



**Master Plan Update  
2014-2018**

St. Joseph County Parks Department  
50651 Laurel Road  
South Bend, Indiana 46637

*This report documentation was prepared under contract for:*

**St. Joseph County Parks**

50651 Laurel Road  
South Bend, IN 46637  
Phone: (574) 277-4828  
Fax: (574) 273-2334



*Prepared by:*

**Charles F. Lehman, ASLA, President**

Lehman & Lehman, Inc.,  
Landscape Architecture and Planning  
510 Lincolnway East  
Mishawaka, Indiana 46544  
Phone: (574) 257-0255  
Fax: (574) 257-1966

All Rights Reserved.

Except as it is used by the client in direct relation to the master plan implementation, no part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any way without expressed permission by Lehman & Lehman, Inc.

Copyright 2014

Lehman & Lehman, Inc.



# Table of Contents

## Section A: Introduction

Introduction.....	Page A – 3
Planning Team .....	Page A – 4
Planning Area.....	Page A – 5
Planning Area Map .....	Page A – 5
Master Plan Goals .....	Page A – 6
Park Department Goals and Challenges .....	Page A – 8
Master Plan Implementation and Additional Studies.....	Page A – 9
Impact of HEA 1001 .....	Page A – 10
Challenges.....	Page A – 10

## Section B: Park Agency Profile

Park Agency History .....	Page B – 3
Park Agency Location.....	Page B – 3
Mission Statement.....	Page B – 3
Park Staff.....	Page B – 3
Department Roles .....	Page B – 4
Park Board Members .....	Page B – 5
The Park Law .....	Page B – 5
Goals of the St. Joseph County Park Board.....	Page B – 6
St. Joseph County Parks Foundation.....	Page B – 7
The Friends of Bendix Woods and Spicer Lake .....	Page B – 7
St. Joseph County Parks Organization Structure.....	Page B – 8
Park Agency Budget .....	Page B – 9
Appropriation History .....	Page B – 9
Service Radius of St. Joseph County Parks.....	Page B – 11
Potential Greenways and Land Acquisitions Map.....	Page B – 12
Land Acquisition Strategies.....	Page B – 13
St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Facilities.....	Page B – 14
Facility Infrastructure Inventory .....	Page B – 14
Overall Park Properties Map.....	Page B – 15
Park Property Maps .....	Page B – 17
General Program Inventory .....	Page B – 27
Accomplishments and Statistics.....	Page B – 31
Cooperation with Adjacent Communities.....	Page B – 44
Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) .....	Page B – 47

## **Section C: Community Profile**

History of St. Joseph County .....	Page C – 3
Location of St. Joseph County .....	Page C – 4
Man-made, Historical and Cultural Features .....	Page C – 5
Community Attractions and Recreation Opportunities .....	Page C – 5
St. Joseph County Government Agencies .....	Page C – 6
Community Services .....	Page C – 7
Transportation Links .....	Page C – 8
Major Industries.....	Page C – 8
Socio/Economic Factors.....	Page C – 9
Population Growth Statistics .....	Page C – 9
St. Joseph County Demographics.....	Page C – 10
Natural Features .....	Page C – 11
Plants and Wildlife .....	Page C – 14
Why Soil Data is Needed.....	Page C – 15

## **Section D: Public Participation**

Public Participation .....	Page D – 3
Park Agency Meetings .....	Page D – 3
Presentation of the Plan .....	Page D – 3
Community Survey.....	Page D – 6
SWOT Analysis .....	Page D – 9
Focus Groups .....	Page D – 10

## **Section E: Plan of Action**

Agency Strategic Focus .....	Page E – 3
2014-2018 Park Master Plan: Goals and Strategies.....	Page E – 3
Action Plan .....	Page E – 4
Funding Resources.....	Page E – 9

## **Section F: Resolutions and Approval**

Board Resolution Adopting Master Plan.....	Page F – 3
Section 504 Assurance of Compliance .....	Page F – 5
IDNR Approval Letter .....	Page F – 7

## **Appendix**

Reference Sources Used in this Study
Appendix Items

# Section A: Introduction

## **Section A: Introduction**

Introduction .....	Page A – 3
Planning Team .....	Page A – 4
Planning Area.....	Page A – 5
Planning Area Map .....	Page A – 5
Master Plan Goals.....	Page A – 6
Park Department Goals and Challenges .....	Page A – 8
Master Plan Implementation and Additional Studies.....	Page A – 9
Impact of HEA 1001 .....	Page A – 10
Challenges.....	Page A – 10

## Introduction

The Lehman & Lehman Planning Team was retained in March 2013 to prepare a master plan for St. Joseph County Parks. Over the last decade much commercial development has evolved in the area and connectivity with other adjacent communities has been discussed and implemented. These community amenities all place an increased emphasis on quality of life and coordination with other park agencies in recognizing St. Joseph County Parks as a vital component of northern Indiana.

