

ISLAND PARK MANAGEMENT PLAN AND GUIDELINES - 2015

Introduction

Island Park was a sand dune on the edge of Lake Huron 12,000 years ago. As the lake receded, it left a river channel, the Thunder Bay River. Before settlement vegetation of that area of Alpena is listed as: Mixed Oak Savanna, Mixed Conifer Swamp, Hemlock and White Pine forest. Currently, the Island is part Jack Pine forest and part sand dune covered with beach grass, Red Oak, Red and White Pine, *Populus* species and other grasses. Along the shoreline there are two marsh areas. Also present are invasive exotic species, Autumn Olive and Tartarian Honeysuckle, Buckthorn and Spotted Knapweed.

There is evidence that the island was occupied periodically by Native Americans until settlers arrived in the early 1800s and the logging industry began. After the Ninth Street Dam was built in 1923, the water level rose and an island (Island Park) was formed. Trees from the island were cut for lumber and sand removed to be used as fill for the growing city of Alpena. When the Waterfowl Sanctuary was designated as such in 1938, the island was included in the sanctuary designation. In 1944, the island was deeded to the Sportsmen's Club.

The Sportsmen's Club started conservation projects beginning in the 1940s by planting shrubs that provided food for birds, Autumn Olive and Tartarian Honeysuckle. During 1982 and 1983, soil conservation projects were implemented by Huron Pines Resource and Development Program and the Sportsmen's Club, utilizing the labor of Alpena Community College students and the Michigan Youth Corps. These projects included building fishing platforms, stairways, nature trails, and a handicapped viewing platform, O.B. Eustis Lookout, and a canoe launch. Beach grass was planted to control soil erosion. A gate to the bridge was installed to prevent wheeled vehicles from using the island.

Acquisition and Initial Plan

Due to decreasing members, funds, and limited space, the Sportsman's Club decided to sell the island. Grant money from the Michigan Land Trust Fund made it possible for the city of Alpena to buy the island as a natural area for environmental education and quiet recreation for public use. Groups of school and youth, senior citizens, local residents and visitors to the area were among those who frequented the island.

In July 1985, the Alpena City Council voted to accept ownership of Sportsmen's Island which was purchased with the Land Trust Fund and local monies. The Alpena Community College Volunteer Center pledged to maintain the island with volunteer assistance for 10 years.

At this time a Wildlife Sanctuary Advisory Committee (later the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board) was appointed by the City Council. The Committee's mission was to maintain the island as a natural place for environmental education and quiet recreation. Management concerns were erosion control and preservation of the fragile environment. Action plans included, maintenance of trails and erosion repair projects by blocking vertical trails.

After the first 10 years of maintenance by Alpena Community College, the island was maintained by numerous volunteers from many different organizations who participated in erosion control, planting, clean up, tree removal, surveys, invasive species removal and just

general maintenance of the island over the years. During this period the city removed the Sportsman's Clubhouse from the island.

Island Park: 1990 to 2015

In May 1991, the name of the island officially changed back to its historic name of Island Park. The name was found on a stone monument on the island commemorating soldiers of WWII and was dated June 7, 1946.

An herbaceous plant inventory was done in 1993 which resulted in the removal of non-native invasive shrubs and planting of indigenous plants; this project was ongoing. Self-guiding pamphlets were produced for the five distinct habitats, birds, wildflowers and trees. The tree pamphlet identified 25 different trees and identification markers for them were placed around the island. After the pamphlets were published, guidelines for visitors were established.

Educational efforts included arranging guided nature tours for students. As many as 20 elementary classrooms a year took part in these tours for many years.

Maintenance, repairs and improvements were done. The concrete walkway, flagpole, concrete shuffleboard and the club house electricity and water were removed.

In 1995, the canoe dock was replaced and the gravel trail to the lookout was paved. The cement outhouse structure was cleaned out and painted and became a storage shed for maintenance equipment and River Rats program materials. In 2013, all the stairways were replaced.

Existing Conditions

Island Park is 17 acres, triangular in shape and approximately 600 feet above sea level. It lies within the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary. The sanctuary, comprised of 500 acres within the city limits, is bounded by the north and south shores of the Thunder Bay River between Bagley Street to the west and Ninth Street Dam downstream.

There is a barked trail system around the island of approximately nine-tenths of a mile with interconnecting trails, some of which are barked. There are also several unsanctioned trails. A narrow asphalt road leads from Duck Park across the bridge to the island. The paved road continues to a handicapped accessible lookout at the top of the island from where the other sanctuary islands can be viewed. There are three stairways within the designated trails that facilitate movement around the island. One of these stairs at Ninebark Hollow contains another platform which allows viewing of the river. Besides the viewing platforms, there are four fishing docks and one canoe launch platform. Other than strollers and wheelchairs, no other wheeled vehicles are allowed on the island.

