

CITY OF AUSTIN PARKS, RECREATION, AND FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

2022 Annual Report



PARKS, RECREATION, AND FORESTRY DEPARTMENT

500 NE 4 AVENUE AUSTIN, MN

MISSION

The Austin Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department creates community through people, parks, and programs. We strengthen community image and sense of place, support economic development, safety and security, promote health and wellness, foster human development, increase cultural unity, protect environmental resources, facilitate community problem solving, and provide recreational experiences.

PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY ACCOMPLISHMENTS for 2022

- Director of Parks, Recreation & Forestry, Dave Merrill, began working 5/23/22. Former Director, Kevin Nelson, resigned on 3/4/2022.
- Completed C.I.P. projects:
 - Metal roofing on a number of pavilions throughout various parks.
 - Pool Security System
 - Pool Sound System
 - Pool Painting
 - Family Changing Room installed at pool
- Clean-up days were promoted and continued all summer and into the fall, with mostly single-group efforts providing volunteers greater scheduling flexibility.
- Awarded Tree City USA designation for 42nd year in March 2022.
- In December 2022, submitted Tree City USA application for the 43rd year.
- Interior renovation of Pool House with floor painting, family changing room, hand dryers and trim painting. External improvements were made by sealing and painting the pool vessels, comprehensive security camera system, and a new sound system.
- All Park restrooms were re-painted.
- Dog Park was upgraded with a portable toilet, additional mulch, 2 security lights and a windscreen for the shelter.
- A new warming house was installed in Kaufmann Park.
- The tree crew completed 159 work orders that included 124 trees trimmed and 35 removed and there were another 122 trims in parks and other areas and 54 removals. 188 trees were planted in parks and 56 planted in boulevards; the crew also grounded out 107 stumps which included hauling away the chips and adding black dirt.
- Spruce Up Austin began the planning of and refurbishing process of Honor Guard Park.
- Completed a tiling project at Shirley Theel so that the green spaces drain properly after winter snow melt and seasonal rains.
- Replaced lighting within pavilions with LED fixtures.
- Began the parks master plan process that was put on hold due to the 2020 coronavirus pandemic.
- Began design and implementation of a new departmental website
- Dave Merrill attended the 2022 NRPA National Conference in Phoenix, AZ. Dave Merrill and Riley Donovan attended the MRPA State Conference in Brainerd, MN.

EQUIPMENT PURCHASED IN 2022

- Acquired a new Jacobsen wide-area mower, inclusive of an all-season cab.
- Acquired a new “flower cart”

PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY GOALS FOR 2023

- Create a positive culture through stewardship, community pride, open communication and FUN!
- Develop a new mission statement reflective of our position within the Austin Community
- Complete our Parks and Trails Master plan
- Manage the urban forest as an asset that is valued and recognized for its positive impact in the community
- Continue to assess our park system and to add upgrades:
 - Continue to upgrade playgrounds.
 - Continue to replace sand in non-flood areas under play equipment with wood fiber or other options which meet ADA requirements.
- Look into the greater needs of park facilities.
- Continue to adapt recreation programming to changing needs and trends for youth and adults.
- Embrace new ideas and have an open mind to change.
- Be a good steward of the environment - partner with others.
- Complete several CIP projects for 2023 and continue to plan for future projects that enhance APR parks system.
- Work with Spruce Up Austin to complete tree plantings, grooming, and care.

CREW

Forestry Crew - The forestry crew performs the maintenance on all trees in boulevards and parks in the city of Austin. They remove and trim trees which block the view of street signs and also those in preparation for street construction. They are amongst the first to get called in following (tree) storm damage on boulevards, clearing the way of City trees, limbs, and branches which may have fallen, thus obstructing streets, driveways, and sidewalks. The team grinds all of the tree stumps and cleans up shrubs and trees from the City's parks. Letters are mailed (from APR Department) to private property owners, instructing them of need to do the same to dead, dangerous, and/or diseased trees. This crew also works with other maintenance staff within our park system with mowing, hauling from the garbage routes, flooding rinks, and other work as necessary. The department was able to secure two urban foresters from Ampact/ClimaCorps. They were hired to work 40 hour/week for 11 weeks. They have been primarily working on the Emerald Ash Borer plan and the city tree inventory.

