memorial Preserve provides an opportunity for local groups and organizations to become engaged in the construction and maintenance of facilities that are of benefit or interest to them. For example, a volunteer day may result in the establishment of a new segment of trail, removal of a patch of invasive species, creation of a rustic picnic shelter, or construction of a new stage for the amphitheater. This level of engagement can build pride and attachment in the preserve as an asset to the community, all while teaching valuable skills and connecting participants to nature. The master plan is intended to provide a framework that ensures improvements support the long-term vision for the preserve.

## Budget and Funding

Funding for initial capital cost and ongoing operations and maintenance costs is essential for a successful regional park. Funding will be primarily the responsibility of Goodhue County. There will be an emphasis on seeking outside funding in the form of grants.

It is anticipated that a portion of future capital projects will be well-positioned to secure regional or state funds for recreation, water quality improvements, and habitat restoration. These sources will contribute to capital construction costs. Examples of outside funding sources include:

- » Park dedication funds
- » Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission funding
- » [Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#)
- » Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment funds
- » Foundations and nonprofits
- » Statewide Health Improvement Program

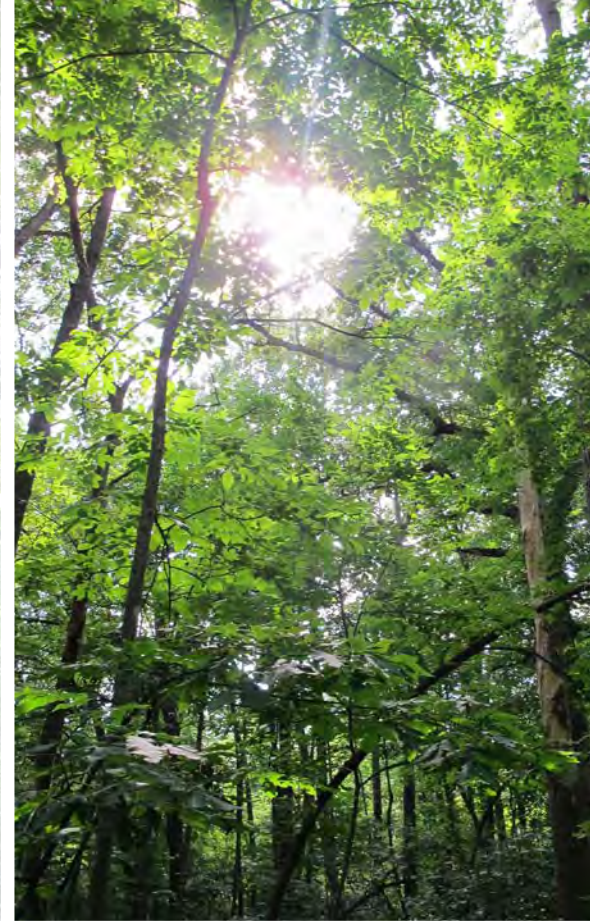
Funding for operating and maintaining the park and trail facilities will be the County's responsibility. Operating costs will be funded through their annual budget.











# Nielsen Memorial Preserve Master Plan