The converted shed continues to be used for maintenance equipment and educational materials. Additionally, there is an amphitheater area with three benches. There are two other benches, one on top of the island and one at the island's entrance. The latter one was an Eagle Scout project. Two signs: one commemorating Soil Conservation District efforts and one a map showing the trail system grace the entrance together with the large rock monument in memory of WWII soldiers.

Biological surveys

As mentioned earlier, surveys of the trees, the birds and herbaceous plants on the island were done in 1993 and a series of pamphlets describing the various island habitats: swamp, marsh, dune, meadow and forest were produced. A tree and shrub distribution survey was done by Alpena High School Agricultural Science students in 2005. A zone map for Autumn Olive was generated by Alpena Community College Advance Biology students for Autumn Olive removal in 2011. Since the floral quality of the island is low, secondary succession is taking place along with some planting of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants native to the area.

Recreation The island remains an ideal for quiet recreation such as walking, bird watching, photography and viewing nature.

Education The study of natural subjects continues to be encouraged. Small groups or a classroom of students are invited to walk the designated trails and stand on the docks to view flora and fauna. Invasive non-native species education through identification and control occurs once or twice a year. A summer program called River Rats enables children 5 to 10 years old to experience hands-on natural science education. The self-guided pamphlets are available to the public at the entrance to the island and can found on the City of Alpena website.

Preservation The island's vulnerable ecosystem is of special concern. The aim is not only to protect the environment but to protect the wildlife that inhabits or visits the island.

Management zones The island is defined by the trail system, lookout, docks, stairways and amphitheater which are maintained. All other areas are ecologically sensitive and not to be disturbed. Visitors are encouraged to stay on the designated trails. Two erosion areas are marked by signs. As mentioned, there are restrictions for wheeled vehicles and bicycles. Dogs must be leashed.

The City is to be contacted by anyone wishing to have group activities on the island.

Bibliography

Kus, Cindy; THE ALPENA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, A Planning Study, 1980
Minutes from the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board, 1990 to 2015

MANAGEMENT PLAN MARCH 2015

Mission

The Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board stewards the Sanctuary by providing creative leadership and expertise to maintain, enhance, and promote this unique natural resource for public education and enjoyment.

Vision

Island Park will continue to be a natural area providing educational opportunities and quiet recreation for everyone. Maintenance will ensure the conserving and protecting of its natural ecosystems, native flora and fauna, and its cultural significance to the Alpena area.

TRAILS:

Goal: People will have access to all habitats; however, they will be directed to walk only on the designated trails (See ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE AND VISITORS).

The main trails will be maintained free from obstruction and debris. Dead trees that are close to the designated trails will be removed. Branches encroaching on these trails and stairs will be trimmed back. Poison ivy where it grows close to the designated trails will be removed with a suitable herbicide.

Recommendations:

The main designated trails and designated trails to all the distinct habitats will be maintained, such as barking. (See Appendix 1)

Vertical trails will be blocked in sensitive areas with brush and/or plantings of suitable vegetation. If this does not reduce traffic on these vertical trails within 2 -3 years, man-made barriers will be built.

A pamphlet and signs will be created to describe designated trails that are appropriate for walking.

Action:

Maintain all designated trails to distinct habitats.

Block vertical trails with brush and native plant vegetation.

Build barriers where brush and native plant vegetation have failed to protect the environment.

Make a pamphlet stating Island Park Guidelines.

Make a sign that describes Island Park Guidelines.

FORESTS AND OTHER HABITATS:

Goal: Maintain a healthy environment in all habitats and remove invasive species. Planting native plants suitable to the island ecology is approved. (See Appendix 2 and 3)

Recommendations:

Ensure that the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board is aware the island ecosystem is not likely to ever return to its pre-settlement condition.

Invasive species will be removed using the Bradley Method. (See Appendix 4)

Aged Jack Pine will be culled from the forest as needed, after consulting a specialist. Native plants will be planted in suitable habitats either to enhance biodiversity (consult specialist), prevent erosion or replace trees being removed.

Action:

Consult with a specialist to establish a plan for removal of aged Jack Pine as needed.

Invasive species will be removed annually by volunteers.

A survey and inventory of invasive non-native species by Huron Pines to determine feasibility of removing Common or Glossy Buckthorn.

Encourage planting of native species. (See BIODIVERSITY)

HARD LANDSCAPES (STRUCTURES):

Goal: Hard landscape consists of the docks, stairways and railings, 2 lookouts, benches in amphitheater and along the designated trails and the shed. These are to be kept in good

repair. Access to the water for fishing is available at 3 docks; these docks and the designated trails to them are kept open and maintained. The fourth dock is too high for fishing and is for viewing. The fifth dock is a boat dock with cleats. The shed contents are inventoried and kept tidy. (See Appendix 5)
Signs of vandalism are removed.

There should be minimal construction, only that which protects the natural area and has been approved. Building and signage is to be kept to a minimum in order to focus on the natural environment.