Mowing Crew - The mowing crew has a huge responsibility with 593-plus park acres, 52,800 linear feet along trails, in addition to flood areas, the library, arenas, senior center, and Nature Center. Not long after the grass-growing season ends, following parks winterizing and parks clean-up, the parks crew digs into their winter-season work of removing snow (as weather dictates) from 16 miles of city sidewalks, which include the library, Town Center, both arenas, and Mill Pond path. Parking lots snow removal includes parts of City Hall, Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, the parks shop, and the outdoor rinks. The majority of City trails do not have winter maintenance; however, when deemed

necessary to use a path to get to another area to plow, paths are cleared. The parks crew is also called upon by the street department to assist them with plowing or hauling snow.

Mechanic - The Parks Department mechanic does everything from major overhauls on engines and transmissions, to tune ups on weed eaters. He also assists with mowing and removing snow as necessary. The Parks mechanic keeps equipment for parks crews running smoothly and on schedule. The majority of his work is performed at the central garage building. The current mechanic accepted a new position with the city and his last day was 12/31/2022.

Park Maintenance/Equipment Operators & Construction - They have their hands full keeping the park system healthy and usable for the public. Buildings are constructed and maintained by this crew; they're truly jacks of all trades. During the summer months, one individual, who is a certified pool operator, is pulled from parks duties to prep and maintain the municipal pool(s). During certain projects, his time is split. Equipment operators also assist the tree crew when they are removing trees or grinding stumps.

Flower Crew - Temporary/seasonal employees are hired for the growing season to water and care for the city's flowers. Duties include caring for the plantings within existing hanging flowerpots, and within ground planters in public areas, including the library building, municipal building, and Sterling medians. The total of hanging flower baskets in 2022 was 254. The plantings arrangements have been fairly similar most years.

Seasonal Crews - This sizeable group includes all of extra summer help who operate equipment such as the smaller mowers and trimmers; also included in the group are the lawn inspector, the landscaper/planter, the ball diamond maintenance crew, summer recreation instructors and officials, and pool staff. Extensive parks maintenance and programming are made possible with the assistance of the department's seasonal staff. The winter staff are just as important in assisting with staffing the needs at the arenas, as well as the warming houses for outdoor rinks and the sledding hill, plus others for winter recreation programs.

NOTES

- Members from all City departments meet monthly as a safety committee to help solve dangerous issues. They strive to put together policy to ward off workplace injuries.
- There were 182 weed orders processed, and of those orders 81 were mowed by the contracted mowing company and billed to the property owner. If the bills were not paid, they were assessed to the property taxes of the respective owners.
- All 120 of the garden plots were rented within the Community Gardens in 2022.
- The Parks department maintains the library grounds as well as inside repairs and painting of that facility.
- The City Archery Deer Hunt was offered this past fall for the sixth consecutive year. There were successful cooperative arrangements made in 2021 to expand the properties on which hunting was/is allowed in an effort to even better manage the deer population in Austin. The season ran mid-October through the end of December. Collectively, 269 deer have been harvested in Austin over the course of the six seasons. The 2022 deer harvest was 44.
- The Showmobile was used/rented for community celebrations and private rentals on 5 different occasions.

The Parks and Recreation Department also worked and continues to work with other government departments and agencies as requested as follows:

Street Department - Remove tree stumps and trim trees for street projects. Drive trucks for snow removal. Operate boom truck for hard-to-reach heights in the arenas during maintenance and in other areas of the city.

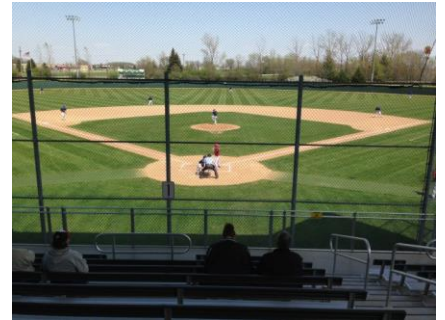
Austin Utilities - AU assists the Parks Department as they trim trees around high voltage lines and by offering safety training for the tree crew when it comes to working around high voltage lines. The tree crew, in turn, assists them by chipping brush piles resulting from easement trimmings. Austin Utilities installed two light poles at both the Skate Park and the Dog Park for safety.

Mower County Highway - APR has, on an emergency-only basis, gone out to rural areas to assist in trimming back trees at site-obstructed intersections.

Austin Public Schools - APR has helped seed and level turf as well as they trim and remove trees. This is a symbiotic relationship, so there is mutual aid to best utilize all playing fields and properties.