This parks master plan was finalized and adopted by the Park Board in April 2014 to enable the Parks to continue balanced planning for the overall park system, meeting local recreation needs within available resources, while meeting long-term goals and objectives.

The Consultant believes that such five-year master plans should not be static or rigid but rather, such plans need to be dynamic and flexible in issues not anticipated. This master plan is a five (5) year plan for St. Joseph County Parks, which should be used as a tool and as a guideline for implementation of the action steps contained herein and as a basis for decision-making throughout the next five years. The plan should be kept up to date and reviewed annually, thus keeping the Parks in a perpetual state of being in “the first year of a five-year plan.”

**Planning Team:** The Planning Team consisted of the lead consultant, Lehman & Lehman, Inc., a landscape architecture and planning firm with considerable park and recreation planning experience throughout Indiana and the Midwest. One of the primary responsibilities of the Lehman & Lehman Planning Team was to facilitate the planning process and provide information to the Owner that enabled the community to make informed park and recreation planning decisions. Local citizens and park and recreation professionals played an important role in the development of the plan and are the true park and recreation experts in the St. Joseph County community because of ongoing daily involvement in park and recreation planning and management.

**Process Summary:** The planning process established for the parks and recreation facilities in this master plan generally followed guidelines published by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) for the preparation of five-year park and recreation master plans.

**Input Summary:** A variety of methods were utilized in the preparation of this plan that included:

- Progress meetings with park / recreation staff and park board
- Stakeholder focus group meetings with various park & recreation and community interest groups
- Public opinion survey
- Public input meeting

## Planning Team

### St. Joseph County Park Board

Larry Catanzarite..... President  
Donna Pfeil ..... Vice President  
Virginia Calvin ..... Secretary  
John Ferrettie..... Board Member  
John P. Gleissner ..... Board Member  
Tom Panzica ..... Board Member  
Phil Sutton ..... Board Member

### Park Administrative Staff

Evie Kirkwood ..... Director  
Steve Slauson ..... Deputy Director  
Kelley Herrera ..... Administrative Manager  
Jamie Hartzke ..... Leisure Services Manager  
Leslie Witkowski ..... Interpretive Services Manager  
Sam Bennett ..... Operations Manager  
Tom DeMonia ..... Facilities Manager

### Master Plan Task Force

Matt Kahn ..... St. Joseph County Parks Foundation Board  
Andrew Szczechowski ..... St. Joseph County Parks Foundation Board  
Donna Pfeil ..... St. Joseph County Parks Board  
Tom Panzica ..... St. Joseph County Parks Board  
Rob DeCleene ..... South Bend/Mishawaka Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Corey Noland ..... St. Joseph County Council  
Bob Harke ..... Friends of Bendix Woods/Spicer Lake  
Tim Sexton ..... Community Affairs, University of Notre Dame

### Master Plan Consultant

Charles F. Lehman, ASLA, FRSA  
President, *Lehman & Lehman, Inc.*  
Landscape Architecture and Planning  
Mishawaka, Indiana