Tree markers (24) related to the Forest Sampler pamphlet are placed about the island to assist in identification. Vegetation is cleared around the markers for visibility. (See Appendix 6)

Recommendations:

Further structures in the form of barriers to traffic are needed. See Trail Action #3
Improvement is needed for tree markers and Forest Sampler pamphlet. (See PAMPHLETS)

Action:

Identify areas where brush and plantings have not proven effective in the past 2 or 3 years and construct barriers. (See TRAILS)

PAMPHLETS:

Goal: Provide self-guiding pamphlets for nature study of the island. The various pamphlets are stocked and available at the entrance; they are a big part of the island experience. The rack is checked and filled every week from April to October.

Recommendations:

Form a committee to review format of pamphlets. (See ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE AND VISITORS)

Create an Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary pamphlet containing Island Park Guidelines.

Action:

The new pamphlet committee will review and update all pamphlets if needed.

The Forest Sampler pamphlet will be revised and a new tree ID system devised.

An Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary pamphlet will be produced.

BIOIVERSITY:

Goal: The island has a diverse number of native trees and shrubs and a few native herbaceous plants. Plantings on the island are to be done with plants native to the Great Lakes area. In an attempt to encourage native biodiversity, non-native invasive shrubs and plants are being removed. Native plants and seeds can be planted after the non-native are removed. Flower beds are discouraged because of lack of water source and volunteers.

Recommendations:

Small, more selective plantings are recommended.

Any new plantings should be approved by the Board.

Removal of non-native invasive species is encouraged. (See FOREST)

Native plants and seeds can be planted after non-native invasive species are removed.

Action:

The Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board will approve all plantings.

EDUCATION:

Goal: The Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board appreciates and seeks assistance from natural resource professionals to become better stewards. Part of the mission is to promote education for all ages; therefore, we encourage nature study, preferably in small groups. The study of secondary succession is endorsed. Groups are encouraged to contact City Hall before they plan activities on the island. (See Appendix 7)

Recommendations:

Enhance study areas.

Encourage aquatic studies.

Provide access to the water for aquatic study.

Maintain birdhouses.

Actions:

Consult with specialists to supplement and improve herptofauna.

Build a boardwalk into Blackbird Marsh with access to the water for study of aquatic wildlife.

Build aquatic study area in area of west dock.

RIVER CENTER:

Goal: Island Park will be maintained as the outdoor lab for the proposed River Center providing a place for Natural Science Education.

Recommendations:

Actions:

TRASH:

Goal: Regular removal of trash is needed.

Recommendations:

Ask for help from Volunteers.

Action:

Contact volunteer groups for assistance.

VOLUNTEERS:

Goal: Volunteers are needed to carry out the management plan. Volunteers are encouraged to help maintain the Island.

Recommendations:

Actively work to establish a friends/volunteer group.

Action:

A Board member will talk with other groups that have volunteers/friends groups to learn how to form such a group.

A list of volunteer activities will be created.

ENVIRONMENT, WILDLIFE AND VISITORS:

Goal: The Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary Board is tasked with protecting the island flora and fauna. Visitors are welcome. Bicycles and vehicles, except those needed for Board activities, are restricted. Strollers and wheelchairs are permitted.

Dogs can visit the island with their owners. According to a City ordinance, a dog must be under the control of its owner at all times. Mutt Mitts are available in the parking lot.

Recommendations:

Visitors will be asked to stay on the designated trails shown on the map and pamphlets. There will be signage at the entrance to the island asking visitors to stay on the designated trails. There will be a map in a pamphlet showing the designated trails. A sign will be installed asking owners to leash their dogs for the protection of other visitors and wildlife.

Action:

Signage for the above recommendations.
Create a map showing designated trails

Appendix

Map of Island Park showing designated trails for walking
Tree, shrub inventory
Autumn Olive Zone Map
Bradley Method
Inventory of Island Park shed.
Map showing location of trees for Tree Pamphlet
Email from Phyllis Higgman, Natural Features Inventory

Island Park Management Plan Committee: Elizabeth Littler, Melissa Doubek, Vernie Nethercut, Stephanie Prince, Roger Witherbee, ex officio.

THE GUIDELINES

Welcome to Island Park, the heart of the Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary, where you can spend a time away from the noise and bustle of the city in a natural environment preserved for your enjoyment.

If you are quiet, you may observe many birds and other wildlife - please respect the wildlife as the Island is their home.

Take pictures, a walk, go fishing, look at the views or rest on a bench – a time for quiet recreation.

Because the island is a fragile sand dune lightly covered with soil and plants, please stay on the designated trails.

Please keep your dog on a leash at all times for the enjoyment and safety of people, plants and wildlife.

For group activities, please register with the city by calling the Alpena City Planner at 354-1771

Plan updated by Elizabeth Littler, March 2015