FACILITIES

Riverland Baseball Complex- (April-October) Home to the Riverland Blue Devils, Club League, PHS/Lyle, Austin High School Varsity, Junior Varsity, A, B & C, American Legion, VFW, Austin Youth Baseball, Austin All-Star BB, and Hispanic League. In 2005, three fields were ready for play along with having the concession and restroom building up and running. In 2006, the new stadium on field number one was completed. The fourth field was renovated and usable. This complex has two lit fields: the stadium field (number one) and the original college field (number two). Riverland had 13 games, High School had 20 games, 1A sections were held 5/27, 5/31, 6/2, 6/4 at the complex. VFW and AYB combined for 14 games throughout the summer. The 14AAA/ 15AAA/ 15AA MSF tournaments were held 7/22, 7/23 and 7/24. The VFW tournament was held 8/10-8/14. Countless practices between all user groups were held on fields 2, 3 and 4 throughout the year.



Todd Park Softball Complex- (April-October) There are eleven fields combined between the north and south complexes. Field number ten, a pony baseball field, and field eleven, a softball field, are located on the east side of the north complex. Field number seven, a pony baseball field, is located within the 5-Diamond complex. Todd Park Complex users include Park and Recreation youth & adult teams, Girls Fast-Pitch softball, Austin Jr & High School, Pacelli/Lyle High School, Austin Youth Baseball, ARC Softball, Austin All-Star BB, and Minnesota State High School League for Sections 1A, 1AA, 1AAA & 1AAAA. MSHSL softball sections took place on 5/24, 5/26 5/31 and 6/2 at both complexes. Youth softball was able to play a total of 54 games, along with practices. T-ball had 24 games/ practices. Peewee ball had 24 games/ practices. 5-pitch softball had 12 games/ practices. Adult Softball played a combined 102 games between Men's and Coed leagues, followed by a post-season double-elimination tournament for each. Adult kickball played 60 regular season games and they also had an end of the season tournament.



Todd Park Soccer Complex- (April-October) This complex has a total of six fields. These fields were largely funded by a Hormel Foundation grant. Users include Park and Recreation leagues, Austin Youth Soccer Club Teams, Middle School, Riverland College, community and Hispanic Men's league. Youth soccer had 10 teams and used all fields throughout the spring/ summer.

Municipal Pool – (June 6-August 12, 2022) The City offers a 50-meter, ten-lane pool with concession area and bathhouse. The pool has a separate diving well with one 1-meter and one 3-meter diving board in addition to a 16-ft climbing wall. The tot pool with a bounce 4-seat tot swing and splash pad are also separate to aid in safety of the little ones. In 2018, two slides were added to the main body of water, (1) 159-ft open flume, and (1) 60-ft speed. Pool users still have plenty of room to swim!

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Tags/ Admissions:	\$58,222	\$65,264
Swim lessons:	458	418
Pool attendance:	16,137	12,151
Family Fun Night	319	301
Water Exercise	17 (3 classes)	153

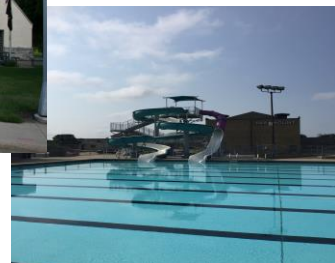


Izaak Walton Cabin - Acquired in the fall of 1996, this year-round facility continues to be used for rentals and in-house programs. The building was utilized on 103 dates, with 82 of them being rentals in 2022 compared to 67 and 58 in 2021.

Veterans Pavilion - (April 15-October 15) This spectacular addition to the park system was ready for public use June 1, 2002. In 2022 there were 37 rentals and 6 community functions compared to 47 and 6 in 2021.

Park Pavilion Rentals - (April 15-October 15) In 2010, the board approved charging a rental fee for park pavilions which are fully accessible and have electricity.

	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>	
Todd Park			
Northwest Pavilion	43	41	Rentals
Northeast Pavilion	32	30	Rentals
South Pavilion	24	12	Rentals
Lions Park			
West Pavilion	14	9	Rentals
East Pavilion	33	25	Rentals
Horace Park			
Horace Gazebo	3	2	Rentals
Lafayette Park			
Lafayette Pavilion	25	19	Rentals
East Side Lake			
Gazebo	7	2	Rentals
Shirley Theel			
Memorial Pavilion	15	26	Rentals
	196	166	Total Rentals



Outdoor Rinks - The outdoor skating rinks in the community are generally open from Christmas break through the end of February; weather permitting. Supervised warming houses with land and hockey rinks are located at Kaufman and Galloway Parks. The outdoor rinks and Skinner's Hill were open from December 29, 2021 to February 2, 2022.