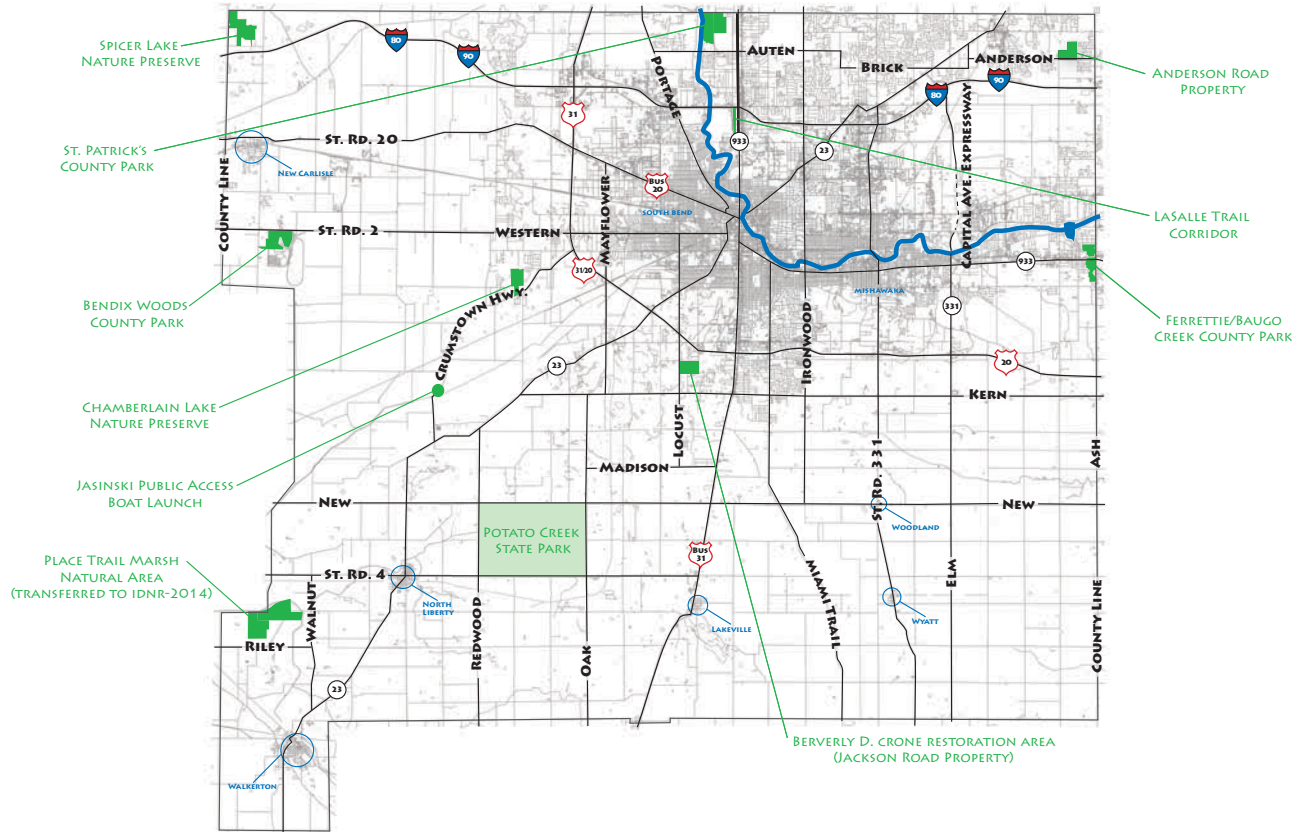




## Planning Area

St. Joseph County is in the north central part of Indiana, with a total area of 467 square miles. This planning area is bordered on the north by the state of Michigan, on the west by LaPorte County, on the east by Elkhart County and on the south by Marshall County.

## Planning Area Map



## The Master Plan Goals

Lehman & Lehman, Inc. feels that master planning is undertaken in order to achieve clearly defined strategies and objectives, and to provide recommendations for action on identified future needs tied to those objectives. We believe that the continual participation of the public in the planning process is essential. From a user's perspective, personal involvement in the identification of problems, needs, desires, and ultimately decisions, is much healthier than reacting to decisions already made by management.

The planning process needs to be continuous and must be sensitive to changes of conditions, needs, new information and opportunities. This document should not be considered the "final" plan, which can become irrelevant and stagnant. With annual reviews by the St. Joseph County Park and Recreation Board planning will remain a productive ongoing process facilitating future actions.

The St. Joseph County Park Department staff and the Park Board have agreed on the following goals for the 5-Year Parks and Recreation Plan:

- Gather feedback and input from as diverse a group of St. Joseph County residents as possible, and report it in an accurate manner.
- Use national recreation standards, combined with a careful needs analysis to create new priorities for parks and recreation in the city.
- Create a plan that is dynamic, and provides pertinent, useful information and guidance for the next five years in St. Joseph County.
- Present the plan and gain its acceptance within St. Joseph County communities
- Receive approval from IDNR for eligibility for application for Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) grant programs.
- Use the plan as a springboard to apply for all applicable grants
- Review the Action Plan on an annual basis for the purpose of budgeting and planning.