Riverside Arena and Packer Arena - These facilities are city-owned, managed by the Parks and Recreation Department, and maintained by the Austin Street Department. APR schedules ice time and supervisory staff at both facilities. Use includes that for the Austin Bruins, Austin Youth Hockey, Austin High School, Riverside Figure Skating Club, private rentals, stick time, youth learn to skate and learn to play hockey, 3 on 3 and public skate. Packer arena was set-up with 6 pickleball courts for the months of September & October for indoor play. 169 unique visitors played pickleball during this time.

Ice Hours Used by the following groups:

	<u>'21 Riverside</u>	<u>'21 Packer</u>	<u>'22 Riverside</u>	<u>'22 Packer</u>
Youth Hockey	120.75	134.75	239.25	342.25
AHS Boys & Girls	163	0	211.75	0
Riverside Skate Club	121	4.5	115.5	9
Public Skate Hours	9.5	16	35.75	30.75
Stick Time Hours	3	0	7.5	0
Recreation Programs			123.5	-
Private Ice Rentals	112.25	3	81.5	15
Summer camps	49.5	-	98	-
Austin Bruins (practices)	193.25	-	269	-
Bruins (game hours)	116	-	112	(1/1-12/31)

<u>Park & Rec Program Participant numbers:</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2022</u>
Skills & Drills (Mites – Bantams)	93	116
3-on-3 Hockey (Mites – Bantams)	185	210
Learn to Play Hockey	31	20
Learn to Skate	40	42
Curling	65	60
Public Skate	939	944
Stick Time	15	33
Youth Hockey Summer Camp (new in 2022)		24

Riverside Arena - is the home of the Junior Hockey team, the Austin Bruins. The owners are Craig Patrick and Mike Cooper; the team's head coach is Steve Howard. The Austin Bruins have developed a great fan base offering some exciting hockey games since their first season began in the fall of 2010. February 4, 2022 marked the twelfth year of "Paint the Rink Pink," a fundraiser by the Bruins giving funds to the Hormel Institute for breast cancer research.



Dryland Events:

Packer Arena -

- Park & Recreation youth archery - 2 days/week, June-July
- Rain location for Park & Recreation youth tennis
- Cedar River Rabbit Club Show – 2 days
- Open Pickleball-169 unique players (Sept. & Oct)
- AHS CEO Class Tradeshow
- 1 AHS Graduation open house



DEPARTMENT SUPPORT FOR AREA ASSOCIATIONS

Hockey Association - APR rents the Association ice at both Riverside and Packer Arenas, and they utilize ice on outside rinks as well. The Association runs the concession stands in both arenas, and they further assist the department through the use of their equipment for APR “learn-to” programs. They have also purchased the rink divider boards, which are used with the Mite program as well as 3-on-3 programs.

Baseball Association - APR accepts registrations, lays red rock on the infields, maintains fences, and other duties. The Association runs the concessions at RCC, which has also contributed to much in terms of upgrades and additional maintenance at the fields. This complex benefits from many volunteer hours (maintenance and other staffing), which helps to contribute to its success; the complex/facility would be difficult to operate within the budget without their assistance.

Austin Youth Soccer - They continue to help with improvements to the soccer fields and with growing the game in the Austin area.

Spruce Up Austin - APR assists in ordering materials, plantings, and watering trees so that this group can continue to raise funds to beautify City green spaces. They have many volunteers who help to maintain many City parks and green spaces, and they also help to educate the community regarding the benefits of trees to the environment.

Austin Disc Golf Association - Continue working with them on the courses in Todd Park and Driesner Park. They have received many accolades on this course and are ranked in the top five in the state. The association is an active group which helps to both maintain and improve the three courses in Austin. 27 holes are available in Todd Park and 18 holes available at Driesner and Lafayette Parks.



PARKS

Bustad	14th Ave SW	Ballfield, playground
Bandshell Community	9th Place SW	Bandshell, sledding, play equipment, Veterans Pavilion, trail
Cullen	11th Ave SW	Playground equipment
Decker	6th Ave NE	Basketball, playground
Driesner North	Oakland Pl SE	Playground
Driesner South	Oakland Pl	Playground, shelter without electricity, 18-hole disc golf, trail
East Side Lake	Oakland Pl NE	Boat landing, fishing dock, playground, pavilion, gazebo, restrooms, Tree Trek, trail
Galloway	2nd Ave SW	Hockey & land rinks, warming house, playground
Honor Guard	8th St NE	Resting bench, passive
Horace Austin	N Main St	Municipal pool, play equipment, skate park, fishing pier, access to Mill Pond & trail
Kaufman	11th Ave SE	Hockey & land rinks, warming house, play equipment
Lafayette	S Main St	Ball field, playground, restrooms, shelter w/electricity, 18 holes of disc golf & trail
Lions Park	Oakland Pl NE	Play equipment, restrooms, two shelters w/electricity, volleyball court & trail
Murphy Creek	7th Street NW	Play equipment, basketball, gazebo & trail
Jay C. Hormel Nature Center	1304 21st St NE	X-country skiing, restrooms, walking trail, interpretive center, Ruby Rupner Auditorium, log cabin
Northwest	13th Ave NW	Ball field, play equipment, shelter w/o electricity
Orchard Creek	16th Ave SW	Play equipment, basketball and gazebo w/electricity
Rotary Centennial Park	8th Ave SE	Horseshoe courts (across the Street), basketball courts, play equipment, two gazebos, restrooms with solar energy & trail
Sherman	6th Ave NW	Ball field, basketball, play equipment
Shirley Theel	400 25th St SW	Soccer field, ball field, play equipment, restrooms, pavilion & walking trail
South Grove	4th Drive SW	Ball field, basketball, play equipment, shelters & trail
Sutton	Oakland Pl SE	Playground, shelter w/o electricity & trail
Todd	21st Ave NE	Ball fields, playgrounds, restrooms, shelters w/electricity, volleyball courts, 27-hole disk golf course, soccer fields & trail
Whittier	3rd Ave SE	Greenway, natural habitat
Wildwood	16th Ave NW	Play equipment, natural habitat, trail
Worlein	606 NW 1 Dr	Benches, passive

RECREATION

City recreation is responsible for planning, promoting, and organizing a comprehensive recreation program for all ages. The philosophy is to provide for the citizens of Austin the most complete recreation programs possible for the greatest number of people at the lowest price. Please keep in mind that programing for children and adult sports are for the most part self-supporting.

SELF-SUPPORTING PROGRAMS	2021	2022
Winter/Fall Programs		
K - 6 th Grade Basketball	120	99
Archery League, ages 9-18	not offered	26
Dome Baseball ages 7-12	55	95
Summer Programs		
Archery ages 9-18	26	38
Golf, ages 6 and up	30	(Meadow Greens offered it)
Water, Nature & Adventure (playground)- 12 max	12	not offered
Shake, Rattle & Read (playground) - 12 max	12	not offered
Track, ages 5 - adult	59	61
Tee Ball, 4-year olds	45	47
Tee Ball, 5-year olds	56	50
PeeWee ball, 6- & 7-year-olds	57	63
Youth Softball, ages 7-11	28	22
Soccer, ages 4-13	123	143
Tennis, ages 4-11	55	34
Austin Packer Summer Swim at the Municipal Pool	35	24
5 th & 6 th Grade Fall Volleyball	42	not offered
Victory Volleyball (participants)	38	64
Austin Youth Wrestling, grade K-6	12	45
MSF Volleyball Tournament (teams)	cancelled	68
Shamrock Open-NYWA Wrestling Qualifier	cancelled	78
Noon Kiwanis Track Meets	330	243
Family Fun Night at the Pool	319	301
<u>ADULT PROGRAMS</u>		
Dome Flag Football	cancelled	not offered
Softball Leagues	209	266
Kickball League	101	142
Volleyball Leagues, Winter - co-ed	cancelled	16
Volleyball Leagues, Fall - women's	cancelled	28



JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER

The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center, which began in 1971, is made of over 530-acres of restored and remnant prairie, hardwood forest, wetlands, and meandering streams. It is located in western Mower County outside the city of Austin. The nature center provides opportunities for viewing birds and wildlife as visitors walk, run, or ski the over nine miles of trail. Thousands of students and other visitors participate in nature-themed programs annually.

JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER ACCOMPLISHMENTS FOR 2022

- Offered and facilitated environmental education programming to PreK through 8th grade students.
- Continued to partner with Matchbox Children's Theater to put on the Halloween Warm-Up.
- Continue to partner with Austin Audubon bird related programming.
- Recruited 26 students to participate in the mentorship program for the summer of 2022 and put on the Dammen Family Adventure Day to support the mentorship program.
- The new track chairs acquired in December of 2021 have gotten used and promoted.
- Acquired a new trail vehicle and larger groomer with funding from the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center
- Grants:
 - The Legislative Citizen Commission Minnesota Resources (LCCMR) grant from the state continues to support staffing for environmental education with the goal of increasing our reach outside of Austin. So far we have increased all environmental education classes by 41%, non-Austin classes by 183%, and summer classes by 50%.
 - We're working on permitting for the Greater MN Regional Parks & Trails Commission (GMRPTC) trail paving project.
 - We have been awarded a GMRPTC grant to fund the replacement of two creek crossings.
 - We completed our third Conservation Partners Legacy grant from the DNR that funded a \$331,000 habitat restoration project with match provided by the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center (FoHNC).
 - Awarded a 4th CPL grant for additional habitat restoration work.
 - Successful grants from The Hormel Foundation and Austin Area Foundation.

- Gravelbed tree nursery: Utilized the HNC gravelbed for conservation and landscape trees. Helped establish a gravelbed nursery at the fairgrounds to be shared by the city and Mower County.
- Burned approximately 70 acres of prairie.
- Emerald ash borer (EAB) was identified onsite and the Minnesota Department of Agriculture successfully applied for biological controls to be utilized here.
- Kicked off the first Merry & Bright Night at the Nature Center.
- Installed a new \$140,000 mussel exhibit in the interpretive center funded by the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center.
- Replaced siding and windows at the Ruby Rupner Auditorium with CIP money.

COVID-19 IMPACTS

COVID impacts were minimal in 2022. Number of school programs has returned to normal. Participation in summer programs was pretty normal. The biggest challenge from COVID in 2022 was having several staff out with COVID.



GOALS FOR THE JAY C. HORMEL NATURE CENTER IN 2023

In 2023, we will continue to offer environmental, outdoor, and conservation education to all ages in school and public programs while focusing on getting trail, bridge, and habitat improvement projects going while working on grants to maintain the current level of staffing.

- Continue to offer Pre-K through 8th grade school programming to schools inside and outside of Austin.
- Provide free and paid public programming in all four seasons.
- Get necessary permitting in place to begin trail and bridge work.
- Work with the Friends of the Hormel Nature Center on a suite of projects including:
 - Freshen up the landscaping around the interpretive center with a few more plantings
 - Use the gravel bed tree nursery and get trees started and transplanted to areas with a lot of ash trees
 - Replace the rest of the XC skis, bindings, and boots so everything is on NNN bindings
 - Begin developing some sort of nature play area(s)
- Offer these significant events: Nature Play Thursdays, Senior Special Thursdays, Eco Blitz: Tree Week, Halloween Warm-up, and Dammen Family Fun Day.
- Maintain at least 45 summer adventure programs.
- Continue with nature themed programs during the Mower County Fair.
- Apply to the Hormel Foundation to continue to subsidize Mower County students to visit the nature center with their schools for only \$1.
- Burn prairie as needed.
- Plant trees to promote forest health. Work with MDA to release parasitic wasps as a biocontrol for EAB at the nature center.

- Begin the Phase 4 Habitat Restoration Conservation Partners Legacy Grant that the Friends received for prairie restoration, forest restoration, and invasive species removal.
- Recruit volunteers to act as guides in the Interpretive Center and work outdoor projects.
- The nature center will be open 9:00 am- 5:00 pm- Monday through Saturday with staff and volunteers or mentees and on Sunday we will be open 1:00-5:00 pm with one staff person and volunteers or mentees.
- Canoe and kayak rental will to be offered 7 days a week in summer 2023.
- Continue to work with Mower SWCD, CRWD, and the Izaak Walton League to promote soil and water health.
- Continue the Kevin Dammen summer mentorship program.
- Continue to explore opportunities and develop a plan to work with the MN DNR, the MN Zoo and others to participate in the MN Bison Conservation Herd program.
- Work to improve professional development opportunities for staff.
- Rent the Ruby Rupner Auditorium to KinderCare for them to host a summer camp.
- Make adjustments to facility rental prices and policies.