The St. Joseph County Parks & Recreation Master Plan is intended as a guide for providing parks and recreation in the community. The planning process for this document offered insight into the changing needs, trends and events since the last master plan.

Today, Americans spend more time in outdoor recreational activities than ever before and the demand for leisure activities is on the increase.

As interest in recreation grows and the urban areas expand, there will be an increased premium on open space land and related recreational opportunities. The residents of St. Joseph County are fortunate to have

had proper planning guidance in past years to assure the quality of the St. Joseph County Park's system today. This planning, however, needs to continue to guarantee quality recreational facilities and programs for future generations.

With continued growth, St. Joseph County is meeting the challenge to upgrade its roads, services and schools to accommodate its growth responsibly. St. Joseph County is known for its fine people, public concerns, ecological interests, and the quality of services provided to its residents. The St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Department plays an important role in this community. Every year thousands of adults and children visit and use St. Joseph County parks. Each year the St. Joseph County Parks and Recreation Department experiences growth as it strives to meet increased demands and needs.

The following plans were reviewed for relevance and consistency with the vision, goals and objectives outlined in this five-year master plan. While the master plan forms a foundation to help address the growing needs of a park and recreation system these planning tools also help guide future decision-making. These plans include:

- St. Joseph County Parks Master Plan
- South Bend Parks Master Plan
- Mishawaka Parks Master Plan
- Comprehensive Plan for South Bend and St. Joseph County 2002
- Bike South Bend 2010-12

This Master Plan document follows the guidelines outlined by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Outdoor Recreation and makes St. Joseph County eligible for state/federal grants & funding, but, even more importantly, it allows for the establishment of a guideline toward new horizons for the St. Joseph County Parks Department and the Community.

While the department continues to look at greater efficiencies, such as the increased use of volunteers and energy saving strategies, projections for the short term look even more challenging. County officials state that additional significant cuts are pending for the future county budgets.

## Park Department Goals and Challenges for 2014 – 2018



### 2014-2018 Park Master Plan: Goals and Strategies

St. Joseph County Parks is updating their 5-Year Park and Recreation Master Plan. Below are the proposed Goals and Strategies to be incorporated into the Action Plan in the document, as suggested by stakeholders, community surveys, staff, park board members and local officials.

#### 1. GOAL: **Protect and enhance natural and cultural resources**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1.a) Reduce invasive species                    | 1.g) Seek opportunities to add park land in underserved areas                         |
| 1.b) Maintain pond health                       | 1.h) Foster green and sustainability initiatives                                      |
| 1.c) Landscape with native plants               | 1.i) Quantify the environmental value of the parks' green space                       |
| 1.d) Control nuisance wildlife                  | 1.j) Develop interpretive displays and signage that tell the stories within the parks |
| 1.e) Restore stream shorelines                  |   |
| 1.f) Add park land contiguous to existing parks |   |

#### 2. GOAL: **Encourage and promote outdoor activities that highlight natural resources**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 2.a) Create programs that promote healthy lifestyles | 2.g) Design programs for the Boomer generation |
| 2.b) Create fitness related programs                 | 2.h) Create cooperative programs with ND-LEEF  |
| 2.c) Market to new user groups                       | 2.i) Enhance communications with teachers      |
| 2.d) Establish new program partnerships              | 2.j) Promote partnerships with universities    |
| 2.e) Enhance entrance signage                        | 2.k) Develop adventure programming             |
| 2.f) Promote connections to nature for children      |  |

#### 3. GOAL: **Provide funding and sound administration of the parks, programs and operations**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 3.a) Enhance employee workspaces and environment  | 3.f) Utilize grants to fund projects and programs |
| 3.b) Expand volunteerism  | 3.g) Maximize revenue from programming            |
| 3.c) Establish Beverly D. Crone Restoration Area in partnership with Department of Public Works | 3.h) Initiate cost saving initiatives             |
| 3.d) Strengthen the Parks Foundation  | 3.i) Upgrade technology                           |
| 3.e) Invite millennial generation into leadership roles   |   |