FACILITIES

Interpretive Center - Features the exhibit display area with live animals, nature games, preschool play area, a natural history resource library and conference room, two classrooms that can be opened up as one large space, and multipurpose room for renting skis or holding messy classes. The classrooms and resource room are also available to rent when not being used for nature center programming.



Auditorium, Conference Room, and Classroom rentals:

These facilities are used for free public programs, community education programs, conferences, private parties or meeting, and special events.

Rentals Used by the following groups:

	<u>2022</u>	<u>2021</u>	<u>2020</u>	<u>2019</u>
Private:	68	53	32	128
Conservation/City:	25	12	4	35
Total:	93	65	36	163

RECREATION

Hiking, Cross-Country Skiing, Snowshoeing, Wildlife Viewing, and Nature Photography

The Jay C. Hormel Nature Center has over nine miles of trails. Three tracked powerchairs are now available for people with mobility challenges to use for free. There are also two wheelchairs available for the public to use during regular interpretive center hours. Superior wildlife viewing and nature photography opportunities can be found all year on the Nature Center's trail. Trails are groomed for cross-country skiing in the winter.



Canoe, Kayak, Cross-Country Ski and Snowshoe Rentals - Enjoy youth and family canoe trips with Nature Center staff. Canoe and kayak rentals are available on Dobbins Creek to East Side Lake or on the

Nature Center pond. Cross-country ski or snowshoe rental is available during winter. We provide free skiing or snowshoeing on Friday afternoons from 3:00-6:00 pm in January, February, and March for adults and children.



EDUCATION BIRDS OF PREY

- The barred owl and our two red-tailed hawks were utilized in 30 programs in 2022 to approximately 513 people. They are also on display indoors and outdoors every day. Sadly the barred owl had to be put down in December 2022.
- The Hormel Nature Center also provides triage/primary care for raptors/birds of prey. Eleven birds were cared for and either were treated and released, died, or transported to the University of Minnesota Raptor Center.

SPECIAL EVENTS, PROGRAMS, & SCHOOL GROUPS

School Programs - Environmental education programs are offered to all ages with an emphasis on grades K-8. Environmental field trip curriculum includes: stream/pond ecology, maple syruping, prairie ecology, seasons, senses, soil critters, raptors, habitat, nature's adaptations and more. The fee for the field trips has been reduced for Austin and Mower County schools thanks to The Hormel Foundation grant.

Youth & Family Summer Adventure Program – Kids and families got out and discovered nature by canoeing, kayaking, hiking, birding, nature photography and more in our summer adventure program classes. The class fees are based on expense. Scholarships for reduced fees or free classes are available due to funding by private donors,



Summer Nature Play Afternoons –In 2022, families discovered nature with free canoe and kayak rentals, pond scooping for aquatic critters, netting butterflies and dragonflies, archery, self-guided trail activities and nature programs. These free programs run on specified afternoons in June, July and August from 1:00-4:00 p.m.

organizations, and the
of the Hormel Nature Center.

Friends

Summer Senior Specials – Seniors 55 and older participated in 6 free nature programs, a short tour of the trails on our two access vehicles, coffee, and a cookie.

Trail Access Tours & Trackchairs – Visitors enjoyed the nature center trails with free tours on our access vehicles with a volunteer driver during the spring, summer, and fall. Tours are given to mobility challenged people and their families. The date and time are scheduled at least four days ahead. Trackchairs may also be rented for free to use on HNC trails.

Halloween Warm-Up – The enchanted forest comes alive with bats, trolls, owls, and witches. Every ten minutes, a group is led into the boo'tiful forest to meet the assorted spirits that reside there. Established in 1983 this annual event is co-sponsored with Matchbox Children's Theater and is intended for children ages 4-11. Tickets are sold offsite beginning in September.

Crafts of Christmas Past - Enjoy the holiday spirit. Join the Nature Center staff as you make your very own Christmas wreaths. These classes are offered with fees based on material expenses.

Ruby Rupner Nature & Community Programs - Features such performers as folksingers, storytellers, musicians, naturalists, staff and other guest speakers. Free programs are provided by an endowment fund from the Friends of the Nature Center along with other donated dollars.



Eco Blitz:

This is a free, family-friendly series of special events celebrating the importance of humans' interactions with their ecosystems. In 2023, we are planning to take a deep dive on trees. Given concerns over EAB and the future of the community's forest, this is a timely EcoBlitz topic.