#### 4. GOAL: **Improve and update park facilities and equipment**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 4.a) Pave roads and parking lots                          | 4.f) Create use plan for amphitheater  |
| 4.b) Upgrade picnic buildings and shelters                | 4.g) Update rental equipment, such as skis, canoes, life jackets               |
| 4.c) Complete infrastructure repairs and improvements     | 4.h) Develop amenities that establish parks as destination sites               |
| 4.d) Upgrade snow equipment                               | 4.i) Improve accessibility and address upgrades as facilities repairs are made |
| 4.e) Update machinery such as bulldozers, mower, groomers |  |

#### 5. GOAL: **Develop and enhance trails (within parks and within the county)**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 5.a) Improve trail signage                           | 5.d) Establish fitness trail   |
| 5.b) Develop surfaced and measured walking trails    | 5.e) Work with like-minded entities to foster trail connections and community connectivity |
| 5.c) Continue work/construction of the LaSalle Trail |  |

## Master Plan Implementation and Additional Studies

Following the approval of this Five-Year Master Plan, additional focus will be given in detail to the implementation of the Plan. The result of that implementation will be made part of this Five-Year Master Plan.

Part of this implementation will include the potential for additional studies and planning. Such studies identified during the planning process include:

- Mishawaka / Berrien Springs Trail – connectivity of the river front trail system from the City of Mishawaka to Berrien Springs
- Alternative Energy – study alternative energy sources
- St. Patrick’s Amphitheatre Alternatives – study the feasibility and potential for programming and renovation of this park component
- Alternative Revenue Sources – continue to study the potential and impact of alternative revenue sources
- Economic Benefits of Parks – continue to recognize the economic benefits of parks and continue to market and promote as such

By implementing these studies, and with the potential to partner with various agencies and groups, a stronger synergy will be formed while enhancing the end product. New partnerships and collaborative efforts will need to be established as well as maintaining the successful collaborations that St. Joseph County Parks has had in the past.

Partners include, but are not limited to:

- Dog trainers, Pet retail facilities
- Ducks Unlimited/local hunt-fish groups
- Friends of Bendix Woods & Spicer Lake
- Hospitals; orthopedic centers; physical therapy centers
- MACOG
- Michiana Bike Coalition
- Michiana Home School Association
- Mishawaka Parks and Recreation Department
- Morris Performing Arts Center
- No Child Left Inside Coalition
- Northern Indiana Mountain Bike Association
- IN-MI Trail group
- St. Joseph County/Elkhart County Drainage Boards
- St. Joseph County Health Department
- St. Joseph County Parks Foundation
- St. Joseph County Public Library
- Soil and Water Conservation District

- South Bend-Elkhart Audubon Society
- South Bend-Mishawaka Convention and Visitors Bureau
- South Bend Parks and Recreation Department
- Southwest Michigan Planning Commission
- Vinters/area wineries, local caterers

## Impact of HEA 1001

Property tax reform enacted by the Indiana state legislature in 2008 has resulted in a reduction in property tax revenues for units of local government across the state and especially in St. Joseph County. Within the St. Joseph County Parks, the ability to offset tax revenue reductions through efficiency gains is deterred by efficiencies already gained in 2006-2008, as the parks department budget declined in each of those years. “Units of local government that have been running very efficient operations will have fewer opportunities to offset revenue reductions by further increasing efficiency,” states a report from the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment.

St. Joseph County Parks and Park Board must continue to promote the impact of Parks for the County residents. Such promotion and impacts will need to be shared with County leaders.

## Challenges

According to the Center for Urban Policy and the Environment’s report, “some units of local government may decide they have no choice but to reduce or eliminate some of the services they provide. Assuming the services cut were valued by at least some in the community, cuts in any service would have the effect of reducing the overall quality of life in the community.”

Within St. Joseph County Parks, budget reductions in 2009 resulted in a net loss of roughly 4.5 FTEs. The 2009 general budget appropriation was reduced to a level equivalent to the appropriation level in 2000. With improved efficiencies, such as a newly designed central reservation system and reduced mowing plans, some service reductions were mitigated. However, deferred maintenance continues to loom. Park roads and shelters are in need of repairs. The department’s capital projects budget has been zeroed out, therefore many of these plans have been tabled.

## Ownership Transfer

In February 2014, the St. Joseph County Park Board transferred ownership of Place Trail Marsh to the Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife due, in large part, to the lack of manpower and monetary means to take care of the property as it should. This represented 370 acres of previous park open space inventory.