NATURE CENTER PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

	2022		2021		
	Programs	Participants	Programs	Participants	COVID cancels
Austin Public Schools	134	3753	134	3116	3
Mower County Schools (Includes Austin Catholic, Lyle, Grand Meadow, Southland, Gerard Academy, homeschool, Preschool field trips, WSU students)	20	376	27	460	
Outside Mower County (Includes Dodge, Faribault, Waseca and Freeborn, Northwood Kensett)	49	1444	15	412	4
Friends of the JCHNC Bus Tour		16			1
Sola Fide Observatory	7	495	10	228	
KAUS Educational Radio	52		52		
Ski Rentals	25 days	596 rentals	36 days	639 rentals	
Canoe Rentals	175 rentals	283	207 rentals	313 participants	
Thursday Nature Play: Activities Programs	6 7	775 905	6	1461	
Summer Senior Specials	6	143	6	202	1
Trail Access Tours	35	247	39	354	
Summer Youth Adventure Classes	37	333	58*	571*	
Eco-Blitz	4	41	3	24	
Halloween Warm-Up	2	589	2	584	
Christmas Crafts	5	37	5	36	
Misc/Free/Other Programs	33	3109	27	837	
Mower County Fair	3	586	3	387	
Thanksgiving Feast			1	220	
Red Cross Blood Drive	2	78	2	90	
Volunteer Work Party	17	207	4	57	
Summer Youth Scholarships		32		16	
Trackchair rentals		85			
Total:	619	14,098	645	10,275	9



PARKS, RECREATION, AND F



Sola-Fide Observatory- Visitors see the moon, planets, and stars through an 18" reflector telescope. Free programs are held on specified Saturday evenings during the year. The City of Austin has owned and operated this facility since 1991.

SUPPORT

City of Austin: The City of Austin provides funding for the operations and maintenance of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center. That includes funding of 3 full-time nature center staff, 1 dedicated parks maintenance staff, and 2 part-time cleaners.

Friends of the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center: The nonprofit organization that supports the Nature Center through fundraising, programming, equipment, volunteering, and planting of wildflowers and trees. They have also generously served as match to several state grants. Memberships are available at the Nature Center. They also fund 1 intern fully and provide the match on 1 other intern and 1 naturalist.

State of Minnesota: Since 2017, State of Minnesota Legacy Funds have supported 90% of the over \$700,000 habitat restoration at the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center.

In 2021, the State Legislature appropriated \$225,000 of Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund money, requested as a part of an LCCMR grant, to fund a Naturalist for three years and 1 intern every year for three years. The Greater MN Regional Parks & Trails Commission (GMRPTC) approved \$255,552 of Legacy Funding to pave 1.6 miles of trails. The Friends of the Hormel Nature Center are providing the match.

The GMRPTC also approved \$300,000 of funding to replace two creek crossings pending legislative approval.

The Hormel Foundation: THF continues to support the Jay C. Hormel Nature Center by providing grant funding to keep education programs for Mower County students affordable. They also frequently support other projects including the match on the GMRPTC bridge replacement project.

Funding Sources: City of Austin, Friends of the Hormel Nature Center, The Hormel Foundation, Austin Area Foundation, Freeborn-Mower Operation Round Up, and state grants.

STAFF:

David Merrill	Director
Randy Hofner	Park Supervisor
Tricia Branden	Park and Recreation Clerk
Patti Hamilton	Administrative Assistant
Riley Donovan	Recreation Supervisor
Luke Reese	Director/Naturalist
Julie Champlin	Nature Center Assistant
Sydney Weisinger	Nature Center/Teacher Naturalist
Kris Hahn	ClimaCorps Urban Forester
Jenna Baumgartner	ClimaCorps Urban Forester

PARK BOARD

Nik Johnsen	Vice Chairperson
Justin Hanson	Member
Deedee Marx	Member
Chris Grev	Member
Rebecca Waller	City Council
CeCe Kroc	School Board
Helen Jahr	Chair

PARK CREW

Lynn Thompson	Park Maintenance/Equipment Operator
Dayton Kehret	Park Maintenance/Equipment Operator
Greg Bell	Park Maintenance/Equipment Operator
Tim Rodgers	Park Maintenance/Facility Technician
Spencer Wolner	Construction Maintenance
Neal Goergen	Mechanic
Andrew Jensen	Tree Trimmer/Chipper Operator
Jon White	Tree Trimmer/Chipper Operator
Steve Turner	Pool & Park Maintenance/Equipment Operator